

Welfare Delivery: Glimpses from Dhantala and Aradhaknagar

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Abstract

A number of radical reforms championed by scholars in the Indian political system including devolution of more powers to panchayats, end of one party rule at the centre and enlargement of rights to education, food, forests, land, public information and small pensions and insurance for the poor got implemented formally, in past two decades, along with the partial liberalization of the economy. The impact of these momentous shifts on the lives of ordinary citizens is, however, unclear and calls for intensive, long term studies of villages and slums today.

As a contribution, this paper makes use of surveys, focus group discussions, interviews and life sketches, constructed in two working class communities within the National Capital Region, in 1988-89 and again in 2014-15, to track changes in the working of the 'welfare machine' on the ground. The paper shows that over and above structural problems of ingrained inequalities and institutionalized corruption, a policy mess reflected in multiple and contradicting schemes as well as failures of local bodies and delivery mechanisms gravely hamper functioning of welfare measures on the ground. It concludes with some policy implications in light of gathered evidence which needs to be further corroborated and tallied with more long term studies of the complex welfare apparatus at the local level.

Keywords: Welfare, Social Security, Health, Wages, Slums, Villages.

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The crystallization of the welfare state that promises economic as well as physical security to all citizens has been a significant development of modern times. The world has a variety of welfare systems today ranging from Nordic models where up to 40% of GDP is spent on social security to East Asian regimes like South Korea that promote insurance cover for citizens but not equity. In the underdeveloped world also, citizens' welfare has been accepted as a goal of public policy. But financial constraints, corruption and institutional limitations hamper delivery considerably. Variations in the working of welfare across nations (despite a shared concern for ensuring a minimum standard of living for all and a safety net for the vulnerable) can thus be traced to diverse levels of development and also ruling ideologies across nations.

In the maze of welfare systems visible today, the Indian story seems peculiarly puzzling. While we have a long history of social reforms and a unique record of sustained democracy in the developing world, extreme poverty and high levels of morbidity and infant mortality point to multiple dark patches in our tapestry too. No doubt, gains have been made in literacy and life expectancy (which rose from 16% and 33 years respectively, in 1947, to 70% and 65 years now); and some of our provinces have touched human development targets associated with advanced countries generally.¹ Yet, in comparison to even smaller neighbours like Thailand and Malaysia, India's overall human development record seems staggered and even worsening in provinces like Uttar Pradesh where crime, rural stagnation and high levels of population growth as well as distress migration remain marked.²

It has also been worrisome that statutory measures which were seen as game changers by activists and scholars alike since independence finally got implemented, in recent years, but without much improvement on the ground. Just as the country's freedom from the colonial yoke and the adoption of universal franchise along with the abolition of zamindari and affirmative action for dalits failed to remove poverty quickly, similarly, the rise of the Left and 'samajwadi' regimes in our biggest provinces, the end of single party rule and autonomy for statutory bodies like the judiciary, the empowerment of panchayats and mushrooming of better funded NGOs along with formalization of citizens' rights to food, education, information etc failed to realize the visions of 'real freedom' and 'true development' spelt out by thinkers like Amartya Sen and Rajni Kothari earlier.³ Indeed, their progressive launches seem to have eroded the hope for a radical turnaround

based on ‘alternative politics’ in the country besides almost wiping out the coalition that introduced most of these entitlements over the last decade.⁴

What are the roots of this inertia in our welfare record ? And, what alternatives still remain for trials, needs to be carefully understood in this light. Fortunately, a growing body of reports and treatises exist in India today examining the problem from diverse angles.⁵ Different perspectives on the “painful transition” and “logic of underdevelopment” in the country can also be gleaned in literature available on India’s welfare machine. We shall closely examine their assertions and assumptions in the concluding section. Before that it is pertinent to point that no commentary on failed welfare in a society like India would be enriching without deep grounding in long term field research. Unfortunately, such data on communities is scarce in the country even as village and tribal ethnographies based on a year or two of fieldwork have been common.

Studied Sites

In this context, the following paper on the working of welfare schemes in two north Indian communities hopes to address the void in a small way. The names of these habitats are Dhantala and Aradhaknagar and both have been revisited by me several times since 1988 when I first visited them as an M.Phil scholar. While Dhantala is a village of about 2600 persons in Meerut district of western Uttar Pradesh, Aradhaknagar is a slum of about 1700 residents situated on the Delhi-UP border along the Grand Trunk Road. Both are multi-caste communities though the latter has a preponderance of dalits while the former has 55% of residents coming from the middle castes like Gurjars and Kumhars.⁶ Upper castes have moved out of the latter completely but constitute 10% of the former. Manual work is the principal source of earning for almost nine tenth of residents in both locales though small scale and marginal farming is the principal occupation in the studied village and scavenging and street vending is the biggest source of employment in the studied slum.

The specific reason for choosing Aradhaknagar for my original study, in 1988, was its representative character as a middle sized slum of mainly dalit castes and, at a more personal level, its proximity to my home in East Delhi at that time. My choice for a rural locale finally fell on Dhantala at that stage, largely because of the links provided by families that had migrated from this village to Aradhaknagar in the past. The two sites together offer a glimpse (though not a sample) of the laboring poor in rural and urban India were surveyed specifically for examining the functioning of welfare measures in them in 2013-14.

Welfare in Dhantala and Aradhaknagar

A striking feature of welfare delivery, in Dhantala as well as Aradhaknagar, is the multiplicity of overlapping schemes many of which (like *Sukanya* and *Mahamaya*) have not even been heard of by residents.⁷ In 1988, in my first visit, the range as well as the scale of state programs was still small and included mainly measures for redistribution of common land among the landless, the Integrated Child Development Scheme run through village ASHAs and some subsidy on cereals, kerosene and fertilisers. Now, many analysts are reporting that the number of welfare schemes existing on paper, in each block development office (BDO), runs into hundreds.⁸ My own enquiries with the BDO at Kharkauda (which administers programs for Dhantala) and with the Mission Convergence Office (in East Delhi) showed up 130 programs ranging from well funded ones like subsidized rations and MGNREGA to smaller ones like *Kanya Dhan* and programs for rural sports, libraries etc.

The number and scale of welfare programs has thus increased on paper over the past quarter century. Correspondingly, the welfare spend of the state is also said to have nearly doubled from about 3.5% of country's GDP to about 7% now with maximum increments in education and food subsidies.⁹ Lists of various welfare schemes and their allocations can be accessed from concerned ministries' websites easily.¹⁰ Many of them like *Rajeev Gandhi Shramik Kalyan Yojna* and *Krishi Shramik Swasthya Yojna* have become ghost programs now as successive governments have let them dwindle without a formal closure. Another problem that stands out in the welfare apparatus of the country is the misplaced priorities whereby universal needs for basic healthcare, old age pension, decent minimum wage and quality education and infrastructure (including good roads and regular electricity) remain neglected while populist measures like distribution of free laptops to college students and huge subsidies on chemical fertilisers etc multiply with changes in government.

Rampant corruption is another issue commonly talked about in discussions on state's institutions. However, our fieldwork shows that the rural and urban poor detest exasperating procedures and delays even more than small bribes demanded in *daftars*. Thus, a domestic maid residing in Aradhaknagar confessed that she was willing to pay a few hundred rupees if the caste certificate needed for her children's college admissions could be issued fast. She has already lost several day's wages in making repeated trips to the SDM office in Shahdara on foot and standing in long queues even as clerks take unannounced offs and work gets postponed repeatedly. Similarly, a marginal farmer informed me, in Dhantala, that his loan application under the Kisan

card has not been processed by the local bank at Kharkauda and he doesn't mind paying a few hundred if that could save him from repeated visits to the town.

Making Sense of Schemes

Indeed, the most disturbing facet of welfare operations, in our field, is not corruption itself but poor connect between targeted beneficiaries and the delivery apparatus from ministries down to clerks. While a good proportion of the rural and urban poor are literate now, they find it extremely difficult to follow the puzzling fine print accompanying every form or billboard that stand out on entry gates of government offices and are forced to rely on a range of intermediaries or *dalals* (from peons to area pradhans and other elected representatives) out of desperation as procedures seem extremely exasperating for commoners lacking connections and resources to take time off from work.

We shall return to the problem of accessibility of officials and the problem of dalals in local daftars again. Before that it is pertinent to note that the multiplicity of programs and schemes being run by central, state and local governments for the poor and marginal segments can be categorised along several axes for analysis and comparisons. Among the axes for such classification, four are particularly salient namely, efficacy and visibility on the ground; general goals and targeted beneficiaries; scale and allocations; and age, origin and sponsoring parties behind different schemes. In the following pages, we shall focus particularly on first two bases of classification.

Visibility of Programs

Mapping the visibility of welfare schemes in Dhantala and Aradhaknagar, I could track 29 measures about which residents had no information or sense of benefit. Schemes like the Provision of Urban Amenities in Rural Areas (2012), Affordable Housing in Partnership (2008) and Sukanya etc fall in this set. There was another set of 23 programs including the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (allotted 35,000 crores in 2010-11) and the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (allotted 66,000 crores nationally between 2005-11) which were known to educated residents of Dhantala and Aradhaknagar but were seen as not very effective in the *Shuklaesque* world of the local welfare machine.¹¹

Welfare measures that had brought some difference in the lives of our subjects include paltry pensions for the old, widows and the physically challenged, mid-day meals and scholarships for primary and middle school students and central and provincial grants to NGOs and village

Panchayats (of up to Rs 10 lakhs per annum) for constructing local infrastructure and providing services like education, healthcare and sanitation at the local level.

The most valued assistance from the state, in Dhantala and Aradhaknagar, is for subsidized food grains from the public distribution system (including 25 kilograms of wheat at Rs.2 per kg, 10 kilograms of rice at Rs.3 per kg and six kilo sugar at Rs.13 per kg) for identified poor families. This saved upto Rs.1200, per month, in an average household of five members.¹² Another program that has made a mark on the ground is that of accredited social and health assistants (ASHAs) and assistant nurses and mid-wives (ANMs) who have contributed to the fall in infant and maternal mortality rates through vaccination drives, institutional deliveries and maternal care. The *Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakram* and the *Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojna* covering these renamed schemes received Rs.2900 crores from the centre in 2013. Lately, the *Jan Dhan Yojna*, *Skill India Mission*, *Ujjwala* and *Fasal Beema Yojna* launched by the Narendra Modi government have also received good response and praise from residents though the *Swachh Bharat* campaign and the Smart Cities mission are still to show results on the ground.

Besides targeted schemes, a major welfare initiative of the state has been in financial and legal empowerment of local bodies including panchayats and aid for agriculturists through minimum support price on major crops and subsidies on purchase of fertilizer, seeds, agricultural machinery and diesel etc. besides access to cheap credit from banks. The results of these also seem extremely moderate in our field. Indeed, the neglect of rural infrastructure and the division of landholdings besides administrative corruption has kept the mass of peasantry extremely poor while panchayat funds in Dhantala as well as Aradhaknagar remain entirely in the hands of the local pradhan as the village community fails to even meet, not to speak of monitoring said expenditure.

Different Targets

Among criteria by which welfare programs can be categorized in any country, classification by aims or targets is particularly significant. Along this axis, schemes noted in our field can be subdivided into: anti-poverty programs (including food security and employment support for the poor), provisions for basic education and healthcare, minimal insurance cover to the aged and differently abled persons, support for special groups like women, children and dalits, empowerment and equity measures for the same and, at a broader level, development of essential infrastructure (specially roads, electricity and water management) and promotion of economic

growth and governance concerns (specially fare policing and legal process) which are part of the core functions of the state rather than welfare to be precise. While some of these measures aid cultural or local communities, others target individuals or families directly. Some schemes like free schooling and subsidized healthcare are universal in nature while others like cheap rations and monthly pensions for the poor target specific groups. In this essay, we shall discuss the working of four programs from different categories, as noted in our field.

Centrality of Healthcare

Among universalist concerns of modern welfare, the provision of comprehensive healthcare and insurance against disability, unemployment, illness and old age have been seen as the most essential. Indeed, this was the target that was adopted first in advanced countries beginning with Bismarckian Germany, way back in 1880s. In India, however, these critical shields for citizens against adversities have remained thin and delayed. While advanced nations spend about 10 to 15 percent of their gross domestic products on providing healthcare for all (including non-citizens), the Indian state spends only 1.3% of its GDP on this vital prop even now and proposals for a right to health in the country still remain on the drawing board.

Healthcare in Dhantala

Dhantala has no hospital or even a government dispensary till today. The construction of a building for a primary health centre began here in 2011. The building has been completed but no staff or equipment have arrived. The void in the village health system has been filled by three private practitioners, two assistant nursing midwives (ANMs) and two veterinary doctors whose qualifications are uncertain. All these health workers practice 'mixopathy' (a mix of allopathic and traditional Indian treatments). In the absence of reliable medical care within the village, many patients try to cope with small ailments through traditional and domestic cures or else rely on their own resistance to overcome ailments over time. For major problems, they visit the government health centre at Kharkauda or hospitals at Meerut, as a last resort. In such emergencies, however, their first choice is a private doctor or clinic as they fear loss of considerable time and other harassment in government facilities even though costs are minimal there. The absence of lady doctors in Dhantala and Kharkauda also presents a health risk to Dhantala's women. Thus, Rajkali--the village's old mid-wife--informed that she once developed a painful boil between her thighs in adolescence. She could not avail treatment because of absence of any lady doctor in vicinity. It was only after months that the boil subsided with local cures offered by her mother in-law.

On the positive side, the presence of three ASHAs and two ANMs in Dhantala have played a role in bringing down infant and maternal mortality. While the former handle vaccination and counseling, the latter assist in deliveries and post natal care. The salaries of ASHAs is low at Rs.3000 per month though they get additional Rs.600 per delivery arranged at a regular hospital plus transportation charges. Similarly, additional bonus is given for vaccination work. Significantly, slow improvements in the quality of local roads, access to motorized vehicles, and most recently, the provision of ambulances at all block nursing homes by the state government has helped in saving many lives. Prahlad Singh---the village elder--informed that many women used to die during delivery or lost their infants till the last quarter of the previous century. On the other hand, the sex ratio in Dhantala is worsening and it is admitted by villagers that many couples are opting for female infanticide (specially among the middle castes) in view of rising aspirations along with growing crime in the state.

Health Centres for Aradhaknagar

Like Dhantala, Aradhaknagar also lacks any public health facility though the health infrastructure of the capital city is accessible to residents including major hospitals like Guru Tegh Bahadur (GTB) and Rajeev Gandhi Hospitals which are within a four kilometer radius from the slum. Within Aradhaknagar also, there are three semi-qualified practitioners including one Unani and another allopath. These ‘doctors’ are the first choice of slum-dwellers in need of treatment because of their proximity and charge upto Rs.50 (including the cost of basic tablets). Even for serious illnesses, many slum dwellers prefer visiting private doctors in adjacent colonies like Dilshad Garden and Vivek-Vihar rather than going to government dispensaries in same neighborhoods.

Thus, Rajender informed that he is scared of visiting government hospitals not only because they are over-crowded and require a lot of time and patience but also because risks of catching infections and of mistreatment are high there. He admits that the primary health centre at Vivek-Vihar offers free consultation and some free medicines and tests. Yet queues are long and many medicines have to be still purchased from the market. In 2014, ‘health cards’ had been issued to all households in Aradhaknagar promising free treatment of upto Rs.30,000 per annum under the *Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojna*. However these cards have remained useless as no private hospital offers free or even low cost treatment on them.

Still, it cannot be said that government's health facilities have been of no use to the residents. The aged ex-pradhan of the slum—Hari Prasad Mishra is presently working as a security officer--under contract--at GTB hospital. In 2013, he informed that GTB is visited by about 15,000 persons daily of whom many arrive from UP and Bihar with serious ailments like tuberculosis and severe asthma, besides accident victims from surrounding districts. The residents of Aradhknagar also fall back on the hospital for major surgeries and costly treatments which are nearly free here. For minor ailments, however, they avoid going to GTB because the registration and initial checkup itself take up to three hours while tests and reports have to be collected on subsequent visits. Yet, Mishra claims that the government hospital is better than private clinics because staff here is more experienced and qualified and over-diagnosis, needless surgeries and over medication are less likely. He concedes that hygiene is difficult to maintain in such a hospital where patients run into thousands and all are not dedicated to their work.

Pensions

Pensions for the old, the physically challenged and the unemployed have been a major facet of the welfare state in most parts of the world. Based on monthly contributions from the state, employers and beneficiaries or, funded entirely by local or central governments, these provisions were among the first concern of welfarists in the 19th century. Ironically, India which has hundreds of central and provincial schemes for public welfare does not still have a decent pension cover for its army of insecure, ill paid workers in the informal sector that covers 90% of our workforce. Strangely, even the Nehruvian state which had a sterling record of democratic practice, failed to borrow from pension provisions of western welfare systems. The alibi offered by some for stony silence on the issue has been that our country was too poor to offer social security to all workers at the time of independence. However, the state in India has been offering subsidies on fertilizers, diesel etc. and also spending substantial amounts on college education, cultural patronage, government hotels and on hefty salaries to about two crore employees. In this light, a decent pension for vulnerable segments like poor aged persons and insurance against accidents and illness would have been a major relief.

Interestingly, it was after the liberalization of the economy that meager pensions of Rs.75, per month, were started under the National Social Assistance Program in 1995 (rechristened Indira Gandhi National Pension Scheme in 2008) in which the central government provides a base amount which can be topped by provincial governments further. Even in 2013, the centre (which

spent about 30,000 crores on fertilizer subsidy alone) released just about 10,000 crores for this meager benefit to poor widows, physically challenged and elderly persons. In this light, the launch of the *Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Yojna* and the *Jeevan Suraksha Yojna* by the Modi government (assuring insurance cover of Rs. two lakhs against death and accident respectively for account holders paying a nominal charge) seems to be a much needed corrective.

This delayed and paltry response still offers a sharp contrast to Article 41 of our Constitution which directs the State “to provide public assistance to its citizens in case of ‘unemployment, old age, sickness and disablement and in other cases of undeserved want within the limit of its economic capacity and development’”. Number of beneficiaries as well as amounts distributed as monthly pensions also varies across states and over time. Indeed, Delhi and UP present a contrast in this respect as shown in table 1. Thus, in Aradhaknagar, most adults have opened bank accounts and some have availed insurance cover under the Jeevan Jyoti and Jeevan Suraksha programs. The number with such cover in Dhantala is very small still although the Jan Dhan accounts were opened as bank officials themselves came to the village in November last year.

Similarly, the working of the pension scheme is much better in Aradhaknagar. The monthly pension for the poor was fixed at Rs.300 from the beginning in Delhi and was raised to Rs.1500 last year. In UP, on the other hand, it has grown from Rs.75 to Rs.500 between 1995 and 2016. Beneficiaries are to be selected by the gram sabha in the latter and the ward sabha in the latter. In practice, however, gram pradhans and municipal councilors/ MLAs have a major say in these selections as their attestation is mandatory on applicants’ forms. In Aradhaknagar, the number of recipients has grown slowly to 50 elders, 11 widows and 5 physically challenged persons now. In 2014, the fund crunch being faced by the east Delhi municipal corporation and its tussle with the new AAP government in the state lead to the discontinuation of some pensions. In Aradhaknagar also, 20 pensioners who were registered with the corporation have lost this critical aid and are waiting for its restoration under the state government now.

In Dhantala, the proportion of poor pensioners in the population was much smaller initially. Only eight widows, three elders and five physically challenged persons were sanctioned monthly pensions while the actual number of eligible beneficiaries ran into hundreds. It was only in 2016 that the ‘pradhan-pati’ (husband of the newly elected dalit woman pradhan) succeeded in pressurising officials to get more pensions sanctioned for 17 widows and 102 elders in the wake

of approaching assembly elections in 2017. However, complaints regarding misallocation were also heard; a census enumerator claimed that about half of the selected beneficiaries are actually ineligible in Dhantala while another 50 who are eligible do not receive them. More worryingly, the administration in Uttar Pradesh is being accused of partiality in distribution of welfare benefits to favour those castes and communities which are seen as vote banks by the ruling party.¹³

Anti-Poverty Programs

While the Indian state has failed to provide comprehensive insurance cover to all citizens, it has initiated a number of programs to reduce poverty more directly. Among major anti-poverty programs of central and state governments, several categories can be noted. These include employment generation for skilled and unskilled workers; credit, training and marketing support to agriculturists and artisans; and various forms of direct aid to below poverty line (BPL) families through subsidized rations, fuel and housing. Besides this, free education and health care offered by the state and other services like subsidized electricity, water and limited sanitation as also, enabling laws for labour (including minimum wage and maximum working hours), protection for street vendors etc. can also be seen as aspects of state's anti-poverty agenda.

Food Subsidy

The most significant of the anti-poverty measures carried out by the central and state governments jointly is the supply of highly subsidized food grains and some sugar and fuel to selected BPL families on a monthly/ fortnightly basis. In Aradhaknagar and Dhantala also wheat, rice and sugar are provided to BPL families through a specified ration card at the rate of rupees two, three and thirteen per kilogram respectively. The monthly quota for each family is fixed at 20 kilos, 15 kilos and 6 kilos of said commodities. With this aid a family of five is able to save about Rs.1200, per month, on average. This is an extremely vital aid for those near the poverty line which was about Rs.1000, per capita, per month, in rural areas in 2014. Apart from facilities like subsidized food grains and fuel, families with BPL cards can also claim other benefits like low interest on loans for house construction under the Indira Avas Yojna and special benefits in educational and medical institutions of the government.

Multiple benefits accruing to families possessing BPL cards should have helped them in coming out of poverty rapidly. Unfortunately, a number of loopholes in the working of this program have undermined its potential. As pointed by Professor Arvind Panagariya, about 50% of food grain purchased by the state for distribution through its depots gets wasted or stolen in transit

or, in FCI godowns themselves. Of the 1.25 lakh crores proposed to be spent yearly by the state under the Food Security Act 2013 (to serve nearly fifteen crore families in the country), it has been estimated that about 23 % would go into administrative charges alone.¹⁴ Even from the one fourth of food subsidy that actually gets dispersed from the public distribution system, a good chunk is appropriated by non-BPL families who have managed to procure the valued BPL cards through corrupt means. In 2013, the National Food Security Act was passed radically expanding the scale of targeted beneficiaries in both rural and urban pocket. Impact of this measure is evident in our field also now.

PDS in Dhantala and Aradhaknagar

Since a large proportion of Dhantala's residents are farmers who produce a good proportion of needed foodgrains themselves, the village did not have a ration shop till 1990s when price of cereals distributed through ration shops to BPL families were slashed and two types of cards were introduced: red or 'Antyodaya' and yellow or 'semi-BPL'. The latter fetched wheat and rice respectively, at Rs.4.50 and 6.50, per kg., while the former brought them at just Rs.2.50 and 3.50 per kg.

This increased villagers' interest in ration cards as the number of eligible poor households runs into hundreds. Unfortunately, corruption and bureaucratic hurdles restricted the sanction of valued BPL cards and only 26 of these (including red and yellow ones) were actually issued. In the delayed census of BPL families in the village, in 2002, stringent criteria were applied and families with three pucca rooms or a two wheeler or a colour television were all excluded automatically. No revisions were made in the BPL roll of Dhantala for nearly 12 years. This year, however, the new pradhan-pati succeeded in getting about 200 new ration cards for poor families as elections approached in the province and the Food Security Act promising cheap ration to two third of rural families also came into play in the region.

The public distribution system (PDS) is slightly better in Aradhaknagar due to its location in the capital city. In July 2015, out of a total of 290 families, about 210 had received the new BPL cards and were getting full subsidy on their allotted quotas of wheat, rice and sugar. Even before the recent drive for more BPL cards, the slum had about 60 families with red and another 80 with yellow cards in 2012 also. The reason for the vast difference in the number of BPL beneficiaries in Dhantala and Aradhaknagar can be seen in the vastly different resource base of their respective provincial governments and much greater corruption and lack of accountability apparently

prevailing in Uttar Pradesh as compared to Delhi. Indeed, in Aradhaknagar the general rule for procuring a BPL card was to get a recommendation from the area MLA or the councilor (generally through the mediation of their party agents/ locality pradhans) for submission to the ration office. The actual delivery of the cards could take years. But their numbers kept growing especially, in run up to elections.

Apart from the enormous gap between count of needy families and that of BPL cards issued, a number of other short comings can be noted in the working of the PDS system on the ground. In Dhantala as well as Aradhaknagar, for example, residents complain that the quality of supplies at ration shops is poor. Indeed, in Dhantala, many farmers do not prefer purchasing wheat from the ration shop. However, sugar, rice and kerosene (now replaced by subsidised cooking gas) are high in demand and ration dealers are said to be pilfering supplies by opening shops for limited periods only. The problem of documents and residence and identity proof created by migration also prevents many slum-dwellers from obtaining ration cards transferred to their new addresses easily. Thus, while the number of BPL cards is high in Aradhaknagar, those without a ration card is also as high as 90.

Recent Changes

With the passage of the National Food Security Act in 2013, new ration cards have been introduced in place of old red and yellow cards to supply cheap essentials now to about two third of the population in place of only those recognized as BPL earlier. We have seen that about 200 families have such facility in Dhantala now (out of approximately 400 families). But the number had remained low at just 26 till as late as April 2016. On the other hand, in Aradhaknagar (with 290 families), 140 had BPL cards and the number has risen to 200 now.

Besides this, three other changes have been made in the mode of distributing ration through PDS now. Firstly, the new blue cards which are being issued more liberally now are registered in the name of eldest female in targeted families. Secondly, subsidy on cooking gas is being deposited in bank accounts and finally, the amount of grain to be provided to a family is linked to its size now (4 kilos of wheat and one kg. rice being fixed for each adult, per month, in place 35 kg for each family fixed earlier). It is also proposed that families may be able to chose their preferred shop for purchasing allotted ration with the help of biometric record and thus be freed from dependence on one ration depot only.

Employment Generation

A major program for poverty reduction in any country would be large scale job creation specially in the formal sector where rules regarding work and salaries can be enforced. Having failed to stimulate rapid growth in the formal sector, the Indian state tried to promote job opportunities for the poor in a number of other spheres including crafts, small scale industry, self-employment and lately, guaranteed unskilled jobs in the countryside. Meager results of sustained investments in promotion of *Khadi*, handloom and brassware etc. look like a tragic story today. Successive governments also came up with schemes like the Community Development Program of 1950, training and credit programs for agriculturists and craftsmen, loans to cooperatives and grants to NGOs for marketing crafts and agricultural products and the Integrated Rural Development Program introduced in 1978 for creating income generating assets like irrigation tanks, rural roads etc. In 1989, the Jawahar Rozgar Yojna was started to generate more employment opportunities along with a 'food for work program' in drought prone areas. Finally, in 1999, various employment generation schemes were merged into the Swarn-Jayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojna (SGSY). Most recently, the ambitious Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) was passed, in 2006, to guarantee minimum hundred days of work in villages, on demand, at a minimum wage of Rs.80 per day (raised to Rs.150 in 2013).

The exact impact of these programs on poverty reduction has been hotly debated. Poverty remained almost unchanged till 1990s, in India, and declined thereafter under a combination of factors including liberalization of the urban economy which helped in raising rural wages by encouraging migration.¹⁵ In this light, it is not easy to isolate the net impact of MGNREGA on farm wage.¹⁶ In Dhantala itself, MGNREGA could had very little impact on incomes as well as employment as only 26 job cards were made and only two payments were released by the BDO office for partial cleaning of the village pond. Market wage for unskilled work in the region is as high as Rs.250 which is about 50% more than the NREGA wage. The pradhan-pati also claimed that he gave several proposals for development projects in the village including the cementing of the cremation ground, developing fisheries etc under MGNREGA. But neither the villagers seemed willing to work at Rs.150 daily nor are funds released by the district administration in time. He also states that restrictions on amount to be spent on materials as against wages limit the nature of work that can be undertaken under MGNREGA and substantial assets were difficult to create till greater flexibility was allowed under the present government in this respect.

The predecessors of the MGNREGA scheme had also been largely ineffective in Dhantala in generating employment or assets. Thus, under the Jawahar Rozgar Yojna in the early nineties, pucca roads and drains were constructed inside the village for which laborers were paid Rs.28, per day, besides wheat worth Rs.30. But grants never came in time and work was discontinued. Similarly under the Swarna Jayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojna, one self-help group received a loan of Rs.2.5 lakhs, in 2002. But it could not carry on with its *khoya* manufacturing due to poor power supply and internal disputes between partners.

For other forms of employment generation, the central government has set up Kaushal Vikas Kendras recently to train youngsters in skills like hospitality, salesmanship etc. In 2016, a two month course was indeed conducted in the village school but no one has found employment from such training yet. On the other hand, the Kisan Credit Cards have well and a large number of landowners including small farmers have received loans of upto 60,000 rupees on low interest from public sector banks in the nearby town of Kharkauda. The Mudra Yojna started by the Modi government has also been used by two dairy owners to obtain a loan of ten lakhs each for purchasing more buffaloes for their dairies. Those without land and other securities have, however, remained sidelined by such aid also.

Urban Work

The scenario in Aradhaknagar is no different. Slum-dwellers do not yet have a counterpart of MGNREGA. Instead, the state has launched programs for training and providing cheap credit to the urban youth and targeted the poor through the *Shahri Swarozgar Yojna* which aims at promoting self-help groups (SHGs) and collective ventures in slums. In Aradhaknagar, some SHGs were formed and loans on subsidized interest released from public as well as private banks. While six women's SHGs received Rs.10,000 per member in 2013, the ICICI bank provided loans of upto 2 lakhs under its Corporate Social Responsibility program. However, local politicians are said to have charged hefty commissions for facilitating such loans. More worryingly, very few among the ventures actually succeeded. Most loans were used for family events and investments were not even attempted except in a few cases.

It needs to be added here that starting any enterprise, even on a small scale, is difficult in Aradhaknagar as police, electricity department and local politicians also demand bribes or protection money for the same. Rajender informed that he had applied for a loan under the Shahari Swarozgar Yojna at the local Branch of the Punjab National bank. Since he did not pay any bribe,

his file remained stuck for two years till he gave up after wasting a lot of time and energy with the bank's clerks.

Diagnosing Inertia

In the light of above instances, a number of factors can be associated with the general failure of welfare measures in our field. These include: rampant corruption in the administrative machinery, failure of elected local bodies to evolve as effective pressure groups, poor monitoring and designing of policies under populist and sectional pressures and, more broadly, a poor underdeveloped economy, sharp inequalities and restrictive customs and values in our culture. Different ideologues have put differential stress on these underlying factors in explaining the limited success of our welfare system. Thus, Marxist thinkers like K. Balagopal and Randheer Singh continued to stress that the principal factor behind general state failure in the country is the contradictions between classes and the semi-feudal and semi-capitalist basis of our state. In the same vein, it has been pointed that variations in the working of welfare systems across Indian states (from Kerala and Tamil Nadu, on one end, to Bihar and Jharkhand, on the other), can also be explained with reference to caste-class pulls at the regional level.¹⁷

As deeper flaws and limitations within 'classless societies' of the communist world became evident from late 1980's, left scholars were forced to rethink the chimera of egalitarian utopias and adopt the politics of social justice and welfare within a liberal democratic frame. The new reality also shifted focus to forgotten arguments of social reformers like Baba Saheb Ambedkar and of Indian Socialists like Lohia who viewed Indian democracy as open to the fight for greater social justice and the overthrow of traditional elites through rapid education and political organization of marginalised sections. In this approach, political empowerment, caste based reservations and affirmative action were accorded larger salience than the struggle for a classless society.¹⁸

In another variant of political thinking, scholars like Partha Chatterjee and Sudipta Kaviraj stressed that the divide between the state and the masses, in India, is so sharp and that post-colonial 'governmentality' remains so oppressive that masses are forced to negotiate survival through 'political society' or voting power rather than legalistic civil society approaches. Hopes for substantial gains or empowerment for the poor cannot be high in such a context.¹⁹ Such research focused more on the failings of "the everyday state" and on local power structures instead of grand counter narratives against the 'bourgeois or semi-feudal state'.²⁰

Without ignoring the validity of these explanations, we wish to add that the messy world of welfare delivery, within our field, shows many distortions and paradoxes that hint at waste emanating not only from “structured hierarchies” or, for that matter--rampant corruption, ‘elite capture’ of the apparatus and lack of funds but also problems in policy design and the labyrinthine character of local administration. These flaws, at the level of policy and institutional inertia indeed stand out as substantial factors behind the rot rather than mere reflections of deeper causes like the state’s class character and caste and power matrices in regions.

The most serious distortion in our welfare design is that of misplaced priorities; while critical services like cheap and accessible healthcare for all and support for the disabled and the aged remains meager, populist doles and subsidies as on fertilisers and freebies like laptops continue to gobble major sums in our fund starved regime. Other glaring gaps in essential services noted in our field are: missing dispensaries, regular power supply, poor sanitation and a decent minimum wage. Cross cutting and contradictory policies further seem to undo the promise of a number of schemes; increased investment in school infrastructure along with the withdrawal of annual exams for promoting pupils and raising of minimum support price for farmers along with reliance on increased deficit financing leading to steep inflation are examples of such policy conflicts. Elections do propel welfare measures (as noted in Aradhaknagar) but partiality in distribution of aid to vote banks of the ruling party has also been noted (specially in Dhantala).



Besides this, costs of ineffective bureaucracy and lack of capacity in the delivery apparatus are also visible in the implementation of major schemes like the National Rural Health Mission in our field.

The Architecture of Welfare

Dhantala falls in Meerut District which has six blocks including that of Kharkhoda which covers 39 villages. The BDO at Kharkhoda has 12 secretaries (also called *patwari*) each of whom looks after two to three villages. Compared to the local bureaucracy, the constitutional status of elected bodies is higher. Yet, their functioning and powers seem stunted. The Gram Sabha is supposed to meet at least twice a year in UP villages. In Dhantala, a proper meeting of the Sabha

has never happened but different castes do assemble to sort out disputes occasionally. The Gram pradhan admitted that the Panchayat receives about Rs.5 lakhs per annum for maintaining village roads, drains and toilets etc. Besides this, Dhantala was given a grant of Rs.3.8 lacs, in 2012 for completing the dispensary building. Additional Rs.50,000 were received by the panchayat for providing scholarships and mid-day meals to students in two government schools. All these funds are handled by the Pradhan as the gram *sabha* as well as the *samitees* meet rarely. The major change since the 73rd amendment, in Dhantala, has been that the election to these bodies has become regular and villagers have an opportunity for being wooed by politicians and for dethroning them, if required. On the negative side, two pradhans have been murdered since 1995, in the village, and factional rivalries have grown further.

In Aradhaknagar, there is no elected Pradhan though local leaders attached to different political parties describe themselves as pradhans and act as middlemen between the slum-dwellers and government departments. As the slum's pradhans are all unelected party leaders, the lowest elected functionary accessible to slum-dwellers is the local councilor who looks after a constituency of about one lakh now.

The affairs of the *zila* panchayats and the block panchayats seem even more clouded as these bodies have directly and indirectly elected members and some officials on their boards. They receive larger financial support from state as well as central government and are supposed to look after development and maintenance of highways, bridges, irrigation works and hospitals etc. Elections to these bodies has become fiercer and more expensive in recent years. Yet, their effects on the ground seem negligible as district roads, vocational training institutes etc. remain in poor shape and politics in these bodies seems centered on control over funds and positions mainly. The election of the block *Pramukh* (head of the block Panchayat of Kharkauda), in 2010, saw considerable expenditure on distribution of liquor and cash and also much heart-burn among candidates over alleged cross voting by followers.

Policy Implications

We have noted that multiple schemes and distorted priorities in welfare design are a major cause of dysfunction in delivery on the ground. In this light, a major review of all central and provincial schemes and their consolidation and alignment with targeted focus on vital supports for healthcare; insurance against age, accidents and unemployment for all (including the vast numbers

of the self-employed and migrant workers); and provisions for higher minimum wage and decent working conditions should be a priority concern in the policy establishment.

Our stress on wages and universal social insurance does not ignore the importance of affirmative action for 'social justice'. Given the long history of exclusions and high levels of poverty here, the state needs to continue with reliefs like subsidized rations for a major chunk of the population and reservations for dalits and backwards in elected bodies, government employment and education. Yet, some reworking in their delivery may be worth considering specially to exclude repeat beneficiaries from the 'creamy layer' as the evidence from Dhantala and Aradhaknagar shows that the mass of dalits here remain excluded from affirmative measures as a tiny segment from within targeted groups manages to garner most benefits. At another level, social equity and justice also demands radical steps for taxing large inherited wealth to fund comprehensive social security for all.

The redevelopment of slums has been debated for decades in our cities. To bring greater momentum into this process, in situ, multi-storied tenements need to be rapidly developed in the public-private-mode at a greater pace. It is true that slum-dwellers are mostly squatters; but they provide highly cheap labour to cities and the minimum that central and state governments can do for them is provide basic facilities like proper housing, drainage, toilets and health facilities near their habitats. Systematic attention also needs to be given to maintenance while providing such services to drivers of urban growth. Fortunately, programs for job creation and infrastructure building can be synergized well in light of their labour intensive nature.

Corruption in the administrative machinery and among politicians has been a common cause for concern in India. The institution of the Lokpal and Lokayuktas to act as independent watchdogs on the executive, are steps in the right direction. At the same time, invitation for anonymous, evidence based complaints against wrongdoings of public servants and their dedicated monitoring by a well staffed ombudsman, foolproof protection for whistleblowers and greater use of IT to create transparency in governance are also needed.

While tracking corruption, however, we need to be alert that excessive fear of prosecution may actually slow down decision making and lead to policy paralysis if witch-hunts are not precluded. Such a situation actually would harm the poor too, as attested in experiences of the unnamed maid and tailor of Aradhaknagar above. To counter this, stricter accountability for delays in public service and recognition of insensitive behavior towards supplicants in government daftars

as another form of ‘corruption’ is a need of the hour. A firmer carrot and stick policy in the bureaucracy with possible bonuses for outstanding work and stoppage of increments for those facing repeated complaints may be a useful step in addressing this nagging problem in the government machinery.

At the same time, local government needs to be restructured for better implementation of all government schemes. Our experience suggests that a critical tool for better implementation in this regard would be found in empowered ward and slum level resident associations (below elected MLAs and councilors). The population of most urban neighborhoods far exceeds that of a median village. Yet, unlike rural panchayats urban wards with denser populations have not received sufficient help or recognition even after the 74th amendment in the constitution.

Massive leakages in the rationing apparatus and absenteeism in government schools and hospitals have been in news lately.²¹ In this light, it may be useful to carry pilot studies to gauge the impact of a switch to vouchers distributed by the state to the poor for purchase of ration, health and education services directly from the market thus freeing the state from direct involvement in their procurement and distribution and freeing citizens from dependence on state machinery alone. Indeed, wider use of pilots for prior testing of major reforms before their countrywide launch needs to be made the rule rather than the exception now (specially, in light of disastrous experiments like abolition of annual exams and promotion of all pupils till class VIII made mandatory by the UPA government in 2010).

In conclusion, we would like to stress that despite their bitter experiences in government *daftars*, India’s poor still repose faith in the promise of the democratic state. Indeed, it is striking that disenchantment with the state seems much deeper among the better educated and the upper classes than among the suffering poor.²² Reasons may be found in the fact that latter’s

Welfare Delivery in Aradhaknagar and Dhantala, 2013		
Category / Benefit	Dhantala	Aradhaknagar
Number of Families	410	280
APL Ration Cards*	375	200
BPL (red and yellow) Card	25	130
Families without Ration Card	10	90
Old Poor Pensioners	03 (Rs.300 p.m.)*	50 Rs.(1000 p.m.)
Widow Pensioners	08 (ditto)	11 (ditto)
Physically Challenged Pensioners	05 (ditto)	05 (ditto)
Subsidised Loans	Many of 300 landed families have availed loan on Kisan Credit Cards	12 SHGs granted loans ranging between Rs.10,000 and 2 lakhs from banks
Housing Loans	15 grantees given Rs.30,000 on paper	Residents staying from before 2011 acknowledged as claimants for housing aid
Health Facilities	No dispensary within 4 kms.	Several government hospitals in proximity
Education Support	Mid day meals and free uniform and books but poor teaching; kanya dhan scheme for girls**	In addition, 25% seats reserved for poor in private aided schools; ladle scheme for girls**
Infrastructure Growth	Power supply worsening; roads in frequent disrepair	Steady growth in the capital city inc. launch of metro trains
MGNREGA Payments	Only 25 job cards made and only two payments received	Not Applicable
*APL refers to above poverty line and BPL to below poverty line families as decided by local bodies. The pension amounts were raised to Rs. 500 in Dhantala and to Rs.1500 by Aradhaknagar in 2016. There was a jump in the number of old pensioners in the latter from 3 to 102 same year.		

**The Kanya dhan scheme promises Rs.10,000 to matriculate girls and the Ladlee scheme assures Rs.1 lakh to those clearing 12th after timely registration and reporting of progress.

dependence on state support is much greater. Also, the state's failures and inefficiency are dwarfed before the poor by larger shortcomings of non-state actors like NGOs, political parties and the local community itself (including caste and area panchayats). This is not to say that state is the panacea for all ills; it is only to remind that the poor depend heavily on state provisions and await its revamp rather than overthrow or "avoidance" suggested by scholars like Scott and Guha in a different context.²³

Glossary:

Daftars: government offices. *Dalals*: unofficial intermediaries who charge commission for facilitating work in daftars. *Pradhan*: Village headman

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¹ For comparative data on human development indices across regions and the advancements made by states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu in improving literacy, life expectancy etc see: Dreze and Sen (2013).

² Thus, the HDI rank of India, in 2015, was 130 among 188 nations while that of a late starter like Thailand also was 70 on strength of negligible poverty and illiteracy etc. See UNDP (2014), Human Development Report, New York. (accessed on 06-06-16 at <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/hdr/2014-human-development-report.html>).

³ For perspectives on radical alternatives to limited democracy see Sen (1999); Kothari (1988), and Jain (2005). Professor Amartya Sen's stress on capabilities and freedom to participate in the political process particularly inspired a series of radical enactments like the rights to education, information, food etc in India in recent years. Unfortunately, delivery issues were not correspondingly addressed and the UPA lost heavily in the last general election.

⁴ For the puzzling desiccation of the Congress Party after a decade of radical enactments like right to food, information, employment, education etc between 2004 and 2014, see Aiyar and Walton (2014).

⁵ For examples, see Saxena (2012) and Haan and Sabharwal (2008).

⁶ The term middle castes has been used in place other backward classes (OBCs) here in view of latter's negative ring and also because the groups in the middle of the old varna structure are showing increased economic and social mobility since independence.

⁷ For survey data on awareness levels regarding government programs in Dhantala and Aradhaknagar see tables 14 and 24 in my book----(details to be added after referee's acceptance).

⁸ See Saxena (2012).

⁹ For statistical data on the welfare budgets of central and state governments see; Economic Survey (2015).

¹⁰ Specially refer: <http://rural.nic.in/netrural/rural/sites/programmes-schemes.aspx> and http://delhi.gov.in/wps/wcm/connect/DOIT_DDC/ddc/homenew etc

¹¹ 'Shuklaesque' refers here to the unabashedly corrupt local state machinery as painted vividly in the classic novel by Sri Lal Shukla (1980).

¹² The patterns of cereal distribution through PDS shops was changed last year. For details see here p.16.

¹³ Under the present Samajwadi Party government in Uttar Pradesh, for example, the distribution of laptops, scholarships, compensation for crop loss, pension distribution and particularly, recruitment in the police force and lower administration was held as having been biased towards certain communities by Dhantala's residents repeatedly.

¹⁴ Refer Panagariya (2015)

¹⁵ On rise in real wage since 1990s see Sundaram (2013) and Institute of Human Development (2014).

¹⁶ See Gulati and Landes (2004) vs Khera and Dreze (2009); also refer www.nrega.nic.in.

¹⁷ Srivastava (2006), Kohli (1995), Dreze and Sen (2013)

¹⁸ Ambedkar (1936/ 2015)

¹⁹ See Balagopal(1992); Kaviraj (1988) ; Singh J. (2005) and Chatterjee (2004)

²⁰ Refer Jeffery and Lerche (2003), Corebridge (2000), Gupta (1998) and Jeffrey, Craig (2008).

²¹ For a comprehensive report see Bannerjee, Abhijit and Rukmini et..al. (2016).

²² For a similar view also see: Oldenberg (2006).

²³ See Scott, J.C., (2009) and Guha, Ranjit (1984).