
**POLITICAL WILL IN WELFARE POLICY MAKING RE-VISITING THE
POLICY PRECINCTS: A THEMATIC REVIEW**

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ABSTRACT

The present work is an exploration of welfare policies to understand its pro-poor stake. Government interventions undoubtedly intend the upliftment of the vulnerable sections of the society. However, policy failures are not uncommon due to planning-implementation divide and the weak policy premise. Enumerating policy success in terms of number of beneficiaries is necessary but not sufficient. This is, in plain terms, the undercurrent of this article. The policy verity per se warrants a strong political will to ensure percolation of benefits and empowerment of the beneficiaries. The inherent methodology of this study therefore is reviewing critical policy literature to bring out the gaps in welfare policy making. The elucidation succinctly puts forth the need for un-learning the existing practices of policy formulation and re-thinking newer policy paradigms. Empirical cases specifically from the Indian context have been drawn to in support of the core quest of this work in unravelling the pro-poor rationale of welfare policy interventions; this admittedly is in pursuit of the touted mission of a determined political will to pave way for emancipatory paradigm.

Keywords: Welfare policies, Public policy, Government, People, Society

**PRELUDE: SUBMITTING THE CORE QUEST AND THE FRAMEWORK OF THE
PRESENT WORK**

Government intervention is historically viewed as a viable mechanism through which the Third World bureaucracies address the legitimate needs of the people. Public policy interventions¹ serve the purpose of safeguarding the interests of the people, enabling them to meet the

¹The term 'public policy intervention' is used to refer government programmes towards promotion of the well-being of the people particularly, the vulnerable population. Welfare schemes and Poverty Alleviation Programmes (PAPs) of the state that thrust upon measures of amelioration to address the needs of the people merit specific attention under this category. These interventions are intended by planners/policy makers as short-term subventions and serve as crisis-relief operation by the government at times when the private practices would be exploitative. In this thesis, the terms public policy interventions, government policy interventions, social policy interventions are used interchangeably to denote state efforts to champion the cause of downtrodden.

challenges concerning their lives and livelihood. More importantly, the policy claims (statement of intentions placed in the policy agenda) that guarantee better living conditions for the poor - food/income/employment securities - have earned a reputation for the state apparatus as champions of the downtrodden².

There is no second opinion on the need for government interventions to uplift the socially and economically backward sections of the society. However, contentions have been raised periodically on the expediency of the government policy interventions – be it central or state. Policy analysts like Bernard Schaffer (1984, 1985), John Echeverri Gent (1993), Laurence Whitehead (1990), Jos Mooij (1999), Diana Elson and Nilufer Cagatay (2000), Edward Carr (2006) to mention a few, examine the critical issues in policy formulation in pursuit of its development plea.

Drawing inspiration from the works of the policy critics, the present work proposes to study the *pro-poor rationale of government policy interventions*. While there seems to be no dearth of studies³ on welfare interventions, as a statistical summary or a field survey compilation, less is being focussed on understanding the rudiments of the state initiative. So, the present work proposes study on the rationale of public policy intervention.

In vivid terms, mapping the evolution of the intervention with an impetus on thrust areas, as outlined below, is considered a pre-requisite for drawing the success contour of policy mechanism towards its touted mission:

- a. It is imperative to study the **genesis** of the policy choice to know the conditions/order under which it came into vogue⁴.

² For example, taking the case of India, there is no dearth of welfare schemes. The all-India Mid Day Meal programme and its state counterpart Chief Minister's Nutritious Meal Programme (CMNMP) in Tamil Nadu, not only provide nourishment to school children, but also assure better enrolment ratios and lower drop-out rates. Similarly, the centrally sponsored Integrated Child Development Services scheme (ICDS), proposes healthy living of mother and children below 6 years through its comprehensive nutrition and health care agenda. Again, to mention a successful intervention, the Public Distribution System (PDS) of India – central and state initiative, the policy domain of which is more than a poverty alleviation mechanism. Brindavan Moses (1983) in his article titled, "Noon Meals Scheme" has explored the political underpinnings of the nutritious meal programme of Tamil Nadu and the commendable patronage it merited for the leader and his party outfits who propagated the initiative.

³ For example Dr. Lalnilawma's work titled, "Employment Assurance Scheme: An Impact Assessment" (2009) begins with a succinct explanation on the features of the scheme and the methodology adopted to screen the outcome of the intervention vis-à-vis the touted objective of arresting threats on the employment frontiers. An assessment of EAS in terms of amount spent under its varied projects and employment generated is presented along with policy implications. This work is mentioned here as a model of impact studies on state policy interventions.

⁴ It is interesting to observe from the archival reports that some of the policy interventions in India have their roots in the Colonial period which stuck to the policy of laissez-faire. It is therefore critical to trace the genesis of pro-poor interventions that claim an imperialist legacy and had a phased expansion as a deliberate policy instrument in the post independent period.

- b. It is essential to **swot** the policy actors and the policy negotiations to sift out the rationality of the policy choice.
- c. As a corollary, it is rudimentary to pursue a pluralist plank in exploring the pro-poor stance of public policy intervention.

A holistic evaluation of a government intervention mandates a multi-dimensional insight into the policy proposal alongside a statistical survey; that the political, social and philosophical underpinnings of the policy proposal need to be sifted out is not an exaggerated claim, but an indispensable exercise in unravelling policy success.

The *policy premise* of the state interventions are nonetheless defined by the political precincts. This being the case, the development policy interventions are drawn as political projects with stipulated goals; their success gets reflected in their target coverage namely expansion of areas, enhancing the beneficiary list and so on. In other words, quantitative enumeration is accorded priority in defining the success of an intervention in lieu of content appraisal of the mechanism in addressing the strategic concerns of the people.

A review of the policy literature⁵ makes apparent the structural dichotomy viz., the planning – implementation divide. Counting on its holistic appeal and touted fiscal disbursements, it is imperative to de-scribe the negotiation/contract amongst the policy actors – the polity and the society - and their functional channels, which an impact assessment from state beneficiary list hardly can reflect. A content perusal of ‘mechanisms involved and means practised’ in fostering the mission of the intervention is thus recommended.

Submitting the need for unravelling the rationale of government interventions, the core quest is posited thus: ***Questioning the sacrosanctity of government policy interventions***: This is done by analysing a set of critical policy literature with a purport of unravelling the precincts of policy interventions and their welfare connotations. This sheds light on the traditions of public policy making drawing out the lapses of the mainstream model.

In the present study, ***the common sense model of policy making*** (which is how the mainstream model is referred in policy literature) ***and its inherent impositions are explored***, as policy choices, are often determined by the linear process of formulation. The agents of development through their rhetoric pleas in the plan agenda make policy formulation an expertise task. The top-down hierarchy that handles development issues may show optimal outcomes quantitatively, but may lack pro-poor consideration. For example, the ***targeted interventions also seem to be as a gratuitous relief for the most vulnerable segments of the society; nonetheless, the realm that these relief interventions maintain as a pro-development investment seems a bone of***

⁵ Sources consulted is given in the end.

contention. Here I would like to quote Edward Carr (2006) on the limitations of the existing studies on food security issues and his postmodern perspectives for understanding the complexity of food problem. Carr points out that “Food security studies, while giving ever more attention to issues of perception and local knowledge in food outcomes, have yet to engage in a *systematic* discussion ...” (pp.14) laying impetus upon postmodernist approach as “... a means of systematically approaching how actors apprehend and negotiate the complex factors and connections from which they fashion food outcomes by applying postmodern theories of power and knowledge to the study of society’s role in food outcomes” (pg.14). Developing Maxwell’s perception⁶ on postmodernism as “a challenge to ...many accepted ways of looking at the world” (pp.18), Carr draws the need for new approaches to study food problem. Carr thus reinforces the significance of power structures and social contexts in analyzing food problems; his study proposed to sift out “the ways in which these conditions (biophysical and/or economic conditions) are apprehended, and reshape, society and knowledge in particular contexts” (pp.22).

This gap is addressed by encouraging/attempting a sort of ontological discussion⁷ is a review-based finding of this work.

Revisiting the mainstream model of public policy making is the core domain. At the outset, the paper pins down upon two major lapses in the making of public policies identified as *inadequacies and leakages* (policy spill-over). Cues from the works of Schaffer (1984) and Mooij (2002) are drawn respectively *to study the identified lapses within a comprehensive theoretical frame of ‘technocracy’ in policy formulation and ‘political dimension’ of state intervention*. The mainstream structure is explored to understand the spill-over. Policy appraisals of critics are drawn upon to render support to the elemental questions raised in this thesis regarding the verity of government interventions.

While a couple of critical policy literature lay impetus on the politics of welfare intervention, majority of the works focus on statistical projections to tell upon the success or otherwise of the government intervention. Towards addressing this lacuna, the focus of the present thesis is to sequester a political framework in pursuit of analysing the mainstream model and contextualizing the same in the chosen domain of empiricism. In this thesis, PDS – a successful

⁶ Maxwell is seen as a predecessor of Carr in raising a postmodernist discourse in food policy literature. Maxwell’s work (1996) titled, “Food security: a post-modern perspective” discusses the implications of the approach.

⁷ “...An **ontology** is an explicit specification of a conceptualization... A conceptualization is an abstract, simplified view of the world that we wish to represent for some purpose. Every knowledge base, knowledge-based system, or knowledge-level agent is committed to some conceptualization, explicitly or implicitly... The term is borrowed from philosophy...We use common ontologies to describe *ontological commitments* for a set of agents so that they can communicate about a domain of discourse without necessarily operating on a globally shared theory”. Web link for reference: <http://www-ksl.stanford.edu/kst/what-is-an-ontology.html>

policy intervention of Tamil Nadu – is chosen to unravel its permanent status as a social policy instrument. The assiduous implication of the core argument of this study is that it is a progressive reduction rather than a phased expansion of an intervention which defines its success; this is on a reasoning that the purpose for which it came into vogue has been mitigated to a larger extent, if not curtailed wholly.

Hence, musing on the comprehensive development framework of the thesis, the trajectory of PDS is studied from a pro-development perspective; in otherwords, the negotiations/dealings that take place between the policy actors – the governments (central/state) as a procuring and distributing agents, the farmers as producers and sellers of foodgrains and above all the people as Fair Price Shop consumers - are examined. It is proposed that the exploration of the sort will bring to forefront the policy nuances in championing the cause of downtrodden.

This work discusses the lapses of mainstream model of public policy making with cues from the literature.

Section 1.1 examines the rationale of government policy interventions delving upon the traditions in the making of public policies and the state-society relationship under welfare statism.

Section 1.2 explicates the lapses of the common sense model of public policies presenting empirical summaries from the Indian context.

Section 1.3 outlines the precincts of welfare policies as defined by the mainstream pedagogy

Section 1.4 summaries the political precincts of welfare interventions cueing the need for radical changes in policy making

1.1 RATIONALE OF GOVERNMENT POLICY INTERVENTIONS

In Section 1.1 two vital issues of government policy interventions are examined in pursuit of exploring the pro-poor strength of policy agenda. They are:

- The process of public policy formulation.
- The policy liaison between the state and the society.

1.1.1 Traditions in the making of welfare policies:

Section 1.1.1 is an exposition on the mainstream policy-making formula; the import of this c summary is to grapple with the pro-poor rationale of state policy interventions given its political interpretation. Conventionally, policy formulation is a technocratic arrangement and a superior-

subordinate kind of relationship emerges between the government and the people. This mainstream etiquette is extolled as contravening the rationality of welfare interventions.

1.1.1.1 How are public policies framed?

I begin my analysis questioning the dominant model of public policy making at the outset. Bernard Schaffer's view⁸ on common sense model of policy making is taken as an inspiration towards developing this critical argument on policy paradigm. Technically referred to as the mainstream understanding, policy is treated as a thematic utterance of decisions and policy planning and implementation are viewed as two distinct regimes.

In response to the contention of the development radicalists, the policy framers seem to raise the query: How then can a policy be understood, if not in terms of the two logical phases - formulation and implementation? To this Schaffer declares", public practice is however, not a sequence of two separate phases, one before the other, but is three coincident zones" [Schaffer, 1984:157]. The simultaneous zones of public policy as Apthrope [Schaffer, 1984] terms them are: authorization, establishment and allocation. It is pointed out that the structural dichotomy has led to two evils namely disintegrated the policy team and erected a distinct hierarchy in policy planning.

The divide factoid namely planning- implementation dichotomy has set in motion a heterogeneous culture in policy stratagem and segmented the policy making process. In the words of Paul Streeton, "One problem in attempting a realistic and relevant approach to policy problems in development is that the development community consists of 3 or 4 different groups, each with its own experience, approach and ideas, its own culture, but among whom there is little communication. It is rather like one of those peculiarly American institutions, the three-ring circus, where acrobats, clowns and animals perform their tricks simultaneously in three separate rings".[1995:9].

Aside segmentation, the dichotomy has also resulted in allocating assignments distinctly to policy formulators as decision makers. It is interesting to observe that the task of implementation stands exclusively out of formulators' module. Thus, policy making is not planning cum implementation activity but only a decision making process. The linear process of policy making has the following steps:

- "Definition of the problem

⁸ Views of policy exponents like Bernard Schaffer on the linear process of policy formulation are recorded in this section. It is no exaggeration to state that Bernard Schaffer's critical works on public policy making were pioneering attempts towards deconstruction of mainstream policy paradigm that were truly plutocratic in nature.

- Laying out the alternatives
- Predicting the consequences of each alternative
- Valuing the outcomes
- Making the choice” (Schaffer, 1984:148).

In Schafferian language, "The presentation of policy as a dichotomous sequence, a supposed verbalized decision followed by something else called implementation obliterates the significance of, and therefore any need or occasion for discussing or bringing to account all aspects of the actual construction of the policy practice institutional establishment, the practice of allocations, and what would be highly doubtful calculations, strategies, therapies and other technologies, were they ever brought to question and that question should be put about the themes themselves" [1984:160].

Critiquing the technical approach, it is exhorted that the practice of policy does not warrant a rigid framework to arrive at a decision. Quoting an honest declaration by Bailery Morris the then US Commerce secretary, for a query on the toughest decision he has made: “the decisions themselves almost make themselves; if you have all the facts, inevitably you are led to certain decisions” (1984:148) - Schaffer is pessimistic about the scientific rationality of the linear process.

Evaluating the mainstream model, it is argued that policy making includes within its ambit not only process of formulation but also processors of policy mission who lay down the technical requisites of the linear process. Their vision of the development problem/solution is considered to be advanced as against layman’s perception on the score. These sound formulators have contributed a couple of steps within the linear process as an outcome of their compound thinking.

Following Schaffer, it is not difficult to identify the technical components of the linear process which is highlighted below:

- Compartmentalising areas/issues that warrant intervention.
- Labelling these compartmentalised priorities as sectors.
- Propagating a closed decorum between sectors.
- Pronouncing ‘thematic verbal dictations’ as policy measures.
- Declaring its meaningful translation as a non-policy measure.
- Denouncing the concern for policy outcome.

Thinking aloud on the features of the mainstream model of policy making, the pro-poor rationale of government intervention is disputed as the critical reviews point towards the policy fallacies:

- As a “committed structure of important resources” (Schaffer,1985) policy demands creative destruction of technocratic illusion.
- As Geoffrey Lamb puts it aptly, "The trick however is to define the need and design the institutional output so that the problem is constantly tackled, but never quite solved. Institutions need policy problems even more than they need policy solutions" (Geoffrey Lamb, 1985:516).

1.1.2 Patron-client arrangement: A defined liaison

A study on welfare implications of government policy interventions like PDS, ICDS⁹ and similar programmes is challenging due to the bondage that gets established between the people and the government that sponsored the subvention. In the context of defining the relationship between the members of the state bureaucracy and the targeted beneficiaries, it is worth citing the work of Geof Wood (1986) titled, “Don’t give them my telephone number – applicants and clients: limits to public responsibility”. This work brings out the liaison that stems inadvertently between the benefactor state and the recipient society. This invites our attention to the crucial argument of the thesis that public provisioning of welfare services establishes a paternalist understanding with the members of the society.

Wood points out in this interesting discourse that the recipients of welfare provision are formally regarded as ‘applicants’ in the official arena¹⁰. While Wood’s choice¹¹ is ‘client’, he is no way contending Schaffer’s argument on the plight of the poor as the target of social engineering. He preferred the term client, as according to his notion, it also connoted a form of superior – subordinate relationship that was prevalent in the pre-capitalist days. Whether referred to as an applicant or a client, it is a symbol of their powerlessness – a point where Wood is in agreement with Schaffer. His dissonance on the term applicant is due to its thrust on “interstitial” relationship between the state and the poor. Schaffer on one side argues that the relationship is momentary and passing, while Wood opines that it is most often long and permanent. To quote Wood, “The tendency in this direction is strongest under the widespread conditions of long-term welfare distribution and development interventions which are increasingly characterized by long-term, preferential credit distribution, subsidies, price support, extension, schemes for employment generation and so on” (Wood, 1986:481).

⁹ ICDS – Integrated Child Development Services scheme.

¹⁰ The use of the term client was rejected by Schaffer, for in his opinion, it seems loaded with ideological connotations, aside organizational and professional interpretations. He felt the need for making a concrete distinction between service deliveries in political sphere as against that in professional sphere. Schaffer preferred the term ‘applicant’.

Further, Wood's analysis also points to the agenda of the state machinery in making people the passive recipients of the subventions in cash/kind. Labelled as safety net, the munificence of the government arrests any organized representation against the state. Wood's analysis is used to portray bureaucratic power in state-society negotiations. To quote, " These processes of isolation, individuation and labeling are of course crucial reflections of power in the relationship between the state and the society, supported by an array of ideology and institutional materiality around such authoritative activities as policy formulation, planning and implementation" (Wood, 1986:477).

Wood's (and Schaffer) contention on the policy process is apparently grounded on the passive role of the beneficiaries. Targeting and labeling, the institutional onus ends with translation of verbal bids into official statements, pronouncing technically sound goals to ameliorate the conditions of the labeled targets. He argues that labeling and targeting, the primary steps in public policy making, "aggregates people just as it disaggregates them"... "It is this contradiction of structural imperatives which sets limits to hegemony implicit in the presentation of policy process as technical and rational" (Wood, 1986: 478).

Developing Wood's theory on paternalism, it is argued that the state munificence generates space for the people in the political platform as 'passive elements'. The outcome of this new order is that it mutes any kind of upheaval against the complacency of the government in addressing development concerns. The vein of this argument is therefore a post-modern requisite towards de-construction of the 'patron-beneficiary' system as it comes in the way of active civic engagement. Moreover, the long run implications of relief interventions (in the absence of demand for sustainable development measures) could be devastating to the state and the society.

Wood's analysis is presented to cue the repercussions of 'patron-client' model of state intervention as it weakens the development rationale of state policy interventions. The negative spill-over of this model are:

- It supports a culture of serfdom that questions self-esteem of the people and the democracy of the state. Whether a client or an applicant, the interests of the people get subjugated over the state interests.
- It strengthens the linear policy making process as the state bureaucracy identifies, classifies and labels the members of the society towards its end of distribution of doles. With presentation of policy statements the policy process sees its completion.

To understand the contravening tenets of public policy interventions, two major reviews – Schaffer and Wood – on mainstream policy formulation were elucidated. The contradictions of the mainstream model that undermine the pro-poor rationality of welfare interventions are:

- Identifying the problem and solution towards mitigation of people's woes mandated technocratic handling in policy domain.
- Government munificence on a welfare cause strengthened monarchy in political paradigm as subjects evince patronage to the benefactor state.

Consulting the empirical works of Gent (1993), Jos Mooij (2002) and elucidation of Barbara Harriss White – John Harriss (2007) on government interventions¹², the features of the mainstream policy-making formula that support the case of present thesis are highlighted below:

- Importance is accorded to bureaucratic perception of the problems of the society.
- There is a division of the policy making process into separate entities as formulation and execution.
- Defining decision making per se as policy process makes it an expertise task.
- Impetus is laid on technocratic ways of policy formulation – sectoralizing and labelling are basic tenets of public policy making.
- Generation of relief interventions as permanent solution to a long term development malady is politically promoted.
- Lassitude of sustainable programmes of development and leakages of the relief intervention are attributed to 'lack of political will' and 'implementation hurdles'.
- Perennial demand for the political palliative is construed as policy success.

In essence, the critical points of the dominant paradigm which this study sifts out as challenging are posited below:

- Fallacy of dichotomy in policy making.
- Scientific rationality of the linear (policy) process.
- Technical underpinnings of policy outcomes.

Following the theoretical elucidation on tenets of public policy interventions that contend its pro-poor rationale, empirical accounts are presented in Section 1.2.

1.2 LAPSES OF THE COMMON SENSE MODEL OF PUBLIC POLICIES: EMPIRICAL SUMMARIES FROM INDIAN CONTEXT:

In this part the lapses in public policy formulations are elaborated with empirical evidences from the literature. Welfare interventions are popular in the Indian context. The governments – both

¹² While policy notes and government documents present comfortable information and statistics on outcomes of the policy mission, the appraisals of development exponents/policy critics show a grim picture.

central and state - inherently adopt a paternalist approach towards mitigation of insecurities of various kinds such as employment, income and food. Though it may not be forgotten that such threats arise out of failure of the government in attending to the long term development issues, the Indian states have an established legacy of launching welfare programmes to arrest the crisis. These interventions are assigned priority in the election manifesto of the political parties and have merited the attention of the mass.

Two welfare interventions are studied for a critical understanding of welfare paradigms which seemingly appear as state development planks. However the critical components of mainstream model present a clear disjuncture between policy rationale and development rationale. Two issues are taken into consideration in the context of policy disjuncture¹³:

- Policy mission: a technocratic speculation? - Generic or Strategic
- Policy choice: whose prerogative prevails? – Polity or the Society

First issue studied is on the score of policy stipulations – What is the criterion applied in determining the ambit of the policy? Towards this quest, a detailed account of a popular nutrition intervention in the state of Madhya Pradesh is rendered. The scheme referred to as ‘Project Poshak’¹⁴ was launched in 1970s as “an integrated health and nutrition project providing nutrition supplements to "hut-bound" toddler (aged 3 years and below) in isolated rural areas” with the touted mission “to reach the neediest pre-schoolers” (A Case Analysis on Project Poshak, 2010).

Second issue discussed is about the imperativeness of policy interventions; while development needs of the people is said to underscore government intervention, it is their political underpinnings that accord them a perennial status as social policy instruments. It is thus argued that a policy choice is a political prerogative over people’s mandate.

1.2.1 Constraints in Public Policy Concerns: Wheeler’s appraisal of targeted nutrition intervention:

Analyzing a popular nutrition intervention of Madhya Pradesh, Erica Wheeler elaborates upon a mainstream tenet namely labeling as a deviant from development vision. Labeling which is construed as an important step in the mainstream model of policy making is essentially a tool of

¹³It is significant to note that the two queries posited for empirical study are related to the theoretical reviews on policy process and state-society relationship of the previous section.

¹⁴ The discussion on Project Poshak relies upon Wheeler’s critical analysis (Wheeler, 1985) alongwith “A Case Analysis on Project Poshak,” by study guide compilation 2010. Web link for reference: <http://case-analysis-on-project-poshak.html>

political bureaucracy that is conjectured to reflect the needs of the people and the corresponding support of the state. Developing Wheeler's critique, the present thesis argues that strategic concerns often do not make way in the policy agenda albeit the policy proposals may address the generic needs of people's well-being.

Label, is admittedly a description of an individual or a group that is apparent; it denotes its status - formal / informal; it also reflects its condition. In fact the process of targeting (in policy domain) is facilitated by labelling. It is a process of constraining the mind (thought) and the behaviour (action) of the subject to function within the categorization. It is therefore, as Wheeler (1985) remarks, "an act of politics involving conflict and authority" and "a relationship of power". The common labels in the policy arena are mother, women, destitute, labourer, and refugee and so on.

Project Poshak had been a popular nutrition intervention for pre-school children in the state of Madhya Pradesh in 1970. An initial screening of the children in the pilot districts (4) of the state identified 2900 children as eligible for the supplement. Aside this, pregnant and lactating mothers were also targeted for the 'free-take home food supplement'. The target-group comprising of mother - child pairs underscores the mother's role as the care taker of the child.

An interesting phenomenon of Project Poshak is that it was one of the pioneering attempts to cover pre-school children under the component of nutrition; before 1970s, the food interventions covered only school-goers above 4years. Under the 'removal of poverty' campaign by the Indian government in 1970s, special nutrition schemes were promoted. Project Poshak was one among those central government schemes which became popular in Madhya Pradesh by mid 1970s. It was promoted as nutrition cum health scheme in the state. The financial support for the extension of the programme in the state was rendered by the Madhya Pradesh government alongwith GOI sponsorships and International agencies like UNICEF, USAID, CARE etc., It was hailed successful on the following grounds:

- A positive change in the outlook of the mothers' on issues relating to nutrition and health care.
- A sizeable reduction in infant mortality rates¹⁵.
- The "take-home approach" was seen more economical than the "on-site system".

¹⁵ Infant Mortality Rate denotes the number of babies per 1,000 live births who die before reaching one year of age. The IMR was touted to be much lower than the pre-Poshak period. The findings on the performance of the scheme are taken from: A Case Analysis on Project Poshak, 2010: <http://tedibabe.blogspot.com/2010/06/case-analysis-on-project-poshak.html>.

- The delivery of nutrition and health services to the targeted was considered to be satisfactory.

Despite the achievement of its targets, the scheme was not expanded into an operational programme. Some of primary reasons were multiplicity of the objectives and the clash of interests between promoting agencies. In course of time, there was a shift from nutritional feeding to family planning and curative medical care; the latter was a political move which could not be supported within the allotted funds. To explicate this lapse in the agenda of Project Poshak, "Curative medicine was politically more popular because of its use of impressive, visible facilities and services. Since the expensive "luxury" curative type of medicine was the one required and desired by the politically influential, there were no political elites who promoted Poshak. Both the Secretary and Director of Health understood and were committed to the value of Poshak, but they carried its privileged status once they left their offices" (2010).

The scheme targeted mainly the women households and mothers in order to impart them lessons on leading a healthy life style; sessions were organized for mothers on child-caring. Schedules on infant feeding and nature of food were appraised in periodically convened mothers' meeting.

In her analysis of this intervention, Wheeler describes the 'feed the child and teach the mother' rationale of nutrition intervention as patriarchal. Aside the problem of leakages of food to untargeted members of the family and intermittent uptake of the food, the premise of the intervention to teach mothers is contended. Thus, a clarion call to the policy makers is, alongside counting the wastages, to contemplate on the weak fundamentals of the intervention. The vital issues that need rumination based on the case of Project Poshak are summarized below:

The need for deployment of the label 'mother' where 'parent' could well fit; pinning the responsibility of child - rearing to 'female parent' is obviously a mainstream parochial dictation.

The practice of guising the profile of women under the tag of mother. They may be traders, employees, artisans. It is observed that, their functional capabilities are discounted on identification as the mother of malnourished children.

Last, but not the least the label of 'ignorant mother'- is a sign of power -pronouncement of the might over the meek. It is crucial to understand that an enlightened mother as well, may not be in a position to provide nutritive intakes to her children as she may not be the decision-maker which again is attributed to culture and household practices, socio-economic in nature.

Wheeler (1985) in this interesting work on targeted nutrition interventions reports thus: "The mother child system of targeting while physiologically correct, avoids confrontation with all (economic) factors and ignores the fact that in many cultures, women have little authority with

regard to food until it comes into their hands for cooking. It cannot, either, be assumed that women, especially young women have control over their own labour or can decide for themselves what time to allot to child care in competition with other tasks"(1985:477). She further adds that" the rhetoric of mother blaming had swept away any consideration of the fathers' role or of the wider norms of the society in question. Family dynamics in many societies enable the older women in a family to express their power over the younger by this means. This is not a simple question of male domination; it is more a means by which the most vulnerable and least articulate member of any society (younger, poor women) bear the blame for a condition of themselves and their children which they are probably the least able to combat, and which is to a considerable extent a result of the power structure of that society"(1985:482).

Developing Wheeler's analysis it is argued that a welfare intervention for the poor cannot be construed as a holistic measure of development if it is a technocratic choice within a limited spectre. As observed from the above case - the nutrition intervention for the women and children from vulnerable background – it is typical of an awareness and relief camp. To that extent the success of the intervention is based on achievement of spelt objectives like lowering IMR, bringing more people under the project, assuring free health supplements to the identified beneficiaries etc. However, the health status of women and children of the state depend upon strategic concerns beyond the agenda of Project Poshak; entwined with development issues of the state, emancipation of the status of women relate to gender practices prevalent, livelihood patterns, basic education and livelihood opportunities and conditions, and above all the culture that governs their family life. Due to political reasons and/or financial crunch, if the project fades away (as happened in this case), it is not a malaise; but the failure of state apparatus to ensure basic conditions of living for the people of the state, particularly vulnerable population, through public provisioning of sustainable nature including creation of durable community assets and investments in human capital is visibly a development ill.

Caustically stated, it is important to review the state intervention from the perspective of sustainable development vision and not merely from coverage goals; the popularity of the welfare intervention may connote an increasing threat on the development frontiers and the growing number of vulnerable. So, a pragmatic policy approach would be to accord top priority to interests of the poor through a synergetic alliance of the state with the society in development planning. Development pragmatism thus represents nexus of state policy goals (policy measures of capability enhancement) and societal apparition (people's conjecture of their well-being) towards the unified cause of holistic development. It is thus crucial to trace the rudimentary tenets of policy interventions to gain an understanding of their welfare rationale in a pragmatic sense.

1.2.2 Political Prerogatives in Policy Choice: Jos Mooij on Welfare Discourses

A public policy intervention is legitimately viewed as a mechanism that strives to fulfil the aspirations of the people and not just their basic needs. Infact, many of them like DWCRA, TRYSEM, SFDA, MFALA, SUME, SUWE, NREPs¹⁶, the nutrition interventions, etc., were launched as capacity-building schemes. Alongside, addressing their basic necessities, public policy interventions supposedly have an in-built obligation towards emancipation of the vulnerable sections of the society. Therefore, the implication of policy success is that the government is actively engaged in holistic development of the state and society, bearing in mind the interests of the people, particularly the vulnerable population. However, in practise, public policy making has been far from its normative principle namely serving the interests of the society. Its paternalistic concern for society accorded it a formal status as decision maker in the choice of public service delivery.

Interestingly, there has been a decisive shift in the mechanism of state bureaucracy in addressing the welfare needs of the people from donative stance to that of self help module. Despite the fact that self-help module has seen appreciation as a tool of poverty alleviation and emancipation of women and so on, it is not transformative. The policy mission under the alternative order is also a technocrat's choice and the civic engagement is the same as under the paternalist order (donative stance). The two discourses – donative Vs self help - are summarised below with empirical examples to understand the political underpinnings of welfare policy interventions.

Donative discourse Vs Self-help discourse:

Jos Mooij (2002), in one of her eminent works, titled "Welfare Policies and Politics: A study of Three Government Interventions in Andhra Pradesh, India" has traced schematically the history of political populism in Andhra Pradesh, which has underpinned major development interventions in the state. The two schemes namely - PDS and DWCRA - though apparently seem to champion the cause of downtrodden, the political prerogative in determining the logistics of these schemes are vital towards understanding their pro-development cause.

The PDS of Andhra Pradesh was brought into vogue during 1980s by Telugu Desam Party (TDP) whose sweeping victory in the state elections was attributed to promise in the election manifesto to introduce a new food scheme, the "Rs. 2 per kilo of rice" scheme. Within a decade the scheme was hailed for its pro-poor stake. The popularity of the scheme was touted in the commanding state procurement share of around 40% in 1990s.

¹⁶

Tracing the origin of the scheme, Joi Mooij points towards its spectacular launch. Under the auspicious banner of 'Anna Varam' - big brother's gift or rice gift, the 'Two Rupees per kilo of Rice scheme' was launched by the then Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, Mr. N.T. Rama Rao. Those below the income ceiling of Rs.6,000 per annum were granted 25 kgs of rice at the rate of Rs.2/kg. Since then there was no looking back for the intervention which achieved its targets. PDS was therefore seen as successful policy intervention in food-crisis regions of the state.

During late 1990s under TPDS, the AP government announced PDS ration for as many as 11 million card holders vis-à-vis the central allocation to only around 3 million card holders; likewise in terms of the quantity of rice and price/kg, the Andhra Pradesh government was more liberal than GOI sanctions.

Mooij's exploration on the populist food programme has interesting findings, an understanding of which paves way for conscientization¹⁷.

The historical trajectory of the scheme makes it obvious that Rs.2/- per kilo of rice was the vital agenda in the electoral manifesto of TDP (Telugu Desam Party) targeting the vote of the poor, specially the women. The sweeping successes and major come backs evinced by the TDP as against the opposition (supported by entrepreneurial class) are attributed to the subsidized food intervention. Though a cross section of people including the rural poor and peasant cultivator were benefited, it was not without a heavy price in terms of long-term welfare. Aside the fiscal pressure, the celebrity scheme, covered the tenets of TDP, which were anti-poor. To mention a few - non implementation of minimum wages act, enforcement of land ceiling measures etc.

The food intervention @ Rs.2/- per kilo of rice was a universal programme covering every citizen of the state. In a blaze of excitement to render a helping hand to the poor (who are in need) the government introduced the scheme. Such initiatives reflecting the charitable disposition of the party leader towards the vulnerable, as Mooij denotes, have a donative tone, in theme and substance. The government maintained the poor as mute recipients of the rice subvention leading to a regime of paternalism. Alongside welfare subventions, political affiliation of TDP leadership with the grass roots was promoted throughout the state. The apprehension on food subvention as a political prerogative gets strengthened as Mooij points out the alternatives to PDS which seem far more crucial.

As Mooij reveals, in the place of food subvention, a welfare intervention considering the situation in the state could have been any of or all of the following: a) A food for works scheme

¹⁷ Conscientization refers to a type of learning which is focused on perceiving and exposing social and political contradictions. Web link for the reference: <http://www.reference.com/browse/Conscientization>

or allied occupations for tenant cultivators; b) Financial and technical aid to small and marginal farmers to continue farm operations with no disruption; c) Income generating Community Development Works (CDWs). This would have been a meaningful social intervention towards mitigation of unemployment and income poverty. To quote, "The presentation of food programmes has been referred to as a donative discourse because of the emphasis on charity and generosity of the government.... However, "various progressive laws which would help the poor were not implemented. Instead the TDP (Party in Power) administers and protects the system which thrives on the existence of unemployed workers who must accept low wages or starve. TDP brutally suppresses the efforts of workers to organise for land reform and higher wages. A case in point is the way TDP has given the police free rein to attack supposed naxalites whenever they suspect that villagers are organising against the land lords"(Mooij, 2002:28).

The above elucidation is a curtain - raiser on the pro-poor rhetoric of the donative discourse.

The alternative formula of Self-help discourse was based on targeted populism. As a central government initiative the Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas Scheme (DWCRA) got establishment in Andhra Pradesh during 1982–83 under the aegis of UNICEF. As a targeted intervention for women from the destitute section, it was essentially drafted on a self-help slogan. The very design of this intervention gained popularity as earlier interventions were based on benefactor-beneficiary model. It was looked upon as a programme of emancipation of women. Further, as an anti-poverty intervention, the government encouraged active participation of women in income-generating activities like sheep rearing, pickle making and so on. This brought about the growth of micro enterprises in villages of Andhra Pradesh and was technically and financially supported by the state government. By early 90s, the DWCRA was actively involved in public welfare campaigns like 'Save a Rupee a Day' which invited the attention of anti-arrack women's crew – the mobilization that staged demonstration across the state against country liquor. The popularity enjoyed by this scheme retained its stature as a specific intervention for the welfare of the poor women when similar schemes saw integration in 1999; DWCRA was appreciated for two reasons – firstly promotion of group approach and secondly consideration of social well-being of its members, alongside assuring income security.

It can be drawn from Mooij's exploration that DWCRA groups in AP got a phase-lift as poor women's thrift and credit group and received a lot of support from the state government. DWCRA was thus touted as one of the experimental tools of the state bureaucracy supporting the cause of enhancing the capability of women and children and *assuring better living conditions*.

The agenda of DWCRA assured the following for the upliftment of the BPL segments particularly women and children:

- improve the survival position and quality of life of young children and women;
- enable women to increase their earning power and to participate in development programmes;
- increase the impact of ongoing existing development programmes by stimulating, supplementing, strengthening and integrating them;
- involve the community in planning and implementing the programme so that this need-based development activity will be carried on by the community even after outside assistance is withdrawn” (2002:35).

The success of the intervention was read from its statistical performance and received national and international recognition. DWCRA saw rapid extensions in coverage and scope across the state. As per the World Micro Credit Summit estimation (Washington, 1997) AP alone accounts for 40% of DWCRA groups that exist in India and 20% of those that exist in the world. By mid 2000, there seemed a rapid increase in these micro units. “In March 2002, there were 12649 DWCRA groups and 6422 SHGs in Chitoor, 6356 DWCRA groups and 11595 SHGs in Medak and 12448 DWCRA groups and 12584 SHGs in Krishna district”(Mooij, 2002:33).

It is significant to observe that the Andhra Pradesh government initially conceived DWCRA with an empowerment mission of addressing strategic gender concerns. However they merited scanty attention in the implementation phase and the self-help project was confined to increasing the number of micro units and formation of maximum number of SHGs in the state. As a component of GAD (Gender And Development), the DWCRA was posited with a comprehensive agenda the guidelines of which are given below:

- to enjoy equal status with men in the family;
- to live in dignity (freedom from humiliation);
- to meet basic needs like drinking water, fuel for cooking nutritious food for the family, safe livelihood and adequate shelter;
- self sufficiency;
- health and education;
- government within reach;
- decision making capacity within and outside the household;
- leisure;
- freedom from violence, conflict, war;
- mobility;
- ability to make choices” (2002:43).

It is acknowledged from Mooij's analysis that the self-help discourse roped in people's participation in policy paradigm "making a stakeholder of every citizen became one of the driving ideas behind many of the new schemes and policies, so, DWCRA can be seen as an example of a wider trend: "away from universal populism towards a targeted populism and away from a donative discourse towards a self-help discourse"¹⁸. Encouraging women entrepreneurship, female literacy and health care issues were found to be highlights of the welfare intervention. Yet there were serious elements of the agenda which were left unattended by the promoters of the scheme to view DWCRA as a transformative paradigm. Patriarchal practices in the state including child marriages, dowry system, to mention a few, remained unchallenged despite policy outcries on women's liberation. It is noteworthy that child marriages (girls below 15 years and 5 months old) accounted for approximately 56% in Andhra Pradesh. To quote Mooij on the sluggishness of DWCRA on strategic gender concerns "Patriarchy itself is not questioned in the programme" (Mooij:43) . A suitable response to this may be that the power lobbies (political prerogatives) may not have favoured it. As an ingredient of WID (Women In Development), it was believed that DWCRA women would initiate the changes. "After all, even if the government or the male family members would not be in favour, it is possible that the programme creates an internal dynamic, which was nobody's intention in the first instance, but which would mean that under certain conditions it would stimulate a challenge to patriarchy itself" (2002:43,44)

An interesting dimension of Mooij articulation on DWCRA relevant to the present thesis is the policy dilemma on GAD Vs WID approaches of DWCRA as a tool of women's liberation. While the former is a transformative paradigm that addresses the gender issues in a composite society where women have a challenging role concomitant to men; in tandem with environmental requisites, women's subjects are not dealt in isolation. "GAD, therefore, focuses on women and men. It aims to look at the totality of social organisation, at production as well as reproduction. Moreover, it stresses power, conflict and gender relations in understanding women's subordination. It regards women as agents of change, rather than as passive recipients of development assistance" (2002:42, 43).

On the contrary, the agenda of WID approach was to make "women visible" in which policy makers and planners had a contributory role. Under this approach, the challenges of women were dealt separately. Critics of WID approach claimed thus: "...looking at women only led to further isolation. Women received attention, but this happened without looking at

the wider society (including gender relations) in which women had to live, and which perpetuated their marginalised existence" (2002:42) .

¹⁸ Mooij, 2002:41

It is crucial to note that DWCRA was premised upon a comprehensive agenda of GAD, but pursuing even the milder version –WID – seemed complex in policy settings. Touting the significance of political rationale in welfare/public policy formulations, the findings from Mooij's analysis bring to surface:

- The political power in policy making: For instance proposing DWCRA as a self-help initiative towards promoting the well-being of the women from vulnerable backgrounds.
- The technical power in rationalizing policy agenda: Unable to meet GAD or WID propositions, focussing on increasing the SHG units and micro-credit beneficiaries as DWCRAs primary agenda of well-being.

Concluding the empirical summaries, the case for revisiting policy underpinnings is exhorted to assess their holistic contribution in addressing the development needs. Public policy interventions are ubiquitously viewed as welfare mechanisms, but in practise, there stems a disjuncture between the policy mission and the ground reality.

The policy disjuncture exhibits in the following ways:

- *Inadequacy of the mechanism to handle the problem and*
- *Leakages of the policy mechanism*

The second hypothesis leads to a discussion on the efficacy of the policy intervention. Even as a relief measure, the role of welfare intervention is of no less significance as it is supposed to cater to the needs of the downtrodden. As a government programme involving several wings/units and huge budgetary sanctions, evils of bureaucracy like red-tapism, inordinate delays and malpractices are rampant. On this score, it is postulated that as policy channels of public service delivery, the effective operation of welfare interventions relies upon conscientized management.

Recognising the status of public policy interventions as anti-poverty mechanisms and their deliberate choice by political bureaucracy, it is important to discuss the salient features of the welfare interventions, a mainstream perspective.

1.3 STUDYING POLICY PRECINCTS: MAINSTREAM PEDAGOGIES

Excerpts from the literature – theoretical and empirical - are drawn to highlight that the *public policy interventions are supposedly the platforms of people particularly the poor to articulate their demands to the government. So, people are its primary stakeholders and the government is its agent in attending to their needs.* The success of these interventions depends upon the following factors:

- How efficiently they are able to achieve their ends in addressing the needs of the poor as a relief intervention and pave way for sustainable development.
- How effectively they are able to dismantle the political clout/ power lobbying in discharging their obligation to the society.
- How ebulliently they are able to appreciate policy actors particularly grassroots representation in policy negotiations.

These factors are crucial to link the short-term relief programmes with the long term development initiatives of the state. *The scope of welfare interventions is thus to cater to the immediate needs of the poor with a concrescent pact of sustainable measures of development; the success of this concrescence becomes evident when the economy gains self-sufficiency and benefits of development spill-over to meet the demands of the society. Arguably, the policy success leads to progressive redundancy of the relief intervention.*

Thinking aloud on the salient features of public policy interventions, it is thus putforth that *enlightened representation from below can strengthen the pro-development stake of state subventions*. A bottom-up approach is a veritable way towards curtailing the abuse of state policy interventions through:

- Addressing democratic deficit in policy pronouncements.
- Strengthening public provisioning as a mechanism against venal practices.
- Fostering pro-poor growth paradigm.

The contributory role of public policy interventions is presented below:

1.3.1 Empowering the poor:

One of the important tenets of public policy intervention is to enhance the capability of the poor so that there is an upliftment in their status of well-being. Alongside, it lays a platform for people to become vibrant participants in state initiative towards their well-being so that the policy lapses are arrested to a large extent. Active civic engagement not only dismantles technocracy in development planning, but also serves to curb the leakages. To substantiate this point, Gent's empirical case is discussed below

Gent (1993) is clear about the status of public policies as an intervention by the state for the common man and by the common man; he sees it as a pathway that would "promote new patterns of political mobilization, or establish new rules that legitimate novel strategies" (pp.xii). To ensure beneficial policy outcomes, he has laid stress on monitoring mechanisms to examine the accountability of the state in its committed cause. He refers to the monitoring mechanisms as "police patrols" – stringent regulations and social auditing of the schemes - and "fire alarms" –

active grassroots engagement. Gent's thesis is that implementation of public policies in principle mandates participation of the society which is both a stipulation and yardstick of people's empowerment. Managing hurdles of political bureaucracy, if people are able to make their presence vociferous, that is regarded as a strident move towards emancipation of their lives. It is observed from his analysis that grassroots engagement in welfare initiatives is a complex test of potential public as it is bridled with three-fold challenges. Gent refers them as **public participation hypotheses**:

- **The Greater Responsiveness Hypothesis** connotes the gap between the state as the provider of assistance and society as objects of development.
- **The Elite Domination Hypothesis** implies the perennial problem of suppression of the lower stratum by upper strata of society.
- **The Political Patronage Hypothesis** assumes public participation as involvement of NGOs and civic forums with vested interests.

To quote from Gent the aspiration of empowering the poor through active participation in community development initiatives, "In bourgeois parliamentary democracy, the common man has no political role once he has cast his vote in the election. We are determined to give him a continuing role in rural development. When the common villager has realized this role, he will be able to acquire self-confidence, and take collective initiative to change the life of the rural poor and middle class" (pg. 127).

From Gent's articulation it is inferred that public policy intervention could pave the way for the empowerment of the people if its core thrust is primarily upon capacity- building initiatives vis-a-vis state largesse for the poor; and more importantly if its explicit objective is to encourage peoples' participation in implementation of welfare agenda. Gent in his empirical discussion of NREP in West Bengal with a focus on his core argument – people's participation as an index of empowerment-points to the misgivings and pins down upon holistic measures towards emancipating the lives of the poor. A profile of Gent's analysis on challenges and requisites of active public in public policy platform is presented below.

Elaborating upon the state intervention in West Bengal through NREP assuring employment security to the poor, Gent (1993) discusses the vital role of welfare interventions in development goals of the state and secondly, the issue of "paradox of participation". The employment programme was initiated by the CPI (M) in West Bengal in late 1970s. The objective of this programme was to provide work to unemployed rural folk. While benefits in cash/kind were given to the labourers to meet their nutritional needs and improve their living conditions, the mission of NREP was far-sighed. A key objective of NREP was creation of durable community assets and promotion of rural infrastructure. Stressing the imperative need of public policy

interventions to pave way for long term development goals, it is crucial to take note of Gent's observation on the role of NREP in promoting "economic growth that will eventually curtail unemployment and poverty." (pg.133).

The panchayat institution was chosen by the government as an implementing agency of the programme. The initiative merited the attention of the people of the state as Panchayats were viewed as people's agency. However, the panchayats were serving political interests instead of working towards the touted mission of the programme. As panchayat raj was touted as the brain-child of Congress, the party utilized this opportunity to popularize itself as pro-people functionary providing a political platform for the public; on the other hand, the CPI (M) seized the opportunity to make the local elites in the rural areas powerless; in this way, they gained the patronage of poor and middle classes who were hitherto dominated by the local elite in their community. However, the panchayats teamed up with the rural elite and drained away the resources. In essence, the purpose of the employment security mission was defeated as it was acquiescent to power pressures. This is despite the fact that people's representation was reinforced in the programme implementation through active involvement the local community members in panchayat programmes. To resolve this paradox of participation, Gent anticipates government action on the following score:

- To re-orient the political process towards representation of the interests of the poor.
- To alleviate the socio-economic condition of the poor for "as long as the poor remain poor, they are disadvantaged in securing equitable representation" (Gent, 1993: xx).
- To motivate political mobilization of the poor through schemes that guarantee incentives; this upheaval is intended to break the "iniquitous social structures" (Gent, 1993: 205).
- To augment its own capacity not only financially, administratively and in all physical terms, but to impose constraints on its autonomy and invite an audit on its own machinery through "securing the cooperation of non-state actors (Gent, 1993:184).

From Gent's pedagogy for the poor it is arrived that the vital role of state intervention is creation of self reliant society. However, Gent's analysis is restricted as it unravels the role of public in policy implementation which is infinitesimal. Considering the comprehensive agenda of "emancipation", the potential presence of the people in the whole process of public policy making is envisaged and not just in the implementation phase. Gent's thesis submits to mainstream premise of structural dichotomy in public policy making.

1.3.2 A bane on profiteering:

An explicit goal of public provisioning is to ensure basic necessities of life at affordable rates to the poor. The state intervenes in essential goods sector through its public distribution network to

assure physical and economic accessibility of commodities by all particularly the poor. Likewise during periods of economic upheavals, public service delivery is envisaged as a policy instrument to safeguard the interests of the poor against the usurious practices of private enterprise and spiralling rates of essential items.

In a detailed work on public policy interventions titled, “Public Policy towards Essential Consumption Items: Generalizations from the Indian Experience” Dholakia and Khurana (1983) present the quintessential need of policy interventions in facilitating macro economic development planning. In their words, “In the developing countries, public policies are widely used to influence the marketing of essential consumption goods” (pg.171). They place their important observations regarding the need for state intervention taking the case of India’s foodgrains economy. According to their views, in developing countries like India “glaring nutrition gaps” prevail and “critical shortages” arise in essential items of mass consumption. To address this gap, crisis relief interventions are proposed by the government. As Dholakia and Khurana point out the intention of public intervention is “macromanagement of selected consumption items” and ... “a fairly complex set of direct and indirect policies are used to influence the production, distribution and prices of such items” (pg.171). Macro management of essential consumption items, the MSECIs as they are referred to by the authors, are the viable policy instruments in the hands of political bureaucracy to impose checks on profiteering practices of the traders which sees no limits under any or all of these conditions:

- During periods of acute shortages affecting the vulnerable in the rural and urban regions of the state.
- During periods of deterioration in rural distributive trade mechanism.
- During periods of adverse impact of market imperfections.

It is interesting to learn from their study that public policy interventions have a key role to play in safeguarding the interests of the poor under detrimental conditions. The authors have prudently pointed out the latent potential of public policies stating that though they “serve short-term, volatile political problems...MSECIs could play an important role in balanced development” (pg.173). In addition, MSECIs initiate sectoral linkages as “consumption- and distribution-related policies become entwined” (pg.173).

In their elucidation on state intervention in foodgrains economy in the Indian context, they rationalize public distribution of essentials as pro-poor and need-driven. The devastation caused by war, famine, drought and so on during the pre-independent era and the supply imbalances (good/bad crop years) , food trade hassles, the inflationary tendencies in the post-independent decades were battled with success due to PDS network in the urban and rural vicinities. Policy

intervention like PDS was heavily relied up by the national/regional governments to meet the basic food needs of the people.

The proposition of their analysis is that food issue has such complex dimensions but for state management, the private trading would have led to impoverishment of the poor. While acknowledging the fact that (food) policy interventions in Indian context have been “ad hoc and bureaucratic, and the results have been mixed” (pg.177), Dholakia and Khurana argue that crisis situations were controlled by MSECI. To quote from their analysis on the significance of public distribution of ration in India, “Low-income consumers in large urban areas have been protected by rationing systems. In areas with comprehensive public distribution systems, some favourable effects on consumption levels and income redistribution have been reported” (pg.177).

In view of the strategic contributions that public policy interventions can make to strengthen developmental process and serve as stimulants for “integrating consumption-oriented policies with overall development plans they prescribe a well-structured public policy to clarify the following: “What goods? Which groups? What effects? What goals? What time period?” (pg.177). In essence, they point to the inadvertent need for public provisioning and the strategic course of its operation to arrest threats on the development frontiers.

The study by Dholakia and Khurana focuses on efficient management of public distribution of essential goods through effective policy guidelines on targets and time periods, groups and goals; yet the primary concerns are left unaddressed namely:

- Permanent policy status of welfare interventions as a deliberate social policy instrument.
- Perennial need of relief intervention.
- Political intervention to address insecurities of human lives.

1.3.3 Steering Inclusive growth:

Questioning the sacrosanctity of economic growth regimes, welfare paradigms emphasize on growth with justice and equality. The trickle down assurances of growth formula is contended as inadequate in addressing social exclusion. Even the New Growth Theories (NGTs) that propose to address development concerns rely upon market mechanisms to generate growth benefits to the poor. Works of policy proponents on NGTs like Nazrul Islam (2004), Paulos Gutema and Bichaka Fayissa (2004), to mention a few, discuss in detail the applicability of market driven strategies in developing economies where social exclusion – “defined as disabling effects of poverty” (DuToit, 2004:987) - is a serious development concern. Under the prevalent circumstances in most developing economies like India inclusive growth is the recommended panacea for development ills including poverty and unemployment. Policy analysts like

Mahendra Dev (2008) posit the significance of targeted interventions paving way for inclusive paradigms. In his interesting book titled, "Inclusive Growth in India" Mahendra Dev discusses the implicit role of public policy interventions as "safety nets for the poor" (pg.133). The motivation behind these targeted transfers to the vulnerable is as Mahendra Dev claims "protection" against crisis, "insurance" against future uncertainties and "aiding growth promotion". It is worthy to note that as "Mahendra Dev treats inclusive growth as synonymous with equitable development"¹⁹ he regards social safety nets such as PDS as vital policy instruments for inclusive growth. To quote from his study on the role of social safety nets in facilitating inclusive paradigms, "If we leave everything to market and growth, we cannot take care of risk and inequality. Certain redistributive policies can be good for growth. Presence of safety nets can maintain acceptable minimum floor for social cohesion and can prevent irreversible losses of human capital in hard times. The state has a role in helping the poor in times of insecurity and in ensuring minimum levels of provision to those unable to gain from the growth process. Government interventions will blend elements of both redistribution and insurance" (pg.132). According to Dev, public policy failure can be seen as under- performance of safety net programmes towards their cause of addressing social exclusion vis-à-vis their potential and central investments approximating 2% of the India's GDP

At this juncture, a critical engagement with the concept of social exclusion seems an eye-opener on the semantic precincts in a discourse on welfare policy. Drawing inspiration from the works of Du Toit (2004), social exclusion is studied in quest of inclusive growth. To, quote the author on the ways to address the issue of social exclusion, "Although it has the potential to focus attention on the disabling effects of poverty, its most common usage often fails to capture how poverty can flow not only from exclusion but also from processes of integration into broader economic and social networks" (DuToit,2004:987). The frequent usage of the concept in policy agenda appreciates the need for including the excluded lot into the mainstream paradigm. However, pinning down upon "integration/incorporation/inclusion" as mandates for pro-poor development, invites cognition as such top-down prescriptions, can hardly, generate trickle-down. Thus, the author points out that "It cannot be assumed that integration, incorporation and inclusion are necessary panaceas for chronic poverty. Exactly how they will affect poor people depends very largely on just what poor people are integrated or inserted into and the exact ways in which economic and social relations actually work. Facile and sweeping policy prescriptions can easily miss these details...." (DuToit, 2004:1001).

It is in this context public policy interventions seem to be useful mechanism in reinforcing equitable development through their impetus on pro-poor agenda and public participation.

¹⁹ In his foreword note to the Mahendra Dev's book on inclusive growth, C.H. Hanumantha Rao (Centre for Economic and Social Studies) has quoted this.

Making note of cautions from Du Toit's analysis of social exclusion it is evident that inclusion is not a top-down formula, but a process of social engineering. To facilitate the process towards inclusive paradigm, welfare interventions may be a favourable policy option provided it yields to the pact of concrescence discussed already namely paving the way for measures of sustainable development with long term development interests.

While treading towards inclusive paradigm²⁰, public policy interventions would focus on the following:

- Pace and pattern of growth based on the strategy of "shared growth".
- Targeted transfers in the short run and broad-based strategies in the long run.
- Contributions from the society and benefits to the society.

While safety net interventions can contribute to equitable development in the above said ways, the 'inclusive growth' premise of public policy interventions is replete with development fallacies. An intricate study of the inclusive growth premise reveals that the strategy addresses absolute poverty vis-a-vis relative poverty where the income benefits to the people are counted based on "some agreed measure of poverty"; on the otherhand, it is only the issue of relative poverty that attends to inequalities among people from varied income groups. Under these conditions, public policy interventions would serve the goal of rapid rate of economic growth. Essentially, the focus of the policy tool would be on the removal of growth constraints rather than pro-poor concerns.

Thus, it is evident that public policy interventions are essential to address the woes of the society particularly the vulnerable population; however the viability of this mechanism in addressing the welfare concerns of the poor is contended as it is driven by political rationale and state administrative concerns. In policy parlance, the making of welfare scheme is a technical exercise founded on mainstream policy tenets viz., technocratic and top-down, growth oriented (market propelled) and target bound. Hence, smooth operation of linear process of policy making and pro-poor statement of intentions in plan agenda are explicit considerations of policy success coupled with statistical evidence from the official sources regarding coverage achievements.

Although political support towards the pro-poor cause and wider coverage of BPL segments in welfare proposals are not disputed, a parametric assessment of policy content exposing the state-society negotiation is posited as a rudimentary requirement in the present research. It is argued that "a variety of adhoc considerations" as Whitehead (1990) would remark determine public policy tenets. Hence it is crucial to study the verity of state policy intervention even more than its outcomes.. Further, reinstating capability enhancement as the premise of state policy

²⁰ <http://siteresources.worldbank.org>

interventions vis-a-vis state largesse, a case study of Employment Generation Scheme (EGS) of Maharashtra is also included in Section 1.4. Whitehead's exposition is also briefly discussed in this context. The purport of the case analysis is to drive home the point that the present research is not taking a normative stance on the public policy choice or outcomes although it may appear to be so; rather it only sees through the dangers inherent in welfare paradigms of developing economies like India. In welfare states, policy choices are based on the state perception of peoples' problem; and political perceptions are determined by economic and administrative criteria. Further, the case discussion lays thrust on studying the undercurrents of EGS in an attempt to understand the nexus between policy rationale and development rationale.

1.4 CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS: POLITICAL PREMISE OF POLICY PARADIGM:

It is conventional to assess the effectiveness of public policy interventions based on the accomplishment of their spelt targets. A study of the fundamental tenets of interventions is scarcely attempted. The need for reviewing the policy premise and mapping the political precincts of welfare interventions that would shed light on the institutionalisation of the scheme as a pro-poor mechanism. Tracing the historical roots of the policy and unravelling the administrative regulations of policy proposals are vital to underscore the pro-development stake of the policy mission. With the fructification of development proposals of state intervention, the life of relief intervention ceases as the economy sees a phaselift towards a self reliant paradigm. Alternatively, if the need for relief intervention is permanent and the intervention attains a perennial status as a deliberate social policy instrument, could the statistical success of the policy intervention imply development success or does it connote the development malaise? It is argued that phased extension of interventions over decades may be attributed to political reasons. This is no exaggeration as in countries like India the welfare interventions evince political patronage. For eg, In Tamil Nadu, the induction of '2Re./kilo of Rice' scheme of PDS in the election manifesto of opposition party against the then ruling party, brought a sweeping victory to the sponsoring party. In essence, policy critics like Laurence Whitehead opine that optimality of policy choices are determined by concerns external to peoples' preferences for better living conditions.

Whitehead's analysis of the politics of policies (1990) seems crucial in this context. This study questions the etiquette that seems dominating the development domain: the political rationality of policy optimization. At the outset, there are at least eight factors that have been offered as political explanations for specific choice of policies. They are as Whitehead sums them up:

- "Historical traditions
- Socio-structural determinants

- Self-interest of politically powerful sectors
- Entrenched characteristics of the political system
- Formal properties of the political institutions
- Influence of particular economic ideologies or schools of thought
- Logic of particular sequential processes of the “vicious circle/virtuous circle” variety
- Variety of adhoc or conjectural considerations” (Whitehead, 1990:1133).

Thus the significance of examining the tenets of welfare intervention is explained taking the case of Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS) of Maharashtra. Public policy interventions towards promotion of well-being of the poor should lay emphasis on capability enhancing initiative; re-orienting the structure of the economy to cater to the needs of the poor not through extending state largesse, but by promoting productive investments towards pro-poor cause. Maithreyi KrishnaRaj (2004), in her article on EGS of Maharashtra, cues the significance of long term vision in the formulation of development intervention and opines thus; "The long term component, which has in fact the ultimate potential for poverty alleviation, works through the building of productive assets.... The long term impact of EGS on poverty thus depends strongly on the quantity and quality of assets created and the effectiveness of these assets in generating mainstream employment opportunities by proper integration with development plan of the state". Identifying the *raison d'être* for development slag, despite its pro-poor characteristic, she observes, "Apart from the weaknesses inherent in its administrative mechanism, all the limitations of EGS, can, in fact be traced to the origin of the scheme as a relief programme and its incomplete transformation as a poverty alleviation tool" (pg:1599).

In her assessment of EGS, Maithreyi KrishnaRaj explains her apprehension on the effectiveness of this employment intervention in terms of strategic concerns of like gender. Albeit the intervention is appreciated as one of the best policy options in mitigating the problem of unemployment in Maharashtra where the scheme had its genesis and in states across India, Krishnaraj rubs the reviews as “inferred”; this is so because there had been no significant studies on EGS since 1990s the decade which saw sea-change in economic policies of the country. The import of her analysis of EGS is the thrust laid upon unravelling the conceptual underpinnings of policy interventions and sieving the pro-poor operation of public service delivery.

Thinking aloud on Krishnaraj’s thrust upon “concrete evidence for inferred effects” it is worthy to review the explication of Chhaya Datar (2007) on the phased expansion of EGS of 1976 into Maharashtra Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MREGS) in 2006 under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. A crucial element of Datar’s study is to trace the success of the intervention through a qualitative analysis of the verity of policy intervention. For instance, main issues were captured by Datar on the operation of EGS in Maharashtra interrogating the

underpinnings of the intervention (which is what the present thesis puts forth). The exploration was able to sift out the crucial points which were not found in performance reports on EGS. Some of the vital points are given below:

- The dilution of EGS from its principle structure - sponsored by the urban rich with a matching contribution from the state government for rural employment specifically during crisis periods (lean agricultural seasons). It is surprising to mark that while the salaried class managed to spare funds for the cause, the government found it burdensome.
- The physical and fiscal disinterest of the state apparatus in supporting the EGS mission – citing saturation of CDWs on one hand and low demand for EGS option on the other hand. This is viewed as a reason for merging EGS funds with general administrative funds.
- The sluggish response to vibrant proposals of EGS and MREGA – involving able-bodied in the creation of imminent infrastructure and sound ecological practices like water conservation measures, greening of rural Maharashtra and so on. There was no pressure from the public to get these proposals done as awareness was visibly less and hassles at various rungs of bureaucracy were high.
- Loopholes in the implementation phase - both in terms of collaboration amongst the departments of the bureaucracy and with the workers as well. It is interesting to note that the district collector who was entrusted with the responsibility of coordinating the scheme had a poor knowledge of the programme.

Undoubtedly EGS had made dent on the economic well-being of the poor in Maharashtra through providing work for the destitute as crisis intervention. ODI Policy Brief 6 (2006) points to some of the merits of EGS such as:

- “Accurate targeting of EGS” as nearly 60% of targeted households were poor and most of them extremely impoverished²¹.
- “Potential indirect effects through the EGS assets are substantial, based on a village-level Social Accounting Matrix built with the ICRISAT data”.
- Further the “ICRISAT data has confirmed” the positive effect of EGS on agricultural wage rate.
- “Recent surveys ... also confirmed that the EGS facilitated income-smoothing among poor households, and prevented them from making costly adjustments (e.g. cuts in food expenditure, sale of livestock and/or loans at exorbitant rates of interest) during slack months”.

²¹ Based on the findings of village survey quoted in the Policy Brief, 2006.

However, if one explores the undercurrents of EGS as Datar's study reveals, the outcomes would have been very different had the state machinery complied with the development mandates of EGS with perennial advantages to the people and the region.

Therefore the role of public policy interventions is to conjecture a roadmap for sustainable development. Coupled with political complacency, the absence of an integrated plan of sectoral investments weakens the policy premise of the state policy intervention. It is contended therefore that public policy interventions are holistic proposals provided they are structured in a way that the two major loopholes namely leakages and inadequacies are plugged out; this is possibly done through:

- Undermining political clout in policy process.
- Underscoring long term development plans.
- Understanding the conceptual tenets of the intervention.

Drawing cues from the review of public policy literature the present work thus reinforces the need for re-visiting the policy premise arises on the following scores:

- The common sense model of public policy making with its inherent threats of structural dichotomy and technocracy make policy formulation a political affair.
- The decisions taken by the policy formulators in the best interests of the poor seldom invite the views of the poor.
- Reflecting newer policy paradigm is reinstated as welfare economies are gathering momentum in addressing vulnerability.

Thinking aloud on the mainstream policy process, it becomes essential to review the policy proposals from a pluralist perspective to understand their pro-poor stake. Addressing the aforementioned gaps in public policy making would fulfil the welfare agenda of the government policy interventions, championing the cause of downtrodden. The proposal for radical changes in welfare policy making would open up new vistas of research in

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