

Poverty reduction as human rights immanent struggle Case India

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Abstract

According to contemporary definitions we can distinguish two kinds of human rights: first – civil and political rights, second – economic social and cultural rights. When focusing on economic rights it is easy to observe specific group of human population deprived, basically all economic human rights; namely a group living under poverty line. Poverty issue and poverty reduction is one of the crucial consideration of United Nations, countries governments and many NGOs and it is based on notion of economic and social equality or rather raising inequality.

Asia is the continent with majority of population living in poverty and India is the state with enormous – biggest in the world – amount of people living in humiliation of poverty. Both Indian government and international community makes an effort to reduce it and improve the situation. The paper attempts to put some light on the problem.

Keywords: *Human rights, social inequality, poverty line, global poverty line, starvation line, poverty reduction.*

Introduction

“Wherever we lift one soul from a life of poverty, we are defending human rights. And whenever we fail in this mission, we are failing human rights.”

Kofi Annan United Nations Secretary-General

The idea of human rights is as old as humanity, The world's first bill of human rights was discovered on a clay tablet dating back from the reign of Cyrus the Great (555–529 BC).

The documents which form the historical foundation of modern human rights are: the English Bill of Rights (1688), the American Declaration of Independence (1776) and the French Declaration of Rights of Man (1789).

Human rights are the ones that have been conferred to individuals by the states in the modern International Law. The declaration of the United Nations signed on January 1, 1942 at Washington was the first document which used the term human rights. The modern perspective to human rights is reflected in the Vienna Declaration adopted by the World conference on Human rights in June 1993. The declaration categorically states that all human rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent and inter-related.

The legal process in the universality of human rights effectively commenced with the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 (UDHR)**.

According to UN The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, that was proclaimed in Paris the December 10th 1948, article number one says: ' All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.' Among 22 articles of the Declaration some refer to civil rights and freedom some to dignity and materially decent life.

Thus human rights may be analyzed and considered in two groups.

Civil and political rights: Civil rights and liberties are referred to those rights which are related to the protection of the right to life and personal liberty. They are essential for a person so that he may live a dignified life. such rights include right to life, liberty, right to privacy, freedom from torture and right to own property. The nature of both civil and political rights may be different but they are inter-related and therefore it does not appear logical to differentiate them.

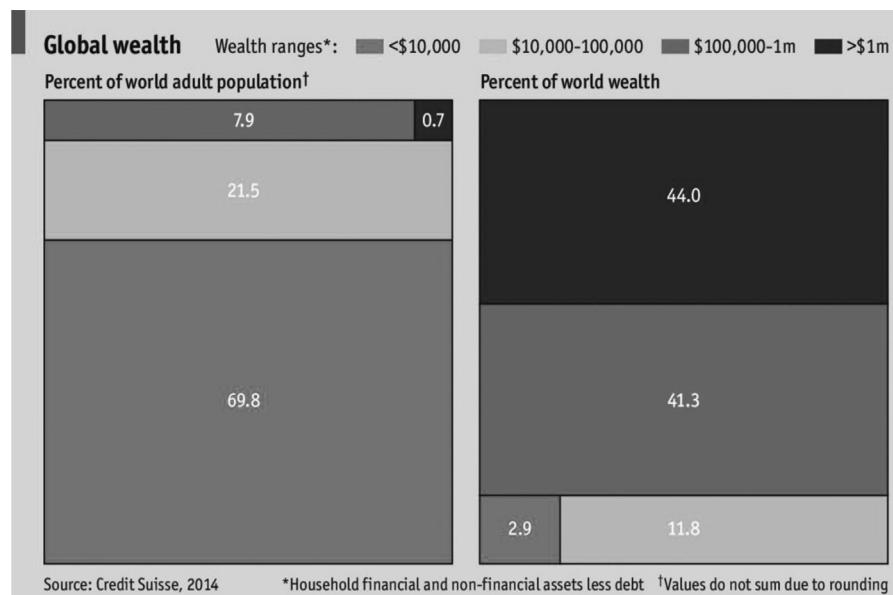
Economic, social and cultural rights: Economic, social and cultural rights are based fundamentally on the concept of social equality (also called 'freedom to') are related to the guarantee of minimum necessities of the life to human beings. In the absence of these rights the existence of human beings is like to be endangered.

Right to adequate food, clothing, housing and adequate standard of living, right to work, right to social security, right to physical and mental health and right to education are included in this category of rights.

When considering economic rights there is an argument: should it take priority over civil and political rights. Economic, social and cultural rights (ESC) are socio-economic human rights, distinct from civil and political rights but to enjoy your civil and political rights one has to be freed from cruel struggle for basic survival. As statistics prove, there is enough wealth in the world – the distribution of this wealth is crucial.

As impressive graph published by prestigious The Economist magazine shows below 8,6% of world reaches households (possessing wealth from 100 000 US\$ till more than 1 000 000 US\$) possess over 85% of world wealth. The 69,8% of world households (owing less than 10 000 US\$ in average each) possess merely 2,9% of world wealth. A majority of them are extremely poor, many of them leave on the edge or below poverty line.

The World Bank uses different criteria to measure poverty. The lowest the digit the less people live “under poverty line”. Thus when China has recently lifted the line till 1,75 US\$ per day they have to count around 200 million people more living in poverty.

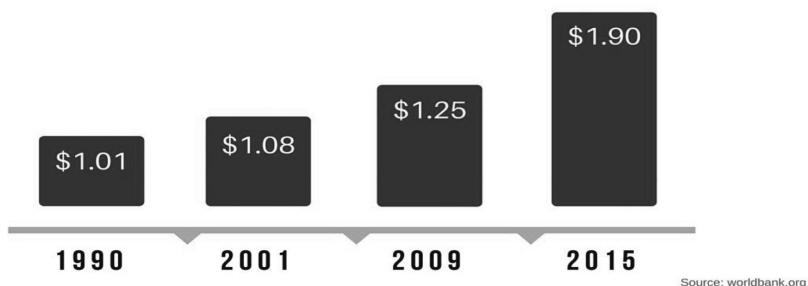


The economist; October 18th; 2014

Poverty in ASIA

Asia's rapid economic growth has put it on track to eradicate "extreme" poverty, defined by the World Bank as daily consumption of less than \$1.25 per person, by 2030. However, the Asian Development Bank reckons this is too low given that nowadays, things like mobile phones are seen as necessities; so it has calculated a more suitable daily minimum of \$1.51. This lifts Asia's 2010 poverty rate to nearly one-third of the population, adding 343 million people to the ranks of the poor. The ADB believes food insecurity, and the risks of natural disasters, global economic shocks and the like, should also be taken into account when measuring poverty. This would further raise Asia's 2010 poverty rate, to nearly 50%.

WORLD BANK GLOBAL POVERTY LINE



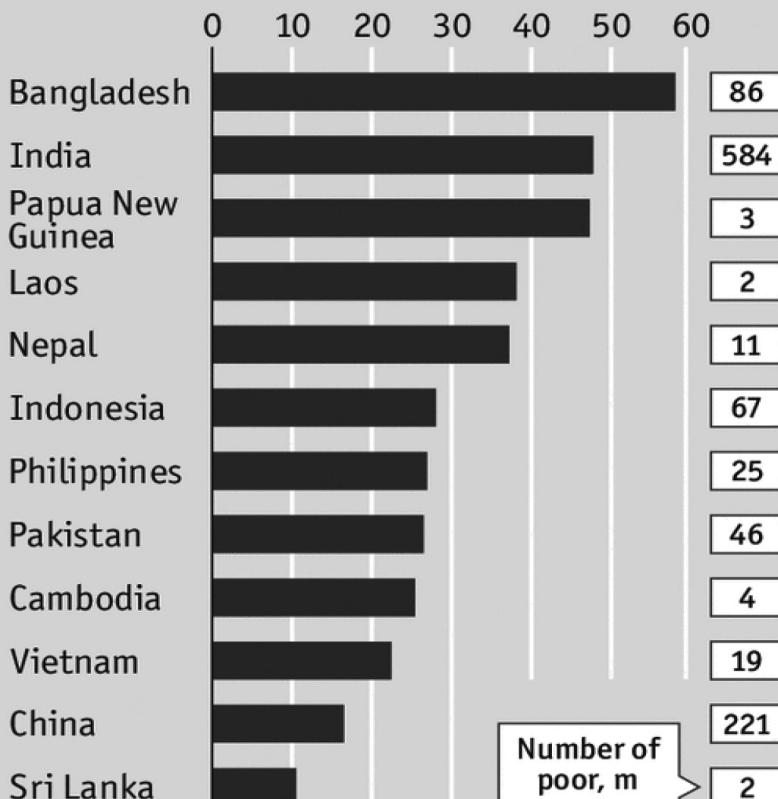
Source: worldbank.org

Different measurements... meaning "global poverty line" are used by different institutions and different governments. Thus there are significant differences in different statistics, however we can assume that more than over two billion people in the world (roughly 20% of human population) live in extreme poverty. Around 50% of them live in Asia. India and China are struggling with the issue, with India being apparently in front of all countries facing poverty problem.

Poverty in Asia

Population living below \$1.51* per day

2010, % of total



Source: Asian Development Bank

*At 2005 PPP

Human rights in India

When considering human rights and poverty we have to underline the social protection role of state. Social protection consists of policies and programs designed to defend human rights and reduce poverty by obeying law, promoting efficient labor markets, diminishing people's exposure to risks, and enhancing their capacity to manage economic and social risks.

It is the duty of every nation to create such laws and conditions that protect the basic Human rights of its citizens. India as world's largest democratic country also provides such rights to its citizens and allows them certain rights including the freedom of expression. These rights, which are called 'Fundamental Rights' form an important part of the Constitution of India. In India under "the Protection of Human Rights of 1993", the Human Rights have been defined in the following way:

"Human rights" means the rights relating to life, liberty, equality and dignity of the individual guaranteed by the constitution or embodied in the International Covenants and enforceable by courts in India".

India has also enacted the protection of **Human Rights Act in 1993** and also constituted the National Human Rights Commission, the State Human Rights Commission in different States and Human Right Courts.

The analysis of the human rights should be made from three perspectives:

- The Socio-Economic dimension of Human Rights in India,
- The legal dimension of Human Rights in India and
- The role of international organizations and NGOs in promotion of human rights.

Considering specific culture and tradition, the steps were taken to protect human rights in India

Particular initiatives have been undertaken for the greater protection of the women, children and certain other groups of the society to address cast system among others;

- Sati Practice has been prohibited in India (Sati was a cruel custom condemning widowed woman).
- The Protection of Human Rights Act, was enacted in 1993.
- Right to Information act was passed in 2005.
- Right to education has been accepted as a fundamental right in India.
- Dowry System has been prohibited by law. The Dowry Prohibition Act was passed in 1961.

Poverty in India

Despite the country's GDP growth rate (about 9%), poverty in India is still pervasive; especially in rural areas where 70% of India's 1.2 billion population live.

It is one of the fastest growing economies in the world and yet its riches are hardly evenly redistributed across the population. It spends only 1% of its GDP on health, which is half that of China, who is already planning on increasing that by a substantial amount of, 3 to 4%.

- Poverty in India Statistics: (Before 2014)
 - 1) 50% of Indians don't have proper shelter
 - 2) 70% don't have access to decent toilets
 - 3) 35% of households don't have a nearby water source
 - 4) 85% of villages don't have a secondary school
 - 5) Over 40% of these same villages don't have proper roads connecting them.

If the decline in poverty went from 60% to 35% between the 70s and the early 90s, globalization and liberalization policies have made this trend go backwards in the 90s.

The poverty in India is measured by a poverty line that is probably one of the most disputed and incessantly attacked measure in the world. It is simply what some call a "starvation line", a line that accounts for the feeling of satiety: measured in calories.

There are different issues when challenging urban and rural poverty.

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

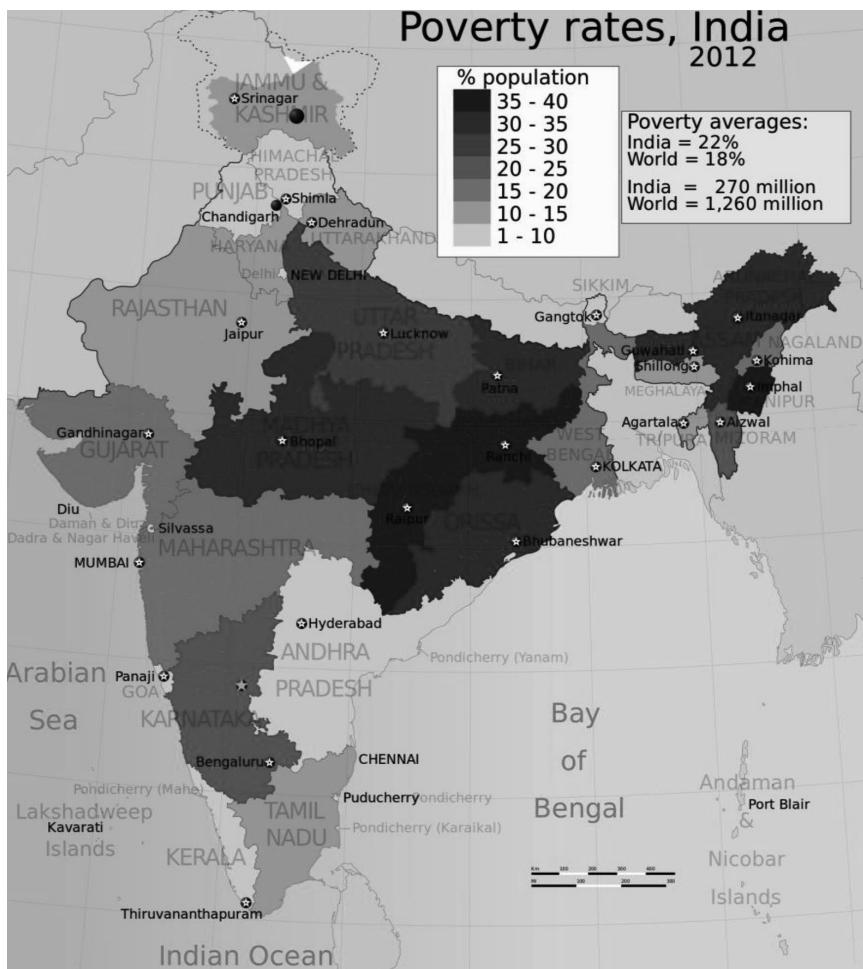
- Poor people migrate from rural areas to cities and towns in search of employment/financial activity.
- The income of more than 8 million urban people is estimated to fall **below poverty line (BPL)**.
- In addition to this, there are around 4.5 million urban people whose income level is on borderline of poverty level.
- A income of urban poor's 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 metropolitan cities (Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai and Mumbai) consists of slum population.
- A large portion of people living in slums are illiterate.

Rural Poverty characteristics : 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:

- **SCST:** (SCHEDULED CASTS AND SCHEDULED TRIBES SYSTEM) 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 causal 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.
- **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.

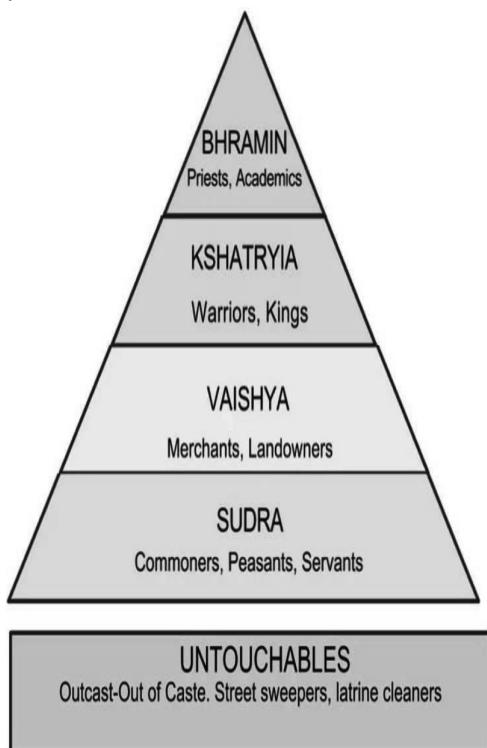
Significant issue for Indian government is the different distribution of wealth and development among different states. The uneven distribution of poverty in India is presented on a map below.



India's government is well aware that poverty is a giant barrier to overcome. The complexity of it puts enormous tasks that are necessary to deal with in order to fully develop the nation. A wide range of anti-poverty policies have been introduced since the 1950s, which took effect after 20 years of implementation. However cultural and traditional environment still restricts government efforts.

Effects of caste system in countries economy: One of the Indian biggest issues is the caste system, the root cause of poverty in India and seemingly the issue fragile to tackle and often avoided by commentators.

The most obvious problem with this caste system was that under its rigidity, the lower castes were prevented from aspiring to climb higher, and, therefore, economic progress was restricted. Lower-caste communities are often plagued by low literacy levels and a lack of access to health care and education. A lack of formal education or training, as well as discrimination that effectively bars them from many forms of employment, and the non-enforcement of protective legislation, perpetuates caste-based employment and keeps its hereditary nature alive.



The picture above shows the importance and complexity of social system in India. It also proves how hard an issue it is to cope. The most important is the education system and poverty reduction for rising lower cast population to better life standards. The authoritarian regulation are partly efficient so far, in particular in rural areas. The governments of different political orientations made the attempts to solve the problem however.

On Monday, 30 May, 2016, Prime Minister of India – Narendra Modi has given the speech about the series of measures and reforms, which will help the Indian economy achieve its potential of high growth. Out of ten major points on the agenda **POVERTY ELIMINATION WAS NUMBER ONE ON THE LIST.**

Government Schemes that are contributing in reduction of poverty in India:

- **Atal Pension Yojana:** is a government-backed pension scheme in India targeted at the unorganised sector
- **Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao Yojana:** (*Save girl child, educate girl child*) is a scheme that aims to generate awareness and improving the efficiency of welfare services meant for women.
- **Housing for All:** is a vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India where all facilities will provide in a place. The government has identified 305 cities and towns in 9 states for beginning construction of houses for urban poor.
- **Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana:** (National Agriculture Development Scheme) is a State Plan Scheme of Additional Central Assistance launched in August 2007 as a part of the 11th Five Year Plan by the Government of India.
- **Midday Meal Scheme:** is a school meal programme of the government of India designed to improve the nutritional status of school-age children nationwide.
- **Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana:** is a government-backed Life insurance scheme in India. It was formally launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.
- **Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana:** is a welfare scheme of Government of India launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2016.

Major goals to reduce the Poverty in India:

1. Accelerating Economic Growth
2. Agricultural Growth and Rural Societies Alleviation
3. Speedy Development of Infrastructure
4. Accelerating Human Resource Development
5. Growth of Non-Farm Employment

6. Access to Assets
7. Access to Credit
8. Public Distribution System (PDS)
9. Direct Attack on Poverty: Special Employment Schemes for the Poor.

To fight poverty requires significant steps in many areas in parallel. The task is challenging and India, as many other countries has to cope. There are improvements but still a lots lies before. Education system plays one of the most important roles.

Conclusion

Asia is the continent with majority of population living in poverty and India is the state with enormous – biggest in the world – amount of people living in humiliation of poverty. Both Indian government and international community makes an effort to reduce it and improve the situation. Inefficient distribution system and general inequality gives a sad and hopeless picture since it limits the equal opportunities. India has a very specific place in the global fight of poverty. It is huge, densely populated, still basing on agriculture and having, until now, still important and influential tradition and culture that hinders reforms. The new government has a heavy task in ahead.

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