Chapter Two

Ways of Combating Poverty: Assumptions, Approaches and Strategies

This chapter focuses on and critically evaluates the major approaches adopted by the state and non-state actors for alleviating poverty. While examining the approaches, this chapter intends to explicate their inner logic, highlight their strength and expose their limitations. The assumption for undertaking this exercise is that approaches do matter. They matter not only for discovering the causes of poverty but also for forging mechanisms to address them. In other words the why and how questions of poverty are the central concern of this chapter.

It is appropriate to say that ‘assumptions’ deal with the ‘why’ question of poverty. We have deliberately put it in plural. This is because understanding of poverty carries with it multiple assumptions. These assumptions try to understand linkages between poverty and social circumstances in different ways. Unlike the assumptions, approaches to the issue of poverty focus on real causes on the ground with a view to find out solutions to combat it. Often ‘assumptions’ and ‘approaches’ tend to overlap and share a large discursive space, although in reality they may differ in terms of their concreteness. Often approaches embody a strong instrumental reasoning whereas the assumptions carry within them a conceptual architecture. Like the assumptions, approaches also inhabit a plural world. For example, if one approach highlight creating assets and employment may be adopted by one approach where as providing primary education and health care facilities or empowering the poor may be the main focus of another approach. ‘Strategy’ also involves discussion on institutions that are involved in combating poverty. In this chapter, the assumptions and strategies
are discussed in an integral manner. This is done in full knowledge that it is plausible to deal with them separately.

The approaches taken up for discussion in this chapter are: (I) Growth-centric approach (ii) Target group approach, (iii) Structural change approach, (iv) Human rights approach, (v) Capability approach, and (vi) NGO-centric approach.

While dealing with poverty, the appropriate agencies of the state may adopt multiple approaches. Approaches determine the ways poverty is looked at, its causes identified, the strategies adopted and their mode of implementation. A particular approach also provides a vision for addressing the problems of poverty.

Poverty is not a natural condition nor is it an inevitable outcome of individual misfortunes, faults and weaknesses. Economic deprivation is also not due to individual shortcomings in personality or moral character. To view poverty as natural or an inevitable product of individual personal traits is to obscure the causes of poverty, justify its existence and detract from the responsibility for its alleviation.

To put it starkly, poverty is socially created. It is created by a complex set of social relationships, sustained by uncaring social structure, insensitive public institutions and apathetic international community. Continuation of poverty results from discriminatory and exclusionary policies that create and sustain an inequitable distribution of resources and prevent people from accessing the benefits of development. In recent times, poverty has increased and intensified for certain sections of population in India and other developing countries, partly attributed to the ongoing process of globalization. The subordination of national economies to the unchecked interests of global capital has also created excessive pressure on the population those who remain at the margins of national economies. The positive
aspects of globalisation—such as increased information exchange, the internationalization of human rights discourse, and the opening of markets to poor people’s products— are obscured by the negative dimension of the process. It is because the over-all direction of globalization process is controlled by the rich and powerful at different levels of economy and governance. These powerful interests tend to reconfigure priorities at national level and uphold unfair trade regimes and monopolistic property regimes at the global level.

Poverty also arises out of consistent and unchecked theft and waste of community resources, corruption and the misappropriation of public wealth. A powerful economic and political class often benefits out of entrenched poverty, hence showing no interest in its alleviation. Poverty too is caused by largely unaccountable systems which govern people and insulate economic and social elites that keep the poor too ill-equipped to participate in political processes or to mobilise the legal process to their aid. It is true that there is almost a global consensus that the scourge of poverty should be eliminated from the world. The Millennium Development Goals make this quite clear. There is also a widespread agreement among policy makers and social activists regarding the negative impact of poverty on individual and community’s wellbeing. However, there is less agreement when it comes to the ways of fighting poverty. It is in this context that a discussion on varied approaches to alleviate poverty becomes crucial. Now let us turn to the discussion on various approaches to fight poverty and destitution.
Growth-Centric Approach

Central to this approach is the assumption that moderate or high economic growth is necessary to support anti-poverty and social agenda. Without prosperity, the argument goes, the government cannot marshal economic resources needed to combat poverty, advance literacy, to promote health, sanitation and to launch a host of programmes aimed at helping the poor. Jagdish Bhagwati, one of the well known exponents of this line of thinking, argues that growth pulls the poor into gainful employment hence it should be seen as an indirect anti-poverty programme. The growth-centric approach emphasizes that economic prosperity seriously enhances the efficacy of social legislation and anti-poverty programmes. In this respect, Bhagwati has offered the example of literacy programme. He uses Myron Weiner’s argument that promoting literacy usually requires that the incentive of poor parents to put children to work rather than sending them to school is outweighed by countervailing values. In the Lutheran religion, for example, everyone is needed to know how to read the Bible instead of relaying on a priest to act as a mediator between individuals and the God. For economists, this countervailing pressure can come from the prospect of earning higher income as a result of education. Higher income, however, will come only when growth provides economic opportunities that allow increasing numbers of children to travel down the educational road. The few schools that do exist in India have had problems with attendance and thus work below the potential output. This is largely because low economic growth over the decades has drastically reduced the chances that improved incomes will result from sending children to school.

1 Bhagwati, Jagdish, 'Poverty and Reforms: Friends or Foes?', Journal of International Affairs, Fall 1998, 52, no. 1, Columbia University, New York, p. 41.
2 Ibid. p. 42.
Bhagwati further says that in some instances progressive social agendas follow economic growth. Thus, for example, many political scientists and sociologists including Barrington Moore and Ralf Dahrendorf argue that democracy emerges when economic growth produces a middle class that seeks democratic rights. Similarly, movements for environmental protection, for children’s and women’s rights, etc., seem to gather steam as economies grow and their populations acquire information and ideas from other countries. Bhagwati notes that this tendency is sometimes used by economists to argue, totally without justification, that economic growth will eventually take care of social and poverty concerns and that we therefore do not need to address them directly. But Bhagwati this line of argument is not correct. He argues that direct social agenda for the poor and minorities needs to move side by side with the policies for economic growth.

At any rate, growth-centric approach as a solution to the problems of poverty has enjoyed an unusual resurgence in recent decades. In this context, the statement of Tadao Chino (President, Asian Development Bank) needs a special mention. At the regional conference of the international forum on capacity building on 10 October 2000, he spoke:

In our experience, economic growth is the most powerful tool for combating poverty. Economic growth can reduce poverty by generating employment and income. Growth also expands public revenues that could be used for better basic infrastructure and social services, of which the poor are in desperate need. Growth can lift many more people out of poverty if it is pro-poor and sustainable. Therefore, first pillar of poverty reduction strategy is pro-poor sustainable economic growth.

However, growth on its own is not sufficient to eliminate poverty, and needs to be accompanied by a comprehensive program of social development. For example, if poor people do not have access to basic education. How could they take advantage of employment and income opportunities retreated by economic growth. If there were gender discrimination and other forms of social exclusion, how could the discriminated and the excluded people take advantage of the expanded economic activities and share the benefit of economic growth? Social development should therefore accompany
economic growth in order to reduce poverty effectively. Thus the second pillar of Asian Development Bank’s poverty reduction strategy is social development. 3

It is clear from the above statement that growth must be accompanied by social agenda for the reduction of poverty. As several international agencies support a growth-centric outlook, it is likely that the main objectives of international agencies would be to use economic aid to accelerating growth. The assumption is that economic growth in turn will create gainful employment for combating poverty. Regarding the theoretical rationale behind this idea, Jagdish Bhagwati citing Harrod Domar writes,

The theoretical rationale was embodied in the well known Harrod Domar growth model, in which employment rises with increasing capital stock and the chief policy instrument is a fiscal strategy to raise domestic savings. 4

The growth-oriented strategy considers that in countries such as India, where poverty is widespread, the strategy of income redistribution to bring poverty down may not be effective. It asserts that even in the short run redistribution would make very little dent in poverty. One-shot approach, the advocates of this strategy argue, will not help with a rising population and stagnant growth, any favourable effect of redistribution on poverty would quickly erode. 5 It is believed that pro-globalisation and pro-privatization economic reforms must be treated as complementary and indeed friendly to both the reduction of poverty and social agenda. 6 It is also feared that even high economic growth may simply bypass certain pockets of poverty or certain groups or communities. Therefore, supplementary programmes or safety nets are needed so that these measures can act as means to lift the poor out of abysmal poverty.

5 Ibid., p. 37.
6 Ibid., p. 33.
It is assumed that agricultural growth (through intensive farming) will boost up the rural economy. The use of latest technology and other modern methods of farming along with more emphasis on cash crops will help the farmers to enhance agricultural productivity. This in turn will help them earn more, and agriculture would be a profit-making business. However, in recent times the suicide of farmers due to acute distress and debt burden in states like Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka may not be answered by this producing safety-net type of policies.

The supporters of high-growth strategy opine that the trickle-down effect will help slowly in poverty alleviation. There are several authors who have refuted the claims made by the high-growth strategy advocates. According to them, economic growth does not inevitably trickle down to the most poor, nor does it make an impact on the lives of individuals and communities trapped in poverty for decades. Commenting on the Green Revolution and its impact Kohli writes:

There is little unambiguous data demonstrating that the growth in output in the “green revolution” areas of India had been accompanied by higher output per acre for the small farmers or increments in the availability of work or increments in the real wages for the landless, while real wages may well have undergone some improvement, the situation is unclear with regard to the overall availability of work over time.\(^7\)

Jagdish Bhagwati while supporting the growth-centric approach goes beyond a narrow ‘trickle-down’ perspective which he considers as passive. He argues for devising an active ‘pull-up’ strategy requiring extensive savings mobilization, with the State playing a major interventionist role in the process. He also supports the supplementary programmes by the government to accompany growth which can help the poor to get rid of poverty and be a part of the mainstream economy.\(^8\)


It is also argued that an increasing rate of economic growth has an even greater influence on the reduction of poverty. The implication here is that some workers may not be hired under normal growth conditions, but may find increased employment opportunities during periods of high and sustained economic growth. It is argued that increases in economic growth are indeed significantly related to reductions in the poverty rate for all families.9

If we look at the process of growth-centric economic development, we can find that market is considered as a promoter of high growth. Market promotes growth as it needs a section that would be having the purchasing power for the goods available within it. It favours more export and import business either in agriculture sector or in any other sector because in this way a set of middle men would obtain profit from all these transactions. Markets cater to the needs of those who can buy. Making profit is the sole motive underlying the market transactions. They want production in large scale not production by masses. The strategy of the World Bank and other international financial institutions favour market-oriented development process. These institutions give stress on market friendly policy reforms.

whatever be the contribution of policy reforms in accelerating growth in recent years, growth alone will have a limited impact, because there are large segments of rural poverty that persist due to the inability of some sections of the population to participate in the growth process.10

In India the first three plans from 1951 to 1965 appeared to assume that growth along a wide front would translate into income poverty reduction without any

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10 Kohli, Atul, Ibid., p. 243.
specific additional measures.\textsuperscript{11} It is noticed that the incidence of poverty apparently rose by the mid-1950s compared to the early 1950s, which would appear to contradict the above assumption.\textsuperscript{12} The principal objective of planning in India has been to achieve high growth, but many scholars have pointed out that without pro-poor policy and effective state intervention, poverty cannot be eradicated only by promoting high economic growth.

### Target Group Approach

As has been pointed out earlier several scholars argue that economic growth will not automatically ensure that its benefits are shared by the weaker section of the society. Hence, a direct state intervention by formulating development programmes especially for this section of the society is seen as an appropriate strategy for poverty alleviation. This is what is known as the ‘target group approach’ to alleviate poverty. Regarding the target group approach Abdul Aziz writes:

> In the Indian context this strategy of development has been adopted in recent years particularly from the fifth-five year plan onwards. The approach to fifth plan insists in evolving a series of programmes meant for the poor particularly the rural poor. These programmes are expected to generate employment and incomes for the poor who have since been referred to as the “target group”. Planning for the development of the target group as a logical step now has resulted in the preparation of employment oriented Bloc plans under the auspices of the integrated rural development programme with the chief objective of identifying poor in each of the 5004 Blocks in the country, and based on the skills of the family and an inventory of the available local resources and infra-structure, to give appropriate development schemes to such families.\textsuperscript{13}

> In addition to devising appropriate schemes for the needy families, the state has come forward in recent years with ‘area development plans’ as part of a broad poverty alleviation strategy. These area development programmes include plans for tribal area


\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.

development, drought prone area development schemes and many other programmes. These programmes are supposed to create employment opportunities for the poor living in this area, to ensure food security for them in the lean seasons. Watershed development programmes are implemented for small scale irrigation in the drought-prone areas. The poor work in these projects and get daily wages in grains and cash.

The basic objective of target group approach in India is to provide opportunities to people below the poverty line to undertake income-generating activities. This is in the form of wage employment or self-employment. The financial package for self-employment normally includes a loan and a grant/subsidy component as well as some access to relevant skill development inputs. The thrust is on income-generation or employment-generation at a specific point of time.\textsuperscript{14} The government provides subsidies for these activities. The participating Banks provide loans to the poor to start these activities. Government subsidy is provided through the Banks. The Central Government bears major part of the cost in these programmes. But the state governments also share the burden of the cost, though less in comparison to that of the Central Government. At the local level it is the District Rural Development Agencies (DRDA) and Block officials along with the village level Panchayat functionaries who are involved in the implementation of these programmes. Special preference is given to the socially marginalised sections of the society in these programmes.

In rural India, the poorest of the poor include mainly the landless agricultural labours, small and marginal farmers and other wage labours. Among these categories, people belonging to scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and women are the most

vulnerable. To help these people, the Government of India has adopted many strategies. Provisions are made for ensuring a quota of the most vulnerable groups within the poor. Being vulnerable, these groups need direct assistance from the Government. From this one can see that the anti-poverty strategy in India gives emphasis on direct attack on poverty at the micro level.\footnote{Hirway, Indira, \textit{Abolition of Poverty in India with special reference to Target Group Approach in Gujarat}, New Delhi, Vikas Publishing House, 1986, p.2.} The poor are provided with necessary inputs, technology, credit etc. to start income-generating activities. Special programmes are being implemented for the poor. The economic philosophy behind the special programmes is that special preferential treatment is necessary to enable the poor to participate in the process of development.\footnote{Krishna, Raj, ‘Small Farmers: State Policy and Programme Implementation’, in B.M. Desai (ed), \textit{Intervention for Rural Development}, Ahmedabad, Indian Institute of Management, 1977, p.95.} The market-oriented economic development, unless properly coordinated, creates inequalities of income and leaves the marginalised sections of the society unprotected from the vagaries of market forces. As a result, the socially, economically and educationally backward sections of the society rarely get the benefits from the market. In light of this, it is not difficult to see that these people need special care from the state so that social justice can be accorded to all.

The process of economic development creates many opportunities for the people who enjoy a minimum level of income and assets, some initial enabling condition so that they can initiate economic activities for their wellbeing. For good or ill, people are linked to the market forces and every economic activity is dictated by the terms and conditions of the market. In this condition the asset-less poor having nominal income insufficient for sustainability can not benefit from the over-all process of market-oriented economic development. They need special care and assistance. It is the
government's responsibility to provide them with minimum assets and employment opportunity so that they can participate in the process of economic development.

The Government of India has formulated different policies for directly addressing the issue of poverty. The programmes aim to lift the poor from the poverty line. Navin Chandra Joshi categorised the government intervention programmes for rural employment into two categories: (1) The Area Development Programmes, and (2) Family/beneficiary Programmes. The area development programmes are Drought Prone Area Programme (DPAP), Desert Development Programme (DDP), Integrated Tribal Development Programme (ITDP) and Food for Work Programme / National Rural Employment Programme (NREP). The family/beneficiary programmes include Small Farmers Development Agencies (SFDAs), Marginal Farmers and Agricultural Labourers Agencies (MFALAs), Swarna Jayanti Gram Swarojgar Yojna (SGSY) etc.

From time to time, many of these programmes are redesigned and renamed. The Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) has been redesigned with a focus on self-help groups and a new programme called Swarna Jayanti Gram Swarojgar Yojana (SGSY) is being implemented. Jawahar Rojgar Yojna (JRY) providing wage employment has been redesigned with the role of the Gram Panchayat and renamed as Sampoorn Grameen Rozagar Yojana (SGRY).

Let us take one programme each from these two categories and analyze to see how they work. One of the major area development programmes is the Drought Prone Areas Programme (DPAP). This programme was launched by the Central

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Government in 1973-74 to tackle the special problems faced by those fragile areas, which are constantly affected by severe drought conditions. These areas are characterized by large human and cattle populations which are continuously putting heavy pressure on the already fragile natural resources base for food, fodder and fuel. The basic objective of the programme is to minimize the adverse effects of drought on the production of crops and livestock and productivity of land, water and human resources thereby ultimately leading to the drought proofing of the affected areas. The programme aims at promoting overall economic development and improving the socio-economic condition of the resource poor and disadvantaged sections inhabiting the programme areas through creation, widening and equitable distribution of the resource base and increased employment opportunities. The objectives of the programme are being addressed in general by taking up development works through watershed approach for land development, water resource development and afforestation/pasture development. The recent impact studies sponsored by the Ministry of Rural Development have revealed that with the implementation of watershed projects under Drought Prone Areas Programme, the overall productivity of land and the water table have increased and there has been a significant impact in checking soil erosion by water and wind. The programme has also helped in overall economic development in the project areas.

The main emphasis of the strategy adopted as a part of this programme is on watershed projects. This area development programme is to be implemented exclusively on watershed basis. The watershed project is to cover a village, as far as possible. This programme gives emphasis on the direct participation of people in

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19 Ibid., p.100.
planning and development of watershed areas and maintenance of assets in the post project period. Panchayati Raj Institutions have the right to monitor and review the programme at district, Block and village levels. They can also function as Project Implementation Agencies if they so desire. As per the provision of this programme, voluntary agencies are to be given effective role in the implementation of the programme particularly in motivating people and providing training to them.\(^\text{20}\)

Another important beneficiary-oriented programme is the Swarna Jayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY). This programme aims at providing self-employment to the poor. This is implemented by the Ministry of Rural Development with the help of the respective State governments. This programme covers many aspects of self-employment like organization of the poor into self help groups and their capacity building, training, selection of key activities, planning of activity clusters, infrastructure build-up, and technology and marketing support. The programme focuses on organization of the poor at grassroots level through a process of social mobilization for poverty eradication. Social mobilization enables the poor to build their own organizations i.e. self-help groups, in which they participate fully and directly and take decisions on all issues that will enable them to cross the poverty line. Efforts are made to involve women members in each Self-help groups. 50% of Self-help groups in each Block should be exclusively for women. Group activities are given preference. The beneficiaries in this programme are called Swarozgaris. The programme emphasizes assistance to the swarozgaris for those activities which have been identified and selected as key activity in terms of their economic viability in the area. Families below the poverty line in rural areas constitute the target group of the programme. Within the target group, special safeguards have been provided to

\(^{20}\) Ibid., p.101.
vulnerable sections, by way of reserving 50% benefits for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, 40% for women and 3% for disabled persons. Assistance under the programme, to individual swarozgaris or Self-help groups is given in the form of subsidy by the government and credit by the banks.

The programme seeks to lay emphasis on skill development through well-designed training courses. Those who have been sanctioned loans are to be assessed by the Block officials and are then given necessary training. The design, duration of training and the training curriculum are tailored to meet the needs of the identified key activities. The District Rural Development Agency is entitled to meet the expenses incurred by the training institutions for both basic orientation and skill development training.

The SGSY attempts to ensure upgrading of technology in the identified key activity. The technology intervention seeks to add value to the local resources, including processing of the locally available material from natural and other resources for local and non-local market. The SGSY provides for promotion of marketing of the goods produced by the Swarozgaris, by organizing exhibitions at different places. The SGSY is being implemented by the District Rural Development Agencies (DRDAs) with the active involvement of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), the Banks and some other agencies. The programme is monitored both by the Central Government and the State governments.

Many studies have been undertaken regarding the planning and implementation of these programmes. These studies have revealed many loopholes and faulty and inefficient implementation of these programmes. The evaluation studies of these programmes show that the participation rate of the poor in asset-based
income/employment generating programmes has been very low, and that those who have been benefited by these programmes are mostly better of among the poor, and also several non-poor.\textsuperscript{21} These studies have revealed that the major factors responsible for the limited success of the special programmes are related to the performance of the implementation machinery of the programmes.\textsuperscript{22} Because of lack of knowledge and confidence on the part of the beneficiaries and because of absence of any institutional support, a whole host of ‘development middle men’ have sprung up who cheat the beneficiaries in the name of sharing of illegal gains with the bureaucracy to facilitate sanction or acceptance of household oriented scheme.\textsuperscript{23}

It is also reported that the factor of gender inequality is neglected in the implementation of Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP). In the whole process of implementation of IRDP women have been by and large overlooked. In this respect D. Bandyopadhyay writes:

Family approach in a way ignored the economic potential of women workforce. There is some validity in this criticism. Participation of women in the programme has been very low. Women beneficiaries constitute only 7 per cent of the total number so far assisted under IRDP. One of the reasons might be that stereotyped schemes which are taken up are not suitable for women excepting the traditional tailoring, sewing, and knitting. Secondly, it is reported that banks are more averse to lending to women than to men. Thirdly, the mechanical manner in which the programme is pushed through allows one shot to endowment of capital asset leaving the family to fend for itself. Hence, diversification of income generating assets suitable to both men and women in the family can hardly be done. And, lastly, the traditional attitude which often frowns upon the women having semi-autonomous economic status in the family might largely be responsible for generally ignoring Women in the entire process of development.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{21} Hirway, Indira, (1986), \textit{op. cit.}, p.4.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid. p.4.
This description makes it clear that women are not being benefited by these programmes even at a smaller level. Regarding the planning deficiencies of these programmes Indira Hirway states that the definition of the poor was vague in the sense that it could not keep away the non-poor taking advantage of the programmes. Most of these special programmes are formulated at macro level or at the Centre. They are not always appropriate in the same form when implemented at micro levels. As a consequence, many a times the schemes perform miserably at micro level.

The special programme strategy attacks only a part of the problems afflicting the poor when it provides them credit to buy an income-generating asset along with institutional and organizational help. The policy frame of the target-group oriented special programmes strategy is partial in the sense that it attempts to eradicate poverty only by attacking a part of the problems. It underestimates the point that rural poverty is primarily related to the over-all functioning of rural economy, society and polity. It lacks a holistic understanding of the nature of rural poverty. The issue of marginalisation and discrimination and their remedies are overlooked by these set of programmes. The subsidy has been the centre of attraction of these self-employment programmes. This has resulted in misappropriation of government funds by the implementing agencies including the Bank officials. Only money transfer to the poor without adequate institutional, social and legal support does not yield the desired result. As the structural dimensions of poverty are not addressed adequately, the programmes fail to achieve their intended potential. The exploitative structure of the rural economy which affects the development programmes is not taken into

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consideration in these programmes, and this remains one of the major shortcomings of this approach.26

Structural Change Approach

This approach focuses on the structural causes of poverty in society. The key assumption here is that if the root cause of poverty is structural, then it requires structural remedies for its redressal. It attributes unequal ownership of means of production, exploitative social relations and repressive power structure as the root causes of poverty and underdevelopment. So long as this system continues, poverty will persist unabated. To eradicate poverty there is an urgent need for effecting structural changes in society. In case of India, it is the concentration of land holding, caste system, gender inequality, lack of empowerment of the people and certain other factors that are considered as the structural causes of poverty.

Land Reforms

Land constitutes one of the major means of production in India. As a means of redressing poverty it is suggested that this means of production has to be redistributed among the people those who depend upon it but do not possess it. Unfortunately, the theme of land reforms, which figured prominently in the first few decades after the Indian independence, receded into the background in the later decades. When the Green Revolution arrived in the late 1960s economists and the policy makers were quick to persuade themselves that the new technologies held the key to the problems of slow growth as well as to those of socio-economic inequalities in rural society. But after two decades of green revolution, this belief proved to be an illusion. The limitations of the

26 Ibid., p. 6.
Green Revolution too were observed in the field. Its impact was confined to a few pockets of the country, small number of crops and selected farming groups.27

Green revolution was based on a high-expectation that it would save India from hunger. But as far as hunger in India is concerned it is the lack of distribution of assets and wealth that has caused hunger in India. The Green Revolution idea as a policy package advocated industrial technologies, such as chemical fertilizer and hybrid seed, for the agricultural sector of India. At the time of independence, India was not producing enough to feed its citizens. In this context, adopting strategies for augmenting food production was an urgent need. Introduced in the 1970s, these technologies succeeded in increasing farm output in a handful of commodities. These technologies are being promoted by the government and aid agencies. There is no doubt that the output of food grains was increased in the aftermath of Green Revolution in India. But this revolution had its downsides. It had bypassed most Indian farmers, who lived in the poorer states and who were without access to large areas of land necessary to profit from these technologies. The three-quarters of all farmers who cultivate one third of the total land mass remained marginal to this process. Small farmers produce 41 percent of the total grain and over half of India’s total fruits and vegetables. They are more productive than the Green Revolution farms even though they cultivate rain-fed lands using only human labor and animal traction.28

The environmental cost of the Green Revolution is now becoming apparent in Punjab and Haryana, two states known for adopting the strategies for intensive agriculture. There farms in these states are threatened by sinking water tables, soil

salination, and soil erosion caused by excessive use of chemicals and mono-cropping. The economic unsustainability is also evident, as prices of chemical inputs such as fertilizer and pesticides are becoming increasingly high due to the government’s elimination of input subsidies.

The Green Revolution, it was becoming apparent to scholars and policy makers, alone cannot be the answer to India’s endemic hunger. Two hundred and thirty three million people are malnourished in India today and while small farms are important in preventing acute hunger, the problem remains one of distribution, not of food grain production.

At any rate, India being an agricultural country, land issue is bound to be crucial for addressing the issue of poverty. Land was and still is at the centre of conflict in the rural agrarian economy of India. From a historical point of view, M.S.A. Rao points out three major conflict situations in this regard. According to him:

First, the conflict between the big landowners or non-cultivating Zamindars and the cultivating tenants; second, the conflict between owner-cultivators and money lenders who came to own land which had been mortgaged with them in return for cash loans; and third, the conflict between landowners and owner cultivators on the one hand and land less agricultural labourers on the other, In fact, the process of development of these three conflict situations reflects the changes in the political economy under colonial and independent India. While peasant movements centring around the first and second conflict situations were pre-dominant in the pre independence era, the third became significant in the post-independence phase especially with the growth of the Naxalite movement.29

Providing the poor with productive land is usually very crucial in any agrarian economy. India is no exception to this general rule. Land reform is one of the most central steps in this process. The effectiveness of land-reform programmes in improving productivity and reducing rural poverty relies on many factors including

land quality, access to technology and strong local agricultural markets. However, access to land is the single most important prerequisite for improving economic condition among the rural poor.\textsuperscript{30}

One of the main objectives of the land reforms has been the re-ordering of agrarian relations in order to achieve an egalitarian social structure, elimination of exploitation in land relations, realising the age old goal of land to the tiller, enlarging the land base to the rural poor, increasing agricultural productivity and infusing the element of equality in local institutions.\textsuperscript{31}

Every ill that plagues India cannot be attributed to the failure of land reforms, but poverty and much of the violence and extremism in the country are even today highly correlated with lack of access to land. Lack of land reforms affects urban India as well. The teeming slums of New Delhi and Mumbai abound with countless landless labourers who have flocked to the city in search of livelihood. Many among the migrants are from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar- states which have an abysmal record in land reform.

Under the constitution of India, land reform is the responsibility of individual states so while the Federal government provides broad policy guidelines, the nature of land reform legislation, the level of political will and institutional support for land reform and the degree of success in implementing it have varied considerably from state to state with the agenda remaining unfinished in most states. Indian officialdom acknowledges its failure to implement land reforms.

Dr. K.Venkatasubramanian, member of India’s Planning Commission says,


If China has continued to be stable in spite of its size, defying the biological dictum that corpulence is a sign of decay, China watchers ascribe this to their land reforms. In India everyone was talking about land reforms but this vital area has taken a back seat with nothing being done.\(^{32}\)

Talking about land reforms as an issue in Indian political scene shortly after the independence, Siddharth Dube says that the Congress tried to take everybody with it and in this process betrayed the issue of land reforms.

The Congress-led path to independence won the masses the extraordinary gift of the vote but afforded no distributive justice in the form of land reforms and other such measures. In its attempt to carry large sections of Indian society with it in a time of extreme strife and divisions, the Congress was too compromised to take on the onerous task of land reform. And the focus on rapid industrialization in turn only helped the elite to get more deeply entrenched from which it is increasingly hard to dislodge them.\(^{33}\)

In the late 60s the Congress rediscovered land reform since political parties promising land reforms made substantial gains in elections. To counter this, measures like a land ceiling were introduced but in true Indian style it was known how to dilute the law and eventually subvert it. Green Revolution farming also exacerbated the gap since credit and inputs were showered on medium to large size holdings in well-irrigated areas leading to a further consolidation of their power. Without fundamental land reforms in place, years later, the devolution of funds to Panchayats under Rajiv Gandhi did not help either since the panchayats themselves were controlled buy the upper castes and the landed. Thus the ugly gap between rhetoric and practice continued.

\(^{32}\) Land reforms in India, http://www.Inwent.org

Land, land tenures etc. are under the exclusive legislative and administrative jurisdiction of the states as provided in Entry No. 18 of List II (State List) of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution. However, the Central Government has been playing an advisory and coordinating role in the field of land reforms since the first Five Year Plan.34

Despite attempts at land reforms over successive plan periods in India, the basic character of the agrarian economy has not undergone any structural change. The pattern of land distribution is highly skewed. There is high concentration of land in the hands of a few land owners on the one hand and the growing number of marginal and sub-marginal framers on the other. It is necessary to reconsider the issue of land reforms, in rural India. In fact, it has been argues that the need for poverty alleviation programmes has arisen because the land reforms have not been implemented in a systematic way. The experience of several countries in East Asia shows that land reforms, leading to structural equity in the distribution of land, are an essential prerequisite for economic development through agricultural transformation.35 In addition, the efficiency of land use and land management, and protection of land rights of the tribals and women have assumed great significance in the context of the changes that are taking place in rural India.

The Dynamics of Caste

It is arguable that caste constitutes an important basis of social relations in India. Caste prejudices and discriminations against the so called lower castes (Dalits) are deeply connected to their status as poor. The efforts of the poor dalits to get out of the trap of poverty are obstructed due to factors directly related to caste. People from

34 Ibid., p. 110.
35 Planning Commission, Ninth Five Year Plan Strategy Paper, Government. of India.
the high castes categories create obstacles on the path of the dalit’s efforts to start any type of profitable economic activities. Traditionally dalits used to work as manual labours in the houses or agricultural fields of the high caste people. The high caste people fear that if the dalits get into any profitable economic activities they would no longer available to work in their fields in low wages. Hence the dalits are either discouraged or face hardship in this process. It is likely that people belonging to the dalit community remain poor unless they get any salaried job giving them economic security. Unless the poor dalits are safeguarded from caste prejudices and discrimination-related victimisation and exclusion, poverty would remain as usual among the people of this community. Caste system creates a conducive atmosphere in which social injustice to the Dalits thrives. This prompted Dr. B. R. Ambedkar to advocate “annihilation of caste”.  

He attributed the sufferings, miseries and inhuman living condition of the depressed classes in India to be the consequences of caste system prevailing in Hinduism. He said that economic status was not the only source of power, religion and social status also could generate power at various stages of society and history. Untouchability creates handicap for the Dalits to take up initiative for their economic betterment. Ambedkar had no faith in the efficacy of Gandhi’s reform agenda. He said “I will not die a Hindu”. He even compared the institution of caste with a monster.

For centuries people belonging to lower castes have been resisting caste domination unleashed by the upper caste communities in India. This has created and

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38 Ibid., p. 248.
continues to create violence in many parts of rural India. Elaborating on this dimension, S.K. Thorat and S. Venkatesan write:

The caste system in India has resulted in highly stratified social structure with a hierarchy of castes. In traditional and formal sense, the caste system is based on three interrelated principles. These are predetermined social, cultural and economic rights of each caste based on birth, the unequal and hierarchical (graded) division of these among the castes and provision of strong social ostracism supported by social and religious ideology to maintain the Hindu social order. While the first two of them defined and laid down the framework of the caste system, the third prescribed the social mechanism of its enforcements. Third feature of caste system is quite important and crucial in providing the continuity of the system despite the changes in the legal framework of social behaviour of the Hindus in contemporary India. The social ostracism normally takes the form of numerous penalties, supported by social and religious ideology. The form of social ostracism varies from social and economic boycott to various types of physical punishments to the low caste untouchables who challenge the traditional rules, the violation of the customary rules and practices invite violent conflicts between the Dalit and the dominant castes.39

It is not only in the social sphere but also in political and bureaucratic spheres that caste considerations hold their sway. The policies and programmes are time and again being manipulated or violated by the upper caste groups to appropriate the benefit meant for dalit communities.

To ensure social justice for the so called lower castes, untouchability has been abolished by the Indian Constitution (Article 17). Many other constitutional safeguards, such as Article 15 of the Indian Constitution also exist to anchor social justice agenda in the country. Article 15 provides that the State and public institutions cannot discriminate against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. As a policy of positive discrimination, reservation is provided to the people belonging to these communities in admission to educational institutions,

government jobs, in legislatures at all levels. Many special programmes are being implemented for them. But in reality, the rule of law instruments are dominated by the social forces which results in not achieving the goals and visions enshrined in the Indian Constitution. Dalits often remain at the receiving end of the institutions which are supposed to protect their interest.

Some writers do not wish to view caste identity and economic status together. Yogesh Atal, for example states that as there are both rich and the poor families in any upper caste, so is also the case in Dalit communities. He advocates that not only inequality needs to be distinguished from poverty, but poverty should also be de-linked from caste. He argues:

Social deprivation may lead to the downgrading of the social status, and may even adversely affect the economic well-being of the family or the caste, but such a consequence cannot be equated with poverty. And, this for two reasons: (i) poverty may exist among those also who may not be regarded as socially deprived; and (ii) not all those who belong to the category of socially deprived groups- castes or tribes — can be classed as poor. From this view, it will be erroneous to regard the concept of ‘Dalit’, which has now replaced the Gandhian coinage of ‘Harijan’ in India, as a synonym of poor. While it is true that those who are covered by this all-embracing term (Dalit) belong to the constitutionally defined cluster of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes that have suffered from alleged neglect and oppression from the upper strata of the society, it would be wrong to equate social inequality with poverty.

However, Yogesh Atal’s argument for de-linking caste and economic status does not hold water. It fails to explain why the people of some particular castes are working as manual scavengers, cobblers, sweepers etc. which is, in the society, considered as a very low status job with nominal payment. Why almost all the people dying of starvation in India belong to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, and many such questions can’t be answered by Yogesh Atal’s argument. It is true that all dalits

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41 Ibid., p. 26.
are not poor; but the correlation between dalit and poor economic status is exceptionally high. It is here that the caste and class converges. It is also the case that centuries-old practice of discrimination has created severe structural impediments on the path of dalits’ economic wellbeing. Often the poverty alleviation measures meant for the uplift of dalits get circumscribed by caste discrimination and injustices. As a result, dalit communities remain trapped in the vicious circle of poverty.

**The Implications of Gender**

It is now well known that gender inequality and gender-based discrimination keep women deprived of their rights. The unequal power relations both inside the family and in the larger society keep women in a disadvantaged position leading to exploitation. Socio-cultural hegemonic norms and male domination in politics and bureaucracy, and such other decision making bodies, create handicap for women. Patriarchy makes women vulnerable to the subjugation by men. This exploitative structure based on subjugation, domination and discrimination leads to deprivation of women economically, socially and politically. They suffer the most in the family as a consequence of poverty. The most disadvantaged groups among women, such as widow, divorcee etc, remain at the receiving end. Usually women do not have command over resources. Poverty among women can’t be eradicated unless this structure of injustice is done away with.

Women suffer from institutionalised discrimination and deprivation. In many traditional communities they have no right to property or inheritance. Their place of residence and their relationships to others, especially after marriage, are determined by social customs over which they have no control. There are still places where
women do not have full legal capacity and so cannot conduct transactions without which they cannot escape the cycles of dependency to which they are consigned. Many countries have passed legislation to remove these restrictions. But in the absence of strong government action in favour of women, legislation alone has failed to change social attitudes or behaviour and women continue to suffer from traditional mores and practices.

The Burden of Rural Power Structure

The caste and landed elite dominate the rural power structure and corner the benefits offered through public institutions. They collaborate with the bureaucracy and lobby with the government for their own interest. Often, powerless and dependent poor cannot challenge these local elites. Top level policy making for poverty alleviation, usually cannot ensure the participation of the poor in the process of its implementation.

As a step for empowerment of the people and to ensure people’s participation in the implementation process of polices at local level, Panchayati Raj system was revitalised. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act paved the way for a fundamental change in the way public goods are delivered in rural areas.\(^42\) To ensure participation of women and the Dalits the Constitutional amendment ensured their presence in all the three tiers of Panchayats.

George Mathew considers that reservation of one—third seats and offices for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions will lead to a silent revolution. He firmly believes that a social transformation aimed at women could be achieved by

Panchayati Raj Institutions. But many writers are sceptical of decentralisation. In a country with a heterogeneous population, a danger is that decentralisation will make it more difficult to protect the interest of weaker segments of the population, notably women, SCs and STs, and in particular, to ensure that they get their fair share of the public goods. Rajesh Kumar is of the view that without land reforms Panchayati Raj system can’t work successfully. He writes:

Can we really have a successful Panchayati Raj without breaking the monopoly of the landed elite over the village level Panchayati Raj institution, namely the Gram Panchayat? No, For a successful Panchayati Raj system we need to undertake genuine and effective land reforms first.

Rajesh Kumar says that merely providing for reservations for weaker sections and women will not usher in an effective participatory grassroots democracy. The fact that economic empowerment is the essential precursor of political empowerment must be borne in mind. In India, a country of villages, land is the most dominant element in the exercise of power in rural areas. And it is also true that only a handful of families in a village control it. These landed elite dominate the Gram Panchayats and other two Panchayati Raj institutions namely- Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishad. The government is usually unable to make a dent in the unequal power relations in villages. For this reason, the decentralisation legislation has no substantial impact for the empowerment of the disadvantaged section of the society.

43 Mathew, George, ‘Panchayati Raj in India,’ in Mathur, Kuldeep(ed), Development Policy and Administrations, New Delhi, Sage, 1996.
44 Chatlopadhyay,Raghabendra and Dullo, Esther (2004), op. cit., p. 979.
46 Ibid., p. 8.
Human Rights Approach

Human Rights approach to poverty alleviation looks at poverty within in a broad frame. It takes this notion beyond ‘income poverty’. Although it does not negate the importance of economic dimension of poverty, it also focuses on the non-income aspects of poverty. Life expectancy, literacy and deprivation of health services are considered as components of human poverty. Defining the meaning of human poverty, Raja J. Challiah writes:

Human poverty has been defined as ‘the denial of opportunities and choices most basic to human development to lead a long, healthy, and creative life and to enjoy a decent standard of living, with freedom and creative life, dignity, self-esteem and the respect of others. This understanding of poverty perceives the poor as active agents struggling against impoverishment. Therefore eradication of poverty entails strengthening, what Amartya Sen has called ‘capabilities’ of the poor, and simultaneously create opportunities in society to enable them to make full use of it. Strengthening capabilities, therefore, is crucial for helping the poor to confront and cope with not only a paucity of income but also a host of other adversities as well, such as disease, disaster and discrimination .......... the concept of human poverty also entails the recognition of gender inequality as an essential part of poverty. Measures of income-poverty are usually made at the household level and do not capture intra household disparities. A gendered approach to human poverty would involve examining how resources such as food, education, health services, and productive assets are distributed within the household. intra-household distribution of these assets is a valuable pointer to how well capabilities can be strengthened through public and private interventions. 47

This description focuses on the issues of minimum standard of human life and how the poor can achieve this. Lack of capabilities to take advantage of the opportunities available in the new situations, will make the poor vulnerable, Hence they need to be equipped with the required skill and resources. These can be ensured through the human rights approach to poverty alleviation. James Gustave Speth suggests that the right to be free of the crushing burden of poverty must be counted

among the most fundamental of human rights. The argument he puts forward is that poverty is embedded in all realms of the existence of poor people, and extends beyond lack of income. It can be said that the most basic human rights challenged by human poverty is the right to life. Nearly one-third of the people in the least developed countries, most of them in sub-Saharan Africa, cannot expect to live beyond the age of 40. Poverty results in adult illiteracy. This means that the poor or lack access to knowledge, to information and to the press. They lack the ability to exercise connected rights such as political participation. On the other hand women are the hardest hit by human poverty. Poor women suffer the same deprivations as man. They face additional obstacles in the family. They don’t get equal opportunities to education and health services as well as to productive assets.

Human Rights approach sees poverty as the denial of human rights. It is the state who is the duty bearer to ensure various rights to the poor. These rights include the right to be free from poverty. Poverty is seen as an injustice, a denial of freedom from want. Poverty is a wrong suffered by the poor; they are victims of a violation of their human rights. Regarding the goals which can be achieved if human rights approach is followed for poverty eradication, James Gustave Speth again writes,

By following human rights based approach to the eradication of poverty a variety of human rights goals can be achieved within the same set of policies. For example, enacting and implementing equal opportunity laws will help empower men and women to gain more equitable access to productive resources, liberating individual initiative and creating economic opportunities. Legislating against gender discrimination enhance the capabilities of women by giving them better access to credit and other productive resources, property and inheritance rights and improved political participation and representation. Supporting and enacting a rights based approach to the needs of indigenous peoples can not only end discrimination

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50 Speth, James Gustave, op. cit., p.287.
against them but also serve to protect and regenerate environmental resources and mediate social conflict over resource allocation.51

If human rights approach to poverty eradication will be followed it will automatically link itself to so many other rights for the disadvantaged section of the society. A decent standard of living, adequate nutrition, health care and other social and economic achievements are not just developmental goals. They are human rights inherent in human freedom and dignity. But these rights do not mean an entitlement to a handout. "They are claims to a set of social arrangements — norms, institutions, laws, an enabling economic environment - that can best secure the enjoyment of these rights."52 Expanding human capabilities and securing human rights can empower poor people to escape poverty.

UNDP gives emphasis on human rights approach to poverty eradication. It plays an important role in the protection and promotion of human rights. Its programme is an application of the right to development through the eradication of poverty. The promotion of human rights and the eradication of poverty are linked to each other. They are mutually supportive goals. Without a viable human rights framework, it would be difficult for the poor to be organised for demanding their rights to be free from poverty. UNDP is working in this respect. In order to support democratization and the institutions of good governance, UNDP is performing its role in the integration of human rights and sustainable human development.53 In January 1998 UNDP prepared a position paper entitled, "Integrating Human Rights with sustainable Human Development", the aim of this paper was to promote a dialogue and action on the links between human rights and sustainable human development. In

51 Ibid., p.287.
52 UNDP, Human Development Report, 2000, p. 73.
her introduction to this policy paper, Mrs. Mary Robinson, UN high commissioner for human rights, states,

We must understand the role of human rights as empowering of individuals and communities. By protecting these rights, we can help prevent many conflicts based on poverty, discrimination and (social, economic and political) exclusion that continue to plague humanity and destroy decades of development efforts.\textsuperscript{54}

The UDNP in its Human Development Report 2000 points to six elements of policy that are central to accelerating poverty eradication and realising human rights.\textsuperscript{55}

These are:

1) Pursuing pro-poor economic growth

2) Restructuring Budgets

3) Ensuring Participation

4) Protecting environmental resources and the social capital of poor communities

5) Removing discrimination

6) Securing human rights in law

The above elements need to be the guiding principles of state policy for poverty alleviation. Only having an institutional arrangement for providing financial assistance has benefited the middle men and the wrongly selected non-poor beneficiaries in India. Hence it is important that an integral and rights-based approach is necessary for combating poverty on a sustainable basis.

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., p. vi.

\textsuperscript{55} UNDP, \textit{Human Development Report, op.cit.}, p. vi.
Capability Approach

Amartya Sen is the main architect of this approach. Sen considers poverty as the deprivation of capabilities. In recent years this idea has been taken up by the UN agencies addressing the issue of poverty and underdevelopment in different parts of the world. The idea has been articulated for a wider audience by the United Nations Development Programme (UDNP) in its annual series of Human Development Reports. It rejects the role of prices as an index of marginal utility or as the definitive measure of scarcity.56 In the book Development as Freedom (1999), Sen provides a powerful case for his capability approach to poverty. He suggests that the inability to function in society is the best marker of poverty. This can be related to different levels of actual income or commodities in different societies at different times. Sen identifies that it is the individual’s level of functioning that matters, rather than quantity of money he or she owns. Many of the functioning he is concerned about are basic functioning such as the freedom to get an adequate diet or shelter.57

Sen suggests that it is not what you have got that is important but what you can do with it. Sen explains:

In this perspective, poverty must be seen as the deprivation of basic capabilities rather than merely as lowness of incomes, which is the standard criterion of identification with poverty.58

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Sen says that deprivation of elementary capabilities can be reflected in premature mortality, significant under nourishment (especially of children), persistent morbidity, widespread illiteracy and other failures.\textsuperscript{59}

Sen's capability approach has four core concepts: functions, freedom, pluralism and incompleteness.\textsuperscript{60} Regarding the idea of functions as one of the core value of capacity Sen argues that functions — that is, 'the various things a person may value doing or being taken together create a better conceptual space in which to assess social welfare than utility or opulence. Functionings are 'beings or doings', such as being nourished, being confident, or taking part in group decisions.\textsuperscript{61} The focus on functionings differentiates the capability approach from other approaches to the evaluation of well-being. For example many would evaluate well-being in the space of psychic utility or preference fulfilment.\textsuperscript{62} Others would evaluate it in terms of income per capita, or in terms of the commodities persons were able to command.

In the capability approach, freedom is concerned with 'the real opportunity' that we have to accomplish what we value. Capability refers to a person's or group's freedom to promote or achieve valuable functionings. It represents the various combinations of functionings (beings or doings) that the person can achieve. Capability reflects the person's or group's freedom to lead one type of life or another..., to choose from possible livings.\textsuperscript{63} Capability approach includes a greater

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid. p.20.
\textsuperscript{61} Sen, Amartya, (2001), \textit{op. cit.}, p.75.
\textsuperscript{62} Alkire, Sabina, (2002), \textit{op. cit.} p.5.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., p. 6.
range of welfare. This view includes diverse social considerations besides welfare. Hence it supports pluralism. In this context Sabina Alkire Writes,

The capability approach enriches the consideration that inform the analysis of social choices and social welfare by widening the informal basis of such analysis to include a greater range and kind of welfare than simply happiness or revealed preference, and by expanding the moral principles that coordinate this information to include consideration besides welfare. In this way it supports pluralism, the view that valid well-being and valid social welfare come in diverse forms.\(^\text{64}\)

Another important aspect of capability approach is its incompleteness. The capability approach is deliberately incomplete.\(^\text{65}\) Sen is more concerned with showing how the capability approach can be shared by persons of diverging, even contradictory, philosophical systems than taking and defending a substantive but contentious position. The intention behind this foundational plurality is to allow economists and development practitioners to work on pressing issues for which consensus on fundamentals is not necessary.\(^\text{66}\)

\textit{In Inequality Reexamined} (1992) Sen identifies two grounds for allowing incompleteness: fundamental and pragmatic. He writes:

The idea of well-being and inequality may have enough ambiguity and fuzziness to make it a mistake to look for a complete ordering of either... The 'pragmatic reason for incompleteness' is to use whatever parts of the ranking we manage to sort out unambiguously, rather than maintaining complete silence until everything has been sorted out and the world shines in dazzling clarity... 'Waiting for toto' may not be a cunning strategy in a practical exercise.\(^\text{67}\)

Sen argues that the residual incompleteness is honest rather than disappointing. Babbling is not, in general, superior to being silent on matters that are genuinely unclear or undecided.\(^\text{68}\)

\(^\text{64}\) Ibid., p. 10.
\(^\text{65}\) Ibid., p. 10.
\(^\text{66}\) Ibid., p. 10.
\(^\text{68}\) Ibid., p. 134.
Many criticisms have been levelled against Sen’s capability approach. One problem in this respect is regarding measurement. It is stated:

We may be able to agree theoretically that a capability definition to poverty is the ideal, that those who have greater difficulties in achieving adequate functioning in society, for example the disabled or the elderly, need a higher level of money income to reach an equivalent level of quality of life as those who are able—bodied. The problem is, how much more cash will they need? Is it possible to put a financial premium on any level of social dysfunction? How much more money would a person with dementia require as compared, say, with a person suffering from dyslexia? While these measurements remain so complex we are likely to be left or a single number index compiled from a list of ‘essential items’, however philosophically superior a capability definition might be. Another problem is that the capability definition seems to include within it an assumption of the relative definition of poverty without making this explicit, and, more importantly, without addressing the possible disadvantages of such a definition.  

Martha C Naussbaum criticises Sen stating that he has never made a list of the central capabilities. Nussbaum relates capability approach to the deprivation suffered by women. Nussbaum writes:

The capabilities approach is fully universal: the capabilities in question are important for each and every citizen, in each and every nation, and each is to be treated as an end. Women in developing nations are important to the project in two ways, as people who suffer pervasively from acute capability failure, and also as people whose situation provides an interesting test of this and other approaches, showing us the problems they solve or fail to solve. Defects in standard GNP- and utility based approaches can be well understood by keeping the problems of such women in view; but of course women’s problems are urgent in their own right, and it may be hoped that a focus on them will help compensate for earlier neglect of sex equality in development economic and in the international human rights movement.  

It is fair to conclude that capability approach has enriched the issues of human development and has provided conceptual ammunition for fighting poverty. It has helped in better crafting policies that can be accountable and responsive. In order to make a

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substantial dent in poverty alleviation, the role of all state institutions, civil society and international organisations in co-ordination with each other becomes necessary.

**NGO-centric Approach**

To keep in line with the process of involving non-state actors in the processes of development, the state has gradually been following the principle of social contracting with the Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in implementing its anti-poverty programmes. This way NGOs are provided with space to collaborate with the governments in power. NGOs find a place in many government and semi-government policy and implementation bodies. Due to the failure of the state in reaching the poor and the marginalized, NGOs are seen as viable institutions that can mediate between the poor and the state. As a part of civil society the NGO’s role in micro—macro linkages and policy advocacy has become a dominant feature in recent decades.71 There is enormous increase of the number of NGOs in India during the 1990s. An estimated over 30,000 NGOs most of them with rural focus, are actively working in India.72 NGOs have acquired legitimacy and credibility to a great extent, notwithstanding charges of corruption and lack of public accountability and transparency levelled against some NGOs.73

In the beginning, the approach of the NGOs was mainly based on the idea of public charity. But it has gone through substantial changes in recent years. NGOs have developed perspectives on participatory process and sustainable development. They are focussing on self-management and grassroots democracy. In this regard Joel S. N. R. Bhose writes,

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72 Ibid., p. 15.
73 Ibid., p. 15.
Together with development, the NGOs developed the perspective of participatory process (as against the top-down and centralized approach of the political and governance system) and many started practising them at the grassroots to strengthen self-management and grass root democracy. Thus from the charity-service and different ideologies of early 1970s emerged the concept of sustainable development in mid 1990s with quite a number of NGOs following this perspective. This however, does not mean that all NGOs belong to the same category. Over the wide spectrum of NGOs in India one could find various types of NGOs. 74

NGOs by and large put lots of emphasis on participation and mobilization. It is important to remember that the NGO world is not a monolith. For instance, some NGOs replicate government interventions on poverty, whereas some other NGOs model their activities on government initiatives in particular sectors of development such as focusing efforts on primary education and health, housing and sanitation. 75

Anyway NGOs interventions on poverty are of smaller scale than the government interventions. In this regard Niraja Jayal writes:

There are many notable convergence between the approaches of the government and NGOs in rural development. Let us take poverty alleviation as an example. Some NGOs, imitating government interventions like the Integrated Rural Development programme (IRDP) or the Jawahar Rorgar Yojana (JRY), seek to enhance the asset position and the income-generating potential of the poor, by providing them with the opportunity to acquire, skills, or credit or land improvement to make more productive. Others model their activities on government initiatives in particular sectors of development and, as such, focus their efforts on primary education and health, housing and sanitation. The main difference between governmental interventions and those of NGOs is the distinctly smaller scale of the later, as also the importance NGOs attach to participation and mobilisation. 76

NGOs deal with various activities for Rural Development in general and poverty alleviation in particular. They are involved in providing various services and executing varied programmes such as relief, rehabilitation, income generation, community organisation, awareness creation, capacity building and recently

74 Ibid., p. 15.
76 Ibid., p.144.
advocacy lobbying, empowering etc.\textsuperscript{77} Some help weaker sections of the society such as small and marginal agricultural labourers, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, while others are drilling tube wells for supply of drinking water, setting up schools and hospitals in the rural areas, undertake work to provide better nutrition to children, develop programmes in family welfare and population control, organize vocational training to enable students to set up their own outfits etc. They also undertake special programmes for the aged.\textsuperscript{78}

Now-a-days it is seen that the government is handing over some of the task of development works to NGO for implementation. This is helping the NGOs sector to be an alternative or providing services and implementing developmental programmes. In this respect quoting John Clark and David Hulme, Niraja Jayal writes:

Recent years have seen in increasing tendency for the government to hand over developmental tasks to NGOs for implementation. This has also been a solution favoured by multilateral funding agencies like the World Bank which, following their disillusionment with the managerial capacities of governments and their search for ‘good governance’ and the better management of development programmes, have sought to channel funds directly to NGOs. Indeed, it is estimated that 12 percent of development assistance worldwide is channelized through NGOs of the Northern hemisphere.\textsuperscript{79} When the state transfers the implementation of development programmes from its own departments to NGOs, this does not necessarily imply a rolling back of the state. Rather the state now draws upon the skills offered, by NGOs as ‘Public Service contractors’. The NGO sector can easily become an alternate provider of goods and services, without strengthening the capacity of the community to influence state policies and action. Some observers of this process have expressed the fear that NGOs may become so involved in service delivery that the local associations they create or foster

actually and up empowering NGO personnel and leaders, rather than the poor and disadvantaged.\textsuperscript{80}

The importance of NGOs in development assistance is partly attributable to the disillusionment with government; their ability and willingness to reach the poor, even in relatively inaccessible areas; and their capacity for innovation and experimentation. These are among the factors that make NGOs appear attractive to multilateral agencies like the World Bank, as also to donor countries. Governments find them useful because they offer cheaper and more efficient delivery systems than the leaky and corrupt government ones. They can also act as interlocutors, facilitating public consultation and ensuring the greater responsiveness of state agencies, and altogether creating sorely needed legitimacy. It is hardly surprising, then, that many NGOs leaders are to be found on commissions and other official bodies as consultations.\textsuperscript{81}

This narration makes it clear that the state is not able to provide proper services and the NGOs, in very limited extent, have been able to reach to the people in the area of their operation. The international donor agencies are also more interested in the NGOs. And they argue that the governments should incorporate the role of NGOs in their developmental plans. For instance, the World Bank instructed Bangladesh to abrogate rules that discourage the establishment of NGOs.\textsuperscript{82} The emergence of the ‘new poor’ under structural adjustment has given NGOs a more legitimate role in a climate of public retrenchment.\textsuperscript{83}

\textsuperscript{80} Hulme, David and Edwards, Michael, \textit{NGOs, States and Donors: Too close for comfort?}, Macmillan, London, 1997, quoted in Jayal, Ibid.


\textsuperscript{82} Willam, Aubrey. ‘A Growing Role for NGOs in Development’, \textit{Finance and Development}, vol.27, no.4, 1990, pp. 31-33.

There has been a sharp increase in the number of NGOs in recent years in India. There is also enormous increase in the resource they command. They are getting high amount of foreign funding and also getting funding from the national government. In 1986 the council of for advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology (CAPART) was established under the aegis of the Ministry of Rural Areas and Employment. The main objective of CAPART is to distribute development funds from the government to NGOs working in rural development sectors like rural technology, water supply, watershed management, and social forestry. As per the statistics of 2001, it was funding 6,370 voluntary organizations in as many as 16,697 projects.84

Though there has been sharp increase in the number of NGOs, the fund they get and their role in developmental activities, NGO and their approach is criticized on various grounds. The performances of the NGOs have failed to create any impact on the government departments to improve the quality of services they provide. Rather it has made the government look towards NGOs to deliver services and make the people dependent on the NGOs. In this context Joel S.G.R. Bhose writes.

The NGOs by-and-large focus on developmental activities at the grassroots. In doing so, many NGOs tried to fill in the gap where government institutions and departments (like health and education) failed by running parallel programmes to provide services. Such an approach has not succeeded in creating an impact on the government departments to improve the quality of services they provide. On the other hand it made the government looks towards NGOs to deliver services and make the people dependent on the NGOs. The net result has been further strengthening of the dependency of the needy people. The right course would be to provide information, create awareness and strengthen the capability of the people to demand from the system and get their basic needs and services as their fundamental right.85

84 Jayal, Niraja Gopal,(2001), op.cit.,p.144 .
Another dimension which is revealed in this regard is that most of the NGOs get themselves involved in accomplishing soft tasks, and they confine their roles to a few villages in a given area. They seem to be satisfied in working in isolation and delivering certain social services.\textsuperscript{86} In the age of globalisation and liberalisation the role of NGO for poverty alleviation is given more and more emphasis. But without democratic participatory structures and a state fully committed to redressing inequality and poverty, the gains from economic globalisation are likely to centre on those with power and influence. It will hardly reach to the dispossessed. The stress on agents in civil society, notably NGOs, fails to tackle the question of structural inequality. As we have pointed out earlier structural factors lie at the root of poverty.\textsuperscript{87}

It is noticed that impact of the NGOs poverty alleviation efforts has not been so substantial in dealing with poverty. In comparison to the problems they face, their efforts are limited. It is very unlikely that NGOs can ever achieve the scale necessary to combat the extent and depth of poverty in India. This is not withstanding the fact this sector has grown enormously in recent years.\textsuperscript{88} However, it is fair to say that NGOs can effectively implement and monitor anti-poverty policies at micro-levels, at a low scale. Besides, they can also effectively mobilize the poor for interest aggregation and popular monitoring. They can also ensure popular participation in the formulation and implementation of programmes.\textsuperscript{89} It is also the case that in inaccessible areas, NGOs provide basic services to the poor when state or market has

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., p.21.
\textsuperscript{87} Pasha, Mustaplia Kamal, \textit{op.cit.}, p.182.
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid.
NGOs work closer to the poor and hence can understand their needs better. It is said that NGOs can identify the poor more effectively as well as ensure participatory methods in implementing various programmes. NGOs are trying to be innovative as well as cost effective in delivering various services.

There are so many limitations noticed with NGOs implementing developmental programmes. It is observed that the presence and spread of NGOs is neither uniform nor widespread. They have failed to make wider impact on poverty alleviation. NGOs interventions have become status quoist. They are trying to reform some of the limitations of the state’s programmes rather than bringing any radical changes in the distribution of resources or power across different sections. Now-a-days the state is increasingly co-opting NGOs and the later are becoming like sub-contractors. They are only trying to implement the programmes designed on top-down basis. Again, NGOs are depended on outside donors. It is likely that they are being driven by the donors’ agenda for all their activities rather than deciding their priorities in an autonomous way. If NGOs are to act as sub-contractors or depend largely on donors, they may be bothered mainly about their upward accountability to the fonder ignoring the broader accountability required of them for the poor and the grass root organisations.

In spite of these limitations, the NGO sector is playing a vital role in a situation of state failure in implementing anti-poverty policies in India. For several reasons, the state is not in a position to be the effective initiator and implementer of

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93 Edward and Hulme (1998), *op cit.*
policies in India. In this situation their role has become vital. To see the role of NGOs in terms of black-or-white will not be adequate.

**Conclusion**

Poverty has various causes, some are conjunctural, some are episodic and some are deeply structural. Poverty, as the previous discussion suggests, is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon. It also encompasses and cuts across many levels: local, provincial, national, regional and global. No one-solution-fits-all can address the problem of poverty in the Global South. Even within a single country like India, the approaches to poverty have to be varied, nuanced and context-specific.

Poverty is inseparably linked to lack of control over resources, including land, skills, knowledge, capital and social connections. Without these resources, people are easily neglected by policy makers and enjoy limited access to institutions, markets, employment and public services. As highlighted by this chapter, different approaches and strategies for combating poverty are constitutively embedded in different conceptions of poverty. It is natural that from different conceptions flow different strategies for fighting poverty. It is now clear that in the policy circles in India a restricted conception of poverty, looking only at the income, is no more the exclusive lens through which policies are made. The popularity of human development approach is slowly growing in India. The publication of state-level human development reports is a vital evidence for this. However, the capability approach advocated by Sen is yet to get manifested in policies of the Government of India. It will not be wrong to say that the moral implications of Sen’s model are not entirely lost on the top policy makers of this country.
However, measurement of poverty still remains a contentious issue in India. A conception of poverty that takes into account both the structural and contingent factors is best capable of generating a sound anti-poverty program in India. Although the role of the state is vital as far as the poverty alleviation is concerned, there is a growing realization that other actors such as civil society and market should be roped in for achieving human development goals in the country. Even in the times of economic reforms and globalization in India, common citizens still tend to invest a great deal on the role of the state in India. It will not be an exaggeration to say that in spite of faulty and poor implementation of anti-poverty programmes, the common citizens in India still consider the state as the provider of human welfare and the prime architect of resource distribution. On a normative plane, the state is still considered as a key institution of social change in India. This is not to say that the existing state in India is doing great or following the right kinds of policies for the poor. As a matter of fact several things are wrong with the existing Indian state. It is not surprising, therefore, that poor citizens struggle to make the Indian state as their own, their own instrument for achieving equity and social justice.