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**INDIA : A SOCIALISTIC WELFARE STATE**

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**Abstract**

Nature of the state has remained an issue of subjective analysis as application of different theoretical approaches decisively derives different , often diametrically opposite response. Despite the above mentioned theoretical limitations this paper intends to argue that the constitutional commitments and institutional initiatives does indicate that despite unintended drawbacks in operationalisation the basic intent has remained closer to the ideals of a welfare society.

The term socialistic and welfare have diverse meanings as academicians have tried to define and explain these concepts by using different yardsticks which has more often been subjected to their subjective understanding of the concept. In other words ideological moorings have made it difficult to arrive at an agreed conceptualization of the nature and scope of these thematic conceptualizations. Thus no effort is made to discover as to what is the nature and meaning of the welfare state. Often, welfare state is equated with a welfare society. The two are by no means synonymous. Though the credit for propounding the concept of welfare economy goes to Keynes but its genesis in the rudimentary form can be traced in the ideas envisioned and explained in earlier writings as well which includes the following: Bentham's utilitarian ideas propounding 'greatest happiness of the greatest number'; Bismarck Beveridge's conception of 'social insurance and social security'; the constitutional doctrine of 'liberty, equality and fraternity' as enunciated during the French Revolution and the idea of ownership of basic industrial enterprises and services by the people/public at large etc. John M. Keynes( doctrines of controlling the trade cycle and avoiding mass unemployment), Webbes( championing the cause of the poorest and cleaning up the base of society), Leonard Hobhouse( concept of welfare ) and writers like

Dicken,Ruskin ,J,S,Mill and others enriched the idea as they placed emphasis on the welfare of human beings. There is however, no positive or comprehensive philosophy, no ideology that underlies the many policies and programmes that are supposed to form part of Welfare State.

According to Ebenstein “the main principle of welfare state are relatively simple : first, the recognition that every member of community is entitled ,solely, because he is a human being , to a minimum standard of living .. Second, the welfare state is committed to a policy of economic stability and progress, seeking to eliminate the cycles of violent booms and busts in the economy by public policies whenever private enterprise is unable to prevent by itself the threat of economic instability or decline. Third, the welfare state is committed to full employment as one of the top priorities of public policy.....Adherents of the welfare state believe that free enterprise can be preserved and strengthened by full employment policies without going to the extreme of nationalization .Taxation property adjusted to periods of prosperity and depression , interest rates determined by the governmental decisions according to current and prospective economic needs and conditions , fiscal policies designed to redistribute purchasing power in harmony in best interest of nation, investment incentives to private business in times of slack, public works for direct unemployment relief , government credits to builders or buyers of home –these are but a few measures the government can adopt in stabilizing the economy without changing its foundations .”<sup>1</sup>In the field of social security, the welfare state aims at protection against want , sickness and old age.

Man is not satisfied by bare living, but good life. The vision of good life is at the root of welfare state. Thus, the welfare state is no longer the police state. It undertakes the responsibility of bringing about material welfare of the people. It takes steps to remove illiteracy, poverty and unemployment. It upholds the rights of all without discrimination of caste, colour , creed and sex. It respects the dignity of human personality and assures justice to all .It does not leave the poor and the weak to their own fate; it goes to their rescue and provides them with adequate and equal opportunities to develop themselves . It regulates economic and other activities of the other people in the larger interest of the society and does not allow a particular class to exploit the other classes.

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<sup>1</sup> Ebenstein ,D.C.The Welfare State , John Murray , 1952

Almost all the states take pride in calling themselves welfare states. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century nearly all the states followed the policy of laissez-faire. The promotion of welfare state was left entirely to the individuals and group of individuals. The movement from laissez faire to welfare had its origin in England. It was in the reign of Queen Elizabeth I that the first Poor Law Act was passed. In France too, Napoleon III, in the fifties of the last century, initiated a large number of reforms which could be rightly called the necessary features of welfare state. Bismarck in Germany made the first great welfare experiment by introducing social insurance against sickness, accident, old age and disability. This programme was further taken over and expanded by social democrats after the 1900. In USA, though there was lot of opposition to the welfare state concept which was described by Hoover, a former president, as the backroad to collectivism, there has been a gradual formulation of a number of social and economic reforms which have practically turned America into a welfare state. Denmark, Norway and Sweden are the other welfare state of Europe. Even totalitarian states are welfare states in an indirect way. The only difference is that in the totalitarian states more attention is paid to the material welfare than to moral and spiritual welfare and welfare is planned and executed from above. Thus the concept of welfare state have become a universal concept. According to Ebenstein, "The forces behind the movement of classical western liberalism for laissez-faire to the welfare state were economic, political and psychological."<sup>2</sup> The miseries caused by the growth of industrialization with the policy of laissez faire left man with no other option but to look towards the state as an instrument which could help the individual in bettering his lot. On the political level the Universal Adult suffrage had enabled the voters to discover that the right to vote entailed not only the political power to elect members of the legislature or the executive but also vast social and economic powers. Now people feel both in advanced and under-developed countries that misery and poverty do not result from unchangeable decrees of nature but from changeable institutions of society. All this has resulted in making the state a welfare state.

The Colonial rule in India till August 1947 was not congenial to the growth of welfare state. Although a unified and well-knit, administration prevailed for about a century and half the primary task of the British in India was one of maintaining law and order. Not much was done to improve the lot of the common man

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<sup>2</sup> Ebenstein, W. Great Political Thinkers, 3rd ed., p 809

After Independence, the immediate task before the political leaders and the constitution framers had been to bring about considerable socio- economic improvements. The prime aim was to improve economic conditions of the masses by utilising ,mobilising and consolidating the meager under-developed resources available with the country in the best manner. India committed herself to the idea of Welfare State by clearly expressing in the introductory paragraph/ preamble that independent India would strive to secure socio-economic and political justice to its citizens through institutional arrangements of democratic governance within a republican form of governing apparatus.<sup>3</sup>The cardinal concept of justice, social, economic and political embodied in Objective Resolution and the Preamble to the Constitution of India quoted above was the foundation stone of the edifice of the modern democratic Welfare State in India

The ideal of socio-economic justice which is a sheet anchor of a modern democratic Welfare State is spelled out in specific terms in Directive Principles of State Policy embodied in Part IV of our Constitution. The welfarist ideas have found place in the chapter on Directive Principles of the State Policy of the Indian constitution. The provisions made under Articles 39 to 47 provide for many such provisions viz ; ensuring adequate means of livelihood; removing gendered based discrimination in fixing wages for the same work; ensuring common good by taking care of distribution of material resources of the country in a fair manner; ensuring right to work and adequate safeguard from exploitation of child and adult workforce/labour; ensuring right to free education, particularly up to the age of 14 and assistance of the state in case of unemployment, old age sickness and disabilities etc.; ensuring living wage, just and humane conditions of work leading to a decent living with opportunities for leisure and socio-cultural opportunities; ensuring educational and economic interests of the underprivileged sections of the society in general and scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in particular, and ensuring the betterment of public health by improving their level of nutrition and standard of living.

These directives were further strengthened by inserting certain provisions in part III of the Constitution which embodies/reflect critical elements or necessary conditions for ensuring realization of the cherished goal. The Fundamental Rights are therefore nothing less than an absolute protection to its citizens. "The whole object of Part III of the Constitution is to provide protection for the freedoms and

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<sup>3</sup> Shukla ,V.N.-The Constitution of India (4<sup>th</sup> Ed)Lucknow,1964,p 1

rights mentioned therein against invasion by the state."Like the English Magna Carta, the Indian Bill of Rights protects fundamental liberties .The provisions made in Article 14 of the constitution clearly guarantees equality before law and equal protection of the law. The guiding principle of this Article is that all persons and things similarly circumstanced shall be treated alike both in privileges conferred and liabilities imposed Article 15(1) ensures rights of the citizens from any discrimination on the grounds like religion/faith, gender/sex, caste and place of birth etc. This in fact is a specific application of the general principle of equality embodied in Article 14.Clause(3) and (4) of this Article empower the government to enact suitable laws to ensure affirmative action in favour of women, children and socially and educationally backward communities in general and scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in particularArticle 32 provides the right to move the Supreme Court or High court by appropriate proceedings for the enforcement of fundamental rights So, there is a constitutional guarantee. Taken together the above provisions of directives and individual rights are a manifesto for the ideal of Welfare State. India is committed to the creation of a Socialist Welfare State and these are guidelines for the achievement of this ideal.

Most of the judges have also indicated that India is committed to a Socialistic Welfare State. P.B. Gajendragadkar, former Chief Justice of India said "The Indian Constitution makers were fully alive to the problems posed by the idea of Welfare State and so the Constitution has guaranteed to its citizens - justice social economic and political."<sup>4</sup> Hidayatullah, former Chief Justice of India stated that our Constitution is an instrument admirably suited for the establishment of a liberal and socialist democracy "in which the rival claims of individual and society can be completely reconciled and through which the erection of a Welfare State is rendered practical."<sup>5</sup>

The constitutional resolve started getting reflected through various actions undertaken by the government after the first general elections itself. In March 1950 the central government resolved in the cabinet to create an institution called the 'Planning Commission' to formulate a Plan for the most effective and balanced utilisation of the country's resources. The First Five Year Plan document stated clearly, "The goals of social and economic policy are prescribed in the Directive Principles of the Constitution." The First Five Year Plan represents the

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<sup>4</sup> Law , Liberty and Social Justice ,1965.p82

<sup>5</sup> Mr Hidayatullah , Justice .S.C. of India , Democracy in India and the Judicial Process , Bombay, 1966 ,p 62.

first attempt to translate these principles into a national program to ensure the building of a welfare state.<sup>6</sup>

The Second Five Year plan document explain that “the accent of the socialist pattern is on the attainment of positive goals, raising the living standards, the enlargements of opportunities for all , the promotion of enterprise among the disadvantaged classes and the creation of a sense of partnership among all sections of the community. The Directive Principles of State Policy in the constitution had indicated the approach in broad terms, the socialist pattern of society is more concretized expression of this approach.”<sup>7</sup>

The Third Five Year Plan stated, “the basic objective of India's development must necessarily be to provide the masses of Indian people the opportunity to lead a good life.”<sup>8</sup>The Fourth and Fifth Five Year Plans also placed a great deal of stress upon removal of poverty and unemployment. the sixth five year plan laid stress on" improving the quality of life of people in general with special reference to the economically and socially handicapped population.” The objective of national planning in India is not only to raise the national income and the per capita income but also to ensure that benefit is evenly distributed in such a manner that disparities in income and living are. In other words efforts are intended to be made in such a way that the process of economic development does not lead to social tensions endangering the fabric of democratic society. A cursory glance at the manifestoes of political parties who compete in the process of gaining political power would indicate that despite ideological differences most of these parties claim to achieve the goals of socialistic welfare society.

In order to tackle various problems associated with social defence, the Central and State Governments have created several legislations in the past in the field of juvenile delinquency, crime, probation, prostitution etc. to provide the necessary statutory framework for correctional and rehabilitation services .In plans and Annual budgets more resources are being allocated for social welfare of children, women and depressed classes.The U.N’s resolutions and monitoring is also helping a lot for the welfare of children and women to promote welfare of the groups. The U.N also gives assistance to member states. India being a member of

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<sup>6</sup> GOI:First Five Year Plan ,p 115

<sup>7</sup> GOI:Second Five Year Plan ,p 24

<sup>8</sup> The Third Five Year Plan ,p.1

the agencies of U.N System takes advantage of their technical assistance for the promotion of social welfare.

A State cannot be a welfare state if the aims of removal of poverty and substantial rise in level of employment are not accompanied by social justice .Today, in India, very few people are controlling a substantial amount of wealth in the country .This is not a healthy sign for achieving the above explained objectives of development/growth with justice. As the ultimate purpose of development is to provide increasing opportunities to all people for a better life, it is essential to bring about a more equitable distribution of income and wealth for promoting both social justice and efficiency of production to raise substantially the level of employment ,to achieve greater degree of income security ,to expand improved facilities for education, health, nutrition housing and social welfare and to safeguard the environment .Thus qualitative and structural changes in the society must go hand with rapid economic growth and existing disparities - regional ,sectoral and social- should be substantially reduced .

The objective of social justice as articulated in the second plan has two major dimensions .The first dimension is improvement in the living standards of the poorest/ disadvantaged groups in society and second is a reduction in inequalities in asset distribution .In 1954 the government declared in the parliament that the policies and programmes would be formulated to achieve egalitarian principles of creating a socialistic pattern of society for ensuring equality in income and wealth rather than private profit . This idea of socialistic pattern of society became the guiding principle of the successive five year plans. In particular, it suggests that the benefits of economic development should accrue more to the relatively less privileged sections of the society and there should be a progressive reduction in the concentration of income wealth and economic power

The third Five Year Plan had emphasized on establishing progressively greater equality of opportunity and bringing about reduction in disparities of income and wealth and a more even distribution of economic power. The plans aimed at raising the standard of living of the people through programs which at the same time were designed to promote equality and Social Justice. The particular emphasis on improving the condition of least privileged and weaker section of the society is specific for the provision of employment and education. efforts were

also directed towards reduction of the concentration and divided diffusion of wealth ,income and economic power.

In the Fourth Plan the broad objective of planning has been defined as a rapid economic development accompanied by country as progress towards equality and Justice and establishment of a social and economic democracy. Fifth Plan emphasized the minimum needs programme to ensure the welfare of the weaker sections. The Sixth Plan also aimed at development of the weaker sections of the society. In fact all successive plans have emphasized the same goal despite changes in the orientation on thrust areas of development No doubt for decades Government of India and State Governments are using a variety of instruments ranging from direct attack on poverty and asset inequality to more indirect fiscal measures to pursue these ends but poor outcomes have forced many analysts to believe that there has not been much visible and perceptible positive impact on the people. The gulf between the haves and have- nots has not narrowed down. The implementation of the program intended to establish socialistic society have had insignificant effects resulting in status quo. Therefore, we must provide greater degree of redistributive bias into our development effort to ensure the growth of socialistic society.

India ,no doubt has achieved good progress towards promoting welfare of the targeted masses who have been subjected to suffering from abject poverty. There has been good improvement in the provision of social services- health and education. On examining critically, however, we find that we lag behind in many ways. Position of women and children is not satisfactory. Besides scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, backward class and weaker section of the society have not progressed as expected. But the major question which arises is that what are the reasons for it and why we have not been able to meet the aspirations of the people as mentioned in the sacred document called constitution. It is a pity that a country with such an intellectual heritage has failed to grapple these problems.

So the need of the hour is that the objectives of social welfare must be spelt out in clear terms and linked with broader objective of social policy and socio-economic development to achieve an integrated National Welfare Programme. Adequate coordination is required among all the governmental bodies concerned with social welfare and related social programs, such as education, health, housing, justice and labour both at the Centre and the State. The planning and coordinating machinery should also facilitate communication and continuous



exchange of general and specific information, as well as ensure effective collaboration at the operational level.

All round social planning should be based on scientifically collected pertinent factual data. Such planning is not being done in the developing world because of the non availability of reliable data of sufficient and right quality. In the absence of such data it becomes difficult to convince the planners resulting in the poor allocations to social welfare.

We should encourage therefore more active participation of citizens in the planning and implementation of social welfare programs. Public Cooperatives is an active and a living element in dynamic democracy. The resources in the developing world are limited and we can serve more people in an efficient manner through their active involvement. **Moreover**, responsibility of social development should be decentralised to a great extent to ensure close relationships with the beneficiaries and the communities to be served. This would also help in getting feedback from the people as that would be useful in the planning and evaluation of social welfare. Besides, we must provide this welfare services in the rural areas, urban slums and tribal areas.

The government should make efforts to extend social welfare to neglected rural areas on an adequate basis, taking into account the particular needs of rural areas. These services must be provided in according to the needs of the areas. Technical standards for social welfare programs should be developed by the government with the help of institution engaged in the education and training of social workers. These standards should be adapted according to situation to ensure the implementation of the overall social policy. Technical standard should be simple and clear so that they are really understandable to all concerned with social welfare and to the general public.

In many countries, voluntary organisations have traditionally played and continued to play an important role in providing social welfare. Government should encourage and assist such organisations by providing finances, technical consultancy and supervision to help them maintain standards and improve their effectiveness. The care should be taken that the voluntary organizations are not reduced to the bureaucratic organisation.

There is a shortage of qualified people to manage this sector. Administrators in key position of responsibility for social welfare programmes of policy making, planning and operational level should be selected on the basis of administrative ability and technical qualification in the field of social welfare. The general administrator should not be depleted to plan and implement social welfare.

Clearly defined administrative procedures should be developed for handling all complaints regarding the functioning of social welfare activities. The procedure should be simple and intelligible so that beneficiaries and general public make best use of it. This will help in assessing the impact of the services on the people.

So, good relationship with the general public is of crucial importance to the development and administration of social programs. Suitable provision should therefore be made for public relations activities to be carried out by the body responsible for social welfare. Such activities should be designed to provide interpretation and wider understanding of programs, stimulate interest and support of social welfare and to create a favourable climate of public opinion. The public relations activities relevant to social welfare program should be coordinated and conducted in close cooperation with those of such other Central local authorities responsible for general public relation activities of government on an overall basis.

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