

# Empowering Children and Women through Poverty Alleviation – A Review Paper

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## ABSTRACT

*Poverty of a child leads to many types of criminal acts including sexual assault. Education is a must for every child so that he / she can understand things and can differentiate between Good and Bad, Right or Wrong, Punya and Paap, Satya and Asatya, Dharm and Adharm etc. Poverty is the biggest problem which leads to corruption, bad habits, wrong doing, encourages paap, speaks asatya and does adharm. This is a review paper to bring out reasons and efforts made for alleviation of poverty in India with special reference to children and women.*

## I POVERTY IN INDIA

Poverty in India impacts children, families and individuals in a variety of different ways through:

- (a) **The high infant mortality** - 1.4 million children die each year in India before their fifth birthday. In addition to Nigeria, Pakistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and China, India is one of the countries with the highest child mortality rates. Pneumonia, malaria and diarrheal diseases as well as chronic malnutrition are the most frequent causes of death.
- (b) **Malnutrition** - not even a bowl of rice a day - India is one of the world's top countries when it comes to malnutrition: More than 200 million people don't have sufficient access to food, including 61 million children. 7.8 million infants were found to have a birth weight of less than 2.5 kilograms - alarming figures for a country commonly referred to as the emerging market.
- (c) **Child labour** - no time to play and learn - Although child labour for children under the age of 14 in India is prohibited by law, according to official figures, 12.5 million children between the ages of 5 and 14 are working. Aid agencies assume that in reality, there are many more estimating that 65 million children between 6 and 14 years do not go to school. Instead, in order to secure survival, it is believed that Indian children contribute to the livelihood of their families; they work in the field, in factories, in quarries, in private households and in prostitution.
- (d) **Lack of education** - no opportunities without education - According to UNICEF, about 25% of children in India have no access to education. The number of children excluded from school is higher among girls than boys. Although women and men are treated equally under Indian law, girls and women, especially in the lower social caste, are considered inferior and are oppressed by their fathers, brothers and husbands. Without education, the chance of finding a living wage from employment in India is virtually hopeless.
- (e) **Child marriage** - the early end of childhood - In spite of banning minors from marrying in 2006, it is still widespread in many regions of India. The main leaders in this practice are young girls, who are still children themselves and become mothers too early. Many of them die at birth. According to an investigation by the medical journal The Lancet, 44.5% of girls are still married in India before they are of legal age. Due to poverty, many parents encourage early marriages for their daughters in hopes of better lives for them.
- (f) **HIV / AIDS** - a taboo in Indian society - 2.7 million Indians are infected with the HIV virus; about 220,000 of them are children, with the tendency rising. The lack of education and the lack of condoms mean that the virus is spreading faster and faster and more and more people are dying of AIDS - especially in the slums of the growing cities. More and more children are living there as so-called AIDS orphans, often being infected with the virus as well.
- (g) **SOS Children's Villages** - fighting poverty in India - Since 1963, the SOS Children's Villages have been involved in India. In a total of 41 SOS Children's Villages across the vast country, around 18,000 children and young people find a new home - the majority of them are girls. Nearly 5,000 girls and boys receive access to education at the 16 SOS Hermann Gmeiner schools in the Indian subcontinent. In the nine SOS Vocational Training Centres, over 1,300 young people are completing a qualified vocational training. Medical and psychological help is available to needy families in the 34 SOS Social Centres and the two SOS Medical Centres. The SOS Children's Villages is working together with other aid organizations and the population to fight poverty in India.

## II CAUSES OF POVERTY IN INDIA

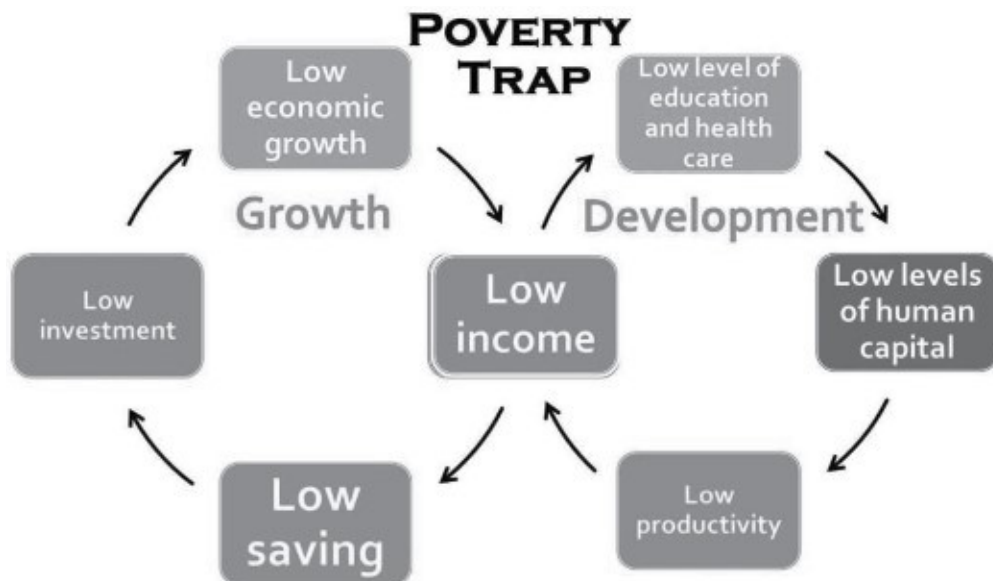
- (a) **Population Explosion:** India's population has steadily increased through the years. During the past 45 years, it has risen at a rate of 2.2% per year, which means, on average, about 17 million people are added to the country's population each year. This also

increases the demand for consumption goods tremendously.

- (b) **Low Agricultural Productivity:** A major reason for poverty in the low productivity in the agriculture sector. The reason for low productivity is manifold. Chiefly, it is because of fragmented and subdivided land holdings, lack of capital, illiteracy about new technologies in farming, the use of traditional methods of cultivation, wastage during storage, etc.
- (c) **Inefficient Resource utilisation:** There is underemployment and disguised unemployment in the country, particularly in the farming sector. This has resulted in low agricultural output and also led to a dip in the standard of living.
- (d) **Low Rate of Economic Development:** Economic development has been low in India especially in the first 40 years of independence before the LPG reforms in 1991.
- (e) **Price Rise:** Price rise has been steady in the country and this has added to the burden the poor carry. Although a few people have benefited from this, the lower income groups have suffered because of it, and are not even able to satisfy their basic minimum wants.
- (f) **Unemployment:** Unemployment is another factor causing poverty in India. The ever-increasing population has led to a higher number of job-seekers.

However, there is not enough expansion in opportunities to match this demand for jobs.

- (g) **Lack of Capital and Entrepreneurship:** The shortage of capital and entrepreneurship results in low level of investment and job creation in the economy.
- (h) **Social Factors:** Apart from economic factors, there are also social factors hindering the eradication of poverty in India. Some of the hindrances in this regard are the laws of inheritance, caste system, certain traditions, etc.
- (i) **Colonial Exploitation:** The British colonisation and rule over India for about two centuries de-industrialised india by ruining its traditional handicrafts and textile industries. Colonial Policies transformed india to a mere raw-material producer for european industries.
- (j) **Climatic Factors:** Most of india's poor belong to the states of Bihar, UP, MP, Chhattisgarh, odisha, Jharkhand, etc. Natural calamities such as frequent floods, disasters, earthquake and cyclone cause heavy damage to agriculture in these states.
- (k) **Poverty Trap:**



### III WAYS TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM OF POVERTY IN INDIA

More than 800 million people in India are considered poor. Most of them live in the countryside and keep afloat with odd jobs. The lack of employment which provides a liveable wage in rural areas is driving many Indians into rapidly growing metropolitan areas such as Bombay, Delhi, Bangalore or Calcutta. There, most of them expect a life of poverty and despair in the mega-slums, made up of millions of corrugated ironworks, without sufficient drinking water supply, without garbage disposal and in many cases without electricity. The poor hygiene conditions are the cause of diseases such as cholera, typhus and dysentery, in which especially children suffer and die.

India has been showing a steep and a stable GDP growth rate, which has impressed investors around the world. However, due to the country's inability to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor, the people living in rural areas are still suffering from poverty. Undoubtedly, this is a huge economic crisis that must be addressed immediately.

There are a lot of diverse perspectives on the issue. Nobel Prize winner and reputed economist Amartya Sen has suggested that the government should invest in poverty aid programs. Many economists also say that the government should work towards income generation by increasing employment opportunities. Apart from that, people living in small villages and rural areas should be counselled and encouraged to save and invest their money properly.

- (a) **Education** - Illiteracy is the biggest reason behind poverty in India. Illiterate people living in rural areas, villages and small towns are the most vulnerable to unemployment. More than 51% of the rural population earns from casual labour. A huge chunk of population works on farms and makes a living. Education is necessary to enhance their farm productivity and overall income. Educated people can also find new jobs, which can help them overcome poverty. Girl child education is also important for the society. Educated girls can grow into skilled workers and get well-paying jobs. Working women can earn and support families, thus giving their kids a better standard of living.
- (b) **Investment on infrastructure** - India's poverty crisis also arises from the dearth of basic infrastructure like schools, hospitals, toilets, electricity and non-polluting heating options. The government must look to invest in the infrastructure of the country, which can go a long way and help build an environment suitable for enterprise development and income generation.

- (c) **Skill development** - Today most of the industries seek skilled labourers and workers. The government must introduce new programs for people to learn basic skills that can help them find jobs. Development of vocational and technical skills is also very important to eradicate poverty from the country.

Two-thirds of people in India live in poverty: 68.8% of the Indian population lives on less than \$2 a day. Over 30% even have less than \$1.25 per day available - they are considered extremely poor. This makes the Indian subcontinent one of the poorest countries in the world; women and children, the weakest members of Indian society, suffer most.

### IV POVERTY ALLEVIATION PROGRAMS IN INDIA

- (a) **Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP)**: It was introduced in 1978-79 and universalized from 2nd October, 1980, aimed at providing assistance to the rural poor in the form of subsidy and bank credit for productive employment opportunities through successive plan periods.
- (b) **Jawahar Rozgar Yojana/Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana**: The JRY was meant to generate meaningful employment opportunities for the unemployed and underemployed in rural areas through the creation of economic infrastructure and community and social assets.
- (c) **Rural Housing** – Indira Awaas Yojana: The Indira Awaas Yojana (LAY) programme aims at providing free housing to Below Poverty Line (BPL) families in rural areas and main targets would be the households of SC/STs.
- (d) **Food for Work Programme**: It aims at enhancing food security through wage employment. Food grains are supplied to states free of cost, however, the supply of food grains from the Food Corporation of India (FCI) godowns has been slow.
- (e) **National Old Age Pension Scheme (NOAPS)**: This pension is given by the central government. The job of implementation of this scheme in states and union territories is given to panchayats and municipalities. The states contribution may vary depending on the state. The amount of old age pension is ₹200 per month for applicants aged 60–79. For applicants aged above 80 years, the amount has been revised to ₹500 a month according to the 2011–2012 Budget. It is a successful venture.
- (f) **Annapurna Scheme**: This scheme was started by the government in 1999–2000 to provide food to senior citizens who cannot take care of themselves and are not under the National Old Age Pension Scheme (NOAPS), and who have no one to take care of them in their village. This scheme would provide 10 kg of free food grains a month for the eligible senior

citizens. They mostly target groups of ‘poorest of the poor’ and ‘indigent senior citizens’.

- (g) **Sampoorna Gramin Rozgar Yojana (SGRY):** The main objective of the scheme continues to be the generation of wage employment, creation of durable economic infrastructure in rural areas and provision of food and nutrition security for the poor.
- (h) **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) 2005:** The Act provides 100 days assured employment every year to every rural household. One-third of the proposed jobs would be reserved for women. The central government will also establish National Employment Guarantee Funds. Similarly, state governments will establish State Employment Guarantee Funds for implementation of the scheme. Under the programme, if an applicant is not provided employment within 15 days s/he will be entitled to a daily unemployment allowance.
- (i) **National Rural Livelihood Mission: Aajeevika (2011):** It evolves out the need to diversify the needs of the rural poor and provide them jobs with regular income on a monthly basis. Self Help groups are formed at the village level to help the needy.
- (j) **National Urban Livelihood Mission:** The NULM focuses on organizing urban poor in Self Help Groups, creating opportunities for skill development leading to market-based employment and helping them to set up self-employment ventures by ensuring easy access to credit.
- (k) **Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana:** It will focus on fresh entrant to the labour market, especially labour market and class X and XII dropouts.
- (l) **Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana:** It aimed at direct benefit transfer of subsidy, pension, insurance etc. and attained the target of opening 1.5 crore bank accounts. The scheme particularly targets the unbanked poor.

## V CONCLUSION

Poverty of a child and woman leads to many types of criminal acts including sexual assault. Government at state and national level have taken large number of initiatives to eradicate poverty which have shown significant impact but unless education and literacy level becomes over 90 per cent the good governance alone cannot achieve the target. Society has to play a key role in this.