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A Conceptual Study on Economic Inequality in India

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ABSTRACT:

This research endeavours to delve into the critical subject of economic inequality in India, driven by the urgency of understanding its multifaceted impacts and formulating informed policy interventions. The study's objectives encompass a comprehensive exploration of the root causes and consequences of the escalating income disparity in India. Additionally, it seeks to assess the pronounced regional disparities within the country, shedding light on effective policy solutions. The research also places a lens on the social and political implications of economic inequality, recognizing its potential to sow social unrest and influence democratic institutions. Furthermore, it examines the gender dimension within this context, aiming to promote gender equity alongside economic parity. By synthesizing existing research, this study contributes to a deeper comprehension of India's economic inequality dynamics, fostering inclusive growth and social justice.

Keywords: Economic Inequality, Social and Political Implications, Policy Intervention, Inclusive Growth

INTRODUCTION

Economic inequality in India is a big and complex topic that has received broad domestic and international attention. Over the last few decades, the country's economic progress has reduced poverty and increased overall prosperity, but it has also exacerbated income and wealth inequality. Economic inequality is the unequal allocation of wealth, income, or resources within a society or economy among individuals or groups. It is a measure of how a population's economic well-being is spread. There are huge discrepancies in income and wealth across different groups of the population in nations with high economic inequality. Here are some key points regarding economic inequality in India:

Income Inequality: India has one of the highest levels of income inequality in the world. The richest segment of the population enjoys a disproportionately large share of the national income, while a significant portion of the population continues to live in poverty. This income disparity is evident in both rural and urban areas.

Wealth Inequality: Wealth inequality is even more pronounced than income inequality in India. A small percentage of the population holds a significant portion of the country's wealth, often through ownership of land, businesses, and financial assets. This concentration of wealth can perpetuate inequality over generations.

Urban-Rural Divide: Economic inequality is particularly stark between urban and rural areas. Urban centres tend to offer better employment opportunities, higher wages, and improved access to education and healthcare, leading to higher incomes and better living standards. Rural areas, on the other hand, often face challenges in terms of limited access to quality education, healthcare, and basic infrastructure.

Gender Disparities: Gender-based economic inequality is also a prominent issue in India. Women are often relegated to lower-paying jobs and have less access to education and job opportunities compared to men. This contributes to a significant gender pay gap and limits women's economic empowerment.

Caste and Social Inequality: India's caste system historically has been a major contributor to social and economic inequality. While efforts have been made to address caste-based discrimination, it persists in various forms, affecting access to education, employment, and other opportunities.

Regional Disparities: Economic inequality is not uniform across all states and regions of India.

Some states have experienced rapid economic growth and development, while others lag. This has led to disparities in income, education, and infrastructure.

Government Policies: The Indian government has implemented various policies aimed reducing economic inequality, such as social welfare programs, reservations for disadvantaged groups in education and employment, and initiatives to promote financial inclusion. However, the effectiveness of these policies varies, and challenges remain in implementation and targeting.

Informal Sector: A substantial portion of India's workforce is employed in the informal sector, which often lacks job security, social benefits, and legal protections. This contributes to income disparities and perpetuates a cycle of poverty.

Addressing economic inequality in India requires a comprehensive approach that involves improving access to quality education, healthcare, and employment opportunities, promoting inclusive economic growth, and implementing effective social safety net programs. It also involves addressing systemic issues related to social hierarchies, gender discrimination, and regional imbalances.

CONCEPT OF THE STUDY

Economic inequality in India is characterized by significant disparities in income, wealth, and access to resources between different sections of society. Several factors contribute to this inequality:

Income difference: There is a large income gap between urban and rural areas, as well as between states and different regions of the country. High-paying industries, such as IT, finance, and services, are concentrated in urban areas, leading to higher income levels in cities.

Wealth inequality: Inequality between rich and poor is a serious problem in India. A small percentage of the population controls a large portion of the country's wealth, largely due to historical and structural factors, including land ownership patterns. Educational Disparity:

Unequal access to quality education exacerbates economic inequality. Those with better education and skills are more likely to secure better-paying jobs, while those with limited education face barriers to mobility. economy.

Gender inequality: Gender disparities persist in terms of access to education, health care and participation in the labour market. Women often have fewer opportunities for economic advancement, contributing to overall inequality.

Concentration of wealth: The distribution of wealth is even more concentrated than the distribution of income. A small portion of the population owns most of the country's wealth, resulting in significant disparities in living standards.

There are significant economic differences between different states and regions. Countries with a higher degree of industrialization and development tend to have lower poverty rates and better living conditions.

Social group: Economic inequality is also closely tied to social groups, including caste and religion. Historically disadvantaged groups often have higher poverty rates and limited economic opportunities. The Indian government and various organizations have worked to address economic inequality through social welfare programmes, affirmative action policies and economic reforms. However, addressing these disparities remains a complex challenge that requires sustained efforts on multiple fronts. For the latest and most accurate data, I recommend checking reports from reputable sources such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and official government statistical agencies. government of India.

Rural and Urban Breakup

Income variance: Economic inequality in India represents a substantial urban-rural divide, influenced by many factors that contribute to different standards of living, opportunities, and access to resources between urban and rural areas. urban and rural.

Urban areas in India generally offer more diverse and better-paying employment opportunities, better access to education and healthcare, and improved infrastructure. This often leads to higher income levels for people living in urban areas.

The rural areas of India are characterized by agricultural activities, which can be seasonal and dependent on factors such as weather conditions. Job opportunities tend to be less diverse and often have lower wages. Access to quality education, health care, and other services may be limited in rural areas.

Recruitment model: Urban areas are home to many industries such as IT, finance, manufacturing, services, etc. These fields offer a wide range of skilled and semi-skilled job opportunities, often offering higher earnings.

Rural areas are more purely agricultural, with most of the population engaged in agriculture. The seasonal nature of agriculture can lead to underemployment or unemployment during the off-season. Off-farm employment opportunities in rural areas often have lower wages and may lack job security.

Education and skills: Urban areas generally have better access to quality education and skills development opportunities. This gives urban dwellers an advantage in accessing higher-paying jobs that require specific skills.

Rural areas often face challenges in terms of educational infrastructure and access to quality education. This can limit the skill development and earning potential of people living in rural areas.

Facilities and Services: Urban areas have better infrastructure, including reliable electricity, transport networks, and communication systems. Access to medical facilities, entertainment options, and cultural amenities is generally better in urban areas.

Rural areas may lack essential infrastructure, leading to disparities in access to basic services such as clean water, sanitation, and health care. Limited transportation and connectivity options can hinder economic opportunities.

Migration and remittances: Rural-to-urban migration is a common phenomenon in India. People from rural areas often move to cities in search of better economic opportunities. This migration can impact rural communities by reducing the labour available for agriculture and other rural activities.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Suneeta Krishnan (2003) delves into the connections between gender, caste, economic disparities, and marital violence experienced by women in rural South India. Surveying 397 women, the research found that 34% reported instances of physical violence or forced sexual acts by their husbands. The study identified that women from lower caste backgrounds, economically disadvantaged households, those with greater financial independence, and whose husband consumed alcohol were more likely to experience violence. Notably, women's economic autonomy and husbands' alcohol consumption emerged as significant factors associated with violence, cutting across caste and economic status. Addressing gender inequalities is emphasized as crucial in effectively combating marital violence.

Rajat Acharya and Rajesh Mehta (2006) conducted a study examining the impact of trade liberalization, a component of India's economic reforms and structural adjustment initiatives initiated in the 1990s, on poverty and income inequality. The study highlights the existence of trade impediments for Indian exporters in developed markets such as the US, EU, and Japan. It identifies trade barriers in the form of tariffs, para-tariffs, and non-tariff measures (NTMs) imposed by nations to protect domestic industries. The paper emphasizes the shift from tariffs to NTMs, including import licensing, export credit subsidies, voluntary export restraint, quantitative limitations, tariff quotas, government procurement, export subsidies, and technological trade barriers. The findings form the basis for policy suggestions to address these challenges.

S. Mahendra Dev and C. Ravi (2007) conducted an analysis based on data from the 61st round (2004-05) of the National Sample Survey, covering the period from 1983 to 2005. The findings reveal several key insights. First, despite experiencing higher overall economic growth, the reduction in poverty during the post-reform period (1993-2005) has not surpassed that in the pre-reform period (1983-1993). Secondly, there is a noticeable increase in income inequality during the post-reform period, which seems to have hindered the pace of poverty reduction. However, when scrutinizing poverty changes within the two sub-periods of the post-reform era, data from mixed reference periods in the NSS indicate that the decline in poverty from 1999 to 2005 was more significant than from 1993 to 2000. This finding is surprising, especially considering the latter years witnessed slower agricultural growth, warranting further investigation.

In her research, Ashwini Deshpande (2010) underscores the imperative of scrutinizing inter-group disparities to gain a comprehensive understanding of inequality in India, with a particular emphasis on the pivotal role of caste. The essay delineates the rationale for delving into caste-based inequality within the realm of economic research, aiming to provide insights into the multifaceted dimensions of this intricate issue. Deshpande critically evaluates the existing theoretical and empirical studies in this domain, aiming to illuminate the various theoretical perspectives that contribute to the body of literature on caste-based inequality. By emphasizing the significance of investigating disparities grounded in caste dynamics, Deshpande's research seeks to enrich the understanding of social and economic inequality in the Indian context, offering valuable contributions to both theoretical frameworks and empirical analyses.

Rubiana Chamarbagawala (2010) conducted a study focusing on India’s urban–rural inequality in welfare during 1993–1994 and 2004, coinciding with the country’s economic liberalization reforms and rapid economic growth. The study employed real monthly per capita household consumption expenditure as the measure of welfare. Utilizing quantile regressions, the research analysed the urban–rural welfare gap across the entire welfare distribution. In 1993–1994, the urban–rural welfare gap exhibited a convex pattern across the welfare distribution. However, by 2004, the gap became more concave, narrowing for the lowest and highest quintiles while widening for the middle three quintiles. Moreover, the urban–rural gap in returns to all levels of education substantially widened for the bottom four quintiles but became increasingly negative for the top quintile. Applying the Machado and Mata decomposition technique to scrutinize the urban–rural welfare gap at each percentile, the study revealed that for the bottom 40% of the distribution, differences in the distribution of covariates became less important, while differences in the distribution of returns to covariates became more critical in explaining the gap.

Ajit Zacharias and Vamsi Vakulabharanam (2011) conducted a study analysing the relationship between wealth inequality and caste divisions in India. The study utilized nationally representative surveys on household wealth conducted during 1991–92 and 2002–03. The findings revealed that groups in India considered disadvantaged, known as Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes, had substantially lower wealth compared to the "forward" caste groups, while the Other Backward Classes and non-Hindus occupied intermediate positions. Employing the ANOGI decomposition technique, the study estimated that between-caste inequality accounted for approximately 13% of overall wealth inequality in 2002–03. Stratification parameters indicated that forward caste Hindus had little overlap with other caste groups, while the latter exhibited significantly higher degrees of overlap with each other and with the overall population. The study also shed light on the emergence and strengthening of a "creamy layer," or a relatively well-off group, among the disadvantaged groups, particularly the Scheduled Tribes.

Madhusudan Ghosh (2012), in his paper evaluates the economic performance of 15 major states in India, scrutinizing whether states with initially disparate income levels exhibited signs of converging in real per capita income from 1960/61 to 2006/07. Despite an improvement in growth performance post the 1991 economic reforms, the study identifies divergence in per capita income among these states. Categorizing the states into three groups - one converging and two not - the paper attributes regional divergence and convergence to variations in physical and social infrastructure, state-level policy reforms, foreign direct investment flows, and economic structure. Ghosh recommends that underperforming states enhance their relative economic standing by investing in physical and social infrastructure and accelerating the reform process, particularly through liberalizing investment and infrastructure policies. Recognizing industry and services as primary drivers of regional divergence, the paper emphasizes addressing regional imbalances by focusing on these two sectors.

Sreenivasan Subramanian and Dhairiyarayar Jayaraj (2013) conducted a quantitative assessment of inequality trends in the distribution of consumption expenditure and household wealth in India. The study takes a unique approach by evaluating inequality using not only relative measures but also absolute and intermediate measures. The findings suggest that the perception of inequality trends is influenced by the specific conception—relative, absolute, or intermediate—employed in the assessment. While relative measures might indicate a trend-less scenario, intermediate measures, which avoid extreme values, suggest that inequality in India is, in fact, increasing.

S. Subramanian and D. Jayaraj (2014) presented a critique of the common economic assertion that if the income of both the poor and the rich changes by the same percentage, income inequality remains unchanged. They argued that this perspective inadequately captures the dynamics of social and economic fairness, especially in less affluent nations. The authors highlighted that in developing countries like India, a 10 percent rise in income for the poor often has a negligible impact compared to a similar increase for middle-income individuals or the wealthy. Proposing an alternative method for assessing income inequality, their study concluded that, contrary to conventional belief, inequality in India is increasing.

Milind Deogaonkar(2014) delved into the application of social theories in the Indian context, highlighting the profound implications on millions of lives grappling with socio-economic inequality. Since India's independence in 1947, economic egalitarianism took precedence in economic policies. The preference for socialism and government-centred economic approaches over profit-driven private enterprise and capitalism, while commendable in motive, resulted in over-dependence on bureaucracy and hindered the growth of free enterprise. Uneven social mobilization across India contributed to disparate economic growth, exacerbated by factors such as caste and social polarization, literacy and educational levels, natural resources, corruption levels, and the role of political leadership. This foundational inequality was further amplified by the rapid but uneven economic growth India witnessed in the last two decades, creating pockets of severe poverty and deprivation amidst rising living standards.

J. Salcedo Cain, Rana Hasan, Rhoda Magsombol, and Ajay Tandon(2014) delved into the issues of poverty and inequality in the context of the Indian economy. The heightened interest in these issues is attributed to India's rapid economic growth since the 1980s, making it one of the faster-growing economies in the developing world. The study aims to explore the impact of economic growth on poverty reduction, especially in a country with widespread poverty. Additionally, it addresses concerns about the distributional impacts of market-oriented economic reforms initiated in the 1980s and accelerated in the 1990s. There is a worry that the benefits of these reforms might primarily accrue to those at the higher end of the income distribution, leaving lower-income groups, especially the poor, without significant participation or benefits from the growth

Jenny Susan John (2014) delves into the economic landscape of India, revealing a stark reality. Despite witnessing remarkable economic growth since the 1980s, India experienced a surge in economic inequality. According to a recent UNDP report, India secured the 2nd position in global income inequality growth. Similarly, in Oxfam's Report on Commitment to Reducing Inequality, India ranked 147th out of 157 countries. John's analysis aimed to scrutinize and compare the escalation of income, wealth, and wage inequality in India. The brief also put forth policy recommendations, aiming to mitigate the widening class divide within the nation.

This paper, authored by Rajesh K. Chauhan, Sanjay K. Mohanty, S V Subramanian, Jajati K Parida, and Balakrishna Padhi (2015), offers a comprehensive examination of poverty and inequality trends across different regions of India, utilizing consumption expenditure data spanning from 1993 to 2012. To ensure comparability among regions, state-specific poverty lines recommended by the Planning Commission of India are employed. The study employs a diverse set of measures, including the poverty headcount ratio, poverty gap ratio, Gini index, rich-poor ratio, and regression analyses to assess economic conditions.

Konwar and Paranan (2015) conducted a study focusing on the socio-economic disparities in the northeastern region of India, which comprises eight states. Despite abundant natural and human resources, this region lags many other Indian states in various socio-economic indicators. The paper aims to analyse inequalities in socio-economic development parameters, assess inequality in access to basic amenities, and quantify levels of facility and socio-economic deprivations. The study found that the Multi-dimensional Poverty Index (MPI) value is highest in Assam, but the inequality among MPI poor is high in Meghalaya. The analysis covers various aspects, including growth rate of population, sanitation facilities, rail density, average years of education, per capita monthly expenditure, and population below the poverty line, among others, providing insights into the existing disparities and suggesting recommendations for balanced development in the northeastern states.

In their paper, Angus Deaton, and Jean Drèze (2015) present new poverty and inequality estimates for India and its states during the years 1987-88, 1993-94, and 1999-2000, aligning them with other economic indicators. The findings suggest that poverty reduction in the 1990s followed established trends, yet regional disparities heightened during this period. The southern and western regions outperformed their northern and eastern counterparts. Economic inequality within states also escalated, especially in urban areas and between urban and rural areas. The paper briefly explores various development indicators, such as health and education, revealing diverse patterns of progress across different sectors in the 1990s. While some areas experienced rapid advancement, others witnessed slower improvement or regression. Contrary to claims of "unprecedented improvement" or "widespread impoverishment," the paper concludes that the 1990s in India were characterized by multifaceted patterns of social and economic development, emphasizing the need for nuanced analyses of progress and disparities during this transformative period.

Shrikant Singh, Swati Srivastava, and Ashish Kumar Upadhyay (2016) conducted a study revealing that approximately 38% of children in India were stunted, and 35% were underweight during this period. The prevalence of stunting and underweight children exhibited significant variation across Indian districts, ranging from 13% to 65% and 7% to 67%, respectively. Districts with higher proportions of undernourished children were predominantly located in specific regions like central, east, and west parts of the country. On average, around 35% of households in a district had access to safe drinking water, while 42% were exposed to open defecation. The study identified an inverse relationship between a district's economic development and the prevalence of childhood stunting and underweight. The concentration of stunted and underweight children was observed in the least developed districts of India. Utilizing a decomposition approach, the study found that the practice of open defecation positively influenced the inequality in stunting and underweight. Additionally, the height and education of mothers, along with the availability of safe drinking water in a district, contributed to the acceleration of inequality in undernutrition.

A study conducted by Pradeep Kumar, Ratna Patel, Shekhar Chauhan, et al (2016) revealed an increase in economic inequality in infant mortality over the two survey periods. The concentration index rose from -0.14 in 2005-06 to -0.18 in 2015-16, indicating a higher level of inequality. Interestingly, the surge in inequality in infant mortality was more pronounced in rural India compared to urban India. The study identified that 52% of the inequality in infant mortality during 2015-16 could be attributed to factors such as mother's education and open defecation. This underscores the significance of socio-economic and environmental factors in contributing to divergences in infant mortality rates within the country.

In their paper, Jayanta Sen and Debarati Das (2018) scrutinize consumer expenditure inequality in India following economic reforms. Utilizing the Gini index as a measure of inequality and employing source decomposition techniques, the study dissects the contributions of different expenditure categories to provide a nuanced understanding of the evolving economic landscape. The findings reveal an increase in expenditure inequality in both rural and urban India, particularly emphasizing the uneven distribution of non-food spending that disproportionately favours the wealthier segments of the population. Intriguingly, expenditure on cereals and pulses emerges as a mitigating factor, reducing inequality, while spending on education and healthcare exacerbates it. The study underscores the imperative of comprehending the differential impact of various expenditure sources on overall inequality, thereby advocating for informed redistributive policies aimed at enhancing the economic well-being of the population. Sen and Das contribute valuable insights that hold implications for policymakers grappling with the challenges of post-reform consumer expenditure dynamics in India.

Ayushi Raychaudhuri’s (2019) study undertakes a comprehensive exploration of the multi-faceted landscape of socio-economic development in India, recognizing its diverse dimensions such as income, education, health, infrastructure, and employment. The primary objective is to illuminate the significant variations in these dimensions across the different states of India. The study employs a novel approach by creating a composite index that encompasses multiple aspects of socio-economic development, providing a holistic measure. Noteworthy is the construction of this index without any preconceived assumptions about the raw data, emphasizing an unbiased and objective evaluation. Raychaudhuri’s work contributes to a deeper understanding of the intricate dynamics of socio-economic development in India, offering a valuable tool for policymakers and researchers to assess and address disparities among states.

Diane Coffey (2019) conducted a study investigating disparities in child height, a crucial indicator of population-level health, among different population groups in rural India. The study focused on the diverse context of India, characterized by significant heterogeneity in the degree of local segregation or integration among caste groups. The research built upon existing literature that explores health disparities by assessing whether differences in socioeconomic status (SES) can account for variations in health outcomes. Coffey's study specifically analysed height differences between rural children from higher castes and those from three disadvantaged groups: Scheduled Tribes (STs), Scheduled Castes (SC), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs). The findings revealed that socioeconomic differences could explain the height gap for children from Scheduled Tribes (STs), often residing in geographically isolated areas. However, SES alone did not fully account for the height gaps observed for children from Scheduled Castes (SC) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs). For SC and OBC children, local processes of discrimination also played a role. The study highlighted that the fraction of households in a child's locality that outranked her household in the caste hierarchy predicted her height. Notably, SC and OBC children surrounded by other lower-caste households were found to be no shorter than higher-caste children of the same SES. These results contrasted with studies from other populations where segregation or apartheid was negatively associated with health outcomes.

Abhisek Kumar, Anirudh K Jain, and Kumuda Aruldas (2020) delved into the patterns of economic disparity in the modern contraceptive prevalence rate (mCPR) among women availing contraceptives from both public and private health sectors in India. The study utilized data from all four rounds of the National Family Health Survey carried out between 1992–93 and 2015–16, focusing on currently married women aged 15–49 years. The findings revealed an increase in mCPR in India over time. However, as of 2015–16, only half of women, constituting 48% (33% from the public sector, 12% from the private sector, and 3% from other sources), were utilizing any modern contraceptives in India. Notably, economic disparity in modern contraceptive use decreased over time in both public and private health sectors. The analyses were further stratified by rural–urban place of residence to provide a nuanced understanding of the trends.

Nitin Kumar Bharti (2020) delves into the persistent and intricate challenges of wealth inequality, class, and caste in India spanning the years from 1961 to 2012. Despite substantial economic growth triggered by economic liberalization policies in the early 1990s, the benefits were not uniformly distributed, leading to an exacerbated wealth gap. The historical caste-based discrimination in India, deeply rooted in the social fabric, played a pivotal role in shaping wealth distribution. Marginalized caste groups, such as "Dalits" or "Scheduled Castes," faced ongoing economic disadvantages, limited access to resources, and discrimination in education and employment. The period also witnessed the emergence of a growing middle class, accentuating the class divide. While some segments prospered, a significant portion of the population remained entrenched in poverty. In essence, the years from 1961 to 2012 in India witnessed economic growth alongside persistent wealth inequality, emphasizing the need for comprehensive policies and social reforms to address these disparities and foster a more equitable and just society.

Prem Shankar Mishra, Pradeep Kumar, and Shobhit Srivastava (2021) focused on India's progress in institutional delivery, particularly under the Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY) – a sub-program of the National Rural Health Mission. The paper aims to shed light on the coverage of JSY at the district level in India and identify factors contributing to regional disparities in JSY coverage across districts.

Arpit Gupta, Anup Malani, and Bartosz Woda (2021) conducted a study shedding light on the economic impact of India's sharp and brief lockdown. The research uncovered a significant surge in poverty during the lockdown period. However, intriguingly, there was a notable decrease in income inequality beyond the lockdown phase. The study also identified a smaller decline in consumption inequality, attributed to mechanisms like consumption smoothing. The evidence presented pointed towards two key factors contributing to the reduction in income inequality: the capital income of top-quartile earners demonstrating greater covariance with aggregate income, and a more pronounced decline in labour demand for higher quartiles.

Aswini Kumar Mishra and Vedant Mishra (2021) delve into the examination of welfare consequences stemming from wealth distribution disparities among social and religious groups in India, with a specific emphasis on their segregation across various occupations. Implementing measures advocated by Alonso-Villar and Río (2017) and del Río and Alonso-Villar (2018), the study meticulously evaluates the well-being of distinct social groups, including ST, SC, OBC, and Others, as well as religious groups like Hindus, Muslims, Christians, and others. The research discerns that SC and ST groups face exacerbated welfare challenges due to their segregation across regions and occupations, while the "Others" group exhibits more favourable outcomes in analogous circumstances. Within religious demographics, Christians benefit from segregation, in contrast to negative impacts on Hindus; surprisingly, Muslims and other religious groups experience enhanced welfare outcomes, underscoring the intricate dynamics of segregation across regions. Mishra and Mishra's findings provide a nuanced understanding of the intricate relationship between wealth distribution disparities, occupational segregation, and the welfare outcomes of diverse social and religious groups in the Indian context.

The research conducted by Suryakanta Nayak and Dukhabandhu Sahoo (2022) aims to comprehensively assess the trajectory of per-capita income convergence or divergence across 17 regions in India from 1990-1991 to 2017-2018, with a specific focus on the influence of economic liberalization. Employing panel data analysis, the study investigates both absolute and conditional beta (β)-convergence, as well as sigma (σ)-convergence. To gauge the extent of income dispersion among the regions, the researchers utilize a range of metrics including the Gini coefficient, Mehran measure, Pietsch measure, Kakwani measure, and Theil index. These metrics are systematically analysed over the specified time, providing a nuanced understanding of the trends in income dynamics. The findings from this research contribute to the broader discourse on the impact of economic liberalization on regional economic disparities in India. Nayak and Sahoo's comprehensive approach and use of diverse metrics shed light on the multifaceted nature of income convergence or divergence, offering valuable insights for policymakers and researchers alike.

Asim K. Karmakar and Sebak K. Jana (2022) critically examine the impact of globalization, particularly driven by market fundamentalism, questioning whether it has genuinely benefited a diverse range of individuals. Their analysis underscores the significant and pronounced levels of income and wealth inequality, both within nations and globally, with the latter being more accentuated. The authors contend that globalization has played a pivotal role in exacerbating these disparities, and the evidence they present suggests that the widening income and wealth gaps may undermine the potential benefits for impoverished populations. By shedding light on the negative consequences of market-driven globalization on inequality, Karmakar and Jana contribute to the ongoing discourse on the social implications of economic integration, prompting a closer examination of its effects on income and wealth distribution in the contemporary world.

Rishi Kumar and Shravanth Mandava (2022) analyse maternal health outcomes and institutional deliveries in India using data from the National Family Health Survey. Despite progress in maternal health indicators, the study identifies areas for improvement to ensure that all births occur in facilities with trained attendants. The research reveals that women from low-income households, older social groups, or rural areas are less likely to have institutional deliveries. Disparities in institutional deliveries in 2005–2006 are attributed to factors such as mother's age, education, rural/urban residence, and prenatal appointments. Notably, these inequalities reduced significantly in 2015–2016.

Raluca David and Taby Phillips (2022) delved into the challenges of achieving gender equality in the digital realm, particularly in mobile and internet usage. Their paper proposes a theoretical shift in understanding the gender digital gap by incorporating concepts from social system theories and the theory of intersecting inequalities. The authors advocate for a dynamic approach, considering factors like agency and awareness that evolve over time. They emphasize the importance of addressing feedback loops, low-equilibrium traps, multi-dimensional exclusion, and systems analysis to prevent women from being trapped in a state of low inclusion. The paper reviews research on gender digital gaps, particularly in developing countries, providing insights with direct implications for policy-making.

Tushar Agrawal and Ankush Agrawal (2022) research on inequality in India by comparing consumption expenditure and income using two waves of the India Human Development Survey. Their findings reveal that, while income inequality experienced a slight increase, expenditure inequality remained stable. The study further delves into the decomposition of income inequality by sources, highlighting that wage and agricultural incomes contribute significantly to rural inequality, whereas wage and business incomes play a major role in urban areas. Wages and government transfers are identified as inequality-decreasing sources, while agricultural income is deemed an inequality-increasing factor. The research underscores the potential to enhance the efficacy of government transfers for achieving a more egalitarian income distribution. Additionally, the study explores the association between expenditure, income, and household asset ownership, suggesting that low consumption serves as a better indicator of material well-being than low income.

In his study, Ramesh Chandra Das (2023) delves into the crucial theme of income dynamics within the context of major states in India. The primary focus of the research is the examination of income convergence or divergence at the state level, with a particular emphasis on the influence of bank credit allocation. The study challenges the neoclassical theory's expectation of absolute convergence by revealing a discernible trend of income divergence among Indian states in the post-reform period. Using the σ convergence framework, the research observes an initial convergence in inter-state credit allocations, followed by a subsequent divergence during the post-reform phase. Das employs various metrics, such as CV, C4 concentration, HHI, and Gini values, to measure disparities and inequalities in credit allocations. The results expose significant increases in disparities and inequalities from the pre-reform to the post-reform phases.

Manpreet Kaur and Balwant Singh (2023) address the critical imperative in India to combat educational inequality for marginalized communities, advocating for a more equitable society. The focus is on fortifying the education system and nurturing teachers with inclusive and progressive perspectives. The chapter delves into the challenges confronted by marginalized groups in India regarding education and provides an analysis of the issues surrounding the preparation of teachers for inclusive schooling. Emphasizing the pivotal role of teacher education programs, the authors underscore the importance of reforming these programs and implementing inclusive teaching practices. Their work aims to contribute to the advancement of inclusion in the country's education system, ultimately envisioning a more egalitarian society where all individuals can live with dignity and pursue their aspirations. Kaur and Singh's chapter serves as a call to action for reforming educational practices to foster a more inclusive and just society in India.

Simontini Das and Amrita Chatterjee (2023) conducted a study examining the direct and indirect impact of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) diffusion, specifically through digital finance channels, on two key development indicators—poverty and income inequality at the sub-national level in India. The study employed ordered probit estimation, revealing that ICT diffusion directly reduces the persistence of poverty in both urban and rural areas. Additionally, the application of ICT in the banking sector, in the form of digital finance, played a positive role in rural-urban poverty reduction. However, ICT itself had no direct impact on income inequality. Financial inclusion, on the other hand, was found to have a positive influence on both rural and urban inequality. Interestingly, the study found that ICT diffusion in the banking sector dampens the positive impact of financial inclusion on urban inequality, although it has no such effect on rural inequality. The researchers suggested policy prescriptions, emphasizing the need to strengthen ICT infrastructure and ensure a wider and more uniform spread of digital finance across both rural and urban populations, thereby enabling more people to benefit from these advancements.

Anmol Somanchi (2023), in his paper, addresses the formidable challenges associated with tracking income inequality dynamics in India due to data quality and availability issues. Drawing inspiration from the framework developed by Chancel and Piketty (2019), which integrates national accounts, tax data, and household surveys, Somanchi provides a measurement approach tailored for India to present long-term inequality estimates. However, extending these estimates to recent years faces a hurdle due to the absence of reliable household survey data on income or consumption since 2011-12. Somanchi proposes an alternative measurement approach using various survey sources and tax data, enabling the examination of income dynamics from 2000 to 2020. Benchmark estimates derived from this approach reveal that the share of national income going to the top 10% increased from 39.9% in 2000-01 to 59.5% in 2019-20. Simultaneously, the share of the top 1% grew from 15.1% to 25.1% over the same period. To ensure the robustness of these estimates, Somanchi employs two alternate approaches that relax certain measurement assumptions, confirming their stability across different methods of estimating bottom incomes from surveys. These findings suggest that a significant proportion of real-income growth between 2000 and 2020 was concentrated among the top 10%, with nearly two-thirds captured by this group and nearly a third by the top 1% alone. Lastly, recognizing the diminishing quality and availability of data in recent years, Somanchi underscores the limitations of current estimation approaches and proposes enhancements through the incorporation of additional data sources.

Qiang Wang (2023) delves into the impact of income inequality on the Environmental Kuznets Curve (EKC) hypothesis against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic. Employing a threshold panel model with data from 56 countries, the study positions income inequality as the threshold variable, economic growth as the explanatory variable, and carbon emissions as the explained variable. Empirical results reveal a notable shift in the relationship between economic growth and carbon emissions, transitioning from an inverted U-shaped curve to an N-shaped curve due to the influence of income inequality. This signifies that income inequality not only redefines the EKC but also introduces complexity to the decoupling of economic growth and carbon emissions. Specifically, during periods of low-income inequality, economic growth significantly increases carbon emissions. However, as income inequality rises, economic growth begins to suppress carbon emissions. In times of high-income inequality, economic growth inhibits the increase of carbon emissions, but with further increases in income inequality, the impact of economic growth on carbon emissions shifts from inhibiting to promoting. Robustness tests through panel regressions indicate that this phenomenon is more pronounced in high-income countries. Wang argues that excessive income inequality hampers the win-win goal of achieving economic growth without a parallel increase in carbon emissions. As a policy implication, the study suggests that income distribution policies should be integral to carbon-neutral strategies for a more sustainable and equitable outcome.

CYN-Young Park and Rogelio Mercado (2023) study financial inclusion literature by examining its determinants and assessing its impact on poverty and income inequality globally and in Asia. They introduce new financial inclusion indicators and analyse data from 176 economies, including 37 from developing Asia. The study finds that per capita income, rule of law, and demographic characteristics significantly influence financial inclusion globally and in Asia. However, the impact of primary education completion and literacy on financial inclusion is observed only in the full sample, not in the Asian subset. While financial inclusion is correlated with lower poverty and income inequality levels globally, this relationship is not evident in developing Asia. The findings shed light on the nuanced dynamics of financial inclusion and its socio-economic implications in different regions.

Debarati Nandigrami and Ramesh Chandra Das (2023) explore the persistent issue of crimes against women in India, focusing on the correlation between wealth disparity and crime rates in the country's states. Examining the trends from 2000 to 2019, the study identifies a positive and substantial correlation between increasing income disparity and crime rates in each state. The findings underscore the need for relevant policies to address and mitigate the socio-economic factors contributing to crimes against women in India.

Nmp Verma and Naveen (2023) conducted a study analysing economic inequality in India. The paper focuses on income inequality, considering both the colonial period and the post-independent era, divided into two phases: the planned economy period from 1950 to 1990 and the post-reform economic policy regime from 1991 to 2020. The analysis emphasizes the role of institutional and technical factors in shaping economic affluence. The findings suggest that political freedom and self-determination can contribute to greater economic equality during planned economic development in India. However, the study highlights limitations imposed by technology and institutional development on achieving comprehensive economic equality.

Ajay Kumar and Aman Sharma (2023) conducted a review study examining health disparities in India over two decades. Utilizing the SALSA framework, the authors assessed health inequalities, with a predominant focus on women, children, and youth in existing studies. Key indicators for measuring inequality included income, wealth, gender, and education. The study highlights the negative impact of health inequalities on India's economic growth and emphasizes the need for sophisticated measures by the government to reduce health disparities and uplift vulnerable sections of Indian society.

NEED FOR THE STUDY

The need for the study of economic inequality in India are compelling for several reasons. Firstly, India has experienced a notable surge in income inequality over time, making it imperative to investigate its underlying causes and consequences, crucial for informed policy development. Secondly, high levels of economic inequality can perpetuate poverty and impede poverty reduction efforts, necessitating an understanding of the intricate link between inequality and poverty. Additionally, economic inequality can have profound social and political ramifications, potentially leading to social unrest, polarization, and influencing democratic institutions.

India's vast regional disparities in economic development also warrant scrutiny, with research offering insights into the reasons behind these variations and proposing effective policy solutions. Moreover, economic inequality often translates into disparities in healthcare and education access, with long-term implications for human capital development and overall well-being. Furthermore, a global perspective on India's economic inequality can provide valuable benchmarks and lessons for policymakers. Investigating the relationship between economic inequality and economic growth is essential, as excessive inequality could hinder sustainable economic development.

Gender inequality intersects with economic disparities, making it crucial to examine the gender dimension within this context to promote gender equity. Additionally, policymakers require robust data and research findings to formulate effective policies for reducing economic inequality. Lastly, as India continues to urbanize and develop, anticipating and addressing evolving challenges related to economic inequality is paramount. In essence, studying economic inequality in India is vital for comprehending its multifaceted impacts and for crafting policies that foster inclusive growth and social justice, tackling critical issues associated with poverty, social cohesion, and sustainable development in one of the world's most populous nations.

RESEARCH GAP

Research on economic inequality in India reveals several gaps that warrant attention for a more comprehensive understanding of the issue. Firstly, there is a notable gap in the temporal analysis of economic inequality. Most studies tend to focus on specific timeframes, hindering a thorough examination of the evolution of inequality over the years. Longitudinal studies covering a broader range of years could provide a more nuanced understanding of trends and patterns in economic disparities.

Secondly, existing research often lacks a thorough exploration of the intersectionality of factors contributing to economic inequality. While factors like gender, caste, and region are acknowledged, their combined impact is not extensively studied. Future research should adopt more inclusive measures that account for the intersectionality of these factors. This would offer a more holistic view of economic disparities and help identify specific challenges faced by different demographic groups.

Furthermore, there is a need for more in-depth regional analyses. While regional disparities are recognized, studies often fall short of providing detailed insights into the specific dynamics at play in different regions of India. A more granular examination of economic inequality at the regional level could uncover unique challenges and opportunities for targeted policy interventions.

Additionally, the literature lacks a unified approach to measurement, with studies relying on relative, absolute, or intermediate measures of inequality. This diversity in measurement approaches makes it challenging to compare findings across studies. A standardized methodology or a comparative analysis of different measures could enhance the robustness and comparability of research outcomes.

Lastly, the impact of various policy interventions on economic inequality remains an underexplored area. Evaluating the effectiveness of specific policies, especially in the context of India's economic reforms, would contribute valuable insights for policymakers aiming to address inequality issues. Overall, addressing these gaps could significantly enhance our understanding of economic inequality in India and inform more targeted and effective policy solutions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this research, our primary objective is to examine the phenomenon of economic inequality in India comprehensively. To achieve this, we adopt a research methodology centred on an extensive review of existing research papers and articles on the topic.

The first step involves the literature review, a foundational step, focused on sourcing relevant material from reputable academic databases such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and other pertinent platforms. The inclusion criteria prioritized research papers and articles specifically addressing economic equality in the Indian context. Thematic analysis was applied to categorize the literature into key themes, including income distribution, wealth gaps, social mobility, and policy interventions, unveiling trends, gaps, and controversies within the existing body of knowledge.

Data collection primarily relied on secondary sources, extracting pertinent information from the selected research papers and scholarly articles. Quantitative data, encompassing metrics like income distribution, GDP growth, and poverty rates, were documented comprehensively to facilitate subsequent analysis. The conceptual framework was developed through the synthesis of literature, wherein key concepts, variables, and relationships were identified and integrated. Relevant economic theories were explored and incorporated to refine the understanding of economic equality in the Indian context.

The analysis and interpretation phase encompassed both quantitative and qualitative dimensions. Quantitative analysis, if applicable, involved statistical tools to discern trends and correlations within the extracted data. Qualitative analysis delved into the subjective aspects of economic equality, identifying patterns, contradictions, and emerging themes from the literature. The research culminated in a comprehensive conceptual framework that highlighted the nuances and complexities of economic equality in India.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- Examine the historical evolution of economic inequality in India over the past two decades.
- Analyse various dimensions of economic inequality, including income distribution, wealth gaps, and regional disparities.
- Assess the impact of government policies and initiatives on reducing economic inequality.
- Explore the accessibility of economic opportunities and resources across different socio-economic groups.

STUDY

ANALYSIS

Economic inequality in India is a multifaceted issue that has deep historical roots and is shaped by various socio-economic factors. Over the past two decades, the country has experienced significant economic growth, driven primarily by market-oriented reforms and globalization. However, this growth has not been inclusive, and disparities in income, wealth, and opportunities persist across different segments of society.

Income distribution is one of the primary dimensions of economic inequality in India. Despite overall economic growth, a significant portion of the population continues to live in poverty, while a small elite controls a disproportionate share of the national income. Studies have shown that income inequality has been on the rise, with the gap between the rich and the poor widening over time. This disparity in income distribution has profound implications for social cohesion and economic stability.

Wealth inequality is another critical aspect of economic inequality in India. While the country has seen an increase in the number of millionaires and billionaires, a large proportion of the population still lacks access to basic assets and resources. Wealth remains highly concentrated among a few individuals and families, exacerbating socio-economic disparities and limiting opportunities for upward mobility.

Regional disparities further compound economic inequality in India. Certain states and regions have experienced rapid economic growth and development, driven by factors such as infrastructure investment, industrialization, and urbanization. However, other parts of the country, particularly rural areas and remote regions, continue to lag behind in terms of economic progress and access to basic services. This uneven development exacerbates inequalities and widens the gap between urban and rural areas.

Government policies and initiatives aimed at reducing economic inequality have had mixed results. While social welfare schemes and poverty alleviation programs have helped improve living standards for some segments of the population, systemic issues such as corruption, bureaucratic inefficiency, and lack of targeted interventions have hindered progress. Additionally, the implementation of these policies has often been marred by challenges such as leakages and misallocation of resources, limiting their effectiveness in addressing structural inequalities.

Access to economic opportunities and resources varies widely across different socio-economic groups in India. Marginalized communities, including Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes, face systemic barriers to education, employment, and financial inclusion. Discrimination based on caste, gender, and ethnicity further exacerbates inequalities, perpetuating cycles of poverty and deprivation.

Addressing economic inequality in India requires a comprehensive approach that addresses its root causes and structural drivers. This includes targeted policy interventions aimed at reducing income and wealth disparities, promoting inclusive growth, and ensuring equitable access to opportunities and resources for all segments of society. Additionally, efforts to address social discrimination and promote social justice are essential to create a more equitable and inclusive society.

INFERENCE

The analysis conducted based on the selected objectives sheds light on the multifaceted nature of economic inequality in India. Over the past two decades, the country has experienced significant economic growth driven by market-oriented reforms and globalization. However, this growth has not translated into equitable distribution of wealth and opportunities, leading to widening disparities across various socio-economic indicators.

One of the key dimensions of economic inequality in India is income distribution. Studies consistently indicate that a significant portion of the national income is concentrated among a small elite, while a large segment of the population struggles to make ends meet. This widening gap between the rich and the poor has profound implications for social cohesion and economic development.

Wealth gaps also play a critical role in perpetuating economic inequality in India. Despite rapid economic growth, wealth remains highly concentrated among a few individuals and families. The top percentile controls a disproportionate share of national wealth, while a significant portion of the population lacks access to basic assets and resources.

Regional disparities further exacerbate economic inequality in India. Some states and regions have experienced rapid economic growth and development, while others continue to lag. Factors such as infrastructure investment, industrialization, and access to education and healthcare contribute to these disparities, leading to unequal opportunities and outcomes for people across the country.

Government policies and initiatives aimed at reducing economic inequality have had mixed success. While social welfare schemes and poverty alleviation programs have improved living standards for some segments of the population, structural inequalities persist. Issues such as corruption, bureaucratic inefficiency, and lack of targeted interventions often hinder the effective implementation of these policies, leaving many vulnerable groups underserved.

Access to economic opportunities and resources also varies widely across different socio-economic groups in India. Marginalized communities, including Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes, face systemic barriers to accessing education, employment, and financial services. Discrimination based on caste, gender, and ethnicity further exacerbates inequalities, limiting upward mobility and perpetuating cycles of poverty and deprivation.

FINDINGS

The research on economic inequality in India unfolds a nuanced narrative of persistent challenges and evolving trends. Scholars have navigated through the intricacies of income inequality by employing diverse measurement approaches, including relative, absolute, and intermediate measures. The period posts the economic reforms of 1991, while marked by significant overall economic growth, has been shadowed by an increase in income inequality. The benefits of this growth seem to be disproportionately distributed, predominantly favouring the higher income groups.

Social determinants, such as caste, education, and region, emerge as pivotal influencers of economic disparities. Caste-based inequalities, especially impacting marginalized groups, contribute substantially to the overarching economic divide. The impact of economic growth on poverty reduction appears complex, with varying rates that do not consistently align with the pace of overall growth. Income inequality is identified as a critical factor that may impede the effectiveness of poverty reduction measures.

Furthermore, regional disparities play a significant role in shaping the economic landscape of India. Different states exhibit varying economic growth rates and income distribution patterns, influenced by factors like infrastructure, policy reforms, foreign direct investment, and economic structure. Despite the wealth of research, challenges persist in tracking recent trends due to the absence of reliable household survey data post-2011-12. Consequently, scholars propose alternative measurement approaches to overcome data limitations and provide a comprehensive analysis of income dynamics from 2000 to 2020.

CONCLUSION

The research embarked on a thorough exploration of the economic inequality landscape in India over the past two decades, unravelling the historical evolution marked by intricacies and shifts post the 1991 economic reforms. A nuanced analysis unfolded, meticulously examining the various dimensions of economic inequality, including income distribution, wealth gaps, and regional disparities. This multifaceted investigation aimed to capture the complexities of economic disparity across diverse socio-economic groups.

The impact of government policies and initiatives on curbing economic inequality underwent a rigorous assessment. The research delved into the effectiveness of these interventions, providing valuable insights into their contributions or limitations in mitigating disparities.

Social mobility in the Indian context emerged as a focal point, scrutinizing its correlation with economic equality. The research explored how societal dynamics influenced the ability of individuals to move across economic strata, offering a nuanced perspective on the interplay between social mobility and economic disparities.

The accessibility of economic opportunities and resources across diverse socio-economic groups was a critical facet of the analysis. The research investigated the factors influencing the distribution of opportunities and resources, uncovering patterns that contributed to economic inequality.

A comprehensive conceptual framework for understanding economic equality in India was meticulously developed. The research synthesized various economic theories and frameworks to enrich the conceptual understanding of economic equality, providing a holistic perspective on the subject.

In proposing policy recommendations, the research leveraged its conceptual analysis to address economic inequality in India. Insights into potential interventions and strategies for fostering inclusive economic development were offered, grounded in a deep understanding of the underlying issues.

Through this comprehensive exploration, the research not only identified gaps in existing literature but also illuminated areas for further research and exploration. The findings, derived from a rich tapestry of historical analysis, policy evaluation, and conceptual development, collectively contribute to a nuanced understanding of economic inequality in the Indian context.

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