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ABOUT US

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**EVALUATING THE ROLE OF DIRECTIVE PRINCIPLES OF STATE
POLICY IN SHAPING POVERTY ALLEVIATION POLICIES IN INDIA:
A SOCIO ECONOMIC ANALYSIS**



Dissertation Submitted to Center for Post Graduate Legal Studies of
Maharashtra National Law University, Nagpur in
partial fulfillment for award of the degree of

MASTER OF LAWS (LL.M)

Submitted by

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**MAY, 2025
MAHARASHTRA NATIONAL LAW UNIVERSITY, NAGPUR**

DECLARATION

I, Deeksha Rajawat pursuing Master of Laws (LLM) from Maharashtra National Law University, Nagpur, do hereby declare that the present Dissertation titled is **EVALUATING THE ROLE OF DIRECTIVE PRINCIPLES OF STATE POLICY IN SHAPING POVERTY ALLEVIATION POLICIES IN INDIA: A SOCIO -ECONOMIC ANALYSIS** an original research work and has not been submitted, either in part or full anywhere else for any purpose, academic or otherwise. I further declare that resources used from all primary and secondary sources (including electronic sources) have been duly acknowledged.

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Prof. (Dr.) Shilpa Jain

Dr. Madhukar Sharma

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DEEKSHA RAJAWAT
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LIST OF ABBRIVIATIONS

DPSP – Directive Principles of State Policy

MGNREGA – Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act

PDS – Public Distribution System

SC – Supreme Court

HC – High Court

UDHR – Universal Declaration of Human Rights

UN – United Nations

ILO – International Labour Organization

NSSO – National Sample Survey Office

GDP – Gross Domestic Product

BPL – Below Poverty Line

SDGs – Sustainable Development Goals

NGO – Non-Governmental Organization

EWS – Economically Weaker Sections

RTE – Right to Education

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CHAPTER -I

INTRODUCTION

The Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP) embedded in Part IV of the Indian Constitution are the guiding philosophy and ethical framework that presides over the country's socio-economic policies. Though non-judicial and not judicially enforceable, they constitute the core obligation for the State to develop a society based on social and economic justice.¹ The contribution of DPSPs towards the formation of poverty alleviation policies in India has been significant, as they have impacted legislative and executive measures targeted towards economic inequalities, social injustices, and the basic rights of weaker sections of society.² Based on the principles of social justice, economic, and political the DPSPs have greatly influenced policy formulations that aim at poverty eradication through land reforms, labor legislation, social security provisions, education, and public health programs.³

The Indian Constitution, which was influenced by the Irish Constitution and socialist ideology, acknowledges that economic inequalities cannot be left to market forces.⁴ This is evident in various DPSPs, more so *Articles 38, 39, 41, 42, 43, and 47*, which stress the requirement of reducing inequalities,

ensuring equitable distribution of wealth, affording employment opportunities, enhancing workers' rights, and enhancing the standard of life of citizens. Through the decades, multiple governments have created multiple policies and welfare schemes in line with these tenets, such as the *Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)*, the *National Food Security Act*, the *Right to Education Act*, and social security programs for unorganized laborers.⁵ The judicial interpretation of DPSPs, especially through such milestone judgments as *Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala (1973)* and

¹ M.P. Jain, *Indian Constitutional Law*, 7th ed., LexisNexis, 2014, p. 1539.

² Granville Austin, *The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation*, Oxford University Press, 1966, p. 75.

³ S.K. Chaube, *Constitutionalism and Democracy in India*, Orient Blackswan, 2009, pp. 102–105.

⁴ D.D. Basu, *Introduction to the Constitution of India*, 24th ed., LexisNexis, 2019, p. 423.

⁵ Government of India, Ministry of Rural Development, *MGNREGA Annual Report 2022–23*; *National Food Security Act, 2013*; *Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009*.

Minerva Mills v. Union of India (1980), has further underlined their significance by stating that the goals incorporated in the DPSPs are necessary for the fulfillment of fundamental rights.¹

A socio-economic analysis of DPSPs indicates that although they have made a considerable impact on policy-making, their implementation has been sporadic because of political, administrative, and financial limitations. The recurring problems of poverty, unemployment, malnutrition, and poor access to basic services indicate the disconnect between constitutional ideals and ground realities.² But with the rising focus on welfare policies based on rights, supplemented by judicial activism and popular pressure, the importance of DPSPs in the modern governance scenario has been boosted. In such a scenario, assessing the intersection of DPSPs and anti-poverty policy is important for comprehending the process through which constitutional directives find expression in action-oriented steps influencing the socio-economic environment of India. This research will critically analyze how far DPSPs have influenced poverty reduction measures, their strengths and weaknesses, and the future direction in facilitating inclusive and sustainable development in the nation.

DPSP are well embedded in the ancient Indian philosophies and traditions as well as modern constitutional ideologies. The idea of basic values or guiding principles governing the administration has its origins in ancient Indian literature like Arthashastra and Manusmriti, which laid stress on the state's responsibility for social justice and economic well-being. But the contemporary structure of the DPSPs was heavily drawn from the Irish Constitution of 1937, which had included similar directive principles to direct the legislature and the executive towards the attainment of socio-economic justice. The architects of the Indian Constitution, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Sardar Patel, appreciated the necessity for a code of principles that would act as a moral guide to future governments, so that India moved towards a welfare state. These principles were enshrined in Part IV of the Indian Constitution, drawing not only from Ireland

¹ *Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala*, AIR 1973 SC 1461; *Minerva Mills Ltd. v. Union of India*, AIR 1980 SC 1789.

² Planning Commission of India, Twelfth Five-Year Plan (2012–2017): Faster, More Inclusive and Sustainable Growth, Volume I.

but also from other democratic and socialist movements across the world.¹

The historical development of the DPSPs can also be traced to the nationalist movement and dreams of Indian leaders in the freedom struggle. The Nehru Report of 1928, one of the first attempts to frame a constitutional structure for India, put special focus on socio-economic rights like universal education, equal wages, and safeguarding the rights of workers. In the same vein, the Karachi Resolution of 1931 by the Indian National Congress identified a number of socio-economic goals, including providing basic economic rights, the right to employment, and public ownership of major industries. These concepts made their way into the Directive Principles as the Constitution was being drafted from 1946 to 1949, and it testifies to the vision of India's leadership to have economic democracy go hand-in-hand with political democracy.²

In the Constituent Assembly debates, the incorporation of the DPSPs was extensively debated, with members concurring that although these principles would not be enforceable in law, they would still act as a basic guide to governance. In contrast to Fundamental Rights, which are enforceable and justiciable by courts, the DPSPs were intended to shape policymaking, such that the state would actively strive to minimize inequalities, eliminate poverty, and ensure social welfare. The framers of the Constitution felt that an independent India should have a roadmap to improve the condition of downtrodden people and mend historical wrongs. Hence, DPSPs contain clauses on equal distribution of wealth, safeguarding children and laborers, enhancement of education, and nature protection, among other objectives.

The DPSPs have served as a guiding force in molding India's lawmaking and policymaking processes over the years. Though initially regarded as non-enforceable, different judicial interpretations, especially in cases like *Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala (1973)* and *Minerva Mills v. Union of India (1980)*, have reaffirmed their importance in constitutional rule.³ The judiciary has repeatedly stressed the importance of harmonious coexistence between

¹ Constituent Assembly Debates, Vol. VII, 19 November 1948 (Speech by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar on the Directive Principles).

² Constituent Assembly Debates, Vol. VII, 19 November 1948, p. 494.

³ *Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala, (1973) 4 SCC 225; Minerva Mills Ltd. v. Union of India, (1980) 3 SCC 625.*

Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles, acknowledging that the latter form the basis for realizing the ideals incorporated in the Preamble.¹ Governments have also enacted various policies in line with these principles, such as land reform acts, social welfare policies, and workers' protection laws, affirming the belief that the DPSPs are fundamental in steering India towards a fair and equitable society.²

Accordingly, the intellectual and historical provenance of the DPSPs uncovers deep foundations in both Indian and universal traditions of public governance. Stretching from classical Indian political theory to contemporary democratic socialism, the principles express India's dedication to justice, equity, and public welfare. Even though they lack the force of law, their political and ethical implications continue to inform legislative steps and judicial understandings, which make them an integral part of India's vision for the Constitution.³

1.1 Statement of Problem

The DPSP of the Indian Constitution are guiding principles of governance that aim to promote social justice and economic welfare. Although they are non-justiciable, they have had a strong impact on poverty alleviation policies in India. Yet, how far DPSPs have been able to influence legislative and policy initiatives to reduce poverty is debatable. Whereas path-breaking programs like MGNREGA and the National Food Security Act manifest DPSP aims, ongoing socio-economic inequalities, gaps in implementation, and inefficiencies in policies cast doubts about their real effect. This paper attempts to examine the contribution of DPSPs towards the evolution of poverty reduction policies in India, assessing their efficacy from a socio-economic perspective. It seeks to measure the difficulties of policy implementation and examine how constitutional guidelines can be utilized more effectively to attain inclusive development and eradication of poverty.

¹ See *State of Kerala v. N.M. Thomas*, (1976) 2 SCC 310, where the Court emphasized reading Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles in harmony. Also see M.P. Jain, *Indian Constitutional Law*, 8th ed. (LexisNexis, 2018), p. 1354.

² see B. Shiva Rao, *The Framing of India's Constitution: A Study* (Indian Institute of Public Administration, 1968), Vol. II, pp. 243–250.

³ *State of Kerala v. N.M. Thomas*, AIR 1976 SC 490; *Minerva Mills Ltd. v. Union of India*, AIR 1980 SC 1789.

1.2 Research Objectives

1. To examine the role of the DPSP in shaping the policy for poverty alleviation in India.
2. To assess the socio- economic impact of MGNREGA and its effectiveness in reducing poverty.
3. To evaluate the effectiveness of food security program in reducing poverty.
4. To examine the role of state and local governance in aligning poverty alleviation initiatives with the DPSP.
5. To identify the limitations and challenges in the implementation of poverty alleviation policies program.

1.3 Hypothesis

The DPSP have played an important role in the formulation and implementation of policies aimed at alleviating poverty in India

1.4 Research Questions

1. How have the DPSP influenced the formulation of poverty alleviation policies in India?
2. What has been the socio economic impact of MGNREGA in terms of reducing poverty?
3. How effective are food security programs in addressing poverty in India?
4. What role do state and local governance bodies play in implementing poverty alleviation initiatives with the DPSP?
5. What are the challenges and limitations in implementing poverty alleviation programs in India?

1.5 Review of Literature

- Granville Austin (1966) – The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation

Austin emphasized that the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSPs) represent the social and economic philosophy of the Indian Constitution. He argued that they were intended to transform India into a welfare state by providing a framework for economic justice, making them a crucial tool for poverty alleviation.

- D.D. Basu (2013) – Introduction to the Constitution of India

Basu underlined the non-justiciable nature of DPSPs but highlighted their role as guiding principles for governance. He analyzed how several socio-economic laws and policies, including land reforms and employment schemes, are inspired by Articles 38, 39, and 41–47 of the Constitution.

- Amartya Sen (1999) – Development as Freedom

Sen argued for a broader understanding of poverty that includes social exclusion and lack of capabilities. Though not a legal text, his socio-economic framework supports the argument that DPSPs, by promoting education, health, and social welfare, contribute indirectly to poverty reduction.

- T.K. Oommen (1990) – State and Society in India

Oommen examined the state's role in addressing social inequality and found that while the DPSPs provided moral legitimacy to anti-poverty measures, political will and implementation have often been lacking.

- Upendra Baxi (1985) – The Crisis of the Indian Legal System

Baxi critiqued the state's failure to effectively implement the DPSPs, attributing persistent poverty to a disconnect between constitutional ideals and legal-political reality. He emphasized the need for “judicial activism” in interpreting DPSPs in ways that empower the poor.

- N.C. Saxena (2005) – Hunger, Under-nutrition and Food Security in India

Saxena provided a policy-oriented perspective, arguing that schemes like the Public Distribution System (PDS) and MGNREGA were driven by the constitutional mandate under DPSPs to ensure adequate livelihood and nutrition.

- M.P. Jain (2014) – Indian Constitutional Law

Jain provided a detailed doctrinal analysis of DPSPs and their relationship with Fundamental Rights. He argued that judicial interpretation has gradually strengthened the enforceability of DPSPs, especially in cases related to socio-economic rights.

- Law Commission of India – Reports

Several reports of the Law Commission have advocated for integrating DPSPs more closely with enforceable rights. For example, the 245th Report emphasized the role of legal reforms in realizing the socio-economic objectives laid down in the Constitution.

- Ministry of Rural Development Reports (MGNREGA, 2021)

These annual reports demonstrate how constitutional values embedded in DPSPs guide real-world policy implementation, particularly employment guarantees and food security.

- Ravi Srivastava (2004), “Poverty Targeting in India: A Case of Multiple Targeting Failures” – Economic and Political Weekly (EPW)

Srivastava examines the targeting of poverty-alleviation schemes like PDS and NREGS and links their inefficiencies to the lack of enforceable socio-economic rights, despite being motivated by DPSPs.

- Madhav Khosla (2010), “Making Social Rights Conditional: Lessons from India” – International Journal of Constitutional Law

Khosla critically assesses how India balances enforceable Fundamental Rights with non-justiciable DPSPs. He explores how the state uses DPSPs as a justification for introducing poverty-alleviation schemes even in the absence of clear legal mandates.

1.6 Research Methodology

The research methodology for this research takes a socio-legal and analytical perspective to assess the contribution of the DPSP in the formulation of poverty alleviation policies in India. The research is based on doctrinal research, where constitutional provisions, legislative structures, and judicial interpretations will be analyzed to determine how DPSPs have impacted policymaking over the years. Moreover, secondary sources like books, journal articles, government

reports, and policy documents will be examined to evaluate the practical application and efficacy of poverty reduction programs in the context of DPSPs. Comparative evaluation of different policies, including food security, employment, and social welfare policies, will be done to identify how far they are aligned with constitutional requirements. The research will also take a qualitative approach by evaluating judicial pronouncements that have strengthened the role of DPSPs in governance and policy-making. Through the synthesis of legal interpretation and socio-economic understanding, this study seeks to offer a clear appreciation of the ways in which DPSPs serve as guiding principles for poverty alleviation in India.

1.7 Expected Outcome of Study

The study on “Evaluating the Role of Directive Principles of State Policy in Shaping Poverty Alleviation Policies in India: A Socio-Economic Analysis” reveals that the DPSPs have significantly influenced the formulation and evolution of poverty alleviation measures in India. Although non-justiciable, these principles have served as crucial moral and constitutional guidelines for successive governments in framing laws and socio-economic programs aimed at reducing poverty and inequality. Key welfare initiatives like the *Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)*, the *Public Distribution System (PDS)*, and various rural development schemes have drawn direct inspiration from DPSPs advocating for the right to work, social security, and equitable distribution of resources. The study also finds that while DPSPs have provided the philosophical foundation for a pro-poor policy framework, the actual impact has been uneven due to challenges in implementation, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and limited political will. Nonetheless, the study concludes that DPSPs continue to play a vital normative role in shaping India’s poverty alleviation agenda and in promoting the ideal of a welfare state envisioned in the Constitution.

1.8 Significance of Study

The significance of this study lies in its exploration of how the DPSPs have influenced poverty alleviation policies in India, shaping the country's socio-economic landscape. By examining the interplay between constitutional directives and policy implementation, this research highlights the extent to which DPSPs have guided legislative and executive actions in addressing poverty, inequality, and socio-economic justice. The study provides an in-depth analysis of key welfare schemes, legal frameworks, and judicial interpretations that have contributed to poverty alleviation, assessing their effectiveness in achieving the constitutional vision of a just and equitable society. Furthermore, it critically evaluates the challenges in translating DPSPs into enforceable rights and effective policies, offering insights into policy gaps and areas for reform. This research is significant for policymakers, legal scholars, and social activists as it sheds light on the constitutional foundation of poverty alleviation efforts, their real-world impact, and the need for a more robust policy framework to achieve socio-economic justice in India.

1.9 Scope and Limitation

The scope of this study encompasses an in-depth examination of the DPSPs enshrined in Part IV of the *Indian Constitution*, with a specific focus on their influence in shaping legislative and policy measures aimed at poverty alleviation. It includes an analysis of relevant constitutional provisions, landmark judicial interpretations, and government initiatives and schemes such as the *Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)*, the *National Food Security Act (NFSA)*, and *Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY)*. The study also seeks to evaluate how the socio-economic vision embedded in the DPSPs has evolved over time and influenced policymaking across different political regimes. However, the study is limited by certain constraints. As the DPSPs are non-justiciable, their enforcement relies heavily on the political will of the government, making it difficult to measure direct causality between these principles and actual policy outcomes. Moreover, while this analysis draws on qualitative assessments and policy reviews, it does not include primary empirical data or large-scale fieldwork, which may limit the depth of socio-economic impact

evaluation. Additionally, the diversity in state-level implementation and regional disparities pose challenges in assessing the uniform impact of DPSP-inspired policies across the country.

1.10 Chapterization

Chapter-I Introduction

The DPSPs, found in Part IV of the Indian Constitution, serve as essential moral guidelines for the State to ensure social and economic justice. Though not legally enforceable, they have significantly influenced poverty alleviation and welfare policies through land reforms, labor laws, and programs like MGNREGA and the Right to Education Act. Inspired by ancient Indian philosophy and the Irish Constitution, the DPSPs reflect India's commitment to building an equitable society. Historical milestones like the Nehru Report and Karachi Resolution emphasized these goals, which were later embedded in the Constitution. Landmark judgments such as *Kesavananda Bharati and Minerva Mills* underscored the importance of harmonizing DPSPs with Fundamental Rights. Despite challenges in implementation due to political and financial constraints, DPSPs continue to shape India's development strategies and remain crucial in promoting inclusive and sustainable growth.

Chapter-II Role of DPSP in shaping poverty alleviation policies

The DPSPs, outlined in Part IV of the Indian Constitution, serve as essential guidelines for the governance of India, aimed at establishing a just and equitable society. Although not legally enforceable, these principles significantly influence legislation and policy-making, particularly in addressing poverty, social injustice, and economic inequality. *Articles such as 38, 39, 41, 42, 43, and 47* explicitly direct the State to promote conditions that ensure human dignity and reduce exploitation. The DPSPs have been instrumental in shaping welfare initiatives like the Five-Year Plans, MGNREGA, PDS, and IRDP, which collectively work toward poverty alleviation and inclusive development. Furthermore, the judiciary has upheld the importance of DPSPs by interpreting them in harmony with Fundamental Rights in landmark cases like *Kesavananda Bharati and Minerva Mills*, thus reinforcing their role in achieving the Constitution's vision of social and economic justice.

Chapter-III Role of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act [MGNREGA] in Poverty Alleviation

The *Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)*, enacted in 2005, is a landmark social security measure aimed at reducing rural poverty and promoting inclusive development in India. By guaranteeing 100 days of paid employment annually to rural adults willing to do unskilled manual work, the program transforms employment from a welfare provision to a legal right. It addresses structural issues like landlessness, unemployment, and seasonal migration while simultaneously building rural infrastructure such as roads and irrigation facilities. MGNREGA prioritizes marginalized groups especially Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, women, and landless laborers thereby promoting social justice and gender equality. It empowers local governance through decentralized implementation and fosters grassroots democracy. Although it has faced challenges such as delayed payments and administrative inefficiencies, MGNREGA remains a powerful tool for poverty alleviation, rural development, and economic empowerment when implemented effectively.

Chapter-IV Food Security and Poverty Alleviation

Food security and poverty alleviation are deeply interconnected challenges with significant implications for human rights, development, and social stability. Despite advancements in agricultural productivity, millions still suffer from hunger and malnutrition, highlighting the gap between food availability and access. Addressing these issues requires more than just efficient agricultural practices; it necessitates a strong legal and ethical foundation grounded in the right to life and dignity, as recognized by international and domestic legal frameworks. Governments play a critical role in ensuring food security through laws, policies, and welfare schemes, such as land reforms and food distribution systems. Furthermore, judicial activism and public interest litigation have increasingly contributed to the enforcement of food rights, especially in poverty-stricken regions. This study explores the legal basis for food security, evaluates anti-poverty policies, and critically analyzes their implementation from a rights-based perspective to identify strengths, shortcomings, and future directions for achieving

sustainable food security and poverty reduction.

Chapter-V Role of State and local Governance in Poverty Alleviation

The role of state and local governance in poverty alleviation is critical to ensuring inclusive and sustainable development. As the closest tiers of government to the people, state and local bodies are uniquely positioned to identify grassroots needs, implement targeted welfare programs, and ensure efficient delivery of essential services. Through decentralized planning, community participation, and coordination with central schemes, these levels of governance help bridge the gap between policy formulation and on-ground execution. Their active involvement enhances transparency, accountability, and responsiveness, making poverty alleviation efforts more effective and regionally tailored to the diverse socio-economic conditions across the country.

Chapter-VI Strengthening Poverty alleviation Issues and challenges

Poverty alleviation remains one of the most pressing developmental challenges across the globe, particularly in developing countries. Strengthening efforts to reduce poverty involves not only implementing effective economic and social policies but also addressing structural issues such as inequality, unemployment, lack of access to education and healthcare, and inadequate social protection systems. Despite significant progress through various poverty reduction programs, many obstacles persist, including limited resources, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and the marginalization of vulnerable populations. To overcome these challenges, there is a growing need for integrated and inclusive strategies that empower communities, enhance livelihood opportunities, and ensure equitable distribution of resources.

Chapter-VII Conclusion and Suggestions

The DPSPs have played a significant role in shaping poverty alleviation policies in India by guiding legislative and executive action toward socio-economic justice. Though non-justiciable, these principles have provided a constitutional foundation for programs aimed at improving living standards, ensuring equitable distribution of resources, and empowering marginalized communities. Over the decades, welfare schemes and rights-based legislation such as the Right to Education, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, and

food security initiatives reflect the influence of DPSPs in targeting poverty and inequality. However, challenges in implementation, political will, and institutional inefficiencies have sometimes hindered their full realization. While the DPSPs may lack enforceability, their normative force continues to inspire and shape India's poverty alleviation strategies within a democratic and welfare-oriented framework.

CHAPTER-2

ROLE OF DIRECTIVE PRINCIPLES OF STATE POLICY IN SHAPING POVERTY ALLEVIATION POLICIES

The DPSP, which are part of Part IV of the Indian Constitution, are guiding principles of governance that strive to create a just, equitable, and welfare-state society.¹ Though not enforceable in a court of law, these principles play a role in giving shape to legislative and executive policies, especially with respect to dealing with poverty and socio-economic imbalance.² India, being a welfare state, has depended extensively on DPSPs to inform policies towards poverty eradication, social justice, and economic development. Articles like Article 38, where the State is obligated to ensure a social order that reduces inequalities, and Article 39, where the focus is placed on sufficient means of livelihood and fair distribution of resources, provide the foundation for different welfare programs.

The problem of poverty in India has been a core challenge since independence, which was marked by widespread unemployment, underemployment, illiteracy, malnutrition, and lack of access to the basic necessities of health, education, and shelter. Identifying these challenges, the DPSPs outlined an overarching framework for social and economic policies for the purpose of combating these system-based problems. Items *like 38, 39, 41, 42, 43, and 47* explicitly instruct the State to endeavor to establish such conditions as shall enable the people to live a life of dignity free from exploitation and poverty. Article 38, for example, requires the State to guarantee a social order for the growth of welfare of the people, while *Article 39* stresses the policies for sufficient means of living, equal work for equal work, and shelter from exploitation. Such provisions, though not enforceable in a court of law, impose a strong moral and political duty on the government to introduce policies that reduce poverty and improve the well-being of the underprivileged sections of society.³ Throughout the decades, the contribution of DPSP to the formulation of poverty alleviation policies

¹ *Constitution of India, Part IV (Articles 36–51), Directive Principles of State Policy.*

² M.P. Jain, *Indian Constitutional Law*, 8th ed. (LexisNexis, 2018), p. 1498.

³ Article 37, Constitution of India – “Though the provisions contained in this Part shall not be enforceable by any court, the principles therein laid down are nevertheless fundamental in the governance of the country.”

of India has been extensive and multi-faceted. The principles enshrined in the DPSPs have served as a beacon for policy-makers, guiding the policy formulation and implementation of various socio-economic schemes for poverty eradication and inclusive growth. Pillar initiatives like the *Five-Year Plans*, the *Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)*, the *Public Distribution System (PDS)*, the *Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP)*, and other social security schemes for marginalized sections owe their ideological genesis to the constitutional vision as enshrined through the DPSPs. These welfare provisions mirror the constitutional directive for securing distributive justice, the elimination of economic inequalities, and empowering marginalized communities.¹

In addition, the Indian judiciary has been proactive in upholding the significance of DPSPs in governance. Under the doctrine of harmonious construction, the courts have interpreted fundamental rights in the context of DPSPs, thus enhancing their role in providing social and economic justice. Landmark decisions such as *Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala*, *Minerva Mills v. Union of India*, and *Unni Krishnan v. State of Andhra Pradesh* have reaffirmed the complementary role of Fundamental Rights and DPSPs and held that both are indispensable for achieving constitutional objectives. The courts have also held as constitutional poverty alleviation schemes and welfare acts predicated upon the principles enshrined in DPSPs.

2.1 Concept and legal framework of DPSPs related to poverty alleviation

DPSPs are guidelines for the government to create a just society by ensuring social welfare, economic equality, and human rights. DPSPs are non-justiciable but have a significant influence on making legislation and policies for poverty alleviation. The Indian state has depended on these principles to create economic initiatives and legislation that respond to economic inequalities and are an empowerment for marginalized sections of society.²

¹ Constitution of India, Article 38(2); see also Granville Austin, *The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation* (Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 75–79.

² Granville Austin, *The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation*, Oxford University Press, 1966, p. 75.

Poverty alleviation is a fundamental goal embedded within the DPSPs, which promote social and economic justice. The drafters of the Constitution mentioned above were aware that political democracy alone, without socio-economic transformation, could not ensure real justice. The DPSPs, therefore, form the blueprint for economic equality and better living conditions for the poor.¹

DPSPs working towards poverty alleviation encompass provisions involving securing a fair economic order, promoting social welfare, and ensuring equitable distribution of wealth and resources. These principles direct the state to develop policies for eradicating hunger, unemployment, homelessness, and denial of education and healthcare.²

2.1.1 Legal Framework of DPSPs Related to Poverty Alleviation

1. Article 38 – Promotion of Welfare of the People

Article 38 mandates the state to strive to promote the welfare of the people by securing a social order in which justice social, economic, and political shall inform all institutions of national life. It further directs the state to minimize inequalities in income, status, and opportunities. This article forms the foundation for poverty alleviation programs.³

2. Article 39 – Principles of Economic Justice

Article 39 outlines specific economic justice principles that aim to reduce poverty and economic disparity;

- Ensuring that wealth and resources are not concentrated in a few hands but are distributed for the common good.
- Providing equal means of livelihood to all citizens.
- Preventing the exploitation of workers, ensuring fair wages, and providing adequate working conditions.
- Ensuring that children and youth are not forced into hazardous employment due to economic necessity.

3. Article 41 – Right to Work, Education, and Public Assistance

This article directs the state to provide work, education, and

¹ Upendra Baxi, “Directive Principles and the Development of Socio-Economic Rights in India,” in *Law & Poverty: Critical Essays*, 1988, p. 65.

² See Article 39, 41, 42, 45, and 47 of the Constitution of India.

³ *Dalmia Cement (Bharat) Ltd. v. Union of India*, (1996) 10 SCC 104.

public assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness, and other disabilities. It has been the basis for employment schemes like the *Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)*, which guarantees rural employment and helps alleviate poverty.¹

4. Article 42 –Humane Conditions of Work

Article 42 mandates the state to ensure humane working conditions and maternity relief. It aims to protect laborers from exploitation and improve their socio-economic conditions. Various labor laws have been enacted under this provision to safeguard workers' rights.²

5. Article 43 – Living Wage for Workers

Article 43 directs the state to ensure that workers receive a living wage and decent standard of life. This principle has influenced minimum wage laws and social security measures for workers in the unorganized sector.

6. Article 45 – Provision for Early Childhood Care and Education

Recognizing the link between education and poverty, Article 45 originally mandated free and compulsory education for children under 14 years. Though later replaced by the fundamental right to education (Article 21A), it continues to guide policies aimed at providing quality education to underprivileged children.

7. Article 47 – Improvement of Public Health and Nutrition

Article 47 obliges the state to raise the level of nutrition, improve public health, and prohibit the consumption of intoxicating substances that are injurious to health. Several food security and health schemes, such as the National Food Security Act and Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), are rooted in this principle.

2.1.2 Judicial Interpretation and Implementation

DPSPs cannot be enforced in courts, the judiciary has generally interpreted fundamental rights in the context of these principles to promote social justice. In decisions such as *Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala (1973)* and *Minerva Mills v. Union of India (1980)*, the Supreme Court highlighted the need

¹ P.D. Kaushik and Sangeeta Arora, "MGNREGA and its Role in Rural Employment," International Journal of Research in Commerce and Management, Vol. 2, Issue 12, 2011.

²Municipal Council, Ratlam v. Vardhichand, (1980) 4 SCC 162.

for balancing Fundamental Rights with DPSPs. The Court has further identified the Right to Livelihood as a derivation of the Right to Life under Article 21, which in turn enforces the state duty to eliminate poverty.

2.2 Relevant Provisions of DPSP relating to Poverty Alleviation

They show the concern of the Constituent Fathers to construct a welfare state that will strive for social and economic justice for all citizens, particularly the weaker sections of society. One of the most important goals of the DPSP is the alleviation of poverty, which is closely interrelated with the concepts of equality, dignity, and social justice. Poverty alleviation in the DPSP does not just mean economic progress but includes the vision of enhanced living standards, access to essential needs, and social justice in the distribution of resources.

Several provisions under the DPSP are directly or indirectly connected with poverty elimination. These provisions direct the State to formulate policies that tackle the main causes of poverty, i.e., unemployment, deprivation of access to education, healthcare, and social security, and disparities in the distribution of assets. Article 38(1) instructs the State to foster the welfare of the people by securing and defending a social order in which justice social, economic, and political shall guide all institutions of national life. This provision emphasizes the obligation of the State to establish a socio-economic climate where poverty and inequality are reduced to a minimum. In addition, *Article 38(2)* creates a definite duty upon the State to reduce differences in income and eradicate differences in status, facilities, and opportunities not only among persons but also between regions.¹

Article 39 goes on to explain the socio-economic objectives of the State that are necessary for poverty elimination. It requires the State to make its policies with a view to securing that the people men and women equally have the right to an adequate means of livelihood.² It also provides that the control and ownership of material resources of the community shall be so apportioned as to serve the common good to the best possible extent, thereby striving for equality in the distribution of wealth. The provision also endeavors to avoid the concentration

¹ Ibid., Art. 38(2).

² Ibid., Art. 39(a).

of means of production and wealth in the hands of a few, which is one of the major reasons for poverty and socio-economic inequality in India. In addition, Article 39(e) instructs the State to see to it that workers, especially those employed in hazardous vocations, are not compelled to work in ways prejudicial to their health and strength, thereby indirectly serving the cause of poverty alleviation by protecting their earning capacity and human dignity.¹

Article 41 of the DPSP enshrines the right to work, education, and public assistance in the event of unemployment, old age, sickness, and disablement. This article is significant to poverty alleviation as it acknowledges the role of the State in affording social security and a minimum level of living for all citizens, particularly vulnerable groups that are susceptible to falling into poverty because of unexpected events. Article 42 supplements this by requiring the State to provide for just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief, thus upholding the working poor and safeguarding them from exploitation.²

Another important provision is Article 43, which outlines the State to provide a living wage, terms of work that provide a decent standard of living, and effective enjoyment of leisure and social and cultural opportunities for all laborers, including those in industry and agriculture. This article broadens the notion of poverty eradication from simple subsistence wages to include general well-being and quality of life. Moreover, *Article 43A* directly takes into account the inclusion of workers in the administration of industries, such that those who are part of the economic growth of the country are also partakers of its prosperity.³

Article 46 binds the State to advance the educational and economic welfare of the weaker sections of society, and especially the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), and to safeguard them against social injustice and all types of exploitation.⁴ This article acknowledges that poverty tends to be closely associated with social discrimination and seeks to address economic as well as social dimensions of deprivation. The relevance of these provisions of the DPSP on poverty alleviation is that they serve as guiding

¹ Ibid., Art. 39(e).

² Ibid., Art. 42.

³ Ibid., Art. 43A.

⁴ Ibid., Art. 46.

principles for the governance and policymaking of India. Although not justiciable in a court of law, they are central to the governance of India, according to *Article 37 of the Constitution*. Year by year, several poverty alleviation programs and welfare schemes introduced by the Government of India including the *Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)*, *Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY)*, *Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY)*, and the *Public Distribution System (PDS)* are indicative of the DPSP.¹

2.3 Judicial Interpretation of Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP)

Though these principles are non-justiciable, i.e., they cannot be enforced by the courts per se, the Indian judiciary has been instrumental in interpreting them in a revolutionary manner. By way of different milestone judgments, the Supreme Court and High Courts have not only assigned constitutional status to the DPSPs but also reconciled the same with the Fundamental Rights in order to realize the goals of a welfare state.

During the initial years following the adoption of the Constitution, the judiciary adopted a conservative stance with regard to DPSPs. The Supreme Court, in such cases as *State of Madras v. Champakam Dorairajan (1951)*, ruled that in case of conflict between Fundamental Rights and DPSPs, the former would hold sway since Fundamental Rights are justiciable and DPSPs are not.² The court held that the directive principles must conform and operate subsidiary to the basic rights. This restrictive interpretation of DPSPs restricted their function in the constitutional framework, confining them to mere guidelines for state policy without any binding effect.

The turning point was the landmark judgment in *Golak Nath v. State of Punjab (1967)*, in which the Supreme Court held that Fundamental Rights could not be amended to deprive or curtail their content.³ Although this case was mainly concerned with the amendment powers of the Parliament, it set the stage for subsequent cases in which the nexus between Fundamental Rights and DPSPs was again examined. A more balanced view was presented in the famous *Kesavananda*

¹ Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, MGNREGA Annual Report 2022-23; Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, PMAY-G Guidelines; Ministry of Finance, PMJDY Progress Reports

² *State of Madras v. Champakam Dorairajan*, AIR 1951 SC 226.

³ *Golak Nath v. State of Punjab*, AIR 1967 SC 1643.

Bharati v. State of Kerala (1973) case, which brought into existence the Basic Structure Doctrine.¹ The court stated that Parliament has the authority to amend any component of the Constitution but cannot amend the basic structure of the Constitution. The Directive Principles were recognized as fundamental in the governance of the country, and their importance was lifted to be a part of the basic structure of the Constitution. DPSPs were therefore bestowed with a constitutional status higher than regular laws but below the basic features of the Constitution.

Additional fortification to the DPSPs' stand came from the judiciary in *Minerva Mills v. Union of India (1980)*, who placed stress upon maintaining harmony between Fundamental Rights and DPSPs.² The court stated that if one were to accord absolute predominance to either of them at the expense of the other, the harmony of the Constitution would be disrupted. The decision put special emphasis that DPSPs are not self-declaratory mere pious resolutions but constitute pillars upon which rests the ability of justice to take effect and equal opportunity can flower.

Judicial interpretation soon thereafter in landmark judgments such as *Unni Krishnan v. State of Andhra Pradesh (1993)* read certain DPSPs into the Fundamental Rights to make them legally enforceable.³ For example, the right to education, being a directive principle in the first place as contained in Article 45, was construed as a part of the right to life as contained in *Article 21*. This judicial activism reached its culmination with the 86th Constitutional Amendment (2002), which added Article 21A, declaring the right to education a Fundamental Right.

Another important interpretation was in *Olga Telis v. Bombay Municipal Corporation (1985)*, in which the Supreme Court held that the right to livelihood is part of the right to life under Article 21.⁴ This was an indirect means of enforcing the directive principles which seek to provide a decent standard of life to all citizens. By such innovative interpretations, the judiciary extended the scope of Fundamental Rights to encompass the socio-economic rights contained in the DPSPs.

¹ *Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala, AIR 1973 SC 1461.*

² *Minerva Mills Ltd. v. Union of India, AIR 1980 SC 1789.*

³ *Unni Krishnan, J.P. v. State of Andhra Pradesh, AIR 1993 SC 2178.*

⁴ *Olga Tellis v. Bombay Municipal Corporation, AIR 1986 SC 180.*

The judiciary has also been instrumental in interpreting DPSPs in the context of environmental concerns. In *M.C. Mehta v. Union of India* (1987) and other environmental cases, the courts have relied on Article 48A, which obliges the State to protect and improve the environment, and Article 51A(g), a citizen's Fundamental Duty to protect the environment, to impose sustainable development principles.¹

Over the last few years, the Supreme Court has repeatedly emphasized the role of DPSPs in pursuit of constitutional objectives. In *Ashoka Kumar Thakur v. Union of India* (2008), the court upheld OBC reservation in educational institutions on the basis of noting that socio-economic justice constitutes a fundamental tenet of the Constitution and DPSPs supply a blueprint towards attaining the same.²

2.4 DPSP as Guiding Principles for Welfare Legislation

These principles embody the socio-economic theory on which Indian state is to operate, and they set up the blueprint of the establishment of a welfare state. The constituents of the DPSPs by the draftsmen were instilled with vision to advance social justice, ameliorate inequalities, eliminate poverty, and elevate the standard of living of people. The importance of these principles is that they become moral duties to the state that urge the legislature and the executive to make laws and policies oriented towards welfare.³ One of the main aims of the DPSPs is to advise the state to shape welfare legislation that ensures the ideals of justice social, economic, and political contained in the Preamble to the Constitution. There are a number of provisions contained in the DPSPs that specifically intend to advance the welfare of the people. For example, Article 38 instructs the State to endeavor to promote the welfare of the people by ensuring a social order in which justice, social, economic, and political, shall guide all the institutions of national life. It also requires the State to reduce inequalities in income, status, facilities, and opportunities.⁴ This directive principle is especially

¹ *M.C. Mehta v. Union of India*, AIR 1987 SC 1086.

² *Ashoka Kumar Thakur v. Union of India*, (2008) 6 SCC 1.

³ M.P. Jain, *Indian Constitutional Law*, 8th ed. (LexisNexis, 2018), p. 1201.

⁴ V.N. Shukla, *Constitution of India*, 13th ed. (Eastern Book Company, 2017), p. 269.

significant in a nation like India, where a significant portion of the population suffers from poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, and social discrimination. Welfare legislation relating to minimum wages, equal pay for equal work, social security, and poverty alleviation programs have their origin in this directive principle. Moreover, Article 39 lays down specific principles of policy that are to be followed by the State, such as ensuring adequate means of livelihood for all citizens, securing equal pay for equal work for both men and women, protecting the health and strength of workers, safeguarding children from exploitation, and distributing resources to serve the common good. These guidelines have resulted in the implementation of various welfare legislations like the *Minimum Wages Act*, *Equal Remuneration Act*, *Maternity Benefit Act*, *Child Labor (Prohibition and Regulation) Act*, and other laws regarding prevention of exploitation and protection of workers.¹ The State, acting on these lines, has also implemented land reforms, redistribution of wealth, and other schemes for rural and urban development to eradicate socio-economic inequalities.²

Additionally, *Article 41* underlines the right to work, to education, and to public relief in respect of unemployment, old age, sickness, and disablement.³ It has guided the State to enact employment guarantee programs such as the *Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)*, which ensures the right to work and generates employment opportunities to rural families. In the same vein, Article 42 ensures just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief, which have resulted in the passage of a number of labor welfare legislations guaranteeing workers' rights, workplace safety, and grant of maternity benefits.⁴

The Directive Principles also seek to promote social justice by virtue of *Article 46*, which instructs the State to protect the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of society, specifically the Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and other socially and educationally

¹ Ibid.

² D.D. Basu, *Introduction to the Constitution of India*, 24th ed. (LexisNexis, 2021), p. 421.

³ Ibid., p. 422.

⁴ S.C. Kashyap, *Our Constitution: An Introduction to India's Constitution and Constitutional Law*, (National Book Trust, 2015), p. 140.

backward classes.¹ This has led to affirmative action policies, reservation in institutions of learning and public employment, and special welfare schemes for the empowerment of marginalized groups. *Article 47*, guiding the State to enhance the level of nutrition, enhance public health, and ban intoxicating beverages and drugs, has seen public health initiatives, nutrition programs such as the Mid-Day Meal.

¹ National Commission for Scheduled Castes, “Report on Welfare Measures for SCs/STs,” 2020.

CHAPTER-III
ROLE OF MAHATAMA GANDHI NATIONAL RURAL EMPLOYMENT
GUARANTEE ACT IN POVERTY ALLEVIATION

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), passed in 2005, is one of the most ambitious and important legislative initiatives to combat rural poverty and ensure inclusive growth in India.¹ Conceived as a social security program, MGNREGA aims to raise the livelihood security of rural households by ensuring 100 days of wage employment within a financial year to each adult member who wants to undertake unskilled manual work. It is a rights-based program and makes employment a legal right by changing the paradigm from a welfare-based to a rights-based approach to development. In a country where poverty and unemployment have remained persistent challenges, particularly in rural areas, the implementation of MGNREGA has been regarded as a transformative intervention with far-reaching socio-economic implications.²

Rural poverty in India has intrinsic structural reasons such as landlessness, unemployment, seasonal migration, and agrarian distress. The rural economy that is largely agrarian-based often has not provided sustainable livelihood alternatives to millions. Here, MGNREGA effectively plays a double role: it releases the poor from poverty through wage employment, and simultaneously it improves the rural infrastructure by developing durable assets like roads, ponds, irrigation facilities, and soil conservation works. Therefore, the program not merely deals with the issue of income poverty but also challenges the chronic challenges of rural development by increasing the productive potential of the rural economy.³ The importance of MGNREGA in poverty reduction is also reinforced by its inclusive nature, focusing on marginalized segments of society

¹ Ministry of Rural Development, The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005, Government of India.

² Shah, Mihir et al., MGNREGA: A Catalyst for Rural Transformation, Economic & Political Weekly, Vol. 43, No. 16, 2008.

³ Reddy, D. N., & Upendranadh, C., National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme: An Evaluation of Operational Issues in Implementation, 2008.

like Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), women, and landless workers and thus strengthening social justice and equity.

In addition, MGNREGA is not a job scheme per se but a holistic socio-economic intervention with far-reaching effects on rural livelihoods. Its open and decentralized implementation framework ensures the active involvement of the Gram Sabha and Panchayati Raj Institutions, thus encouraging grassroots democracy and people's empowerment. The equal payment of wages to women and men under MGNREGA has helped gender empowerment, offering rural women a platform of economic independence and social status. The program also has major multiplier impacts in the rural economy as payment of wages under MGNREGA enhances the purchasing power of rural households, promotes local markets, and helps reduce poverty above the direct beneficiaries.¹

Nevertheless, while being worthy of its goals and performance, the contribution of MGNREGA towards poverty reduction has also been subjected to challenges and criticism. Factors like delayed payments, insufficient awareness among the beneficiaries, corruption, and bureaucratic barriers have frequently worked against the efficient functioning of the program. Again, regional differences in the functioning of MGNREGA testify to the need for improved mechanisms of monitoring and evaluation. However, when used efficiently, MGNREGA is an effective tool for poverty reduction and rural development, providing social security, curbing distress migration, and fostering sustainable livelihoods.²

In this socio-economic evaluation of MGNREGA's contribution to poverty reduction, it is vital to consider both the successes and weaknesses of the program. The evaluation has to review the contribution of MGNREGA to employment generation, income improvement, creation of assets, social inclusion, and gender equality. It has to examine the structural and administrative reforms required to consolidate the program's implementation and enhance its capability in eliminating rural poverty. Finally, MGNREGA is a paradigm shift in India's strategy towards poverty reduction from passive welfare interventions to an active,

¹ Ibid.

² Dutta, Puja et al., *Right to Work? Assessing India's Employment Guarantee Scheme in Bihar*, World Bank, 2012.

rights-based, participatory, and developmental approach for empowering rural citizens and creating socio-economic transformation.

3.1 Overview of MGNREGA: Legal Framework

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), 2005, is flagship legislation in India that seeks to offer a legal guarantee of wage employment to rural families.¹ It is one of the largest public works programs in the world that was launched to deal with rural poverty, unemployment, and migration. MGNREGA is a rights-oriented employment generation strategy with a robust legal framework of transparency, accountability, and participatory development. It aims to improve the livelihood security of the rural population by offering assured wage employment for at least 100 days in a financial year to each rural family whose adult members are willing to engage in unskilled manual labor.

MGNREGA is not just an employment scheme but also a means of empowering rural people, preventing distress migration, ensuring social inclusion, and bringing about sustainable rural development. The Act requires a decentralized planning and implementation process by Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and insists on the participation of Gram Sabha's in decision-making.

The MGNREGA has multiple objectives that aim to address various aspects of rural poverty, unemployment, and social inequality. The objective of MGNREGA are discussed in detail below:

1. Livelihood Security through Guaranteed Employment:

One of the primary objectives of MGNREGA is to enhance the livelihood security of rural households by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every rural household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. This legal guarantee helps to mitigate the impact of seasonal unemployment and acts as a safety net for vulnerable rural populations.²

¹ Ministry of Rural Development, The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005, Government of India, available at: <https://nrega.nic.in>

² Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, MGNREGA Annual Report 2022–23, p. 14.

2. Creation of Durable Rural Assets:

MGNREGA not only focuses on generating jobs but also creating long-lasting and sustainable assets for rural infrastructure development. These assets are water conservation works, land development, plantation, rural connectivity, and anti-erosion measures. This makes employment generation also result in productive community building.¹

3. Strengthening Decentralized Governance:

The Act gives greater importance to the role of local self-governments, specifically Gram Panchayats, in planning, executing, and monitoring the scheme works. This enhances grassroots democracy and participatory development through which local people actively participate in decision-making.²

4. Social Inclusion and Empowerment of Marginalized Groups:

MGNREGA places special emphasis on the involvement of marginalized sections of society, including Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, women, and landless laborers. The Act requires that at least one-third of the beneficiaries must be women, thereby empowering them economically and socially.³

5. Preventing Distress Migration:

By creating jobs within rural settings, MGNREGA aims at lessening rural laborers' need to go to urban settlements in pursuit of jobs. It helps to enhance social stability at the rural level and minimizes pressure on city infrastructure.⁴

6. Environmental Protection and Natural Resource Management:

The Act promotes activities that conserve natural resources and improve environmental sustainability. Works related to drought-proofing, water conservation, afforestation, and land development not only generate employment

¹ Ibid., pp. 16–17.

² Ministry of Rural Development, Operational Guidelines of MGNREGA 2013, 4th Edition, Chapter 2.

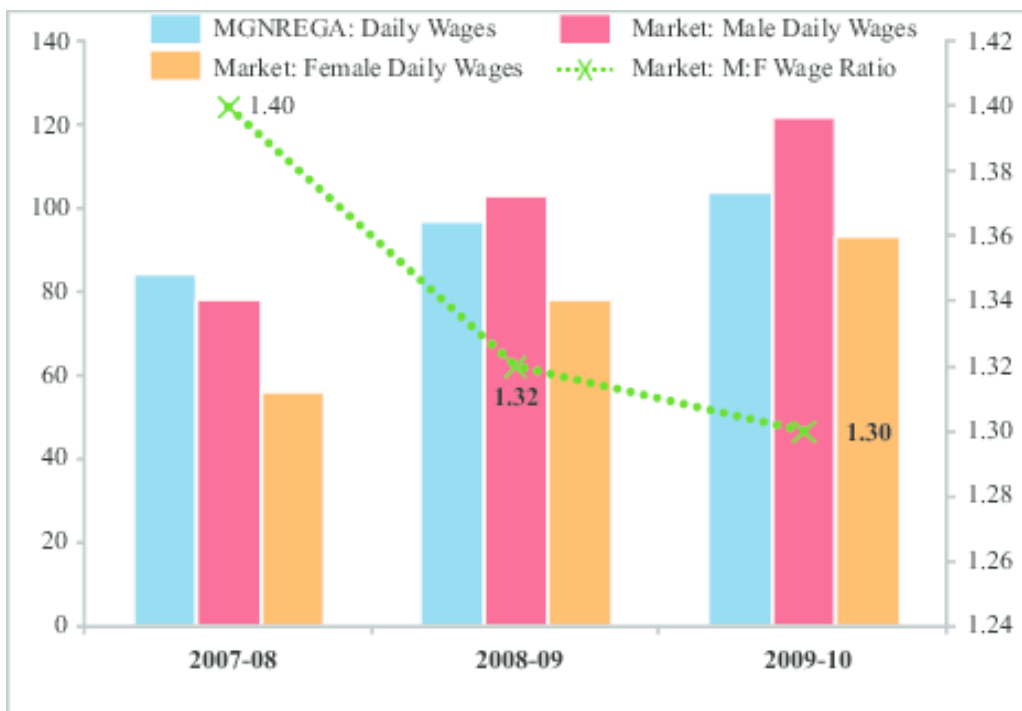
³ Ibid., Chapter 4, p. 37.

⁴ Nikhil Dey and Aruna Roy, "Employment Guarantee and Urban Distress Migration," EPW, Vol. 43, No. 6 (2008), pp. 18–20.

but also ensure long-term environmental benefits.

3.1.1 Legal framework of MGNREGA

The Act requires that each rural household whose working members are ready to undertake unskilled manual work shall be guaranteed a minimum of 100 days of wage employment in a financial year. What distinguishes MGNREGA is its legal compulsoriness the state is bound by law to offer employment within 15 days of a request for work, and if not, an unemployment allowance has to be provided to the applicant. The Act stipulates detailed norms for minimum wage payment, gender equality (with a third of the beneficiaries being required to be women), and furnishing of facilities at worksites like drinking water, first aid, and crèches. In addition, it requires the active participation of Gram Panchayats in planning, sanctioning, and implementing works, thereby incorporating ideals of decentralized administration and local self-reliance. The Act also includes robust measures of transparency and accountability, including compulsory social audits, upkeep of job cards, and a grievance redressal system to prevent corruption and irregularities. Supported by elaborate operational guidelines laid down by the Ministry of Rural Development, the legal architecture of MGNREGA ensures that the program remains not only employment-focused but also rights-based, participatory, and development-oriented.



Diag. 1- Impact of MGNREGA implementation on male and female wages in the market



Diag. 2- Performance of MGNREGA over the years

3.2 Implementation Mechanism of MNREGA 2005

Its implementation mechanism is critical to its success and is designed as a bottom-up, demand-driven, rights-based program.¹ The implementation structure encompasses multiple levels of governance Central, State, District, Block, and Gram Panchayat each with specific responsibilities and accountability mechanisms. Below is a detailed explanation of the MNREGA implementation mechanism:

1. Central Government's Role

At the top of the implementation chain is the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD), Government of India, which is the nodal agency. Overall policy-making, release of funds, issuing operational guidelines, monitoring implementation, and ensuring transparency and accountability measures are to be done by the Central Government. The Act requires the Central Government to bear 100% of the cost of unskilled wage and 75% of the material cost. It also covers administrative costs and assists in capacity-building activities.²

The Ministry creates a Management Information System (MIS) called the NREGA Soft, which makes data accessible to the public. It extends technical and financial assistance to States for implementation and conducts regular social audits and third-party reviews. The Central Employment Guarantee Council (CEGC) is also established under the Act to counsel the central government and assess the scheme's implementation.³

2. State Government's Role

The State Governments have an important function of localizing the program in terms of regional requirements. They place state-specific rules within the parameter of the Central Guidelines. They also have the mandate of establishing a State Employment Guarantee Council (SEGC), which provides advice on the execution and oversees the program at the state level. States are also obligated to make timely and sufficient releases of finances to districts and ensure appointment and training of personnel. The State Government contributes 25% of

¹ MINISTRY OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT, MAHATMA GANDHI NREGA: ANNUAL REPORT 2020–21, at 5 (2021),

² Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, MGNREGA Operational Guidelines 2013, Chapter 1: Roles and Responsibilities of the Central Government.

³ *Ibid.*, Chapter 1: Roles and Responsibilities of the Central Government.

the cost of materials and a portion of the administrative costs. It also nominates a State Rural Employment Guarantee Commissioner or an officer with similar powers who coordinates and monitors implementation at the state level. The State is also responsible for formulating annual plans based on inputs received from the district and block levels, ensuring that the decentralized planning process is adopted.¹

3. District-Level Implementation

At the district level, the District Program Coordinator (DPC) usually the District Collector or CEO of the Zila Parishad is primarily responsible for implementation. The DPC oversees the preparation of the District Labor Budget, sanction of block-level plans, and integration of these into a consolidated district plan. The official also oversees timely flow of funds, tracks progress, organizes training and capacity-building programs, and convergence with other schemes of development. The Zila Parishad has a significant function to oversee the implementation and also gets involved in the planning and monitoring process. The District Program Coordinator makes sure that records and reports are kept in sync with the MIS, and ensures grievance redressal mechanisms function properly.²

4. Block-Level Implementation

At the block level, the Program Officer (PO), typically a Block Development Officer (BDO), coordinates the implementation of MNREGA. The PO ensures that the demand for employment from Gram Panchayats is aggregated, authenticated, and met. The PO is also responsible for assigning work to Panchayats, tracking the progress of ongoing works, and authenticating job cards and muster rolls. The Program Officer also organizes training for Panchayat-level officials and holds a roster of technical personnel, including Junior Engineers and Worksite Supervisors, to plan and implement works. The PO is responsible for ensuring social audits are carried out and the Gram Sabha is involved in the process of approving the list of projects.³

¹ Ibid., Chapter 2: Roles and Responsibilities of the State Government.

² Ibid., Chapter 3: Roles and Responsibilities of the District Program Coordinator and Zila Parishad.

³ Ibid., Chapter 4: Roles and Responsibilities of the Program Officer.

5. Gram Panchayat and Village-Level Execution

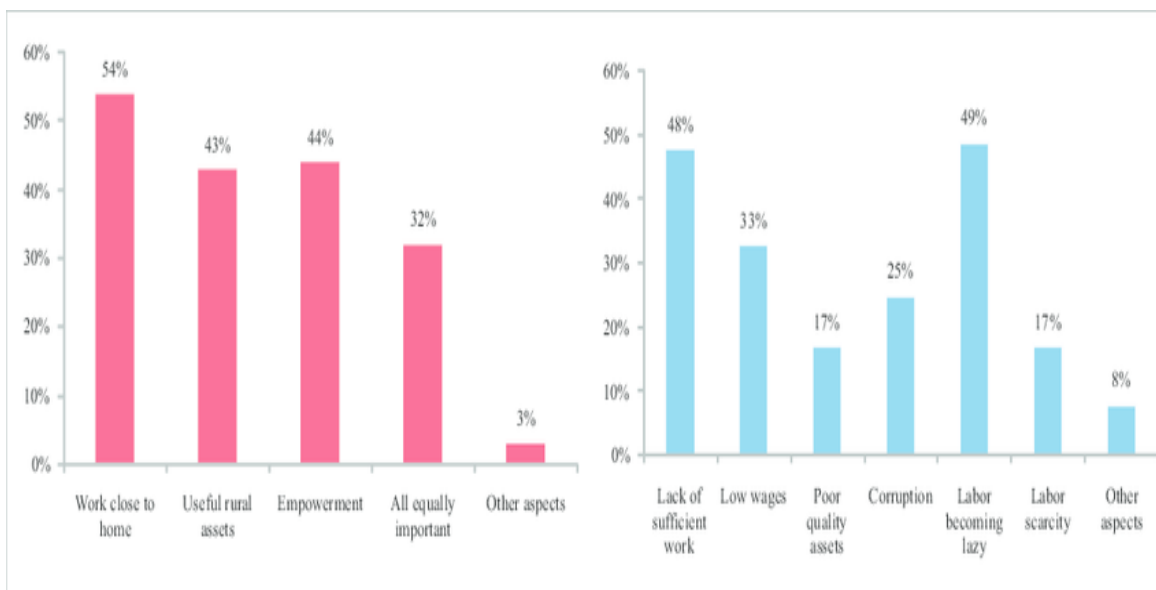
The Gram Panchayat is the most important level of MNREGA implementation, as it is the major implementing agency. The Gram Sabha, the gathering of adult villagers, has a key role in planning and social auditing. It sanctions the list of allowed works according to local needs and priorities. The Gram Panchayat provides Job Cards to eligible households and ensures that work is made available within 15 days of being demanded. The Gram Panchayat also keeps records such as muster rolls, work registers, and payment of wages. The Panchayat makes payments within 15 days after the work is completed, in the absence of which the worker becomes eligible for compensation. Every Gram Panchayat develops a shelf of projects that are manpower-intensive and include water conservation, land development, afforestation, and rural infrastructure. Technical inputs are given by line departments or trained staff. The Panchayat also undertakes social audits twice a year, where citizens examine expenditures and implementation of projects.¹

6. Use of Technology and Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT)

In the recent past, MNREGA has adopted technology-led changes in order to enhance efficiency, transparency, and accountability. One of the highlights is the use of Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT), in which the wages are credited directly into the workers' bank or post office accounts. This reduces corruption and delay in disbursement of wages. Biometric Aadhaar authentication is also used in most states for identification purposes. The MIS platform, NREGA Soft, facilitates real-time tracking of projects, monitoring of fund flows, and analysis of demand-supply gaps. Assets have also been geo-tagged and GIS-based planning tools employed. Technology has been integrated at all levels, from the issuing of job cards to disbursement of wages, which has improved accountability significantly.²

¹ Ibid., Chapter 5: Roles and Responsibilities of the Gram Panchayat.

² Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, MGNREGA Operational Guidelines 2013, Chapter 10: Use of Information Technology in MGNREGA.



Diag. 3- (a) Most beneficial and (b) Worst aspects of MGNREGA implementation

3.3 Socio-Economic Impact of MGNREGA

The socio-economic impact of MGNREGA has been profound, particularly in reducing poverty, promoting rural development, and strengthening social justice. The philosophical foundation of MGNREGA is deeply rooted in the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP) enshrined in Part IV of the Indian Constitution, which lays down the principles fundamental to the governance of the country and aims to establish a welfare state.¹

One of the core socio-economic impacts of MGNREGA is poverty alleviation. By ensuring a guaranteed source of income, the Act has substantially reduced rural poverty and provided economic security to millions.² This impact is in line with Article 39(a) of the DPSP, which directs the State to ensure that citizens, men and women equally, have the right to an adequate means of livelihood.³ MGNREGA operationalizes this directive by legally entitling rural households to employment opportunities, thereby empowering the marginalized and vulnerable sections of society. In addition, the wages earned under MGNREGA have helped improve food security, education, health outcomes, and asset creation for rural families, leading to a gradual transformation of the rural

¹ Constitution of India, Part IV, Arts. 38–51.

² Ministry of Rural Development, MGNREGA Sameeksha 2006–2012 (Govt. of India, 2012).

³ Constitution of India, Art. 39(a).

socio-economic landscape. Furthermore, MGNREGA has been instrumental in promoting social justice and reducing inequalities, resonating with Article 38 of the DPSP, which mandates the State to secure a social order for the promotion of the welfare of the people and to minimize inequalities in income, status, and opportunities. By giving preference to Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and women in employment generation, MGNREGA has helped in the social upliftment of historically disadvantaged communities. The Act also mandates that one-third of the beneficiaries must be women, thus significantly contributing to gender empowerment. This emphasis on inclusivity directly corresponds to Article 46 of the DPSP, which commands the State to promote the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, particularly SCs and STs, and protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation.¹

The program has also contributed to rural infrastructure development, which is critical for long-term economic growth and poverty reduction. Works undertaken under MGNREGA, such as the construction of roads, water conservation projects, irrigation facilities, and afforestation efforts, have created durable assets that benefit entire communities. This ties closely to Article 43, which speaks about promoting cottage industries and rural development. By enhancing rural productivity and infrastructure, MGNREGA indirectly facilitates self-employment opportunities and strengthens the rural economy. Moreover, the emphasis on sustainable development through activities like water conservation and land development aligns with the broader constitutional vision of environmental protection expressed in Article 48A, which directs the State to protect and improve the environment.²

MGNREGA also plays a crucial role in ensuring the right to work, an aspiration recognized by Article 41 of the DPSP. Although the right to work is not enforceable as a fundamental right, MGNREGA provides a legal guarantee of employment, thereby taking a major step toward fulfilling this constitutional promise. It recognizes the dignity of labor and empowers individuals to demand their rightful share in the economy. The Act's emphasis on transparency,

¹ *Constitution of India, Art. 46.*

² *Constitution of India, Art. 48A.*

accountability (through social audits), and participatory governance strengthens democratic principles at the grassroots level, contributing to better governance and responsive administration.¹

Another significant socio-economic impact of MGNREGA is counter-cyclical employment. In times of economic distress or agricultural downturns, MGNREGA serves as a safety net, providing employment when alternative opportunities are scarce. This reduces distress migration from rural to urban areas and maintains economic stability in rural regions. The creation of employment in rural areas during lean agricultural seasons not only supports household incomes but also sustains rural demand for goods and services, thus promoting overall economic resilience.²

3.4 Employment Generation and Livelihood Security under MGNREGA

It has been described as one of the world's largest and most ambitious social security and public works initiatives, demonstrating the Indian state's resolve towards inclusive growth, poverty alleviation, and social justice. MGNREGA promises a minimum of 100 days of wage employment in a fiscal year to each rural household willing to undertake unskilled manual labor. The Act is demand-based, meaning that the work right is ensured by law and has to be provided within 15 days from the date of application. The applicant is also entitled to receive an unemployment allowance if the government does not furnish work. This characteristic changes the character of public employment from a welfare intervention to a legal right, giving the rural poor the ability to assert their rights. Employment generation, MGNREGA has played a vital role in reducing rural unemployment. It offers a safety net during agricultural lean seasons and times of distress like droughts, floods, or economic crises.³ By directly creating wage-based employment opportunities, the Act not only supports families financially but also helps to slow down the migration of rural labor to urban centers. The consistent availability of work close to home enables people to stay in their villages and maintain their social and cultural ties.

¹ The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005, Chapter X (Social Audit).

² International Labor Organization, Public Employment Programs and Social Protection in India (ILO Working Paper, 2017).

³ Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, Annual Report 2022–23.

MGNREGA also promotes livelihood security by creating durable assets that support long-term rural development. These include water conservation structures, irrigation canals, roads, ponds, and soil improvement works. Such infrastructure boosts agricultural productivity, improves access to markets, and strengthens community resilience against climate-related shocks. Consequently, the scheme contributes not only to short-term income generation but also to sustainable livelihood enhancement over time.¹

The Act focuses on inclusive involvement, particularly of women, SCs, STs, and other marginalized sections. Women have always represented more than 50% of total person-days earned under the scheme, thereby empowering them economically and socially. The payment of equal wages to men and women also enhances gender equality. MGNREGA therefore serves to be an instrument of social transformation, promoting participatory democracy via institutions such as Gram Sabha's, which also have a fundamental role in planning and monitoring work.² Even with its success, MGNREGA has encountered challenges in implementation in the form of delayed payment of wages, corruption, insufficient planning, and differential performance across states. However, through effective reforms and technological interventions like Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT), Aadhaar linkage, and digital job cards, most of these problems are being solved.

¹ Sharma, A. "MGNREGA and Sustainable Livelihoods: A Study in Rural India." *Indian Journal of Labor Economics*, vol. 58, no. 4, 2015.

² MGNREGA Operational Guidelines, Government of India, 2013 Edition.

CHAPTER-IV

FOOD SECURITY AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION

Food security and poverty alleviation are closely related problems that have far-reaching consequences for human rights, development, and social stability. In a world where farm productivity has increased exponentially, it is ironic that millions of people continue to experience hunger and malnutrition. The legal and policy environments created at both national and international levels are important in addressing these problems. Providing food security is not just about efficiency in agriculture; it is a legal and ethical duty based on the right to life, dignity, and decent standard of living, as enshrined in international documents like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and domestic constitutions.¹

Effective poverty reduction policies should include measures that ensure regular access to adequate, safe, and nutritious food. Law is used by governments as a means of creating facilitating environments through land reforms, social welfare schemes, price regulation, and food distribution systems. Additionally, judicial activism and public interest litigation have increasingly influenced the realization of food rights, particularly in nations dealing with widespread poverty.²

This study attempts to examine the legal underpinnings of food security, assess policies aimed at reducing hunger and poverty, and analyze their enforcement from a rights-based approach. Through a critical examination of legislative structures, government initiatives, and judicial statements, this research intends to identify the strengths, lacunae, and directions needed for the achievement of sustainable food security and poverty reduction.³

¹ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 25; Indian Constitution, Article 21; South African Constitution, Section 27.

² People's Union for Civil Liberties v. Union of India, (2001) Writ Petition (Civil) No. 196 of 2001 (Right to Food Case).

³ International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), Global Hunger Index 2023, IFPRI, Washington, D.C.

4.1 Evolution of Food Security Policies in India

The evolution of food security policies in India has been deeply intertwined with the country's socio-economic development and political priorities. At the time of independence in 1947, India faced a massive food crisis due to a combination of colonial extraction, partition-induced disruption, and natural calamities. The early years saw an acute dependence on food imports, especially under the PL-480 program from the United States. Realizing the vulnerability that came with dependence on external sources for basic sustenance, the Indian government adopted a strategy aimed at achieving self-sufficiency in food production.¹ This approach was epitomized by the launch of the Green Revolution in the 1960s, which brought about a technological transformation in agriculture through the introduction of high-yielding variety (HYV) seeds, chemical fertilizers, and improved irrigation facilities. While the Green Revolution succeeded in dramatically increasing food grain production, particularly wheat and rice in states like Punjab, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh, it also led to regional disparities and environmental concerns over time. Alongside boosting production, the government established institutions such as the *Food Corporation of India (1965)* to procure, store, and distribute food grains systematically, and the Agricultural Prices Commission (later the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices) to ensure remunerative prices to farmers.²

Over time, food security policy in India expanded from mere availability of food grains to issues of accessibility and affordability for the poor. The introduction of the Public Distribution System (PDS) became a key element of this strategy. Originally intended to distribute food grains across urban areas, the PDS was later revamped in the 1970s to cover rural areas as well. However, by the 1990s, criticism grew over the PDS being inefficient, leakage-prone, and failing to target the genuinely needy.³ This criticism led to the development of the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) in 1997, which aimed to identify Below Poverty Line (BPL) families and provide them with subsidized food grains.

¹ D. Gale Johnson, "Agricultural Policy and Indian Economic Development," *The American Economic Review*, Vol. 58, No. 2 (1968): 571–583.

² *People's Union for Civil Liberties v. Union of India & Others*, Writ Petition (Civil) No. 196 of 2001, Supreme Court of India.

³ *The National Food Security Act, 2013*, No. 20, Acts of Parliament, 2013 (India).

Despite this, issues of exclusion errors, inclusion errors, and continued leakages persisted. At the same time, India also witnessed significant judicial activism around the right to food. The landmark *People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) vs. Union of India case (2001)* led to a series of Supreme Court orders transforming food security into a justiciable right, thereby forcing the government to strengthen schemes like mid-day meals, Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), and maternity entitlements.¹

The most significant legislative development came with the enactment of the *National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013*. The NFSA sought to provide legal entitlement to subsidized food grains to approximately two-thirds of the population. It legally mandated the existing food security programs, such as the PDS, Mid-Day Meal Scheme, and ICDS, and introduced new entitlements, such as nutritional support for pregnant women and lactating mothers. The Act also emphasized transparency, accountability, and grievance redressal mechanisms to ensure better implementation. However, the implementation of the NFSA has faced its own challenges, including delays in the identification of beneficiaries, problems with Aadhaar-based biometric authentication, and financial and administrative burdens on state governments. More recently, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of robust food security mechanisms was starkly highlighted. The government launched the *Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY)*, under which additional free food grains were distributed to NFSA beneficiaries, showcasing an adaptive and responsive approach to emerging crises.²

Today, food security policies in India are increasingly recognizing the need for a holistic approach that includes nutrition security, agricultural sustainability, and resilience to climate change. Initiatives like the POSHAN Abhiyaan (National Nutrition Mission) aim to address malnutrition, while programs promoting millets and diversified diets seek to move beyond calorie sufficiency toward broader nutritional goals. Thus, from emergency responses and production enhancement to legal entitlements and nutritional well-

¹ R. S. Deshpande and Saroj Arora, "Agricultural Policy in India: A Policy Matrix," *Indian Journal of Agricultural Economics*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (1996): 1–15.

² Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, Government of India, "Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY)," Press Information Bureau Release, March 2020.

being, India's food security policy has evolved into a multi-dimensional framework that continues to adapt to changing challenges and aspirations.

4.2 National Food Security Act, 2013 - Provisions and Impact

The National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013 is a landmark legislation in India aimed at ensuring food security for all citizens, particularly the marginalized and vulnerable sections of society. It seeks to provide access to sufficient food at affordable prices, which is a key component in the fight against poverty and hunger. The Act is a significant step toward realizing the constitutional mandate of securing adequate nutrition for all citizens, especially the disadvantaged groups.¹

4.2.1 Provisions of the National Food Security Act, 2013:

1. Coverage of Beneficiaries: The NFSA provides food security to up to 75% of the rural population and 50% of the urban population, effectively covering around 67% of India's total population.² It categorizes households into two main categories:
 - Priority Households: These households are eligible to receive subsidized food grains at highly reduced prices.
 - Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) Households: This category includes the poorest of the poor, who are entitled to receive an even higher level of food assistance.³
2. Food Grains Entitlement: Under the NFSA, individuals in the priority households are entitled to receive food grains at subsidized rates:
 - 5 kg per person per month of food grains (rice, wheat, and coarse grains).⁴
 - The prices are set at ₹3 per kg for rice, ₹2 per kg for wheat, and ₹1 per kg for coarse grains.⁵ This provision ensures that individuals, particularly those from low-income families, can access essential food items at a price that is far lower than the market rate.
3. Nutritional Support: The Act includes provisions for the nutritional support of vulnerable groups such as pregnant women, lactating mothers, and children.

¹ Constitution of India, Article 47.

² Section 10, National Food Security Act, 2013.

³ Ministry of Food and Public Distribution, Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY), Government of India.

⁴ Section 3(1), NFSA.

⁵ Schedule I, NFSA.

These groups are entitled to:

- Take-home rations or hot cooked meals through Anganwadi services and maternity benefits.
 - A special focus is placed on the nutritional needs of children below the age of six, who are entitled to free meals at schools under the mid-day meal scheme.¹
4. Grievance Redressal Mechanisms: The NFSA includes provisions for the establishment of grievance redressal mechanisms at both the district and state levels. This enables beneficiaries to file complaints regarding issues like exclusion from the ration list, non-receipt of food grains, or discrepancies in food distribution. The redressal process is intended to ensure that the system remains accountable and transparent.
 5. Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT): In some cases, the government has implemented the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) system for food grains, allowing cash transfers to beneficiaries, which they can use to purchase food from the open market.² This is aimed at reducing inefficiencies and corruption in the physical distribution system.

4.2.2 Impact of the National Food Security Act, 2013 on Poverty Reduction

- a. Improved Access to Food: The NFSA has had a substantial impact in improving access to food for the economically disadvantaged sections of society. By providing subsidized food grains, the Act directly addresses one of the main issues faced by poor households: food insecurity. This has not only reduced hunger but also ensured that individuals have better access to a nutritious and balanced diet, which is essential for improving overall health and productivity.³
- b. Reduction in Malnutrition: Malnutrition is a persistent problem, particularly among children and women. The NFSA addresses this by ensuring that children under six years of age and pregnant and lactating women receive adequate nutrition. The provision of free or subsidized meals through various schemes like Mid-Day Meals, Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), and Take-Home Rations has helped improve the nutritional status of millions

¹ Ministry of Education, Mid-Day Meal Scheme.

² NITI Aayog Report on Direct Benefit Transfer in Food Subsidy (2020).

³ UNDP India, Impact Assessment of the NFSA.

of people.

- c. **Economic Stability for Low-Income Families:** By ensuring that low-income families receive food at subsidized rates, the NFSA reduces their overall expenditure on food. This results in increased disposable income, which can be spent on other essential needs such as education, healthcare, and housing. This economic relief can indirectly contribute to breaking the poverty cycle, as families are better able to invest in their future well-being.¹
- d. **Promotion of Inclusivity:** One of the key impacts of the NFSA is its emphasis on social inclusivity. It ensures that the most vulnerable sections of society, including Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and other marginalized groups, receive food assistance. This has helped integrate these communities into the mainstream and reduced their socio-economic isolation.
- e. **Institutional Reforms in Food Distribution:** The NFSA has spurred reforms in India's food distribution system. For example, the implementation of the biometric-based Public Distribution System (PDS) aims to reduce leakage and ensure that food grains reach the intended beneficiaries. Furthermore, with the DBT system being tested in some areas, the Act has facilitated experimentation with more modern, efficient ways of delivering food security benefits.²
- f. **Addressing Poverty-Related Vulnerabilities:** Poverty is not just about income; it is also about access to basic necessities like food. The NFSA helps address the vulnerability caused by poverty by ensuring that individuals and families do not have to make difficult trade-offs between food and other essentials like education or healthcare. This long-term reduction in food insecurity helps build human capital and supports poverty alleviation efforts by enabling children to attend school and adults to maintain their health and work productivity.³

4.2.3 Challenges and Areas for Improvement

- **Leakages and Corruption:** In some areas, food grains are diverted or sold in the open market, undermining the goals of the Act. While there have been improvements in transparency and monitoring, the system still faces issues

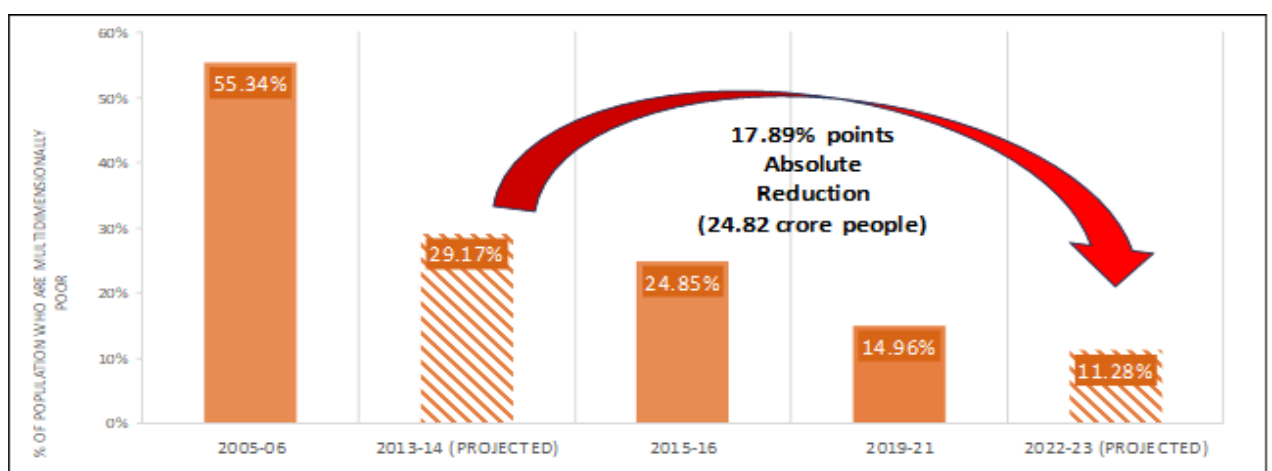
¹ Economic Survey of India (2017-18), Chapter on Welfare Schemes.

² Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) Report on PDS Reforms (2021).

³ Planning Commission (now NITI Aayog), Poverty and Human Development Indicators.

related to corruption.¹

- **Inadequate Coverage:** While the Act aims to cover two-thirds of the population, millions of people still remain excluded, particularly those in urban slums, who may not fall under the category of priority households. The Act does not fully address the needs of the urban poor.
- **Quality of Food:** There are concerns about the quality of food grains distributed through the PDS. There have been reports of the food being of substandard quality, which affects the nutritional benefits of the program.²



Diag. 4- 2015-16 to 2019-21 (10.66% annual rate of decline) compared to period 2005-06 to 2015-16 (7.69% annual rate of decline). All 12 indicators of MPI have recorded significant improvement during the entire study period. To assess the poverty levels in the year 2013-14 against the current scenario (i.e. for the year 2022-23),

4.3 Analysis of Food Distribution Systems (PDS, Mid-Day Meal, etc.)

In India, food security and poverty alleviation have long been central goals for the government. The country's food distribution systems, such as the Public Distribution System (PDS) and the Mid-Day Meal Scheme, play a vital role in reducing poverty and ensuring nutritional support to vulnerable populations.³ These programs are designed to address hunger, malnutrition, and the socio-economic challenges faced by the marginalized sections of society, particularly in rural areas and low-income urban.

¹ CAG Report on Leakage in PDS (2020).

² Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), PDS Food Quality Assessments.

³ Government of India, Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, Annual Report 2022-23.

4.3.1 Public Distribution System (PDS) and its Role in Poverty Reduction

The Public Distribution System (PDS) is one of the most significant food security mechanisms in India. It aims to provide essential food items, such as rice, wheat, and sugar, at subsidized rates to low-income households. The system operates through a network of fair price shops (FPS) that distribute food grains to eligible families. PDS plays a crucial role in poverty reduction by improving access to food for economically disadvantaged groups, ensuring that basic nutrition remains affordable even when market prices are high.¹

Over the years, PDS has expanded significantly, with the introduction of schemes like the National Food Security Act (NFSA) in 2013, which guarantees food entitlements to a larger section of the population.² The Act covers up to 75% of the rural population and 50% of the urban population, providing them with rice, wheat, and coarse grains at highly subsidized prices. This expansion of food access directly impacts poverty reduction, as it helps alleviate the financial burden of purchasing food, especially in economically weaker households. However, challenges such as leakage, corruption, and inefficiencies in distribution networks have undermined the full potential of PDS. Ensuring that the right people receive the benefits is a continuing struggle. Efforts to digitize PDS and implement direct benefit transfers (DBTs) have been introduced to curb these issues, but they still face implementation challenges.³ Despite these hurdles, PDS remains a critical component of the government's strategy to combat poverty and hunger.

4.3.2 Mid-Day Meal Scheme and its Contribution to Poverty Alleviation

The Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) is another food security initiative, particularly aimed at addressing hunger and promoting education. Launched in 1995, the scheme provides free lunches to children in government and government-aided schools across India. The primary objective of the scheme is not just to reduce malnutrition but also to increase school attendance and retention, especially among children from economically disadvantaged families.

¹ Planning Commission of India, Performance Evaluation of Targeted Public Distribution System, 2005.

² National Food Security Act, 2013, Government of India.

³ NITI Aayog, Evaluation of PDS Reforms and DBT Implementation, 2021.

The scheme has proven to be an effective tool for poverty reduction, as it targets children in low-income households. By providing nutritious meals during the school day, it alleviates the financial pressure on families, especially those who may struggle to provide sufficient food at home.¹ Additionally, the nutritional benefits of the meals contribute to the cognitive development and physical health of children, thereby addressing the vicious cycle of poverty and malnutrition that often prevents upward mobility. In terms of broader societal impacts, the Mid-Day Meal Scheme has also had positive effects on gender equity, as it encourages the education of girls, who are often at a disadvantage when it comes to food security and education. Many rural and urban poor families are more likely to send their children to school when they are assured of a free meal, thus improving overall literacy rates and providing children with the foundation for better employment opportunities in the future.²

4.4 Effectiveness of Food Security in Addressing Hunger and Malnutrition

Food security has proven to be one of the most effective strategies for addressing hunger and malnutrition, as it tackles the problem at its root: consistent and equitable access to sufficient, nutritious food. Hunger and malnutrition are often seen as the most visible faces of poverty, and without secure access to food, individuals cannot sustain a healthy life, nor can societies progress. The four pillars of food security—availability, access, utilization, and stability—work together to create a framework that not only ensures people do not suffer from hunger but also that they receive the quality of nutrition necessary to thrive. When governments and institutions prioritize food security, they lay the groundwork for reducing stunting, wasting, underweight prevalence among children, and chronic health problems caused by micronutrient deficiencies such as anemia, vitamin A deficiency, and iodine deficiency disorders. Food security initiatives, such as improved agricultural productivity, fortified food distribution, and nutritional supplementation programs, directly contribute to lowering rates of undernutrition and have demonstrated significant success in many developing countries.³

¹ UNICEF India, Nutrition and School Meals Report, 2019.

² PROBE Report, Public Report on Basic Education in India, 1999.

³ World Bank, Repositioning Nutrition as Central to Development, 2006.

However, the effectiveness of food security goes beyond just filling stomachs it is also about the quality of food that people consume. Malnutrition is no longer only about lack of calories; it is also about lack of essential nutrients. In many low-income populations, diets are often dominated by cheap, energy-dense but nutrient-poor foods. Here, food security programs that emphasize diet diversity and the availability of fruits, vegetables, legumes, dairy, and lean meats become crucial.¹ Programs such as India's *Midday Meal Scheme* or *the Integrated Child Development Services* (ICDS) are practical examples of how food security interventions can improve nutritional outcomes, especially among vulnerable groups like children and pregnant women. These programs not only provide meals but often incorporate health education and sanitation practices that enhance the body's ability to utilize food properly. Thus, the concept of food security evolves from merely providing food to enabling better health and human development outcomes, demonstrating its broad and deep effectiveness in combating malnutrition.²

Moreover, the linkage between food security and the socio-economic determinants of malnutrition cannot be ignored. Food insecurity is both a cause and a consequence of poverty. By ensuring stable food access, communities experience improvements in health, educational outcomes, and economic productivity. A well-nourished child is more likely to attend school regularly, concentrate in class, and perform better academically, setting them up for greater opportunities in adulthood. Adults who are food secure are healthier, miss fewer days of work, and are more capable of contributing productively to their economies.³ In this way, food security acts as a catalyst for breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty. Studies have shown that countries that have invested in comprehensive food security policies, such as Brazil's "Zero Hunger" program, have seen significant reductions in both hunger and poverty rates, alongside improvements in child health indicators. Thus, when food security is integrated

¹ HLPE, Nutrition and Food Systems, A report by the High-level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition, 2017.

² World Health Organization (WHO), Essential Nutrition Actions: Improving Maternal, Newborn, Infant and Young Child Health and Nutrition, 2013.

³ Graziano da Silva, J., The Zero Hunger Program: A New Approach to Fighting Hunger in Brazil, FAO, 2010.

into broader social protection frameworks, its effectiveness in addressing malnutrition is magnified, fostering resilient and thriving societies.¹

Despite its success, the effectiveness of food security interventions can be limited by systemic challenges such as unequal distribution of food, conflicts, climate change, and economic instability. Food production alone does not guarantee food security if vulnerable populations are unable to access or afford nutritious food. For example, in many parts of Africa and South Asia, even when food availability increases, the poorest households may still suffer from malnutrition due to economic barriers, discrimination, or lack of transportation infrastructure. Climate-related shocks like droughts, floods, and pests further threaten food systems, highlighting the importance of building resilience through sustainable agriculture, food reserves, and insurance mechanisms. Therefore, to maintain and enhance the effectiveness of food security in addressing hunger and malnutrition, policies must adopt a multi-sectoral approach, addressing agricultural development, market access, education, healthcare, social safety nets, and environmental sustainability simultaneously.²

Food security remains one of the most effective mechanisms for addressing hunger and malnutrition across the globe. It promotes not only survival but also human flourishing by ensuring that food is sufficient, safe, nutritious, and accessible to all.³ Successful food security initiatives result in improved health outcomes, enhanced educational achievements, reduced healthcare costs, and stronger economies. Yet, its full potential can only be realized when food security efforts are comprehensive, inclusive, and resilient to emerging global challenges. Governments, civil society, international organizations, and communities must work in tandem to strengthen food security frameworks, recognizing that ending hunger and malnutrition is fundamental to achieving broader goals of human rights, social justice, and sustainable development.⁴

¹ United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Human Development Report 2021/22.

² FAO, Transforming Food and Agriculture to Achieve the SDGs, 2018.

³ HLPE, Food Security and Nutrition: Building a Global Narrative Towards 2030, 2020.

⁴ United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals Report, 2022.

4.5 Challenges in Implementation of food security act

The National Food Security Act, 2013 (NFSA) in India, while a landmark measure towards ensuring food and nutritional security, is marred by myriad challenges. These range across administrative, infrastructural, fiscal, and socio-political aspects, impinging on the net efficiency and efficacy of the Act.

a. Identification and Targeting of Beneficiaries:

One of the primary challenges to the implementation of the Food Security Act is the proper identification of eligible beneficiaries. The Act seeks to cover 75% of the rural population and 50% of the urban population, but identifying who fits into these broad categories is a difficult task. In most of the states, the beneficiary lists are stale, having been drawn from the Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) statistics or previous Below Poverty Line (BPL) surveys.¹ This results in inclusion and exclusion errors where ineligible individuals avail themselves of the benefits of the Act, while numerous deserving poor are excluded. The absence of systematic updating of databases, in conjunction with weak verification procedures, reduces the targeting effectiveness and contributes to generalized citizen complaints. Furthermore, inconsistencies at the state level with respect to implementation criteria exacerbate these differences and diminish the universality which the Act aims to realize.²

b. Leakages in the Public Distribution System (PDS):

The Public Distribution System, the keystone of NFSA implementation, remains plagued by systemic inefficiencies and corruption. Efforts at digitization and PDS modernization through efforts like Aadhaar-based authentication and electronic point-of-sale (ePOS) machines have not prevented diversion of food grains, ghost beneficiaries, and spurious ration cards.³ Much of the subsidized food grains do not find their way to the target groups but are diverted and sold in the open market by corrupt middlemen. States lacking effective monitoring and accountability mechanisms experience higher leakage issues. In addition, infrastructural shortcomings like a lack of godowns, substandard storage facilities, and inadequate transport lead to spoilage, theft, and

¹ Government of India, Ministry of Rural Development, SECC Report, 2011.

² Jean Drèze, "Universalising Food Security," The Hindu, 2014.

³ Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India, Performance Audit of TPDS, 2016.

delays.¹ All of these undermine the effectiveness and transparency of food supply under the Act.

c. Fiscal Burden and Sustainability Concerns:

Enacting the Food Security Act involves a significant financial burden on the Central and State Governments. Procurement, storage, and off-loading of food grains at highly subsidized prices involve heavy expenditure. The Central Government incurs the cost of procurement from farmers at MSP, transport, and maintenance of the central pool, whereas States spend money on the last-mile delivery. During periods of economic recession or budgetary deficit, it is difficult to sustain this mass scale subsidy. Moreover, long-term viability of such a huge welfare scheme can be questioned with escalating food prices, procurement, and storage costs. The rising fiscal expenditure can also be seen as pushing out investment elsewhere in other crucial sectors like health, education, and infrastructure, which hampers even-level development.²

d. Agricultural Procurement and Regional Disparities:

The Act's overdependence on the current procurement system has caused regional imbalances and distortions in farm production. Procurement activities are all concentrated in select states such as Punjab, Haryana, and Andhra Pradesh, where relative infrastructure is better. This builds an uneven incentive structure, with farmers in these states producing too much wheat and rice, and sometimes at the expense of healthier or more sustainable crops. These and other states that have large populations of food insecure individuals do not have proper procurement infrastructure and are not in a position to feed into or derive an equitable share from the pool of central food grains. The regional imbalance hits the local producer as well and restricts geographical spread and variability of food in the Act.

e. Nutritional Adequacy and Diet Diversity:

Though the NFSA provides calorie security by ensuring availability of grains such as wheat and rice at subsidized prices, it is deficient in meeting comprehensive nutritional requirements. The Act fails to adequately

¹ Planning Commission of India, Evaluation Study on Targeted PDS, 2011.

² Subramanian, Arvind, "Food Subsidy and Fiscal Deficit," Indian Express, 2015.

include pulses, edible oils, fruits, vegetables, or animal protein that form integral parts of a balanced diet. This cereal-focused strategy risks inducing disguised hunger or micronutrient deficiencies among targeted groups such as children, women, and the elderly. While the Act provides for nutritional support to pregnant women and children under programs such as the *Mid-Day Meal Scheme and Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)*, the quality and variety of food served tend to be low because of underfunding, inadequate training, and weak monitoring.¹

f. Administrative and Capacity Constraints:

Effective implementation of the Food Security Act needs a well-organized administrative machinery and trained staff at all levels from procurement officers to fair price shop dealers. But most states have very severe capacity issues. The bureaucracy is usually overworked, under-equipped, and poorly trained to deal with the intricacies of NFSA implementation. In most instances, grievance redressal mechanisms and vigilance committees vital accountability tools are either non-functional or nonexistent. Delays in State Food Commission and Designated Officer appointments have also been noted, which discourages monitoring and supervision.² The necessary digital infrastructure for real-time monitoring and data handling remains weak in rural and remote areas, making effective implementation even more challenging.³

¹ Accountability Initiative, Public Expenditure on ICDS and MDM, 2021.

² Ministry of Consumer Affairs, State Food Commissions—Status Report, 2020.

³ CAG Report, ICT Use in NFSA Monitoring, 2022.

CHAPTER-V
ROLE OF STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN POVERTY
ALLEVIATION

Poverty continues to be one of the most acute socio-economic problems in India, endangering not just the dignity of the people but also negating the constitutional guarantee of justice, equality, and fraternity.¹ In tackling this problem, the DPSPs incorporated in Part IV of the Indian Constitution act as a moral and constitutional guide that directs the State to fulfill its obligation to create a welfare society. While non-justiciable, the DPSPs set down the fundamental aims for the regulation of the country, such as the elimination of poverty, decreasing inequality, and ensuring proper means of livelihood for all citizens.² These principles easily demonstrate the objective of the architects of the Constitution to employ administration as a constructive instrument for social justice. The successful implementation of these principles, especially in the field of poverty reduction, depends heavily on the administration and cohesiveness of the State governments and local self-governing institutions i.e. the *Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and Urban Local Bodies (ULBs)*. Although it is the Union Government that plans general policy guidelines and provides finance, it is the State and local governments that are entrusted by and large with executing poverty reduction schemes at the grass roots level. Their local knowledge, people's interface, and constitutional obligation under the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments make them key drivers in reconciling policy implementation with the social goals conceived by the DPSPs.³

State governments have a central role in designing state-specific welfare programs, tailoring central schemes to local contexts, and facilitating inter-departmental coordination to meet the multi-dimensional character of poverty.⁴ Local governments, in contrast, serve as the implementing arms, facilitating participatory governance through Gram Sabhas, Ward Committees, and local planning mechanisms. They implement a number of poverty reduction programs

¹ Constitution of India, Preamble.

² Article 39(a) & (b), Constitution of India.

³ 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, 1992.

⁴ Ministry of Rural Development, Devolution Index Report, Government of India.

like the *Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS)*, *National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM)*, *Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY)*, and State-specific social protection programs that have a direct bearing on achieving the objectives outlined in Articles 38, 39, 41, 42, and 47 of the Constitution. Notwithstanding constitutional provisions and policy guidelines, challenges including administrative inefficiencies, corruption, constraints in resources, and lack of accountability frequently interfere with the poverty alleviation schemes getting aligned to the DPSPs.¹ Thus, an examination of how the State and local government systems actually operate in practice particularly with reference to institutional capacity, fiscal decentralization, and citizen participation is vital to analyze their efficacy in implementing the Directive Principles.

This research aims to examine the institutional function of State and local governments in India in bringing the ideals of socio-economic justice inherent in the DPSPs to reality in terms of concrete poverty reduction outcomes. It seeks to examine the interaction between constitutional requirements and on-ground governance processes, providing lessons on best practices, gaps, and suggestions for enhancing the alignment between constitutional guidelines and developmental implementation.²

5.1 Role of State Governments and Panchayati Raj Institutions

➤ Role of State Governments in Aligning Poverty Alleviation Initiatives with DPSPs

The State Governments in India are responsible for implementing the objectives prescribed under the DPSPs, particularly those aimed at the eradication of poverty, the curtailment of inequality, and fostering social justice.³ While DPSPs are non-justiciable in nature, they constitute the pre-cast ethos of India's model of welfare state as conceptualized in *Part IV (Articles 36–51)* of the Constitution.⁴ Most of the topics related to poverty alleviation agriculture, land reforms, rural development, public health, education, and employment are in the

¹ World Bank Report, *Improving Public Service Delivery in India*, 2021.

² M. Govinda Rao and Nirmala Rao, *The Indian Fiscal Federalism*, Oxford University Press, 2006.

³ D.D. Basu, *Introduction to the Constitution of India*, LexisNexis, 2020.

⁴ Constitution of India, Part IV, Articles 36–51.

State List or Concurrent List. This constitutional division of powers places State Governments as the prime implementers of welfare measures, and therefore, of poverty alleviation policies guided by the DPSPs.¹

State Governments implement a wide range of activities including making employment generation programs, giving free or subsidized health care and education, dispensing food grains under the Public Distribution System (PDS), and facilitating social security initiatives like pensions and housing for the weaker sections. For instance, Article 39 makes it obligatory for the State to provide a sufficient means of livelihood, equal remuneration for equal work, and prevention of accumulation of wealth.² To achieve this, State Governments have initiated welfare schemes such as the Mukhya Mantri Gramin Awas Yojana (Bihar), Kanyashree Prakalpa (West Bengal), and Rythu Bandhu (Telangana). These schemes specifically address the poor and marginalized sections of society, thus promoting the spirit of DPSPs through focused poverty alleviation. Additionally, the State Governments serve as implementing agencies for most centrally sponsored schemes (CSS) like the *Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)*, *Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY)*, and *National Rural Health Mission (NRHM)*. The success of these schemes largely relies on the administrative effectiveness and financial commitment of the State Governments. States also develop State Action Plans which are in compliance with national agendas, incorporating constitutional directives such as Articles 38 and 46, which prescribe the elimination of income disparities and the advancement of educational and economic interests of the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and other weaker segments of society. Hence, State Governments are not only implementors but also policymakers and planners whose poverty reduction activities harmonize with the ideals reflected in the Constitution.³

In addition, States enact and implement land reforms and tenancy reforms that are critical to rural poverty reduction. Land redistribution and tenure security have a direct connection to Articles 38(2) and 39(b), which deal with fair

¹ Granville Austin, *The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation*, Oxford University Press, 1999.

² Planning Commission of India, *Report on State-Level Poverty Initiatives*, 2013.

³ Constitution of India, Art. 38, 46.

distribution of material resources and eradication of economic inequalities. These incremental reforms, although unevenly executed in the different States, have made a significant impact in the empowerment of landless laborers and tenant farmers, especially in such States as West Bengal and Kerala. Essentially, State Governments are responsible for actualizing the welfare objectives enshrined in the DPSPs, converting them into implementable programs and localized policies which are adapted to the respective socio-economic contexts of each State.¹

➤ Role of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in Aligning Poverty Alleviation Initiatives with DPSPs

Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) are the decentralized democratic institutions that were given constitutional strength by the 73rd Amendment Act, 1992.² They reflect the philosophy of decentralization, which distances governance from the elite and takes it to the people, particularly in rural India where poverty is most severe. Empowerment of PRIs is neatly in line with *Article 40* of the Constitution, which mandates the State to structure village panchayats and vest them with such powers and authority as may be required to empower them to act as units of self-government. PRIs accordingly have a very important role in putting into action and tailoring poverty reduction schemes in accordance with the socio-economic requirements of their constituencies as per the Directive Principles.

The greatest value addition of PRIs in poverty reduction is that they serve as the implementing and monitoring agencies of numerous schemes at the village, block, and district levels.³ Gram Panchayats, specifically, serve as local implementation arms for schemes such as MGNREGA, PMAY, National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), and Swachh Bharat Abhiyan. By keeping in touch with the community, PRIs ensure that the fruits of these schemes find their way to the targeted beneficiaries, thereby fulfilling the constitutional mandate of Article 38(1) to further the welfare of the people and secure a social order based on justice social, economic, and political. Additionally, PRIs facilitate participatory

¹ Ibid.

² The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 (Act 73 of 1992), inserted Part IX into the Constitution of India, strengthening Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) at the constitutional level.

³ Shah, A., "Panchayats and Rural Development," *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, 2021.

governance, which is vital in comprehending and combating the causes of poverty. Through such forums as Gram Sabhas, the local community is empowered to express their grievances, propose schemes, and call for accountability from the authorities. Such a participatory process not only increases transparency but also complies with Article 43, which supports the encouragement of cottage industries and the economic organization of village life. Panchayats are a driving force for local economic development by supporting Self Help Groups (SHGs), village industry, and skill development schemes. They increase employability and income generation in rural sectors.¹

Another noteworthy role of PRIs is social justice. By providing representation to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and women, PRIs implement Article 46 mandating the advancement of educational and economic interests of weaker sections.² Women sarpanches and Dalit leaders have, in several instances, brought on board innovative poverty reduction programs with the lived experiences of marginalized sections. For example, in a number of states, women's Panchayats have led the drive to introduce nutrition, sanitation, and education schemes, thereby contributing to overall poverty alleviation and inclusive development.³

Moreover, PRIs enable the bottom-up planning process that is critical to successful decentralization. They draft village development plans that reflect local priorities and socio-economic conditions, thus ensuring that poverty alleviation strategies are reality-based and context-specific. Localized planning also serves the ideals of Article 39(c) that demands policies that avoid the concentration of wealth and means of production. In addition, the intense interaction of PRIs with the community bridges the gap between policy making and implementation, making welfare schemes more effective and upholding the constitutional promise of a just and egalitarian society.⁴

¹ Government of India, National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), 2023.

² Constitution of India, Art. 46.

³ Gupta, R., "Women and Rural Governance: Case Studies from India," *Journal of Rural Development*, 2020.

⁴ Patel, S., "Decentralization and Local Governance in India," *Indian Political Science Review*, 2022.

5.2 Decentralization and Poverty Alleviation

Poverty continues to be an enduring feature of Indian life, even as it has witnessed the major economic growth and development of recent decades. Poverty alleviation needs not only economic change, but a dedicated, multi-faceted approach including institutional, social, and political structures.¹ Decentralization and governance reform have, among them, proven themselves to be effective tools in bringing about equitable development and successful poverty alleviation. India's Constitution, under the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSPs), offers a moral and constitutional obligation to the State in the direction of ensuring justice social, economic, and political to all citizens of India. Aligning poverty alleviation programs with the DPSPs in such a context is, therefore, obligatory. Furthermore, decentralization of power via the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments has authorized local governments to respond directly to the needs of the poor. This interaction between constitutional thought and bottom-up governance presents a powerful approach to poverty eradication that is sustainable.²

5.2.1 Decentralization: Concept and Constitutional Framework

Decentralization is the process of devolving power from central governments to lower tiers of government, especially to local or regional governments. In India, this concept gained formal acceptance through the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution in 1992, which formalized Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) respectively. These amendments gave constitutional status to local governments and assigned them planning and implementing development programs' responsibilities.³

The theoretical basis for decentralization in the Indian case lies in the principle of subsidiarity, which recommends that activities be carried out by the lowest level of government capable of doing so efficiently.⁴ Since India is a country with a richly varied and huge socio-economic landscape, centralized

¹ Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* (Oxford University Press, 1981), 3-5.

² James Manor, "The Political Economy of Decentralization," *World Development* (1999), 14-16.

³ N.S. Gopal, "Local Self-Government and Governance in India," *Indian Journal of Public Administration* (1994), 22-24.

⁴ Jean-Paul Kegley, *Decentralization in India: Theory and Practice* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 56-58.

planning rarely managed to respond to poverty dynamics at the local level.¹ Decentralization allows the establishment and implementation of policies attuned to local needs, resources, and problems. Additionally, decentralization promotes participatory governance. With the addition of Gram Sabhas, Ward Committees, and compulsory representation of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and women, local government mechanisms are such that the most vulnerable voices find their place in decision-making. This further increases the accountability, responsiveness, and effectiveness of poverty reduction initiatives.²

5.2.2 Link Between Decentralization and Poverty Alleviation

Decentralization and poverty reduction are strongly interrelated, especially in the case of developing nations where poverty is pervasive and centralized administration usually finds it difficult to address local concerns effectively. Decentralization is the devolution of power, responsibility, and resources from central to local government levels. Through this, local governments and communities are empowered to participate in decision-making directly influencing their lives. As poverty is typically local context, decentralized governance systems are more capable of recognizing and addressing local issues, preferences, and resource limitations. One of the major ways in which decentralization helps in alleviating poverty is by encouraging participatory development. Since local governments are closer to the people, they are more likely to know about the poor's specific problems in their areas and hence can formulate more pertinent and focused programs. This leads to better delivery of services in sectors such as education, health, sanitation, and rural infrastructure all of which have a direct bearing on poverty reduction. In addition, where communities participate in planning and implementation, they are likely to experience higher ownership and responsibility, thus resulting in better and sustainable development outcomes.³

¹ M. K. Singh, "Poverty Alleviation: Decentralized Planning," *Journal of Indian Planning* (2003), 19-21.

² P. S. Nair, "Decentralized Governance and Poverty Reduction: A Case Study from India," *Asian Development Review* (2007), 7-9.

³ UNDP, "Decentralization and Poverty Reduction," United Nations Development Programme, 2020.

Decentralization also facilitates improved allocation and use of resources. Subnational governments can mobilize and utilize resources more effectively, cutting down on bureaucratic bottlenecks and corruption that might set in within centralized systems. Decentralization of finance, for example, enables the subnational governments to mobilize and expend funds based on priorities so that expenses correspond with the true needs of the poor.¹ In addition, decentralization encourages competition between local units, which stimulates them to innovate and perform better in responding to social and economic problems. Yet, the success of decentralization in poverty alleviation is very much dependent on the ability of local institutions, transparency in the governance process, and fair allocation of resources. Without adequate checks and balances, decentralization could result in elite capture or mismanagement, which would defeat the purpose of decentralization.² Thus, decentralization to be effective in poverty reduction needs to be backed by robust institutional structures, sufficient finance, capacity-building, and inclusive mechanisms for the involvement of marginalized groups.³

Decentralization in India: The Panchayati Raj System

India's 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 institutionalized Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), giving constitutional status to local self-governments. PRIs are responsible for planning and implementing various rural development schemes such as:

- MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act)
- National Rural Health Mission (NRHM)
- Public Distribution System (PDS)

These schemes have had a significant impact in reducing poverty, improving livelihoods, and enhancing social security for rural populations.⁴

¹ Oates, W. E., "Fiscal Federalism," Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972.

² Bardhan, P., "Decentralization of Governance and Development," *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 2002.

³ Crook, R. C., and Sverrisson, A. S., "Decentralization and Poverty-Alleviation in Developing Countries: A Comparative Analysis," *The Journal of Development Studies*, 2001.

⁴ Government of India, "The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992," Ministry of Law and Justice, India.

5.2.3 Challenges in Decentralization and Poverty Alleviation

Decentralization, which is usually considered a way of strengthening local governments and enhancing public service delivery, is confronted with a number of challenges in the area of poverty reduction. One of the main challenges is the low capacity of local governments, particularly in developing nations. Most local governments do not have the technical skills, resources, and administrative frameworks to develop and implement efficient poverty reduction programs. This limitation has the potential to result in poor utilization of resources and below-par outcomes since local governments may be unable to design interventions specific to the individualized needs of their population.¹

Decentralization has the potential to widen gaps in certain situations as more prosperous regions can be afforded more access to resources while poor regions continue to lack and go under-funded. Yet another major challenge is the political dynamics at the local level. Decentralization tends to provide chances for local elites to seize power and resources, which can lead to a misallocation of resources or even corruption. In areas where the local political setups are weak or dominated by nepotism and patronage, the advantages of decentralization might not reach the marginalized groups. Rather than focusing on poverty, decentralized government could potentially perpetuate present inequalities, especially if local elites focus more on the needs of some over others.²

Additionally, decentralization can make coordination across levels of government more difficult. In most instances, local governments might not have the autonomy or authority to enforce some policies efficiently, as they rely on central government assistance for funding or decision-making. This intergovernmental conflict can slow the implementation of important poverty reduction programs or result in conflicting policies that dilute their impact. In addition, the policy and service fragmentation across governments can render poor communities unable to access the services they require due to the complexity of

¹ Shah, A., "The Political Economy of Decentralization," Public Administration and Development, 2006.

² World Bank, "Decentralization in Developing Countries," World Bank Report, 2004.

coordination and thin dispersal of resources.

Lastly, decentralization does not necessarily translate to higher accountability or participation of citizens. Although local governance institutions can be nearer to the people, proximity does not necessarily mean that local governments will be responsive to the poor's needs. Weak civic participation, transparency, and institutional mechanisms for oversight can counteract the efficiency of decentralization in poverty reduction. Lacking robust mechanisms of accountability and participation by citizens, decentralized government could fail to achieve its full potential to support sustainable poverty reduction.¹

5.3 Case Studies of Practices in Poverty Alleviation at the Local Level

Poverty alleviation at the local level often involves multifaceted approaches, including education, economic empowerment, and community development, as demonstrated in various case studies. These strategies aim to address the root causes of poverty, such as lack of access to quality education, limited employment opportunities, and inadequate infrastructure. The most effective approaches typically involve local initiatives, community participation, and government support, often tailored to the specific needs and circumstances of each location.²

5.3.1 Case Study 1: Kerala's People's Plan Campaign

5.3.1.1 Background:

Kerala's People's Plan Campaign (PPC), which was launched in 1996, is a shining instance of grassroots-level governance spearheading poverty reduction efforts. PPC sought to decentralize the planning process by making local bodies (Panchayats) strong enough to take charge of development planning and implementation. Kerala state government set up a model of decentralized planning in line with DPSP³, which focus on social welfare, poverty reduction, and equal distribution of wealth.

¹ Malena, C., "From Political Won't to Political Will: Building State-Society Partnerships for Poverty Reduction," *World Development*, 2004.

² Jean Drèze & Amartya Sen, *An Uncertain Glory: India and its Contradictions* (Penguin Books, 2013).

³ Constitution of India, Part IV – Directive Principles of State Policy.

5.3.1.2 Role of Local Governance:

Under the PPC, the local governments were authorized to plan and implement poverty alleviation schemes. Local authorities had a great deal of financial autonomy, enabling them to spend funds for community-led development. The local government institutions were supposed to draw up yearly plans in accordance with overall state and national objectives, like eliminating poverty and enhancing the standard of living, based on principles outlined in Part IV of the Indian Constitution DPSP. This policy is in consonance with DPSP provisions *like Article 38 (encouragement of welfare of the people), Article 39 (reasonable distribution of wealth), and Article 46 (encouragement of educational and economic interests of Scheduled Castes and Tribes).*¹

5.3.1.3 Poverty Alleviation Initiatives:

The PPC's poverty alleviation programs focused on areas such as healthcare, education, housing, and livelihoods, all of which were designed with active community participation. initiatives included:

- Self-Help Groups (SHGs): SHGs were encouraged by the local governments to promote economic activity at the grassroots level, emphasizing women's empowerment and poverty reduction. The SHGs played an important role in enhancing household incomes in rural villages.²
- Shelter for the Poor: Decentralized planning saw the implementation of shelter schemes by local bodies for economically weaker sections to meet the housing needs of persons in poor shelters.
- Public Health and Educational Schemes: The local government provided health and educational schemes meeting the local requirements and solving malnutrition, maternal mortality, and dropout problems in schools, particularly concentrating on deprived classes.

5.3.1.4 Impact and Challenges

The People's Plan Campaign resulted in marked advances in poverty reduction, with notable successes being recorded by Kerala in literacy, health, and income generation. However, issues such as uneven local capacity and

¹ Constitution of India, Art. 38, 39 & 46.

² Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India, Best Practices under People's Plan Campaign, 2003.

poor coordination among governance tiers resulted in discrepancies in program implementation. Notwithstanding these problems, the PPC demonstrates how convergence of local governance with the DPSP can translate into more participatory poverty reduction outcomes.¹

5.3.2 Case Study 2: The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in Rural India

5.3.2.1 Background:

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), which began in 2005, is another major poverty reduction scheme that is both state and locally governed. The Act promises 100 days of wage employment to rural families with an emphasis on the development of long-lasting assets and infrastructure as well as enhancing the rural poor's livelihoods.²

5.3.2.2 Role of Local Governance:

At the local level, Panchayats are central to the implementation of MGNREGA. Local governments are tasked with the identification and prioritization of projects, mobilization of labor, and overseeing the implementation of these projects. Local governments make sure that the program is in accordance with national poverty reduction objectives through rural employment, asset building, and sustainable development in line with DPSP principles, specifically Article 41 (Right to Work) and Article 46 (Promotion of the economic interests of Scheduled Castes and Tribes).³

5.3.2.3 Poverty Alleviation Initiatives:

The prime focus of MGNREGA is to improve the economic well-being of rural families through assured employment. Certain programs under MGNREGA that help in poverty alleviation are:

- **Generation of Employment:** The scheme offers wage employment to rural workers, hence raising household income, particularly for the poor and vulnerable sections of society, and declining seasonal unemployment.
- **Infrastructure Development:** Works executed under MGNREGA like road building, water conservation and land development offer not just work but also

¹ Government of Kerala, Housing for the Poor: Guidelines under PPC, 1997.

² The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005.

³ Constitution of India, Art. 41 & 46.

build long-term economic growth.

- Empowerment of Women: Empowerment of women has been a significant area where MGNREGA has been particularly successful, with women being involved in the job market through this initiative, generating economic independence as well as promoting gender equality at rural levels.¹

5.3.2.4 Impact and Challenges

MGNREGA has been able to achieve significant improvements in rural livelihoods, curbing migration, and bridging economic inequalities. Still, delayed payment, corruption at the local level, and a lack of effective monitoring have undermined the effectiveness of the program in certain areas. In spite of these problems, MGNREGA is an example of how decentralization with effective local government participation can be used to achieve poverty reduction as per the wider constitutional principles envisaged in the DPSP.²

5.3.3 Case Study 3: The Madhya Pradesh Rural Livelihoods Project (MPRLP)

5.3.3.1 Background:

The Madhya Pradesh Rural Livelihoods Project (MPRLP), which was initiated in 2000, aims at poverty reduction through promotion of sustainable livelihoods of rural poor, especially those belonging to weaker sections like Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and women. The project conforms to DPSP provisions aimed at furnishing proper means of livelihood and ensuring just and equitable distribution of resources.³

5.3.3.2 Role of Local Governance:

MPRLP functions through a system of local governance institutions like the Panchayats and Self-Help Groups (SHGs), with emphasis on community-driven development. Local governments play an active role in planning, decision-making, and implementation of livelihood programs. As per Article 39 of the DPSP, which seeks equitable distribution of wealth, the project ensures allocation of resources to marginalized communities.⁴

¹ Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, MGNREGA Annual Report 2022-23.

² Ibid.

³ DFID, Madhya Pradesh Rural Livelihoods Project Final Evaluation Report, 2011.

⁴ UNDP India, Strengthening Livelihoods in Madhya Pradesh: Lessons from MPRLP, 2012.

5.3.3.3 Poverty Alleviation Initiatives:

Key initiatives under the MPRLP include:

- **Self-Help Group Formation:** SHGs were formed to provide savings and credit to rural women, thereby enhancing access to finance and promoting entrepreneurship at the local level.
- **Livelihood Support Programs:** Local authorities provide support to programs in agriculture, animal husbandry, and handicrafts that are aimed at providing sustainable livelihood and poverty alleviation.
- **Women Empowerment:** The project focuses on the economic empowerment of women through skill development, entrepreneurship, and leadership.¹

5.3.3.4 Impact and Challenges

MPRLP has promoted better livelihoods for thousands of rural households and has made valuable contributions to empowering women in the state. However, inefficiencies in infrastructure, poor access to markets, and bureaucratic inefficiency have hindered the progress toward poverty alleviation. Still, the project serves to highlight the significance of local governance in providing that poverty reduction strategies are informed by the doctrines of social justice and equality specified in the DPSP.²

5.4 Coordination Between Centre and State for Effective Implementation in Poverty Alleviation Initiatives with DPSP

The effective implementation of poverty alleviation programs in India requires strong coordination between the Centre and State governments. This coordination ensures that policies and initiatives align with the DPSP, which aim to promote social welfare, equality, and the reduction of poverty and inequalities. They provide the foundation for inclusive development, and both the state and local governments play pivotal roles in translating them into action.³ However, effective poverty alleviation necessitates smooth collaboration between all levels of government to address challenges such as resource allocation, policy implementation, and intergovernmental communication.

¹ Government of Madhya Pradesh, MPRLP Livelihood Interventions Summary, 2010.

² S. Narayan, "Livelihoods and Decentralization: A Study of MPRLP" (2013) 48(12) EPW 75.

³ Ibid

1. Institutional Mechanisms for Coordination

For the successful implementation of poverty alleviation initiatives, institutional mechanisms are crucial. The government has established several bodies that facilitate coordination between the Centre and States, such as:

- **Inter-Governmental Coordination Committees:** These committees, like the National Development Council (NDC) and the Niti Aayog, are platforms for debating development targets, plans, and exchanging best practices. The Niti Aayog, in turn, is pivotal in ensuring alignment between state and central priorities and poverty alleviation goals, and in developing state-specific plans.¹
- **State Planning Boards and Ministries:** Planning boards and ministries at the state level are responsible for the formulation and implementation of programs according to state-specific requirements as well as national priorities. Planning boards coordinate with the central government to ensure poverty alleviation activities are in accordance with national targets under schemes like MGNREGA, Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY), and the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM).²
- **Fiscal Transfer Mechanisms:** The Finance Commission and its suggestions are critical in ensuring proper financial resources are transferred from the Centre to the States. The transfers are vital for the operation of poverty alleviation programs at the grassroots level. The utilization of funds, however, calls for states to follow certain guidelines and targets from the Centre to ensure they align with national objectives.³

2. Aligning Policies with DPSP

The coordination between the Centre and State also ensures that poverty alleviation programs embody the values of equity and social justice inherent in the DPSP, namely:

- **Article 38 (Promotion of Welfare of the People):** Programs need to be framed according to national priorities like amelioration of conditions of life, provision of basic amenities, and uplifting economically weaker sections. The Centre in

¹NITI Aayog, Strategy for New India @75, 2018.

² Ministry of Rural Development, MGNREGA Annual Report 2022–23, Government of India.

³ Tapas Sen, “Federalism and Fiscal Transfers in India,” Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 48, No. 19 (2013).

this case is to give resources and direction to state governments so that these objectives are fulfilled successfully.¹

- Article 39 (Equality of Wealth and Resources): National schemes such as MGNREGA have the objective to provide wage employment opportunities and wealth redistribution, keeping in view the principles of social justice and equitable distribution as enshrined in Article 39. Centre-State coordination is essential in providing these schemes to the most backward sections of society.²
- Article 46 (Promotion of Educational and Economic Interests of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes): The provision obliges states to pay special attention to upliftment programs in the case of weaker sections. The Centre is frequently responsible for offering specific assistance to these groups through policy decisions under affirmative action and financial transfers. Timely coordination ensures that state governments execute these programs according to national needs and the services extended.³

3. Implementation Challenges and Solutions

Political Differences: Political dynamics at the Centre and state levels can pose difficulties in the coordination of goals, especially when the ruling party at the Centre is different from the ruling party in a state. For instance, states can oppose the implementation of centrally directed programs because of political differences, impacting the effective rollout of poverty alleviation programs. To overcome this, there is a need to develop a cooperative federalism model where the Centre and States give more importance to people's welfare than to partisan interests.⁴

State and Local-Level Capacity Gaps: Although the Centre can release financial resources, states and local governments might not have the ability to manage and implement programs successfully. Decentralization of authority, as laid stress on by the DPSP, demands that local bodies should possess training, resources, and administrative support necessary to execute poverty alleviation projects. Improving the capacity of local bodies and ensuring that they possess

¹ *Constitution of India, Article 38.*

² *Ibid.*, Article 39.

³ A. S. Narang, *Indian Government and Politics*, Gitanjali Publishing House, 2014.

⁴ Nirvikar Singh, "Cooperative Federalism in India: Myth and Reality," *India Review*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (2014): 193–211.

technical and managerial capabilities will be able to fill these gaps. Resource Allocation Imbalances: Those states with more financial resources tend to gain more from centrally funded schemes, putting poorer states at a disadvantage. This imbalance can hinder the overall success of national poverty reduction programs. The solutions involve ensuring that fiscal transfers and resource allocations consider the unique needs of poorer states and regions to ensure a more balanced distribution of resources.¹ Monitoring and Accountability: Failure to have effective mechanisms for monitoring and accountability may result in inefficiencies and corruption, diluting the effectiveness of poverty alleviation programs. Centre and States must work together to enhance accountability processes, including applying technology for resource allocation tracking and program progress tracking, ensuring transparency, and engaging local communities in monitoring.²

5.4.1 Examples of Successful Coordination:

- **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA):**

MGNREGA is one of the best examples of Centre-State coordination for poverty alleviation. The Centre provides the financial resources and overall framework, while states adapt and implement the program according to local needs. Local Panchayats play a key role in identifying projects and mobilizing labor. The Centre also ensures regular monitoring and evaluation of the scheme to ensure that it aligns with the poverty alleviation goals in the DPSP.³

- **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY):**

The PMAY is another example where the Centre and States collaborate closely to provide affordable housing for the poor. The Centre provides financial assistance, while states are responsible for the identification of beneficiaries, construction, and project execution. Coordination between the two is vital to avoid duplication and ensure that resources reach the intended populations, particularly underprivileged sections like the economically weaker sections (EWS).

¹ Ministry of Rural Development, Performance Audit Report on MGNREGA, CAG of India, 2020.

² 15th Finance Commission, Report for the Period 2021-2026, Government of India.

³ Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, *An Uncertain Glory: India and its Contradictions*, Princeton University Press, 2013.

CHAPTER-VI

STRENGTHENING POVERTY ALLEVIATION: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Poverty reduction has been one of the most enduring problems for India ever since its independence. Even after decades of steady economic growth and the introduction of many welfare schemes, a major segment of the population remains poor and deprived. But the adoption of poverty alleviation policies in India has encountered a variety of challenges and limitations, both procedural and structural.¹ These include weak targeting, inefficiencies in the bureaucracy, corruption, absence of accountability, and lack of proper integration of local needs and circumstances. Further, while DPSPs offer the moral and constitutional basis for pro-poor policymaking, their lack of legal enforceability typically means that they have limited impact on ground realities. The mismatch between constitutional aspirations and policy outcomes creates legitimate questions regarding the efficacy of existing frameworks.²

A socio-economic examination of these concerns shows that there is a necessity for deep reforms and out-of-the-box thinking to enhance poverty reduction efforts. Recommendations are to improve legal accountability, enhance public engagement, enhance inter-sectoral coordination, and implement rights-based approaches to welfare. It is crucial that poverty relief policies transform in terms of both design and implementation, conforming better to the ethos of the Directive Principles and the constitutional ideal of an egalitarian society. This study proposes to assess these aspects critically and provide pragmatic suggestions for augmenting the contribution of DPSPs to fighting poverty in modern-day India.³

¹ Surjit S. Bhalla, *Poverty and Inequality in India: A Re-Examination*, Brookings Institution (2021).

² B. Sivaramayya, "Directive Principles: The Goals and the Means," in B. Shiva Rao (ed.), *The Framing of India's Constitution: Select Comments*, Indian Institute of Public Administration (1967).

³ C. Raj Kumar, "Human Rights, Development and the Indian Constitution: The Need for a Holistic Perspective," (2006) 28 *Human Rights Quarterly* 3.

6.1 Structural and Administrative Challenges of Poverty Alleviation

One of the foremost structural challenges in the implementation of poverty alleviation policies rooted in the DPSPs is the persistent disconnect between constitutional ideals and administrative reality. While the DPSPs in Part IV of the Indian Constitution lay down a broad and aspirational framework for a welfare state, including provisions aimed at securing the right to work, education, and public assistance in cases of unemployment and old age (*Article 41*), equitable distribution of wealth (*Article 39*),¹ and ensuring adequate means of livelihood for all citizens (*Article 39(a)*), the institutional infrastructure responsible for translating these principles into actionable programs often suffers from inefficiencies, fragmentation, and a lack of coherence. Overlapping jurisdictions between central, state, and local governments create administrative bottlenecks, with poor inter-departmental coordination leading to duplication of efforts or, conversely, complete neglect of responsibilities.² This fragmentation is especially evident in flagship schemes such as the MGNREGA or the PDS, where the lack of proper convergence between welfare departments and local governance mechanisms results in inconsistent delivery and uneven regional performance.³

Administrative limitations also stem from endemic issues such as bureaucratic red tape, corruption, lack of accountability, and inadequate capacity building. The implementation machinery is often marked by an excessive top-down approach that fails to account for local needs and realities, thereby limiting the responsiveness and adaptability of poverty alleviation programs. For instance, while the DPSPs envision policies that promote economic justice and eliminate inequalities, the administrative apparatus frequently lacks the training, sensitivity, and community engagement required to identify the multidimensional nature of poverty in rural and urban areas. Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms remain weak, with limited use of real-time data and performance indicators, resulting in poor impact assessment and feedback loops.

¹ *Constitution of India, Articles 39 and 41.*

² Rajani Kothari, *Politics and the People: In Search of a Humane India*, Ajanta Publications, 1989, p. 112.

³ Jean Drèze and Reetika Khera, "Recent Social Security Initiatives in India," *World Development*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (2006), pp. 557–572.

Additionally, the absence of grievance redressal systems further alienates beneficiaries, particularly those belonging to marginalized groups such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and women, whose participation in the design and execution of welfare policies remains minimal.¹ Another critical structural issue is the inadequate financial devolution to states and local bodies, which impairs the effective realization of welfare measures envisioned in the DPSPs. Despite constitutional amendments intended to empower Panchayati Raj Institutions and Urban Local Bodies, these entities often remain fiscally dependent on higher levels of government and lack the autonomy and resources needed to tailor poverty alleviation initiatives to local conditions.² This centralization of financial and policy authority undermines the spirit of cooperative federalism necessary for addressing regional disparities in poverty. Moreover, the socio-economic infrastructure such as health, education, sanitation, and affordable housing required to sustain long-term poverty alleviation is often underdeveloped or poorly maintained in poverty-stricken regions, further impeding the actualization of the goals articulated in the Directive Principles.³

In conclusion, while the Directive Principles of State Policy provide a visionary foundation for poverty alleviation in India, their transformative potential is significantly undermined by structural and administrative challenges. These include fragmented governance frameworks, bureaucratic inefficiencies, weak accountability mechanisms, lack of fiscal decentralization, and insufficient capacity at the grassroots level. Addressing these issues requires not only reforms in the policy design and delivery architecture but also a renewed commitment to the constitutional ideals of social justice and equity. Strengthening institutional frameworks, enhancing participatory governance, and ensuring transparency and financial autonomy at all levels of government are crucial for making poverty alleviation policies more effective, inclusive, and aligned with the directive principles' vision of a just and equitable society.

¹National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Annual Report 2020-21, Government of India.

² Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Report on Devolution Index, Government of India, 2015.

³ UNDP India, Human Development Report 2020: Beyond Income, Beyond Averages, Beyond Today, New Delhi.

6.2 Corruption, problems and Policy Gaps

Poverty alleviation remains a central goal of social and economic policy in many developing nations, including India. While numerous programs and schemes have been launched to address poverty, their effectiveness is often undermined by systemic corruption, administrative inefficiencies, and significant policy gaps.¹ Corruption siphons off resources meant for the poor, distorts implementation, and erodes public trust.² Additionally, poorly designed policies, lack of coordination among government tiers, and inadequate monitoring mechanisms further hinder the intended impact of poverty alleviation efforts. This intersection of governance failure and policy shortcomings calls for a critical evaluation of existing frameworks to ensure that anti-poverty initiatives truly reach and uplift the marginalized.

6.2.1 Corruption in the Delivery of Welfare Services

Corruption is still one of the most endemic issues that afflict poverty reduction initiatives in India. It pervades all levels of governance, from policy-making to ground-level implementation. Bureaucratic corruption in the allocation of subsidies, food grains, housing allowance, and employment guarantees frequently translates into resources intended for the poor being diverted by middlemen or stolen by officials. For example, Public Distribution System (PDS) directly corresponds with the DPSP under Article 47 (upgrading the standards of living and the level of nutrition), but it has for long been a victim of all-pervasive corruption. Spoiled ration cards, diversion to the black market of food grains, and manipulation of beneficiaries' lists are common, degrading the performance of the scheme. Such corruption not only leads to resource misallocation but also undermines public confidence in state institutions, hence undermining the moral authority of the State to serve as a welfare agent.³

¹ Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, *An Uncertain Glory: India and its Contradictions* (Princeton University Press, 2013), p. 54.

² Transparency International, *Corruption in India: Bridging Research and Practice* (2020), available at <https://www.transparency.org/en/news/corruption-in-india-bridging-research-and-practice> [Accessed 10 May 2025].

³ Surjit Bhalla, "Recounting India's Poverty Reduction," *Brookings India Policy Brief*, 2018.

6.2.2 Problems Welfare Schemes and Programs

Close to corruption are the structural and financial problems that welfare schemes. Much of the money set aside for poverty reduction never reaches the targeted poor because of administrative inefficiency, procedural lags, and the absence of accountability mechanisms. This issue is most severe in job-related schemes like the MGNREGA, which is based on Article 41 of the DPSPs (Right to Work).¹ Research has established that even with huge budget outlays, a significant percentage of MGNREGA wages remains delayed or unpaid because of weak fund flow management and ghost beneficiaries. Equally, in schemes such as the *Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY)* for housing, middlemen extract unlawful commissions, and construction quality suffers, reflecting a gap between policy intention and reality on the ground.²

6.2.3 Policy Gaps and Incoherence in Implementation

Though DPSPs give a firm normative base, Indian poverty alleviation policies tend to be plagued by the absence of coherence, integration, and consistency within sectors. Numerous policies are dealt with in silos, where there is overlapping jurisdiction and incompatible goals between departments and governments. This results in duplication of effort, wastage of resources, and incoherent results. For example, although there might be several schemes for skill development or health insurance, the lack of coordination among ministries means that delivery is fractured and coverage uneven. Furthermore, some poverty alleviation schemes are not representative of the socio-economic conditions of the marginalized groups they seek to cover. Top-down policy formulation in the absence of proper grassroots consultations results in interventions that are inappropriate to local priorities and needs.³

In addition, most of the welfare schemes are not supported by statutory safeguards, making them susceptible to policy changes, budget

¹ Comptroller and Auditor General of India, “Performance Audit of MGNREGA,” Report No. 6 of 2013, pp. 14–16.

² Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, “Annual Report 2020–21,” at 55–56.

³ NITI Aayog, “Three-Year Action Agenda (2017–18 to 2019–20),” at 123.

reductions, and political discontinuities.¹ In contrast to the right to education (*Article 21A*) that has been made justiciable by way of legislation, most socio-economic entitlements enunciated in the DPSPs are aspirational in nature. The inability to convert these principles into legally enforceable rights restricts their transformative potential and creates a large gap between constitutional vision and legislative action.

6.3 Role of Law and Governance in Realizing DPSP Objectives

The DPSPs in the Indian Constitution are non-justiciable guidelines stating the goals of the country's governance. They are not court-enforceable but act as vital standards that guide the government to enact policies and legislation designed to ensure social, economic, and political justice. One of the major aims of the DPSPs is to enhance welfare and justice for all citizens, especially in the case of poverty eradication, which is an essential component of social justice.²

6.3.1 Role of Law in Realizing the DPSP Objectives on Poverty Alleviation

The DPSPs find significant support from the law to achieve the ends set out thereunder, particularly with respect to poverty eradication. The DPSPs urge the state to take measures to minimize inequalities in income and status, give proper livelihood to all citizens, and establish the right to work as a basic right. There are a number of provisions in the Constitution and other laws that directly serve these purposes.³

A notable case is Article 39 of the Constitution, which instructs the state to see that the material means of the community are so distributed as to sub serve the common good. It further points out that the citizens must be secured of adequate means of livelihood, thereby directly going towards poverty reduction. The legal system according to the law requires the state to strive towards eliminating inequalities between the poor and the rich. Acts like the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), which ensures the right to work for rural citizens, are a crucial factor in giving employment to the

¹ Utsa Patnaik, "The Republic of Hunger," *Three Essays Collective*, 2008, at 94.

² B. Shiv Sharma, "Directive Principles and the Role of Judiciary," *Journal of Indian Law Institute*, Vol. 42, No. 2, 2000, at 198–200.

³ Justice R.C. Lahoti, *Preamble: The Spirit and Backbone of the Constitution* (Eastern Book Company, 2004), p. 53.

economically backward and marginalized sections of society.

A case in point is the Food Security Act, aimed at guaranteeing food access for every citizen.¹ Aside from these, The *National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA)*, *Public Distribution System (PDS)*, and other rural development schemes under the law are helping to improve the poor by ensuring that they have access to the labor market and necessary goods and services to address their basic needs.² These legislations strengthen the provisions of the DPSP to alleviate the socio-economic inequalities that cause poverty.

Additionally, legal safeguards against exploitation, including laws relating to minimum wages, protection of workers' rights, and social security, have made remarkable progress in enhancing the poor's livelihood. For example, the Minimum Wages Act, 1948, guarantees that laborers, especially in rural settings, are remunerated decently for their work, which directly assists in reducing poverty.³

6.3.2 Role of Governance in Achieving DPSP Objectives on Poverty Alleviation

Governance, both in policy-making and administrative roles, is the process by which the objectives of the law are realized. Effective governance guarantees that welfare programs and legal measures for poverty reduction are delivered in an efficient, transparent, and inclusive manner. The state function envisioned in the DPSPs is not only to enact laws but to construct institutions that can enforce these laws in order to deliver sustainable poverty eradication solutions.⁴

In this regard, the successful operation of welfare programs needs efficient governance systems at different levels. The government needs to ensure that its poverty reduction programs, including direct cash transfers, rural job schemes, and social safety nets, are delivered to the poor. For example, *Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY)* and the *Atal Pension Yojana (APY)* are

¹ National Food Security Act, 2013, No. 20 of 2013, INDIA CODE.

² Government of India, Ministry of Rural Development, "Annual Report 2020–21," available at <https://rural.nic.in/>.

³ Minimum Wages Act, 1948, No. 11 of 1948, INDIA CODE.

⁴ Basu, Durga Das, *Introduction to the Constitution of India* (LexisNexis, 24th ed., 2019), pp. 398–401.

designed to provide financial inclusion and security to economically weaker individuals.¹ Such governance efforts, aided by legal codes, are inevitable in achieving the goals of the DPSPs.

In addition, governance also needs to address decentralized decision-making so that local populations are engaged proactively in the formulating and implementation of poverty reduction strategies. In the PRIs and ULBs, governance enables the local populace to ascertain their needs and strive to address them within the constitutional framework extended to them. Decentralized governance also promotes accountability, ensuring that funds designed for poverty reduction are utilized effectively.² The governance function also includes fostering an environment that is conducive to economic growth, which is inclusive. Through their emphasis on infrastructure development, education, healthcare, and other human development dimensions, the state can ensure that the population has opportunities to lift itself out of poverty. Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) and interactions with NGOs are also important governance measures that enable resources and know-how to be pooled to impact the disadvantaged groups.

Monitoring and evaluation is another governance aspect of extreme importance in the alleviation of poverty. Through monitoring the success of different poverty reduction programs, governance institutions can ensure that they are changing and evolving through time to improve their service delivery for the poor. This is crucial for schemes like *Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY)* offering health insurance to the poor and the *Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY)*, which will offer affordable housing.³ Ongoing monitoring prevents these schemes from being merely theoretical but also useful in reality to the beneficiaries.

6.3.3 Challenges in Realizing the DPSP Objectives for Poverty Alleviation

Despite the legal and governance systems in place, a number of challenges stand in the way of the complete achievement of the DPSPs for poverty

¹ Government of India, Ministry of Finance, “Jan Dhan to Jan Suraksha,” (2020), <https://financialservices.gov.in/>.

² Mathew, George, “Panchayati Raj Institutions and Human Development in India,” *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. 60(3), 2014.

³ Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Government of India, “Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban),” available at <https://pmay-urban.gov.in>.

reduction. Corruption, bureaucratic inefficiency, and political interference tend to impede the proper implementation of welfare schemes. For instance, the Public Distribution System (PDS), though well-intentioned, has been plagued by pilferage, leakages, and targeting inefficiencies, resulting in the exclusion of the most deserving ones.¹

Besides that, lack of proper funding of social welfare initiatives and absence of political will for putting poverty eradication at top priority can effectively constrain the extent of influence by governance and regulations focused on poverty reduction. Though legislation such as MGNREGA has worked in providing work to millions, its efficiency gets affected due to issues such as delayed payments and weak implementation on the ground.²

The informal economy also poses a big challenge. Much of India's labor force works in the informal sector, and those working there are not afforded formal legal protections.³ The informal economy comprising small-scale traders, casual workers, and farm laborers frequently doesn't receive the benefit of government welfare schemes, further perpetuating poverty.

The relationship between law, governance, and the realization of the DPSP objectives is fundamental to achieving the goal of poverty alleviation in India. Through laws that provide social safety nets and through governance systems that ensure these laws are implemented effectively, the state has made significant progress in addressing poverty. However, challenges such as corruption, bureaucratic inefficiency, and the informal economy continue to undermine efforts. To fully realize the aspirations of the DPSPs, a sustained focus on improving governance, strengthening legal frameworks, and ensuring that the benefits of poverty alleviation programs reach the most vulnerable sections of society is essential.

¹ Dreze, Jean and Khera, Reetika, "Recent Social Security Initiatives in India," World Development, Vol. 98 (2017): 555–572.

² Comptroller and Auditor General of India, "Performance Audit Report on MGNREGA," 2013.

³ International Labour Organization, "India Labour Market Update," ILO, July 2022.

CHAPTER-VII

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The DPSPs, enshrined in Part IV of the Indian Constitution, have long served as a moral and political compass for the State, guiding it toward the establishment of a just, equitable, and inclusive society. Though non-justiciable in nature, the DPSPs constitute a vital component of India's constitutional architecture, reflecting the aspirations of the Constituent Assembly to build a welfare state that prioritizes social justice, economic equality, and the eradication of poverty. This dissertation has critically examined how these principles have influenced and shaped poverty alleviation policies in India, across various decades and through changing socio-economic contexts.

At the heart of this inquiry lies the recognition that poverty is not merely the absence of income but the denial of opportunities and freedoms essential for a dignified human existence. The DPSPs, through provisions such as *Articles 38, 39, 41, 42, and 43*, lay down the foundational values for addressing these deprivations. They underscore the importance of securing adequate means of livelihood, ensuring equal pay for equal work, safeguarding the health and strength of workers, and providing public assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness, and disablement. These ideals, though initially treated as non-binding, have progressively informed legislative and executive action, and at times, even the interpretative approach of the judiciary.

Over the decades, successive governments have launched a plethora of poverty alleviation programs rooted either explicitly or implicitly in the objectives outlined by the DPSPs. Landmark schemes such as the IRDP, MGNREGA, NRHM, and PMAY represent efforts to translate constitutional ideals into tangible outcomes for the poor and marginalized. These policies have addressed poverty in its various dimensions be it employment, education, health, housing, or food security and have sought to promote both social protection and economic empowerment.

Despite these initiatives, the persistence of poverty, inequality, and exclusion in India remains a sobering reality. Structural issues such as corruption, bureaucratic inefficiency, policy fragmentation, and a lack of

participatory governance have often hindered the effective implementation of welfare programs. Moreover, the top-down nature of many schemes has failed to adequately engage local communities in the planning and execution processes, leading to misallocation of resources and reduced accountability. It is here that the spirit of the DPSPs calls for deeper introspection not just in the formulation of policies but in their design, delivery, and monitoring mechanisms.

The judiciary, although initially hesitant to enforce DPSPs due to their non-justiciable status, has gradually adopted a more integrative and purposive approach. Through landmark judgments such as *Minerva Mills v. Union of India*, *Olga Tellis v. Bombay Municipal Corporation*, and *Unni Krishnan v. State of Andhra Pradesh*, the Supreme Court has harmonized the Fundamental Rights and the Directive Principles, emphasizing that both are complementary and mutually reinforcing. In particular, the expansion of *Article 21 the Right to Life* and Personal Liberty to include the right to livelihood, health, shelter, and education, reflects an increasing judicial recognition of socio-economic rights as essential for the meaningful realization of civil and political liberties. This interpretative transformation signifies an important shift in the constitutional vision, whereby the State's duty to alleviate poverty is no longer viewed merely as a moral obligation, but as a component of enforceable human rights.

Another important aspect illuminated by this research is the federal and decentralized framework of poverty alleviation. While the Union government formulates broad policy directives and financial outlays, the actual implementation often rests with the States. This necessitates effective coordination, fiscal devolution, and capacity-building at the state and local levels, particularly through the PRIs. The *73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments* have further strengthened the local governance apparatus, empowering rural and urban bodies to undertake planning and implementation of developmental schemes. The DPSPs, especially Article 40 (on village panchayats), find practical expression in these decentralized frameworks, reinforcing the idea that participatory democracy is indispensable for meaningful poverty reduction.

Nevertheless, the road ahead demands a reinvigorated commitment to the spirit of the Directive Principles. In an era marked by economic

liberalization, digital transformation, and shifting labor markets, poverty assumes new forms and challenges. Informal employment, urban homelessness, rising cost of living, and exclusion from digital and financial infrastructure are emerging concerns that require innovative and inclusive policy responses. The Directive Principles, with their inherent emphasis on human dignity, social equity, and distributive justice, remain ever-relevant in framing responses to these contemporary challenges.

Furthermore, there is a growing need to align India's poverty alleviation policies with global commitments such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 1 (No Poverty) and Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities). The DPSPs provide a constitutional foundation that resonates with these international standards, enabling India to pursue sustainable development not merely as an economic agenda but as a constitutional imperative. This convergence between domestic constitutional values and international human rights norms further reinforces the centrality of the DPSPs in shaping India's development trajectory.

The DPSP represent a profound constitutional vision of socio-economic justice. While their non-enforceability has posed limitations, their moral authority and philosophical depth have profoundly influenced India's poverty alleviation discourse. The challenge now is not only to continue translating these principles into effective legislation and policy but also to ensure their realization through robust institutions, democratic participation, and transparent governance. A just society cannot be built on abstract ideals alone it requires concrete action, continuous vigilance, and a collective commitment to the constitutional promise of dignity and equality for all. The Directive Principles offer both the direction and the impetus for such a transformative journey.

SUGGESTIONS

- The DPSPs in the Indian Constitution represent a vision for social justice and equitable development. While they are non-justiciable in nature, their influence in guiding socio-economic legislation and poverty alleviation initiatives has been significant. However, there remains substantial scope for improvement both in terms of academic inquiry and state action. The following are comprehensive suggestions that span legal, administrative, political, and policy dimensions.

- While DPSPs are not justiciable by any court, there is a growing school of thought that advocates at least partial justiciability of some of the socio-economic rights, particularly relating to the basic needs of food, education, health, and shelter. The Indian judiciary has indeed established the foundation for this in judgments such as *Unni Krishnan v. State of Andhra Pradesh* and *Olga Tellis v. Bombay Municipal Corporation*, where the judiciary interpreted fundamental rights in terms of DPSPs. Many poverty alleviation programs in India sound promising on paper but suffer from poor implementation. This gap often results from systemic inefficiencies, corruption, and a lack of accountability mechanisms. Schemes such as MGNREGA, PMAY, and NFSA have suffered setbacks due to such flaws.

- Every new social welfare legislation and poverty alleviation scheme should include a constitutional statement of purpose highlighting its alignment with relevant DPSPs. This would reinforce the constitutional imperative and ensure a more enduring commitment across political regimes. The Planning Commission (now NITI Aayog) and concerned ministries should adopt a “DPSP compliance test” as part of their policy formulation checklist.

- The government, in partnership with civil society organizations, should undertake a nationwide constitutional literacy campaign focusing on socio-economic rights under Part IV. School curricula and adult education programs must incorporate constitutional education modules to empower citizens to demand and monitor effective implementation of poverty alleviation measures. The Supreme Court and High Courts must continue to read socio-economic rights into the ambit of fundamental rights wherever feasible. The higher

judiciary should issue continuing mandamus in significant public interest litigation (PIL) cases to monitor compliance and implementation of policies directly linked to DPSPs, particularly those dealing with food security, housing, education, and health.

- The judiciary and policymakers should adopt an integrated interpretative approach that emphasizes mutual reinforcement between the two sets of constitutional mandates. Law schools and judicial academies must emphasize this harmony in their curricula and training modules to nurture a generation of jurists and administrators committed to a rights-based approach to development. Economic planning at the central and state levels should explicitly adopt a DPSP-centric approach, with particular emphasis on *Articles 38, 39, 41, 42, and 47*. Fiscal policies should prioritize expenditures on health, education, and rural development. Progressive taxation and targeted subsidies must be implemented to support redistribution and upliftment of the poor.

- The *73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments* empower local bodies to play a critical role in poverty alleviation. However, their potential remains underutilized due to lack of funds, functionaries, and autonomy. Devolution of powers to Panchayats and Urban Local Bodies must be deepened with adequate financial support and capacity-building. Poverty alleviation initiatives must be planned and executed with active participation of local elected bodies, who are better placed to understand community-specific needs in line with the directive principles.

- Non-governmental organizations and community-based groups have made notable contributions in areas like microfinance, women's empowerment, rural employment, and food distribution. Yet, their role is often marginal in formal poverty alleviation strategies. The government should create institutional mechanisms to involve NGOs in planning, monitoring, and evaluating poverty alleviation programs. Accreditation frameworks and public-private partnerships can harness their local knowledge and innovation, improving the reach and quality of service delivery in accordance with DPSPs.

- Many countries with comparable socio-economic conditions have implemented innovative anti-poverty frameworks. Lessons can be drawn from Latin American models of conditional cash transfers, African models of community-based health insurance, or East Asian investments in universal education. A comparative study of international best practices should be undertaken with the objective of incorporating adaptable models into the Indian context. The DPSPs provide a constitutional foundation for such comparative learning, encouraging India to meet global standards in social development.

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