

An Analysis on How Historical Events are Impacting Indian Modern Public Policies

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ABSTRACT:

Understanding the historical connections behind public policy choices is crucial for effective governance, especially in a diverse and vibrant society like India. Many contemporary policies are often seen as immediate responses to current challenges, yet they are deeply rooted in historical frameworks that shape their purpose and design. In this paper, I explore how classical governance models influence modern Indian public policies and examine how this historical continuity impacts their effectiveness and relevance today. By analyzing five key areas—Incrementalism, Ayushman Bharat, Panchayati Raj, Atmanirbhar Bharat, and Reservation policy, I aim to uncover the rich interplay between our past and present. Ultimately, this research advocates for a deeper appreciation of historical context in policy-making, as it can enhance our understanding and response to the evolving needs of Indian society.

INTRODUCTION:

In the face of rapid changes, a spectre continues to haunt us and living in a moment of accelerating crisis we're forced to confront numerous challenges every single day. Yet amidst these conditions, the public office of long term that we can hold accountable, is the government, who then with its tool of policy-making, attempts to respond to these epochal changes.

Upon delving into the dynamics of policy-making we find that history and the lessons it provides have long played a pivotal role in the construction of social, economic, and political policies as well as structuring modern-day administration. Foundations of governance, banking, legal systems, diplomacies, and public policies in India are often built on experiences from the past and it is through these experiences that we are provided with valuable lessons, reflecting on both failures and successes that help us navigate through contemporary challenges.

Guided by Harry S. Truman's observation that *'the only new thing in this world is the history you don't know'* this paper aims to theorize how collective social memory of the past shapes our present. The primary focus is on the role of classic administrative philosophies in formulating policies of today and emphasizing on the cyclical nature of the policy-making process where old solutions are adapted to cater to modern problems.

It explores multiple case studies and nuances to showcase a) instances of incrementalism and b) evidence of how historical events influence our current public policies.

1. WHAT IS INCREMENTALISM?

Incrementalism is a theory that views policy-making as a process of small, gradual changes rather than large, sweeping reforms. This concept is essential in understanding how contemporary Indian public policies are formulated by building on historical precedents. By examining the roots of incrementalism,

this section will explore how historical policy frameworks continue to shape modern governance practices in India. While strategizing purposes of the government, policy-makers assimilate and act upon multiple strands of information such as historical context, societal conditions, economic trends, and public sentiments to ensure that the policies introduced are relevant and effective within the specific societal framework. However, a critical question that remains in the process is that what truly drives a change in public policy- A radical innovation or graduation evolution?

In the mid 20th century when the political environment increasingly came to be shaped by competing ideologies, Charles E. Lindblom, an American political scientist, emerged as a critical voice in the field of policy analysis. The period was dominated by pursuit of ideals which according to him were abstract, like that of drawing in radical changes. He noted the complexity of real-world problems and realised that these ambitious ideals are difficult to translate into effective policies. Therefore, in response to this, incrementalism was introduced in the 1950s. This theory, shaped by the realities of time, promotes the strategy to build upon past policies and is regarded by Lindblom as a rational decision-making ideal.

Its framework incorporates the concept of political expediency where matters for discussion among organizational decision-makers consist primarily of modifications to the existing programs rather than of solutions to problems involving significant change. It recognizes that decision-making is shaped by limited time, information, and the need to minimize risk for decision-makers and organizations. Incremental policy-making also values feedback and continuous mutual adjustment among decision-makers.

However this theory is criticised by another school of thought, which strongly supports the radical or comprehensive change theory. Yekrezkal Dror, a professor of Political Science and Public Administration at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem has made some trenchant criticisms of Lindblom. Dror, unable to accept the strategy, strongly argues that incrementalism is not fit for developing countries as it discourages innovation. Instead, it encourages inertia, and continuation of the status quo and believes that it constitutes a barrier in improving the policy-making process. According to him, developing countries in order to achieve acceptably large improvements in policy results cannot do with marginal changes as they are simply not sufficient.

So the question under observation that remains is whether gradual incremental change is only a form of adaptation that leaves intact what ought to be changed in the society or whether it is a practical strategy for developing countries, where deficiencies like cultural and value-based differences result in lower rankings in rationality and secularisation.

In answer to this, we come to realise that the approval of incrementalism is qualified by the proviso that gradualism should not become so gradual so as to be self-defeating.

Cultural settings and values of different societies, if neglected in the process of policy-making, may result in unpredictable consequences. When policies are not made realistically considering the context of cultural history, the chances of successful implementation are even smaller. This pattern can be categorized as “formalism” where the gap between what is supposed to happen and what actually happens often increases. Such policies are therefore innovative only in a declaratory way.

As one scholar succinctly describes and I quote:

“Once the novel effect of the innovation passes, things somehow settle down again at their own level. The new and shining data-processing equipment does not produce the data as expected, the new procedures for processing forms of application for credit situation; the new organisations become curiously similar in their operation to the organisations they were supposed to replace”

Additionally most of the developing democracies of the world today have such societal conditions that

many cultural identities become resistant to large sudden changes. In this scenario, the incremental strategy turns out to be the most appropriate.

Therefore, despite the unfavourable conditions mentioned by Dror, most of the developing countries reject radical changes and appear to use the methods of incrementalism and rational-deductive approach for their policy making.

In fact on closer examination we find that even Indian public policies follow this trend where in place of radical shifts, policies tend to evolve, through small adjustments and build upon previous frameworks. This step-by-step evolution underscores the continuity of administrative and policy patterns of the past and their application in the present.

So the sections that follow serve as case studies to illustrate how historical blueprints continue to shape contemporary public policies. The below mentioned examples demonstrate how the ideas and frameworks from the past are merely not just relics but serve a purpose as they actively inform and influence the policy-making of present times. By examining these connections, we can better understand the enduring impact of history on current governance practices.

2. AYUSHMAN BHARAT: A RESURGENCE OF INDIA'S HISTORICAL WELFARE POLICIES

India's welfare policies, exemplified by Ayushman Bharat, stem from a long-standing tradition of societal care and responsibility that dates back to ancient times. In eras like the Vedic period and the Mauryan dynasty, the concept of state responsibility for the well-being of its citizens was paramount, with rulers enacting policies to support the health and security of the people. These early systems emphasized the role of the state as a guardian of public welfare, creating an enduring ethos of care that has shaped modern India's approach to policy-making.

Ayushman Bharat, launched to provide healthcare to economically vulnerable populations, exemplifies how this historical commitment to welfare has been adapted to address contemporary challenges. This program is more than just financial assistance; it represents the government's role as both protector and enabler of equitable growth, aligning with India's pre-colonial values. By building on these foundational ideals, India's welfare policies work to mitigate inequalities, striving to create an inclusive society that acknowledges past injustices while fostering a future based on mutual support and compassion.

2.1 Vedic Foundations of State-Sponsored Healthcare and Equity

In ancient medical system of India, treatments date back to the Vedic period of about 2nd millennium B.C., With the literature Charaka Samhita and Sushruta Samhita which established a broad framework of healthcare system in India, these texts are not only significant for the top medical knowledge of the time like usage of herbs and surgery but also for the special focus on the healthcare as the community service. Especially, they pay attention to the government's obligation in the campaign of public health, and describe the moral duties of physicians (*bhishaka*) to patients (*rogi*). The profession of physicians was supposed to deliver services to everyone, independent of rank or wealth, which set the basis for general medical equity.

Charaka, the ancient Ayurvedic physician also laid much emphasis on what should be the behaviour of physicians, where they should be compassionate, friendly and free from any biases like colour, origin, financial status etc. It also underlined the value of profound knowledge of human behaviour as well as medical science.

And Sushruta Samhita, which is even though majorly dominated by sections on surgery, also mentions public hospitals and charitable hospices supported by the rulers and rich people for rendering medical help

to the indigent population.

Hence evidently ancient principles continue to echo in the modern day public policies especially welfare schemes such as Ayushman Bharat. Implemented to extend insurance to universal healthcare access for the financially unstable population, Ayushman Bharat is in harmony with these Vedic texts' underlying concepts of love and appropriate care for the forgotten people. The scheme works under the policy that some private configured hospitals provide free service which has its ethical base as ancient India saw healthcare not as a service to the privileged but as a public right, Unbiased towards any social or economic status. The historical precedence of state-sponsored welfare, seen in early medical and social programs, continues to inform India's modern welfare schemes. Ayushman Bharat embodies this long-standing tradition, reaffirming the idea that current policies are deeply influenced by India's historical approach to public welfare. These modern initiatives are not novel but extensions of the past, reflecting the continuity of care for vulnerable populations.

2.2 Ashoka's Dhamma and Mauryan Initiatives for Public Health

The Mauryan Empire, particularly under Emperor Ashoka, set a high standard for governance, focusing on public welfare, healthcare, and moral responsibility. This section delves into Ashoka's Dhamma and other welfare policies, highlighting how these early systems laid the foundation for modern Indian governance models, especially in healthcare and social services. The Mauryan Empire established by Chandragupta Maurya in 321 BCE became renowned for its strongest administrative system and commitment to public welfare, particularly in the realm of healthcare. From Chandragupta's visionary governance to Ashoka's transformative Dhamma, the Mauryan rulers set enduring principles of compassionate governance that resonate even today, influencing modern policies such as Ayushman Bharat.

Ashoka's Dhamma, the message of morality and ethics of behaviour that went beyond religions, paved the way for starting basic governance concepts based on compassion, non-violence and well-being of mortals. This philosophy which came after the disastrous Kalinga (present-day Odisha) war, can be said to be in consonant with such modern public policies as welfare and cosmopolitanism. Ashoka embraced new policies after he witnessed a lot of suffering which inspired him to change the policies he adopted in a bid to avoid suffering of helpless people in the Indian society, which is a lesson that is still felt to date in Indian polity.

In this respect, one of the aspects of Dhamma was state taking the responsibility of the healthcare system. Ashoka's second Rock Edict prescribes building hospitals, dispensaries and planting herbs useful in medicine, and the healing of humans and animals. These are facilities that practise free outpatient care mimicking a contemporary Indian welfare-state policy such as the Ayushman Bharat which aims to deliver on health care to financially insecure citizens. The policy research identifies that the compassionate nature of the modern Indian policies does not have its roots in colonial intervention or from the economic liberalisation post 1991 but the policy framework has been influenced from Ashoka's Dhamma.

2.3 In the Times Pallavas and Cholas

The Pallava and Chola dynasties were pioneers in establishing state-supported healthcare systems in South India, reflecting an early form of public welfare. This section will explore their contributions to the development of village dispensaries and town hospitals, showcasing how their efforts laid the foundation for current welfare systems in India. More examples of state sponsored health care systems/ The first example of state supported health care organisations can be traced back to ancient South India to the government organisations which were under two dynasties known as the Pallava and the Chola Empires

during the 6th and 13th century c.e. Information regarding dispensaries and treatment as public duties and the feasibility of health care services can be found in epigraphical texts from the Pallava period (CE 574-879). Likewise in the Chola phase we get an account of support for establishment of village dispensaries, town hospitals and providing other local medical facilities.. It was structured during this time and the use of terms such as *atulasalai* or *vaidyasalai* for dispensaries became very common.

A notable example of the referenced inscription is from 1226 CE in Andhra Pradesh. This inscription, found on a stone pillar in Malakapur, details a donation made by Kakatiya Queen Rudramma and her father Ganapati. With the income from these lands allocated for a maternity home, a hospital, and a school, they gifted several villages. This highlights the philanthropic efforts of rulers in supporting healthcare and education during that period. which recorded that Kakatiya Queen Rudramma together with her father Ganapati donated lands towards the establishment of a home for pregnant women and a maternity home, a hospital and a school. This proves how royal they are to the public wellbeing whereby the kings and queens are seen as pious and philanthropic for supporting the health cause.

The similarities with the current Indian public policies are visible, in fact, the schemes like Ayushman Bharat. As these antiquity dictators poured their money into education and building facilities, modern-day policies are to support accessible healthcare for economically unstable citizens. A proper understanding of a state's part in funding and managing healthcare has historical antecedents that are traced back to the Chola, Pallava period to contemporary India.

These historical practices reveal that the need for welfare schemes and protection was recognized long before contemporary times. The principles underlying these ancient and medieval welfare measures resonate with modern policies, such as the Ayushman Bharat Yojana, which aims to provide comprehensive healthcare coverage to economically vulnerable sections of society. Similarly, historical policies reflected an understanding of the importance of supporting the disadvantaged and maintaining social stability.

By examining these historical precedents, we see that the concept of welfare is deeply ingrained in Indian tradition and governance. The evolution of welfare policies from ancient and medieval times to the present underscores a continuous commitment to addressing societal needs and ensuring the well-being of all citizens. The modern welfare schemes are, therefore, part of a long-standing tradition of social responsibility and protection, adapting to contemporary challenges while rooted in a rich historical legacy.

2.4 Chronicles of Travellers

In the intricate narrative of ancient Indian history accounts of travellers serve as vital sources of information. Their writings, filled with detailed descriptions and reflections, not only document the historical landscape but also reflect on the firsthand experiences that approach history with a more nuanced perspective, hence helping us avoid the biases that may have coloured the writings of court historians and chronicles.

Historical accounts of travellers such as Fa Xian and Hiuen Tsang provide invaluable insights into ancient India's welfare systems, particularly in healthcare. Their observations of hospitals and charitable institutions offer a glimpse into early state-supported public services. This section examines their contributions and how these historical systems connect with today's welfare programs like Ayushman Bharat. The two most renowned Chinese travellers of the time were Fa Xian and Hiuen Tsang. They emerged as pivotal figures unfolding their journeys like epic tales that traverse the vast subcontinent

- **FA XIANG**

Fa Xiang (CEE 405-411) a Chinese Buddhist monk, travelled to India primarily to obtain sacred Buddhist

texts and to understand the practices of Buddhism. This journey led him to the region of Magadha, where he came to visit Bodh Gaya (the revered site of Buddha's enlightenment). During his time there, Fa Xiang observed and encountered the societal structure within the Mauryan Empire and his experiences prompted him to document extensive volumes on the social structure and cultural dynamics of that era.

His observation from around the early 5th century CE. provide one of the earliest accounts of charitable dispensaries in ancient India. According to Fa Xiang, these dispensaries were established in Pataliputra (modern-day Patna) and were open to the sick from all communities. The mention of such facilities indicates that public health infrastructure was already in place during this period, catering to people regardless of their social or economic background. These dispensaries offered free medical care and acted as important centres for public welfare, mirroring the concept of state responsibility for healthcare.

These accounts highlight the existence of a state-supported healthcare system where medical services were provided without charge. This is particularly significant as it shows how rulers, even in the early centuries, saw the need to create a system of healthcare that was inclusive and accessible to all, much like today's Ayushman Bharat initiative. The charitable nature of these dispensaries suggests a moral and ethical commitment to healthcare, ensuring that the most vulnerable and marginalised had access to medical treatment—a principle that aligns with the modern welfare state.

• HIUEN TSANG

Roughly two centuries later, Hiuen Tsang (CE 629-645), another renowned Chinese traveller, provided further details on India's ancient healthcare system during his travels. He described the presence of hospices (*punya-salas*) along the highways in towns and villages. These hospices, which served both travellers and the local population, provided food, drink, and medical care, and were staffed by physicians who treated the poor and the sick. These institutions, called *punyasthanas*, *dharmashalas*, and *viharas*, not only offered medical services but also embodied a holistic approach to public welfare by catering to both physical and social needs. These were the Indian counterparts of the western almshouses, monasteries and infirmaries of those times.

3. DECENTRALIZATION POLICY: PANCHAYATI RAJ AND THE ECHO OF GRASSROOTS DEMOCRACY

The decentralisation of governance through the Panchayati Raj system has long standing foundations in India, where local governance has long been a feature of village life. This section will explore the evolution of decentralised governance from ancient India to modern times, highlighting how the Panchayati Raj system is a continuation of traditional self-governance practices.

The 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments of the Indian Constitution marked a pivotal shift in India's framework of governance by introducing Panchayati Raj institutions and Urban Local bodies as a third-tier system of local governance tailored for rural and urban areas respectively. This resulted in an administrative reform while also leading to a fundamental restructuring of the way governance operates at the local level, recognizing the need for a decentralised and participatory democracy.

There exist several schools of thought that revolve around the origin of this system citing evidence of democratic institutions in ancient Greece, feudalism in Europe and social meetings and gatherings held under a banyan tree in ancient India. One set of scholars have been heavily influenced by western political thought and claim that the principles of decentralisation were borrowed from the western experience and adapted to Indian settings. Yet another school of thought contends that the idea of local governance and decentralisation in India is not imported from the west but rather its origin is deeply rooted in India's histo-

rical and cultural traditions.

3.1 The Non-Centralized v/s Decentralized Systems of Governance

The debate, however, becomes complex when historians attempt to differentiate between decentralized and non-centralized systems of governance. Unlike the modern state where power is often centralized and subsequently devolved to local authorities through formal processes of decentralization, many ancient Indian politics were non-centralized by design. The bottom-up approach in ancient India, where governance organically flowed from local to higher levels, makes it difficult to categorise these systems strictly as decentralized in the modern sense.

In these non-centralized political structures, local units enjoyed autonomy without a centralised authority overseeing them. Hence, these systems might be better described as prototypes of federations, where power was distributed rather than devolved. Decentralization, in its contemporary form, implies the existence of a central authority that intentionally disperses power to local bodies.

3.2 Ancient Indian Polity

Nevertheless there exists enough evidence to support the perspective stating that the decentralized system of governance was an integral part of early Indian polity. Villages were self-governing units, with *gram sabhas* (village assemblies) playing a pivotal role in local administration. The existence of *sabhas* and *samitis* at different levels indicate the operation of governance structures that closely mirror modern decentralization efforts. This supports the argument that India's local governance systems were indigenous creations rather than being transplanted from Western thought.

3.2.1 Emergence of Ancient Indian Communities

Since prehistoric times humans have exhibited a natural tendency to sustain themselves through community and group living. For activities such as hunting, gathering, and protection from wild animals, cooperation within a group was essential for survival. The collection of resources and the execution of essential tasks could not be efficiently managed by a single individual over time. Living in groups, however, inherently brings about the need for moral and ethical dilemmas, necessitating the formation of rules and social norms to ensure collective well-being.

These had to be imparted in individuals through governance and moral order that has persisted throughout history. In the context of India, ancient village communities often convened under banyan trees to discuss and resolve issues. Over time, the authority of the village head, initially chosen and later nominated, expanded significantly, encompassing judicial, administrative, and other critical powers. Early kings largely distanced themselves from village matters, focusing primarily on revenue collection rather than local governance.

Resembling the current decentralisation policy in India, this system reflects the same principles of entrusting local governance to communities, prioritizing local involvement and reducing reliance on distant central authorities.

3.2.2 Evidences of Democratic Governance in Vedic and Puranic Periods

Today the world recognises Greece as the birthplace of democracy, with Cleisthenes, the father of democracy, leading the way around 500 BCE. However, history tells a richer tale and evidence from around the world proving that Greece was not alone in shaping this monumental concept. In fact, far to the east, India, often overlooked in this narrative, holds its own legacy of a democratic governance. (in vedas, Upanishads and manusmriti)

We find traces of self-governing villages in depictions of Rig Veda, one of the oldest sacred texts in the

world, originating from ancient India that was composed between 1500-1000 BCE. It mentions the existence of various tribes and clans often headed by a chief known as *Gramini*. He enjoyed a high status in the village much like a “*sarpanch*” in today’s settings and besides being in-charge of the defence, he also had administrative, judicial and revenue collecting powers.

3.3 Principles of Village Administration in Kautilya’s Arthashastra

Arthashastra in the form of an ancient Indian treatise on statecraft, economic policy and military strategy composed by Kautilya (most famously known as Chanakya) is a handbook for the guidance of the governing group or rather a manual for participating politicians or leaders. Kautilya who was a scholar and advisor in the court of Chandragupta Maurya, the founder of the Mauryan Empire in 321 BCE in this treatise had given a detailed explanation of panchayati system significantly focusing on the nature and functions of the village chiefs/ *Gramini*, duties of other local representatives and the involvement of citizens or people residing in villages.

Much like the way today’s Panchayati Raj system grants local governance bodies the authority to legislate and manage affairs at the grassroots level, Kautilya’s Arthashastra also emphasized on the executive and legislative powers of the village heads. The Panchayats, with their executive responsibility for implementing government schemes, echo the administrative roles Kautilya assigned to village officials, who were tasked with executing decisions and managing local resources. Moreover, just as Gram Nyayalayas today resolve minor disputes at the village level, Kautilya's framework also recognized the importance of local dispute resolution, highlighting the enduring significance of empowering local governance both in ancient and modern times

3.4 Records Of Foreign Travellers

Apart from the wealth of evidence provided by indigenous sources, the accounts of foreign travellers also offer compelling proof of the existence of a Panchayati Raj system or the practice of local governance in Indian villages. Notably Megasthenes, who served as the Greek ambassador at the court of Chandragupta Maurya around 302 BCE, recorded detailed observations of India’s decentralized governance in his renowned work, *Indica*. He described a well-organised village administration divided into six departments, each catering to different societal needs, thus affirming the indigenous nature of local governance. These records defy the claim that decentralized governance in India was a western import, instead they highlight its ancient and structured presence.

Furthermore, during the Gupta period, which is also known as the Golden Age of Indian history, the Chinese traveller Fa Xian extensively documented the effective functioning of village Panchayats. His accounts, written in the early 5th century CE, provide further evidence of the continuity and sophistication of India’s village governance systems. These historical records, from both Greek and Chinese travellers, substantiate the enduring legacy of indigenous local governance, deeply rooted in Indian society long before any western influence.

The Panchayati Raj system reflects India’s historical commitment to decentralization and local governance. By empowering local bodies, modern policies continue the tradition of village self-governance, showing that contemporary decentralization efforts are firmly rooted in India’s ancient administrative practices.

4. ATMANIRBHAR BHARAT: SPINNING THE WHEEL OF SELF-RELIANCE

Throughout the tumultuous tides of India's history and beneath the ever – evolving symbols of India's flags, one humble yet iconic object that has remained constant in India's history– is the *charkha* or the spinning wheel (*Persian origin charkh* (چرخ)- *meaning wheel*). More than just a household item, the charkha during the freedom movement became the very heartbeat of a people yearning for freedom, embodying the essence of self-reliance. As the nations' collective consciousness awakened, the charkha, binding the hopes of millions in its thread, symbolized the desire to break free from the shackles of exploitation and foreign domination.

That same spirit, first woven into the fabric of India's freedom struggle resonates even today in a scheme implying a path of self-reliance. Atmanirbhar Bharat policy launched by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the year 2020 was declared as a new vision and idea for the Indian Economy and social development to deal with problems that were to arise in the post covid period. However, as the name suggests "Atmanirbhar" (*Sanskrit origin: atman- self and nirbhar -dependent*) it can be largely viewed as a modern-day adaptation of the concept of self-reliance having its roots in the ancient Indian philosophy. Modi himself in the inaugural speech took to mention about the concept as a cornerstone for future development and stated that the "very idea" of an Atmanirbhar Bharat was a product of age-old "sanskriti," or culture, and "samskara," or character, having its roots in Hindu religious scriptures such as the Vedas and Shastras. His explanation was liberally peppered with Sanskrit quotes, ostensibly to add the heft of ancient wisdom to this doctrine of the future. He quoted the *Mundakupanishad*, and said "eṣa vaḥ panthaḥ"—*this is your road, to demonstrate why self-reliance was essential*.

Besides having a Vedic essence, a similar approach was used at the time of freedom struggle during the Swadeshi movement. Gandhi expressed his view of Swadeshi as a strong economy, decentralisation of power in villages and encouraging the local and less industrialised. His view was that India's economic future lay in Charkha and Khadi; "If India's villages are to live and prosper, the charkha must become universal." (Harijan, 1939).

Having now observed that the idea of self-reliance, which is at the forefront of this policy is no novel idea but rather a resurgence of a deep-seated vision that has shaped India's governance for centuries, sections down below trace the enduring legacy of the concept from ancient India to present day and reveal how the spirit of Atmanirbhar Bharat is but the latest chapter in much longer story of India's economic sovereignty.

4.1 State-Driven Craftsmanship and Domestic Production in Vijayanagara Empire

Much like today's emphasis on internal production and reduced dependency on foreign imports, the 14th century Vijayanagar Empire situated on the Deccan Plateau in Southern India was built on a foundation of agricultural self-sufficiency and thriving domestic industry.

Medieval India, like other feudal societies, had its economy based on agriculture and a great majority of the population was connected with land. However, the centuries immediately preceding large- scale European colonisation of the subcontinent, were times of considerable change in Southern India. This period was marked by intensification of craft products and expansion of international and internal commerce. In fact apart from agriculture many other industries had flourished during the 15th and 16th centuries. If after agriculture there was any sector in the Vijayanagar empire that had contributed to the economy the most then it was the industrial sector. The economic structure of the village community crafts notably domestic industries in the peasant households contributed to the economy of that time, and agriculture and industrial production came to be recognised as twin pillars of economy. The industry was linked inseparably with domestic production. The crafts separated from agriculture resulted in further

development of production, first represented by a combination of handicrafts production for the market with agriculture produced in peasant households and second, carried on by professional artisans.

The period between A.D. 1500 AND A.D. 1600 constitutes an important landmark in the history of Vijayanagar Empire. While the empire, under Tuluva ruler- Krishnadevaraya, was engaging in international trade, particularly with the Portuguese and Southeast Asian countries, the governance made sure that the core of its economy relied on internal production and consumption which significantly contributed to the long- term sustainability of the Empire.

The towns of the Vijayanagar Empire became bustling centres of economic activity, where craftsmen and artisans thrived under the state's patronage. The artisans usually came to settle down in the temple towns and these being the nuclei led to the concentration of industries in such areas. The development of trade between the town and the local village was closely connected with the production of commodities in town. Among the different factors affecting industries, the multifaceted role of state policy is important. It is well known that an important part of the administrative doctrine of medieval India suggested that the state should take care of economic prosperity and provide employment and protection to traders and craftsmen. The court was a great employer and a customer's strong central power meant peace and stability, which was required for economic growth.

Moreover, as Atmanirbhar Bharat places a special emphasis on revitalizing and empowering textile industry through Production-Linked Scheme (PLI) and Mega Investment Textile Parks (MITRA), Vijayanagar Empire was also renowned for its state-supported textile production, especially cotton and silk fabrics. Weavers, spinners, and dyers played a significant role in the economy, producing textiles for both local consumption and trade within India. In medieval literature, loom is a part of innumerable poetic similes and metaphors. It appears that the spinning wheel with the crank handle was introduced in India only in the 14th century by the Turks. The heyday of the weaving industry in the Vijayanagar Empire was during the 15th and 16th centuries when kings provided an added impetus to textile production giving facilities and privileges to weavers and traders of cloth.

An inscription from Tirupati dated 1538 gives some information about the extent of specialisation in different types of weaving. It also gives information regarding the extent of technological specialisation. The development of certain industries in the Vijayanagar Empire leads to the conclusion that the demand for cloth, especially fine cotton, must have gone up. During the 15th century and to some extent in the early 16th century, textile trade continued to be in the hands of indigenous merchant guilds.

4.2 Atmanirbhar Bharat in Gandhian Philosophy

As the world moves towards modernisation, many ideas practised and preached by Mahatma Gandhi are becoming increasingly relevant as guides to state policy. The most interesting, and understandably controversial, of his favourite ideas is that of Atmanirbhar Bharat or local self-reliance. Having its roots in the Indian Swadeshi movement and as a staunch advocate of "swaraj" (*meaning self-rule*) Gandhi from the very beginning emphasised on localism and the importance of self-reliant villages, promoting the growth of domestic or small- scale industries, thereby supporting village-level economies.

By popularising khadi (*derived from the word khaddar i.e. hand spun natural fibre cloth*) and the use of the charkha, Gandhi sought to foster a spirit of independence and sustainability within the local economy, empowering communities to produce for themselves and reduce reliance on external forces. From handloom to freedom the charkha and the khadi movement encouraged Indians to spin their own cloth (khadi) instead of using British textiles. His emphasis on local crafts, handicrafts and self-sustaining economies mirrors the ethos of "vocal for local" where local products elevated the ideology of self-reliance

and self-government.

Moreover Gandhi, being acutely aware of the widespread poverty and lack of education among a large section of India's population, believed that any planning that overlooked the need to absorb labour wealth would be fundamentally flawed (for India). He argued that centralised methods of production, regardless of their output capacity, were incapable of providing employment to the vast number of people in need of work. For him, sustainable development in India had to focus on labour-intensive strategies that uplifted the masses, ensuring both economic productivity and social inclusion.

The launch of the Non-Cooperation Movement in 1920 marked the period when boycott of foreign goods and services, for the very first time, was promoted on a large-scale as a part of a mass movement. The advantages to Indian mill-owners would be obvious and appreciation of them would doubtless swing over to the movement with the support of a wealthy and powerful community. Under Gandhi's leadership the widespread boycott became the key strategy in undermining British economic interests while fostering *swadeshi*, or the use of indigenous goods, which symbolised India's quest for self-reliance and resistance to colonial rule.

5. RESERVATION POLICY: CHARTING THE EVOLUTION AND INSTITUTIONALISATION OF MARGINALISATION

The reservation policy in India is a vital part of its affirmative action efforts, designed to address historical injustices and ensure fair representation of marginalized communities. Rooted in the Indian Constitution, this policy allocates specific quotas in education, employment, and government institutions to groups systematically disadvantaged by caste-based discrimination, including Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC).

The primary objective of the reservation policy is to level the playing field, counteracting centuries of social exclusion by promoting social and economic mobility for these communities. By reserving seats in government jobs, educational institutions, and legislative bodies, the policy creates avenues for these groups to participate more fully in India's economic and social life. Beyond simply setting quotas, reservation reflects a broader commitment to social justice, inclusivity, and building a society with equal opportunity for all its citizens.

The roots of this marginalization lie in ancient India's rigid social structure, specifically the concept of *varna*. In this system, society was divided into four main classes: Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaishyas (merchants), and Shudras (laborers). The Shudras occupied the lowest position in this hierarchy, deprived of many rights, including the freedom to work in specific occupations or access education and religious practices. Over time, this hierarchical structure became hereditary, further entrenching inequalities and giving rise to the caste system.

As the caste system evolved, the Shudras, and those considered outside the *varna* system altogether, became the "untouchables." This group faced severe social, economic, and political exclusion. Denied fundamental civil rights and opportunities, they bore the brunt of societal discrimination, which endured for generations and left a lasting legacy of inequality in Indian society.

The impact of these historical injustices is still evident in modern Indian society, where marginalized communities continue to face challenges in accessing opportunities. The reservation policy, therefore, is a response to this legacy, designed to support those groups who have been denied their fair share of resources and social mobility. By linking past injustices to present efforts, reservation policies aim to foster a more inclusive society, offering historically disadvantaged groups a path toward empowerment.

and equality.

5.1 Rig Veda's Mention of the Four Varnas – Institutionalizing Brahmanical Superiority

The Hindu caste system is described in the Rig Veda (composed between 1500-1000 BCE): one of the oldest Hindu texts. The text consists of numerous *suktas* (hymns) that convey spiritual and philosophical teachings. Among these, one is Purusha Sukta or the cosmic man whose body symbolizes the origins of the four varnas/classes: the **Brahmins** as his head, the **Kshatriyas** as his arms, the **Vaishyas** as his thighs, and the **Shudras** as his feet. These four varnas were supposedly originally conceived as occupational categories. To begin with, it was an assignment of working in turn and was used as a way of organizing labour. Nonetheless, it developed rapidly and turned into a caste system in which social class was hereditary and castes were fixed. At the top of this pyramid, the Brahmins enjoyed the principle of spiritual authority, and the pontificate was compounded by conferring scholarship that enabled them to control most religious and social activities.

The Brahmanical class assimilated much power for itself, accepting religious sanction regarding its authority to uphold the caste system. This institutionalization of caste superiority in the society not only resulted in a stratified society, but also completely suppressed social mobility for the lower caste people. The consequences of this historical separation do, however, continue to exist in the present in the form of today's enduring socio-economic inequalities to which contemporary public policies are responding. Today, born from this kind of structure, several policies including the reservations where the intention has been to give a voice and a chance to those who were previously dominated by this structure. Present-day India seeks to address societal inequalities by confronting the prejudices that emerged from the *varna* system and working towards rectifying these disparities. Against the historical backdrop of the Rig Veda, the evolution of modern public policies reflects a continuous struggle against institutionalized inequality. This ongoing effort highlights the importance of anti-discrimination measures in the pursuit of social justice.

5.2 Discrimination in Post-Brahmanical Society

As the Brahmanical social order evolved, later texts like the *Manusmriti* further entrenched caste-based discrimination. These texts outlined stringent behavioral norms and imposed restrictions on interactions between castes, especially between the so-called “upper” and “lower” castes. This era marked the emergence of untouchability, relegating specific groups, particularly the Dalits, to a status of impurity and effectively ostracizing them from society. The Dalit or Untouchables were deprived of even the rights to own land, education, and attend pompous religious ceremonies. Being locked into occupations that rendered them impure such as manual scavenging, they were socially isolated which reinforced economic subordination and exclusion. Such systemic discrimination had become rampant, a proof that independent India required public policies to have an effect on the deep-rooted inequalities that had set in over several decades.

Consequently, the policies of reservation turned out as significant regulations as corrective measures to establish the lower castes in education, employment and political sectors. Since these groups of people suffered injustices that confined them to the peripheries of society, current policies in the civilized world seek to extend social and economical support to these people. This juxtaposition of historical evolution of caste discrimination and the policy making show persistent work being done on eradicating discrimination and reinventing equal society in a society which is yet to shed its historical sins.

5.3 Pre-Independence Period- Untouchables

The British colonial government used the society of India and especially the caste system to their advent-

age. Although they ruled India, but did not initiate major socio-legal reforms towards the society – while women’s practice of Sati was banned and girl marriage restricted, the caste system did not suffer a similar fate most probably due to lack of interest by the British in toppling it. This inaction led to the stiffening of caste structures. The continuing failure to take meaningful action.

However, the early part of the 20th century saw a change mainly with the emergence of the untouchability movement led by leaders such as Dr.B.R.Ambedkar. His pressure for their integration in the systems of education, employment, and even politics called for prompt structural reform. Ambedkar who was most instrumental in framing the Indian Constitution made a dramatic change in eradicating the caste prejudices that were carried in the newly independent Indian state. The Constitution was adopted in 1950 and actually contains no provisions that let discrimination be conducted based on caste, but it annihilates such act by protecting the rights of equal section of citizens through Article 15; however, the constitution of India uses the concept of positive discrimination in the shape of reservations for SCs and STs. These measures aimed to rectify historical injustices and provide marginalised groups with access to opportunities in modern India. The evolution from colonial exploitation to constitutional safeguards illustrates how the legacy of caste has influenced contemporary public policies, reinforcing the nation’s commitment to social equity and inclusion.

5.4 Debate Over Its Relevance Today

The reservation system in India was initially established as a temporary measure to uplift marginalised communities and ensure their participation in society. However, decades later, the continuation of these policies has sparked intense debates about their relevance in the modern context. Proponents argue that systemic inequality persists despite legal protections. They highlight the underrepresentation of Dalits and other backward classes in higher education, government positions, and the private sector as evidence of the ongoing need for affirmative action. Supporters contend that reservation policies have dismantled some barriers, granting marginalised communities access to education, employment, and political representation. As they pointed out, without these measures those groups would remain marginalized and restricted.

On the other hand, people say that reservation, which was required at the time of independence, has led to the formation of castes which were to be eradicated. They say that such policies help aggravate split identity, which promotes casteist politics. Nowadays, one can hear more and more often that people belonging to reservations should use the caste system not only to select individuals, but as the basis of division into classes. It has resulted in the introduction of the recent quota famously known as the economically weaker section (EWS) quota targeting those who are economically disadvantaged but can be from any caste. Development of the reservation policy that took place accords with the permanent struggle to weigh social justice with economic feasibility, especially with the appearance of the EWS reservations in 2019. This policy debate has an echo of the Indian reality that caste oppression coexists with new forms of marginalisation. The debate on reservations today shows that historical crimes define modern policy making and requires proper analysis of the ways to get equity in a new society.

CONCLUSION

Therefore, the paper shows that history remains an important determinant of modern Indian public policies. It is within the background of such historical transformations, cultural worldview and societal change that the contemporary policy structure in India has evolved as discussed in this paper. It can therefore be seen from the foregoing that Indian polity has been in a welfare and governance phenomenon

since the Vedic period to Mauryan, Gupta and colonial forms of governments. So, the Ayushman Bharat Yojana, and the concept of Panchayati Raj are not only governing concepts of the present age but the outcome of the ideas prevalent for centuries in terms of public health insurance, justice distribution and decentralisation of power.

Programs such as Ayushman Bharat by the government also prove how policies today are still an early form of ancient Indian welfare policies for the poor, thus stressing that public policies are not simply conventional or consequent, but are syndromes of cultural-historical roots in India that continue to build on their past.

Moreover the reservation policy, for example which aims at redressing the exclusion of a particular category of people, has its historical roots in the caste system created by Hindu scriptures such as Rig Veda. While these ancient practices supported continued enduring social imbalances, many current public policies strive to redress such injustices, and, therefore, represent a persistent effort to temper the historical imbalances with contemporary equity.

The discussion of this paper reveals that the Indian policy cycle reinvents history and patterns of the existing society and hence bringing about the policy. Incrementalism as explained implies that the policies do not take drastic turns, a fact we have come across. On the contrary they are more or less gradualistic, innovatively transforming old solutions to contemporary problems. This method of governance is in tune with the culture and population of a diverse nation like India where change and particularly big bang change is not easy to bring about.

Besides, as this paper also shows, welfare programmes, such as Ayushman Bharat, are not novelties but products of the continuity of earlier forms of governmentalities that embraced the welfare of everyone. In some respects these reflect the successive layers of Indian governance philosophies which may have changed over the millennia but have not broken from their base values at any point of time.

Therefore it can be said that history has a significant influence over present day Public Policies of India. Ancient structures of governance, religious scriptures, colonial history and post-colonial evolution have produced a cumulative but continuous political policy making process that intermingles traditional and contemporary concerns. In the future, it will be important to appreciate these historical factors playing a pivotal role in constructing fairly good and compliant policy measures.

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