
| RESEARCH ARTICLE**Striking a Balance: Challenges in Fostering Equality while Avoiding Centralization of Power in India's Diverse Dimensions****Zahid Hasan Reyad¹** ✉ and **Kazi Tasnim Jahan²**^{1,2}*Department of Law, Feni University, Feni, Chittagong, Bangladesh***Corresponding Author:** Zahid Hasan Reyad, **E-mail:** www.zhreyad@gmail.com

| ABSTRACT

This research focuses on the issues that India faces as it tries to ensure equality while preventing power concentration across its various dimensions. There are many complexities in Indian society. This research study figures out the relationship between promoting equality and decentralizing authority by using an analytical method. This study is conducted by taking a holistic approach that includes political, economic, social, and cultural issues. The aim of the research is to uncover the barriers that hinder the achievement of equilibrium between equality and power distribution. The research study technique comprises problem identification, data collecting, analysis, finding interpretation, and discussion of consequences and recommendations. By using this extensive methodology, this research provides useful insights.

| KEYWORDS

Equality, Power decentralization, India, Diversity, Challenges

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1. Introduction

The assertion made by Erk and Koning (2010) that multilingual federations tend to decentralize over time while monolingual federations tend to centralize is made possible by the high degree of linguistic diversity that is deeply ingrained in Indian society. The challenge lies in attempting to ensure equity for all citizens of India, a country rich in diversity in terms of ethnicity, geography, and culture. However, in the process, we must exercise caution to avoid giving an excessive amount of authority to a small number of individuals or locations since this could lead to unfair circumstances for others. Thus, it's similar to trying to balance things without allowing one side to gain too much power by walking a tightrope.

The objectives of the research include:

1. Identifying the current state of equality and power distribution across various dimensions in India.
2. Exploring the factors contributing to inequalities and power imbalances in different regions and among different groups.
3. Investigating strategies and policies aimed at fostering equality while avoiding centralization of power.
4. Assessing the effectiveness of existing initiatives and proposing potential solutions or improvements.
5. Analyzing the implications of different approaches on social cohesion, economic development, and political stability.

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6. Providing recommendations for policymakers, organizations, and communities to promote inclusive growth and equitable distribution of power.

This research study is conducted by using "Analytical Methods". In this process, the data findings are critically analyzed to come to decisions about the underlying challenges to foster equality while avoiding centralization of power and keeping balance on them altogether from the Indian perspective.

2. Literature Review

Many articles concern the decentralization of service provision, especially in health care; relatively few involve natural resource management. The authors of the many research articles presented their findings in a variety of ways, and that is why the identification of the connection between decentralization, empowerment, and equity can be challenging.

2.1 Equity and Equality

One of the database searches mentioned above-treated equity as if it were equivalent to equality. The two terms are sometimes used interchangeably, although, in fact, they mean quite distinctive things. Equity means something is fair, just, or impartial. Equality means equal or sameness. Equality is Equity. Equity might entail equality, but not necessarily.

2.2 Decentralization

The transferring of the administrative authority, public resources, and responsibilities of central government agencies to lower-level organs of government or to non-governmental bodies is usually understood as a political process of Decentralization, such as community-based organisations (CBOs), 'third party' non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or private sector actors (Crook and Manor, 1998: 6–7; Rondinelli et al., 1989; Meenakshisundaram, 1999; World Bank, 2000a: 3). Conceptually, important distinctions can be made among **deconcentration**, in which political, administrative and fiscal responsibilities are transferred to lower units within central line ministries or agencies (Crook and Manor, 1998: 6–7; Rondinelli et al., 1989; Meenakshisundaram, 1999: 55; emphasis added); **devolution**, which sub-national units of government are either the process by which sub-national units of government is created or strengthened in terms of political, administrative and fiscal power (Blair, 2000; Crook and Manor, 1998: 6–7; Rondinelli et al., 1989); **delegation**, is the way to transferring the responsibilities to organizations that are 'outside the regular bureaucratic structure and only controlled by the central government indirectly,' (Meenakshisundaram, 1999: 55; emphasis added); **privatisation**, is the process of transferring all responsibility for government functions to nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) or private enterprises which are independent of government (Meenakshisundaram, 1999, 56).¹

3. Methodology

This research study is conducted by using "Analytical Methods". In this process, the data are collected from the survey of different research papers, and findings are critically analyzed (statistical analysis) to come to decisions about the underlying challenges to foster equality while avoiding centralization of the power as well as keeping balance on them altogether in Indian perspective. This research delves into the provided objective questions in the introduction and collects data and information from researchers who have written similar articles. It also includes the report by Oxfam International, World Economic Forum, and Forum of Federations Blog to figure out India's present scenario in terms of inequality, equal distribution, and the ways the administration system is centralized or decentralized.

The data collection process involves a comprehensive analysis of relevant information on the finding topic to foster equality while avoiding the centralization of power in India's diverse dimensions. In addition, this process of collecting data also went through the systematic method in terms of the selection of the papers that are included in this research study paper.

¹ Craig Johnson, "Decentralisation in India: Poverty, Politics and Panchayati Raj" 04 (February, 2003)

At the onset of the search, a wide range of research papers, articles, and publications were identified as similar to the provided topic. There were some criteria, including in-depth analysis, relevance to the subject matter, and credibility of the sources. The research study delves into the articles of different scholars like Craig Johnson, Amy R. Poteete, and Ajay Kumar Singh with the same interest based on the research objectives questions, academic publications, and reputable sources which provide valuable insights into the complex field of Indian society, the power distribution and maintain equality.

The intention was to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted challenges faced by India to pursuit the decentralization of power and fostering equality after reviewing a substantial number of previously published research articles. The selection process is designed to capture different perspectives and approaches in the matter of the presented issue and to emphasize the inclusivity and diversity in terms of sources.

However, to ensure a robust foundation for the focused study analysis and findings, the research study data collection process involved the examination of a significant number of existing research papers. The underlying object of the methodical approaches is to present an insightful exploration of the existing complexities surrounding the balance between power distributions and to foster equality in India's diverse dimensions.

4. Findings

In terms of establishing equality in Indian society, India showed visible significant progress, but it is still facing several challenges. Some of these are as follows:

1. **Caste System:** The caste system is an age-old social hierarchy that has been deeply ingrained in Indian society. Despite being abolished by the Indian Constitution, it still exists in practice and has led to discrimination, exploitation, and marginalization of certain groups.
2. **Gender Inequality:** In spite of the many laws and policies in India, gender inequality remains challenging. Women face discrimination and violence in many forms, including domestic violence, sexual harassment, and female infanticide.
3. **Poverty:** Poverty is a major challenge in India, and it affects many aspects of life, including education, health, and employment opportunities. This leads to inequality and a lack of access to basic resources and services.
4. **Regional Disparities:** India is a vast country with diverse cultures and languages. Regional disparities in terms of development, education, and employment opportunities exist, which leads to inequality.
5. **Religious Differences:** India is a secular country, but religious differences have led to discrimination and violence in some cases.
6. **Lack of Political Will:** Despite the existence of laws and policies to promote equality, there is a lack of political will to implement them effectively.

Professor *Himanshu* of Jawaharlal Nehru University said,

"What is particularly worrying in India's case is that economic inequality is being added to a society that is already fractured along the lines of caste, religion, region, and gender."

India is one of the fastest-growing economies in the world and one of the most unequal countries. Over the last three decades, it has been clearly seen that inequality has been rising sharply. The result of crony capitalism is that the richest have cornered a huge part of the wealth, and also by inheritance. The poor are getting poorer day by day, but on the other hand, the richest are getting richer at a much faster pace. The poor are still struggling to earn a minimum wage, living by hand to mouth, and, let alone, access to quality education and healthcare services. The consequences of it are many, among them continuing to suffer from chronic under-investment of them. The

vulnerable sections of society, especially women and children, are the worst sufferers from these widening gaps and the rise of inequalities.²

The survey results show that “from the total national wealth, the top 10% of the Indian population holds 77% of the wealth. In 2017, 73% of the total generated wealth went to the richest. In India, *670 million people comprise half of the population; most of them are the poorest people, and their wealth increased by 1%.³

4.1 Inequality in numbers

According to a report by the *Johannesburg-based company New World Wealth*, India is ranked in the second position for being the most unequal country globally; the millionaires are controlling 54% of its wealth. India is listed among the 10 richest countries in the world, with a total individual wealth of \$5,600 billion, but it is a bitter truth that India is relatively poor. In comparison with the world's most equal country, Japanese millionaires control only 22% of the total wealth.

According to the latest data from **Credit Suisse**, the richest person in India is 1%, and they own 53% of the country's wealth. Among the richest 5% own 68.6%, while the top 10% have 76.3%. At the other end of the pyramid, the poor own 4.1% of the national wealth.

In 2000, the **Credit Suisse** data showed that India's richest 1% owned just 36.8% of the country's wealth, while the share of the top 10% was 65.9%. Since then, their share of the pie has increased steadily. The present scenario is that the share of the top 1% exceeds 50%.

This is much more than the **United States**, where the richest 1% own 37.3% of total wealth. The scenario of **Russia** is worse than that of India, where the top 1% owns a stupendous 70.3% of the country's wealth.⁴

4.2 Inequality in Palanpur: 1957–2015

Palanpur, a village in India, experienced significant population growth from over 500 in 1957/8 to 1,250 in 2008/9. The village's caste structure, consisting of eight groups, has played a significant role in the village's development. The Thakurs, the largest caste, are economically powerful and have moved into the non-farm sector. The Muraos, traditionally cultivating castes, have seen their economic status decline. The Jatabs, at the bottom of the hierarchy, have experienced significant upward mobility over the years.

Agricultural practices have evolved since the late 1950s, with the spread of irrigation, new seed varieties, fertilizers, pesticides, rental markets for agricultural equipment, and the introduction of new crops. The expansion of irrigation from half of village land to 100% by 1974/5 and the intensification of farm mechanization have contributed to agricultural development. Additionally, cropping patterns have shifted towards higher-value crops.

Over time, more villagers have become involved in the non-farm sector, accounting for nearly 60% of average household income in 2008/09.

4.3 Instruments

Dynamic de/centralization in India has been achieved through constitutional amendments and increased use of Union framework legislation. The Third Amendment Act of 1954 allowed the Union to regulate essential commodities, including foodstuff, in the public interest. The Sixth Amendment Act of 1956 restricted states' power to tax important raw materials and eliminated multiple taxation in interstate trade and commerce. The Forty-Second Amendment Act of 1976 aimed to strengthen the Union government and shift the administration of justice below the high courts to concurrent jurisdiction. The tax over professions up to a limit further enabled states by the execution of the Sixtieth Amendment Act, 1988. The Seventy-Third and Seventy-Fourth Amendment Acts provided constitutional bases to panchayats and municipalities, but their practical effect has been little decentralization. The

² India: Extreme inequality in numbers (2022) Oxfam International. Available at: <https://www.oxfam.org/en/india-extreme-inequality-numbers> (Accessed: 19 June 2024).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Inequality in India: What's The real story? (no date) World Economic Forum. Available at: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/10/inequality-in-india-oxfam-explainer/> (Accessed: 19 June 2024).

"service tax" is provided by the enactment of the Eighty-Eight Amendment Act, 2003, which could be levied by the Union; hence, the Union and the states could be appropriated. Most de/centralization-relevant constitutional amendments were intended to promote centralization, except for federal financial relations. India should remain a centralized federation that considers the larger public welfare, and this notion is guided by the rulings of the Supreme Court. Framework legislation has also been largely centralizing, with several enactments impacting states' competence over land planning, water harvesting, forest management, and development projects in tribal and forest areas.

Union regulatory institutions in India have led to a national governance regime focused on technocratic efficiency, with a hierarchical relationship between central and state institutions. These bodies, which are post-constitutional developments, have the authority to issue binding administrative orders and frame rules in various policy sectors. The Seventh Pay Commission Report 2015 listed up to 36 Union regulators in India, which work under the control of Union ministries. This centralization and nationalization of public policies, including some previously reserved for states, curtail the rule-making authority and administrative autonomy of states.

4.4 Static De/Centralization Today

India's federation is still more centralized today than at the outset, with the second most centralized legislatively and administratively after Australia and less centralized fiscally than Germany. However, it is relatively more decentralized in legislation in agriculture, health care, law enforcement, and social welfare and more centralized in tertiary education, environmental protection, finance and securities, language, and natural resources. In administration, seven policy areas are relatively decentralized, while India is more centralized in education, environmental protection, finance and securities, and natural resources. India displays medium levels of de/centralization across the five categories, except for the proportion of conditional grants. This pattern confirms the highly skewed distribution of powers between the union and states in the Indian constitution in legislative, executive, and financial domains.⁵

India, once highly centralized, is now among the most centralized of the six federations in the study. The country has experienced little dynamic de/centralization, with the dominant pattern of Union-state power relations being stability. The main exceptions are pre-tertiary education, citizenship, and immigration. Change has occurred primarily through constitutional amendments, Union framework legislation, and the creation of Union regulatory authorities. The Supreme Court's rulings consistently display a pro-Union bias, upholding the highly centralized distribution of powers. Citizens' strong identification with the federation and preference for a strong center and uniform policies have played a role in preserving a high level of centralization. The centralization process was not undermined by India's cultural and linguistic diversity, not even after the ethno-linguistic criteria were re-organized. Centralization has been driven by policy uniformity and national interests and security.⁶ The process of decentralization is not enough to overcome the social structural inequities within local communities. However, the effect of decentralization can be seen in terms of the improvement of the situation of marginalized groups, i.e., women and the poor.⁷ Careful institutional design does not offer a *panacea* but helps to minimize the inequalities.

5. Discussion

India has made significant progress in establishing equality in Indian society, but there is still a long way to go. Addressing these challenges will require sustained efforts from all sections of society. Here, the whole discussion focuses on the effects of decentralization in reducing poverty and women's political empowerment among many prevailing inequalities in India.

5.1 Decentralization and poverty reduction

Increased involvement in local politics will enhance the standard and accessibility of public services, which is the idea that the basis of democratic decentralization works; it is not only the way to enhance political involvement but also with a specific focus on improving the lives of the impoverished and socially marginalized groups (see, for

⁵ Ajay Kumar Singh, "Dynamic De/Centralization in India, 1950–2010" 49 *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 112-137 (24 July 2018).

⁶ *Ibid*

⁷ Amy R. Poteete, "Is Decentralization a Reliable Means of Increasing Equity?" (13 August 2004)

instance, de Souza, 2000). For proponents of democratic decentralization, a central challenge of improving the delivery of public services becomes one of 'crafting' (Ostrom, 1990) institutions that can maximize participation in political life. To reduce poverty, the associated systems of the government provide access to the (many) resources and conveniences that will empower the poor and vulnerable groups in society.

In spite of having great variation among cultures, countries, and regions, governments can typically play a pivotal role in the poor and predominantly rural areas:

- Firstly, to the provision of public welfare, i.e., education for all and healthcare services;
- Secondly, the provision of divisible goods, i.e., irrigation, agricultural extension, and credit;
- Thirdly, to the determination and enforcement of laws regulating key economic inputs, i.e., capital, labor, land;
- Fourthly, a critical element is the recognition and protection of the freedom of organization, association, and entitlement in the eyes of the state.

It is worth emphasizing that all of these are problematic in that they require systems of good governance that will ensure that public resources are being delivered efficiently and effectively (Johnson and Start, 2001). It is often justified that the strongest calls for public sector reform are needed due to misallocation or 'corruption' (e.g., the World Bank, 2000d; the Economist, 2001).⁸

5.2 Supporting women's political participation through decentralization

Decentralization has been defended by multiple authors (e.g., Mill, Rousseau, Tocqueville) because lower levels of governance are more easily accessible to civil society. Political engagement and decentralization are related processes. Both poverty and inequality are impacted positively by this process; it helps to create some of the essentials that will also keep democracy stable. Focusing on local concerns, especially towards women, and ensuring more engagement of women in politics is therefore enhanced by decentralization.

In the Forum's Gender Equality and Federalism report, author **Christine Forster** writes that,

"Sub-national units create entry points for women that are more attractive to women candidates because they are located close to home, they enable women to work at local and community level, and they enable them to develop confidence, skills, and experience."

The statement of Pakistani women who serve on local councils have stated that,

"In empowering women through providing them freedom of expression and right to take part in decision-making is the outcome of decentralization process." It is hopeful but not as satisfactory that Decentralization and multilevel government did not ensure the expected percentages of female political participation.

"Multiple subnational units create multiple access points for women to lobby for reform measures in multiple forums, for example, local parliaments, unions, courts, and political parties," suggests Forster, drawing on Williams' findings. Decentralization thus fosters an environment that is conducive to women's representation and involvement in politics.⁹

5.3 Research Limitations

The aim of the research study is to provide valuable insights in the matter of finding the existing challenges in India to foster equality as well as to avoid the centralization of power; however, it acknowledges there are certain limitations that have affected the results and the interpretations of the findings and these are as follows:

The data collection process was one of the main limitations of the research study. Although it is common for researchers who are striving to include a wide range of research papers and publications, there could have been

⁸ Craig Johnson, "Decentralisation in India: Poverty, Politics and Panchayati Raj" 06 (February, 2003)

⁹ Decentralized governance to reinforce women's political participation in the MENA region - forum of federations blog (2021) Forum of Federations Blog -. Available at: <https://forumfedblog.org/decentralized-governance-women-political-participation/> (Accessed: 19 June 2024).

other relevant sources. This limitation impacted the comprehensiveness of the analysis, and there is a possible chance that it will not be fully represented in the research findings from many perspectives.

In Addition, in terms of the data collection process, the existing literature and previously published scholarly articles introduced a potential limitation. The study researchers made conscious efforts to select credible and diverse sources; however, the inherent limitations of the selected research papers have influenced the overall interpretation of the findings.

Furthermore, the scope of the study has limited the depth of analysis on particular dimensions of India's diversity, which include regional disparities or cultural nuances. These restricted focuses also have implications for the generalizability of the findings and the applicability of proposed solutions to all dimensions of India's diverse society.

Though this paper has many of these limitations, the study aimed to offer valuable insights into the complexities of fostering equality and decentralized power distribution in India while recognizing the need for future research to address these constraints and utilize the novel aims of this study.

5.4 Suggestions for future research

As per the findings of this research study, there are many possible avenues prevail for the upcoming research and practical applications, and these can build the following insights:

Comparative Analysis: From this research, the next generation of researchers can conduct their research through a comparative analysis of the issue between India and other states with similar geographical backgrounds to foster equality and maintain the decentralized power system. In addition, the comparative study will help to understand effective policies and strategies.

Longitudinal Studies: To track the evolution of power distribution in India's diverse dimensions, conducting longitudinal studies can help avoid centralization of power and equality, which will offer valuable insight. It is important to understand the process, including the dynamics of change and ways existing to adapt multifaceted shifts, which could help inform the development of more effective policies.

Case Studies: The case studies of this research paper will help to conduct an in-depth case study analysis, which focuses on specific regions within India's territory and delves into localized challenges and opportunities related to the process of decentralization of power and equality. Exploring nuances of regional disparities would provide a more broad understanding of the issues.

Perspectives of the stakeholders: To inform the more inclusive and sustainable approaches, it is important to gather stakeholder perspectives, which include the communities that were marginalized, local authorities, and policymakers.

Policy Impact Assessment: It would be beneficial in fostering equality and decentralization of power to assess the impact of existing policies and initiatives. On the basis of empirical evidence, future studies could evaluate the effectiveness of the specific interventions and improvements that are proposed.

Intersectional Analysis: The intersectionality of the factors related to this research paper, i.e., gender, socioeconomic status, and equality, will provide a more nuanced understanding of the challenges existing in India's diverse dimensions.

There are many scopes for future researchers to study and delve into the complex interactions between multiple dimensions of diversity that exist in the Indian perspective.

Scholars can further contribute to the discourse on fostering equality and decentralized power distribution in India's diverse dimensions, which will ultimately inform evidence-based policies and practices to promote inclusivity and equity. This can be done through these avenues for the next research.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, India's diversity poses a challenge to the goal of the country in terms of ensuring equity for all citizens while avoiding centralization of power. To minimize poverty and ensure equity as a possible solution, decentralization has been identified. However, equity does not guarantee that policymakers, organizations, and communities must work together to promote inclusive growth and equitable distribution of power, as well as avoid the centralization of power. It is suggested from the research that a balance must be struck between fostering equality and avoiding centralization of power in India's diverse dimensions. By implementing effective strategies and policies that take into account the unique needs and circumstances of different regions and groups, the desired balance will be achieved. Moreover, this research study provides recommendations for policymakers, organizations, and communities to achieve the sole goal of this research. This research was based on the previous research findings, but the development process of India is not static; it is always progressive. It can be an issue when the comparison is taking place between the statistics of the previous to the actual scenario of the present time in 2024. The authors of the research were not from the country where the research suggested recommendations, and they are not the actual sufferers of the consequences of the bad effects of unequal distributions of wealth and centralized systems. Furthermore, according to the research paper findings, the next researchers in the same field can take readymade references to utilize the main aspect of this research, the way of making a balance between the two main issues, the decentralization of the power and fostering equality in parallel. In addition, this research was done using the qualitative approach, and the next researchers can also do this research using other approaches like quantitative or mixed approaches.

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