

Political Sociology of Poverty In India: Between Politics of Poverty and Poverty of Politics¹

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Although relative differentials exist, absolute deprivation is high in most parts of rural India. For example, about half the population of rural India is illiterate and suffers from 'capability poverty'; about 40 per cent have extremely low incomes. Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan and West Bengal are the most backward states.

- India Human Development Report (1999)

In 1993-94, when slightly less than 40 per cent of all Indians were below the poverty line, the proportion was 54 per cent for the Scheduled Tribes and 50 per cent for the Scheduled Castes. Though the tribals of India are only about 8 per cent of the total population, they accounted for 40 per cent of the internally displaced population, another major characteristics of poverty.

- National Commission on Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (2002)

Human attainments appear to be better and more sustained in those parts of the country where there is social mobilisation for human development, and where female literacy and empowerment encourages women to have a say in the decision making process at the household level.

- National Human Development Report (2001)

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1. Introduction

Political sociology of poverty requires an analysis of the relationship between the political, economic and socio-cultural actors, institutions and processes in the context of poverty. It assumes that poverty is a complex and cumulative consequence of power relations over a period of time between groups within a region and between regions in the modern world system.

This paper on political sociology of poverty in India is based upon the assumption that

- a) the caste system and economic inequality complement each other in the case of the poorer sections of Indian society,
- b) Indian society has experienced complexities in identification of class system due to the manifold gradations of social rank, which have evolved in the form of caste and tribe along with quasi-religious settings of deprivation,
- c) the colonial and post-colonial polity have been organized around the recognition of nebulous coexistence of 'caste' and 'class' principles in the approach of state and political community towards the weaker sections of the society.

The Indian Constitution and political community have given recognition to the grave condition of resourcelessness of the weakest sections of Indian society through the system of 'Scheduled' castes and 'Scheduled' tribes. In other words, while recognizing the heuristic value of 'caste', 'gender', 'tribe' and 'class' as separate analytical and sociological categories, this paper suggests that caste, tribe and class merge into each other in the domain of absolute as well as chronic poverty in India. This clarification is important as there are a large number of instances of 'caste into class' and 'class into caste' as well as tribe-caste convergence in terms of economic conditions. But they do not negate the fact that for the last several decades there is marginal difference in the caste status of the absolutely poor classes and there is very limited evidence of economic prosperity ('creamy layer') among the depressed castes and tribes particularly in the rural domain of the Indian economy.

2. Historical Context

Any attempt to comprehend the Indian experience of poverty eradication through construction of welfare state and political mobilization in the last five decades needs to recognize that India is a post-colonial society where a) the colonial heritage in the statecraft, and b) the legacy of anti-imperialist national movement in the political community and political culture, play critical roles. This relationship between the 'colonial past' and the 'democratic present' is very significant for understanding the changing nature and orientation of the state and society in the context of poverty in India since independence in 1947.

It is also necessary to remember the differences between the rise of democratic polity in Europe and the emergence of welfare state in India. To quote Jawaharlal Nehru, a pioneer of democratic socialism during the anti-colonial movement between 1920s and 1940s and the first Prime Minister of free India from 1947 to 1964, "In Western countries, full blooded democracy with adult suffrage came to the people very late, in the Twentieth Century". They had in the meantime profited from the Industrial Revolution. They got the resources before they gained democracy so that when the demands came for better living conditions they had the resources to fulfil them. In India, we have full-blooded democracy but not the resources.

The results of the Indian endeavour of poverty eradication are not satisfactory in international terms. But the specific and comparative aspects of India help us in contextualising the Indian project of nation building through planning for a poverty free welfare state and a socialistic society between 1950 and the end of the millennium. They also provide insights about the international standing of India in the community of nation-states, where the largest democracy of the world is found to be lagging behind Sri Lanka, China and Indonesia (see Table 1). The Indian political process is being shaped by continuous interaction between the imperatives of interest group dynamics, democratization, decolonization and nation-building. These four factors provide the basis for legitimacy of the post-colonial state. They also give content to the concepts of 'public welfare' and 'national interest'.

Table 1: India's global position on human and gender development

Country	HDI Rank	Human development index (HDI)		Gender development index (GDI)		Gender empowerment measure (GEM)	
	2000	1992	2000	1992	2000	1992	2000
Norway	1	0.932	0.942	0.911	0.941	0.752	0.837
Australia	5	0.927	0.939	0.901	0.956	0.568	0.759
Sri Lanka	89	0.704	0.741	0.660	0.737	0.288	0.274
China	96	0.594	0.726	0.578	0.724	0.474	0.483 \$
Indonesia	110	0.637	0.684	0.591	0.678	0.362	0.362 @
India	124	0.439	0.577	0.401	0.560	0.226	0.240 @
Pakistan	138	0.483	0.499	0.360	0.468	0.153	0.176
Nepal	142	0.343	0.490	0.310	0.470	0.315	–
Bangladesh	145	0.364	0.478	0.334	0.468	0.287	0.223
Mozambique	170	0.246	0.322	0.229	0.307	0.350	0.428 @
Ethiopia	168	0.227	0.327	0.217	0.313	0.205	–
Nigeria	172	0.207	0.277	0.196	0.205	–	–

Note: \$ relates to HDR 1998 @ relates to HDR 1999 * relates to HDR 2000

Source: Human Development Report (HDR) 1995, 1999 and 2002.

As a consequence, there were several changes in the state and society relationship in India during this period, which have caused i) decline of politics and rise of economics, ii) rise of dominant caste coalitions and decline of upper caste hegemony, iii) erosion of national constitutional consensus and rise of centrifugal movements, iv) stress on decentralization along with weakening of the process of center-formation including planning, v) rise of movements of erstwhile marginalized categories of people e.g. women, depressed classes like Dalits and Scheduled Tribes, ethnic groups, etc., vi) rise of 'region' instead of 'nation' as the operational category of the party system, vii) weakening of the middle class political culture as well as rise of crime-politics nexus with patronage from the neo-rich classes, and viii) rolling back of the welfare state under the pressure of global forces of liberalization.

The relationship between poverty, politics and state has continued to play a significant role in the political sociology of independent India

as it did during the colonial era. The issue of poverty came onto the State's Agenda through different processes after the end of colonial period. First there was a constitutional process which was a consequence of the nationalist discourse where "Community Development" and decolonization were presented as two sides of the same coin. It created an appropriate focus in the making of the constitution of independent India.

Secondly, there came a developmentalist phase which gained importance during the drive for promoting capacity building among the rural cultivators through "Land Reform" in the 1950s. The idea of 'poor peasant' became unacceptable in the discourse of development under the Congress Raj. Of course, it failed to include the landless labourers in its conceptualization of recasting the rural power structure through 'land reforms'.

Then came the phase of nation wide rural agitations in the 1960s. The newly created propertied peasants started asking for increase in state's patronage and, the pauperised peasants urged for radical transformations to ensure jobs, wages, dignity and justice. The states' responses were crystallized as the "Green Revolution".

Finally, India became market oriented in the 1980s as state-centric initiatives became counter productive at worst and ineffective at best. There was a new faith in market mediated system management among the propertied sections of Indian peasantry as well as the urban propertied classes. It was termed "the era of liberalization". Rolling back of the state did show some results in the first few years. But the bifurcation of the propertied and the pauperised was reinforced by the end of the 1990's. Thus there are new indications of pressures about continuity of chronic poverty and creation of 'new poor' in the context of liberalization. In fact, it may be appropriate to suggest that after the 'first generation reforms' or 'structural adjustments' and the consequential rolling back of the state, there is resurfacing of poverty in rural and urban sectors resulting in unrest and conflicts. This rediscovery of poverty is accompanied by refocusing of the political agenda of the India political sectors including political parties, trade unions, peasant bodies and other major components of the power pyramid in India (see Table 2).

Table 2: Poverty and Regime Orientation

Year	Poverty ratio in per cent			Number in Millions.			Regime Orientation
	Rural	Urban	Combined	Rural	Urban	Combined	
1957-58	55.2	47.8	53.9	186.8	33.8	220.6	Land Reforms
1973-74	56.4	49.0	54.9	361.3	60.0	321.3	Anti Poverty Programmes
1977-78	53.1	45.2	51.3	264.3	64.6	328.9	Antyodaya Approach
1983	45.7	40.8	44.5	252.0	70.9	322.9	Market Oriented
1987-88	39.1	38.8	38.9	231.9	75.2	307.1	Liberalization
1993-94	37.3	32.4	36.0	244.0	76.3	320.3	Structural Adjustment
1999-00	27.1	23.6	26.1	193.2	67.1	260.3	Rediscovery of Poverty
2007*	21.1	15.1	19.3	170.5	49.6	220.1	—

* Poverty Projections for 2007

Source: Tenth Five Year Plan, Vol. I, Planning Commission.

In short, the link between active political mobilization (of varying intensity) and rural transformation has played a vital role in shaping the destiny of the poor. The state and its legislative and bureaucratic apparatus have been a secondary factor. Hence the change in the national economic scenario with reference to peasants in general, and poor rural masses in particular has been primarily a political phenomenon (see Mohanty et.al., 1998).

3. The Constitutional Content

The conceptualization of poverty free welfare state in India has been accomplished in two phases - i) the period of national movement for freedom from foreign rule, and ii) the making of Indian Constitution through a constituent assembly. The Indian national movement was able to focus the attention of the masses on growing poverty and the recurrence of famine which was due to defective policies of the colonial government. It was the view of leading public men like Dadabhai Naoroji (1825-1917), M. G. Ranade (1842-1901) and R. C. Dutt (1848-1909) that the solution to the social and economic backwardness of India could not be found through the British Government's policy of laissez-faire, but that only a national government which actively

promoted development by direct government action could bring about improvement in living standards. The resolutions of the Indian National Congress from 1929 onwards emphasized the need “to make revolutionary changes in the present economic structure of the society and to remove grave inequalities in order to remove poverty and ameliorate the condition of the masses”. The resolution of 1931 underlined that “political freedom must include real economic freedom of the starving millions” and elaborated the fundamental rights which should be included in the Constitution of free India to provide a basis for it. It was followed by the formation of a National Planning Committee with Jawaharlal Nehru as Chairman in 1937 on the initiative of Subhash Chandra Bose as the President of Indian National Congress.

A complementary process of conceptualization was contributed by the constant debate about the nature and priorities of the state in post-colonial India among the Gandhians, socialists, communists, radical humanists and other ideological groups in the national movement. The charter of demands and agitations by various class organizations of peasants and industrial workers provided the guidelines for the approach of the national movement to poverty and its eradication from villages and towns of India. In fact the decisive push to the colonial rule came with large scale peasant mobilization in the last decades of the freedom movement.

The concept of welfare state became the lodestar of the Constituent Assembly of India. It made its impact on the thinking of the leading lights of the Assembly who wanted to secure ‘justice – social, economic and political’ for all citizens of the Republic. They were clear that without social and economic democracy, political democracy had no meaning in a poor country like India. The Preamble, Fundamental Rights (Articles 12 to 35), Directive Principles of State Policy (Articles 36 to 51), and the special provisions for Scheduled Castes and Tribes and Backward Classes (Articles 330 to 342) are significant dimensions of the Indian constitution from this perspective. They have created the imperatives for progress from political democracy to social and economic democracy which means “working for a certain measure of well-being for all”.

The Preamble of the Constitution commits the state to the development of a free society based on the dignity of the individual in which there would be equality of status, opportunity and justice. The state has to endeavour towards harmonization of interests between individuals, groups, and between individuals and groups on one hand and interests of the community on the other. The Preamble places justice above the other principles of liberty, equality and fraternity.

The values embedded in the Preamble are elaborated in the Fundamental Rights and the Directive Principles. The Fundamental Rights have covered all the traditional civil and political rights included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. There are six broad categories of the fundamental rights:

- i. The right to equality (Articles 1, 15,16,17, and 18)
- ii. The right to freedom (Articles 19 and 21)
- iii. The right against exploitation (Articles 23 and 24);
- iv. The right to freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion (Articles 25 to 28);
- v. The right to minorities to conserve their culture, (Articles 29 and 30); and
- vi. The right to constitutional remedies for the enforcement of all these Fundamental Rights (Article 32).

The Directive Principles of State Policy are basically inspired by the concept of a welfare state. Article 37 declares that the Directive Principles are “fundamental in the governance of the country” and that “it shall be the duty of the State to apply these principles in making laws”. However these are non-justiciable. Article 38 defined the aim as follows; “The State shall strive to promote the welfare of the people by securing and protecting as effectively as it may a social order in which justice – social, economic and political, shall inform all the institutions of the national life”. In Article 39, stress was laid on the right to adequate means of livelihood, equally for men and women; equal pay for equal work for both men and women; conditions of work ensuring health and strength, protection of children and youth against exploitation and against moral and material abandonment. It

is also laid down that the state should ensure that 'the ownership and control of the material resources of the community are so distributed as best to subserve the common good'; and that the 'operation of the economic system does not result in the concentration of wealth and means of production to the common detriment'.

Furthermore, the duty is enjoined on the State that 'it should, within the limits of its economic capacity and development, make effective provision for securing the right to work, to education and to public assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness and disablement, and in other cases of undeserved want' (Article 41). The state should also provide for 'securing just and human conditions of work and for maternity relief'; and 'security to all workers - agricultural, industrial and otherwise - a living wage, conditions of work ensuring a decent standard of life and full enjoyment of leisure and social and cultural opportunities' (Articles 42 and 43).

Particular stress is laid on special assistance to the weaker sections of the people, including the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes and the other weaker sections with a view to promoting their educational and economic interests and to protecting them from social injustice and exploitation. With regard to rural economy, Articles 40 and 48 enjoin the application of modern scientific methods to agriculture and animal husbandry and the implementation of programmes and improvements through self-governing Panchayats. Promotion of cottage industries on an individual and cooperative basis is mentioned in Article 43.

Article 45 fixed a definite time limit during which the State would endeavour to provide free and compulsory education for all children until the age of fourteen years from the commencement of this Constitution.

The above principles were given a more precise direction when Parliament accepted the socialist pattern of society as the objective of social and economic policy in December 1954. In 1976, the 42nd Amendment Act added certain new directives to the Constitution of India:

- a) that children are given opportunities and facilities to develop in a healthy manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity;

- b) that the operation of the legal system promoted justice on a basis of equal opportunity, and in particular the State provided free legal aid in cases of economic and other disabilities;
- c) that the participation of workers in management of industries is secured; and
- d) that the environment is protected and improved and the forests and wild life are safeguarded.

4. Anti-Poverty mobilizations and their results

The direction of post-colonial polity in India was evolved during the three Five Year Plans between 1951 and 1965 in the context of peasant mobilization and other protest movements. Self-reliance was the basic goal of the Nehruvian agenda under the hegemony of the Congress Party. It is important to recognize that the response to the peasant movements in the Fifties by the nascent post-colonial state and the hegemonic ruling party, Congress, was:

- a) to eliminate intermediaries for creating a broad based proprietary class in the village who took interest in promoting agricultural production;
- b) to facilitate infrastructure facilities through a variety of inputs and concessions;
- c) to ensure minimum price support through purchase of agricultural products by public sector corporations.

The impact of these reforms created two opposite results –

- i) it promoted the expansion of owner-cultivator class which came from upper and upper-middle strata of the caste system; and
- ii) it created insecurity among tenants, agrarian workers, and semi-bonded tillers due to increased pressure of market forces upon the agricultural sector.

Agriculture was changing into a 'market oriented, cash based, and profit claiming occupation, causing deterioration of the situation of the poorer strata in rural India. In short, there was emergence of

commercialization, monetization and market/profit oriented production due to the state's plans and programmes between 1950 and 1965. The number of agricultural proletariat - (who belonged to the 'lowest' castes and the Scheduled Tribes) grew at an exponential rate. But the strategy of "incremental democratic modernization" encountered a series of problems from 1963 onwards, which made the Nehruvian approach obsolete in many spheres of State policies. A new set of national issues regarding food scarcity, increase in prices, national defence, foreign dependence, economic stagnation, and regional inequalities generated a cumulative stress between 1963 and 1967. As a consequence a new agenda called Ten Point Programme came into being. The dilemma of dependent accumulation and declining dominance of the Congress Party created a shift in India's direction of development. The slogan of "Jai Jawan - Jai Kisan" (victory to the soldiers - victory to the peasants) symbolized the new thrusts of the State. The 'sixties saw a wave of disenchantment with the entire planning process'. There was visible growth of discontent in the late sixties (Kumar, 1989).

Between anti-Congressism and Naxalism, there was a great range of activism and mobilization all over rural and urban India. This coincided with the 4th Five Year Plan and the 5th Lok Sabha elections. Despite the intelligence and experience, Indian planning had gotten into a rut. The results were disappointing. It was time, therefore, for the planners to ask themselves whether the things they had been trying to do were really correct. Thus the period of the 4th Five Year Plan was marked by political weakness and economic anxieties. The poorer sections of the society and the pro-poor political formations were making impressive moves for collective action. It was the era of second wave of land conflicts after the late nineteen forties and early fifties.

The second wave of rural mobilization in the sixties contained two distinct groups of rural masses. There was a movement launched by the newly emerged proprietary classes constituted by rich farmers and middle peasant proprietors. The communists called them 'Kulaks' which was an exaggeration of their economic capacity. They were also named 'Bullock Capitalists'. Their mobilization was aimed at

securing increased patronage from the state. They did not come into conflict with the interests of the industrial and commercial urban proprietary classes. It was led by peasant based regional political formations which came into existence in 1960s in several provinces of India. Many of them got amalgamated into a national political party, Bharatiya Lok Dal, led by Charan Singh in 1974.

Another movement was launched by the agrarian poor with increasing prominence of the agricultural workers. The movements of the rural poor in the 1960s and 70s were centred around a combination of economic, social and political issues. Economically, they were in need of security of employment, minimum wages, rights over a certain share of the produce, distribution of surplus lands, and reduction and liquidation of debts. Socially, they were agitated about violation of legally acquired rights, gender discrimination, violence and humiliation by upper caste/class men and public officials. Politically, they were attempting to resist repression and terror of the upper and middle castes who had recently turned into land owning classes in rural India. They found a nexus of the newly emerging proprietors and the nascent post-colonial state. They also felt that the state was paying more attention to the proprietary classes as it considered them as the agents of development. They were led by the left wing parties like Communist Party, Communist Party (Marxist), Socialist Party and Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist).

The rural poor in the 1960s comprised of a) pauperized peasants, b) agrarian workers belonging mostly to the depressed castes and tribes and other marginal groups, and c) a large section of women. Their struggles gave rise to uncomfortable questions regarding the usefulness of the socio-economic framework of developmental planning adopted after independence. They exposed the limits of the development policies as they had failed to improve the condition of the poor even after three Five Year Plans, and a generation long political stability in the form of Congress rule. They brought the nation 'face to face' with the continuity of unimaginable forms of exploitation and oppression of the rural poor. It was an indictment of the post-colonial state and its patronage to newly propertied castes and communities in the name

of development and nation building since 1950s. Above all it proved that there is a 'dialectical interconnection' between the various sectors of the society and polity.

5. Politics of Poverty Eradication

The issue of poverty became a central question during 1964-71. It was triggered by the Lohia-Nehru-Nanda debates in Lok Sabha in 1964 about the nature of poverty and its extent. It became recognized as a political imperative of democratic governance as a large number of people were still trapped in economic settings which forced them to live below the levels of subsistence. It was legitimized by the slogan of Garibi Hatao (eliminate poverty) by the Congress Party under the leadership of Indira Gandhi who routed most of the anti-Congress political parties in the general elections of 1971-72. It appeared that after a long wait, the moment had arrived for fulfilling the dreams of Swaraj by creating an egalitarian social order based upon economic self-reliance and democratic social transformations.

It is another matter that the electoral mandate was not translated into effective socio-economic steps due to a variety of reasons – domestic as well as international. Low savings, limited investment, sluggish industry, a steep rise in the money supply and a sharp decline in agricultural production were the prominent features of economic administration. The problems were further complicated by international 'price revolution' and a phase of 'stagflation' in the world economy. In 1973-74, inflation had turned everything topsy-turvy. It was coupled with the crisis of leadership within the Congress Party at the Central and the provincial levels. The situation gave rise to multiple political pressures, student-youth movements and working class protests which culminated in a national movement against the failures of the government in terms of checking corruption, controlling price rise, creating employment, and providing relief to the poor. It was led by Jayaprakash Narayan, one of the founders of democratic socialism in India (who later devoted himself to the cause of Sarvodaya or Gandhian reconstruction of the Indian society, economy and polity to promote welfare of all) and was supported by socialists and others.

After a phase of indifference and tolerance, the ruling party declared the State of Emergency due to the intensity of internal protests. At the same time, it had to adopt a 20-Point programme of welfare measures to show that even in a situation of crisis, the government is committed to continue the process of relief and welfare.

In spite of these adversities, the change in the orientation of the political community and the policy makers in the early 1970s, was remarkable. According to C.T. Kurien (1979), "When a small group in the Planning Commission proposed in 1962 that the central concern of our planning has to be the removal of poverty as early as possible, it was a novel and consequently very suspicious idea. But within a decade it had become not only the accepted economic dogma, but also a highly articulated political programme". The new mood was reflected in the Fifth Five Year Plan. For example, *Towards An Approach to the Fifth Plan (1974-79)* proclaimed "there would seem to be a conspicuous element of historic inevitability in a direct approach to reducing poverty becoming the main thrust of the Fifth Five Year Plan. The Plan is being formulated by a government that has massive mandate from the people, both in the Parliamentary elections of 1971 and the state elections of 1972, on the basis of a programme whose centre piece is *Garibi Hatao*. The homogeneity of the Governments at the Centre and most of the states during the formulation and early years of the Fifth Plan is guaranteed. This should enable bold and imaginative proposals being put through on the basis of an enlightened national consensus" (Kurien, 1978).

Thus, the Fifth Five Year Plan was a landmark due to its special thrust on creating the maximum possible dent on the low end poverty while ensuring that the country moves one more step in the direction of economic independence. It was also remarkable due to its recognition that the Indian economy had reached a stage where larger availability of resources makes it possible to launch a direct attack on – a) unemployment, b) under-employment, and c) poverty. It clearly admitted that the twin causes of poverty are i) underdevelopment, and ii) inequality and it is inadmissible to ignore or underplay either factor. Therefore, it pointed out that the problem of poverty couldn't

be overcome within the foreseeable future by efforts in one direction only.

India entered the phase of liberalization in 1980s under Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and the process continued inspite of change in leadership at the level of the Prime Minister. The year 1991 was the beginning of an explicit phase of rolling back of the state due to the imperatives of liberalization. Relatively higher growth was recorded during 1980-2000 and particularly during 1990s which was a decade of structural economic reforms. It also showed decline in poverty and improvement in health and literacy levels of the people of India. But India continues to suffer from high levels of illiteracy, high rate of infant mortality, high incidence of disease, disability, and malnutrition even after half a century of freedom and democracy. Allocations for health and education have been only 4.1 percent of the GDP (1996-97) which was lower than several developing post-colonial countries like Malaysia and Sri Lanka.

The sociological consequences of the liberalization-globalisation drive have been summarized by Yogendra Singh (2002) as state versus market dilemma. He argues that the extent to which the power of market increases and expands, the significance of the state as a supreme political institution, undergoes major alterations. Idealistically, some protagonists of the market even anticipate the end of the notion of sovereignty. For societies such as India, where nation-building has still not reached the level of integrative maturity, such fears of the end of sovereignty or a threat to it due to unhindered play of the global market force cause not only acute anxiety but also pose a challenge (Y. Singh, 2002).

6. Poverty and Conflict Lines: Class, Caste and Tribes

Analysis of poverty-politics relationship needs understanding of power dynamics and conflict patterns because inequality of access to resources generates processes of conflict in the context of interests between the included, the marginal and the excluded sections of any society. The conflicts make reform and strategies and processes of poverty elimination imperative. This requires a multi-dimensional

understanding of the interconnectivity of the spheres of state, market and community and the interrelatedness of the local, regional/national, and global domains. All these need special attention in exploring the challenges of chronic poverty.

Poverty and the poor are always associated with (a) resourcelessness, (b) choicelessness, (c) insecurity and (d) deprivation which creates incapacities in the pursuit of dignified life in a given society for a person, household, group or community. Furthermore, those suffering chronic poverty also suffer several simultaneous disadvantages including gender, age, caste, ethnicity, location, etc.

According to A.R. Desai (1986) a new class configuration has emerged as a direct consequence of the conjunction of peasant mobilization and government measures over the last few decades. It contains the following categories of rural population: a) *Rich Farmers and Land lords* owning 15 acres and more, possessing 50 per cent of the total land and constituting 7 per cent of the population, b) *Middle Farmers* – with 5 to 15 acres of land, possessing 30 per cent of the total land and constituting 19 per cent of the population, c) *Poor Farmers* owning between 1 and 5 acres, possessing 17 per cent of the total land and constituting 30 per cent of rural population, and d) *Agricultural Labour* without land or owning less than 1 acre of land, possessing about 2 per cent of the total land and constituting 44 per cent of the population. The national picture also suggested presence of five categories on the basis of household income with 10, 19, 12, 192 and 420 million persons in them (Stern, 1993).

Table 3: Household Income In India (1989-90)

Income Group	Income Per Annum (Rs.)	No. of People (in million)	Percent of Population
Low Income	Less than 12,000	420	59.0
Lower Middle	12,500-25,000	192	27.0
Middle	25,000-40,000	12	10.0
Upper Middle	40,000-56,000	19	2.6
High Income	More than 56,000	10	1.4

Source: NCAER data as quoted in Robert Stern (1993: 5-6).

The population below poverty line (1993-94) has two major features: i) Overwhelming presence of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes population, ii) Assam, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa and Uttar Pradesh were found to be above the national figures of population below poverty line where as West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka were within the proximity of national figure (35.9 per cent) (see Table 4).

The relation between the resourcelessness of the chronic poor and settings of conflict is rooted in the quest for security and dignity through ending of choicelessness of the chronic poor in a variety of ways. Such households, loaded with a complex set of disadvantages and assetlessness, are usually involved in subsistence type of activities which get them poor returns. Since their earnings are meager, they survive on small amounts of borrowed money or they are forced to

Table 4 : Percentage of Population Below Poverty Line : Rural-Urban and SC/ST Total (By states: 1993-94)

States	Rural		Urban		Total (General)
	SC	ST	SC	ST	
Andhra Pradesh	26.02	25.66	43.82	46.68	22.1
Assam	45.38	41.44	14.34	07.11	40.8
Bihar	70.66	69.75	55.16	35.76	54.9
Gujarat	32.26	31.20	44.99	35.47	24.2
Haryana	46.56	41.55	23.58	00.00	25.0
Himachal Pradesh	36.89	63.94	18.52	00.00	28.4
Karnataka	46.36	37.33	61.59	62.05	33.1
Kerala	36.43	37.34	31.59	01.08	25.4
Madhya Pradesh	45.83	56.69	65.00	65.28	42.5
Maharashtra	51.64	50.58	52.56	61.06	36.5
Orissa	48.95	71.26	47.45	64.85	48.5
Punjab	22.08	27.00	27.96	00.00	11.7
Rajasthan	38.38	46.23	48.63	13.21	27.4
Tamil Nadu	44.05	44.37	61.50	30.08	35.0
Uttar Pradesh	58.99	37.11	58.02	36.88	40.8
West Bengal	45.29	61.95	37.73	19.41	35.6
All India	48.11	51.94	49.48	41.14	35.9

Source: National Commission for SC/ST, Sixth Report 1999–2000 & 2000–2001, annexure 3. 11, p. 41.

suffer from hunger. They are mostly unable to change the power relationships and there are no mechanisms of grievance redressal. The powerful local forces, in conjunction with the corruptible sections of the state apparatus, manipulate and misappropriate the common resources and public funds which create further helplessness and frustration. It has been termed as 'web of poverty' with centrality of continuous alienation of the people trapped in it and occasional confrontation in the society. This could lead to social tension, despair or a combination of both (Sharma, 2000).

The increasing visibility of a "fault line of deprivation and conflict" is a consequence of such a setting in India today. It is visible in a number of districts of Uttar Pradesh (13), Bihar (26), Orissa (10), Jharkhand (10), Chattisgarh (4), Madhya Pradesh (16), Andhra Pradesh (4), Assam (3), Tripura (1) and Arunachal Pradesh (3) (India Today, 2003). In the terminology of bureaucracy and media, these states have a number of districts which are conflict prone due to the effective presence of "Naxalites", "Senas" (private armies), externally aided "extremists", and separatists. Despite the variation of labels, all of them indicate presence of deepening social conflicts around issues of deprivation and poverty. It is another matter that the pattern, form and objectives of mobilization of discontent are defined by: a) social cleavages, and b) the political conditions of the states.

At the same time, the growth of economic, social and cultural disequilibria, rooted in chronic poverty and resourcelessness is a cause of national concern. It affects governability as well as social and economic development. It also promotes increasing togetherness between poverty and political violence, which causes legitimization of crises and invites use of police force to control its proliferation. If the state gets tough, it creates "martyrs" and myths. If the state remains tolerant and mild it faces escalation of violence and disruption of law and order. The feeling of political and economic exclusion invites entrepreneurs of violence. Therefore, the advocates of violence enjoy such settings where a large number of persons are found to be living on the margins of the economy and society. How do we institutionalize the process of conflict resolution, in a volatile setting of chronic poverty

and social deprivations ? There is gradual decay of the state apparatus at the micro and meso levels in around 76 districts of India where under-development and poverty provide conducive setting for growth of organised violence. The “fault line” and its growing visibility needs further study.

The issue of chronic poverty and conflict is associated with the persistence of insecurity in the life setting of a person, household, group, or community (UNDP, 1999). Human security suggests that people can exercise their choices in pursuit of secure and dignified existence in society safely and freely. It has two main aspects; a) safety from chronic threats such as hunger, disease and repression, and b) protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life whether in homes, in jobs or in communities. According to the United Nations approach, the many threats to human security, differing for individuals at different times, fall into seven categories:

- i. Economic insecurity,
- ii. Food insecurity,
- iii. Health insecurity,
- iv. Personal insecurity,
- v. Environmental insecurity,
- vi. Community and cultural insecurity,
- vii. Political insecurity

These insecurities and threats can affect people everywhere. Famines, ethnic conflicts, social disintegration, terrorism, pollution and drug and human trafficking can no longer be confined within national borders. Some global challenges to human security arise because threats within countries rapidly spill beyond national frontiers, such as greenhouse gases and trade in drugs. Other threats take on a global character because of the disparities between countries - disparities that encourage millions of people to leave their homes in search of a better life, whether the receiving country wants them or not. And frustrations over inequalities in incomes and political power

often build up into serious civil conflicts between groups, whether ethnic, religious or social.

Those suffering chronic poverty are caught in the midst of a set of basic conflicts which perpetuate their insecurity through 'capability poverty', resourcelessness and choicelessness. Some of these conflicts are silent and invisible e.g. the crisis due to ecological factors. Several others are visible as demonstrated by the sufferers of class, caste, ethnic gender, religious (communal) and racial discriminations. Together they contribute towards the continuity of chronic poverty in a cumulative manner by sustaining the logic of power relations and marginality of the chronic poor in the discourse of power. They envelop the institutions and processes of state, market and community.

The most visible and loud conflicts in the context of chronic poverty are found to exist around a) class, b) caste, and c) tribes (ethno-regional issues).

(a) About Class based Conflicts:

The class based conflicts have industrial and rural spheres. Both kinds of conflicts are sinking into marginality in terms of their impact. In the industrial arena, economic liberalism has led to flexible labour market policies like subcontracting, outsourcing and the engagement of temporary and part-time workers in core activities of the labour process. India's integration into the global economy and far reaching structural adjustment for it in the 1990s has weakened the strategic position of the trade unions. According to the Labour Bureau figures of the Government of India, there has been a decline in the number of man-days lost due to strikes and lockouts in 2000 compared to the figures for 1992. Furthermore, more man-days are lost due to lockouts than strikes (J. John, 2001).

In the rural arena, 298 million persons constitute the labour force engaged in agricultural and allied activities which is 79 per cent of the total workforce. A majority of the workforce engaged in agriculture consists of small and marginal farmers and agricultural labourers. About 80 per cent of total rural labour households (over 30 per cent of total rural households) are agricultural labour households. Of them, the

Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes constitute nearly 50 per cent. In general agricultural labourers suffer from seasonal unemployment, job insecurity, poverty, indebtedness, and lack of access to productive assets. They suffer from lack of social security and inability to form their own organizations. The economic reform measures have worsened their condition due to recent hike in the prices of food grains. There is also decline in their position in comparison to their counterparts in other activities in both rural and urban areas in spite of absolute rise in their wages. The hope of 'land to the tillers' generated before independence has receded beyond the realm of realization.

A significant section of owner-cultivators ("farmers") have become vulnerable to poverty due to the promotion of capital-intensive agriculture. In recent years farmers of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Punjab have committed suicides in significant numbers due to crop failures and indebtedness. According to newspapers there were 2409 suicides by farmers between 1995 and 1998, but it needs further study (see Table 5). According to one observer our country is a heaven for middlemen who earn their fabulous commissions and a hell for farmers who sweat and toil (Ramarao, 2003).

Situations of direct and indirect conflict between the poor in rural and urban spheres of the economy and the propertied sections and the state are spreading in various parts of the country. A cycle of conflicts, control and suppression and re-emergence with added strength appears to occur in significant number of rural areas in most of the poor states. The issues causing conflict in rural areas are security of employment, minimum wages, share in the produce, securing of surplus lands, reduction and liquidations of debts and violence by the land owning classes.

There are also tensions and clashes in the context of sexual and cultural oppression and political denial. In fact the year 2000-01 has been a difficult one for rural economy. Income has declined. Agricultural production has been sluggish; food production has declined by almost 5 per cent. Suicides persist. The rural development programmes have recorded declining growth. A combined view of the

Table 5 : Suicides of Farmers in Karnataka (from 1-4-2003 to 8-09-2003)

Districts	No. of Suicides	Districts	No. of Suicides
Bagalkot	7	Belgaum	13
Bangalore (Rural)	8	Davangere	30
Bangalore (Urban)	1	Bellary	9
Bidar	4	Chitradurga	6
Hassan	15	Gulbarga	3
Chamarajnagar	3	Bijapur	1
Haveri	14	Dakshina Kannada	–
Uttara Kannada	–	Gadag	6
Dharwad	8	Koppal	7
Mandya	22	Chickmagalur	6
Raichur	2	Tumkur	9
Shimoga	18	Kolar	6
Mysore	8	Kodagu	2
		Udupi	–
		Total	208

Source: The Hindu, September 14, 2003.

situation of the rural labourers, marginal farmers, and the rural sector's contribution to the national economy gives a depressing picture. It is marked by limited growth of high and upper middle-income households (7.6 million households in rural and 10 million households in urban areas), increased regional disparity (Bihar and Gujarat at 1:7), and the general tenor of the National Agricultural Policy (July, 2000), which ignores the agricultural labour and marginal farmers and may accentuate the pre-existing inequities with possibilities of social strife and disenchantment (Prasad, 2001).

The situation in the urban settings is diffused. But there is growing discontent due to the increasing belief that the current development policies do not have the capability to create the framework within which the conditions of the poor might improve. In urban India slums are growing at the rate of 5 per cent. 24 per cent to 28 per cent of the urban population in Karnataka, Maharashtra and Delhi lives in slums as a fall out of poverty and deprivation. This provides a setting of

recurring conflict between the urban poor and the Government Machinery as they are created out of 'illegal encroachment of government land'. There is high frequency of inter-community strife and conflicts. In fact violence is forced upon them as a way of living. The slum dwellers work mostly in the unorganized sector (in jobs requiring less skill and training). Their incomes are quite insufficient to enable them to lead a dignified life and enjoy basic rights (see Table 6).

Paradoxically, the condition of the working class in the organised sector is found to be drifting from resistance to hopelessness and less conflict in the context of the new economic policies. The new labour laws have diminished the space for class conflict in the organised sector

Table 6: Slum Population in Urban India

States	1981 Rate	Growth	% of Urban Population in Slums	Distribution of Slums between:		Distribution of Slum Population between		State's Urban Noof (1991)	Share in India	
	Urban Slum Popn	Total Urban Popn		Undeclared Slums (%)	Declared Slums (%)	Undeclared Slums (%)	Declared Slums (%)		No of Slums %	Total Urban %
A.P.	—	4.20	3.90	24.4	76.8	23.2	53.5	46.5	11.4	8.2
Bihar	—	2.76	17.0	94.2	05.8	96.6	3.4	4.3	3.2	5.2
Gujarat	5.35	2.95	8.3	52.0	48.0	54.8	45.2	4.6	3.5	6.5
Haryana	9.38	3.68	16.8	82.6	17.4	78.5	21.5	2.2	2.1	1.9
Karnataka	8.45	2.58	24.2	22.0	78.0	19.5	80.5	10.7	9.9	6.4
Kerala	11.55	4.87	17.9	100.0	0.0	100	0.0	0.9	0.4	3.5
M.P.	6.96	3.76	10.9	48.4	51.6	44.5	55.5	5.0	5.0	7.0
Maharashtra	6.20	3.38	26.5	56.9	43.1	55.1	44.9	20.0	24.6	14.0
Orissa	11.57	3.18	18.5	92.3	7.7	69.5	30.5	3.1	2.4	1.9
Punjab	—	2.00	2.58	4.3	58.4	41.6	35.5	64.5	1.0	2.8
Rajasthan	8.87	3.37	5.1	75.6	24.4	60.9	39.1	1.3	1.5	4.6
T.N.	2.96	1.79	13.9	85.4	14.6	61.5	38.5	7.2	7.7	8.8
U.P.	8.53	3.36	5.0	65.2	34.8	60.7	39.3	5.5	4.2	12.7
W.B.	5.58	2.59	24.0	80.9	19.1	81.5	18.5	13.9	13.3	8.6
Delhi	2.38	3.80	28.4	47.1	52.9	37.6	62.4	8.3	7.3	3.9
All-India	5.19	3.15	15.4	63.8	36.2	56.1	43.9	100	100	100

Source: NSS Report, No. 417, Sept. 1997.

of industrial India. There are three major events which have contributed towards the decline of the 'class power' of the organised workers in the last decade – i) disinvestment in the public sector, ii) retrenchment and contractualization of the private industrial establishments, and iii) global recession in the industrial sector. An overview of the changing labour relations scenario may be presented by comparing the figures of industrial disputes in India in 1992 and 2002. It is seen that the figure has declined from 1714 to 413. There was also phenomenal decline in the number of workers involved in disputes and man days lost in the last decade (see Table 7). It needs further enquiry to be able to understand the implications of declining number of trade union strikes in an era of economic transition in favour of entrepreneurs.

b) On Caste Oriented Conflicts

Caste based conflicts are increasing in the context of enlargement of the capacity of two blocks - the political power of the dominant castes and political mobilisation of the Dalit castes or the Scheduled castes. It is causing conflict in the electoral arena, labour market, and civil society.

Table 7: Industrial Disputes in India since 1992

Years	Disputes	Workers Involved	Man days Lost
1992	1714	1252225	31259000
1993	1393	953867	20301000
1994	1201	846429	20983000
1995	1066	989695	16290000
1996	1166	939304	20285000
1997	1305	981267	16971000
1998	1097	1288923	22062000
1999	927	1310695	26787000
2000	771	1418299	28763000
2001	674	687778	23767000
2002	413	523594	15697000

Source: Indian Labour Journal, July 2003, Ministry of Labour, Government of India, Shimla-Chandigarh.

The quest for political power among the Scheduled Castes around the provisions of 'Reserved seats' in legislature has been a major feature of Indian Democracy. They achieved a significant breakthrough with the growth of coalition politics in 1969-71. The making of OBC and Dalit Vote Banks was a singular contribution of socialist politics which contributed towards a 'Silent Revolution' in the era of "Green Revolution" (Jeffrelot, 2002). At the same time there is marginal increase in the percentage of Dalits below the poverty line during the privatization-globalization regime from 44.7 per cent in 1987-88 to above 48 per cent in 1993-94, which is significantly higher than estimates for the general population (39 per cent). The literacy gap between the SCs and rest of the population has also remained more than 17 per cent between 1961 and 1991. According to the Census of 1991 more than 80 per cent rural Dalit women were found to be illiterate. They were also sufferers at the hands of the dominant castes in different parts of India. Between 1995 and 1997, a total of 90,925 cases were registered between with the police under different categories of crimes and atrocities against the Dalits. Nearly 70 per cent of all the offences were reported from the BIMARU states - Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh (see National SC/ST Commission Report, 1997-98).

Mass murders of the Dalits by dominant castes in Andhra Pradesh and Bihar has underlined the depth of conflict between the castes in rural India over the last several years. According to an estimate, the period between 1990 and 1999 witnessed 35 instances of caste-based massacres, the total number of victims being about 400. More than 350 of those killed were from among the lower castes (Frontline, 1999). In short the issue of caste-class convergence in the context of chronic poverty in an era of dominant caste democracy and liberalization-globalisation is promoting anti-Dalit caste violence in rural areas and decline in the opportunities for the Dalits in the urban-industrial economy (see Black Paper, 1999).

According to the Sixth Report of the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (1999-2001), the extent of crimes and atrocities on persons belonging to Scheduled Castes is much

higher than those on Scheduled Tribe. The cases of atrocities on Scheduled Castes are about 6-7 times more than STs, though the population of SCs is only twice that of STs. Uttar Pradesh (6122), Rajasthan (5623), and Madhya Pradesh (4667) have reported highest incidence of crime against Scheduled Castes. These three states account for 65.4 per cent of the total cases of atrocities on SCs in the country during 1999. The position of registered cases of atrocities in other states was Gujarat (1781), Andhra Pradesh (1749), Karnataka (1277), Tamil Nadu (883), Bihar (820), Orissa (772), Maharashtra (605), Kerala (514), Haryana (121), Himachal Pradesh (54), Punjab (39) and Delhi (18). There had been a declining trend in crimes committed on members of SCs, STs, between 1997 and 2000. In the case of SCs, number of crimes came down from 32,997 in 1995 and 27,944 in 1997 to 23,742 in 2000; and for STs from 4644 in 1997 to 3958 in 2000. This decline deserves closer study to find out the relative roles of state, political mobilization, media and NGOs and increasing vigilance and resistance by SCs and STs.

One of the most obvious reasons for so many attacks on SC men and women is related to the refusal of the SCs to work without dignity and appropriate wages. The assertiveness of these castes for higher wages, freedom of choice of work and endeavor to achieve mobility as cultivators are among the most frequent reasons for atrocities against SCs.

c) Tribes and Conflicts

The Tribal dimension of chronic poverty is most pronounced in the context of conflicts and movements. They constitute 8 per cent of the population. 83 per cent of them live in the area between West-Bengal and Gujarat, 12 per cent in the North eastern region, 4 per cent in Nilgiri Hills and 1 per cent in J&K and Himachal Pradesh. It is believed that confrontation has been the quintessence of the situation in the tribal areas after the rise of 'state' as a formal system of political and administrative authority. The ever-increasing exploitation of the tribals and elimination of their lands led to revolts and rebellion in many parts of India. 'Leave them alone' (or 'exclusion') as in the hills of North-East and 'light' administration (or 'partial exclusion')

elsewhere was the response of the Imperial Regime in the face of determined resistance to their advancement and consolidation. The dawn of independence ushered in a new era of high hopes and soaring aspirations with an ebullient nation committed to the ideals of democracy, equity and social justice. The cause of weaker sections, particularly the tribal people, was accepted as a national task with clear premises and constitutional commitments. But the hopes were belied. The tribal people in fact faced regression as the personalized administration gave way to an amorphous faceless system. Influx of immigrants, alienation of their lands and underdevelopment are three major problems of the Tribal communities.

According to the Report of MPs and Experts (Bhuria Committee Report, 1995), "Notwithstanding the rhetoric of the past four decades, on account of absence of effective democratic decentralization at even district levels, demands and agitations for separate states in the country have taken root in Jharkhand, Bodoland, Uttarakhand, etc. Iniquitous policies and actions and economic imbalance have led to resentment among the deprived regions. Assertions on the basis of region, ethnicity, languages, etc. have been made. They have come to feel that without the political power of a state, they are not able to claim their rightful due"¹.

In economic terms, the Scheduled Tribes (ST) have been found to receive a total household income of Rs. 19,556 and a per capita income of Rs. 3,504, which are 76 and 78 per cent respectively, of the national average. Both incidence and intensity of poverty are higher among the Scheduled Tribes in comparison with the national average. They have recorded a literacy level of about 40 per cent in comparison to an all India average of 54 per cent. Only about one-fourth of ST women are literate. Literacy levels are extremely low for STs in Bihar, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa.

More than 87 per cent of the total population has been depending on agriculture for their livelihood, supplemented by collection and sale of minor forest products. However the percentage of cultivators has declined from 68 per cent to 54.5 per cent in 1991 and the proportion of agricultural labour is increasing correspondingly. Vast

areas of tribal lands have been acquired under the Land Acquisition Act and still are being acquired for industrial and infrastructural development. Out of the total 213 lakh displaced persons (1951–1990), 85.4 lakhs are Scheduled Tribes. They constitute about 40 per cent of the total number of displaced persons. From the total 83.8 lakh rehabilitated persons, 21.2 lakhs i.e. 39.4 per cent belong to STs. Dams (41 lakhs), mining (6.5 lakhs) and industries (3.8 lakhs) are the major causes of tribal displacements. A landmark judgement of Supreme Court in the case of *Samatha vs. The State of Andhra Pradesh and others* (11th July, 1997) has placed a check on this. The Supreme Court has ordered that government lands, forest lands and tribal lands in the Scheduled Areas cannot be leased out to non-tribals or to private companies for mining and industrial operations.

Social insecurity among the Scheduled Tribes, particularly the ST women, is also a cause of concern. Out of nearly 4000 cases of atrocities committed against Scheduled Tribes in 2000, there were 391 cases (9.8 per cent) of rape. The incidents of atrocities on Scheduled Tribes were highest in Madhya Pradesh (1756), followed by Rajasthan (1221), Gujarat (367), Orissa (335), Andhra Pradesh (178), Maharashtra (171), Tamil Nadu (105) and Kerala (81). The direct and indirect relationships between the efforts of STs to move out of exploitative dependencies and the acts of atrocities is a relevant question for further systematic enquiry. At the same time, it may be concluded that the extreme forms of exploitation and violation of civil rights that exist in areas such as Chattishgarh and Jharkhand have turned them into places of long standing insurgency. Another reason for the rising violence in forest areas is encroachment by migrants who are taking over the land of the local people. This causes conflict over resource use.

Such a profile of tribal India makes it obvious that the tribals are the worst sufferers of resourcelessness and choicelessness as well as the most disenfranchised section of the Indian population in post-colonial India. They are leading components in a variety of mobilizations in the last two decades including movements for environmental protection (*Narmada Bachao*), states reorganization (Jharkhand, Uttarakhand,

and Chattisgarh), political separation (the separatist movements of the North-Eastern Tribals), and resistance to globalization (Kashipur). Such conflictual mobilizations have brought the issue of chronic poverty of tribal India to the attention of national media and policy analysts in recent years thereby prompting the governments to come forward with a variety of anti-poverty measures and development packages. Creation of three new provinces Jharkhand (out of Bihar), Chattisgarh (out of Madhya Pradesh) and Uttaranchal (out of Uttar Pradesh) is a major effort to address the challenge of tribal alienation and unrest. It also marks the beginning of assertiveness for tribal autonomy and dignity in the Hindi belt of India.

7. Two Trajectories of Poverty, Politics And Conflicts : West Bengal And Bihar

India is a vast economic, cultural and political area with diversities. But the policy of the elimination of rural intermediaries and land reforms adopted after independence caused “reshuffling” of class relations in the countryside. The transformation initiative was a response to long peasant mobilizations during the freedom movement for addressing poverty. However, it performed a dual function – i) elevating the richer section of the tenants into owner class which broadened the base of the proprietary classes who take active interest in agricultural development for maximizing profit, and ii) growth of marginal farmers, ‘back door’ tenants and proletarianized labour due to new tenurial system. The change has promoted intense competition among the newly emerging proprietary classes. They are also contending with the demands and struggles of the rural masses which are being steadily pauperized and marginalized.

On the other hand, evolution of democracy has contributed to the metamorphosis of major caste groups including the Dalits into competing associations beyond the ascriptive principles of the caste system. There has been eruption of caste organizations with intense activities in nearly all sectors of the emerging economy and in the political processes which is a response to the imperatives of the democratic political system. The changes in the caste system have the

following characteristics: i) There is simultaneous weakening of the upper castes and strengthening of intermediary agrarian caste promoting a dominant caste coalitional complex in the political space, and ii) The lower caste who are also major occupants of the lowest economic labels, are getting regrouped to counteract the adverse effect of new economic and political processes. This section has been offered preferential facilities ('reservations') and opportunities in elections, education and government services. It has contributed to making the lower castes vocal.

The impact of new constitutional projects for the abolition of the caste system and restructuring the class system through affirmative action in response to the modern India has been uneven and complex. It has contained and resolved some of the most prominent issues causing conflict in the society. But it has also given rise to new competition and conflicts due to realignment of political, social and economic groups. Therefore it is relevant to provide a glimpse of the paradoxical relationship between economic, social and political structures and processes in the context of poverty and social conflict by presenting the cases of West Bengal and Bihar.

West Bengal's Record

West Bengal and Bihar are neighbouring states which belonged to the Bengal Presidency in the colonial era. Their political economy was organized through zamindari system. Both had strong peasant movements, trade union activities and anti-poverty political formations. Both were sites of intense rural conflicts and urban movements in the post colonial decades. Both were ruled by the Congress Party between 1952 and 1967 and both got their first non-Congress governments in 1967. But they followed different trajectories in the last four decades since 1967 that resulted in major reforms in favour of poorer sections in West Bengal. Today, there is no major industrial or agrarian conflict in West Bengal (see Table 8).

First, we look at the politics and social change in West Bengal which along with Bihar and Orissa had the highest proportion of population below the poverty line. West Bengal has been plagued by

Table 8: Industrial Dispute: West Bengal and India

	1968	1972			1977	
	West Bengal	All India	West Bengal	All India	West Bengal	All India
No. of disputes	454	2317	367	2912	480	3117
No. of Workers involved	397237	129059	343649	1593333	307344	2193215
No. of Man days lost	7343706	17243679	4594023	17921344	8481000	65320000
	1993		1998			
	West Bengal	All India	West Bengal	All India		
No. of disputes	8	263	4	231		
No. of Workers involved	201209	565152	51222	954940		
No. of Man days lost	20327	2291547	339222	7254337		

Source: *Indian Labour Statistics 1973* (pages 160, 174–175 and 182–183); 1978 (Table No. 10.8, pages 305–306); 1994 (Table No. 10.2A, pages 205–207) and 1998 & 1999 (Table no. 10.2A, pages 219–221); *Ministry of Labour, Government of India, Shimla, Chandigarh* (2001).

high population density, industrial stagnation, rural conflict and economic decline in the 1980s. But these conditions were changed through reorientation of the government policies via social mobilization and political alliances which was steered by a left front coalition in office since 1977.

High levels of unrest in rural areas for effective implementation of agrarian reforms, radical trade union movements for better wages, cheaper food items, education, health and transport facilities and emergence of a leftist political front were the outstanding features of West Bengal since late 1960s. The movement of the small and marginal farmers accelerated after the foundation of first United Front Government in 1967. It culminated into the famous Naxalbari revolt and the birth of Naxalism (or Maoism and Marxist – Leninist Communist Party). The United Front Government was removed by the centre and the peasant protests and ‘Naxalite’ activists were ruthlessly suppressed under President’s Rule. But within a decade, there was Left Front Government in Kolkata after sweeping out the Congress regime at the centre and the state in 1977. Agrarian reforms

and organization of local governance system were given top priority by the Left Front Government. This resulted in a sustained period of conflict containment and political stability for decades after 1977. For example, the number of riots came down from 11,702 (1977) to 3,899 (2000) whereas there was no substantial change in the scene of Bihar or All-India (see Table 9).

How was this accomplished? There was redistribution of more than 9,13,000 acres of land amongst 19,93,660 households which covered a large proportion of the rural population of the landless and land-poor households. Decades old demands of tenants-farmers organizations for higher crop shares, security of tenures and legal status of tenancy agreements were accepted through "Operation Barga". It gave relief and strength to the vulnerable and exploited sections of rural Bengal, which accounted for 1.44 million share croppers in the state.

West Bengal is an example of generating conducive setting for poverty eradication and conflict resolution through a combination of reforming production relations and instruments of local governance. It has been achieved on the basis of political mobilization and electoral strength around 'peasant unity'. Now West Bengal is engaged in negotiating the path beyond the agrarian agenda for satisfactory progress in universalization of health care and basic education (Dreze and Sen, 1997). In other words the record of West Bengal shows positive correlation between poverty and conflict on one hand, and conflict, political change and economic reforms on the other.

Table 9: Riots since 1972

STATE/YEARS	1972	1977	1992	2000
Bihar	10053	12349	15067	10647
West Bengal	9488	11702	7256	3899
All India	65781	80449	104749	80456

Source: *Crime in India*, Bureau of Police Research and Development, Ministry of Labour, Govt. of India, New Delhi. The figures of 1972 (pages 11,12); 1977 (pages 24,25); 1992 (pages 45,49) and 2000 (pages 52,54) are taken from the annual reports of the same years.

The Case of Bihar

The history of rural unrest and agrarian movement in Bihar goes back to the Kol and Bhumiji insurrections of 1831-33 against the newly established colonial administration in Chota Nagpur and adjoining areas. The peasant movements in the regions to the north and south of the Ganges, from mid 19th century to the present day, have been regularly studied due to their significance for the peasants and agricultural workers of India. It proved to be the nucleus of All India Kisan Sabha as well as the Indian National Congress, Socialist movements and Communist movements in the twentieth century. But Bihar failed to institutionalize any change in the exploitative agrarian structure after independence. While the introduction of democracy with universal adult franchise, raised the expectations of poor peasantry, changeless agrarian system of Bihar soon became a victim of the dual failures – continuity of extremely exploitative relations and growing stagnation in the agrarian economy (see Table 10).

The stagnation in agricultural production around 5 per cent annual compound rate of growth between 1969–70 and 1983–84; which was lowest in India, not only caused depeasantization but also led to declining fortunes of the rich and middle peasants. It had widened the scope of conflict between the rich and middle peasants and the rural proletariat. The inability (as well as resistance) to pay minimum wages to the agricultural workers (most of whom belong to the Scheduled Castes) had turned them towards the new revolutionary leadership for

Table 10: Land Distribution in Bihar

Farmer	Holding	Area
Sub Marginal	52.03	8.28
Marginal	24.73	20.74
Small	13.67	25.13
Medium	8.54	34.25
Large	1.01	11.59
Total	100.00	100.00

Source: Prasad, I. (2000): *Bihar (Aarudh Vikas) Gandhi Sanghrabaha, Patna, Table No. 11, p.32.*

their fight for wages. As a consequence violent clashes had become a general phenomenon in Central Bihar. According to official sources, there were 463 and 590 violent clashes in 1998 and 1999 respectively. But the list of events of mass murders due to the conflicts between various sections of peasants and agricultural workers began to grow particularly from 1990-91 onwards including Devas Diyara (1991, 15 killed), Bathanitola (1996, 22 killed), Laxamanpur Bathe (1997, 58 killed), Shankar Bigaha (1999, 22 killed), Senari (1999, 34 killed), and Miyanpur (2000, 34 killed) (see Table 11).

Table 11: Social Violence in Bihar

S. No.	Year	Village	Person killed	S. No.	Year	Village	Person Killed
1.	1971	Rupaspur	15	19.	1992	Bara	39
2.	1977	Belchhi	11	20.	1994	Lamargarha	11
3.	1980	Pipra	14	21.	1996	Bathanitola	22
4.	1980	Parasbeegha	11	22.	1997	Haivaspur	10
5.	1985	Banchi	15	23.	1997	Jalpura	11
6.	1985	Laxmipur	12	24.	1997	Kodarma	13
7.	1986	Arwal	22	25.	1997	Balumath	12
8.	1986	Kesara	11	26.	1997	Amkudar	10
9.	1988	Nonahinagava	19	27.	1997	Laxmanpur Bathe	58
10.	1988	Damaha	11	28.	1997	Narvoul	20
11.	1989	Danwar	30	29.	1997	Atakadeeh	10
12.	1991	Kansar	10	30.	1997	Nagari	10
13.	1991	Teesarkhora	14	31.	1999	Shankerbigaha	22
14.	1991	Khura	11	32.	1999	Narayanpur	11
15.	1991	Malwaria	11	33.	1999	Senari	34
16.	1991	Davas Diyara	15	34.	1999	Khagari Bigaha	12
17.	1991	Railigarha	10	35.	2000	Apasad	11
18.	1991	Basasingha	10	36.	2000	Miyanpur	34

Source: *Hindustan (Hindi) Patna, June 18, 2000.*

It seems that the state machinery had become marginalized as most of these killings were carried out by armed groups belonging to peasant communities and the marginal and landless poor (see table 12). These Senawars had become more prominent than the electoral and other institutional forms of conflicts and competition.

In short, Bihar is a case where politics has failed and there is absence of effective local governance apparatus, like Panchayats, Police Station

Table 12: Violence Around Caste-Class Nexus. (1996-2000)

Date	Place	Number	Killer	Group
1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
11 July, 1996	Bathani tola	21	Ranweer Sena	Dalita
24 December 1996	Haivaspur	13	Ranweer Sena	Dalita
31 December 1997	Laxmanpur bathe	61	Ranweer Sena	Dalita
11 May 1998	Nagri bazar	10	Ranweer Sena	Dalita
25 January 1999	Shankerbigaha	22	Ranweer Sena	Dalita
10 February 1999	Narayanpur	11	Ranweer Sena	Dalita
14 February 1999	Usari sarai	7	People war group	Upper
18 March 1999	Senari	33	MCC	Castes
21 April 1999	Zahirbigaha	12	Ranweer Sena	Castes
18 Number 1999	Latu	12	M.C.C.	Dalit/OBC
3 June 2000	Rajiv bigaha	6	M.C.C.	Muslim
13 June 2000	Apasarh	11	M.C.C.	Yadava
16 June 2000	Myanpur	34	Renweer Sena	Upper Caste OBC

Source: The Sunday Statesman , 18 June 2000.

and Block Development Offices. The larger political system has been affected by corruption at high places. It has led to criminalization of politics and politicization of crime as a cumulative consequence which is indicated in the increasing number of kidnappings in Bihar (see Table 13). The incidents of kidnapping have increased from 580 in 1972 to 2711 in 2000 – a five-fold increase in the state of Bihar whereas it was 769 and 926 in 1972 and 2000 in West Bengal.

Bihar is also the state with the largest proportion of persons below the poverty line as 26 out of 37 districts are among the most backward

Table 13: Kidnappings since 1972

STATE/YEARS	1972	1977	1992	2000
Bihar	580	887	968	2711
West Bengal	769	969	632	926
All India	9402	12240	13996	22871

Source: Crime in India, Bureau of Police Research and Development, Ministry of Labour, Govt. of India, New Delhi. The figures of 1972 (p.11,12); 1977 (pages 24,25); 1992 (p.45,49) and 2000 (pages 52,54) are taken from the annual reports of the same years.

districts in the country. Therefore, it should not be a surprise if Bihar is affected by increasingly violent settings of economy, polity and society as the state system has consistently failed to respond to poverty affected groups and social conflicts around poverty problems despite major changes in the governments between 1967 and 2002 at the provincial and central levels.

8. Poverty of Politics-Limits of Planning and Reservation

It may be useful to have an overview of the relationship between poverty and politics, as articulated through the two processes of planning and reservation during the last five decades of post-colonial India. Poverty in India, whether it is measured in terms of income or nutritional levels, is concentrated among certain occupational classes and social categories in both the rural and urban sectors. Most of the rural poor are found among (i) peasant cultivators with very small holdings, and (ii) agricultural workers from the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes. The causes of poverty in urban settings are mostly underemployment in various occupations with low productivity occupations such as portering, insecure employment and low real wages in some industries. Migrant workers are prominent amongst the urban poor. Furthermore, as none of the urban poor are producers of food and have to buy a part of their total requirements in the open market, they are extremely susceptible to rising food prices. In addition, the urban poor suffer from extremely bad conditions of housing, water supply and sanitation.

There has been a steady decline in the proportion of people below poverty line from about 55 per cent in the mid-1970s to 36 per cent in 1993-94 and to around 30 per cent in 2001, but their actual numbers have been rising. At the same time it is true that food insecurity and income poverty have been brought on the state's agenda through series of mobilizations, as well as natural calamities, in the last five decades. It also shows that poverty continues to create severe adversities in the lives of the rural people, particularly the small and marginal farmers, agricultural laborers and artisans and has a high incidence among the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in rural as well as urban areas. It is regionally concentrated in seven states – Assam, Bihar, Orissa,

Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and West Bengal. But there are extremely poor districts in several other states as well.

As a consequence, food security and poverty eradication have been the key objectives of the Indian planning strategy. A number of direct poverty alleviation programmes were introduced from 1971-72 after the massive electoral success of the Congress led by Indira Gandhi in 1971-72. Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) and Training for the Rural Youth for Self Employment (TRYSEM) were two key components of the poverty related programmes in this period.

Poverty was a major theme in politics and planning since 1971-72. But the crisis of implementation, non-viability of projects and slow economic growth created several weaknesses in it by the mid 1980s. It caused a shift from income generation to human development oriented schemes. It also exerted pressure for de-bureaucratization of the poverty related programmes through peoples' participation via Panchayat Raj institutions and NGOs.

With a paradigm shift in the late 1980s to the early 1990s, the issue of poverty lost its significance in the political discourse of India. This decline in importance was reflected in the Election Manifestos of major Indian political parties where the idea of growth and governance found more prominence than poverty alleviation and expenditure on employment generation. Expectations from private sector activities were a new component of the planning strategy in the era of liberalization.

Rise in the frequency of violent conflicts in the regions suffering from poverty is becoming a significant feature of the political landscape of India since the shift of political attention away from the challenge of poverty. Land reforms, removal of illiteracy and malnutrition, encouragement of shelter construction for the homeless, and social mobilization for breaking down the caste barriers which have trapped the SC and ST population in rural areas are some of the neglected themes in the national politics of India since the inauguration of the phase of rolling back of the state from the economic sphere.

At the same time it may also be highlighted that the engagement

with poverty alleviation through planning has experienced four kinds of limits- economic, administrative, political and international constraints. The Anti-Poverty Programme of today's India involves 1 percent of GDP or 6 per cent of the Central Budget, 55 per cent of which is allocated for food subsidy or Public Distribution System (PDS), 35 per cent is allocated for Rural Works Programme, and around 5 per cent is provided for Self Employment Programmes. But there are severe resource problems due to the compulsions of allocating 50 per cent of the available national resources for debt servicing and 25 per cent for defence needs. The challenge is compounded by the continuing mal-functioning of local self-governance mechanisms and bureaucratic inefficiencies in the poverty affected areas. Politically, the situation has worsened due to the rise of crime politics nexus and more importance being accorded to politics of identity over politics of 'common interests'. Internationally there are growing pressures upon the Indian state for 'rolling back'. It is further complicated by the presence of hostile neighbours who are not keen on promoting regionalization in South Asia Economic Zone.

Reservation was the second most important political intervention in meeting the challenges of poverty and deprivation. But this has remained more symbolic than substantive. Let us first have a look at the constitutional provisions for safeguarding the interests of the SCs and STs. Article 17 (abolition of untouchability), Article 23 (prohibition of forced labour), Article 45 (universalization of primary education), Article 46 (promotion of educational and economic interests of SCs and STs), Article 330 and 332 (proportionate reservation of seats in the Lok Sabha and the State assemblies) and Article 335 (appointment to services and posts in Union and State services), are the most important provisions of the constitution of India in the context of protective measures for the amelioration of the conditions of the weaker sections of Indian society.

In the case of the Other Backward Classes (OBCs), there has been the use of Article 16(4) of the Constitution of India to address the problem of inadequate access to representation in the services under the state. It was activated in 1990 on the basis of the

recommendations of a Second National Commission on Backward Classes (also known as Mandal Commission) with the caution of the Supreme Court that the benefit of reservations will not be extended to persons/sections falling under the category of 'creamy layer'.

This system of special treatment to underprivileged sections involves three types of preferences.

1. Reservations, which provide easier access to valued positions within important social institutions like legislature, government services and academic institutions. It is also used in land allotments, housing and other scarce resources.
2. There are expenditures of government resources on behalf of the beneficiaries like scholarships, grants, loans, legal aids etc.
3. There are special protections, such as measures to protect "untouchables" from discriminatory treatment.

Given such an institutional approach, the policies of reservations have created a symbolic power for all those who belong to the SCs (16.7 percent of the population), STs (8 per cent) and OBCs (52 per cent). It has also given recognition to the need for national reorientation for such sections of the population who are found to be trapped in a 'web of poverty' due to conjunction of social, economic and political deprivations and discrimination over a period of time.

The reservation policy regime has promoted a progressive outlook in the society because it legitimizes integrative representation and redistributive mobilization. Besides, it has to be recognized that the exclusive emphasis upon 'timeless' system of reservation in jobs and legislature has bypassed the poor of these categories. There has been evolution of blocks of vested interests in such category of the beneficiaries of reservation in the past five decades.

The majority of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are agricultural labourers. Because of economic compulsions, their children have to go to work when they should be in schools. Children who labour, lose education and therefore employment opportunities when they are adults. Without the means of income for want of education,

they in turn may continue to send their children to work. It strengthens the vicious circle of poverty and this has not been addressed by 'job reservation'.

Similarly the question of number has played a crucial role in determining the chances of receiving attention of the state and gain of vote power. It has created cleavages between the large, medium and small groups of SCs, STs and OBCs. For example, the SCs are 21 per cent of the population in Uttar Pradesh. But Chamars constitute 12.7 per cent and Pasis are 3 per cent. They have created a sub-category of empowered and mobile SCs. But there are 6.5 per cent other SCs, with a total share of only 2.8 per cent in population, who remain most depressed due to numerical marginality. The rise of dominant castes among the OBCs like Jats, Yadavas, Kurmis, Lodhis, Reddys, Kammas, Vokkaligas, Lingayats, etc. has led to marginalization of the other OBCs who are recognized as Most Backward Castes (MBCs) in the discourse of power.

In short, the impact of reservation policies is visible in the political culture where the SCs the STs and the OBCs have emerged as new corporate identities with constitutional protection for representation and empowerment. But it has not contributed towards any qualitative shift in the lives of the poorer sections of these communities, where poverty is getting perpetuated in overwhelming numbers despite decades of freedom and democracy, planning and reservations.

9. Liberalization, Poverty Alleviation and Conflicts

Opening the market of India to global companies and reducing the role of public sector have been two major components of the new economic policies. They are also associated with globalization of capital mobility and ethnicization of political mobilization. It was found that there was i) a boom in the private sector, ii) stable growth in agricultural sector (3.6 per cent per annum), iii) declining rate of population growth (1.6 per cent per annum), and iv) improvement in social indicators (like literacy rate, infant mortality rate, gender related indicators etc.). In the early 1990's, poverty worsened following structural adjustments, a poor harvest and a decline in food availability. There was some decline

in poverty and by 1993-94 it fell below the 1987 level. States in the north and east, that have 40 per cent of India's population have lagged in reducing poverty since the late 1970's.

According to economic analysts, expenditure on social sector schemes as part of the welfare oriented programs of the Indian state has been increasing in real terms in the era of liberalization (see Table 14).

Table 14: Central Government expenditure (Plan and Non-Plan) on Social Sectors and Rural Development

Item	1992-93 Actual	1998-99 Actual	2000-01 Actual	2000-01 Actual	2001-02 Actual	2002-03 Actual
1. Social devices	6397	19750	23406	26550	29267	33547
a. Education, Sports & Youth Affairs	1878 1722	6604 3993	7081 5012	7696 5291	8703 5734	9948 7038
b. Health and Family Welfare	788	4073	4465	4932	5853	5391
c. Water supply, Sanitation Housing and Urban Development	371	1041	1169	1317	1331	1438
d. Information & Broadcasting	488	916	951	969	1133	1385
e. Welfare of SC/ST and Other Backward Classes	347	708	845	894	871	900
f. Labour, Employment and Labour Welfare	803	2415	3883	44124 1327	3092 2550	2768 2768
g. Other Social Services				4449	5729	4679
h. North-Eastern area	3211	5854	5184	321^	341	5430
2. Rural Development				2350^	2500	2500
3. Basic Minimum Services (BMS)* including Slum Development				2500	2533	2800
4. Pradhan Mantri Gramodaya Yojana (PMGY)@ Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY)@						

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Table 14 Continued: Central Government expenditure (Plan and Non-Plan) on Social Sectors and Rural Development

Item	1992-93 Actual	1998-99 Actual	2000-01 Actual	2000-01 Actual	2001-02 Actual	2002-03 Actual
5. Social Services, Rural Dev. BMS and PMGY (1+2+3+4)	9608	29288	32638	36170	40370	45642
6. Total Central Govt. of expenditure as % GDP at current market price	17.40	16.04	15.40	15.50	16.0	16.74
7. Social Services, Rural Dev. BMS & PMGY as a % of total Expenditure	7.8	10.5	11.0	11.1	11.1	11.1
8. Social Services, Rural Dev. BMS & PMGY as a % of GDP at Market Prices	1.4	1.7	1.7	1.7	1.8	1.9

Note: Figure for the year 1992-99, 1998-99 to 2000-01 are actual.

*: Came into operation from 1996-97

@: Launched in 2000-01 (BE) as a new initiative for basic rural needs.

** : The total Central Government Expenditure excludes the transfer of state UTs share of small savings collections.

§: Ratios to GDP are at current market prices as released by COS, GDP for 2002-03 is based on COS'S Advance Estimates.

^: RE figure

Source: Budget Documents.

At the same time it has also been pointed out that it is mainly through increased expenditures of the Central government. The state governments are easing out of their constitutional commitment to sustain programmes in social sectors and it is a matter of concern. Here the social sector expenditure is defined as the total expenditure on social services and rural development. The social services include education, health and family welfare, water supply and sanitation. The rural development expenditure relates mostly to anti-poverty programmes and is presented as 'economic services' in the budget documents.

The realities of 'reforms' have created new challenges for India

since: a) So far mostly the better off sections are able to respond to market signals and the rural population has benefited less. b) India is suffering marginalisation in a globalized world and loss of domestic market due to unfettered entry of the foreign companies under the WTO provisions. c) The role of government in economic and social matters is shrinking which has caused apprehensions about 'the future of the protective discrimination' for the weaker sections.

These challenges are being listed as tasks during the Second Generation Reforms. It is recognized by the policy makers that "Freedom from ignorance, diseases and fear, along with freedom from want, are the best guarantors of human development. But education, health care, water and sanitation services, which can ensure these freedoms, are not accessible to all. To ensure easy accessibility, we need public action in these areas if human development has to gather momentum. Together, these facilities comprise a nation's social infrastructure that is as critical as physical infrastructure for a widely shared and inclusive development". These challenges have been integral in the making of the new approach to poverty (see Table 15).

A set of new goals has been adopted in the field of education, health, and safety nets. Ensuring 100 per cent literacy in the next five,

Table 15: Poverty Index

1)	Health Deprivations (3): i) Life expectancy less than 40 years ii) Lack of access to basic medical services iii) Non-immunized children
2)	Educational Deprivations (2): iv) Illiteracy rate v) Un-enrolled children
3)	Economic Deprivations (5): vi) Below poverty line vii) Katcha dwelling viii) Lack of sanitation facilities ix) Lack of safe drinking water x) Lack of electricity connection

Source : National Human Development Report 2001.

if not three years; aim for 75 per cent enrolment in higher secondary schools of good quality with encouragement to private sector to provide good schools in every Taluka; raising college enrollment to 20 per cent in the age group 20-24 years; and revitalizing the university system are the major goals in education. Healthcare policy goals include reducing the all-India infant and child mortality rate; expanding health care infrastructure to rural areas; ensuring access to clean drinking water; and encouragement to NGOs and private sector to engage in the health sector. The construction of social safety nets will be based on a) a model employment programme covering the whole country, b) Integrated child development services to reduce child mortality and poverty and c) group-based micro-credit schemes to cover the entire country. Thus, there are new tasks before India, in the context of Global Goals for moving further in the direction of construction of the welfare state after five decades of successful democratization of the political culture and decolonization of national economy (see Table 16).

The social sector expenditures have resulted in the decline of illiteracy from above 80 per cent in 1951 to less than 35 per cent in 2001. The longevity of the people of India has increased from less than 39 years in 1951 to above 65 years in 2001. Even the incidence of poverty has declined from over 50 per cent in 1950s to less than 30 per cent in 2001. But the new challenges are demanding a new interface between the nation-state and the modern world system at the global level and between the state and the market in Indian political economy. So far the shift of paradigm has been carefully utilized by dominant elite caste, the coastal zones of south and west, major industrial groups, and global financial firms. It has promoted consumerism among the middle classes and scams among the elite in power. At the same time a new wave of people's movements by political parties and non-party organizations has been created to demand freedom from illiteracy, hunger, diseases, environmental degradation, and unemployment.

The pressure groups for social justice and political empowerment are also becoming increasingly visible and assertive. The Dalit movement, the women's movement, the movement of local people

Table 16: Millennium Development Goals to be achieved by 2015

Goals for development and poverty eradication set at the UN General Assembly in 2000:	
1) Eradication of extreme poverty and hunger:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Halve the proportion of people living on less than \$ 1 a day. ● Halve the proportion of people suffering from hunger.
2) Achieve universal primary education:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ensure that children everywhere – boys and girls alike – complete a full course of primary education.
3) Promote gender equality and empower women:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education by 2015.
4) Reduce child mortality:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reduce infant and under – five mortality rates by two-third.
5) Improve maternal health:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reduce material mortality ratio by two-quarters.
6) Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS. ● Halt the begin to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases.
7) Ensure environmental sustainability:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources. ● Halve the proportion of people without sustainable safe drinking water. ● Achieve, by 2002, a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers.
8) Develop a global partnership for development.	

Source: *Human Development Report 2002 of UNDP.*

(tribes) for control over land, forest, and water resources are some examples of it. The movement for Right to Information and pressure for Electoral Reforms are becoming significant as the citizens are getting increasingly anguished about criminalization of politics and increasing marginalisation of common people's concerns. It seems that the need of the hour is to drive India towards a system of participatory democracy through planning for decentralization of power and

empowerment of the marginal sections of the masses like women, the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, based upon the twin goals of rapid growth and elimination of poverty for the construction of a just and prosperous social order. It is likely that the heritage of Indian National Movement, the basic values of the Constitution of India (including the Directive Principles) and the continuous widening of the social base of democracy in India in the last five decades may provide the required support in the era of liberalization and global market mediation.

It is important to take note of the roots of sluggishness in poverty reduction in the era of liberalization and address the same. The World Bank approach attempts to argue that there are five interrelated compartments of problems which are contributing to the continuity of poverty:

- i) characteristics of agricultural growth in the 1990s,
- ii) the slowdown of growth in the poorer states (which are predominantly agricultural),
- iii) the problems of infrastructure, social services and poverty programmes (especially in the poorer states),
- iv) poor incentive framework, and
- v) weakness in governance.

The World Bank analysis has also given content to the eradication of poverty in India in the new century:

- a) upliftment of 300 million people concentrated in poorer states,
- b) raising literacy rate from 62 per cent (50 per cent for females) by enrolling over 300 million children (mostly poor) who are out of school,
- c) addressing the gender based inequalities faced by women in the political, legal and economic systems,
- d) reversing the decline in infrastructure spending to meet urban needs and to increase the rate and spread of urbanization.

It is arguing in favour of implementing “second phase of reforms” which involves – i) cuts in explicit and implicit subsidies together

with privatization of power, ii) government rolling back from infrastructural activities in favour of private sector, iii) more spending on health and elementary education, iv) improvement in government and governance, v) completion of deregulation of goods and factor markets, and vi) provision of high quality infrastructure services.

The critics of liberalization are arguing that liberalization has made the economy systematically “demand constrained”. They indicate that the demand constrained nature of the Indian economy is manifested today as the combination of industrial recession and surplus stocks of foodgrains and foreign exchange. They argue that “withdrawal” by the state is the primary reason for the emergence of the demand constraint as it has created deflationary effects which are not offset by private investments. It has contributed negatively to the fields of employment and poverty. First of all employment in the organized sector has been virtually stagnant for some time; of late even rural employment expansion has begun to stagnate. According to the economic survey of 2003, there was a net 3 percent decline in rural employment in the preceding year which was a serious indicator of the crisis of employment. Secondly, the head-count ratio of rural poverty which had declined significantly during the eighties has ceased to decline over the nineties, and might have marginally increased (see Table 17).

This perspective points out that it is ironical that the government

Table 17: Head count Poverty Ratio (per cent) 1977-98

NSS Round	Period	Rural Ratio	Urban Ratio
32	July 77 - Jan. 1978	50.60	40.50
38	Jan. 83 - Dec. 83	45.31	35.65
43	July 87 - Jun. 88	39.60	35.65
46	July 90 - June 91	36.43	32.76
50	July 93 - Jan. 94	38.74	30.03
51	July 94 - June. 95	38.0	33.5
52	July 95 - June. 96	38.3	28.0
53	Jan. 97 - Dec. 97	38.5	30.0
54	Jan. 98 - June 98	45.3	N.A.

Source: Prabhat Patanaik - “An Overview” in The Indian Economy 2001-2002, p. 3.

is claiming the existence of large foreign exchange reserves, massive food grain stocks and markedly low inflation, as achievements, while their simultaneous presence is indicative, on the contrary, of an unprecedented crisis in the Indian economy, a crisis of shrinking demand whose other manifestations are retrenchments, closures, and lay offs in organised sector industrial units, a decimation of textile weavers leading to suicides, growing rural unemployment, and aggravation of rural poverty. The situation is more likely to deteriorate progressively (Patnaik, 2002).

10. Summing Up

Three conclusions come to the fore: a) there has been a decline in the role of politics in poverty alleviation in last several years, b) there are more conflicts between the poverty affected social groups and others in the rural areas in recent decades, and c) poverty related conflicts have positive and negative potential in the context of political and economic reforms.

It can also be suggested that the challenge of poverty in India has been through five phases since independence. First, there was political mobilization for indirectly bringing the poor into the state's agenda in 1950-1966 period through planning for industrialization of the economy and modernization of agriculture. Then during 1967-1979 there was direct 'focus on the poverty and poor'. It was an era of mobilization of poor and politics against poverty. Removing poverty was the essence of the political discourse in terms of the ideological context. The period 1980-89 was that of by-passing the poor and their problems. It created the context of liberalization and consumerism. 1990-99 was the period of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP). It was also a phase of diffused conflicts and mobilization around caste and regional disparities. But now, from 2000 onwards there is rediscovery of poverty and the poor. It is marked by rural disenchantment with globalization and increasing fault lines of poverty and related conflicts in every region of India. It is another matter that the new phase of rediscovery of poverty and poor is also an area of only marginal interest of the political parties and other major political

actors (like trade unions, peasant organizations, etc.). Thus it has been a journey from politics of poverty to poverty of politics during the five decades of freedom.

It is also definite that political sociology of poverty will determine the course of liberalization in India. If there is deepening of disparities and destitution then there will be enough reasons for the political actors, particularly the political parties, and the poorer sections of the society to get their act together on the problems of persistence of poverty. It will make class-caste-tribe nexus more relevant for mobilizing the poor. In case there is remarkable decline in the ratio of poor in the second generation reforms as assumed by the protagonists of liberalization then there may be further marginalization of the voice and concerns of the chronic poor in the Indian polity.

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End Notes

- 1 A parliamentary committee was constituted to look into the problems of the Scheduled Tribes of India. It submitted the Report in 1995 and this became the basis of constitutional reforms for the Scheduled Tribes. The report is known as Bhuria Committee Report as the Committee was headed by Shri Dilip Singh Bhuria.