

Routledge Studies in Development Economics

INCLUSIVE ECONOMIC GROWTH IN INDIA

INDUCING PROSPERITY AND ENDING DEPRIVATIONS

Shiladitya Chatterjee



Inclusive Economic Growth in India

Chatterjee discusses India's economic strengths and weaknesses and its progress towards inclusive growth by providing an overview of the Indian economy, its future challenges and current policy strategies.

Chatterjee's overview of the economy touches on its historical, geographical and socio-political context. Considering the factors that contribute to its current growth such as India's low dependency ratio, vast internal market and growing private sector and entrepreneurial class, he argues that inclusive growth rests amongst others on agricultural transformation and targeted policies that address the needs of medium, small and microenterprises (MSMEs) which dominate industry and constitute the majority of the informal and services economy; and also interventions directed at social groups and geographical regions falling behind. Benchmarking India's progress on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), this book closes by advancing policy options to address various inequities and deprivations including social inequalities, in particular the issues of ethnic division, gender and caste, going beyond the blunt instrument of affirmative action.

Having served at the state and central levels of Indian government and the Asian Development Bank, Chatterjee presents the pressing issues of inclusive growth in India in an accessible volume, one of interest to development economists, researchers in development studies and inclusive growth as well as policy makers.

Shiladitya Chatterjee is visiting senior fellow at the Institute for Studies in Industrial Development, New Delhi. He is also the president of Global Forum for Sustainable Rural Development.

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To Gopa

For her constant encouragement and infinite patience
while I wrote this book



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1 Introduction

Perspectives influence policy.

But views and perspectives differ according to one's vantage point. The recent inauguration of the 22-kilometre-long Mumbai Trans Harbour Link, for example, was undoubtedly a matter of great pride for all Indians who saw it as a symbol of India's rapid growth and another example of India's building of world class infrastructure. It was also a matter of satisfaction for all vehicle users in Mumbai and other cities who can expect the burgeoning of similar infrastructure soon in their cities too. The impressive sea link across the Mumbai Bay which now connects the island of Mumbai to the mainland with another major bridge will reduce congestion in the metropolis and save considerable time for vehicle users anxious to get onto expressways.

Such infrastructure is crucial for urban India's further growth and development. However, to the vast proportion of the population without access to motor vehicles in India, the event would not have created much of an impression.¹ A similar lack of enthusiasm is also likely in those countless villagers who still need to travel miles to reach good roads to take their produce to markets or reach hospitals and schools, when they hear of the construction of infrastructure such as highways, expressways and airports in places quite distant to them.

But the reality of modern India is that the needs of this section of the population which are often far greater than that of those who are more privileged gets less talked about. They still remain mostly unheard and their views inadequately represented. The development process could be distorted, however, if all perspectives are not brought to the fore. In other words, growth could fail to be fully inclusive if the development needs of the entire population, particularly those being left behind, are not counted. And this failure to adequately reflect the needs of the deprived populace is apparent in the cumulative outcomes that 76 years of India's development have brought about since independence.

If this were not so, why would India's basic public services such as health care and quality education remain mostly inaccessible to the vast majority of India's citizens? Why should a large proportion of the population remain undernourished and the future of a significant section of our children be compromised

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owing to inadequate nutrition? Why should women who comprise half our population still not enjoy equal status at home and society, be still discriminated at work and remain poorly represented in public life and in the management of corporate houses. Why is it that disadvantaged groups in our society have still not attained the same levels of human development as the general population and still suffer discrimination? Why have certain regions of our country remained significantly less developed while others have grown and prospered?

The Indian Constitution has laid down that the State shall strive to eliminate all forms of inequalities in society. Article 38 of the Directive Principles of State Policy, states:

38. State to secure a social order for the promotion of welfare of the people:

- 1 *The State shall strive to promote the welfare of the people by securing and protecting as effectively as it may a social order in which justice, social, economic and political, shall inform all the institutions of the national life.*
- 2² *The State shall, in particular, strive to minimise the inequalities in income, and endeavour to eliminate inequalities in status, facilities and opportunities, not only amongst individuals but also amongst groups of people residing in different areas or engaged in different vocations.*

The need for inclusive development had thus been recognized by India's Constitution and in particular by Section 2 of the Article above which was inserted by amendment in 1979. But despite this, as this book will argue in the following chapters, while growth has indeed occurred, and fast growth too in the last few decades, it has passed by a large section of India's population due to a variety of factors including inequalities fostered by natural market forces resulting from growth which are not mitigated by sufficient public responsiveness to the needs of the less disadvantaged, and inappropriate policies and institutions to foster inclusion.

In a growing economy, increasing inequality due to play of market forces is often considered inevitable. As early as 1955, Simon Kuznets in an influential paper³ proposed his famous "inverted U" shaped curve of inequality hypothesizing that as countries developed, income inequality first increased, peaked, and then decreased, and demonstrated this using data both across countries and over time. Several theoretical explanations have been advanced including Kuznets' own⁴ which based this phenomenon on structural change: as growth induces structural change of the economy with migration of population from primary (agrarian) to secondary (industrial) sectors, the increase in proportion of workers in the higher paying industrial sector causes an increase in inequality, which at later stages reduces as the predominant share of workers moves to the industrial sector. This has not happened in India yet and could be an explanation for India's continued increase in inequality. There are several other explanations too for the initial increase and subsequent decrease in inequality.⁵

But states concerned with the welfare of their citizens are expected to try vigorously to ensure that inequality causing market forces are counter-balanced by public efforts – both policies and investments – to ensure inclusion. Various factors may reduce the effectiveness of the state to play this equalizing role. Policy makers may be unduly influenced by the more vocal urban and better-off groups and fail to heed the needs of less empowered and weaker sections of society. States' capacities may be limited, for example, by the resources at their command as I have argued in the case for India in Chapter 3. Or, states' policies may have been inappropriate and thus not been able to foster inclusive growth.

The need for countries such as India to earnestly foster inclusive growth has become increasingly pressing. The evolution of development strategy focusing on inclusive growth began initially with the object of combining the achievement of faster growth with reducing extreme poverty – the most pernicious manifestation of lack of inclusion. India's Five Year Plans from the first (1951–56) to the ninth (1997–2002), for example, all stressed on increasing growth which had been dismal in the initial years and since the fifth plan (1974–78) increasingly on poverty reduction. That plan specifically espoused the slogan of “*garibi hatao*” (remove poverty). This followed the adoption of poverty lines and increased sophistication in the measurement of poverty which revealed alarming levels of poverty in the country. The Planning Commission had estimated that in 1973–74 more than half (51.5 percentage) of the population was in poverty.⁶

India has achieved considerable success in raising growth rates particularly after it ushered in economic reforms which led to faster growth since the early 1990s. It has also succeeded in reducing extreme poverty although poverty by broader more appropriate measures remains high. Moreover, along with faster growth, inequality has increased sharply. Access to basic services such as health and education by poorer and socially discriminated and deprived sections of the population has also remained quite inadequate. Recognition of these developments had caused the focus of the 11th (2007–12) and 12th (2012–17) Indian Plans to specifically emphasize attainment of inclusive growth. The 11th Plan was titled, “Towards Faster and More Inclusive Growth” and the 12th Plan, “Faster, More Inclusive and Sustainable Growth.”

India's experience is similar in many respects to that of Asia as a whole. High growth with falling but continuing high poverty and increasing inequality had raised concerns generally in the region about the quality of such growth and the realization that such unshared growth could undermine social cohesion, disturb social and political stability, and ultimately make such growth unsustainable.⁷ Like India, country after country began stressing on inclusive growth as a panacea.

The understanding of what inclusive growth should comprise has evolved through the last few decades. Apart from fostering growth, it should include major elements that promote inclusion. Inclusion should not, however, be seen merely in income terms and removal of non-income poverty and inequality is

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important too. Writers such as A. K. Sen had stressed that poverty should not be considered through the metric of income alone but should include capability deprivation: people are poor by being deprived of education, good health and by living in poor environments as much as by insufficient incomes which should also be addressed.⁸ Similar to this was the belief that one of the major factors causing inequality and harming development is inequality of opportunity, that is, inequality in the access to education and health and the consequent need to level the playing field.⁹ Finally, despite fostering growth and attempting to ensure equality of opportunity there would always be a significant number of the vulnerable population who could be reduced to poverty due to economic and environmental shocks and safety nets are necessary to take care of them.

In a major 2010 study by the Asian Development Bank on inclusive growth,¹⁰ therefore, such growth was characterized as conforming to three equally important facets: first, it must be high enough to create productive jobs and economic opportunity for the population; second, it must be socially inclusive to ensure that it provides equal access to economic opportunities to the entire population such as education, health and other basic social services that raise human development and capacity; and finally, there must be social safety nets to prevent those who cannot participate in the growth process or are temporarily deprived of livelihoods due to economic or natural environmental shocks to be provided with the minimum wherewithal to stave off poverty.

However, to a large extent, the task of achieving inclusive growth, at least in India, remains largely an incomplete project. In the rest of this book, I discuss the nature and extent to which India has veered away from the path of inclusion and how it must be steered towards it.

Chapter 2 discusses the first pillar of inclusive growth – attaining rapid growth – which India has been successful in achieving since the economic liberalization it introduced in the early 1990s. It also discusses the pitfalls India faces in maintaining the economy on a rapid growth path and the looming threats it must overcome to do so.

Chapter 3 discusses India's unbalanced and non-inclusive development with particular focus on income inequality and poverty. It also discusses alternative ways to achieve inclusive growth rejecting growth with redistribution given the public sector's limited resources and capacities and advocates instead that public policies should focus on influencing the growth process itself from the beginning to be more broad-based and participatory. Apart from focusing more attention on access to opportunities and human development, each of the production sectors – agriculture, industry and services – must be made to grow but with particular emphasis on the large masses of workers who are being bypassed in each of these sectors causing growth to becoming non-inclusive in each of them.

Chapter 4 explores ways of achieving higher agricultural growth in this lagging but crucial sector, which is a major factor behind India's non-inclusive

growth overall. The chapter also discusses how to make such growth inclusive. The sector has traditionally suffered from insufficient investments and inappropriate policies. Reforms are needed and the recent attempts to introduce reforms and their nature and implications are discussed. The sector has also suffered from a long-standing lack of attention to the majority of its workers and producers namely the small and marginal farmers and agricultural labourers. The chapter discusses approaches to improve their livelihoods.

Chapter 5 discusses the case of the industries sector and ways of reviving the sector and enabling it to play a more productive role in the economy. As in the case of agriculture, India has not adequately dealt with the problems that have been besetting its largest employing yet most unproductive subsector – the micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs). The chapter also discusses the problem of unbalanced geographical industrial growth and through a case study of West Bengal analyses the factors including policies and institutions that have played a big role in its industrial underperformance and how these can be reversed.

In Chapter 6, the same problem of lack of inclusion is seen to pervade the services sector which is growing in a lop-sided fashion. While very fast growth is taking place in sub-sectors such as ICT, financial services and real estate, which employ very few, other socially crucial sub-sectors such as education, health and environmental protection are failing to grow which is a challenge the sector must overcome. Also, the overwhelming majority of workers in the sector are in unproductive informal employment and ways of transitioning them into formality must be found if inclusive growth is to be fostered.

Chapter 7 discusses another dimension of exclusion – that of socially discriminated groups. While improvements have occurred in their lot, their social and economic attainments still remain significantly behind that of the general population. This unacceptable situation even after 76 years of development effort needs serious efforts to overcome and possible approaches are discussed.

Chapter 8 discusses geographical exclusions using the state as the unit. Some states have continued to lag behind the others and the reasons behind this phenomenon are discussed. Inclusive growth will have to tackle this dimension of exclusion as well and the chapter discusses the various instruments that can be used including those with the Central Government which will have to more effectively deploy them in order to achieve geographically balanced and inclusive growth.

Chapter 9 focuses on India's progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Goals which require all countries to prioritize key development outcomes and achieve specific targets in areas of social equality, environmental sustainability and economic growth would, if achieved, considerably advance inclusive growth in India and similarly across the world. The chapter assesses how India fares compared to the world average and the average of its neighbouring East Asia and Pacific region and finds that the Indian performance is not satisfactory. Forecasts of current trends show that a large proportion of the SDG targets will remain unfulfilled, implying that very much more

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effort will have to be made to achieve these targets. The chapter discusses the main areas of concern and ways of improving India's performance on those.

Finally, Chapter 10 which in the concluding chapter draws out the main tasks before policy makers based on the discussions in the earlier chapters, to more effectively pursue inclusive growth.

Notes

- 1 Government of India (2021) The Road Transport Year Book for 2017–18 and 2018–19 estimates that total vehicle penetration per 1000 persons at 32 only (Table 5.1).
- 2 Inserted by the 44th Amendment of 20–06–79.
- 3 Kuznets (1955).
- 4 Kuznets (1966).
- 5 Acemoglu and Robinson (2002).
- 6 EPW Research Foundation (1993).
- 7 See for example IMF (2015). The study demonstrates that if the income share of the top 20 percent (i.e. of the rich increases), then GDP growth actually declines over the medium term; while an increase in the income share of the bottom 20 percent (the poor) is associated with higher GDP growth.
- 8 Sen (1999).
- 9 World Bank (2006).
- 10 Zhuang (2010).

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