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Poverty in India

Introduction

Poverty refers to a situation when people are deprived of basic necessities of life. It is often characterized by inadequacy of food, shelter and clothes. In other words, poverty refers to a state of privation where there is a lack of essential needs for subsistence.

India is one of the poorest countries in the world. Many Indian people do not get two meals a day. They do not have good houses to live in. Their children do not get proper schooling.

Poor people are the depressed and deprived class. They do not get proper nutrition and diet. Their conditions have not sufficiently improved even long after over 65 years of our Independence.

What is Poverty?

Poverty means deprivation of basic necessities such as food, house, clean drinking water, shelter, toilet, etc. Poverty is mostly prevalent in developing countries such as India, Bangladesh, Africa, Latin America, etc.

Poor people stay in underprivileged living environment. Without adequate food and nutrition, many poor people suffer from malnutrition. Without clean drinking water, they are forced to either stay thirsty or drink unclean water.

Young children are seen engaged as child labors. Without proper sanitation and toilets, they are forced to defecate on open fields. Homeless people have no choice but to live in the open.

Poverty in Rural and Urban India

Poverty in urban India

Just like most of the growing and developing countries, there has been continuous increase in Urban population.

- Poor people migrate from rural areas to cities and towns in search of employment/financial activity.
- The income of more than 8 crore urban people is estimated to fall **below poverty line (BPL)**.
- In addition to this, there are around 4.5 crore urban people whose income level is on borderline of poverty level.
- A income of urban poors is highly unstable. A large number of them are either casual workers or self-employed.
- Banks and Financial institutions are reluctant to provide them loan because of the unstable income.
- Five states that constitutes around 40% of all urban poor people of India are Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Odisha, and Madhya Pradesh.
- Around 35% of the total population of the four metro cities (Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai and Mumbai) consists of slum population.
- A large portion of people living in slums are illiterate.
- The initiatives taken to deal with the problem of urban poverty has not yielded the desired results.

Poverty in rural India

It is said that rural India is the heart of India. In reality, the life of people living in rural areas is marked with severe poverty. In spite of all the efforts, the condition of poor villagers is far from satisfactory. The report on Socio-economic and Caste Census (2011) reveal the following facts:

- **SCST:** Of all the rural households, around 18.46 percent belongs to scheduled castes, and around 10.97 belongs to scheduled Tribes.
- **Major source of income:** Manual casual labour jobs and cultivation are the major sources of income for rural people. Nearly 51 percent of all households are economically engaged in manual casual labour and nearly 30 percent of them is engaged in cultivation.
- **Deprived:** Around 48.5 percent of rural households are deprived according to the census.
- **Assets:** Only 11.04 percent of families own a refrigerator while there is a vehicle (including two-wheeler, boat, etc.)in around 29.69 percent of the rural houses.
- **Income Tax:** Only 4.58 percent of rural households pay income tax.
- **Land ownership:** Around 56 percent of village households doesn't own a land.
- **Size of rural houses:** The houses of around 54 percent rural families consists of either one or two-rooms. Out of them, around 13 percent lives in a one-room house.

Causes of poverty

Indian soil is fertile, so are Indian men and women, these are families which have five, six, ten even up to twenty children. With such a potential for huge population India, in the recent or even in the remote past, has not fully realized the importance of controlling the population, nor did our country felt the danger of such population. The ancient Hindu society was completely oblivious of the significance of population for the following reasons:

- There was neither any mechanism to count or record of old Indian Territory, nor was there any effort to know about the population.
- There was no homogeneous distribution of population – all scattered in different groups of agricultural and tribal society, the elites being divided among different kingdoms and dynasties without any significant social welfare measures.
- The concept of poverty was virtually unknown in India. Superstition, too much faith on destiny and God and lack of concerted efforts kept a huge country under the blanket of poverty for century after century.

For ages India has been known as a poor country with millions of poor people hardly being able to make both ends meet. Agriculture was of poor standard, though on fertile soil in some areas, dependent entirely on the whims of nature. There was hardly any industry except brick making and terracotta.

With this situation there have been many invasions by foreign powers some after the golden times of Gupta period. The attackers were the Sakas, the Huns, the Lodhis, Pathans, Moghuls, all allured by the richness of the natural resources and unopposed invasions.

All these kept the millions absolutely poor on the international concept specially the western world that were materialistic, development oriented and looked for higher and higher standard of living. In India, even during the British regime, not much of improvement of life style of common people occurred except introduction of Railway, Postal System, Revenue Collection, some Government Offices etc.

With a huge mass of poor people with very little base of economic development Indian Government after independence some sort of planned economy started and some systematic development of the country and society have been attempted. In 1947 almost 800 million people were poor and in the last 70 years since independence a lot of development has taken place, a few million people have been elevated to upper middle class and rich community but the majority has still remained poor, poorest of the poor.

The growing population inflates the problem of poor techniques used in Agriculture. Further, there is unequal distribution of wealth. As a result, the poor people are often exploited by the wealthy community. The most important causes of Poverty in India are poor agriculture, growing Population, gap between rich and poor, corruption and black money.

Poor agriculture: India is mainly an agricultural country. About 80% people of our country depend on agriculture. But our agriculture is in a bad way. Farmers are poor and uneducated.

They do not know the modern methods of farming. They have no good facilities of irrigation. They do not get seeds and fertilizers in time. Thus, the yield is poor. Agriculture is not profitable today. We face the shortage of food. We have to import it. So, poor agriculture is one of the causes of India's poverty.

Growing population: Our population is growing rapidly. But our resources are limited. The growth in population creates problems for us. Today, our population is 1.20 billion; tomorrow we will be 1.21 billion and so on. We need more food, more houses, and more hospitals for them. So we have no money to spend on development projects. The ever-growing rate of population must be checked. If not, we may not be able to remove India's poverty.

Gap between the rich and the poor: The widening gap between the rich and the poor is also responsible for India's poverty. The rich are growing richer. The poor are growing poorer. This economic gap between the two must be reduced. Our social system should be changed. The poor people must get all help to reap the fruits of Independence.

Corruption and black-money: There are corruptions in every walk of life. There is inefficiency in offices. People have become selfish. They neglect the national interests. Black money causes the problem of rising prices. Some people have all the privileges. But many others are suffering. Black money affects our economy. It causes poverty.

Effects of poverty

1. **Illiteracy:** Poor people constitutes greater share of illiterate population. Education becomes extremely difficult when people are deprived of basic necessities of life.
2. **Child Labor:** In India, a large number of young boys and girls are engaged in child labour
3. **Nutrition and diet:** Poverty is the leading cause of insufficient diet and inadequate nutrition. The resources of poor people are very limited, and its effect can be seen in their diet.
4. **Poor living condition and Housing problems:** The don't get proper living conditions. They have to fight the hardship of poverty to secure food, clothes and shelter. A large number of poor families live in houses with one room only.
5. **Unemployment:** Poor people move from villages to towns and from one town to another in search of employment/work. Since, they are mostly illiterate and un-skilled, there are very few employment opportunities open for them. Due to unemployment, many poor people are forced to live an unfulfilled life.
6. **Hygiene and sanitation:** These people have little knowledge about hygiene and proper sanitation system. They are not aware of the harmful consequences of not maintaining proper hygiene. The government is taking initiatives to make available clean and safe water, and proper sanitation system to them.
7. **Feminization of poverty:** Women are the worst victims of poverty. Poverty affects greater number of women than men. The total of poor women outnumbers the total population of poor men. The causes include low income, gender-inequality, etc. They are deprived of proper-diet, medicines and health treatment.
8. **Social tensions:** Poverty is often characterized with income disparity and unequal distribution of national wealth between the rich and the poor. Concentration of wealth in the hands of few rich people lead to social disturbances and revolts. Fair or even distribution of wealth leads an overall improvement in general standard of living of people.

How to Stop Poverty in India?

Several measures can be undertaken to stop or eradicate poverty in India. Some of them are discussed below:

Increase in per capita food production: The rate of growth of production of food grains as a whole has barely kept ahead of population growth. An increase in per capita food production would ensure steady supply and stable price. An examination of the different components of food grain output is very revealing. Superior food grains, i.e., wheat and rice have done perceptibly better than the coarse grains, and wheat has done very significantly better. It is true that the Green Revolution strategy, particularly in relation to wheat has been very successful. However, there is much that need to be done.

Agricultural and land reforms: In Indian conditions, radical socio-economic changes are required to ensure the self-reliant, long-term growth of the economy. These changes should ensure reforms of the land tenure system helpful to the poor and middle peasants, liberate them from the hard grip of the moneylenders, ensure supply of agricultural inputs to working farmers, widen irrigation facilities and help a quicker advance of agro-industries.

Increase in production of essential items: In the industrial sphere, units manufacturing luxury consumer items must be made to refashion their patterns of production in terms of export potential and the limited range of internal consumption potentialities, and use the rest of the productive capacity towards producing low-cost essential commodities like inexpensive textiles, bulbs, tube lights, transistors, shoes, cycles, etc.

Tackle the problem of income disparity: To bring about this change in our private sector production mix, however, exhortations will be self-defeating, since production thus conceived, is much less profitable per individual commodity produced. Apart from considerations of social justice, even purely in terms of economic development, glaring income disparities have to be quickly tackled.

Ceiling on maximum income: A ceiling on maximum individual incomes has to be defined and strictly enforced, whether an individual is in a job, profession or business. Individual incomes above the ceiling should be impounded for the building up of a national development fund by the Government. This would ensure, firstly, substantial financial resources for the Government to make planned investments and secondly, drastically reduce internal demand leaving them largely for export.

Tackle the problem of black money: The black money menace, of course, has to be frontally attacked at all levels along with these measures. This is urgent to bring about a balance between the available goods and services and money in circulation in short to fight the inflationary pressures on the economy; to mobilize maximum public finance for developmental activities and to eradicate the chances of corruption, market manipulation and conspicuous consumption.

Massive investment in public sector: A massive investment and expansion programme in the public sector is required. This expansion has to embrace not only infrastructural areas like power,

energy and so on but also the key and consumer sectors of the industry along with the commercial and distributive agencies. This expansion has become urgent to safeguard the working people from the vagaries of hoarding and price manipulation of the traders.

Education: Illiteracy is a major national problem and a major cause for poverty. Illiterate people living in villages and small towns find it hard to get employment. Around 51 percent of rural families are engaged in casual labour jobs, while another 30 percent is engaged in agriculture. Education will empower them to engage in better jobs, which in turn would help them come above the poverty line. In this regard, women education is also considered very important. Educated women can make better earnings and support the family. Educated mothers have great influence in the academic progress of the child. It is rightly said that, “The Hand That Rocks the Cradle Rules the World”. Hence, educated mothers can monitor the academic performance of their children and help the country to eradicate illiteracy and poverty.

Skill development: Most industries engage skilled labours. There is a decline in demand for unskilled labours in most factories and mills. In such a situation, there is a need to stress on development of skills for specific trade, so that these modern industries can get technically skilled labours. Establishment of Vocational Education and Training (VET) institutes is a big step towards the eradication of poverty from our country.

Check on population growth: Due to massive increase in population, the demand for basic necessities such as housing, food and shelter is at its peak. The resources are limited. The growth in demand for essential commodities far exceeds the supply of these commodities leading to a situation of price-rise (inflation). Awareness campaigns explaining the benefits of controlling the population growth should be widely circulated.

Women empowerment: Women (and girls) forms around 50 percent of the world population. Since ages, they have been treated as a burden to the society. They were deprived of equal opportunity for education, food, nutrition, and economic participation leading to the situation of ‘Feminization of poor’. Women empowerment and education would strengthen them to bring economic benefits both at individual and national level. The government and social organisations are taking significant steps towards creating awareness regarding the importance of education of girl-child.

Steps taken to Alleviate Poverty

As the number of poor people in India go up to 400 million, which is equivalent to about one-third of the world's poor population, Government of India have undertaken a large number of steps for reduction or abolition of poverty.

1. Gramin Bank: The nationalized commercial banks do not offer loan to poor people because they do not have the capacity to repay. So a new type of Bank e.g. Gramin Bank which offers loan or micro credit to the farmers and labors has been set up.
2. Primary school, Technical School, development of skill like Welding, Carpentry, Black Smithy, etc to be set up.
3. Poverty Eradication Schemes (Garibi Hatao): There have been more than 10 such schemes like Employment Guarantee Scheme, PMRY, Rural Employment Scheme, old age pension scheme etc.

India today has a population of around 1200 million which is second to China which has a slightly higher population of nearly 1400 million. There is a club called "Billionaire's Club" i.e., 1000 million or 100 crores of people of which only two members are there e.g. China and India.

In India we have by democratic methods accepted a policy of "Hum do, hamare do".

Poverty Alleviation Programs (PAPs)

1. IRDP – Integrated Rural Development Program
2. NREP – National Rural Employment Program
3. TRYSEM – Training Rural Youth for Self-Employment
4. AAY – Antyodaya Anna Yojana
5. RLEGP – Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Program
6. JRY – Jawahar Rozgar Yojna
7. SFDA – Small Farmers Development Agency
8. FFWP – Food for Work Program
9. DDP – Desert Development Program
10. DPAP – Drought Prone area Program
11. Scheme for Providing Self-Employment to Educated Unemployed
12. Employment Assurance Scheme
13. JGSY – Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana
14. SGSY – Swarnajayanthi Gram Swarozgar Yojna
15. PMRY – Prime Minister's Rozgar Yojana (PMRY)

Conclusion

Poverty is a national problem and it must be solved on a war footing. The government is taking a number of steps to mitigate poverty. Eradication of poverty would ensure a sustainable and inclusive growth of economy and society. We all should do everything possible and within our limits to help alleviate poverty from our country.