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Introduction

Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially. At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom. A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance. It is fitting that at this solemn moment we take the pledge of dedication to the service of India and her people and to the still larger cause of humanity.... That future is not one of ease or resting but of incessant striving so that we may fulfil the pledges we have so often taken and the one we shall take today. The service of India means the service of the millions who suffer. It means the ending of poverty and ignorance and disease and inequality of opportunity. The ambition of the greatest man of our generation has been to wipe every tear from every eye. That may be beyond us, but as long as there are tears and suffering, so long our work will not be over. (Nehru 2003¹)

With these evocative words, an independent India began her tryst with destiny. It is fitting that we celebrate the awakening of the Indian economy and an era of faster annual growth by remembering this pledge of service to the 1.2 billion-plus population in diverse corners of India. This book is dedicated to exploring the contours of the day to day lives of Indians in 2004 and 2005, nearly 60 years after this pledge was made. This search must acknowledge the achievements of the last century as well as anticipate the challenges of the twenty-first century. It must document the lived experiences of Indian families in cities and villages from Kashmir to Kanyakumari as they go about negotiating their daily lives in a globalizing India. In documenting the way they live, work, educate their children, care for their aged parents, and deal with ill health, we seek to infuse the development discourse with the lived experiences of ordinary people.

We begin by thanking the 41,554 families in the India Human Development Survey (IHDS) 2005, who opened their hearts and homes to strangers and shared details of their daily lives. The diversity of India demands that experiences of Indians from remote parts of the North-East be heard along with those in the crowded streets of old Delhi, and those of Adivasi and Dalit labourers be heard side by side with those of the upwardly mobile middle class. A search for a human face for the nation demands that individuals not be reduced to growth rates or poverty rates but that, instead, their lives be seen in holistic terms. This study attempts to balance competing goals of painting a broad panorama, without ignoring the details, by relying on interviews with men, women, and children in the IHDS.

Our narrative relies on the IHDS for empirical support. This survey was organized by the authors of this book, as a part of the collaboration between University of Maryland and National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER), New Delhi, with assistance from 24 organizations located throughout India. The survey, which involved 41,554 household interviews in 1,503 villages and 971 urban blocks in 33 states and union territories of India (Figure AI.1 in Appendix I), was designed to be nationally representative. This survey builds on a prior survey conducted by NCAER in 1993–4. This survey is unique in that it was designed to measure different dimensions of human development, with a particular emphasis on understanding social inequalities. Unlike single-topic surveys of health, labour market behaviour, or consumption patterns, it emphasized a variety of

¹ Jawaharlal Nehru's midnight address to the Constituent Assembly, 14–15 August 1947.

topics of interest to a study of human development under a single rubric, providing us with a rich array of data for our study.

What does it mean to take a holistic perspective on people's lives? Past *Human Development Reports* have expanded development discourse beyond its focus on economic growth to consider human development and people's basic needs, such as their standard of living, education, and health care. It is now universally accepted that these different dimensions of human development—livelihood, education, and health—play important roles in shaping personal well being. However, these markers of individual well being are embedded in wider networks of family and kin groups, castes, tribes, and religious identities, the political economy of villages and towns, and the direct and indirect actions of the state and civic society.

In this book, we seek to deepen this development discourse in four ways. First, while building on past discourse on human development, we seek to expand it by looking beyond basic indicators to more complex evaluations of human development. For example, we look not just at levels of school enrolments, but at assessments of what is being learned. Second, recognizing the diversity of Indian society across gender, caste, ethnicity, religion, income, education, and region, we consistently disaggregate the human development outcomes by each of these characteristics and try to ground our discussion within these differences. Third, we emphasize that individuals exist in a web of social networks and expand our discussion to examine how individuals are linked to the world around them. Contexts are important for each of the human development outcomes we consider. Finally, a holistic perspective on people's lived experiences must recognize how the separate dimensions of human development are interrelated. Employment, education, health, and social networks must be addressed in separate chapters, but they do not exist as independent segments in people's lives. A major advantage of a comprehensive survey like the IHDS is the ability to investigate these interrelationships.

COMPLEXITY

We seek to document patterns of human development at its most basic level in Indian society. In accomplishing this task, we try to refocus the rhetoric of development from basic indicators of welfare to the new challenges facing India in the coming decades. For example, much has been attained in the field of education since Independence. Although the literacy rate for elderly individuals aged 60 and older is barely 59 per cent for men and 19 per cent for women, their grandchildren aged between ten to fourteen boast of 92 per cent literacy among boys and 88 per cent among girls. It is time to set a higher bar, and focus on school quality and functional

skills. So, in addition to asking about enrolment rates, IHDS also gave the eight to eleven olds simple tests of reading, arithmetic, and writing. We also asked about English fluency and computer skills.

A second example is found in our analysis of employment. Rates of employment and sectoral location remain important indicators of individual and family position. But to understand how Indian families manage the opportunities and risks of the modern economy, we need to look also at how families, and even individuals, diversify their employment patterns across sectors, combining agricultural and non-agricultural labour or cultivation with private business.

A final example of the need to expand past approaches to human development is the IHDS measurement of economic position. Excellent measures of consumption levels have been available from the National Sample Survey (NSS) for years. More abbreviated measures of economic standing, based on household possessions, have been well developed by the *National Family Health Survey (NFHS)*. The IHDS included adaptations of both these measures. But while consumption expenditures and household possessions can provide good estimates of levels of economic well being, they say little about how households came to their current economic position. Income measures are necessary for a better understanding of the sources of poverty or economic success. The IHDS provides the most comprehensive data, yet, available on Indian incomes.

INEQUALITY

Variations in all these markers of well being are consistently mapped across cleavages in Indian society, based on gender, caste, religion, class, and place of residence. Similar tables at the end of each chapter show variations in each type of human development.

While amelioration of these inequalities has been at the core of the nationalist agenda in twentieth century India, the success of these efforts has often been disappointing. Even well meaning policies often fail due to poor implementation. For example, in spite of increasing efforts at reducing educational inequalities in school enrolments, IHDS data documents substantial differences in reading, writing, and arithmetic skills between children of various socio-religious groups. Dalit, Adivasi, and Muslim children read at lower levels and can complete fewer basic arithmetic tasks than their forward caste brothers and sisters, even those with identical school attainments.

Additionally, external forces in a now global world pose challenges that risk unintentional widening of inequalities. Analyses, presented in the chapter on employment, indicate that Adivasis are far more likely to be employed in agriculture than other socio-religious communities. Consequently,

the agricultural stagnation of the 1990s has had a far greater impact on Adivasis than on other communities, contributing to the income disparities reported in Chapter 2. Disproportionate regional growth further exacerbates these inequalities because Adivasis are far more likely to be rural and live in poorer states like Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Madhya Pradesh, than in the prosperous Punjab or Haryana.

Nevertheless, an important theme that emerges from the chapters that follow is how deep regional cleavages are, even compared with caste and income inequalities. While it is well known that some states are far more economically developed than others, this general economic observation misses much of the nature of interstate disparities. Chapter 7 shows that a poor, illiterate Dalit labourer in Cochi or Chennai is likely to be healthier, and certainly has better access to medical care than a college graduate, forward caste, large landowner in rural Uttar Pradesh. Social inequalities matter, but their importance is overwhelmed for many aspects of human development by state and rural–urban differences.

Contexts

The extent of these regional inequalities justifies the attention that the IHDS placed on investigating the social and economic contexts in which the 41,554 households found themselves. The IHDS recognized that individuals exist in a web and sought to examine how individuals, families, and communities are linked to the world around them. Consequently, we focused on gender roles and norms when trying to understand gender disparities in Indian society; explore the way in which different families are linked to social networks and institutions when studying inequalities between diverse social groups; and tried to focus on institutional structures and linkages shaping the relationship of villages and states in an increasingly global world.

INTERRELATIONSHIPS

We argue that it is time for the development discourse to pay greater attention to the politics of culture and the culture of politics. The politics of culture is perhaps most clearly seen in the discourse surrounding gender in Indian society. Gender inequality, in different markers of human development, particularly the imbalance in the juvenile sex ratio, is well recognized in literature. However, role of cultural traditions, in creating a climate within which these inequalities emerge, have received little attention. In this study, we examine differences in intra-family relationships across different parts of India and different communities, and observe far greater egalitarian gender relations among Adivasis and a greater willingness of parents in southern India to rely on daughters for social and financial support. We argue that it would be surprising if more favourable gender ratios among Adivasis and in south India were not related to these differences in

gender roles. We also suggest that instead of thinking of culture as being immutably fossilized, it would make sense to see it as a process that is being constantly modified and to understand that public policies have a broad impact on how traditions are interpreted and modified. Results on women's employment provide an interesting example by showing that gender inequalities in salaries are far greater in the private than in the public sector. The culture of politics and the differential ability of states to ensure a climate within which their residents live healthy and productive lives is a recurring theme throughout this study.

In addition to introduction and conclusion, this monograph is divided into four sections. The first section focuses on livelihoods, with chapters exploring the level and composition of household income and poverty; agriculture and access to means of production; employment patterns and wages; and standard of living. The second section focuses on education and health, with a focus on assessing current status as well as the availability and cost of educational and health services. The third section focuses on the well-being of vulnerable populations: children, the elderly, and women. The fourth section is unique in its focus on the linkages between individuals and households and the broader social structures. Chapters in this section include analysis of social integration of the households into broader community networks; the level of village development in an increasingly global world; and the policy responses in the form of social safety net provisions. Our survey methodology and sample are discussed in Appendices I and II. Some highlights are discussed in Box 1.1.

In trying to provide a holistic view of the daily lives of Indian families, this monograph covers a broad terrain. However, many chapters contain similar themes. Chapters on income, agriculture, and employment suggest that while India remains overwhelmingly rural, with nearly 72 per cent of the Indian population still residing in villages, stagnation in agricultural productivity has found an echo in the declining importance of farming in the household economy. Although 53 per cent of the rural households engage in farming and 57 per cent engage in raising livestock, only 20 per cent of the households draw all their income from agriculture. Nearly 27 per cent of rural males work in the non-farm sector and a further 21 per cent combine own-account farming/care of live stock/agricultural wage labour with non-farm work. Salaried work, particularly in the public sector, remains at the top of the job ladder. Salaried public sector workers earn an average of Rs 6,980 per month as compared with salaried workers in the private sector who barely earn Rs 4,569 per month, if in a permanent job and Rs 2,365, if in a temporary job. All of them are better off than the manual labourers, who earn only Rs 50–80 per day and are lucky if they can find about 200 days of employment in a year.

Education remains the key to obtaining this coveted *sarkari naukari* (government job), but access to education is socially structured. Although school enrolment has been rising at a rapid rate and about 85 per cent of children aged six to fourteen are enrolled in school, only 54 per cent of eight to eleven year olds are able to read a simple paragraph and barely 48 per cent are able to do two-digit subtraction. There is wide divergence in the three R's (reading, writing, and arithmetic) by social and religious background, with children from Dalit, Adivasi, and Muslim families falling substantially behind other communities. Not surprisingly, this educational deficiency is reflected in lower access to salaried jobs among these communities. Chapter 6 also records high rates of private school enrolment among both urban and rural children, with children of the rich being far more likely to attend private schools than those from poor households. Private schools seem to offer higher quality education, as seen in skills obtained by children. With 51 per cent of the urban children attending private schools, this trend seems more or less irreversible in urban areas. Growth of private schools in rural India is a relatively recent phenomenon; and with only 20 per cent of the rural children in private schools, there is still a chance to improve the quality of rural government schools and keep middle class as well as poor children in the same school, somewhat levelling the playing field.

In contrast, social inequalities in health seem far less important than regional inequalities. Individuals in the north central plains are more likely to suffer from minor as well as major illnesses than those in southern states. If education is undergoing rapid privatization, medical care seems to be already dominated by private providers. In spite of an extensive network of government clinics, four times as many Indian households rely on private care as on public medical-care. Out-of-pocket expenses for public services remain high, and a perception of better quality in private care seems to drive many people—even poor people—towards using private medical care.

As Section 3 documents, households continue to be primary determinants of the well-being of members who reside within them—and the sites within which inequalities between boys and girls, and men and women are articulated. An overwhelming preference for sons continues to result in fewer girls being born than boys and a lower survival rate for girls than for boys. In spite of the ban against prenatal sex determination, 25–30 per cent of the women respondents acknowledge receiving an ultrasound or amniocentesis during their pregnancy, and women with no sons are far more likely to undergo an ultrasound or amniocentesis than those with a son. Moreover, nearly 34 per cent of those who underwent these tests seemed to know the sex of the child, although it is illegal for a medical provider to tell them. Not surprisingly, considerably fewer girls than boys

are born in many parts of India. At the same time, households also continue to be primarily responsible for the welfare of the elderly. Nearly 87 per cent of the elderly we studied live in extended families and while a few receive pensions or benefits from government schemes such as the National Old Age Pension Scheme, this income is rarely adequate for support.

However, these households are located in a rapidly globalizing world, and their linkages to this world receive attention in Section 4. The analysis of linkages between households and the broader social fabric paints an interesting picture of diversity across states and regions but greater homogeneity within states. Who individuals know, and more importantly who knows them, often determines the success they have in obtaining jobs, health care, and better quality education. Consequently, social and religious background plays an important role in whether anyone in the household knows a government worker, teacher or school employee, or medical personnel. Dalits, Adivasis, and Muslims have access to fewer networks than other social and religious groups. In contrast, participation in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or other organizations is a function of whether an organization exists in a community, and we find sharp differences in organizational memberships across states but few differences between households in a state. Throughout our analysis, we consistently find differences in human development outcomes for individuals by place of residence, with those living in rural areas being the most disadvantaged. However, a deeper analysis of village development reported in Chapter 12 paints an interesting picture of both progress and isolation. Although some pockets of isolation remain, roads and primary schools are available in most villages, and even electric connections are available in a large number of villages. However, when we focus on higher level services as well as quality of services, differences between states become vast, to some extent explaining the differences in human development outcomes across states. The findings in this chapter also point to an ironic observation: the development discourse has tended to see civil society institutions, particularly the NGO sector, as filling the vacuum when the state is weak or ineffective. We find that many of the community-based programmes, which are run directly by NGOs or as an intermediary of the state, are far more prevalent in areas where infrastructure is better developed. Thus, instead of being a substitute for state action, these organizations complement state inputs.

As we assess different dimensions of human development in a rapidly evolving social and economic context, the role of public policy assumes paramount importance. By all accounts, Indian economic growth is accompanied by rising inequality between different social groups, between urban and rural India, and between states. As the chapter

on income points out, most statistics on inequality in India are based on consumption expenditure which understates income inequality, and it may well be that inequality is rising at a faster pace than is conventionally acknowledged.

Readers of the *Human Development Reports* may find a lack of attention to the Human Development Index (HDI) in this monograph puzzling. *Human Development Reports*, developed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), have pioneered the HDI relying on components that include life expectancy at birth, adult literacy; gross enrolment in primary, secondary, and tertiary education, and gross domestic product per capita. This index allows for a ranking of countries in order to provide a quick feedback to policy makers. The *National Human Development Report 2001* prepared by the Planning Commission uses somewhat different indicators but follows a similar approach. The value of these indices lies in their simplicity and the focus on a limited number of variables. However, given our interest in broadening this discourse by focusing on the complexity of different aspects of well being in India, and attention to

inequality by caste, tribe, religion, class, gender, and place of residence, we eschew the construction of indices and instead focus on a variety of markers of human development that are included in the literature and that we consider important for addressing the challenges that India will face in the era of transition.

This introduction began with an allusion to the high hopes with which India's tryst with destiny began at Independence. As we conclude, we remain cognizant of the parallels between India at Independence and at the start of the twenty-first century. The lethargy of the middle years, in which the normative expectation of the Hindu rate of growth was 3–4 per cent per year, has been banished by the rapid economic strides of the past decade. It is time to set a higher bar for the kind of human development we strive for.

To quote Amartya Sen,²

It would be a great mistake to concentrate on the Human Development Index. These are useful indicators in rough and ready work: but the real merit of the human development approach lies in the plural attention it brings to bear on development evaluation, not in the aggregative measures it presents as an aid to diverse statistics.

Box 1.1 IHDS 2005

The IHDS was carried out by researchers from the University of Maryland and the NCAER between December 2004 and November 2005. The data collection was funded by the US National Institutes of Health. The survey involved face-to-face interviews with members of 41,554 households located in urban and rural areas of 33 states and union territories and was designed to provide a nationally representative sample. The survey collected information on income, consumption, employment, education, health, and different aspects of gender and family relationships from both male and female respondents and provides information about the lives of 2,15,754 individuals. It also collected information on schools, medical facilities, and village infrastructure. The survey was administered in 13 languages and was carried out by 25 organizations with interviewers fluent in local customs and language. These data are now in the public domain and are freely available for analysis by interested researchers. More information is available at www.ihds.umd.edu

Source: IHDS 2004–5 data.

² Sen (2000).