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POLICIES AND THEIR IMPLEMENTATION IN INDIA: AN ASSESSMENT BEFORE AND DURING COVID-19 LOCKDOWN

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Abstract:

To prevent the Covid-19 effect, governments across world have imposed lockdown besides the other preventive measures. Undoubtedly, lockdown has affected the world adversely in terms of economy and human resources. But, India being a country of diversity where people of different caste, class, race, and ethnicity live is affected greater than other countries. Due to diverse socio-economic structures, living standard of Indian is unequal. This inequality forces underprivileged sections to migrate for livelihood and better opportunities to other places. The lockdown in India which was with a purpose to prevent community spread of Covid-19 resulted in the greatest exodus of migrant labour and their hunger, disease and death on the roadside. Owing to the socio-economic structure and also Covid-19, Indian govt. has been launching various welfare schemes to cope up the situation and uplift the marginalised sections. But the exodus and its results during Covid-19 pandemic not only expose the reality but also raise some questions as to why exodus occurred only in India. Why did numerous die during the reverse migration? What schemes and programme did government launch? And most importantly, how these schemes are implemented before and during lockdown? What is the attitude of mainstream society and state agencies towards these marginalised groups in terms of schemes and their implementation? To map this, before and during lockdown, scrutinizing some autobiographical narrative and incidents, this paper attempts to explore the schemes/programmes and their implementation. The exploration proves that there is a crystal clear biasness in policy formulation and their implementation. Consequently, study may help the governments and civic society in near future in formulation such programmes and their result-oriented execution.

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1.0 Introduction:

People are marginalized across world on diverse axes i.e. caste, class, gender, race, ethnicity, colour, region and religion etc. They are discriminated, humiliated, exploited and in some cases perpetrated violence also: physically, psychologically and emotionally. In India also, caste, class, gender, religion, region and ethnicity play crucial role in marginalization of the people. Some people are marginalized on single axis and some on multiple axes such as Dalits and Dalit women etc. To mainstream these people, governments across the world take affirmative action and Indian government is no exception. Therefore, this study aims to evaluate if the various welfare schemes and initiatives by Indian government or NGOs are implemented

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effectively or not. Further, if these schemes are really result-oriented or just show. Ideally, it is considered that govt. without any prejudice formulates and implements schemes for the people in problem. But, if India government has, indeed, formulated and executed policies indiscriminately is also a matter of exploration. For the purpose the researcher has planned to study the schemes and their implementation by government before Covid-19 pandemic for marginalized sections; and during Covid-19 pandemic lockdown. The study reveals the discriminatory attitude of government and other NGOs in formulation and execution of policies for different marginalized groups at different times and also in the same given situation i.e. pandemic.

2.0 Material & Method:

For the purpose of study, literary but autobiographical narratives such as Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life* (2008), Nalini Jameela's *Autobiography of a Sex Worker* (2007) and Bama's *Karukku* (2012) have been chosen as primary sources while some related news and other literature as secondary source. Further, for convenience, the study is divided into two parts: Before Covid-19 pandemic and, During Covid-19 Pandemic. In the first section, the literary texts along with other incidents in the society will be under exploration and in the second section; the news and some data from other sources will be under close scrutiny. The postcolonial and gender theories are used as tools to study the texts and occurrences for the purpose.

3.0 Before Covid-19 pandemic:

To empower marginalised sections, government launches various schemes. Before any emergent situation i.e. Corona-19 Pandemic, every affirmative action for upliftment of these sections supposed to or can be executed efficiently. But the narrative and available sources paint a different picture. With regard to this, Bama (2012) underscores the discriminatory attitude towards Dalit in establishment of modern facilities such as post-office, bank, training centres, school, etc. These being essential service centres, particularly educational and training, are generally established at the mainstream locations—distant from Dalits'. This spatial distance proves a cultural obstruction for Dalits to access these facilities owing to the caste compartmentalization in India same as Black, on axis of colour, face the same problems while accessing public facilities in America. Though, Indian Constitution guarantees the right to equality for all but in praxis it is absent. So there is large gap between theory and praxis.

The problem in accession of the public facilities for Dalits is not the novel one but centuries-old which continued even in colonial period despite the fact rulers were Britishers not Indians. Such gaps surfaced when the English had ordered the reservation for Dalits in the schools. But it could not be materialised as the dominant caste and teachers all were reluctant to disseminate knowledge to them. For example, on establishing, the school of Cherumans, an untouchable caste at Calicut, "The angry Nayars and Tiyas used to waylay the boys as they went to school and snatch the books from their hands. The higher caste teachers refused to teach them in such separate schools established exclusively for the untouchables." (Hunter Commission, 1882 as cited in Ambedkar, 1928) Further, Brahmin teachers "declined to join or even resigned from the service to avoid teaching untouchable^a children in the schools called Adi-Andhra schools." (Hunter Commission, as cited in Ambedkar) Consequently, to avoid tension Britishers first had opened separate schools for Dalits and later submitted before Brahmins on the issue of Dalits' education.

^aPreviously called untouchable, but now Dalits

Of poor implementation of policies this is not a single case but one of the millions. The Commission report (1896-97) certifies it plainly. Consequent to the Brahmin's casteist stubbornness, the Director' of Public Instruction reveals the action of the local officers of the Kaira District in relation of the admission of low caste pupils. He quotes that Brahmins' casteist attitude, consequent to Britishers' extension of education, "led to five or six large schools being closed for years and the huts and crops of the low caste people being burnt in one village and the imposition of a heavy punitive post on that village for two years." (as cited in Ambedkar, para. 25) Such is the state of Dalits across India from centuries in record and unrecorded instances are countless.

To escape from this exploitation and atrocities, marginalised sections move to cities consequent to the faulty schemes or the poor execution. It is needless to mention that there they have to live in ghettos, on drains' banks, footpath and near railways tracks. Since, this is unauthorised occupancy; they face constant threat of police, natural calamities, and disease. Moreover, they are left with the same occupational options they had available in their in the villages. The govt. and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) work for upliftment of these marginalized people to mainstream them. Accordingly the inclusive programmes are run for victims of gender, caste and class etc. These inclusive programmes and policies aim to uplift marginalised sections from ghettoisation to dignified place in society.

But, the problem still persists. The reason for this persistence is not the faulty policies only, though some are, but the implementation. Since the exploiters-subjugators are in-charges of disbursement and implementation of the schemes, their narrow mindset executes them discriminately. Since the dominant sections conduct all the surveys, Kelvin argues, "it is very likely that individual census takers filled out most of the data themselves, without consulting each individual in the area, the possibilities for self serving activity was immeasurable." He further argues that these surveys being filtered through Brahmins "the English interpreted this on basis of their own experiences and cultural concepts." And even now, the surveyors sometimes don't visit Dalit localities and enter all the requisite information either by themselves or by recommendations of the heads of local body/Panchayat. Moreover, the marginalized people either are not informed or misinformed regarding policies meant for them. In addition, under cover of disbursement of these schemes their political, economical and sexual exploitation is quite common but unrecorded.

To validate the argument, the real unrecorded incident is mentioned. In a discussion with one villager from Noganwan, Jhajjar (Haryana) it has come to know that Sarpanch of village registered Dalits under MNREGA programme during Congress rule in Haryana and UPA in Centre and procured the amount credited to their bank accounts under the scheme by getting their signatures in lieu of few hundred rupees or a gift. Since the power to implement rests with the exploitative dominant sections, the real benefits of the schemes do not percolate down to the target persons. It is also perceptible in case of Rohit Vemula, a Ph.D scholar at university of Hyderabad, who was forced to commit suicide on 9th January 2016 by holding back his scholarship by his high caste teacher. These examples are just to name while there are countless cases to prove the ill-implementation of the schemes by dominant section executives.

In addition, Bama discloses the humiliating attitude of the teacher in school she studied. On pretext of scholarship, the class teacher or the PT Teacher would ask all the Dalit children to stand up, at assembly or during lessons. Bama records that "They'd write down our name, and then ask us to sit down again. . . We'd stand in front of nearly two thousand children."

(p. 21) Contrary to make the beneficiaries of few hundred rupees as is the case, govt. does not publicise the name of the defaulter, even wilful ones, of millions crores of public fund, not even under RTI. In this regard, The free press journal (2019) reports that “Nearly 50 per cent – or Rs 4.5 lakh crores – of the total value of India’s non-performing assets (NPAs) are due to loans taken out by the top 100 borrowers.” Even in grave case of non-repayment of the public money, The free press journal exposes the role of financial institutions as “. . . the Finance Ministry and the RBI have been refusing to make public the list of big wilful corporate defaulters.” So for a meagre amount of scholarship Dalit students are lined up daily to humiliate where as farmers are issued arrest warrants after their repayment cheques in addition to the confiscation of hypothecated equipment. All this exposes the discriminatory attitude of the govt. officials.

Brahmins were reluctant to teach Dalits even in the separate schools opened for them by Britishers. It is very essential to expose here that these were not only Brahmins reluctant to teach Dalits but Christians too and even in free India. The Christian stakeholders in educational institutions say “If Dalit children take admission their [of the school] standard will fall.” (Bama, p. 119) Due to their mission to education all or owing to the RTE Act 2009, Bama reveals, as a token of gesture Convent schools admit four or five poor children into their school. Thus the deserving students, economically backward, cannot get admission in the school even under RTE but only on mercy of school management while “high and mighty people, who own high-end cars like a Jaguar, employ a well-oiled machinery of touts and school staff to usurp the quota fixed for EWS children,” India Today (2015) reports.

Furthermore, in spite of the right to equality as a fundamental right, Bama narrates, Dalit children even in Christian schools were “made do every menial task.” (p. 103) This is the grim reality of implementation of rules and schemes in schools. Besides, the scholarship scams in different states of India also certify the defective implementation of the schemes. “Many private colleges had used fake accounts to withdraw scholarship meant for SC/ST students. Multiple scholarship bursaries had been transferred to the same account” (TNN, 2018)

The implementation of rehabilitation policies is also not different than the mentioned ones. The people are involved compulsively in professions i.e. scavenging, child labour, bonded labour, sex trade etc. Rescue and rehabilitation of these people is the foremost priority of the govt. in India. So, the rescue schemes have some effective measures with visible results but rehabilitation startles the death and dumb also. Rescue people are left hapless as the funds and disbursement is drop in ocean. Regarding these rehabilitation schemes of sex workers, Jameela (2007) argues “What is meant by rehabilitation? Sex workers may be shifted to a different place, but is it possible to keep sustaining them? ‘Sex workers’ doesn’t refer to a group that stays the same all the time. These are people who keep changing. If some move out, others move in. What can be done about them?” (p. 137)

Undoubtedly, people involved in such professions are not fixed but fluid, some go and other come. The rehabilitation schemes, howsoever inadequate these are, are only for the currently involved people. Govt. does not devise any plan to break off the new entrants completely. Govt. or society seems more interested in cure than the prevention. It is evident in Jameela’s assertion who contends “No one demands the rehabilitation of scavengers who work under the unhealthiest conditions, since that will cause the whole place to stink. Fellows who are out to pinch and prod women on the sly give out exactly the same stink.” (p. 141) The dominant sections execute the rehabilitation and egression policies for marginalized groups so inadequately as to fixate the others to fulfill the structured job demands on the same axis.

Jameela emphasises also the poor implementation of relief programmes run in the Bangladesh^b Colony where she had taken shelter. She exposes the reality of rice and porridge distribution for these wretched. She says, "Half of that was up to the government to organize, the other half with the prohibition committee [liquor selling^c]." (Jameela, p. 119) When her son-in-law's mother asked for rice porridge for four people including Nalini Jameela, the distributors said, "Nalini can't be given porridge,' . . . 'She's not from this place.'" (Jameela, p. 110) The incident infers that the destitute must have bona fide residential status to receive relief. On this issue Jameela furiously interrogates "isn't it a fact that I sought refuge because I'm destitute?" (p. 119)

This is the biographic narrative of execution of the relief programmes. The distributors disburse mechanically and dogmatically overlooking the need of destitute. Further, if one wants some porridge, one has better queue up, even if one is a tiny kid. Jameela satirically remarks that there are rigid rules even to receive this charity. Besides, the recipients' houses are numbered on the walls and written on paper too. Having card, they queue up. Jameela mentions "Along with the porridge, you also get Bengal gram and other lentils-not the good wholesome green gram but the flaccid red gram with no vitamins, nothing, which no one wants." (p. 120) So Jameela points out the difference of theory and implementation praxis of the rehabilitation programmes and schemes.

This is what marginalized sections under various inclusive programmes and policies face. Dragged out of such professions they are put on doles in sheds. In name of rehabilitation these people are "caged up in a dog's house." (Jameela, p. 121) The narrative calls attention to the role of media too. Instead of highlighting the faulty implementation of the schemes, it plays against the victims' dignity. On pretext of various illegal activities in such localities, the media shoves at their body and poverty. Jameela discloses this misomerg^d attitude of media persons as "they barged like animals into the house of Sarojini, sex worker. That was outright bestial. There were four mature young women in that house" only on pretext of reporting the drug-trade in the locality. (p. 122)

To validate all the discussed difference of theory and implementation praxis, the case of Adarsh Housing Society can also be discussed. Constructed on defence land, Adarsh Housing Society in posh Colaba area of Mumbai is a 31storeyed building to cater to the Kargil war heroes and war widows' housing need but "the flats however ended up being allocated to bureaucrats, and relatives of politicians." (The Economic Times, 2017) If the Indian bureaucracy and policy execution violate the rules even for the martyr and their survivors the fate of destitution can easily be imagined. This proves evidently the corruption in the country as the war heroes and martyrs' entitlements were confiscated by so-called nationalists.

4.0 During Covid-19 Pandemic:

Covid-19 pandemic hit the world severely and India is no exception. The first Covid case in the world was detected on 17 November 2019 in China, Davidson (2020) reports. And India detected the first case on 30 January 2020. (Rawat, 2020) To stop the spread, Indian Government decided to impose national lockdown but question arises was this planned or random? What policies did government have to tide over the Corona pandemic? If it had any, how had these

^bThis is the name of colony for poor and rescue people

^cIn Bangladesh Colony, to earn their bread people sold liquor illegally. Govt. run programmes for these people also after the liquor selling was prohibited strictly.

^dThis word is the coined by me of the two words miso+merg wherein miso means hate and merg means the root of margin. Thus the word means hate for marginalized people.

been implemented? So in this section by focusing on some cases, the policies and their implementation during Covid Pandemic will remain in focus.

Between the identification of the first Covid positive case and imposition of first national lockdown from 25 March, the government had enough time to plan, frame policies and execute them meticulously. On 24th March 2020, there were 564 Corona positive cases in the country. (The Hindu, 2020) But due to the unpreparedness, India became a walking home as 40 millions migrant labourers chose reverse migration. (G. Pandey, 2020) The pandemic which can only be controlled by physical distance, masks and other precautions resulted in huge exodus only in India. Nowhere in the world, had this happened except India. Government without taking into account the problems of labour—food and shelter— and community sensitisation to fight Corona imposed lockdown which is sheer a case of indifference towards common folk. Government did not plan to transport the labourers while it did before lockdown for the NRIs through Vande Bharat Mission. Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson reported that 1, 07,123 Indians had been brought back by 4 June 2020. (Bhattacharjee, 2020) It is needless to mention the other evacuation in India i.e. Kota students.

Further, the food was the major problem that forced migrant labourers to migrate reversely. Venkatraman (2020) reports, they “had two options; face Covid without food or walk home.” Lacking food during Pandemic, they had left with no option than to migrate. Though some NGOs came forward to help but it was insufficient. The distribution could not meet their need with efficacy. The ration shops were scarce and government distributed ration on Ration/Aadhar Card basis. Being migrant labourers, they were unable to produce the documents issued by the state they work in. Some of the state governments, the home state or the employing one, aided the marginalised sections with lump sum money but again the same problem. No document they had issued by the state they were working in and the document they had issued by the state they didn't live in. This forced them to migrate reversely.

It is needless to mention that those who starved during pandemic didn't have any accommodation problem. Most of these people live in rented huts or houses in metro cities. So the payment of rent is also a problem besides the class discriminatory attitude of landlords towards their tenants. During Covid-19, landlords in city like Delhi had asked health workers to vacate their rented residences. Such incidents were numerous consequent to which “Delhi's Health and Family Welfare Department on Wednesday [25 March 2020] directed district administrations and police to take strict action against landlords and house owners, who are forcing doctors, paramedical staff and health care personnel to vacate their rented residences in wake of Corona virus outbreak.” (ANI, 2020) However it is very interesting to note that Housing and Land Rights Network (2020) in its report documents that state authorities forcibly evicted at least 20000 people during pandemic [between 16 March to 31 July 2020] totally ignoring the directives of WHO and Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to as well as a guidance note of the UN special Rapporteur. The Press release of Housing and Land Rights Network further reports that “State agencies have arbitrarily demolished the houses of low-income communities and directly increased their vulnerability and risk during this public health emergency.” (p. 2)

In this connection, state as well as Central government appealed the landlords to charge the rent in EMIs or in decremental way. But, the appeal turned in nothing. Additionally, the govt. appealed the employers not to cut the salary during lockdown but contrary to it govt. itself had freezed the Dearness Allowance of govt. employees from January 2020 to June 2021, D. K. Pandey (2020) reports. The govt. also appealed the employers not to fire/relieve any employee but it had relieved itself the contractual employees in Odisha. (Ghosh, 2020) Other

governments are not exceptions. So govt. through its policies and appeals fails to inspire the employers, landlords and other stakeholders to help the lower strata of society during Corona pandemic due to the difference in its theory and praxis.

The most worrisome was that when there is no job there was no point to stay in the cities in state of utter poverty, hunger and starvation, and unpredictable future. Due to uncertainty, the organised sectors could assure them to stay at their current place. In the state of unending darkness, the only sector that seemed as lighthouse was agriculture so the migrant labour journeyed back on foot, by rail tracks, crossing the rivers by tubes and whichever arrangement they could afford. Since Govt. had no policy for medical or any other help for them, many died due to accidents, fatigue or absence of medical facilities. Dutta (2020) reports 198 migrant workers died in road accidents by 1st June 2020. The number may be more than the reported one. Women had to deliver baby on roadside and walk again. Shakuntala Devi is one of many who after delivering baby on road side “. . . rested only for two hours and then walked 150 km more to get medical help.” (Outlook Web Bureau, 2020) Contrary to the inaction of Govt. for migrant labourers, Indian government filed its reply, in response to the petition of a couple that had travelled to USA on February 27 for a composite purpose of business and holiday and they had booked their return tickets for April 6, and stated that it has started evacuation process for Indians stranded abroad and a flight is scheduled to depart from San Francisco to Delhi on May 13. (PTI, 2020) This is how the Govt. acts differently for different people.

After, the exodus became news headlines of International media; Indian govt. took some measures to transport the migrant labourers. The govt. run Sharmik trains to transport the migrant labourers to their native place from different cities of the country. Here also, the labourers travelled in dying circumstance in these trains and some even died. Some media houses report 80 deaths and some around 644. (Rajopal, 2020) Contrary to death of labourers during evacuation programme hardly any died during Vande Bharat programme executed for NRIs. This also raises questions as both the evacuation missions were for people who had migrated from their native places to the Indian cities or the cities abroad for work or business purposes. Even after having the same purpose, the one meant for privileged class was named Vande Bharat Mission and the other for poor people Sharmik Mission. This is also a class consciously discriminatory attitude of the govt. based on biopolitics.

5.0 Results:

The above detailed discussion clearly demonstrates that there undoubtedly is a difference of objective and execution. The policies in India whereby encompass the larger section of the society, the execution hardly circumscribes the target people. This is not due to the lack of man power and requisite infrastructure to disburse the aid and relief but the volition of the machinery and the functioning of bureaucracy. The study proves that govt. very often seems to neglect the marginalised sections of the society and contrarily supports the privileged ones. Furthermore, during Covid-19 pandemic, govt. has failed completely in formulation and execution of policies. The privileged section people travelling for work, study or tour purpose were evacuated before lockdown and during lockdown with dignity while the labourers were left helpless or transported later in inhuman conditions. A great drawback has also been seen in the execution of the policies, particularly for marginalised section, during lockdown and also before pandemic.

6.0 Discussion:

The study in first section, Before Covid-19 pandemic, is based on literary narrative mainly but in the section During Covid-19 pandemic some reported incidents have been undertaken due to

the unavailability of literary narrative during the period. Further, the data undertaken is limited. Had there been the normal situation some more data could be basis of study. However, the data undertaken have been sufficient to provide results to prove the poor execution and discriminatory attitude of the govt. towards marginalised sections before and during Covid-19 pandemic which is apparent in different relief and aid programmes. From this point, this study may help the govt. in future to formulate policies to encompass larger section and also monitor their execution. Furthermore, the inclusive and unbiased attitude of govt. in terms of policy formulation and execution may help further the programme of sustainable development and prove it a democratic govt. in letter and spirit. This study may also help government to devise strategies to track and punish the violators. Lastly, it may prove as cue for the govt. and civic society in future to formulate, execute and monitor different programmes and schemes which may result in Sashakt (strong) Bharat in terms of equality, GDP and per capita income etc.

7.0 Conclusion:

Covid-19 has let the people, agencies, organisations and governments in state of confusion to rethink all about the social affairs. This has also exposed the illusion of society and government's notion of self-efficiency-dependency-and-power. In this chaos, this study aims to study the deficiencies of social and state behaviour towards its citizens. Therefore, this study is an attempt to assess the difference in theory and praxis in govt. policies and programme meant for marginalised sections of India. For this purpose, some literary narratives and some incidents in their lives have been undertaken. The close scrutiny proves there is undoubtedly indifferent attitude of the govt. in policy formulation and poor execution by the govt. machinery. Govt. whereas has taken utmost care for privileged section during and before Covid-19, the marginalised section has completely been left hapless. Due to politics or international pressure, the measures taken by govt. have further exposed its deficient execution with regard to poor people.

Thus the study may prove a basis to formulate policy and their successful-result-oriented-execution which may contribute in sustainable development of the country and also prove its democratic spirit practically. This study has mapped the difference of theory and praxis with regard to policies and aid programmes meant for poor people during and before Covid-19. The scope to study the difference in policies and practices post-migration of these migrant labour with regard to their employment, health facilities, food, shelter and education is still open for prospective researchers from one or different perspective in addition to study in timeframe of during and before Covid-19 pandemic.

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