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Reinventing Governance for Performance in South Asia: Impacts on Citizenship Rights

M. Shamsul Haque*

Department of Political Science, National University of Singapore, Singapore

ABSTRACT

In line with the global trend of "reinventing governance" based on market-driven policies and structures, South Asian countries have adopted some major reforms in governance during the recent two decades. While this market-led shift in governance is largely intended to enhance its performance in terms of greater efficiency and quality, there is a tendency to overlook its implications for the rights and entitlements of citizens in these countries. The article examines the basic tenets or features of this transition in governance, encompassing the replacement of public sector by private sector and the transformation of public management based on business principles. The main objective, however, is to examine the critical impacts of this new mode of governance on the political and social rights of citizens in South Asia. The article concludes by stressing

*Correspondence: M. Shamsul Haque, Ph.D., Department of Political Science, National University of Singapore, 10 Kent Ridge Crescent, Singapore 119260; Fax: (65) 6779 6815; E-mail: polhaque@nus.edu.sg.

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the need for paying adequate attention to citizenship rights in pursuing such reforms in governance.

Key Words: Governance; Performance; Reform; Citizenship; South Asia.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been a fundamental shift in public governance from the statist welfare or developmental model to a businesslike entrepreneurial model in the name of reinventing, redesigning, reengineering or revitalizing the public sector.[1] The new mode of governance[2] is allegedly based on neoliberal assumptions such as free market, minimal state, and individual choice, and has led to the emergence of the so-called "new public management" dominated by business principles.[3] In line with such a global trend, in developing countries, the state-centered model of development administration has gradually been replaced with this market-driven model of governance borrowed largely from advanced capitalist nations. Thus, it is not surprising that in South Asian countries, this market-centric mode of governance has been embraced by recent governments, especially under the influence of major international agencies.[4]

Although this market-led shift in governance has been introduced in the name of improving public sector performance in terms of greater efficiency, competitiveness, and quality,[5] it has serious implications for citizens' political and social rights in relation to the state. As the nature of this state-citizen relationship is a critical factor in shaping the role of public governance,[6] it is crucial to examine the citizenship question in the new context of governance mentioned above. It is relevant, because as the public sector is being downsized, privatized, and deregulated in favor of market forces and individual choices, the entitlement of citizens to social justice and basic needs has come under challenge.[7] In addition, as the citizens are redefined as utilitarian consumers or clients, their capacity to exercise collective power has allegedly weakened.[8] Thus, there is an increasing concern to reinforce citizenship in public governance, enhance citizen's empowerment, and adopt a "citizen first" approach.[9]

In South Asia, most countries have adopted this market-centered model, especially through structural adjustment programs that tend to blame the public sector's inefficiency, favor market competition, and prescribe promarket policies.[10] The rationale for this reinvention in public governance is to enhance performance by increasing the level of efficiency and economic growth.[11] This performance-led reforms in the public sector have serious impacts on low-income citizens with regard to their entitlement to basic

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services, access to power, and participation in decision-making. It is pointed out by Kamal that in South Asia, despite the existence of certain constitutional guarantees, regular elections, and institutions, the adverse economic, political, and social conditions of the poor are such that they cannot exercise political power and participate in governance as full citizens.[12] This critical concern for exercising citizenship rights has become even more important today due to the unilateral focus of market-driven governance on performance understood in terms of efficiency and growth.

There are many business-friendly experts, state institutions, and international agencies presenting a favorable assessment of recent public sector reforms in South Asia without examining the critical impacts of such reforms on common citizens and their rights. In this regard, the article examines the major trends and features of reinventing governance in South Asia; explains the implications of this reinvented governance for the citizens' rights and entitlements; and explores whether there are remedial measures or alternatives for realizing such rights and entitlements.

REINVENTING GOVERNANCE IN SOUTH ASIA FOR PERFORMANCE: BASIC FEATURES

In South Asia, there are major differences among countries such as Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka in terms of territorial size, population, religious composition, and language, although they have certain common historical and cultural legacies and politico-economic structures.[13] As far as the political context of governance is concerned, these countries vary with regard to their ideological inclinations, constitutional provisions, political parties, democratic institutions, and government structures.[14] While India has a established tradition of secular democracy despite its political culture affected by caste and religious strife, Pakistan and Bangladesh have experienced frequent military interventions and occasional civilian governments. While Nepal has a long history of hereditary monarchy with a recent transition toward multi-party democracy, the tradition of democratic politics in Sri Lanka has increasingly moved toward an executive presidency (co-existing with an elected parliament) based on centralized power.[15]

Despite these differences in political structures among South Asian countries, they share considerable similarities in the overall mode of governance. While prior to the late 1970s, most of these countries practiced a state–centered economic model based on extensive government intervention and bureaucratic dominance, since the early 1980s, they have pursued reforms in favor of local and global market forces with a view to expand the realm of the private sector.[16] For Maskey, in South Asia, this reinvention in governance based on a minimalist paradigm aimed to reorganize governing institutions towards a market economy, to replace centralized planning, and reduce the role of the state through new economic policies like deregulation, privatization, liberalization, and budget cut.[17] The primary rationale for these institutional and policy reforms in the region has been to improve economic performance in both the public and private sectors.[18]

For example, to enhance public sector performance, South Asian countries recently adopted a series of reform initiatives, including the Administrative Reforms Commission in India, the Public Administration Reform Commission in Bangladesh, and the Administrative Reform Commission in Nepal.[19] Similarly, the contemporary reform initiatives in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Bhutan have been guided by this objective of greater performance in the public sector. In this section, the article presents more specific public sector reforms in these countries guided by the criteria of performance. These reforms for reinventing governance can be broadly grouped into two categories—those reducing or replacing the public sector in favor of market forces, and those transforming or restructuring the public sector in the image of private sector management.

Reinvention by Replacing the Public Sector

In line with the current global trend, South Asian countries have increasingly moved toward replacing public sector enterprises and activities with those of the private sector through market-oriented policies like privatization, deregulation, downsizing, and liberalization. First, in opposition to their earlier nationalization policy, during the past two decades, South Asian governments embraced the policy of privatization or denationalization affecting all major state enterprises in banking, utilities, manufacturing, infrastructure, telecommunications, transportation, and so on.[20] For instance, the planned economy of India began to be questioned for its alleged inefficiency, and to be gradually replaced with the business sector through privatization and deregulation, which became intensified in the early 1990s when the number of public sector industries declined from 17 to 8, and when the economic role of the state began to shrink.[21] Pakistan also privatized its major state-owned enterprises in the 1990s with an aim to attract private investors to play the leading economic role.

In Bangladesh, the government made considerable progress in privatizing and deregulating its major economic sectors with technical support and advice from various international agencies.[22] Its major state enterprises nationalized in the 1970s, were divested in the 1980s and 1990s. Similarly,

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based on the goal of increasing economic efficiency and managerial performance, Nepal adopted the massive privatization program, although it was disrupted under the ruling Communist Party, which did not reject privatization altogether, but questioned the way it was implemented.[23] In the case of Sri Lanka, the government emphasized competitiveness and efficiency in pursuing deregulation and privatization which began in the early 1980s. Although the deregulation of price control for certain items (e.g., petroleum, railway, and electricity) is politically sensitive, the Sri Lankan government has slowly moved toward greater private sector participation to enhance competition.

There are variations in terms of the scope and intensity of privatization among South Asian countries, but within each country, the policy represents a major shift towards reorienting governance in favor of the private sector. In the region, almost all major sectors are affected by deregulation and privatization, including electricity, water, energy, telecommunication, banking, insurance, airlines, transport, tourism, port, textile, sugar, steel, fertilizer, cement, and so on. One of the most basic assumptions behind such policies is that in general, the performance indicators (such as efficiency, productivity, competitiveness, quality, and delivery) of the private sector is better than those of the public sector. For example, in Bangladesh, the main rationale for privatization has been explained in terms of improving the level of efficiency and productivity, although the outcomes varied among privatized enterprises.[24] Similarly, in Nepal and Pakistan, the main rationale for privatizing public enterprises was to overcome their operational inefficiency.[25]

It is largely this assumption or rationale that motivated the ideologically diverse ruling parties in South Asian nations to pursue the same market-led privatization and deregulation policies during the recent two decades. For instance, in Bangladesh, during the 1970s and 1980s, the authoritarian military regimes of General Ziaur Rahman and General H. M. Ershad began the process of divestment, and this policy was intensified under the elected right-wing government of Khaleda Zia and left-leaning government of Sheik Hasina in the 1990s.[26] In Nepal, the privatization policy pursued by the Nepali Congress government in 1992 continued to expand under the coalition government in the late 1990s.[27] In Pakistan, since 1985, privatization policy has remained a central policy issue despite the diversity in government formations under the state-centric People's Party, the conservative Muslim League, and the authoritarian military regimes.[28] Similarly, in India, since the mid-1980s, promarket measures such as privatization and liberalization have not only been pursued by the Bharatiya Janata Party, it has also been embraced by the Indian Congress that used to practice interventionist state planning.[29] In other words, traditional ideological differences hardly prevented the ruling parties in these South Asian countries to adopt market-led policies to enhance performance.

Second, the assumption of the relative inefficiency and underperformance of public agencies in comparison with private enterprises also encouraged the governments in South Asia to downsize the public sector by streamlining employment and cutting public expenditures. For instance, in order to increase efficiency, India decided to downsize the public sector and debureaucratize and demonopolize its activities.[30] It was observed in 1995 that about 200,000 employees had lost their jobs (including 125,000 industrial jobs in the public sector) in India.[31] In Pakistan, the downsizing of public sector employment involved the consolidation and merger of certain ministries, divisions, and departments. In the case of Bangladesh, the government also used the technique of merger and reduction in the number of decision-making hierarchy to downsize state bureaucracy. It was reported by the World Bank in 1997 that thousands of redundant employees in state-owned enterprises were retrenched in Bangladesh.[32]

The similar downsizing exercise has been pursued by Sri Lanka where there was retrenchment of 42,000 public servants between 1981 and 1990.[33] In Nepal, based on the recommendations of Administrative Reform Commission (1992), the government decided to downsize the public sector and managed to reduce the number of civil servants from 100,632 in 1992 to 77,000 in 1994.[34] In almost all South Asian countries, in addition to retrenchment of existing public employees, the government introduced a policy to freeze the recruitment of new employees.[35] This policy of reducing the number of public employees in South Asia represents the overall global trend of downsizing the public sector.[a] There has also been a downward trend in public sector investment in South Asian countries. For instance, between 1978–1985 and 1986–1991, as a % of total domestic investment, the share of state-enterprise investment dropped from 35.8 to 28.6% in Pakistan, 31.1 to 25.5% in Sri Lanka, and 42.5 to 39.0% in India.[37] It should be noted that according to official interpretations, the main reason for downsizing the public sector was to streamline its unmanageable scope in order to enhance the level of efficiency and improve its overall performance.

Third, in line with the objective of increased performance based on market forces, all South Asian countries have reversed their earlier protectionist policy, moved toward the principle of free trade, and introduced various measures of liberalization. While the protectionist policy stance was largely guided by a strong belief in protecting the national economy from foreign

[a]A survey of 23 developing countries shows that between the 1980s and 1990s, as a percentage of total population, the number of central-government employees dropped from 2.6 to 1.1 percent in Asia, 1.8 to 1.1 percent in Africa, and 2.4 to 1.5 percent in Latin America.[36]

competition, the rationale behind the liberalization policy is to enhance the competitiveness of national economy in the globalized international market. In Bangladesh, despite some remaining constraints on free trade, the recent governments have pursued liberalization policy in order to boost economic competitiveness and encourage foreign investment. Gradually, most trade barriers have been removed, import duties reduced, tax holidays expanded, and repatriation of profits allowed. Today the government has introduced 100% foreign ownership in most sectors, duty-free imports for exporters, tax exemptions for foreign loans, one-stop shop for investors, and so on.[38] India has also liberalized trade and investment in terms of loosening import restrictions, applying tax exemptions for export earnings, offering reduced tax rates for foreign investors, and allowing 100% foreign ownership in certain sectors.[39]

Similar liberalization policy has been introduced in Nepal. In this regard, it has the Foreign Investment and Technology Transfer Act adopted in 1992 and amended in 1996. The government has undertaken various liberalization measures to encourage foreign investors, including the reduction of administrative regulations, withdrawal of import restrictions, expansion of joint ventures, and adoption of tax incentives.[40] In pursuing liberalization, Pakistan has also introduced various incentives for local and foreign investors, such as full protection of foreign investment, creation of export processing zones and free trade zones, exemption from federal and provincial taxes, reduction in import restrictions, withdrawal foreign exchange control, and 100% ownership right and capital repatriation.[41] In the case of Sri Lanka, the major liberalization initiatives include the end of discrimination against foreign investors, provision of one-stop services, guarantee of foreign-investment safety, easy approval of projects, and withdrawal of restrictions on foreign ownership and capital repatriation.[42] In short, in the name of greater economic performance, these liberalization measures have reduced government regulations and restrictions related to foreign trade and investments, and thus, created new opportunities for the local and global market forces.

Reinvention by Restructuring the Public Sector

Beyond the above market-led policies that tend to expand the private sector while reducing the scope of the public sector, South Asian countries have recently adopted various institutional, structural, and functional reforms in their public sector organizations based on the business principles in order to improve their performance. First, while the earlier statist mode of governance led to the proliferation of ministries, departments, and commissions involving

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in the direct production and distribution of goods and services, under the market-driven mode of governance, new sets of government organizations and techniques have been created to facilitate and implement the abovementioned privatization and liberalization policies. For example, in order to manage the process of privatization and facilitate private investment, Pakistan created the Privatization Commission and the Board of Investment respectively.[43] India also established the Disinvestment Commission, the Investment Centre, and the Foreign Investment Promotion Council with similar objective of handling privatization transactions and foreign investment.

In the case of Bangladesh, the government established the Privatization Board, the Deregulation Commission, and the Board of Disinvestment to implement privatization, enhance deregulation, and facilitate foreign investment.[44] These new institutions are known as the Privatization Committee, the Privatization Cell, and the Industrial Promotion Board in Nepal, and as the Privatization Commission and the Public Enterprises Reform Commission in Sri Lanka. The interesting feature of this new set of organizations in South Asia is that although they are government-sponsored, and thus belong to the public sector, their main objective or agenda is to reduce the scope of the public sector and expand the role of the private sector through new economic policies like privatization, deregulation, and liberalization, so that the overall economic performance can be improved.

Second, beyond the creation of these new market-friendly organizations, the overall structure of public sector management is being transformed into businesslike entities known as autonomous agencies or executive agencies in the developed world. In various degrees, these autonomous agencies enjoy greater autonomy in financial and personnel matters and are managed like business enterprises with a view to improve performance. In the case of India, the Divestment Commission recommended for the corporatization of governance by granting more financial and managerial autonomy to certain state agencies or enterprises.[45] It is suggested by the Commission that the extent of such autonomy granted to these state agencies should depend on their levels of performance. Advised by the World Bank, Bangladesh has introduced autonomous agencies that are managed by their respective independent boards assigned with genuine autonomy in operational matters.[46] Recently, Pakistan has also moved toward this scheme of autonomous agencies.

In most South Asian countries, the overall structural trend in public management is toward decentralization, financial flexibility, and operational autonomy. Irrespective of changes in the ruling parties, this structural autonomy and flexibility is emphasized in order to achieve better performance found in the private sector. The increased autonomy of public managers has also created more avenues for them to contract out the delivery of services, and to collaborate with the local and foreign private firms in this regard. In

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fact, there is a growing emphasis on public–private partnership in South Asian countries in delivering services.[47] This current transition in governance in the region represents a noticeable shift from its earlier bureaucratic model.

Finally, the above institutional and structural shifts in public sector management are in line with its newly redefined role in South Asia. In developed countries, this changing definition of the role of public management is largely understood in terms of the replacement of its earlier dominant interventionist role with a more indirect, non-interventionist, and facilitating role.[48] In most Asian countries, including those in South Asia, it is the public sector that played the central role in the past in economic management and service delivery, which began to change in the early 1980s to create opportunities for the private sector to play a more expansive role in this regard. For instance, although the public sector became the leading actor in pursuing planned development in India since its independence in 1947, the recent two decades have seen a basic change in this public sector role—from an active and direct involvement in economic activities to the indirect facilitation of the private sector's greater role. Various ministries and departments have been reoriented toward this role in facilitating rather than controlling or regulating economic management.[49] In this regard, a project was undertaken in India during 1994–1996 to educate public servants regarding the advantages of market-led policies and business enterprises and the role they can play in facilitating the process in this regard.[50] Reinforced by this policy shift to replace the role of the public sector by that of the private sector, today the private sector investment accounts for almost 60% of total investment in India.[51]

Recently, Bangladesh has also adopted measures to reorient its public sector in favor of a catalytic or facilitating rather than leading role in the production and distribution of goods and services—the new policy package is expected to be based on the private-sector-oriented rather than public-sector-dominated model.[52] Similarly, in Nepal, under the Nepal Industrial Policy Act, there has been a reconfiguration of the developmental role played by the public sector *vis-à-vis* the private sector with the increasing priority of the latter.[53] The Sri Lankan government has also tried to reinforce this transition in the public sector's role orientation from a primary change agent to a facilitating institution, especially with regard to creating a supportive atmosphere for the private sector.[54] It should be noted that in South Asia, this recent redefinition of the public sector role—in terms of reducing its interventionist approach and reinforcing its supportive role in assisting the private sector—has largely been based on the abovementioned view that private enterprises performs better than public organizations.

IMPACTS OF REINVENTED GOVERNANCE ON CITIZENSHIP RIGHTS IN SOUTH ASIA

It is discussed above that in line with the global trend of reinventing public governance, South Asian countries have introduced significant changes to gradually replace the public sector with the private sector through various policies (e.g., privatization, deregulation, downsizing, and liberalization), and to transform its structure and role in order to make it more businesslike and business-friendly. It has been emphasized that the main objective or rationale behind the current measures of reinvention is to enhance the overall performance of both the public and private sectors indicated by the increased levels of efficiency, growth, and competitiveness. Even in terms of this narrow definition of performance, the recent indicators do not show any significant improvement. According to the World Bank, in South Asia as a whole, the average growth rate of GDP during the 1980s and 1990s remained the same at 5.7%.[55] In fact, the situation may even look more dismal if one takes into account the worsening conditions of external debt and dependence in South Asian countries.[b] However, as far as the performance of public governance is concerned, it must go beyond the instrumental market-based criteria of efficiency and competition. The performance of public institutions must take into account whether they contribute to the realization of people's needs, demands, and interests, which are often stipulated in the form citizens' rights or entitlements.

In any case, the purpose of this section is to examine the implications of market-led reinvention in governance for the citizenship rights in South Asian countries. In general, the two major domains of citizenship rights include the citizens' political rights (rights to free speech, political participation, and political position) and their social rights (rights to economic security and basic services).[57] The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) recognizes each individual's right to freedom, liberty, equality, justice, education, employment, and so on.[58] In developing countries like those in South Asia, the post-independence period saw the emergence and expansion of these basic citizenship rights guaranteed by their constitutions. However, the realization of these citizenship rights often depends on the nature or mode of governance. In this regard, the main objective of this section is to explore how the recent market-driven reinvention in governance in favor of higher performance, has affected various citizenship rights in South Asian countries.

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[b]Between 1990 and 1997, the total external debt increased from \$12.8 billion to \$15.1 billion in Bangladesh, \$83.7 billion to \$94.4 billion in India, \$1.6 billion to \$2.4 billion in Nepal, \$26.7 billion to \$29.7 billion in Pakistan, and \$5.9 billion to \$7.6 billion in Sri Lanka.[56]

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Implications for Citizens' Political Rights

Under the current market-oriented governance in South Asia, the question of political rights is relevant, because the advocates of this new governance blame the previous state monopoly and control as a major constraint to the realization of such rights, and they prescribe the expansion of market forces as a means to expand civil society and disperse or decentralize political power. It is also relevant because the social and political instability caused by the violation of citizens' rights, may constrain the implementation of promarket policies and endangers the activities of business enterprises. In South Asia, in fact, the situation of political instability is usually so serious that it dampens the dynamism of private enterprises[59] despite the strong support of market-friendly governing elite to these enterprises. In this regard, one needs to examine whether the situation of political rights has worsened or improved during the current mode of governance in South Asia.

The recent experience and evidence show that despite significant changes in governance discussed earlier, the status of citizens' political rights has hardly improved in most South Asian cases. In Bangladesh, for instance, the government has often used the police force causing human rights abuses, arrested and detained people arbitrarily, harassed political opponents, and failed to ensure legal protections of individuals.[60] It is also reported that in recent years, there were frequent crackdown on journalists, intimidation of political activists, limits on freedom of assembly, discrimination against the indigenous people, and so on. In other words, despite the collapse of the military regime, restoration of elected government, and market-led reinvention in governance, the extent of political rights remain limited in Bangladesh.

In the case of India, while the leading political figures often take pride in claiming "the world's largest democracy," in reality, there are serious violations of political rights due to the abuse of power by the ruling party.[61] For instance, recently, the government arrested and detained thousands of people under special security legislation, discriminated against indigenous population, committed violence against scheduled castes and tribal people, imposed certain limits on press freedom, and so on.[62] This micro-level political repression in India is often concealed under the facade of macro-level democracy portrayed in national elections. Similarly in Nepal, there are arbitrary arrests, abuse of detainees, and discrimination against lower castes. It seems that in both India and Nepal, the market-driven policy reforms in governance have not made much improvement in political rights.

In the case of Pakistan, the threats to political rights take various forms, including the replacement of elected government by the military, suspension of the constitution and legislative bodies, detention of political leaders, infringement on privacy rights, controlled broadcast media, prevention of legitimate

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protests, and certain limits on freedom of association.[63] Under the military government, although the market-oriented policies and initiatives have continued, the political rights of citizens have been compromised. In Sri Lanka, although the formation of government has been based on multi-party elections, there are growing tendencies toward centralized political control, weak political opposition, and manipulation of media.[64] There have also been cases of arbitrary arrests and detentions, erosion of due-process protections, and restrictions on privacy and press freedom in Sri Lanka.[65] As in India, the multi-party democracy has not always guaranteed the protection of citizenship rights in this country.

The above examples demonstrate that the traditional limits and threats to political rights still continue in South Asian countries. It is pointed out that although the principles and institutions of democracy are enshrined in the constitutions of these countries, in reality, most citizens of remain politically powerless and vulnerable.[66] According to Kamal, in South Asia, civil society is weak, political culture remains elitist, state power is centralized, and the poorer citizens remain excluded from the political process.[67] Thus, the recent market-led reinventions in governance for improving economic performance has not resulted in stronger political rights of citizens in South Asia. While in developed nations, the expansion of capitalist market forces coincided with the expansion of civil society, decentralization of power, and overall democratization of governance, in South Asia, the recent reform initiatives for expanding market forces have hardly changed the political structures and cultures in the region.

Although it is difficult to establish a causal linkage between market-driven reforms in governance and the limits on political rights, one can safely conclude from the above examples that during the period of these reforms, there has not been any significant improvement in citizens' political rights in South Asia. In fact, there are critics who argue that when the workers resist the adverse outcomes of reforms, international agencies tend to support the suppression of public protests or demonstrations.[68] In the case of India, the current period of market-led structural reforms has seen the weakening of trade unionism and the erosion of the workers' legitimate political rights and bargaining capacity.[69] In Bangladesh, market-led policies have intensified tension among workers, state decision makers, and private enterprises.[70] In the case of Nepal, due to privatization policy, the power of trade unions has diminished, degree of workers' participation has declined, and there are reported cases of workers being harassed.[71] These are few examples of the adverse impacts of market-led reforms on citizens' political rights, although more studies need to be done to draw a credible conclusion in this regard. However, as discussed below, there is a more tangible causal link between these reforms and citizens' social rights in South Asia.

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Impacts on Social Rights or Entitlements

In the evolution of citizenship rights, the recognition of social rights—e.g., citizens' rights to employment and income, decent living standards, and basic services like education and health—emerged largely after World War II in response to growing public demands for such rights. In the developing world, the realization of social rights became indispensable due to the urgent need for providing basic services to low-income citizens. In South Asia, the state played a critical role in generating income, creating jobs, and ensuring people's access to basic education, health care, transport, and agricultural inputs, which led to the expansion of the public sector. Although many public agencies delivering subsidized basic services, suffered from fiscal difficulty and administrative mismanagement, they aimed to fulfill the entitlement of poorer citizens to these basic services. But in the current age of reinventing governance based on market principles, the citizens' entitlement to such service provisions has come under challenge due to new policies such as the privatization of public agencies, reduction in public expenditures, withdrawal of subsidies, deregulation of prices, and introduction of user fees, which have made these services too expensive and unaffordable to poor citizens.

First, it is necessary to contextualize the severity of impacts of such market-led reforms on citizens, because it largely depends on their level of poverty or affluence—while citizens in affluent developed nations can usually afford to pay for basic services like heath and education delivered by the private sector, the poor citizens in the developing world remain dependent on the state provisions of these services. This is essential for the citizens in South Asia that represents one of the poorest regions of the world—it has 22% of the world population but it accounts for 40% of the world's poor.[72] The % of population below the poverty line is 42.7% in Bangladesh, 40.9% in India, 42% in Nepal, 34% in Pakistan, and 40.6% in Sri Lanka.[73] It is reported that during the promarket reforms in governance in the 1990s, the total number of people below the poverty line increased in South Asia from 495 million to 522 million.[74] More specifically, the poverty level increased between the mid-1980s and early 1990s in countries such as India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan.[75]

This worsening situation of poverty is often attributed to market-led policies (e.g., privatization, deregulation, devaluation, retrenchment, and subsidy cut), which have allegedly benefited private firms and foreign investors but worsened unemployment, increased service charges, and perpetuated economic hardship among the rural poor.[76] Critics argue that in the case of India, these promarket reforms have worsened both urban and rural poverty and inequality, especially due to considerable job losses in the process streamlining the public sector.[77] In Pakistan, it is reported that since 1988, public sector reforms under

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structural adjustment program have allegedly increased the number of poor from 17 to 35% of the population.[78] In the case of Nepal, it is observed that the marginalization of public welfare under economic liberalization and privatization may have deteriorated the poverty level.[79] This worsening situation of poverty implies that the capacity of low-income citizens to afford basic services has diminished under market-friendly governance in South Asia.

Second, a more direct explanation of the causal relation between poverty and market-led reforms is the increasing rate of public sector unemployment under these reforms that led to redundancy and retrenchment. It is estimated that worker redundancy resulting from privatization was 240,000 in Bangladesh, 46,700 in Nepal, 34,600 in Pakistan, 120,000 in Sri Lanka, and nearly 10 million in India.[80] The unemployment effect of privatization became intensive in these countries, because many state enterprises were closed down after their privatization. In the case of Bangladesh, it is estimated that the employment loss ranged between 10 and 48% in various privatized units that retrenched thousands of workers.[81] In Nepal, the employment decline in privatized enterprises reached almost 60% in 1995, although the rate of such employment loss dropped in more recent privatization transactions.[82]

Similarly, in India, promarket policies have led to job losses by millions of workers, and worsened the sense of job insecurity among the remaining employees.[83] In Pakistan, the privatization led to a decline in employment in both large and small enterprises, and it was estimated in 1996 that the further privatization plan might affect the jobs of nearly half a million workers.[84] The number of redundant workers in Sri Lanka is estimated to be as 50% in some of the privatized units.[85] In most South Asian countries, such a worsening condition of unemployment caused by market-led policies has become even more serious due to other outcomes of these policies, including a decline in real wages, the rise of inflation, and an increase in consumer prices.[86] Thus, the overall social protection for the working class has diminished in South Asia due to market-driven public sector reforms.

Finally, the social protection and entitlement of citizens in South Asia have also come under challenge due to reduction in social sector budget and welfare subsidy under market-led reforms, which eroded the access of low-income families to basic needs such as education, health, safe water, nutrition, and housing.[87] In the case of education, despite the fact that South Asia has about 56 million children out of school, more than 50% adults illiterate, and a low rank in Education Performance Index, the education budget in most countries in the region has remained dismal[c] during this period of budget cut and downsizing. In addition, the gradual replacement of public education

[c]Spending on education is less than 3 percent of GDP in Pakistan, Nepal, and Bangladesh, and little more than 3 percent in India.[88]

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system with the private school network has made education more expensive and relatively unaffordable to poorer households in cases such as Pakistan.[89]

In the health sector, the emphasis on downsizing the public sector through market-led reforms has not been conducive to expand health expenditure in South Asia. The public spending on health (as a percentage of GDP) is only 1.7% in Bangladesh, 1.4% in Sri Lanka, 1.3% in Nepal, and 0.9% in Pakistan.[90] Under the structural adjustment program in India, the central government grants to state governments declined in the health sector from 19.9% in 1984 to only 3.3% in 1993.[91] On the other hand, the adoption of user fees has led to an increase in health costs and made it less affordable for most people in South Asia.[92] In addition, due to the withdrawal of subsidies from various services under structural adjustment programs in South Asia,[d] today the common people spend more money for basic food items in India, pay much higher prices for agricultural inputs in Pakistan, and face scarcity of essential services in Sri Lanka.[94] In short, the market-driven streamlining of public expenditures and subsidies has serious adverse implications for the citizens' access and entitlement to basic needs and essential services in the region.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

It is evident from the above discussion that although South Asian countries have introduced some major promarket reforms in public governance in order to improve its performance, such reforms have not only failed to show any noticeable improvement to this effect, they also have critical implications for various dimensions of citizenship rights in these countries. During the reform period, there has not been much progress in people's political rights discussed earlier. Moreover, the social rights or entitlements of citizens have directly come under challenge. As a result, it is not surprising that a high percentage of population does not have confidence in the main governing (legal, political, and administrative) institutions and service provisions in South Asia.[95] According to some recent surveys, in all South Asian countries, more than 50% people are dissatisfied with their political representatives, civil servants, and education and health services.[96] The workers associated with trade unions in India and Nepal oppose market-led reinvention in governance due to its adverse effects on employment, job security, social protection, and basic services.[97] In this regard, there is a need for rethinking rather than reinventing governance in South Asia.

[d]Between 1990–97, the total subsidies and other transfers as a percentage of total expenditure declined from 43 to 40 percent in India, from 20 to 8 percent in Pakistan, and from 23 to 20 percent in South Asia as a whole.[93]

First, the top policy makers in South Asia need to transcend the narrow definition of public sector performance based on criteria such as efficiency and competition, and incorporate other dimensions of performance, including whether public governance serve the rights, interests, and needs of all classes and groups of citizens. An overemphasis on market-driven efficiency may often exclude the poor, marginalize the civil society, worsen social inequality, and compromise basic needs.[98] As emphasized in this article, public governance should not only consider the instrumental efficiency dimension of performance, in the ultimate analysis, it must satisfy public needs and demands, and earn public trust in its performance.

Second, there is no doubt that in the current global context replete with external economic pressure and influence (especially from international financial agencies), South Asian countries may often have no choice but to adopt market-led reforms prescribed or imposed by international agencies. In this regard, the top policy makers must find ways and means to negotiate or bargain with such external actors, rethink the adverse implications of these reforms, emphasize citizens' needs and rights, and restructure the priorities of governance. In short, they need to reconcile between external influence and internal expectation, and between instrumental economic efficiency and the citizens' basic needs and entitlements.

Third, since the recent two decades of market-led reinvention in South Asia have already caused considerable losses for low-income citizens, especially the rural and urban poor, the government should adopt certain compensatory policies in order to address the worsening situation of poverty and diminishing living standards discussed above. In this regard, Kamal feels that South Asian governments should explore alternative measures to ensure the realization of citizens' economic and social rights based on distributive justice.[99] In the case of India, the government decided to create the so-called National Renewal Fund to compensate for job losses caused by the recent reforms.[100] However, more adequate compensation package needs to be introduced to ensure that the worse-off citizens can meet their basic needs—it may have positive outcomes in terms of reducing the frequency of protests and strikes launched by the retrenched and impoverished working class disrupting the reinvention agenda itself.

Finally, in South Asian countries, there are major vested interests behind the current reinvention in governance, including local business firms, foreign investors, and the ruling-party members, who have gained considerably from privatization transactions, lucrative business deals, underpriced shares, undervalued public assets, and so on.[101] In this regard, if the political elite would remain neutral, they could play a critical role in mediating the interests of dominant economic forces (e.g., local and foreign investors) with the rights of economically powerless citizens. Since the interests of top policy makers themselves have often been involved in the market-driven reinvention in

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governance, they are not always in a position to play such a mediating role. In fact, it is the deeper alliance between the business and political elites recently pursued at the expense citizens' basic entitlements, which has reinforced the aforesaid negative public perception about governance and posed a serious challenge to its legitimacy in South Asia. Today it is imperative for key policy makers in the region to rethink this new politics–business alliance, revive the basic rights of citizens, restore public trust or confidence, and thus enhance the legitimacy of governance.

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