Chapter 12
Research on Distributive Justice: Implications for Social Policy

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Justice is ultimately connected with the way people's lives go, and not merely with the nature of institutions surrounding them.
Amartya Sen

1 Introduction: Distributive Justice in the Social-psychological Perspective

"Justice" has several connotations—moral, legal, economic, philosophical, political and psychological—and it exists in more than one form. Distinctions have been made between distributive justice (dealing with the fairness of allocation or division of rewards or resources), procedural justice (dealing with the fairness of the method or procedure adopted in order to arrive at a particular decision) and retributive justice (referring to fairness related to what is deserved—positive outcomes or rewards for good deeds, and negative outcomes or punishment for bad deeds). The common element in all forms of justice seems to be the idea of "fairness", or getting what one deserves, both in a positive and in a negative sense. Further distinctions have also been made with regard to the sphere in which any of these forms of justice might become relevant, such as legal, organizational, interpersonal and interactional justice. Often all forms of justice are integrated into the over-arching concept of "social justice", a form of justice that is said to prevail at the broad societal level rather than at an interpersonal or personal level. Emphasizing the social component of any form of justice, Baldwin (1966) describes "social justice" as "a quality of the behaviour of one man to another, that is, of man in society, so that all justice is social justice" (p. 1).

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Social justice as a theme and mission is very frequently referred to by policy makers and usually encompasses a wide range of arenas that pose questions related to justice. The most commonly understood meaning of the word "policy" is "a course of action prescribed and eventually adopted by the state or administration". The term "social policy" refers to a policy that is meant to make specific provisions for society, pertaining to a demarcated aspect of social life—in this case, the distribution of rewards or resources among members of society with the aim of benefitting or empowering them, or restoring their rights, especially those of the exploited or vulnerable sections of society. Examples of some domains of social policy are access to education, health, legal facilities and employment opportunities, empowerment, human rights, poverty alleviation and the like. The target groups are mainly those who, because of their vulnerability to exploitation, do not get their due (in the widest sense of the phrase) and do not have the power or resources to fight for their rights. Such groups would include children, women, the elderly, the disabled, the poor, and generally, the socially and economically disadvantaged sections. The link between justice research and social policy is further highlighted by authors drawing attention to the fact that even if distributive justice is examined at the interpersonal or personal level, it invariably has implications for the group, in addition to the individual (Hegtvedt 2005).

There are several reasons for taking up the issue of social and distributive justice in social policy formulation. First, any aspect of justice in its broadest sense is so close to human lives that it cannot be ignored. Like a clock that is usually noticed only when it stops ticking, justice is attended to typically only when it is violated. At the same time, it is also meaningful to see what, when and how justice principles are upheld. Second, "social justice policy" should be more than a mere slogan: a serious undertaking, with promotive goals and remedial concerns, touching various social issues such as poverty, social exclusion, social disadvantage and marginalization of certain sections of society, human rights, access to legal facilities and empowerment. In this direction, research on behaviour related to distributive justice is undoubtedly valuable and applicable. Third, there is very often a divergence between the academic perspective of those carrying out research on justice, the pragmatic and applied perspective of policy makers, and the implementation goal of administrators. The divergence as well as the shared zones between the three perspectives has been very aptly discussed by Shonkoff (2000) through the metaphor of the three "cultures" of science, policy and practice, in the context of child development. By arguing strongly in favour of a "cross-cultural" stance, Shonkoff focuses on the great potential for convergence between the three perspectives, in spite of differences. Something similar may be said about social justice, in general, and distributive justice, in particular.

While the importance of social justice in social policy rarely gets challenged, the question of how scientific research in the area of distributive justice should be given a place in social policy is more difficult to answer. Both distributive justice and social policy are now treated as academic specializations, but the two have very different approaches. Academic research on distributive justice has been carried out in the philosophical perspective (Rawls 1971, 2001; Nozick 1974; Sandel

2009) and economic perspective (Jasso 1983; Jasso & Guillermina 2007; Sen 2009), along with sociological and legal perspectives. Much of this research has inquired into the relevant issues at the societal or "macro"-level of analysis. A few examples of such an approach pertinent to Indian society can be found in Menon's (1988) treatment of the social process in justice with regard to the legal system, Bhatt's (1989) elaborate description of "micro-action" against social injustice by tribal youth groups in Gujarat, Pandey's (1991) investigation of NGOs (grass-roots organizations) working for the goal of social justice, and the report produced by the Calcutta Research Group (CRG) (2009). A human rights analysis of distributive justice in India dealing with poverty and economic development, in the light of the constitution, has been presented by Elizabeth (2010). Yet another example is that of the work by Pandit (2005) on the impact of the reservation policy in India in reducing marginalization and attaining the goal of social equality. Pandit has analyzed the reservation issue in a socio-legal perspective, adopting the framework of Rawls' theory.

By contrast, academic research with a social-psychological approach typically examines justice issues at the "micro"-level, involving interpersonal and small group interactions in specific situations that involve different variables. Research in the social-psychological perspective has also provided many incisive analyses of the issue of justice. Because of the difference in the methods and perspective, the former research rather than the latter lends itself more readily to inclusion in social policy. If the compatibility between academic research carried out at the "macro"-level, on one hand, and the "policy" and "mplementation" perspectives, on the other, has been debated; one sees even more questioning with regard to the "macro"-level academic research that characterizes the social-psychological perspective. Several books, reviews, critical essays and empirical reports have been published on distributive justice in the social-psychological perspective, demonstrating variations even within this perspective, and drawing attention to a multitude of issues that touch social life closely (Braham 1981; Greenberg & Cohen 1982; Cook & Hegdvedt 1983; Deutsch 1985; Cohen 1986, 1987; Ross & Miller 2002; Törnblom & Vermunt 2007). Many of these issues demand a place in social policy.

The present essay takes the following stand. social-psychological research on justice issues that have close links with social policy is very meaningful in its own right, because it generates theoretically rich insights, opens up unexplored avenues and facilitates the comprehension of justice-related behaviour, so that this understanding can be incorporated into an implementable social policy. Therefore, whether such research findings can find a place in social policy per se should not be used as a necessary criterion for assessing the relevance or importance of this research. Instead, every attempt should be made to actually weave social-psychological research into social policy pertaining to distributive justice, and to make such policy broader and more inclusive.

In this vein, the essay commences with a description of the major features of social-psychological research on distributive justice, followed by a discussion of the implications of distributive justice research for social policy, based on a review of the essential findings.

2 The Social Psychology of Distributive Justice: A Brief Review

Views about distributive justice have varied down the ages, as delineated in texts such as the Dharmashastras, *Manusmriti* (600–300 BC), Aristotle's *Nichomachean ethics* (384–322 BC), Ross (1999) and the teachings of Confucius (551–479 BC), to the present time. The Aristotelian notion of justice is based on the idea of merit, which in turn is defined by more than one criterion. Justice has also been defined in the context of keeping agreements or "covenants" (Hobbes 1651), the correction of wrongs (Mill 1861), "giving to each his due" and being impartial (Baldwin 1966), providing basic liberties and equal opportunities (Rawls 1971), and in the framework of "entitlement" (Nozick 1974). In contemporary social-psychological literature, the concepts of "distributive justice" (Homans 1961), the "meeting of comparative expectations" (Blau 1964), "equity" and "inequity" (Adams 1965) and "distributive fairness" (Leventhal 1980) have received some attention. More recently, Sen (2009) has proposed the view that justice could be construed by people in terms of a combination of multiple concepts, including equal opportunities, entitlement, merit and need. This position argues in favour of viewing "justice" in a global rather than local perspective, and integrating the conceptual facet of "justice" (*nyaya*) with the implemented or applied facet (*niti*).

From a social psychologist's point of view, behaviours pertaining to all of the concepts mentioned above are collectively referred to as justice behaviour, and the rules on which distributive justice is based are referred to as justice rules (Greenberg & Cohen 1982). Other theoretical conceptualizations that emerge out of distributive justice research in social psychology are related to (a) entitlement and deservingness (Feather 1999, 2003); (b) the "just world" belief (Lerner & Miller 1978); and (c) relative deprivation (Runciman 1966; Crosby 1976; Walker & Smith 2002) and social disadvantage. A few other process-related as well as structural approaches, and studies adopting an approach integrating several views, have also been mentioned in the literature. Underlining the common ground in these diverse views, Baldwin (1966) succinctly states that "justice", however it is conceptualized, unequivocally has a social referent.

This feature, namely the social referent of justice, may be taken as an appropriate starting point for the exploration of distributive justice in the social-psychological perspective. In contemporary mainstream social-psychological research on justice, active interest was shown by researchers in both theoretical and empirical research for about three decades, beginning in the 1960s. Leading this research was Homans' (1961) proposition of "distributive justice". This concept was part of a postulate of Homans' exchange theory, and referred to the idea the people expect their rewards to be proportional to their costs. Adams (1965) extended the notion of individual reward/cost proportionality to include the concept of equity: people expect their reward/cost ratio to be equal to the reward/cost ratio of others. Any inequality between the two reward/cost ratios leads to the experience of inequity. Adams' work focused more on inequity than equity. However, other researchers

examined both equity and inequity not only in allocation settings but also in the context of interpersonal relationships (Walster et al. 1978).

In the decades that followed, several attempts were made to examine, explain and interpret the role of diverse variables as determinants of distributive justice. A number of theoretical frameworks were proposed for interpreting the empirical research findings pertaining to how resources and rewards are allocated, and how people perceive and react to fairness or unfairness of such allocation. The large volume of research on distributive justice carried out in the last five decades has been critically and comprehensively reviewed by many authors, yielding a great deal of information on perceived justice and injustice, and allocation rule preferences (Walster et al. 1978; Mikula 1980; Braham 1981; Greenberg & Cohen 1982; Cook & Hegdvedt 1983; Deutsch 1985; Bierhoff et al. 1986; Cohen 1986, 1987; Vermunt & Steensma 1991; Colquitt et al. 2001; Cropanzano 2001; Ross & Miller 2002; Törnblom & Vermunt 2007; Kazemi & Törnblom 2008).

Interest in distributive justice in mainstream social psychology started waning around the 1990s, and questions related to procedural justice, as well as other forms of justice, became more prominent. In addition, organizational justice was emphasized. Still, some valuable research was carried out in the latter phase that provided insight into the criteria used by individuals in reward allocation, and attribution aspects (Cohen 1982; Wagstaff 1994) that guide micro-level allocation decisions.

2.1 The Notable Features of Research on Distributive Justice

Contemporary social-psychological research on distributive justice has largely been concerned with distributive justice as it is demonstrated in reward allocation settings. Such settings typically consist of an allocator (who decides how the reward will be distributed or allocated), recipients (the persons between whom the reward has to be distributed), the resource (whatever is to be distributed or allocated) and the situation (the context in which reward allocation is to be decided).

After the initial focus on the allocator's view of distributive justice, attention began to be paid to the recipient's view and reactions to distributive injustice, or violations of distributive justice. Since the 1990s, interest has also been evinced in the allocation of punishment rather than reward, sometimes referred to as "negative justice". (Although the findings related to punishment are enlightening in their own right, research on this aspect will not be included in the present discussion, because punishment allocation entails questions that go beyond resource distribution and enter the territory of retributive justice).

Interest has revolved largely around the "justice rules" or "allocation rules" that are preferred and/or adopted in diverse situations, and also around the variables that influence or determine justice rule preferences. These variables have been classified, for convenience, as allocator, recipient, resource, situational and cultural variables. This broad classification allows for overlap. For example, cultural variables, when explored in specific contexts, would work as situational variables. Allocator–recipient

relationship, a variable that would be considered both an allocator and a recipient variable, is also included in many justice investigations as a culturally relevant variable.

Cultural factors as possible determinants came into the picture only after about a decade of research on distributive justice. The inclusion of cultural aspects was probably the result of two trends in the field of social psychology. First, social psychologists in general seemed to have called attention to the need for examining social behaviour at large in a broader perspective, going beyond the all-too-familiar Euro-American context. Second, some experts in the field of distributive justice specifically pointed out that "justice" seemed to be treated as synonymous with equity (merit-based justice) as the defining characteristic. This might be appropriate for western thinking about distributive justice, but in many other cultures, criteria such as equality and need might be treated as more important bases of "justice" (Deutsch 1975; Sampson 1975; Lerner & Lerner 1981).

Allocator and recipient variables include demographic factors such as allocator and recipient gender, age, social class, social disadvantage and personality characteristics such as personal control, Machiavellianism, beliefs or worldviews such as belief in the Protestant ethic and "Just World". Some of these variables (namely, gender, age and social class) are more closely involved in social policy. For example, women, children, the elderly, the poor, the physically and mentally challenged, and the socially disadvantaged sections are considered to be vulnerable groups in most societies. Therefore, it is not surprising to find social policy being directed towards the welfare of these groups.

Resource variables include characteristics such as the magnitude of resources (large or small amount), resource scarcity and the nature of the resource (concrete or abstract, universalistic or particularistic). Resource characteristics take on special importance in the conceptualization of distributive justice in an economic framework, taking into account the various kinds and amounts of resources available (Jasso 1983; Konow 2001; Ng & Allen 2005). They are also given prominence in a social-psychological perspective (Lerner & Lerner 1981; Skitka & Tetlock 1992). Mainstream research on distributive justice has dealt mainly with a concrete, divisible and universalistic resource (namely money) with very little information regarding any other resource. Seminal contributions in this regard have been made by Törnblom and his collaborators, applying the resource theory proposed by Foa and Foa (1974) (Törnblom & Foa 1983; Foa et al. 1993). Some Indian studies have examined distributive justice in contexts involving non-monetary resources, in addition to monetary resources, that are meaningful to Indians. Both resource scarcity and the nature of the resource would have close implications for social policy.

Situational (contextual) variables include all those variables that influence justice perceptions and behaviour within any distributive or allocation setting, other than allocator, recipient and resource characteristics. A wide range of situational variables have been investigated. Closeness of the allocator–recipient relationship, expectation of future interaction between the allocator and the recipient, public or private allocation, the specific allocation criteria available in the context and whether the allocator is also a recipient or only a "third party" are a few examples of the situational variables that have been examined in the existing research on distributive justice.

Finally, cultural variables include those that may be special features of certain cultures (for example, a large socially or economically disadvantaged section, caste stratification, or specific beliefs or worldviews). They may also consist of cultural dimensions that are used as common denominators for comparing cultures. Two instances of the "common denominator" kind of cultural dimensions are Hofstede's (1980, 2001) dimensions (individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, power distance and long-term orientation), and Schwartz's values (1994)—ten values represented on two bipolar dimensions, namely (a) Openness to change-Conservation, and (b) Self-enhancement–Self-transcendence. These cultural dimensions have been incorporated in several cross-cultural investigations of distributive justice (Fischer & Smith 2003).

The bulk of empirical research on distributive justice in the social-psychological perspective deals with the allocator's perception of what is fair, the recipient's perception of what is fair, and the determinants of allocators' and recipients' perceptions. In the last-mentioned category, both differences and similarities are expected in the factors that influence the allocator's and recipient's perceptions.

Both the allocator's and recipient's perceptions may be assessed through justice rule preferences or choices out of a given set of alternative justice rules (such as equity or merit, equality and need), perceived fairness of a given allocation (based on one or more of the given justice rules) and perceived unfairness under violations of allocation rules.

At a more conceptual (and perhaps rudimentary) level, what people mean by "justice" is an extremely important piece of information that is necessary for a complete understanding of justice conceptualization and justice behaviour. Theoretically, a broad distinction has been made between justice as preservation of rights, justice as desert and justice as equality (Irani 1981). Surveys of the meaning of justice have, in fact, brought out these aspects as themes emerging in open-ended responses. Knowing more about this component would enable us to know which form of "justice" comes most readily to people's minds—distributive, or other forms of justice. Besides, both intercultural and intracultural variations would be expected in people's conceptualization of "justice". Sadly, there is less than adequate empirical evidence on this aspect.

With regard to distributive justice rules, by and large, three rules have dominated the scene, namely equity, equality and need. Other rules have been mentioned, such as norms and legality, agreement and promise, reciprocity, and generosity (Leventhal 1976, 1980), but these have rarely been examined empirically. Although there has been a strong tendency for equity, equality and need to be treated as separate justice rules, some authors propose that these three criteria may actually represent a single, core criterion of "desert" or deservingness (Wagstaff 1994). Equality as a justice rule is apparently self-explanatory, but distinctions can be made between equality of opportunities, equality of treatment and equality of outcomes (Levin 1981). Similarly, need as a justice criterion is easily understood, yet need may not be uniformly interpreted. As mentioned above, the concept of equity began with Homans' (1961) notion of "distributive justice": individuals experience justice when the rewards they get are proportional to the costs they incur in a particular context. This idea was extended further as "equity" by

Adams (1965), which refers to a similarity or equality between one's own reward/cost ratio and another's reward/cost ratio, within the same context.

According to Adams, inequity is experienced when

$$\text{Reward/Cost Ratio of Person} \neq \text{Reward/Cost Ratio of Other}$$

This generates a sense of injustice or unfairness, which is cognitively and emotionally uncomfortable. Thus, if the reward/cost ratio of Person is less than the reward/cost ratio of Other, then Person feels impelled to reduce or remove inequity. This can be done in more than one way. If Person cannot increase the reward in such a situation, he/she may reduce his/her own cost component (for example, by reducing the amount of work done), or increase Other's cost component (by demanding or ensuring that the other person do more work). Alternatively, Person may justify the inequity cognitively, or may decide to leave the situation (Adams 1965).

Often, when a recipient expects and finds an equal distribution of the reward, there is a tendency to compare only the outcomes, disregarding cost or input. However, when rewards are unequal, the recipient pays attention to the input. If the recipient finds or perceives that inputs are equal, and yet outcomes or rewards are unequal, the situation would be an instance of inequity, especially from the point of view of that recipient who receives a smaller share of the reward. This case should be distinguished from that of unequal reward/cost ratios (in which both rewards and costs vary). Ultimately, however, all cases of inequity may elicit similar reactions on the part of the recipient, namely dissatisfaction, hostility, or reduced inputs to reduce inequity. On a subsequent occasion, if the same recipient has an opportunity to be in an allocator role, there might be biased reward distribution, in order to "avenge" unfairness. Some investigators (Staw 1984) pointed out that Adams' analysis does not present a complete picture of inequity. An important determinant of how much inequity is perceived by the individual is the experience of relative deprivation (Runciman 1966; Crosby 1976; Walker & Smith 2002), and whom the recipient compares himself/herself with. Staw further suggested that, for explaining reactions to inequity in organizational settings, equity theory should be merged with the theory of relative deprivation.

One cannot help noticing that, in the initial research on distributive justice, there was an emphasis on equity as the main criterion of distributive justice. Equity was treated almost as synonymous with "justice" and compared with equality in investigations into distributive justice. With growing sensitivity to the role of cultural factors in the conceptualization of distributive justice, attention was drawn to the role of need as another significant criterion for judging or perceiving justice (Deutsch 1975; Sampson 1975).

Comparing equity (merit), equality and need, most of the earlier studies of distributive justice indicated greater preference for one rule over another. In cross-cultural comparisons, preferences varied between different cultures. Complementing the results of these studies, later findings suggested that more than one justice rule may be used simultaneously in the same situation. For example, the principles of equality, accountability, efficiency and need may be used together, with their relative weightages differing in response to contextual demands (Konow 2001; Scott et al. 2001).

With regard to the methodological approach, the earlier empirical research on distributive justice adopted an experimental approach, with measures of actual allocation behaviour. In a typical laboratory experiment, subjects would be placed in a reward allocation setting involving task performance and would be given information regarding inputs of the participants. The allocator would be asked to make an actual allocation of the reward. The measure of interest was whether the allocation was based on equity (merit, input or contribution), equality or need. The earlier studies involved a comparison between equity and equality only. In the empirical research that followed, actual-behaviour laboratory studies were rapidly replaced by stated-behaviour scenario studies. Subjects responded to descriptions of hypothetical allocation situations and indicated how they would make allocations. This shift might have reduced realism, but it allowed greater versatility and flexibility with respect to the variables that could be incorporated. Yet, the experimental approach was largely retained. As research advanced in this area, more investigators began to use multivariate approaches and to use both experimental and correlational techniques. The focus was still on "micro"-level and bounded contexts rather than society-level settings, and more on quantitative rather than qualitative analysis.

While research on issues of distributive justice is still being carried out because of its academic significance, findings of this research do not seem to have been incorporated into social policy, as stated earlier. If one looks into why social policy has not taken serious cognizance of social-psychological research on distributive justice, several reasons come to the fore, such as methodological problems that make the investigations distant from "real" life, samples that allow for only limited generalization of findings, too much context specificity of the studies, either too much quantification of the dependent variables or too much subjectivity in qualitative analysis, and in some cases, the absence of replication of findings that defies easy explanation. It must be mentioned that these difficulties are not necessarily present in all of distributive justice research, and we do have sufficient examples of consistent and meaningful findings related to some variables that are also socially relevant. Moreover, similar methodological and other problems exist also in justice research carried out in other perspectives.

Considering this scenario, the place of social-psychological research on distributive justice in social policy can be meaningfully discussed by examining the major findings. The social policy implications of any social-scientific research need to be interpreted in their appropriate sociocultural background. The present discussion will now comment on social-psychological research on distributive research in India. Empirical contributions by Indian researchers have facilitated somewhat the understanding of the dynamics underlying justice behaviour. Justice-related research in India includes a study of (a) the meaning of the word "justice" to Indians, (b) justice rule preferences, (c) variables that influence these preferences, (d) perceived fairness of given allocations, (e) perceived unfairness under violations of specific justice rules, (f) and the ratings of importance of various criteria of reward and resource allocation. The volume of Indian research on distributive justice is relatively small and so is the number of researchers in this area. Many of the findings have revealed aspects of justice conceptualizations and perceptions among Indians that are at variance with what would be predicted on

the basis of assumed cultural characteristics—a feature that is both informative and challenging. In other words, several questions in the Indian sociocultural context remain both unexamined and unanswered.

Attention is now turned to certain findings of social-psychological research on distributive justice that should be given a place in social policy.

3 Implications of Distributive Justice Research for Social Policy

For any justice-related social policy to be ultimately effective, it should take into account the following aspects:

- Justice conceptualization of those affected by social policy
- Justice perceptions between different sections of society
- Distinction between the allocator's and recipient's perspectives
- The role of resource variables and sociocultural characteristics

3.1 Justice Conceptualization of Those Affected by Social Policy

Overall, there would be no disagreement with the view that justice-related social policy should be in accordance with the fairness or justice conceptualization of those affected by such a policy. That is, those who are to be benefitted or otherwise affected by social policy must also feel that they will receive what they consider "just" treatment. In most cultural contexts, it is assumed that the basic conceptualization of justice among individuals would match what is expressed through justice rule preferences, perceived fairness of given allocations, and reactions to violations of preferred justice rules. However, evidence from Indian samples (Krishnan 2011) shows that the basic justice conceptualization may be much broader than what is expressed through the context-specific indicators just mentioned.

One informative set of empirical findings in Indian research on justice pertains to *what the word '"justice'" means* to Indian respondents. A survey of this aspect among Indian subjects (including both urban and rural respondents, comprising college students, employed persons, and mothers) revealed a variety of themes, related to distributive justice as well as other forms of justice. Equality of various kinds (equal resources, equal opportunities, impartiality and lack of discrimination) was the most frequently mentioned meaning of justice, followed by deservingness, entitlement, and merit (giving people their due, or their rights, giving rewards according to contributions). Legality (action and behaviour in accordance with the law) was also a theme that figured prominently. In addition, general ethical behaviour and humanitarianism (honesty, truthfulness, charity, and doing good to others)

also got mentioned as a meaning of justice. By contrast, sensitivity to a potential recipient's need, fulfilling one's promises, and following reciprocity were among the least commonly mentioned meanings of justice. A similar pattern of responses indicating the "meaning of justice" has been reported by some other investigators as well, although there are variations in the frequencies of different categories of responses between different samples (Pandey, "personal communication"). In one of these studies, responses from a sample of Canadian university students exhibited essentially similar themes, again with varying frequencies in the different categories of responses (Krishnan & Carment 2006). Some other investigators have gathered similar evidence from other cultures [for example, Hochschild's (1982) study of American beliefs about justice]. Allowing for variations in the denominators underlying people's justice conceptualizations in diverse cultures, one may nevertheless attempt a comparison between these conceptualizations, with some caution. Such a comparison shows that the basic conceptualization of justice, conveyed in a context-free form, might provide a good foundation for justice-related social policy and may give useful leads into what people consider "fair" or "just", in general.

Adding to what "justice" means to people, *the importance assigned to various meanings, definitions and criteria of distributive justice* may also strengthen our comprehension of justice conceptualizations. Some evidence on these lines has been reported in an Indian sample (Krishnan 2011). The greatest importance was assigned to ability and effort as criteria of reward or resource allocation, and to following legal codes, keeping promises and retribution as definitions of "justice". Equality, need, getting one's own rights, reciprocity and helping were assigned less importance. The recipient's disadvantage, group achievement, individual achievement, and seniority as criteria of reward or resource allocation were assigned the least importance. These differences in assigned importance to various criteria did not exactly match the frequencies of mention of these criteria as the "meaning of justice". Nor was there a systematic correspondence between the assigned importance, and Indian findings related to justice rule preferences in scenario studies.

Considering *justice rule preferences*, and the *perceived fairness of given allocations* based on particular justice rules as additional expressions of justice conceptualization, the existing research showed both consistencies and inconsistencies between these two commonly examined dependent variables. Lack of correspondence is also observed between these two expressions of justice conceptualization and the frequency of mention of "meaning of justice" themes (referred to above), as well as the importance assigned to various meanings and criteria of justice. In Indian studies of reward allocation, earlier findings showed a stronger preference for need as a justice rule than merit or equality (Murphy-Berman et al. 1984; Berman et al. 1985; Aruna et al. 1994). However, many other studies have shown a strong equality preference, or merit preference, or non-significant differences between the likelihood of preference for need and merit (Krishnan 1998, 2000, 2001; Krishnan et al. 2009; Pandey & Singh 1997; Singh 1994). These apparent inconsistencies seem to be associated with the presence of specific contextual and resource variables in the allocation setting, such as allocator–recipient relationship, self–other versus other-only allocation, resource scarcity and the like.

Finally, *perceived unfairness under violations of specific justice rules* may also be an expression of justice conceptualization. How people react to perceived injustice has been investigated by some experts independently of perceived justice (Kahn 1972; Schmitt & Marwell 1972; Mikula et al. 1990). Logically, it would be expected that when a particular justice rule is preferred most, is judged to be most fair, or an allocation based on that rule is perceived to be most fair, then a violation of that rule would also be perceived to be most unfair. The opposite can be said for a justice rule that is preferred least, is judged to be least fair, or an allocation based on that rule is perceived to be least fair. However, empirical investigations involving Indian samples that throw light on this form of justice conceptualization do not always bring out the expected symmetry. Some Indian studies showed that perceived unfairness was greatest under ability or effort violation, and under equality violation. In the same studies, perceived unfairness ratings corresponded, respectively, to strong merit preference or strong equality preference in hypothetical allocation settings, but the perceived unfairness ratings did not systematically match ratings of perceived fairness of merit-based and equal allocation, respectively. Legality violation was also perceived to be highly unfair. In the same investigations, perceived unfairness was rated significantly lower under need violation. This finding was matched by the weak need preference reported in some of these studies, but was inconsistent with the strong need preference reported in many others. Perceived unfairness was lowest under promise violation and reciprocity violation (Krishnan 2011). An interesting observation was that in an investigation that compared Indian and Canadian college students (cited above), the pattern of perceived unfairness under violations of specific justice rules was extremely similar in the two samples.

In other words, there may be several ways of examining how individuals in a particular society or culture conceptualize "justice", in context-free or context-bound ways. The lack of congruence between the various expressions of justice conceptualizations poses a challenge to social scientists. Given that some incompatibility between these diverse expressions of justice conceptualization is only to be expected, a clash of interests among those affected by a particular policy should not be surprising. Thus, people who define justice as equality are likely to perceive as "unfair" a policy that goes against equality and favours a particular criterion such as merit, need or legality. Likewise, they are likely to perceive as "fair" a policy that upholds equality. This state of affairs underlines the need to pay attention to the dissimilarities that may exist between different sections of a society, with respect to what is "most fair" in distributive justice—a matter of great concern to policy makers, and one that certainly complicates policy formulation.

3.2 Justice Perceptions Between Different Sections of Society

Probably, it is this aspect that poses the biggest challenge to policy makers. Apart from the overall diversity in justice conceptualizations that are found in every society, different sections of any society may show variations in justice preferences

that are context bound, or pertain to specific resources. “Different sections of society” may be identified on the basis of age, gender, socioeconomic class and social disadvantage. All of these variables may be placed in the category of allocator and recipient characteristics, and the existing research in the area does provide evidence pertinent to these variables.

3.2.1 Age

Both young and very old individuals in any society are considered to be vulnerable to various forms of injustice, and it is common to find social welfare policy being addressed to children and senior citizens. However, social-psychological studies have not yielded information on age variations in justice rule preferences from a lifespan point of view. Nor have they examined reactions among the elderly as recipients of special welfare programmes and the like. Instead, much of the research on distributive justice has looked into developmental variations in allocation preferences shown by children placed in the allocator role.

In the developmental perspective, evidence comes from some studies that adopt a cognitive developmental approach and/or moral developmental approach. In a cognitive developmental framework, Hook and Cook (1979) found that with age, children tended to move from self-interest to equality and from equality to equity in their allocation pattern, and within equity, from ordinal to proportional equity. Adopting Kohlberg’s theory of moral development, Damon’s (1980) studies indicated that very young children in the allocator role adopted allocation criteria such as the recipient being older or younger, or self-interest of the allocator who was also a recipient. Slightly older children adopted equality, and still older children followed equity as the criterion of reward allocation. Damon interpreted these findings as conforming to Kohlberg’s moral developmental stages. Similar developmental patterns among children were reported by Enright et al. (1980a, b, 1981). However, other investigators have found situational variables modifying, or interacting with, the age of the subject. For example, self-interest and equality have been found to be dominant criteria among very young and older children, respectively, but the explanations for adopting these criteria varied between the children (Simons & Klaasen 1979). A more recent cross-cultural comparison of very young children from different cultures has also shown self-interest as a basis of reward allocation (Rochat et al. 2009).

Other investigators have observed equality preference among younger children, but different criteria being used by older children (Sigelman & Weitzman 1991). Zinser et al. (1991) reported that younger children used both equality and need as allocation criteria, whereas older children used equity. Similarly, deviations from the developmental pattern found in western studies have been reported by Singh and his collaborators among Asian subjects (Sin & Singh 2005; Singh et al. 2002; Singh & Huang 1995). In these investigations, perceived input by the recipient was assessed and the outcome (allocation) was measured. The findings indicated that perceived input differences mediated allocations, with variations in the

correspondence between perceived input differences and outcome (allocation) differences. Moreover, the developmental trend was not linear, in contrast to the pattern reported in American studies. The absence of a linear developmental pattern was ascribed to cognitive as well as social considerations among Asian subjects (Singh et al. 2002). Situational variables such as motivation and competence have also been found to colour justice rule preference among both younger and older children (Nelson & Dweck 1977). Yet another study revealed that the nature of the allocation setting (kibbutz or urban) influenced what criteria would be adopted, because of the social norms prevalent in these settings (Nisan 1984). Some other investigators have also found the effect of situational characteristics making a difference in the developmental pattern reported by Damon (Moore et al. 1993).

Indian studies that have investigated age or developmental differences in justice rule preferences have generally not found support for the trends reported in western investigations, or for Kohlberg's moral developmental stages. For example, Sinha (1985) found that both younger and older children adopted equity as an allocation criterion, with proportional equity appearing in younger children, and ordinal equity, in older children. Similarly, Misra (1991) found deviations from the developmental patterns reported in other studies. At all age levels, equality and reciprocity were exhibited by children.

Although age or developmental differences in the adoption of specific justice rules have been interpreted in the light of moral cognitive developmental stages that are alleged to be culturally universal, the cross-cultural universalism of the proposed moral cognitive developmental stages has been debated by some experts (Gibbs & Schnell 1985; Snarey 1985; Darley & Schultz 1990), and the role of socialization in shaping the moral reasoning underlying justice rule preferences has been highlighted. Considering the sparse research on the effects of socialization, child rearing or parenting on moral reasoning, and thereby on justice-related behaviour, it is not possible to make a definite statement on the relative influence of moral cognitive development and socialization, or on their interactive effects, on justice rule preferences.

The translation of age-related findings on distributive justice rule preferences into social policy in the case of children in the allocator role may really not be a meaningful exercise. However, research that takes into consideration children as recipients shows clearly that children are extremely vulnerable to exploitation (for instance, in terms of being denied proper education, or child labourers being paid inappropriate wages). This state of affairs does necessitate inquiry into the question of distributive justice from the recipient's point of view—in this case, recipients who are probably too young to understand that they may be the victims of distributive (and other forms of) injustice, let alone protest against it or react to injustice in any other way. Yet, these young individuals seem capable of responding to the idea of fairness and unfairness, in both allocator and recipient roles, as revealed in the evidence described above. If one takes into account socialization as a significant set of variables that modify moral cognitive developmental trends in a particular sociocultural context, then, possibly, it is easier to see the role of social policy.

3.2.2 Gender

With regard to the allocator's gender, differences in justice rule preference have been reported in several studies (Major & Deaux 1982). Between equity and equality, males prefer equity over equality, whereas females show the opposite trend. This general finding has been explained in terms of the exploitative-accommodative attitude framework: Males prefer equity because it fits in with their self-favouring (exploitative) attitude, whereas females adopt equality because it is consistent with their other-favouring (accommodative) attitude (Boldizar et al. 1988). Extending this explanation to broader dispositional characteristics, it has been suggested that men are more agentic and status assertive, whereas women are more communal and status neutralizing (Kahn et al. 1977, 1980a, b; Major & Adams 1983). Males have been found to react more negatively than females to injustice in reward allocation and to an unjust partner (Kahn 1972). However, findings that indicate interactive effects between personality variables and contextual variables suggest that dispositional or personal variables such as gender may not be acting in isolation. For example, expected interaction between the allocator and the recipient (Shapiro 1975), whether the allocation is public or private (Kidder et al. 1977; Asdigian et al. 1994), whether self-presentation is an underlying motive (Reis & Gruzen 1976) and whether the task characteristics in the situation favour males or females (Reis & Jackson 1981) are some of the variables that may modify the overall gender differences reported in many studies. Gender role type (Bem 1974) as a personality variable has also shown some effects. In one study, androgynous allocators exhibited greater generosity in allocation and discriminated less between recipients than masculine, feminine and undifferentiated types (Jackson 1987). Possibly, a gender role stereotype that allows for a combination or integration of accommodative and exploitative approaches to reward allocation would lead to a similar likelihood of preference for equity and equality as allocation criteria.

Examining gender differences in terms of recipient characteristics, societal-level explorations of reactions to gender wage gap have shown differences between males and females with respect to feeling underpaid. Overall, males have been found to feel more underpaid, and more relatively deprived, than females, even when the general income level of males is higher than that of females (Jackson 1989). Husband–wife variations in salaries or wages were found to be lower among couples who had more egalitarian attitudes that those lower on such attitudes. In organizational contexts, gender differences have been found in the relative importance attached by males and females to distributive and procedural justice, and its relationship with employees' commitment. Commitment was related more to distributive justice among males, but more to procedural justice among females (Sweeney & McFarlin 1997).

In the Indian context, it is notable that prescriptions in traditional Indian (Hindu) texts consider gender as a recipient characteristic, and stipulate that men should get more of a resource or reward, such as inherited property, than women. In contemporary Indian studies dealing with reward allocation and distributive justice, most investigations report non-significant gender differences in justice rule preferences

from the allocator's perspective. In a few studies, interactive effects have been found between allocator gender and situational characteristics. Considering recipient gender, several surveys indicate that a clear gender wage gap exists that is unfair to women (for example, Bhan 2001; Menon et al. 2009). But these surveys do not assess the fairness perception of males and females, and present an economic rather than a social-psychological analysis. While this leaves another gap in information regarding recipient perceptions of fairness, social policy does demonstrate sensitivity to recipient gender from the social welfare point of view and makes more allowances for a fair share of resources as well as opportunities to females.

3.2.3 Socioeconomic Class

Social philosophers such as Rawls (1971), sociologists, and economists have brought out the implications of social class differences for understanding distributive justice by highlighting aspects such as social inequality and the accompanying differences in values (Tallman et al. 1979). A few studies in the social-psychological perspective have also revealed social class differences in justice rule preferences. Some investigators have reported that less distributive justice exists among lower class children than among middle-class children (Enright et al. 1980, 1981). Such class differences possibly reflect varying allocation experiences as recipients. Moreover, there is evidence from other studies that people with higher incomes prefer merit, whereas those with lower incomes prefer need or equality as justice rules. Considering that members of different social classes also vary in income, this finding becomes significant for understanding social class variations in justice rule preferences. This idea has been supported by further empirical as well as theoretical analysis by some authors (d'Anjou et al. 1995). It has also been suggested that different values are encouraged and upheld by members of diverse socioeconomic classes.

Interpreting the findings related to socioeconomic class, it may be said that the distributive justice norms adopted by different socioeconomic classes seem to be influenced by the opportunities available to them for obtaining resources (of various kinds), and the resource scarcity they face. Sections of society that face a relative shortage of economic resources are more likely to prefer equality or need as criteria of reward and resource allocation, compared to those who face less severe resource scarcity (Lerner & Lerner 1981). The latter are more likely to prefer merit or equity. Availability or lack of availability of opportunities may also be viewed as one form of "scarcity", coupled with other problems such as social disadvantage and social exclusion.

3.2.4 Social Disadvantage

Possibly, social disadvantage is one determinant of justice perceptions and justice rule preferences that is unquestionably connected to social policy. The concept of "social disadvantage" has been defined in diverse ways, including disadvantage

stemming from low socioeconomic status, deprivation and relative deprivation, poverty, membership of an ethnic minority, gender, physical disability and so on. In the case of hierarchically stratified societies such as India, social disadvantage is also defined in terms of membership of lower castes. As in the case of social class, the socially disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged sections of a society would probably define "justice" according to the values they develop based on their experiences, and these values may ultimately translate into justice perceptions and justice behaviour.

In general, it would be expected that the socially disadvantaged sections of any society would (a) perceive greater injustice to themselves than the rest of society, and (b) with regard to justice rule preferences, show a greater preference for need and equality as justice rules rather than merit: the socially non-disadvantaged would be more likely to favour merit, or would favour all three justice rules with the same likelihood. The existing studies on social disadvantage report findings that do not show drastic differences between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged subjects. Nor do they throw light clearly on similarities or differences in justice rule preferences. Instead, many of these investigations deal with the extent of justice perceived by the socially disadvantaged. Considering the sense of felt deprivation in women, Crosby (1982) reported that contrary to expectations, working women stated that they felt less injustice than men, a phenomenon that she referred to as a "denial of personal discrimination" or "personal disadvantage". Corroborative evidence has been provided by some other investigators (Foster & Matheson 1995). Comparing the sense of justice or injustice between different socioeconomic and ethnic groups in the United States, Jost et al. (2003) explained the lack of felt injustice or unfairness among the disadvantaged in terms of the concept of "system justification". This idea essentially indicates that the disadvantaged view the existing system as justified and therefore "just", and thereby avoid or reduce ideological dissonance that might stem out of a sense of injustice. With a changed perspective, Laurin et al. (2011) highlight a "self-regulatory" rather than a debilitating role of social disadvantage. Based on the findings of five studies, these authors reported that contrary to common belief and expectations, socially disadvantaged groups, more than the advantaged ones, demonstrated a belief in greater fairness in reward allocation, greater persistence in examinations in spite of poor performance, greater motivation to work harder, and willingness to invest time and effort in pursuing long-term goals.

In a somewhat similar vein, many Indian investigators dealing with justice perceptions among the socially disadvantaged have observed greater action for restoring social justice in the disadvantaged and "weaker" sections (Bhatt 1989; Menon 1988; Pandey 1991). This may be ascribed to the greater need for such action among the disadvantaged. What is possibly more surprising is that some studies in the social-psychological perspective have shown non-significant differences between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged groups. With regard to the Indian context, defining social disadvantage on the basis of caste, no significant difference was found between the socially disadvantaged groups (scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and backward classes) and non-disadvantaged groups (the

"general" category), either in the extent of justice prevailing in society or in justice rule preferences (Krishnan 2001). Other studies that have taken into account the recipient's caste (but without including the idea of "disadvantage") have also found this variable to have a non-significant effect on allocation rule preferences (Singh & Pandey 1994; Pandey & Singh 1997). Corroborating these results, more recent evidence of non-significant differences between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged groups have been reported, even when "disadvantage" was redefined in terms of opportunities available in key domains such as health, education and economic growth, and in social status (Pandey, unpublished dissertation). Particularly considering the social, political, identity-related, and interpersonal importance of caste, and caste-based social disadvantage in Indian society, the absence of significant differences between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged groups is an unexpected finding. Possibly, this finding can be explained on the basis of the reservation policy that constitutionally purports to safeguard the interests of the disadvantaged. Similar findings reported in the U.S., a culture that is very different from the Indian culture, have been explained or interpreted in terms of "denial of personal discrimination" (Crosby 1982), "system justification" (Jost et al. 2003) and "self-regulation" (Laurin et al. 2011). These explanations are not entirely ruled out in the Indian context.

It has to be admitted that a more definite explanation is needed for the lack of significant differences between the disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged, in the case of the Indian society. Until a better method and approach to analysis is devised, the counter-intuitive findings of Indian studies related to social disadvantage may continue to pose a challenge to researchers. Everyday observations suggest that the disadvantaged section of any society, by definition, is more vulnerable to injustice than the rest of society, and deserves priority in social policy. In spite of the non-significant gender differences, and non-significant differences reported in comparisons between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged sections in Indian studies, the special considerations given through legislative (constitutional) and other measures to women and the socially disadvantaged are justified because they have the goal of social equality.

However, such policies may be met with some dissatisfaction in the other sections. It could be argued that the needy sections (low economic class and the disadvantaged) are also typically low input sections with regard to production, even if this is for reasons beyond their control. By contrast, the high input sections who get lower levels of rewards because their merit is treated as less important than need or equality may justifiably feel unfairly treated in terms of outcomes, even if this is done on grounds of their being less needy. In the long run, this kind of circumstance may actually discourage high input or productivity in the non-disadvantaged section. In other words, instead of a lopsided distribution system that caters only to the interests of one section, multiple justice rules may have to be built into social policy related to distributive justice.

That is, depending on the nature of resources, and situational factors, a resource or reward distribution policy that blends equality, need and merit may be what is ultimately effective.

3.3 Distinction Between the Allocator's and Recipient's Perspectives

Social-psychological studies of reward allocation have largely examined the allocator's perspective. However, it is obvious that justice rule preferences and perceived fairness of given allocations would differ between the allocator and the recipient. The allocator–recipient distinction in fairness perceptions was underlined by van Yperen et al. (2005). This variable has been looked at in Indian studies as well (Krishnan 1998; Krishnan & Carment 2006; Krishnan et al. 2009). As expected, perceived fairness of a given allocation in the recipient's perspective shows an element of self-interest. Thus, merit-based allocation is perceived to be more fair than other allocations by a meritorious recipient, and need-based allocation is perceived to be more fair than other allocations by a needy recipient. On the other hand, an allocator who is not one of the recipients would make a disinterested, objective judgment of fairness. To that extent, then, such an allocator's justice rule preference, or perceived fairness of a given allocation, could be taken as a more objective indicator of "fairness". However, if the allocator also happens to be one of the recipients (as in "self–other" allocations), he/she is also likely to exhibit self-interest.

From the point of view of policy making, it becomes imperative to consider the distinction between "self–other" allocation in which the allocator is also one of the recipients, and "other-only" allocation, in which the allocator is not a recipient. This boils down to a distinction between the allocator's perspective and the recipient's perspective. More often than not, such distinctions are ignored, or at least not considered seriously in social policy formulation. The stance of the policy maker appears to be that of allocators in an "other-only" allocation setting, but this may still involve subtle forms of self-interest. It is an inescapable fact that every policy maker or allocator in the societal or national context is an inseparable part of the same society. Therefore, allocation policies essentially become cases of "self–other" allocation in the final analysis. There is every possibility that those who make policies about the distribution of resources often tacitly follow self-interest, adopting one set of allocation criteria for themselves as allocators, and a different set of criteria for the recipients "out there" who are the supposed beneficiaries of their policies. In other words, if true social justice is the objective of social policy, then a careful evaluation of the distinction between allocator–recipient roles is unavoidable. This is one feature that has been brought to light in social-psychological research on distributive justice.

3.4 The Role of Resource Variables and Sociocultural Characteristics

Resource availability, in a broad sense, is the starting point of distributive justice. The existing literature on distributive justice contains economic analyses (for example, Jasso 1983, 2007; Konow 2001) as well as social-psychological analyses

(for example, Foa et al. 1993; Ng & Allen 2005). In general, a consideration of resource variables necessitates a distinction between the micro-level analysis common in the social-psychological perspective and the macro-level analysis common in the economic and sociological perspectives. Combining the two analyses, it should be recognized that ultimately, resource-related variables (that constitute economic conditions), on one hand, and sociocultural characteristics, on the other hand, influence each other. This interaction affects the values nurtured by a cultural or society as a whole and also by different sections within a culture or society. These values, in turn, get expressed in the form of justice perceptions and justice behaviour.

Resource scarcity or availability may be considered both a resource characteristic and a background variable with sociocultural implications. Much has been written about the distributive justice of scarce resources (Lerner & Lerner 1981), the role of self-interest or sensitivity to equality and need (Greenberg 1981) and about the allocation of public resources such as health care and other resources (Skitka & Tetlock 1992, 1993). One of the themes that emerge in this context is that distributive justice issues arise mainly in scarce resource conditions (Lemberg 2010; Maiese 2003). At first, it would appear that when resources or rewards are scarce, self-interest would be stronger than equality, equity or need. Yet, there is evidence that group concerns rather than individual self-interest prevail under reward scarcity, in a non-zero-sum situation, and make equality more salient. Under reward sufficiency, self-interest and equitable distributions have been found to be more likely (Hegtvedt 1987). It has also been proposed that under resource scarcity, a "contingency model" is invoked, that involves a consideration of several situational factors in making distributive decisions, namely the distributive norms applicable to the situation, perceived attributes of the potential recipients, resource constraints and attributes of judges or allocators (Skitka & Tetlock 1992). Moreover, when resources are scarce, attribution of recipients' claims become very important, and allocators may use need or efficiency, depending on whether the recipients' need is internally or externally caused.

In the context of India which appears to qualify as a "scarcity culture" (Williams 1973), specific investigations fail to bring out a significant effect of resource scarcity on the choice of distributive justice rules (Pandey & Singh 1997; Krishnan 2000). However, as in the case of many other variables, this does not mean that Indians are impervious to resource scarcity. Instead, attention needs to be paid to other factors that may be operating in the situation, especially cultural variables and sociocultural characteristics in general.

3.4.1 Cultural Variables

The entry of cultural variables in the study of distributive justice can be considered a landmark in the history of research in the area. Two well-known and commonly used frameworks for cross-cultural comparisons of distributive justice are Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions and Schwartz' value dimensions (Schwartz 1994, 1999),

referred to earlier in the present essay. Among the Hofstede dimensions, individualism in particular became a favourite with researchers. Several cross-cultural comparisons revealed that equity (merit) was preferred most in individualistic cultures, and equality or need was preferred most in collectivistic cultures (Weick et al. 1976; Mahler et al. 1981; Marin 1981, 1985; Leung & Bond 1982, 1984). Other cultures, such as India, were later included in cross-cultural comparisons. Moreover, after the importance of including need as an allocation principle was highlighted, along with equity and equality (Deutsch 1975; Sampson 1975), some intercultural comparisons revealed that need was also a salient justice rule particularly in some collectivistic cultures (Murphy-Berman et al. 1984; Berman et al. 1985; Kashima et al. 1988). As research involving cultural variables progressed, the role of individualism–collectivism in distributive justice started being questioned, partly because other dynamics were seen to be more important (Hui et al. 1991), but also because individualism as a cultural variable itself posed both conceptual and measurement problems (Oyserman et al. 2002). Considering Schwartz' value dimensions, the number of investigations using this framework in the context of distributive justice is much smaller, and the few studies (Fischer & Smith 2004) that have examined the relationship between these value dimensions and distributive justice perceptions in specific cultures provide insight into the possibility of alternative cultural variables influencing distributive justice perceptions. A different perspective, combining economic, sociological and political–ideological perspectives, and incorporating diverse measures of distributive justice, can be found in the work of Powell (2005) as part of the cross-cultural variations in distributive justice perceptions (CVDJP) project.

It should be mentioned in this context that cultural variables have been incorporated into justice research from more than one point of view. In most studies, selected cultural or national groups are assumed to be high, low or intermediate on the Hofstede dimensions, Schwartz values, or on cultural characteristics proposed within some other theoretical framework. Or, specific samples are measured on the cultural variables of interest (for example, idiocentrism–allocentrism corresponding to cultural individualism–collectivism). It may be argued that the cultural context encourages the acquisition of personality characteristics and beliefs through socialization (Triandis & Suh 2002). In addition, features associated with specific cultural variables are included in several investigations as contextual variables that have cultural relevance (for example, closeness of the allocator–recipient relationship or the concern for harmonious relationships as collectivistic variables). Another way in which cultural variables are incorporated is by examining societal features such as a large socioeconomically disadvantaged section, stratification or hierarchy, as correlates or determinants of justice perceptions.

With regard to specific personality variables and beliefs that may function at the individual level as equivalents of cultural variables, there is some evidence that merits mention. For example, considering Machiavellianism, high Machs tend to follow self-interested allocation principles, whereas low Mach individuals exhibit a preference for equal distribution principles. Low self-esteem persons tend to adopt equality, whereas those high on self-esteem adopt equity (Major & Deaux 1982). Some evidence of the role of Machiavellianism, and of need for approval,

in the redress of injustice has also been reported (Blumstein & Weinstein 1969). Persons high on both personality characteristics were less likely to engage in redress of distributive injustice to themselves, than persons low on these characteristics. Another variable, namely the sense of personal control over their own outcomes, was found to be related to justice rule preference. Grzelak (1985) found that persons with a strong sense of personal control over their outcomes adopted the equity rule in reward distribution in a game setting, to a significantly greater extent than those with a weaker sense of control.

In addition, specific personal beliefs may be associated with justice rule preferences. For example, belief in the Protestant ethic was associated with a preference for equity over equality or need (Greenberg 1978). Comparing samples from Jamaica and New Zealand, Frey and Powell (2009) found correlations between belief in the Protestant ethic and support for social justice measures such as welfare, redistribution of wealth, free enterprise and the like, collectively referred to as "social justice values". Similarly, there is evidence of associations between belief in a "just world" (Rubin & Peplau 1975; Lerner & Miller 1978) and distributive justice perceptions, across different cultures (Furnham 1991). The Preference for Merit Principle, or PMP, Scale (Davey et al. 1999) was devised in order to assess the extent to which individuals favour the merit principle in reward and resource allocation, as an individual-difference variable. Preference for the merit principle was found to be a good predictor of attitudes towards measures such as affirmative action.

A few Indian studies show the role of Machiavellianism as a personality variable, in the context of reward allocation. In a series of reward allocation studies involving both college students and supervisors in organizations, Chatterjee (1984) found the following. In actual distribution, high Machiavellians distributed rewards on the basis of bargaining, and exploitatively took as large a share of the reward for themselves as possible. Low Machiavellians, on the other hand, followed the equity or equality rule. In a scenario study of industrial supervisors by the same investigator, a leader's reward allocation that was accompanied by an explanation was perceived to be fair when the explanation was based on group need rather than on personal benefit to the leader. In other words, Machiavellianism level as well as explanations for a given allocation seemed to influence perceived fairness of a given allocation. Exploring the relationship between justice perceptions, and emotional quotient, locus of control and equity orientation as personality characteristics, Gulati and Bhal (2004) found that these personality variables were significant predictors of procedural and interactional justice perception, but not of distributive justice perception.

It is not difficult to see that the personality characteristics and beliefs mentioned here would be influenced by socialization and child-rearing or parenting practices in different cultures. Thus, if contingent rewards and punishments are a part of socialization, this would inculcate something akin to the Protestant ethic, foster an internal rather than external locus of control in work settings, and merit or equity would be affirmed as a more fair principle than equality. However, if the reward–punishment patterns also take into account the origin or source of the behaviour—that is, the attributional aspect—then other principles such as need

may also be perceived to be fair. Unfortunately, one of the noticeable missing links in the study of distributive justice is the role played by socialization antecedents.

As stated earlier, cultural variables can also be examined by incorporating into empirical studies, certain situational variables that are closely linked to cultural characteristics. Taken independently as a category of variables, situational or contextual factors vary widely, and not all of them have cultural links. Many of these have already been cited in connection with gender differences in justice perceptions and justice behaviour. Most of these situational variables are presented by way of information regarding one or more components of the allocation setting. For example, closeness of the allocator–recipient relationship (Leung & Bond 1982, 1984), expectation of interaction with the recipient (Shapiro 1975; Sagan et al. 1981), and public or private setting of the allocation (Reis & Gruzen 1976; Allen 1982; Wegner 1982) are variables that have their effects contextually, but contain a social or relationship element. Equity is more likely to be adopted when there is no expectation of future interaction with the recipient, whereas equality is more likely to be adopted when interaction is anticipated. However, in the case of expected future interaction, allocators in "self–other" allocation context prefer to follow equity if the partner's input is high, but prefer equality if the partner's input is low (Austin & McGinn 1977). In that sense, these situational variables might encompass the cultural values of interpersonal harmony and social approval. A similar comment may be made with regard to resource scarcity and disadvantage as contextual variables. Although resource scarcity or sufficiency is otherwise a resource variable, if information regarding this variable is woven into the context, it may become salient as a sociocultural characteristic. Likewise, information that the recipient is disadvantaged or non-disadvantaged may be a recipient characteristic, but may have situational effects in ways that reflect reactions to a sociocultural characteristic. Yet another instance is that of seniority, or a rank-related characteristic of the recipient. Information regarding this variable may evoke responses as a contextual variable, a recipient characteristic, as linked to the cultural characteristic called "power distance", or the cultural value known as "deference". Seniority may of course be treated as a separate criterion of allocation as well (Rusbult et al. 1995; Fischer 2004; Fischer & Smith 2004; Hu et al. 2004). Most investigations show that the significance of recipient seniority varies between cultures, but there are also findings that demonstrate non-significant effects of seniority in reward allocation (Krishnan & Carment 2006).

The question then is: In what ways do the interactive effects between cultural variables, resource variables and situational variables have a place in social policy?

Blending cultural variables with resource and contextual variables in policy formulation is complicated business, and this is only too obvious in societies such as India. In the light of social stratification in Indian society along with wide economic variations between different strata and sections, it is not surprising that preference for a particular justice rule in one section of society is often pitted against preference for a different and incompatible rule in another section. This incongruity is likely to be exacerbated by the perception of resource or reward distribution as a "zero-sum game", fostered by perceived or actual

resource scarcity. A "zero-sum game" perception is also likely to widen the chasm between the "haves" and the "have-nots" because of the belief that the former possess resources at a cost to the latter, and thereby to generate felt injustice among the "have-nots". Such a belief may be stronger when the resource is concrete (for example, money) rather than abstract (for example, information). Coexisting with this possibility, resource allocation that is grossly unequal, or one that violates the need principle, and yet appears to be consistent with cultural values (such as conformity to tradition, respect for power, and maintenance of hierarchy), may not generate feelings of injustice or hostility. In such circumstances, specifying the basis of resource allocation (for example, recognition of merit or providing for disadvantaged groups) might help to offset a sense of injustice. In short, allocation policies have to be laid down in a way that minimizes or avoids ambiguity and uncertainty, as well as possible interpersonal and intergroup frictions, in the light of both resource variables and cultural factors.

Spontaneously one would ask: Is there any justice-related behaviour in India's sociocultural scenario that involves a social-psychological component, and that has a place in social policy? The answer is in the affirmative. Many examples of social justice issues can be cited for which some kind of social policy or law exists, that show how basic distributive justice principles are being adhered to, or being violated (more often the latter). In such cases, even though the social process in the final analysis may be psychological, other social scientists, activists and policy makers do not interpret it as such. Most of these cases involve a consideration of deservingness and/or entitlement, in one or form or other.

First, all cases of strikes for pay enhancement, or similar demands, are based on perceived inequity: violation of the fundamental distributive justice principle based on rewards being proportional to input or cost, and a violation of deservingness. Procedural injustice is not ruled out in such cases, but the focus seems to be on distributive aspects. Often, demands for increased salary or remuneration are based on social comparisons of reward/cost ratios. Sometimes such demands are based on economic factors (for example, increased cost of living leading to an increase in need, but no corresponding increase in the salary provided by the organization). Whether or not such perceptions are legitimate is of course a different question.

Second, consider Indian farmers at large. It is a sad paradox that these providers of food for the country are also among the most hungry and the most malnourished in the Indian population. Inequitable returns for what farmers produce are frequently the cause of their poverty. Again, getting a return incommensurate with input is an example of inequity. In addition, inadequate returns for farmers' produce are also a violation of a basic need principle, something that does not entail social comparison. In the same context (that is, the condition of farmers and others engaged in agricultural occupations), the right to food is portrayed as a basic right (and thus an entitlement), and the issue of food security and food justice is very much a part of social policy. Mukherjee (2012), in her analysis of the issue of food security, draws attention to what women farmers in Kerala are doing towards the goal of "food justice". Commenting on the issue, she says:

> What can food justice practically mean? First, to prevent situations where grains rot while people die—a very basic principle of distributive justice. But it has to mean a lot more: people must have the right to produce food with dignity, have control over the parameters of production, get just value for their labour and their produce. Mainstream notions of food security ignore this dimension (Mukherjee 2012).

Similarly, in the name of land acquisition for development, farmers have had to give up land that they owned, but the compensation given by the government was found to be inadequate. The same thing can be said about other forms of displacement of communities (for example, displaced communities in the regions of the Narmada dams) (Manthan Adhyayan Kendra). In both of these cases, inequity was one of the rudimentary causes of protest, but not the only one, as many other procedural injustices and human rights violations were also in the picture. Protests in such cases, therefore, should be understood first as psychological reactions to felt inequity and violations of deservingness/entitlement, and only later, as an economic–legal–political issue.

Third, the well-known reservation policy in India that has engendered many controversies because of its underlying justice dilemma has a social-psychological root. The notion of reservation as an expression of "affirmative action" can be encouraged, supported and defended on the basis of the need principle, which, by itself, is rarely questioned. However, reservation in its present form is seen as favouring the disadvantaged at the cost of the meritorious. Continuation of such a policy, it is felt, will destroy the importance of merit and adversely affect productivity in the long run. Moreover, a crucial criterion is the nature and extent of "need" or disadvantage that is alleged to serve as the basis of the reservation policy. Many of the so-called needy or disadvantaged beneficiaries of the policy are actually less "deserving" according to the need principle, than many of the truly needy among the so-called non-disadvantaged sections. With the insertion of the "creamy layer" restriction, there might have been some reduction in the perceived injustice of the reservation policy. Yet the controversy continues.

Furthermore, from the social-psychological perspective, such reactions are only to be expected. Research findings that indicate a divergence between recipient perspectives consistently show self-serving perceptions in the expected direction. A needy or disadvantaged recipient would perceive need- or disadvantage-based allocation to be more fair than merit-based or equal allocation. Likewise, a meritorious recipient would perceive merit-based allocation to be more fair than need-based, disadvantage-based or equal allocation. Both sections (the disadvantaged and the non-disadvantaged) of Indian society might see the reservation policy as being politically motivated, but it is only the section that is negatively affected that would register a protest. An informative description of the social consequences of the reservation policy has been provided by Singh (1988), throwing light on aspects such as the heterogeneity among the "disadvantaged" section, deciding between poverty and caste membership as a criterion of reservation, and the need for bringing about institutional changes. Much has happened since Singh's chapter was written, but the essential dilemma remains.

Fourth, division of family property has a place in legal codes, is a part of social policy and generates distributive justice questions that are social-psychological

in nature. The law requires that ancestral property be divided equally between the offspring, regardless of age, gender, contribution and need. A distinction is made between ancestral property (property that is inherited, and not earned through one's effort) and wealth that is earned by the parents. For the latter, the criteria of division are the prerogative of the owner or allocator. In reality, numerous disputes arise within family members with regard to unfair or unjust divisions of property, whether inherited or earned by the allocator. Considering how the resource was acquired in deciding the fairness of its distribution has been an inherent element in several theories of justice (for example, Nozick 1974). Social-psychologically, this feature represents an attributional or control aspect of the resource. That is, the laws seem to make a distinction between claims of recipients over inherited resources and earned resources, a distinction that is congruent with attributional considerations. Yet, recipients are likely to focus more on the outcome (what share of the property they receive), rather than on other aspects. Any unfairness or injustice experienced with regard to outcome differences in property division thus leads to a weakening of family ties, primarily because of the sense of inequity, and violation of entitlement. Evidence of such reactions was obtained in a study (Krishnan, "unpublished report") conducted through individual interviews of married women in an urban setting. One of the questions in the interview was related to personal experiences that the respondent would consider "unjust" or "unfair" treatment. One of the responses that emerged was a less-than-fair share of the family property to the respondent's family. Disputes between family members stemming from property division may be a common phenomenon in Indian society, despite the family being a strong institution. If family welfare as a part of social policy, including harmonious relationships within the family, is to be taken as an agenda in social justice, then both kinds of concerns, namely fair distribution of ancestral family property, and harmonious family relationships, should find a place in social policy.

Finally, if social justice policies are to be implemented effectively, there is no doubt that individual-level as well as small group–level responses have to be assessed. There are many instances of groups being formed among the target beneficiaries of various social justice or welfare programmes, with the explicit purpose of ensuring that they actually get what they have been promised. These groups themselves are formed because individuals react to felt injustice, and some persons take the initiative of demanding redress. From the policy maker's side, the effectiveness of a social policy and a social justice programme can be assessed only by taking into account the social psychology of distributive justice.

4 Summing Up

All of the implications for social policy mentioned in this essay are meant to emphasize the need for including the social-psychological research on distributive justice in the formulation of social policy. That the goal of social justice, and attaining it through harmony, is a laudable one is unquestioned. That economic,

political, ideological, sociological and psychological considerations will continue to dictate social policy is acknowledged. Whether social justice measures come from the government, or from a non-governmental organization, the response to such measures comes from the individual or the small group. Ultimately, then, the explanation of why a policy "works" or "does not work" comes from small-unit analysis as is done in social psychology. Actively including the valuable contributions made by the presently marginalized "micro-level" social-psychological research on justice will only widen and enrich social policy, making it more inclusive. It is acknowledged that even the most well-intended social policy is no magic wand. This is especially true of societies like India that face multiple problems, such as fluctuating economic conditions, soaring numbers, uncertain natural conditions and pluralism, which can be both an advantage and a disadvantage. Yet, the blind attempt to "make one size fit all" on the part of social policy makers has to be drastically modified. One way to bring about a change in the required direction is to look more carefully at the ignored social-psychological aspects.

In the words of Shonkoff (2000, p. 187), "Knowledge is a moving target. When it survives critical scrutiny, it affirms contemporary thinking and efforts. When it does not stand up to honest challenge, the search for better understanding is intensified".

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