

Poverty, Shame and Social Exclusion

Work Package 4

What do non-poor people think about those in poverty in India?

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Introduction

India's record on poverty is worrisome. Economic progress on the one hand and increasing inequality on the other create a difficult scenario for India. In addition, social institutions such as caste and gender entrench poverty into spiral structures which create discrimination and influences anti-poverty programmes in important ways. In such a context where the chasm?? between traditionalism and modernity is evident, the opinions that non-poor people hold about the poor people critically matter. The states of Kerala and Gujarat are the key states of investigation as in the earlier two work packages. Six students worked in two other Indian states which brings additional interesting insights to this study. Six focus group discussions were conducted: two with school teachers (seven teachers in Kerala and nine in Gujarat); two with women (12 in Kerala and 9 in Gujarat); and two with adult men (6 in Kerala and 8 in Gujarat). We also conducted activity groups with children who completed bubble diagrams which were followed by discussion.

The study found ambivalent attitudes towards poor people by the non-poor sections of society. In most of our data collection contexts we found that the initial sympathetic attitude presented to the researcher vanished in the later part of the interaction.

Respondents' views/perceptions of why some people live in poverty (including views relating to structural, cultural, individual causes)

For a large number of non-poor people, the prevalent view regarding the reason for poverty was the poor people themselves. This was particularly true in Gujarat where industrial transformation has taken place. The poor were viewed as being destined to live in the same condition. One of participant in the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) responded saying, "*Yeh nange aise hi rahenge. Tapasya bhi karein tab bhi kuch na hone waala!*" (They will stay like that – in poverty. Even miracles cannot change their situation). Similar responses also came from Kerala about the tribal population. Mr. M of Edawaka village, Kerala said, "They were same, like, it is their culture. They will live in the forest and drink; don't want to live like us."

According to the non-poor a lot of opportunities were available to the villagers after the rise of industrialism. In fact a lot of the poor became rich using these opportunities, but others wasted all the money in practices such as alcoholism and gambling. Thus the non-poor think the poor should claim themselves responsible for their situation and should not blame others. A statement highlighting this was said by a rich woman: “*Na zameen rahi aur na hi makaan ban paya*” (neither they have land now, nor they built a house of their own). The statement implies that the poor in the village sold their land to the industries and earned a good amount. But they didn't use the amount judiciously and wasted most of it on liquor and other unproductive activities. They lost their land, the money was exhausted and they were now left homeless with nothing. This was to show that the poor were themselves responsible for their condition and have no one else to blame.

A man who came back from Mumbai (he had earlier migrated to Mumbai but returned to the village after industries had arrived) made his living by plying his vehicle between the industry and the village, said “*ab to itna kaam hai yahan. ab bhi ro rahe hain to kaam hi nahi karna chahte*” (now there is plenty of work here. Even now if you keep crying, it is an indication that you don't want to work). Some even mentioned that the poor do not even aspire to a better living for their children.

A female participant said, “*Parivar ki garrebi ka bahut bada kaaran aadmi hota hai, roz jitna kamata hai ussey daru pee leta hai aur ghar mein khane ko kuch nae hota hai. Aurat aur bachhon ke bare mein kuch nae sochta*” (the main reason for poverty within the family is the man. Whatever wage you get, you drink alcohol, and you don't have anything to eat at home, you don't think about your woman and children).

Similar sentiments were also raised in the state of

erala. Mr. M. Wayanad district said, "These things (poverty) cannot be real in Kerala, at least in Kerala. If people want to work, he can get a job. It is more 300 Rs/day that they can earn... In a day then buy alcohol with 100 Rs. He will not go to work for may be... for next three days or so." They believe strongly that poor people are responsible for their own problem. Being an owner of a petrol pump, a tractor and two hotels, they see plenty of opportunity available in the

locality for poor people. On one occasion they even disagreed with the fact that there are poor people in the locality. Their argument was, "See, who is poor people in this locality, most of them is not poor. Poor, mean not like poor, means they have mobile phones and Dish-TV then music system at their home." they believe that there is no one without food, so question whether they can be at all called poor. According to them poor people of this locality are only the tribal people??. They will earn 300 Rs in a day and spend the next 2-3 days drinking. Therefore they not only link their perception about why some are poor with alcoholism but also with tribal origins.

In another instance poorness was blamed on alcoholism. Mr. X, from Kerala said, " Poor don't want to work every day, because one day work gives him more than 300 Rs. Their needs are so little that after working 1-2 days a poor will not work for next 3-4 days. He will buy one bottle of alcoholic with 100 Rs everyday and can sell the empty bottle with 2 Rs and buy 1 Kg of rice with that 2 Rs. They are afraid of losing job but farmers are afraid of losing labourers." Therefore non-poor believes it's a combination of surplus opportunity to earn coupled with deviant behaviour of the poor that keeps the poor always poor. He went on saying, "They are alcoholic, and have no saving habit so they remain poor. They don't want to hear from us but tribes want to continue their way of life. They are alcoholic and spend all money there. They don't want to develop." The responses apparently reflect the fact that the non-poor do not want to take responsibility for those in poverty. However there is an element of disrespect towards tribes because apparently the respondent believes that tribes are misusing government aid.

Mundra area of Gujarat has witnessed unprecedented industrialization in post Bhuj-earth quake. A tax break introduced by the Gujarat government after the earth quake destruction worked as an incentive to industry that rushed to the area to set up a variety of production facilities . Land prices have gone up as a result and famers sold their land as the price had gone up rapidly. Even in such circumstance poverty still persists. One person from Katch, Gujarat believes that in their locality most of the people are not poor. They said, " Who is poor tell me! If one want to work, get job, get money or want to work hard, can get work...There are people who have sold their land but now have nothing left because cannot manage the money and not educated so cannot get new job.. so that's why. People are poor because they drink a lot and don't want to go to work."

Therefore it is not that the poor are poor because they do not get any opportunity to earn but either they don't want to work or they have previously made certain decisions which have restricted their employment opportunity. They also raise issues regarding poor money managing capacity, not only is it linked with their education but also to their common monetary sense. There is also blunt indication that alcoholism is a disease of the poor and their drinking habit increases their worthlessness.

However, not every non-poor person unanimously said that the poor alone were to blame for their own deprivation. Some respondents, especially school teachers pointed out that structural forces were behind poverty and that government policies had failed to lift people out of poverty. Though one school teacher highlighted the drinking habit of poor people, but they wanted to blame the government for the situation of the poor people: "Lot of the schemes are wasted but we cannot blame poor people for that. Many of the schemes are mis-utilized by middlemen and therefore they do not reach poor people. So Government has to be blamed for poor implementation. Some parents really take advantage and utilize these schemes to advance in life. I have seen one child whose parents were a cow-keeper . Today, the child has become "Tahasildar." This is purely out of effort and hard work"

The language people use to relate to/reflect on poverty/people living in poverty:

Poorness of the people is described variously by the non-poor respondents. This variation relates to their respective position in the society and how they are connected with poor people. Mr. M from Wayanad district described poor as "See, who are poor people in this locality, most of them are not poor. Poor, mean not like poor, means they have mobile phones and Dish-TV then music system at their home... So there is no one without food, poor people of this locality are tribal. They will earn 300 Rs in a day and spend next 2-3 days drinking." It should be noted that Mr. Md is a business man who owns a few petrol pumps, trucks and hotels, therefore he sees the poor in terms of employer labourer relationship. The statements suggest that Mr. M relates poorness to characteristics such as being tribal, daily labourers, alcoholic, owns mobile phones and dish tv at their house inside the forest. Mr. Mh from Kutch admits "the condition of 'Horizons' are different" although he did not agree that typical poor people were still there in the village.

Rather, than from the group discussions, our observations suggested that rich men when angry often use abusive language to refer to poor people. This is realized frequently in the speeches of adult men, but also in the children of upper caste mirroring the mentality of their elders. The children also publicly taunt and suppress the decisions and views of their poor friends. The poor children have no other option than to play with this same mix of friends. If they don't play with them, brawls would be likely amongst them. Comments like 'Dekhthe hain! Aane de saa** ko' (we will see; let him (a slang) come) are quite common.

On the other hand Ms. J, a school teacher from, Gujarat described children from poor family as "Poor in study but "tuphan main jada" like they like "masti" and speed (tuphan)... they are innocent, respect everyone, but poor in study." Even she empathetically added, "When parents have not studied how their children can get good education." Apparently she relates students from poor families as first generation learners, having few study skills as a result, and being naughty, playful and innocent. Throughout the interview Ms. P described the typical child of a poor family. She went on to say, "They (parents of the student of her school) work as unskilled labourers, they go to agricultural field, they sell things, have small shops at the vegetable market... they go to the field in the morning and comeback at evening...they get tired and get sleep quickly. If they spend time for their children then what they are going to eat on the day?" The last sentence describes not only her empathy towards poor parents but also how she perceives poverty. It appears that she sees poverty strongly related to extreme physical work for livelihood, extended working hours, and vulnerability to hunger if parents skip working for even a single day.

Students from poor families are often "very sensitive and sometimes very abusive also." Mr. MK from Anand, Gujarat said during the group discussion. "Because they don't get anything, so they became quiet ???? or become quite angry. If you say anything to one, they are sensitive and they become quiet. They can tell you anything in anger, why, because they are poor. They don't have note, pen, pencil; they speak very little or become very angry because of shame... Whatever I say in the class, they can be sensitive and can be aggressive also." The statements indicate two

important things that one is sensitivity towards the children of poorer families and second is how psychology of poor child is perceived by a teacher. On the other hand the same respondent described a poor child's interaction with his father as "Your father asks you that, "Son, have you eaten?" Who ask him (a child from a poor family)? Because early in the morning father leaves home for work and comes back late in night, just to earn money. For this many habit they (parents) make...drinking. Many children are victim of such things. Sometimes when I call their parents they come drunk...what can I talk with them after that? Here they come like that (at school), then what will happen at home. Children are very sensitive that's why they become quite or else they become aggressive. If they are not cared then these can happen." Mr. MN described children of poor families as basically sensitive because they know their economic condition or limitation and are ashamed of their condition. Therefore to him, sensitivity and lacking of basic things a student needs in school are signs of poverty.

The opinion was partially echoed by Ms. G a teacher at a Special school for Tribal Children, in Kerala said, "I have noticed many of these children (poor) are introverts. There is no problem when they interact among themselves in the school. But when we take these children outside the school for events such as intra-school competition we have noticed tribal children perform poorly in viva and occasions when they have to interact with others." Sister S from a government-aided school in Gujarat also described the same observation among school going poor children. She said, "During school hours, these dynamics is not visible but I was hostel warden in our school and I have noticed until X standard somehow poor children identify themselves and sit in separate groups and rich children sits separately." Apparently classroom enforced uniformity among poor children vanishes when they enter into their private life. Therefore the consciousness of being poor always plays an important role in deciding bond of social interaction among poor and non-poor. Hence these teachers ideally can identify a student being poor if the child belongs to certain play groups. However she has also mentioned that after X standard behavioural differences between poor children and rich children are limited. She said, "Because there is some standardization." Sister S has also indicated that sometimes, "students repeatedly don't do homework," and then too she can identify who is poor. Here student's performance is considered to be an indicator of poverty of the family.

Both in Gujarat and Kerala, the changed circumstances and the need to be careful not to use abusive language towards the poor was wide spread among members of non-poor families. For instance, a school teacher in Kerala said that because of the caste emancipation, teachers are careful not to address any one with caste names. However, teachers among themselves still hold negative views about lower caste pupils and when they are amongst themselves they do make such casteist comments. But, in the school they are careful. In the Gujarat villages a rich person said that these days the poor expected respect and equal treatment from the rich: “*Aaj kal to wo mooh mod lete hain, ghar aana jaana band kar dete hain, agar unhe Namaste na karo to, lekin hum aisa karte nahi*” (These days if we don't greet poor people, poor people turn the face from us seeing them, they refuse to come to our houses). This is a reversal from the previous generation when poor people showed high dependency on rich people.

Whether and how respondents differentiate between different 'groups' of people with respect to why they are living in poverty:

Identifying a person or household as poor was not difficult for our respondents. This was because of the subjective parameter being used. For instance, some people flatly denied that there was no poverty in their village since no one was starving in their village. In the same village a very rich person said that most of the people in the village were poor since they: didn't own a house; lived in a particular area of village (ghettoized living); generally wore tattered clothes; the children had inferior hygiene habits ; food habits or periodically kept asking for money . On the other hand, an upper middle class person from this village classified half of the village to be poor, particularly those working in factories the poor labourers (“*Ab saab humare samne toh adha gaon garib hai, ye sab jo company mein kam karte hai, garib hi toh hai*”). Among the children too we found this simplistic measures to be widely prevalent. “*Govt. school sab gareeb bache jaate hain, private school ko ameer bache jaate hain* (all rich children go to private schools and poor children go to govt schools”. Though these subjective parameters were the most commonly found answers, other sgave reflective answers. Few respondents identified the poor as those who are recipients of Govt. benefits. In some cases, identity of the social groups such as caste was clearly pointed out as synonymous with being poor. In one of our locations, the government officials and shopkeepers pointed to the location of the village by saying “*wo neeche wale gaon*

ke log gareeb hain (those on lower grounds)". They were referring to a village which predominantly had people living in poverty located close to a link road, the access to which is narrow, steep and risky. In some important ways, government housing scheme of building houses for the poor people in specific locations had by default had the effect of branding as a 'colony' or area where poor people live.

Head master Mr. P was blunt in relating caste and religion with poorness. He said, "This is related to some 'Jaat' only." As a headmaster he has worked in school and he left his previous school because there a particular group of students used to study. He said, "Those students you know, they were very dirty, their natures are dirty... they cannot speak a single sentence without slang... I used to give much effort, but they dont value education how can they study. They know soon they need to work in his father's business..." His sentiment itself reflected another of his statements, "no one (no other teacher) will tell you these things, when you will ask they will say something else, but everyone within themselves believe the same." At the same time he is very happy to be headmaster in this new school where the school takes care of children better than in conventional state government schools. He also said, "Those types of children come very less in this school." These sentences reflect the fact that non-poor differentiate between the poor on the basis of religion, like Hindu poor and Muslim poor. Not only that but also poor from a particular caste is dirtier, physically and characteristically than others. Poorness here is not as a result of certain religious affiliation but of a certain mentality of the poor which the respondent believes to be closely associated with religion. Such groups of people since, "they live congested area where business is not good, neighbour are not educated and not clean... the parents do not help their children to develop their life through education" these are the main reasons that they remain poor. However it should be also noted that apart from Mr. Parmer, no other respondent has agreed differecntiated among poor people on the basis of caste and religion

An overview of how respondents' views/ attitudes have been formed (e.g through personal and/or professional contact with people in poverty; through media representations; through policy discourses etc)

Most of the participants of FGDs (Kerala and Gujarat) of non-poor and poor people lived in close proximity. However, the social distance between them was huge. Many of the non-poor

people had direct contacts with poor people through business or professional relationships. Particularly, the government primary school's teachers reported that they were closely associated with their students from poorer families. However one respondent named Ms. N. M. (27 years old) from Gujarat possessed very little practical and direct knowledge about poor people even though their father and husband were big farmers. Despite their higher education they had had very little contact or interaction with poor people throughout her life. However they acknowledged that poor labourers often used to seek help from their father, even though they never repaid him, and the same on many occasions has also happened with their spouse.

JL from a village in Gujarat believes that poor people are increasingly becoming dishonest in their activity. He has been helping workers at his workshop financially but never sees them returning his money. He said, "Everyone now wants to make quick money. Poor migrants are stealing from rich Jain households..." His statement also reflects his perception of migrants when he describes them as thieves. This view is based on a recent theft at a Jain household of the village where police caught a migrant with stolen goods. The respondent goes on saying, "now people want to make quicker money, without sweating, without working, quick way... the easy quickest way is cheating! So they will come to you and ask for help but actually they want to get money from you and run away. If people have genuine health problem, they get help. But poor people... many of them want to cheat. This is not the character of Gujarati people... this is happening because of outsiders who are coming to stay at in our villages, people from Bihar." This view was common in areas where migrant people were located. The level of trust was very low between migrant poor people and non-poor local people. According to Mr. L, it is because of western influences even boys and girls from *poor families* can dare to run away from home and dare an inter-caste marriage.

In the villages where caste divisions were deep, this lack of trust was noticed without migrant presence. This was specifically valid when cattle get stolen from a rich household. The suspicion entirely goes in the direction of a poor household with limited means. This lack of trust is also visible in different small level activities like gambling, dairying etc. Here, the rich people were visibly hesitant to lend money to the poor as they believed that the poor cannot be trusted with money. According to them, if a poor person is provided with some money, he will end up

spending the amount on alcohol or gambling. Even if the rich wanted to provide some help they would do so by paying the bills or providing the necessities or meeting the material needs of the poor. A particular statement on this subject was quoted by one of the richest people in the village: “*Inko sab kuch mil sakta hai, par ye log mehanat nahi karna chahte.*” (They can get everything. But they are not ready to work hard).

On the other hand, Ms AA from a village in Kutch was very unhappy because of the way people of Kutch behaved in post earth quake environment. She said, "once a government officer came to my house after the quake but my house was good... mean not much damage, only a wall fall apart by rest was there... no, I mean a wall fell down but the rest was intact but not in condition to live. So the government officials came to my house and ask if we need aid. My said to the officials no, thank you, whatever we will repair our house with that. Whatever my husband has left for me, I will work with that. The official was insisting so much to take some money, since so much money was there in governments' hand after money came from all over the world but not much damage was there in this locality. There was no destruction at lower cast people's colony but they took a lot of money from government that's why they have good houses now."

According to some of the respondents, “*they feel poor but spend more on show-off and have no sense of saving*”. To cite an instance, a few labors were buying posters of film stars, expensive cards each worth Rs25 and rolls of light for diwali, although their economic condition did not support these practices. “*The labors play cards under candle light and think of buying rolls of electric lights*”. However, the people are considerate when it comes to lending money for weddings or for medical help.

In Kothwa, Uttar Pradesh, disrespect amongst the strata was captured during a bubble diagram with a child of a Harijan family as the respondent. He claimed *agar wo chauka marte hain to humein chhakkka maan na padta hai. Aur agar hum chhakka marenge to humein chauka hi milega. Agar hum aisa nahi karenge to wo humein marte hain.* (while playing cricket, if a higher caste boy hits sixer, we will have to respect it. But, if I hit sixer, it is not accepted. If I demanded,

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they beat me up). This demonstrates that the people had an element of disrespect for the poor and especially for the poor of lower caste.

Mr. X from a village in Kerala believes poor are mainly tribal and labourers. He belongs to a farmer's family and they own land totaling more than 80 acres in 4 states. His family prefers labourers from West Bengal, Bihar and Jharkhand than Kerala. He said "Poor don't want to work every day, because one day work gives him more than 300 Rs. Their needs are so little that after working 1-2 days a poor will not work for next 3-4 days...They are afraid of losing job but farmers are afraid of losing labourers." From Kerala Mr X's family only use tribes. Because Tribes are hard working, their demands are therefore less when they are taken to their farmland at Andhra Pradesh. When labourers are taken to other states He said, "Mostly tribals are poor, but not poor in the sense that they don't have food or houses, they even have refrigerator and TVs and etc, but they are poorer than others.

How these views/attitudes are fed into respondents' evaluation of the effectiveness of current anti-poverty policies and how they might be improved (including what people think the aims of such policy should be e.g provide assistance vs preventing 'dependency' etc)

Respondents gave both positive and negative responses to the Government Anti-poverty drive. . However many of the respondents from the teaching community were found to be skeptical about the seriousness of the government's aim to help the poor, or at least they felt the Government should be more resourceful in fixing loopholes within existing policies. A teacher who had taught in three districts of Kerala categorically said that success stories of the poor are the result of their own hard work and efforts, and very little to do with the anti-poverty policies. While complaining government's policy of school education Mr. A P, from a municipality school in Anand complained about poor student teacher ratio in schools throughout Gujarat which significantly higher than ideal 30-35:1 students and teacher ratio. They explained that it is difficult for a teacher to manage a class of 60-80 students within a 40 minute class. Therefore if the government were serious about educating the economically poor students' education, the proper teacher student ratios should be adhered to, otherwise educationally poorer students will continue to get promotion as per government rule without learning a single thing.'

Many respondents in Gujarat talked about the aid dependency among poor people. Ms. SG from Gujarat said, "Government is responsible for their attitude (of laziness or not willing to work and earn) as it has given too much after earth quake... there should be a limit." According to them, government and many of national and international NGOs provides larger amounts of monetary and non-monetary aid which effectively made people greedier for external help rather than standing on their own feet. Ms AA from a village in Kutch echoed that same sentiment by saying, "After earth quake everyone want to someone will take care of their needs...not many damage was done at village but government and many other came with a whole lot of help. You see, the lower cast people's area, there was no Pakka houses but now everyone has pakka house...if you are going to meet them and ask few thing, then the first thing they will ask if they will get any money after answering you in a certain way. So the attitude has changed."

In Kerala respondents were critical about the social security given to tribal and labour class people. They said that excessive facilities are given to such groups of people which in turn has made the people lazy and unproductive. Mr. ME from a village in Kerala said "...they can sell their empty bottle of alcohol and get 3 Rs. And with 3 Rs. they can get 1 Kg of rice with this 3 Rs. (laughter about this subsidized rice) why else you need. They have no tension in life, the Government is giving everything to them." Later on while responding to the question about whether poorer people from tribal communities had their emergency needs met, he commented, "Oh, everything is free for them, the government has spoiled them." Although acknowledging that alcoholism is a wide spread problem some respondent mainly attributed this to tribal people. They see government schemes such as 'Antodaya' and 'Arnapurna Yojna' which provide low cost rice and such commodities to the poor having drastically reduced the incentive to work every day to earn bread and butter.

Conclusion (work in progress)