

Wealth Disparity in India: Challenges and Progress

India is a land of juxtaposition. Vermilion bindis counter turquoise jewels, pungent spices balance saccharine sweets, and lavish hotels float upon slums. This last contrast, however, is an immense challenge for citizens.

In a country of 1.4 billion people, a staggering sixty percent of Indians struggle to survive with a budget of \$3.10 per day (Basu). According to a 2017 Oxfam report, India has a significant wealth disparity, with the richest 10% holding 80% of the nation's wealth, perpetuating the profound impact of income inequality. Over time, this wealth disparity has deepened, with the rich getting richer and the poor continuing to live in poverty and debt.

The wealth gap has widened in a large part due to the fact that almost 70% of people living under the poverty line reside in villages ("India's Rural Poor"). These villages are at a significant disadvantage in comparison to urban centers due to a lack of infrastructure and development. For example, according to a 2018 study conducted by the Pratham Education Foundation, roughly 36% of villages had a viable waste management system (Pandey).

As a result of destitution, the lifestyle of villagers is hard to escape. Small-scale farming is a common job, but production risks such as floods, droughts, and crop failure that come from this type of agriculture make this a very unstable job to have. In villages, there is a lack of opportunity and education to move beyond menial labor. Thus, the cycle of job instability in villages repeats itself.

While the imbalance of money severely impedes the lives of many rural communities, an underlying issue proves to be even more obstructive. Dr. Nagender Swamy, the executive director of Villages in Partnership (VIP), states, "In rural areas, there is a poverty of opportunities rather than purely resources and wealth."

Working to promote village development in the Mahabubnagar District of India, VIP has taken on a very unique approach to tackling poverty. "In purely economic terms, wealth is very skewed." Dr. Swamy explains how the lack of material wealth distribution in India has led to a distrust of institutions and a degradation of the self-worth for many villagers. In turn, many villagers were left feeling apathetic to the state of their society. Through his work with VIP, Dr. Swamy has empowered villagers to take pride in their communities and work for betterment instead of ignoring their issues at hand. He posits, "If you want things to be different, then you need to stop being indifferent."

Wealth distribution in India is far from just, and there is an abundance of scope for improvement. The reality is that efforts for improvement not only need to be backed by the government, but people need to be passionate for change as well. Poverty in India is an issue that not only requires a raise in monetary gains, but also a raise in sociocultural factors. By juxtaposing alms with enterprise, people can work towards a more equitable India.

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Interview with Dr. Nagender Swamy of Villages in Partnership