

**'COMMENTARAO' IN "THE TELEGRAPH" OF FEBRUARY 18
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"Why is North India lagging the South?" by S L Rao

Large federations have considerable variance between their component states. Southern States of the United States were largely poor, many people deprived of the essentials of life; there were dirt-poor whites but they could look down on the blacks; racial discrimination made the blacks legally inferior. That has changed and migration from North to now prosperous Southern states is large .

Dr Ashish Bose, distinguished demographer, in the 1980s coined the acronym BIMARU to describe Indian states that were inferior on many counts of well-being as compared to other states. BIMARU plays on the word "bimar" meaning "sick". The BIMARU states were Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh.

A forthcoming book by Samuel Paul and Kala Sridhar, "The Paradox of India's North-South Divide: Lessons from the States and the Regions" (SAGE 2015), mines available data to establish the differences and the possible reasons for them. The book examines economic outcomes, (production of goods and services, employment and

standards of living); also public governance (by average tenure of Chief Ministers, police firings in the state), and socio-cultural differences (rise of mass movements of the under classes). Adding to these quantitative parameters we need qualitative ones.

UNDP brought out the first Human Development Index for its member countries in the early 1990s. They went beyond GDP growth, to measure other indicators of well-being (like literacy, female literacy, child survival, etc). NCAER in the early 1990s studied an all-India sample of over 30000 households to establish these difference between states. The sample also gave extra representation to majority-minority religions in different states, (for example, Muslims in Uttar Pradesh, or Christians in Kerala, etc). This data helped the Sachar Committee report on the status of Muslims in different states. State governments now report on human development indicators in their respective states. More recently such data is available for many districts as well. This granularity of data for each state, district and perhaps in due course, talukas, cities and towns, will help policy makers to develop policies for one geography that is lower in human development indicators, from another.

India has a low rank on HDI in comparison to most other countries (UNDP). Thus India's Human Development

Index (HDI) of 2013, is 135 (out of a total of 187 countries). The rank has not changed from the previous period. In contrast, during 2008-2013, China's HDI Index moved up by 10 ranks; Sri Lanka moved up by five ranks, and Bangladesh and Nepal whose per capita incomes are much lower than India's, have moved up by two and four ranks respectively.

Paul and Sridhar do not merely rank states. They provide other measures for a detailed comparison between Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh. More limited parameters consider the North versus the South of India. In North and South they exclude Maharashtra, Gujarat, West Bengal, (all relatively more developed states). They compare the states of Andhra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala in South, with the four BIMARU states in North.

Their work shows starting parameters between the two till 1980s to be similar. Social mobilization (rise of the Dravida-dalit- movement and its hold on political power for over forty years are cornerstones of Tamil Nadu's broad based advances in the well being of its population (a majority of whom are dalits and OBCs). However, in contrast, U.P., despite the hold on power by the Yadavs (OBCs) and the Bahujan Samaj Party (dalits), for over thirty years shows little improvement.

Urban areas by themselves, Paul and Sridhar find, all indicators of basic services, that slum households in the North are much worse off than their counterparts in the South. Census 2011 data shows that on average in Southern states, possession of assets improves with higher income. So does access to basic public services improve with higher incomes as a result of rapid economic growth.

The significant increase in per capita income in the southern states enabled a larger proportion of their urban poor to acquire certain private assets than their counterparts in the north with lower incomes. Further, access to basic public services such as water supply, electricity, better sanitation and sewerage, is also much better in the slums of the South than in the North. Economic reforms since 1991 enabled Southerners to take more advantage of the relative freedom for enterprise. The quality of governance and the demand factor (working through social mobilization) were also stronger in TN when compared to UP.

TN had higher initial levels than UP on indicators such as literacy, infant mortality rate (reflecting health status), urbanization, food crop yields per acre, electricity, and roads. TN's initial conditions were better in human

capabilities, urbanization, infrastructure, and resource efficiency, though the degree of superiority varied between the factors. But initial conditions in UP in terms of the stock of all graduates, and political stability (measured by chief minister's average tenure), were about the same or even slightly better than those in TN. On per capita development spending, TN's initial condition was only slightly better than UP. While TN had an edge with regard to the initial conditions of several factors, it did not have an initial advantage in others. By regions (North versus South) also, overall, the findings are similar to the UP-TN comparison. Indeed, the North started with a better record in terms of CMs' tenure than the South.

Rising per capita incomes have led to an improvement of the quality of life of the citizens in the southern states. The access to assets and amenities available to the southern citizens is decidedly better than that of their northern counterparts. This holds true also for the low income people living in urban slums in the south. This is not to say that the poor have benefited to the same extent as the rest of the population. But the quality of life of the poor in the South, judged by assets and amenities, is better than that of their counterparts in the North.

Looking at governance, U.P. has had long tenured Chief

Ministers for some years now. However, the HDI ranking remains low. Clearly it is the quality of governance, not just longevity of CMs, that is important. Thus, good governance in TN (and the South) made it take advantage of the 1991 reforms.

Relatively smaller states and union territories (Haryana, Uttaranchal, Chhattisgarh, Goa, Pondicherry, Sikkim, etc) have performed much better than big ones. U.P. and Bihar are the largest states in India by population and Madhya Pradesh (till Chhattisgarh was formed), by extent. In addition to smaller size of states, quality of leadership in social mobilization also were critical.

Human Development Index map for Indian states in 2006, lists Indian states by their respective Human Development Index (HDI). The national average score for HDI for India in 2008 was 0.467, in 2010, 0.519, 0.554 for 2012, and in 2014 UNDP estimated it at 0.586. Progress has been slow. Kerala shows the best HDI; while others range between 0.358 to 0.790. Well below the all-India average are Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Bihar. Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Uttaranchal, West Bengal, and Karnataka. Near or above the average are Gujarat, Jammu and Kashmir, Haryana, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, NE (excluding Assam), Punjab, Goa, Himachal Pradesh, Delhi, and Kerala.

India has improved its HDI in all of its administrative subdivisions, but by world standards they are low. The reasons are many and complex: quality (not merely longevity) of political and social leaderships, response to public opinion, size of administrative units (states, districts), localization of authority, outcomes in relation to outlays by governments, tradition of good administration, administrative quality.

(1282)