

The privatisation of public welfare in India

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1 Introduction

Mainstream welfare narratives have so far been state-centric often dismissive about the other players in development triad, viz., the market and civil society. In contrast, the public seems to be increasingly convinced about the market in India. Any scholarly analysis of public policy regimes can bring out these complexities. The welfare regimes of the past three decades have been attempting to lift the post-colonial nation-state from the ‘notorious’ group of Least Developed Countries (LDCs). With this backdrop, the paper argues that the state is neither ensuring social welfare nor even bother to be a service-regime. This could be due to the intersectionalities of colonial past twisted through the mixed economy model dwindled from the extremes of socialism to capitalism over the years. Consequently, the common-man has neither capabilities for human flourishing (Nussbaum 2011) nor even the quality of opportunities in real lives.

The peculiarity of the Indian model of development (IMoD) can be observed in the populist rhetoric where diverse players’ desperations to reach the heightened forms of welfare without essentially going through the natural stages. The incessant attempts to enter the global institutions like the United Nations’ Security Council underscores those desperations. Sen has aptly critiqued this as “India is the only country in the world which is trying to become a global economic power with an uneducated and unhealthy labour force.” (Sen 2015). The nature of welfare regime is “unique” where even the deprived citizens have neither social securities nor have support for their basic humane needs. While IMoD restructures the state as a “facilitator” in the welfare regimes from the historicity of *Regulator Raj*, one can witness the mixed roles in public welfare. This practically leads to the privatisation of public welfare (PoPW) where the collective human agencies seem to be rationalising it.

2 Development-Triad

Today in India, the architecture of welfare modernity must be understood in the context of post-neoliberal consensus. State seems to be disappearing in its contractual relations with the other two players in the developmental triad. The insidious disappearance of the state can be noticed not only in the shrinking public expenditures on social sectors but also in the managerial governance ensuring the market-led paradigms to decide the welfare trajectories. Systemically, the street-level bureaucracies are selectively approaching these trajectories in discretionarily defining the welfare regarding the IMoD. The welfare regimes over the years has been predominantly discussing only the vulnerable across the intersections of several identity markers. Though from an egalitarian standpoint, this is understandable, the dependency traps out of this paternalistic system is neither changing the narratives to a higher level nor even pragmatically addressing the existential concerns of the deprived.

This national reality in the global discourse where the welfare theorists are arguing for individual and social conversion factors for capabilities. The central question in these

discourses stands on the concern to the extent to which the welfare regimes recognise the freedom of choice “to live a life one has reason to value” (Sen 1999, p. 10). The celebratory models like the Nordic Welfare regimes are covering divorce as a social risk. For instance, though risk-covers in Switzerland could go to a level up to the dental issues; the essential point is the absence of both supply and demand factors in India. Hence, what one witnesses the blaming of the victims. The systemic efforts are mostly “disciplining the poor” (Soss et al. 2011) marginalising them in real lives. In contrast to the conceptual concerns on the profiling of the unemployed regarding the objectification of the welfare dependents in the West, India is a peculiar model of development. As the world’s largest democracy, it does not display the sensitivities on welfare. It seems a developmental scandal. This underscores the limitations of the electoral democracies based on numerical majoritarianism.

The very notion of citizenship in this model is different where the demographic figures are unreliable due to mediocre management information systems (MIS). This is evident in the softness of the nation-state. Policy decisions are often based on the crisis management where the roles of the state, market and civil society become complex. In this backdrop, if the “idea of justice” (Sen 2009) is the aspiring factor, the national record is rather weak. Neither the distributive nor even retributive justice as such is heading towards a progressive turn. This could be due to the mediocre public delivery systems and the structural reproduction of privileges. As this question, the very basis of democracy, the national imagination of “development” is often deconstructed regarding the desperate attempts to increase the foreign direct investments (FDI) in India.

The welfare regimes in the heightened market capitalism complicate the very notion of the public sphere where neither the commoners nor even the policymakers are seemingly concerned about the deficits in development. This shall further be seen in line with the individualistic aspirations of the collective social order. In this encounter, the shortcomings mentioned above are considered as agency failure out of the collateral damages of capitalism. These damages had aptly been visualised as the regime of “illfares” (Harriss-White and Subramanian 1999) in failing to ensure even the base minimum wage to the poor and marginalised.

The realpolitik of the ‘egalitarian’ idealism drives the headline management where the image of the state is carefully crafted in contrast to the global welfare narratives. In this crafting, the role of development-triad is peculiar where neither the market nor even the civil society is critiquing the state at present. While the Indian state has historically been a “crisis manager” (Mendelsohn & Vicziany, 1998, p. 147), the contemporary Right-wing government’s daring ideological stunts against the political opponents has furthered a vacuum where the intellectuals are increasingly silenced. This silence is naturally strengthening the state to pursue its exclusive cultural-nationalist agendas in the garb of development. This, situated within the individualised process of economic globalisation, leaves the poor to the virtual mercies of the market. Thus, the civil society lobbying is unmatched by the powerful corporates in “guiding” the public welfare from the neoliberal standpoints.

Considering the new market principles of the structural adjustments since 1990, the contemporary trend is the consolidation phase of monopsony in India. In contrast, the global realities of de-globalisation are shocking the “reformed” nation-state at present. While the welfare regime has restructured the narratives regarding the PPP models in a quick-fix fashion, the measures like that of the conditional cash-transfers become the political imperative. Considering this market-led paradigm, one can notice the collapse of the public

institutions. This breakdown must be observed regarding the market's assault on the state regarding the dominance of few corporate houses in the policy circles. Also, one can even notice the state's hostile policies against the selective civil society organisations for the political reasons. Hence, the obsessive growth collaborations of state and market is silencing the civil society. The ideals of competition are creeping in even inside the social institutions. This could be due to the un/natural alliances of the state-market on all sphere of welfare.

In this context, the in/direct regulations of the state on the market are often tweaked in favour of the latter. The legality of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has been aligned with the image management of the companies. The penalty for non-compliance of CSR provisions is almost nil. This underscores the fact that none knows who defines or decides the criteria to identify the deserving agents for the welfare regimes. Though the "selectivity" mechanism comes only at the later stage, the market most often capitalises through their charity politics and social marketing. In contrast to the citizen's entitlement demand in the "developed" world; even the agency self-selection is obscure in India. The state-market nexus in governance furthermore underscores the emergence of the corporatist welfare state with the sporadic changes both at the systemic as well as structural levels. This shall be seen considering the internalisation of the welfare narratives where the neoliberal scripts of managerial reforms hold the clue in the political economy. Consequently, the market is intrinsically leading the state and civil society in the performativity regimes (Ball 2012). In this state-led capitalism, the surplus drives are standing on the principles of insidious forms of economic enslavement. One can witness the marginalisation of the vulnerable men in real lives. Therefore, the affirmative action policies like that of the Reservation is often based on the realities of "liberal guilt". Thus, the social policies are often the legitimising component of the capitalism. The peculiarities of civil society are its inability to go beyond the sensationalism in following up the public issues in detail. This provides substantive reasons for the inertia of the status quo in the alliances of the developmental triad. Welfare implementation notoriety are often justified by the introduction of public-private partnership (PPP) model of interventions. This cognitively paves the way for greater privatisation. However, if the state is not ensuring the enabling conditions for welfare conversion factors, the tax regimes become the systemic robbery.

3 Structure-Agency Dualism

In India, while unemployment allowances are unknown to the welfare discourses, it is important to note that even the minimum wage legislation has been practically frozen. This contrasts with the global reality where the advanced countries are moving beyond the universal basic income in their public discourses. Although this has a dysfunctional effect on the dignity of the working poor; both health and education are often left to the personal responsibilities of the poor. The welfare regime is not even minimalist where the public services are notorious and guided by the statistical manipulations. In this complexity, the public distribution system is a euphemism for hunger and starvations.

The citizen in this context is not an identity often visualised for welfare entitlements where the audit culture of neoliberal governance guides the state's priorities (Shore and Wright 1999). Thus, the epitomes of progressive taxations; universal basic income; food bank and social insurance becomes a Robinhood idealism in this complex dualism. Meritocracy as an efficiency argument theoretically justifies the elimination of redistributive policies. This, in turn, dilutes the disposition of "collective bargaining" of the labour power. The subtler processes of managerialism rationalised by the audit culture ensure the agency accountability as a primary factor in governance. Thus, the public perception of welfare entitlement is almost

nil when it comes to the service deliveries of the state. Though the welfare state is an attempt to inculcate the identities of citizenship in taking the human agencies beyond the comfort zones of primordialities; the opportunities are often socially controlled. For instance, the work-participation rate across the caste, class and regional dimensions are complicated regarding the contextual causalities.

4 Conclusion

Thus, the actors of development are keeping the human agencies inside the Platonian cave with the populist tokenisms of good governance at present. In the illfare regimes, the intersections of paternalism and protectionism often prevent any possibilities of inclusive framework towards transformations. Although conceptualising the welfare in statelessness is a theoretical luxury, the manufactured distractions of the poll-populism must be deconstructed for its realpolitik. The politics of welfare shall not be reduced only to economic participation. The governance shall be capability-friendly in its policies and frameworks where the precondition shall be to enhance the human agency to visualise the ideals of citizenship. The normative narratives of the welfare must, however, be contextual in application but global in ethical standards. These conceptual pathways are theoretically crucial since the mainstream analyses have been historically overlooking both the micro-aggressions as well as the complications at the meso-levels. On an ideal frame, the state must be a force to de-commodify the changing nature of governance. For this, the epistemological bases of the statistics are necessary instead of keeping it as the finality of illfare reality.

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