

A Study of Some Psycho – Social Dimensions of Rural Poverty with Reference To North Bihar, India

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Abstract: Poverty is a global phenomenon. It is a national problem in all the under-developed and developing countries. Even most developed countries face this problem, though their measures of poverty are different. The present research inquiry was undertaken to study some psycho-social dimensions of rural poverty with special reference to North Bihar, India. The problem required some conceptual analysis and psychological enquiry into the roots of poverty. Thus, the present study is of immense value to understand the behavior of the poor. In the present study, the sample comprised five hundred persons of Madhubani district, North Bihar, India. Two groups of the subjects were taken for the study. 250 persons were randomly selected from poor landless families in which no member were engaged in money-minting. Similarly 250 people were selected from well-to-do families. All respondents were from rural areas of the Madhubani district. Data collected through questionnaires schedules based on interview method. After collecting the data, the data were tabulated for giving statistical treatment. Having analyzed the data, results indicated that there are significant differences between the group of poor and well-to-do families on different social-psychological dimensions namely, poverty acceptance, fatalism, risk-taking behavior, future prospects and self-pride/self-esteem as these factors have been emerged as the predictors of poor families. Finally results obtained have been discussed in detail by highlighting the probable reasons.

Keywords: Rural Poverty, Poverty Acceptance, Fatalism, Risk-Taking Behavior, Future Prospect, Self-Pride, Madhubani and North Bihar, India.

INTRODUCTION

The problem of the present study was aimed at studying the “some psycho-social dimensions of poverty with particular reference to North Bihar”. The present problem required some conceptual analysis and psychological enquiry into the roots of poverty.

Poverty is a global phenomenon that has become serious problems of human beings. Yet throughout the early history of society it was not poverty so much as pauperism that occupied the attention of humanitarians and reformers. If we go back to the history we find during the 19th century in England and United States, there was less concern with mass poverty than alarm over pauperism. In this countries attention shifted to poverty and insecurity in the past civil war period. The condition of the poor became defined as a social rather than economic problem only. The discovery of poverty as social problem was made possible by industrialization and new levels of economic prosperity that nourished the belief that poverty might be abolished. At the same time attention

was drawn to the gap between existing deprivation and new definitions of feasible social policy [1].

In addition to the above context, questions arises here that what is poverty and who are poor? So far as the term poverty is concerned, it has been derived from French word “pauper” means poor. Basically poverty refers to the condition of having insufficient resources or income. In its most extreme form, poverty is a lack of basic human needs, such as adequate and nutritious food, clothing, housing, clean water, and health services. Extreme poverty can cause terrible suffering and death, and even modest levels of poverty can prevent people from realizing many of their desires. The world’s poorest people many of whom live in developing areas of Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe struggle daily for food, shelter, and other necessities. They often suffer from severe malnutrition, epidemic disease outbreaks, famine, and war. In wealthier countries such as the United States, Canada, Japan, and those in Western Europe the effects of poverty may include poor nutrition, mental illness, drug dependence, crime, and high rates of disease.

Extreme poverty, which threatens people's health or lives, is also known as destitution or absolute poverty. In the United States, extreme poverty is traditionally defined as having an annual income that is less than half of the official poverty line (an income level determined by the Bureau of the Census). Extreme poverty in developing nations, as defined by international organizations, means having a household income of less than U.S. \$1 per day. Relative poverty is the condition of having fewer resources or less income than others within a society or country, or compared to worldwide averages. In developed countries, relative poverty often is measured as having a family income less than one-half of the median income for that country.

The reasons for poverty are not clear and it's a matter of discussion yet among the researcher. It is because of the fact that some people believe that poverty results from a lack of adequate resources on global level resources such as land, food, and building materials that are necessary for the well-being or survival of the world's people. Others see poverty as an effect of the uneven distribution of resources around the world on an international or even regional scale. This second line of reasoning helps explain why many people have much more than they need to live in comfort, while many others do not have enough resources to live.

Poverty has been a concern in societies since before the beginning of recorded history. According to sociologists and anthropologists, social stratification the division of a society into a hierarchy of wealth, power, and status was a defining characteristic of the earliest civilizations, including those of ancient Egypt, summer in the Middle East, and the Indus Valley of what is now India. The rulers and other powerful or wealthy members of these civilizations frequently mistreated the poor, sometimes subjecting them to hard labor or enslaving them.

It is important to be mentioned that the unequal distribution of wealth and resources generated during the colonial period has become even more pronounced in the postindustrial or information age. Members of societies with access to good educational opportunities and advanced technology profit far more from the emerging global economy than do members of less developed societies.

The poverty denotes serious lack of means for proper existence. The poor are the most common section of any society today. They are available everywhere on earth. The poor appear always to have shorter lives, more illness, more physical and mental

defects, more personal crises, less education, and less protection from hazards.

In India, we have adopted the absolute concept of poverty and the poor are defined as those whose per capita calorie intake falls, below the normative calorie intake of 2100 per day in urban areas and 2400 in rural areas. In its assessment of the base for poverty line, the planning commission of India has said that rural persons with a per capita monthly income of Rs. 228.9 and urban people with a per capita monthly income of Rs. 264/- would be treated as the base for poverty line. It means that in rural areas people with annual per capita income of 2746 will be considered below the poverty line. According to Government agency in 1991 the National per capita annual income was only 2216. The National Sample Survey in its 48th convention said that in 1990-91, 298 million, i.e., 35.5 % people lived below poverty line which increased in 1992-93 to 354.8 million i.e., 40.7%. At the beginning of the 8th five year plan, 17 million people were unemployed that is continuously growing day by day and our Government is unable to control the exigency of situations prevailing now in India.

From an Indian historical perspective, poverty is a pervasive phenomenon. It has been with us for centuries. The socio-economic roots of poverty can be traced in the caste system. The Hindu caste system has four Vernas: Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Shudra. The Shudras had been the lowest of the Hindu society who had virtually no opportunity or economic alternative other than to serve the people of higher castes. Even now, caste is an important factor in defining the social status of a person. Bhatt [2] found that caste hierarchy is closely associated with class hierarchy. The poor and their social life in the British Government. Marx and Engles, Naroji, Dwivedi [3-5] estimated 89.20 percent of the total rural population lived below poverty line in 1941. The extent of poverty during the British India was very high because of India was under colonial rule and was not a welfare state. Beteille [6] suggested that "in India undoubtedly there is a greater acceptance than elsewhere of inequality among the upper and lower strata", reinforced by the theory of 'Karma' and perpetuated by the vested interests of the elite upper-caste-the purveyors of tradition of the codified view of society. Poverty is not a problem of only the poor sections of society; it is of equal concern to policy makers, scholars, and scientists. In social sciences, poverty has traditionally been treated as an economic phenomenon. Psychologists have investigated the effects of economic aspects of poverty on mental health, self-concept, cognitive and adaptive processes of the poor [7-10]. Poverty is not only structural phenomenon but it also has experiential or perceived aspect. There is no doubt that the economic dimension of poverty is important for enumeration,

classification, and decision-making. However, it has limited potential for the social – psychological understanding of the poor [11]. The first conceptual problem pointed out by Allen [7], in the use of an economic measure, is that it is conducive to unitary poverty category; its theoretical implication is that all poor people are alike in economic, social, and psychological domains and the policy consequence is that all of them should be treated similarly. The Unitary poverty category reduces the complex phenomenon of poverty in to naïve categorization and restricts psychologists from broader and in-depth enquiry. This point becomes more distressing in Indian society, which is characterized by mass poverty.

IMPORTANCE OF STUDY

India is considered as one of the poorest countries in the world, the dimension of poverty has been continuously expanding over the years and engulfing a large mass of population into its hungry embrace. Even after the elapse of over seven decades after independence, economic slavery in India has not ended. The economic causes leading to poverty backwardness of agriculture, low industrial growth, population explosion and moreover lack of electricity, water, inadequate bank loan and transportation problem, small scale industries in rural areas have not been able to show their impact. Thus, their role in eradication of poverty is still negligible. There is no denying the fact that population in India is increasing faster than the increase of economic resources. This is one of the important factors representing the poverty line to rise-up.

Poverty had existed in India for generations. The fate of a nation with the problem of poverty unsolved could easily be imagined by those who have foresight and reason. It has both personal and social cost. It has psychological too because poor has social alienation, humiliation and many other problems. A large number of sociologists, economists, psychologists have investigated and discussed this problem citing their own research findings. Psychologists have investigated the effects of economic aspects of poverty on mental health, self concept, cognitive, affective and adaptive processes of the poor [7-10] but still the problem remain alive and further studies are still required. As there is a paucity of researches in this area, hence, the present research was aimed to highlight some of the psychological dimensions of poverty.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Having surveyed the extensive review of literature on the proposed research endeavor, objective of the study was undertaken to investigate the role of some psycho-social dimensions of poverty, the determinants probed were the following:

1. Attitude of the poor towards poverty acceptance
2. The attitude of the poor towards fatalism
3. The ethos of the poor towards their future prospects
4. The risk-taking attitude/predisposition of the poor.
5. Attitude of the poor towards self-pride.

Thus, the present investigators attempted to probe some of the social and personal elements of the poor that lead them to the acceptance of poverty and their future prospective. Hence, the present study was aimed at exposing these hidden factors which would go a long way in effectiveness of poverty enrichment program by bringing Qualitative Changes in their attitude through Psychological Controls.

HYPOTHESES

On the basis of broad objectives of the study, the following hypotheses were formulated for empirical verifications;

1. The sample representing landless families and well-to-do families would differ significantly on poverty acceptance.
2. The sample representing landless laborers and well-to-do families would differ significantly on fatalism.
3. The sample representing landless laborers and well-to-do families would differ significantly on future prospects.
4. The sample representing landless laborers and well-to-do families would differ significantly on risk-taking behavior.
5. The sample representing landless laborers and well-to-do families would differ on self-pride.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

Total sample consisted of five hundred (N=500) for the present piece of research work in which young persons (n=250) of the age-group of 20-30 years were selected from rural areas of Madhubani District of North Bihar in which no person were engaged in any work and they all were literate having school education. Similarly (n=250) young persons of the same age group of well-to-do families were also selected. They were having own land property and their family members were engaged in either Government or Private undertakings with fixed monthly income. They all were educated having college education.

Tools Used

The following tools were used for gathering the data from the respondents to achieve the aims and objectives of the present study:

- (1) Personal Information Blank (PIB) – PIB was prepared to identify the socio-economic status

of the person from where the respondents/sample was to be planned. It was used as a tool for selection of the final sample. It contained five dimensions, viz., personal information, family information, land possession – ownership, agricultural operations, agriculture and other resources.

- (2) An interview schedule to measure psychosocial factors of poverty were prepared by the present investigators and moreover:
- (3) Fatalism inventory developed by Sinha [12] was used to measure the fatalistic attitude of the people in objective terms. It consists of 19 items in the form of simple statements. The response categories are ‘Yes’ and ‘No’. ‘Yes’ responses were scored as 1 and ‘No’ responses were scored as 0 (Zero). The range of score is 0 – 19. The reliability of the inventory has been found .86 on test – retest reliability and validity .82 on product moment coefficient correlation was found which confirms the efficacy of the inventory. Hence, it was considered fit for measuring the role of fatalistic attitude of respondents as a determinant of poverty acceptance and endurance.

Procedure

The entire investigation was completed in five phases – a short narration of phases is presented below: In the first phase of this investigation, the two extreme groups namely, well-to-do and poor families were selected. In the second phase the respondents were located and the final sample was selected adopting the technique of random selection. Altogether 250 respondents of each group from poor and well-to-do were selected. Thus the total sample numbered

(N=500). Identification of the respondents was made on the basis of their responses on PIB. This took a long time.

In the third phase a time schedule in consultation with the respondents was drawn and they were requested to assemble in the village community hall on scheduled date and time. In the fourth phase the two tests PIS and fatalism scales were administered before the respondents with the help of two research scholars, one after another. Sufficient time interval was given in between the two tests toward off the effect of boredom, if any. The respondents took the work at ease. Proper precautions were taken to eliminate copying from one another and ensuring that all the items of the scales must be answered by the respondents.

In the last phase (Phase – five) the response sheets were checked and scored as per norms of the tests. Finally obtained score were tabulated for giving statistical treatment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

By giving statistical treatment of the data obtained, the data have been treated as per requirements of different hypotheses and the results obtained have been discussed.

To test the Hypothesis No.1: “The sample representing poor families and well-to-do families would differ significantly on poverty acceptance”. To test this hypothesis the responses of the two groups on poverty acceptance items of the inventory were scored separately and were subjected to statistical treatment e.g. Mean, SD and t and the results obtained had been presented in table - 1.

Table 1: Showing Significance of Difference between Two Groups on Poverty Acceptance Dimension of the Scale

Sample Group	n	Mean	S.D.	t	p-value
Poor	250	20.03	4.512	4.332	0.01
Well-to-do	250	18.28	4.530		

Indicates significant at 0.01 levels

The table – 1 representing the poor has greater Mean score – 20.03 as compared to its well-to-do counterpart. The SD of both the groups shows similarity in deviations which means both the group of respondents possess similar attitude toward poverty acceptance. Instead of this Mean difference between the groups has been found statistically significant (t = 4.33, p = < .01). Thus, the hypothesis is proved. The obtained results seem to be logical that on the basis of the results one can very well say that the poor accept their with least protest. It is because of the fact that they accept their deprivation as a result of some sin committed in their previous life resulted in their birth in poor

families. On the contrary the respondents belonging to well-to-do families possess negative attitude to poverty and they protest against it and they feel that poverty is a curse and it must be revolted against. On scrutiny of responses of the poor on poverty acceptance, it is often found that they feel that it is God’s will and personal efforts to wipe it off has no meaning. It is because of their lack of education. On the other hand well-to-do group show that they attribute poverty to ignorance, inactivity and faith in external locus of control. The poor lack in work-motivation and level of aspiration and n-achievement and this creates passivity in them which in turn makes them a passive victim of poverty.

This stand finds support from previous researches of Pareek [13] Mishra and Tripathi [14] and others.

To test the Hypothesis No. 2: “The sample representing poor and well-to-do families would differ

significantly on fatalism”, from the table – 2 it can be observed that groups (poor & well-to-do) has been found to be highly significant at .01 level of confidence ($t' = 4.17$). Hence, the proposed hypothesis is accepted where chance error is completely eliminated.

Table 2: Showing Significance of Difference between Two Groups on Fatalism Dimension of the Scale

Sample Group	n	Mean	S.D.	t	p-value
Poor	250	10.06	2.49	4.17	0.01
Well-to-do	250	8.83	3.91		

Indicates significant at 0.01 levels

On the basis of the results obtained as presented in table – 2 it can be inferred that the poor group has a greater Mean score as compared to its well-to-do counterpart. Thus the poor may be taken to be more fatalists. Thus the results seem to quite logical with ground realities. Papica [15] has already studied that persons of passive types throw all responsibilities to God, chance and luck. Thus poor persons are mostly passive as they are generally found to be high in external locus of control. Singh and Sharma [16] have also found similar findings. Hence, the present result has ample empirical support for the present piece of research work.

To test the hypothesis No. 3 “The sample representing the poor and well-to-do families would differ significantly on future prospects”, it can be understood from the table – 3 that both the group of rural areas from where the present sample has been drawn differ significantly on the dimension of future prospect at 0.05 levels of confidence. On the basis of this result obtained it can be said that the poor group do not possess an attitude of having better future. Thus the formulated hypothesis is proved. The present

Table 3: Showing Significance of Difference between Two Groups on Future Prospects Dimension of the Scale

Sample Group	n	Mean	S.D.	t	p-value
Poor	250	13.74	2.90	2.48	0.05
Well-to-do	250	14.42	3.14		

Indicates significant at 0.05 levels

Result gets its support from the earlier findings of the present research work regarding poverty acceptance (hypothesis – 1) and fatalism (hypothesis – 2) as the people of this group have an attitude of accepting their lot without protest and they live it to their luck and external control (God made), they do not expect a better future. Passivity in their behavior and acceptance of status – quo come in their way of future prosperity. Ignorance superstitions, lack of job

information and immobility stand in their way of prosperity, happiness, and dignity.

Hypothesis No - 4. “The sample representing poor and well-to-do families would differ significantly on risk-taking behavior”. To test this hypothesis the responses of the two groups of the sample (poor and well-to-do) on risk-taking items of the scale were scored separately and were subjected to statistical treatment as the result have been presented in table – 4.

Table 4: Showing Significance of Difference between Two Groups on Risk-Taking Dimension of the Scale

Sample Group	n	Mean	S.D.	t	p-value
Poor	250	105.67	24.76	2.01*	0.05
Well-to-do	250	100.53	31.93		

* Indicates significant at 0.05 levels

From the table – 4, it can be observed that the Mean difference between the groups of sample (poor and well-to-do) has been found statistically significant at 0.05 levels of confidence as the ‘t’ - value is found 2.01 level. Thus the formulated hypothesis stands accepted. The results obtained presented in the table – 4 shows that the poor people are not prone to take high risk. This is because of their blind faith in external locus

of control. They believe in luck and chance. Moreover, the well-to-do family groups have conscious information based on rich family background mostly believe in internal locus of control and they evaluate the outcome of their efforts and then take action. Thus the results seem to be quite logical, in the sense that the present findings support from previous study as reported by Papica [15], Danial [17] and Alam [18].

To test the hypothesis No. 5 i.e. “the sample representing poor and well-to-do families would differ on ‘self pride’, it can be observed from the table – 5 that

both the group of the present research inquiry differ on ‘self-pride dimension of the scale. Thus, the formulated hypothesis is also accepted.

Table 5: Showing Significance of Difference between Two Groups on Risk-Taking Dimension of the Scale

Sample Group	n	Mean	S.D.	t	p-value
Poor	250	27.90	4.70	2.19*	0.05
Well-to-do	250	28.80	4.69		

* Indicates significant at 0.05 levels

The results of the present study as mentioned in table – 5 have clearly indicated that poverty or deprivation lowers self-pride or self-esteem. Common behavioral also support the above results (table-5) as the deprived people seldom hold their head high and thus are found to be generally submissive and order taking. The result presented in the table – 5 finds its support from the findings of the previous studies as reported by Singh [19]; Gorwaney [20]; Hasan [21]; Naidu [22]; Rosenberg and Pearlin [23] and others.

CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of the results obtained and its interpretations, the following main findings are summed up:

1. Poor/disadvantaged group is high in poverty acceptance as compared to privileged (well-to-do) group.
2. The poor are more fatalist than the advantaged (well-to-do) group of the respondents especially from where the present piece of research work has been carried out.
3. The well-to-do are more risk taking than the poor group.
4. The poor find their future prospects as weak as compared to its well-to-do group counterpart.
5. The poor have been found to have low self-image/self-esteem as compared to their well-to-do group
6. Finally, it has been concluded that poverty enhances risk-proneness, fatalism and batters self-image
7. At last but not the least, on the whole it is found during the investigation that poverty lowers down the personality profile of the poor people. It is important to be mentioned that the poor are mostly fatalists having least attitude for their best livelihood. They dedicate themselves to fate and have scanty regard for efforts to eliminate or reduce their poverty. They often take higher risks without thinking about the outcome to follow. Thus, it can be concluded that poverty begets poverty and its disastrous effect is widespread.

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