

Poverty, Shame and Social Exclusion

Working paper 2: India

Hard times and the experience of shame in India

Sony Pellissery and
Leemamol Mathew

2012

Dr. Sony Pellissery , Institute of Rural Management, Anand, India
<sony.pellissery@gmail.com>

Dr. Leemamol Mathew, Institute of Rural Management, Anand, India
<leemamol@gmail.com>



Introduction

India is home to the largest number of poor people in the world. Of 1.13 billion people, 27.8 per cent live below the poverty line (below the accepted income level for consumption requirements as per the conservative standards of the Indian government). The face of this deep and persistent poverty is observable in poor spending on health, undignified ageing, poor educational standards, malnourished bodies, inferior housing, poor infrastructure resulting in deterioration in the quality of life, child labour, poor service delivery and a limited focus on health and safety measures in the work place. .

This paper attempt to identify the key codes associated with poverty-induced shame emerging from an analysis of interviews conducted with 29 adults, three elderly people and 28 children living in poor households. Throughout the interviews, participants were asked to talk about their experiences of poverty, its emotional impact and the sorts of coping strategies they used to overcome poverty associated shame. Further details of the methodology are included in [Appendix 1](#).

The report is structured into five main sections. The first section provides an overview of the representations of poverty and shame in the Indian context. Here, we report people's personal accounts of the impact that poverty has on their lives. In the second section, we discuss the various social groups which are subjected to shame in the context of poverty in India. In the third section, we pay special attention to the settings within which poverty-induced shame is likely to occur. Section four of the report focuses on the ways in which people living in poverty respond to feelings of or the imposition of shame. The fifth section identifies some of the counter-indicators to the poverty-shame nexus. This is followed by a final concluding section which summarizes the findings.

1. “Expressions” of poverty

There were evident patterns in the way people participating in the study experienced poverty and the social and emotional impacts that this had on them.

Work-related

Respondents spoke repeatedly of ‘work and income’ and the challenges of meeting the daily expenses of the household on low incomes. Most of the respondents worked in poorly paid jobs (farm laborers, manual laborers, coolies, carpenters; housemaids, hotel cooks, papad (poppadom) makers) who earn between Rs.50 – Rs.400 (depending on the nature of the work). Since most of these respondents are hired and fired according to demand, there is no security of regular work or income. Ramachandran from Kerala said, *“I am a manual laborer. So I go for any work I get. There is no fixed job. Work varies with agricultural work like preparation of agricultural land for farming, planting, etc.....Usually I get 15 to 20 days work in a month. When it comes to rainy season, the number of work days decreases to 5 or 10 days”*. He added, *“The income that I get from the work is often not sufficient to look after my family.”* Some of the respondents reported owning cattle, or buffalo which provided them an extra income. However, due to the cost of animal fodder, most did not benefit much from having livestock.

Borrowing

Most of the respondents reported that they managed to live due to the kindness of many: neighbors, relatives, friends, grocery shopkeepers and so on. The majority reported borrowing money or getting groceries on credit and felt that without this support, their families might have to starve. Jasubhai, Gujarat said, *“I earn Rs.1000 (approximately \$22) per month. It is not sufficient to run my family...What to do? I borrow money... and I have to pay interest...Different persons take different interest...10...8...or...5%.”* The difficulty of meeting the food needs of the family was illustrated by Diwariben, a widow from Gujarat, *“Only I earn and sometimes my elder son goes to work, most of the time he doesn’t. He is very small and he goes to play most of the days. We earn a total of Rs. 1000 per month, but sometimes it is more and*

sometimes it is less [she reported that sometimes they earned up to Rs. 2000]. It all depends on the availability of work. We don't get enough to run the family...whatever we earn we spend... if we don't earn there will be no money in the household. Such times are crucial and then we go to the grocery shop to borrow things to make food.....What to do? If I stay away my children will have to starve". Almost everyone reported experiencing food shortage at times in the home, or having to ask neighbors or friends for food or money, or groceries on credit.

Borrowing and getting into further financial hardship was one of the common themes that emerged from most of the interviews. The participants reported that apart from meeting food needs, the main financial demand on them was spending money to meet social obligations and practices.

The struggle to meet social obligations in order to avoid shame

The struggle to meet the wide range of social obligations such as death ceremonies, marriage ceremonies, house warming and birth celebrations, five years of birth, and religious festivals, were repeatedly described by interviewees in the present study. These were essentially struggles to have basic recognition (Honneth, 1995). If this is not done, loss of face in front of one's 'own people' is reported. Raiben, from Gujarat, said, *"There are certain practices we have to do somehow. But most of the time we may not have money to perform it.... In the community, if our respect is at risk, everyone helps us. If we don't do it, we lose our respect and people will talk about us"*. Therefore, the respondents in the study reported borrowing, if they had no money with them, in order to fulfill cultural and social practices. Ranajanben and her mother in-law, said, *"even if there is no money we borrow it and do"*. This situation put many families into situations of financial hardship.

Some of the respondents reported that if invited to a social event it is customary that everyone gives a gift or money as per the tradition of the community. Loss of face is the failure to meet this norm. Subaida said, *"The practice here is to give money. Each gives according to one's ability, and the amount given is noted down. Though financial capacity is the criteria, when there is some function in my house, people tried to give an*

equal amount of money I had contributed to their function". She added to a further question, "We are not able to give the same amount of money that we have received. Usually the money is given by my husband and it is inside a cover... Mostly I know how much he gives. Therefore, I feel a bit embarrassed when I meet those persons to whom we have given lesser money than we received. There are times when we are not able to give anything at all. When this happens, we try not to attend these functions and if we are obliged to go, then , my husband goes alone."

Some children interviewed believed that most of the practices were unnecessary and that they put a lot of pressure of people in poverty. However, they also understood where such pressure came from. Akhil said, *"Even though poor people are affected, they too spend a lot of money for various functions and practices. This may be because of the prestige and pride associated with it. If they don't invite the relatives or friends for the religious ceremonies they organize, people stop talking to them and even helping them in times of need. They may start to speak ill of them. So to save their social reputation they try to spend a lot of money for such functions, even by borrowing it. This may cause them a lot of financial burden"*.

Basic and relative needs

Children reported many situations where they were ashamed in front of others. The majority of the situations occurred in school but also in the community and at home. Some of the reasons for being shamed reported by children included; not having good enough clothes to wear or not having good shoes, ornaments or cosmetics; not having a good house; or not having enough material possessions (electricity, TV, fridge, furniture, mobile phone etc) at home. For most children and young people in the study, all these were matters of comparison with other classmates. Shani described one of the embarrassing situations in her life, *"I remember last year, I have gone out with a torn slipper. I was feeling so shy about myself. I was wondering what others will think about me"*. Vysak from Gujarat was sad that he did not have a good house, *"I would like to have a better house"*. The majority of the child participants reported their feelings of sadness and shame for not having a good decent house with basic facilities.

Draft – not to be cited without prior permission of the authors

Most children also reported that they would not want their friends to visit their house out of fear that they would recognize the state of affairs upon the visit. Ambili's mother said, *"This house is given to us from the Panchayath in 2003. It was not so neat then. That's why Ambili doesn't like to invite her friends. She feels ashamed of the situation"*. Some children reported that their houses were very small and therefore, they had no space to study at home. Most of the children in the study reported the desire to have a better house. Shani from Kerala said, *"I am happy in this house. But I wish to have a better house"*.

The pre-occupation of the children to have better housing was clearly reflected in the voices of their parents. One of the parents responded: *"My first priority is to have a house of my own. I don't have much things here. But after building a small house of my own, I want to get a few electronic equipments like washing machine, a fridge, grinder etc which are found in every ones house."*

Lack of medical facilities in poverty arise negative emotions

One of the serious issues of poverty described was that of undue delay in accessing or absence of essential medical care, which leads many to a number of negative emotions like shame, sadness and anger. In most of the situations, elderly people suffer a great deal due to lack of financial resources to seek medical help. Chandran said that the saddest period in his life was that of his inability to provide enough medical care to his elderly mother in the last few years of her life. He said, *"I was very sad that I couldn't look after my mother as much as I wanted or wished. During her very last days, I was not able to give her good treatment. I too became sick and there was no money left with me. So I couldn't take her to the doctor. I asked for my brother's help, which he did as much as he could. But there is a limit to what we all could do. When God decides something, there is no point going against it"*.

Jameela expressed shame along with sadness due to her inability to look after her mother when the elderly lady was once seriously ill. She said, *"The night I was not able to take my mother to hospital ("....sometimes I fail. One such occasion was when my*

mother was very sick and I wanted to take her to hospital. I had no money with me. And when I tried to ask the hotel owner, she too had some urgent case. So I couldn't take my mother to a hospital....") is one instance which made me most ashamed of myself".

Similarly, many adults, men and women, lamented that they felt sad, bad, and shameful about their inability to access good hospital care and treatment because of their poverty. Since treatment in Government hospitals was considered to be bad quality, many of these respondents were reluctant to go to Government hospitals, but are unable to afford to go to private hospitals due to the high cost of treatment there. Many of them reported that they felt ashamed, not about their health care but about their inability to provide health care for their dependents. Ramchandran said, *"Last year when I was not able to take my wife to hospital when she was down with fever, I was totally disturbed and sad. I didn't have anything (money) with me on that day and by night she had high fever. The next morning, I got some money and took her to hospital".* He also added that *"I was most ashamed of myself when I think of that night when I couldn't take my wife to hospital. I felt ashamed of myself because, it's my failure that I didn't have any money with me not even to take my wife to hospital".*

The range of experiences of shame described throughout the study is summarized in table 1.

Impact of Poverty

Apart from their accounts of their impoverished condition, the physical settings and the assets at home of the participants also revealed their poor circumstances. Many of the participants lived in a one room house, where the kitchen, living and bedroom were together. Sometimes, a torn cloth was used as a curtain to separate the kitchen and to provide privacy to women who were involved in household works. There was hardly any ventilation to the house and the floors were mainly made from dried cow dung. The construction and the state of houses gave the feeling that the people who lived there would be easily prone to illness.

Table 1: Sources of shame and their expressions in

Sources of shame	Instances from daily life
Loan/debt related	Asking money from relatives/friends/money lenders Non-repayment of loan/debt from bank/money lenders/relatives/friends Confiscating the land by the bank Bank publicly announcing the sale of the property Selling off land to raise money – to marry off daughters, to meet household expenses, to repay loans Migration to an interior fertile land for cultivation Non-availability of loan due to low possessions Public harassment by the money lenders/household attacks of the money lenders Mortgaging /selling the ornaments of wife
Health related	Suicide/murder of a family member Physical violence from in-laws after the suicide of the spouse Disowning of family members after the suicide of the spouse Lack of proper medicine
Work related	Begging in the street Doing unacceptable work (sexual work, daily wage labor) in the community Doing sexual work out of poverty Shifting to any locality in search of work
Social related	Lack of enough ornaments and clothes Discrimination in - social functions/school/community Absence of decent equipment (pucca house, TV, phone) Inability to take the family out for a social function
Education related	Putting an end to the education of children Transferring children to government schools Unable to pay the fees of the child on time
Hygiene	Absence of a toilet at home or in the community

There were few houses with cement or any other tiled floors. The majority of the respondents did not have a TV, Radio, Mobile, Phone, Fridge, Gas connection, Fan, or any furniture at home, except the typical Indian cot (plastic or rope cots with four legs)

Draft – not to be cited without prior permission of the authors

for sleeping. Newspapers, any magazines, or any books, or anything to provide information about the world outside were rarely observed in the homes of respondents, especially in Gujarat. The majority of them possessed a below poverty line (BPL) ration card.

Respondents reported experiencing poor quality housing and overcrowding in the home. Some of the participants received a partial grant from the Government to build a house. They reported that mostly the houses are of poor quality and infrastructure because they themselves hardly had any money to add to the Government subsidy. The majority of the participants were not satisfied with their present housing. There were participants who were about to lose their house as a result of indebtedness. One woman had pledged her house to a money lender to raise an amount for her daughter's marriage. Another woman Rajamma from Kerala, said, *"The other day also the bank manager called me and asked me to pay some amount..... This is the only thing I have. I can't afford to lose my house."*

Lack of money has serious consequences for the physical and psychological health of the participants. The physical appearance of the respondents indicated the direct impact of poverty. Many of the participants in the study were very lean indicating the scarcity of food and undernourishment. The stresses of continued hard work also had their toll on the health of participants. Raiben from Gujarat said, *"...We are dying by doing hard work...if we work hard we will get....."* Consequently, a considerable amount of what they earned was spent on medicines to keep up their health. The remainder was spent on the family but was not nearly sufficient to meet the needs of the family.

Mostly young children and toddlers from these households or from the neighborhood were also very thin and had minimal or no clothing. One of the reasons for this was that many of these children possess only one outfit and when it went for washing, they had to remain without clothes. Since priority was given to food, respondents reported spending very little money on clothing. Many of the respondents wore torn and filthy clothes. Geographical difference was observed with this pattern, as respondents from Kerala were much more presentable in the way they dressed and carried themselves.

.The psychological impact of poverty was expressed in terms of participants' negative state of mind. They used terms equivalent to "sadness, small, worthless, rejection, dejection, hurt feelings, uncomfortable, mentally disturbed, helplessness, shame, embarrassment, irritation, anger and rage". Jasubhai said, *"We feel sad...if we had money then we could have a better life"*.

2. Social Groups specifically experiencing poverty induced shame

People from lower castes and women were clearly social groups which were highly vulnerable to poverty-induced shame. Apart from these both children and parents also were vulnerable to poverty-induced shame in their social roles. Elderly people, though seen to be vulnerable, often had a better social status in the hierarchical context. However, in contexts where such hierarchy is not valued, they were more vulnerable.

Parents are ashamed if they fail to meet the needs of children due to poverty

Embarrassment, sadness and shame feelings are noted among parents when they fail to meet the needs of their children. This included the inability to provide fees, new clothes, good food for festivals, gifts, toys and medical treatment. Moly said, *"Last year I had taken two pairs of uniform for my daughter, but one was torn within no time. She told me that she feels ashamed to wear the torn one. But, I couldn't get her a second pair and it troubled me a lot. I was embarrassed inside, but told my daughter that I would get a new pair soon. I never told her about the tensions I was having inside.....but I try to comfort myself thinking that there are many other students who do not even have a single pair of uniform or dress....."* Moly hence tried to cope with her feelings of shame by thinking about students who are even less financially sound than her own daughter.

Ramachandran said, *"I try my level best to meet the needs of my children. But at times, due to the shortage of money, I have to put off the purchase of goods for one or two days or even for a week. For example, during last Onam festival, I couldn't buy dress for my children..... I was feeling a bit uncomfortable and mentally disturbed....."*

We came across a family in the state of Maharashtra, where the husband drank a lot of alcohol and the wife was the only bread-winner. Except the eldest son (around 14 years old), all other children (a total of five) were girls. The eldest son was paralysed (and completely bed-ridden) from birth and had no proper care. During the interview, his mother expressed mixed emotions. On the one hand, she was feeling shame due to the disability condition of her eldest son. She often wondered whether her hard work (which was necessary to feed the family) in the agricultural fields during pregnancy had had to the effect of giving birth to a disabled child. On the other hand, she was extremely proud of giving birth to a male child.

Gender related shame in Poverty

(i) Husband's behavior

Many women in the study reported that the behavior of their husbands was a matter of shame for them. Such behaviour reported by the participants ranged from irresponsibility to family matters including the financial affairs, quarrelling publicly, drinking behavior, inconsistency in working, humiliating others for apparently no reason and tobacco addiction. Most of these behaviors are directly linked with the financial condition of the family. Savithaben from Gujarat said, *“He spends so much money for tobacco. It is really sad.. If he gives all that money for household expenses then the household would run smoothly. When I tell him something then he replies back that I earn and I spend, you don't give me money. What to do? It is a real shame (sharam) on me and my children.”*

Rajamma, was sad about the irresponsible behavior of her husband. She married him against her parents' wish. She said, *“I approached a nun for help after my marriage..... After the first meeting I could face her easily till my husband become angry towards her and left the work offered by her. Then I was feeling real shame to meet her because of the behaviour of my husband”*. In response to subsequent questions on her husband's behaviour she said, *“The inconsistency of my husband in the work (working under a person for a few days, then quarrelling with*

him and quitting the work) has made me ashamed. I also feel a bit ashamed or embarrassed in front of others when my husband picks a quarrel or argument with them over silly issues.”

Many women pointed out that they risked their honour while attempting to control the behavior of their husbands, for the sake of better financial management within the home. Subaida said: *“We cannot say exactly how much he earns per day. He never says how much he makes. Even if I ask how much he gets, he says: “appam tinnal pore kuzhi ennano” (why you want to know the means, you get the money) so.... nowadays I don’t ask him. But his earning is based on the number of Pappad he makes. In seasons like Vishu festival, when there is a greater demand, he works overtime to earn some extra amount. But in dull seasons, he somehow manages.”* She pointed out that her husband’s expression is almost like directly saying to keep her hands off financial matters, this, she felt, shatters her honour.

(ii) Women are prone to more shame in social functions/settings

Many women in the present study (specific to Kerala) try to avoid social functions because they think they don’t have enough things to present themselves in a social gathering. Subaida from Wayand said, *“I try to avoid visiting the houses of my neighbours as far as possible. I go there only if there is a real need. For marriages and such social functions my husband goes. Men are more comfortable and understanding than women. A rich man will usually never pretend not to know or tries to ignore his poor relatives. He may not help them or lend money. But usually never consider it shameful to talk in public. But women are not so. The rich ones try to avoid the poor ones in public. So to avoid such embarrassment I usually don’t go to the social functions of the rich”.* She further emphasized that despite religion and caste differences, that differential treatment happens. She attributed this to class. *“I try to talk to our relatives. But some of them come dressed in a very stylish way and act as if they are very rich and proud. To these people I don’t talk much. I even try to avoid them because they are so self important. They may not like us going and talking. We are poor people and do not have much to make a show of as they do. So I don’t know how they will react to me. So I try to avoid them. They are rich. Well dressed. They have many ornaments. But we*

are poor. We may not be as well dressed as they are. So it may be shameful for them to mingle with people like us in public places because they may want to keep their status". She went on to confirm the avoidance behavior as emerging from such shamed contexts. *"Once it happened to me that during a marriage function, I tried to talk to one of our relatives who was rich and well dressed. She was with her friends. She pretended that she doesn't know me at all. It has hurt me a lot. From then onwards I try to avoid my rich relatives. It's not because all will behave in the same way. But we cannot say how each one will react. So why should we put ourselves to shame?"*

Another woman from the Hindu community had a similar issue to voice: Rajalaksmi being asked about her presence in social functions said: *"No they are not of the same financial situation. We are poor compared to them. so when there is some marriages, I used to feel, shy about myself since we do not have much . Though there had been no such situation in my mind I used to feel uncomfortable."*

(iii) Standing in the queue

Some women in the study, especially from Gujarat reported that they felt ashamed of standing in the queue for a long time to collect the food ration. The reasons reported are: shame for being made to stand in the queue due to the irresponsibility of the husband, standing for a long time, sometimes standing in the queue without money to buy rations and so on. Though both men and women stood in the queue, Savithaben felt that because she was a woman, she experienced more shame.

(iv) Widow/single mother/deserted wife and poverty shame

India is a patriarchal society, where the death of the head of the family creates a number of problems for the surviving women. Widowhood is best described as 'social death' in the Indian situation (Chakravarti, 2004). Most of the widow's networks break down with the death of her husband, her authority decreases in the household and she is considered inauspicious in the community (Bhai, 2004). In the present study, we met widows, single mothers and deserted wives.

Jameela, a deserted wife, broke down when she spoke about her life after the desertion, *“The tussle between my husband and myself started when I came to know that he has an affair with another woman. I told him to either stop or marry that woman, as more than one wife is legally allowed in our community. (Crying...). He didn’t listen and one fine morning he left me and my children. I waited for a few days, then called up my brother and left with him to my parents’ house. From then, my life was miserable...Not only the financial hardship, people looked down on me because it was not accepted that a married girl comes back to stay with her parents...I didn’t know what to do....Another sad incident happened during this period was that my brother didn’t like my return and staying with them. So, he constructed a house of his own and moved into the new house leaving us alone with my mother...Life was a question mark in front of me... I have done a lot of work from then. In the initial years, it was hard. I was 17 or 18 then. Not knowing what to do, once I took my two kids to Karapuzha dam¹ (about 30 Km away from my home) with the intention of committing suicide.....However, because of the help of a man who came to the dam with a group of people, me and my children are alive today. Since then, I have been going for any work one can think of. I have worked as a manual laborer, gone for road work, gone for road tarring, carried bricks and rocks, have worked in a the house of a doctor as a kitchen servant. And now I am working in this hotel”.*

Jameela’s life was very hard after her husband left her. Jameela also said, *“I borrowed money from many people, and I could never return it on time and I cannot express what I have felt at those moments. As usual, I felt I became very small and helpless. It’s all my fate that I have to listen to these types of dialogues. I used to feel that if I had my husband or if I were to be rich, I need not have to face these situations. Then I used to feel very sad.”*

An example of the exploitation of widows may be seen in the response of Diwariben, from Gujarat, *“Our ration card is with my brother-in-law. We never use the card”*. Diwariben’s ration card is with her brother-in-law and they have been using the card since the death of her husband. Another issue expressed by Diwariben was that of her

¹ Karappuzha dam

inability to collect widows' pension due to lack of money to give to the Government officials. She said, *"They (the administrative office bearers) told me that you give us Rs. 2000-3000, then we will pass your form...We didn't have money so we didn't give them anything, and they didn't approve my form. We didn't have money, from where would I bring? I felt embarrassed. I feel shame to tell (Kahne me muche sharam aathi hein)... Government should help us; instead they are asking money from us"*.

(v) Shame due to lack of sanitation facilities in the community

Most of the women in Gujarat reported that they are shameful to use fields for toilet purpose. The strength of the sense of shame was expressed in the words of Raiben, *"We are daily laborers and how can we afford a toilet. It doesn't feel good and we feel shame (Humko sharam aathi hei). Everyone keeps coming and going, so we have to stand up 10 times, so we don't like it, but what to do if there is sadness we have to do. We need to bear it"*. Meena, a 16 year old girl, from Gujarat reported that she usually tried to go to the toilet at night because she feared that somebody would see her in the day time. However, she also reported that if there was an urgency she had to go in the day time too.

3. Circumstances/Settings that invoke Poverty-induced shame

The interviewees revealed three specific settings in which poverty-induced shame was intensely felt. While all three instances had implications for wider society, and were not uniquely experienced by those in poverty, the impact was greater for those facing financial hardship. . The settings were a) childlessness or the inability to give birth to male child; b) marriage related and c) caste related. In this section, we elaborate each of them.

Son-less women fail to keep family honor/ is a shame for a married woman

The traditional preference for the sons is deeply rooted in the Indian societal structure. Sons are believed to secure the family's economic future. Many studies have shown that couples have a strong preference for sons in India (Williamson, 1976; Arnold et al,

1996; Visaria et al, 2004). Sons enjoy a great deal of prestige, honor and family support. This traditional value internalization in terms of 'having sons' cannot be diffused at any cost in the Indian culture. Studies have reported that son preference is one of the reasons for the increasing rate of abortion² in India (Visaria et.al, 2004). The increasing rate of abortion and female feticide gives rise to a decreasing sex-ratio (941/1000 as per the 2011 census).

Since girls are married off to different families, many parents believe that having only girls deteriorate family wealth along with honor and family name. Many parents believe that daughters are an economic liability due to the dowry system. However, parents try to keep their honor by raising money required for the marriage of their daughters.

While direct questions on son-preference were not asked in the current study, some women reported that of experiencing shame for not having a son or for having given birth only to girl children. The reasons for why sons were preferred were expressed in terms of economic, social, religious and emotional terms. Since traditional values are highly reinforced in poor communities, mothers believe that the honor of the family may be maintained only through sons: sons add to family wealth and property; perform death rites; continue the family lineage; and provide protection when necessary. Sons can help with the family labor on the farm or business; earn wages and support the family. Upon marriage sons bring some reward in the form of a dowry and the daughter-in-law can be involved in the household tasks and support the family. In the midst of all these perceptions, women reported that having only girl children is a shame for them; they are not able to face their in-laws, other community members, and sometimes even their husbands for the reason that they couldn't give birth to a son.

Son-preference may be seen in the words of Geeta, a 40 year old woman from a village in Gujarat. She said, *"I will send my daughter to school until the 5th or 6th class and then I will stop her education. This is the practice in our place. We don't send girls for higher*

² Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) act of 1971 legally allows an Indian woman to avail abortion if the pregnancy carries the risk of severe physical injury, endangers her mental health, when pregnancy results from a contraceptive failure in a married woman or from rape or is likely to result in the birth of a child with physical or mental abnormalities. Abortion is permitted up to 20 weeks of pregnancy even without spousal consent.

studies, but we send boys. Boys will help us when we are old, but Girls will get married at a younger age and we have to give ring, necklace, watch, earrings, utensils, and whatever is required. Then what is the need to educate her?" However, there are mothers who believe that even though not having a son is a shame, daughters may take over the role of sons. Tejal ben, *"I have two daughters. Nobody says anything to me for not having a son. But the community expects every household to have at least one son. Therefore, I feel shame at times. If I had a son then it would have been good but now that I don't have one... what to do? So now we think our daughters to be our sons...when our daughters will get married, we will have son-in-law, and we will think them to be our sons. Now I feel having daughters are good. Sometimes when we are not well daughters think for us; they come to us and take care but sons don't look after us and they don't worry for us but daughters take care every time"*. Of all the interviews conducted, we did not come across any girl from a poor household who had studied above 7th class in the region of Gujarat.

Violation of traditional practices leads to shame

The notion of family is very central to culture and society in India. Thus, marriage occupies an important place not only in the lives of the individual, but also in that of the family, extended family and the caste members of a particular geographical community. The tradition of arranged marriages³ and the dowry system have key roles in determining honour/shame.

Dowry related shame:

Though initially the intention of the dowry system was good; to keep a place for the woman inside the house (seen as inheritance rights of women given at the time of

³ The traditional Indian society favors arranged marriages. Historically, arranged marriages were raised to prominence in the Indian subcontinent when the Vedic religion gave way to classical Hinduism (around 500 BC). Before this period, India had a wide variety of wedding systems, for example; Swayamvara, Gandharva marriage and so on. Many of these systems were more or less like the 'love marriages' of the modern era. However, with the evolvement of classical Hinduism, many of the teachings of "Manu" gained prominence, and large sections of Indian society moved towards patriarchy and caste-system. The shift has caused the evolvement of the institution of arranged marriages too. In arranged marriages, the families of both bride and groom reach upon certain consensus to marry off their offspring. Any difficulties occur to the couple are met by both the families and they live under the support of the families.

marriage), its purpose has drastically changed over the years. Though the dowry system is prohibited by law⁴, this practice is still prevailing in all religions and castes in India. A small dowry is a shame to a girl. In a similar way, a boy capable of fetching a small sum for a dowry also faces shame. The value of a married girl (in the in-laws house) has become dependent on the amount of dowry she brings from her home. Therefore, the family has to gather a big amount to marry off a girl and this pressure frequently places the family in a situation of financial hardship. Those at the lowest in the social and economic hierarchy of the society fall into poverty after the marriage of a girl. Official statistics show that more than 6,000 women are killed every year in India over dowry related issues. 32.4% of crimes against women are attributed to dowry-related violence. Dowry-related shame was described as one of the situations generating serious disgrace for many parents in the study. Inability to provide a dowry put many young girls and family members into shame and dishonor. Paulose, an elderly person from Wayanad, recollected that one of the most shameful moments in his life was that of the break –up of his daughter’s engaged marriage due to his failure to provide the agreed dowry. *“My daughter’s marriage was scheduled to be held in Feb, 2003. The practice is that the dowry should be given on the day of engagement. Somehow I couldn’t give and I asked them to extend the date. I asked many of my rich relatives and friends, but nobody helped me and I myself couldn’t make anything. I told the groom’s family that it would take another two or three days to bring the money. They got angry with me for extending further and further. Finally they said, they are not interested in continuing with the marriage. They also insulted me saying that I may not give the dowry even after the marriage and hence they are not ready to take a risk..... Of course, I was too ashamed at this.... This left a black mark on my daughter too....An*

⁴ The Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961 - In this act, ‘dowry’ means any property or valuable security given or agreed to be given either directly or indirectly-

(a) by one party to a marriage to the other party to the marriage; or

(b) by the parents of either party to a marriage or by any other person, to either party to the marriage or to any other person;

at or before or any time after the marriage in connection with the marriage of said parties but does not include dower or mahr in the case of persons to whom the Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) applies.

Draft – not to be cited without prior permission of the authors

unusual thing happened.... Generally, after the engagement, a marriage hardly breaks-up in our culture. This was a great shame to me, my family, especially my daughter. Then I understood the value of money, how much poor people like us suffer and are ashamed”.

Eloping with someone is a shame in the traditional Indian society

In a society where arranged marriages are a tradition and an overwhelming majority of the population accounts for this, elopement of a girl is considered a severe shame for the parents and family members. Love marriages are not accepted even in urban societies. One of the main reasons of love marriages that popped up in the interview was a lack of money for the parents to provide a dowry. Babu said that his sister married against his parents' wish, but it was her own decision. She in fact eloped with her lover. The major reason for her to take such a step was having irresponsible parents and their inability to marry her off.

On the contrary to the above argument, two women reported that they went against their parents wish, not because their parents didn't have money, but because they couldn't think of anything else, but only love of their partner. Both of them reported that they have caused serious shame to their parents, and family members. In the words of Sreedevi, *“I come from a well to do family. I completed my SSLC and when I was doing my PDC, I met George. He was then a sales man in a stationary shop in Erumeli, Kerala. My parents came to know about our relationship and I got a lot of shouting and beating from my father... He even asked me to stop my studies... Apart from that, he went and met George and threatened him...His argument was that I was not mature enough to enter into a relationship...Moreover, as I knew, George was a salesman and belonged to a different religion...Therefore, I knew that everything is going to affect the family honor. And I was pretty sure that my parents were never going to get me married to him. So I decided to put an end to the relationship and I promised my parents that I will not continue my relationship with George. But George used to come to college bus stop etc and persisted in continuing with the relationship. This brought back my courage..... Very soon, I forgot my promise I made to my parents and we decided to get married. When I was in the 2nd year of my studies, I was hardly 18 years then, we*

decided to get married and one day, in the pretext of going to college, I started off from my home. We spent that night together at Ernakulam..... My life was not smooth as I had expected.....George developed an affair with another girl in three years and left me.....I was left alone with my only son.....I thought about my parents. My parents never contacted me after I ran away. However, One day I made a call to them, but when they come to know that it was me, they cut the phone and I felt very sad. But I had expected this when I left them. I had taken the determination that now anything happens to me I am responsible and so I was willing to face the consequences. The pain I gave them was much more powerful. Compared to that, it is nothing. I made them ashamed in front of our relatives and friends; it is hard for them to forgive.”

Sreedevi’s parents could never forgive her. She eloped with a salesman and created severe shame for the family members. In a country like India, love marriages even with the consent of parents are not very welcomed. Such actions are a serious shame to the family members and the relatives. There is another belief in Indian traditional culture that if we cause pain to our parents and they curse in return, nothing good will happen to the children. In the case of Sreedevi, she believes, this might have come true.

Cultural labeling and shaming

(i) Caste and shame

Anil, a student of 16 years from Paniya community- a poor tribal group of Wayanadu, Kerala, said, *“Many times in the school, especially in my previous school, students made fun of me by calling my caste name. Even my neighbors insult me even now by calling my caste name... (His sister and mother also said that they are being humiliated in many places for being a tribal group)..... In the school and in the neighborhood, there are some types of partiality towards us. It is because of the caste difference and also because of the financial difference.”* On a further question on if he was ever ill-treated by the elderly people, he said, *“They usually make fun of us and insult us by making remarks such as “your caste people.. do like this....like that....””*

Chandran, Anil's father reported that because of their lower caste and poverty, they are always excluded from the mainstream society, *"We are tribals. People look down upon us as a separate set of people. Though we say untouchability is no more, everyone does it in one form or other. When we are at a marriage function, for example, many may not like us sitting with them or at the time of the main dinner. We are expected to sit at the last. When some important people come, we are expected to give our chair or our place where we are sitting to them in case there are no empty seats. Generally, we are invited if there is a function in the neighborhood, but in just a casual manner. I have often felt that we do not receive a warm welcome. I don't think of this as ill-treatment, but it's how our society behaves. It is in the blood of everyone...And it is in our blood too. When we go for some functions or meetings, usually we sit at the last seat or we occupy a corner seat. Somehow we are not comfortable to sit in front. And no one expects us to do so."*

Lower caste people reported that they are always given some unhygienic work and treated unequally in the society. Chandran said, *"We are always treated unequally. Maybe people think that this is the way to treat us. And we have learned to accept it as part of our life. So we don't get any ill-feeling. In all the activities we are treated as inferior to others. If there is some work to be done, the least important work and the most unhygienic work are given to us. There can be situations when a non-tribal person is not able to carry out a work but a tribal person is willing to do it.... There is some work a non-tribal is not willing to do but a tribal man does it most happily. For instance, in the house over there, their dog was killed and they found the dead animal after two days when it began to smell only. So no one else was willing to do it. At last they came to me to bury it and I did it. I think the general trend is that whenever there is an unhygienic work, the first preference is a tribal man or a tribal woman. It is everywhere the same"*.

Children feel inadequate about their condition (e.g. to take free lunch, school kit etc from the school) when compared with other children who don't come under this categorization.

Strong regional differences could be observed here. Though everyone was lower castes no one from Gujarat, reported that they experience shame or any discrimination from

the higher caste. But the responses received from Kerala were a contradiction to this argument. Lower caste people reported experiences of shame and their feelings of being dejected. Various studies have shown how difficult it is for the poor lower castes to raise their voices when they are not emancipated. Kerala society is much more developed in their education, literacy, compared to Gujarat and there is a political culture in Kerala which allows lower caste community members to organize. The differences in the ways people from Gujarat and Kerala were willing and able to voice their experiences can in part be attributed to these wider societal and political differences.

(ii) Poor and Non-poor

The mid day meal (Uchakkanji) is available for students who come under certain categories of poverty in India. In Government run schools, it is available for everyone. Generally, the students of lower classes go for this, but students of higher secondary classes generally do not go. The reason was given by Shani is that *“Yes I know, mid day meals are available in the school. Somehow I am not comfortable and I don’t like to go for mid day meal in the school. Because, noone else in my class goes. Therefore, I feel shame thinking what others will think about me. If at least one student goes, I too will go for the lunch”*. Most of the student respondents reported that they used to go for meals up to 8th standard and then they stopped. Akhil reported that, *“No one goes for Uchakkanji including me. This may be because of the self-esteem or ego... May be thinking that going for Uchakkanji will reduce their self esteem... I am willing to go for Uchakanji and I have asked my friends to come. But no one else is willing to come. So I thought better not to go for it. How can I go alone? My friends will make fun of me. So I don’t want to go for it”*.

The above responses indicate that most of the children considered provision of free meals as inducing shame (notice a contrasting experience with that of adults regarding classifying to the below poverty line (BPL) vs above poverty line (APL) distinctions in section 5). Being categorised as poor in a single group cannot be tolerated by many students. Here many students fell under the social pressure of not going for a mid day

meal. Most of the students reported that they don't go for noon meal just because no one else from my class goes. Children also felt that they were segregated in the school because they were poor. Few reported that some of the children from well off families did not respond or talk to them. Some participants reported that this made them remain silent and withdraw from social activities in the school.

Apart from these three circumstances which are elaborated, we noticed drastic differences in spatial settings which induced shame in both children and adults. For children, the settings of the school, Church and Community were critical. Gracy (16 year old girl) from Kerala said: *"I feel discriminated since primarily the people there in church are interested to talk to people who are rich and well-off. Since I am not from a rich background, I find I don't have friends there and I feel isolated"*. Gracy also reported her embarrassment to go and bring groceries on credit, *"when there are not many people I do it quickly and come back home. But, sometimes, I wait for others to go away to avoid others seeing that I seek credit"*. On the other hand, for adults, Home, community and setting of social functions were the testing points. Children pointed out that many of the instances that occur in school, which induced shame, such as being made to stand when given a wrong answer in the class room, unable to pay school fees, taking midday meals, receiving a school bag, notebook, or umbrella, categorization as poor or lower caste are related to their family circumstances of being poor. On the other hand, adults experienced poverty-related shame at home when they were unable to rise to the expectations of other family members or unable to meet wider social expectations.

4. Coping Strategies of the persons experiencing Poverty-induced Shame

To understand the coping strategies of shame, it is important to appreciate the time-space contextualization of human action (Giddens, 1984).⁵ Continued exposure to

⁵ Time-space contextualization of human action could be understood through a simple example. A person who is working as a vehicle mechanic happens to be looking horrible with grease, paint, dust etc on his working dress. A friend who passes by jokes, 'Shameful, you look pathetic'. The mechanic takes it light as he is aware about the routine nature of getting affected by dirt and cleaning in the evening. In the same way, space also determines the depth of shame that one person experiences. In a social space where a person is known to everyone else, chances of shame are closely associated with the status as given in that social space. On the other hand, in an anonymous

Draft – not to be cited without prior permission of the authors

shame experiences and social exclusion may lead people to internalize shame and behave in a subsequent manner. We found this to be an important reason as to why shame is embedded within certain social institutions. The following conversation between the interviewer and Chandran, a tribal man from Wayanadu, is an example for this tendency to internalize shame.

Question: Can you tell me the situations where you are treated not equal to others?

Answer: The social set up is like that. Except in my house and in the house of my in-laws or family members or in the functions organized by tribal people, we are treated not equally with others. When it comes to any functions organized by non-tribal people, tribals are treated as second class people. We are invited to the functions. But when we are there we are not treated as equal.

Question: Do you feel insulted or what do you feel then?

No. We don't feel insulted. We have learned to accept it as our social status. If we feel insulted, do you think people will be going for these social functions? This is the way our society is made. So these practices are accepted by everyone.

There is therefore evidence of acceptance of shame as embedded in being part of the social institution of the caste. There are occasions when such embeddedness may be challenged through the exercise of agency at various levels. Sometimes this takes the form of rebelling against oft-assigned works, sometimes joining particular types of political parties which have leaning ideologies to challenge existing social institutions. Therefore, emergence of agency was critically important. For example, a common theme that emerged from the interviews with children was that they were adjusted to their current state of affairs (with occasional disturbances).⁶ On the other hand, parents

place, only wide universal norms can be held as benchmarks for shame, and not the social status of individual. Both time and space acts as contexts to anticipate shame as temporary or long duration.

⁶ Children dreamed about a good job only with an aim to support their family financially, but not for any independent reason. Ragisha (17 year old girl) from Kerala who was going to the 12th standard was the eldest in her home. Her dad was mentally ill and mother had eloped with another man. She had three younger brothers. She said: "I have to gain a job so that I can support education of younger brothers and younger sister, and build a new house for us and take care of my dad as much as possible".

aspire for a good future for their children. This led us to examine the involvement of agency in coping.

Dynamics of Parents and Children

While discussing coping strategies, the discursive relationship in mutual understanding between parents and children in financial constraints cannot be neglected. The experiences of poverty are more or less similar when compared between parents and children. However, most of the school going children felt that they experienced much hardship, and many believed that if they were rich, they could have more opportunities. Some of them felt unable to choose a profession which they liked and they are good at because of their parents' poverty. However, none of the children in the study thought that their parents did not do things for them. Most of them reported that though they were sad about the impoverished condition, they knew that their parents did their best to help them in their studies. One of the interesting observations was that many of the parents were in need of and wanted to access welfare programmes. However, while children favoured minority scholarships etc in school, none of them wanted to be a part of welfare schemes in the form of material goods like school bags, books, umbrellas or even midday meals.

A striking point was made by Jameela, where she saw that her son was abused as a consequence of her poor economic background. She had to put her elder son in an orphanage (a welfare house) after her husband left her for another woman. Jameela said, *“.....My son was staying in an orphanage due to my financial difficulties..... One day I came to know from his school that he was absent for many days in the school..... When I enquired in the orphanage, they told me that he was going to school every day and comes back in the evening...Later on, I found out that he fell in to a bad company and was abused in the hostel. His friends compelled him to quit his classes.... I was very sad and ashamed to hear about my son.....Thinking of his future, I brought him back home.....”*

Most of the parents reported that they are sad and disturbed when they cannot meet the needs of their children. The simple needs of children vary from having a good pair of

chappal to good clothes. Chandran said, “*My worries are about my children. There are times when I am not able to give them the best they need. My children understand our situations and so limit themselves and their demands. But I wish if I had enough resources to give them better things like better food, better clothes, a better house, and better conveniences for their studies and so on*”.

Especially on occasions when milestone education is completed (such as 10th standard or 12th standard), there was great turmoil in the households of poor people regarding the next educational step for their children. Sometimes the turmoil was about whether education had to be terminated. At other times, it was about which stream of education (skill-based or other-wise) that a child should choose. Children showed extreme flexibility in poor households not to embarrass parents in their demands.

Classification of coping strategies

The analysis showed that poor people use three types, of coping mechanisms to overcome shame: *problem-oriented, self-oriented and others’ perception oriented* (see table 2). To conceptualize the coping strategies in use by poor people, the present study has adopted the theoretical background of Lazarus and Folkman, (1984) stress coping strategy and Nathanson’s (1992) compass of shame. An additional category of *others’ perception-oriented style* was also found. Since the poor people in the present study prefer problem-oriented coping to the other two coping strategies, the analysis provides an emphasis on this approach.

Table 2: Coping styles in relation to the categories of shame and the behavioral manifestations of coping

Categories of shame	Coping styles	Behavioral manifestations
Inferiority Powerlessness Weakness Helplessness Isolation Embarrassment Dishonor Disgrace Discrimination	Problem-focused	Finding out other source of income (job, business, other agricultural farming, dairy, poultry), investing more on land (region wise variation), consults others on further farming, cut down household and festive expenses, selling off land and moving to a more fertile region, remarriage of suicide widows, comes to terms with the suicide of husband/son, send children for professional courses like nursing for good and immediate return
Helplessness Self-loathing Self-doubt Loneliness Worthlessness Inferiority	Emotion-focused	discontinue a daily activity, blaming/attacking others, blaming the weather and not doing anything, resort to alcohol, avoiding shame provoking situations, increased spiritual activities
Powerlessness Inferiority Dishonor Weakness	Others' perception - focused	Leading various activities, Disseminating knowledge to gather good impression, humble and highly hospitable, providing lots of advice, helping others more than one could do, Increased spiritual activities

Problem-oriented: To understand the problem-oriented coping, the story of Purnia is very apt. Purnia, an 18-year-old-girl from Ganjam district of Orissa, started working in a poultry farm since her family was doomed by crop failures and debt. Although many women work in the poultry farm, sending unmarried and young girls were not accepted in the village. Since her working hours were also slightly odd (from 7pm in the evening), villagers started gossiping about Purnia and the family. Initially she was very sad and

shameful. Later, she decided to turn her ears away from the villagers for her survival. Purnia's family members suffered severe shame, because of poverty, debt and non-repayment of the loan. To escape from this shame, the family took a joint decision that all possible members should work and generate income. Hence, poverty was directly addressed in the family. This problem-oriented approach was found to be effective on the one hand not on the other. Purnia was being shamed for working in the poultry farm. In the face of poverty induced shame, being gossiped was secondary to Purnia. Though her 'self' was attacked directly in the latter, she stood up for the 'family self' to strive against shame.

Emotion-oriented: In the category of emotion-focused coping, we noticed three types of mechanisms. These are withdrawal, avoidance and attacking others.

Withdrawing or hiding from the money lender because of the fear of being harassed in public was the primary form of withdrawal among the poor people under study. Borrowing was common in distress, for which the shame was not as intense as this was a common community response following a crop failure. But being harassed either in public or in private for not repaying the amount induced much more shame where the target becomes a single individual. Therefore, the simplest way to escape from this was to pull out from the situation. Because of the inability to repay the loan, many of the poor people in the present study felt ashamed and found ways to avoid a face-to-face interaction with the money lender.

The ultimate withdrawal seen among the farming community in India in the last decade is suicide. Since shame plays a role in the psychodynamics of suicidal behavior (Breed, 1972; Kalafat & Lester, 2000), the suicides among agricultural farmers in India may be considered as a withdrawal from the shame of poverty. Table 1 shows that inability to repay the loan, mounting interest, repeated crop failure, and being harassed for not repaying the debt are some of the sources of shame among farmers. Those who cannot deal with shame have a tendency to protect the self from further encounters with shame. Suicide is one such action, where freedom from all stressful or shameful

encounters is done consciously. Suicide may also be interpreted as an action of *attacking self* by yielding to a higher power, death. Feeling of unworthiness and inferiority may sometimes make the person attack the 'self' with a permanent liberation. In suicide this permanency may be expected. In actuality, the inability to deal effectively with shame results in the disintegration of the self, where the existence of the self is being denied.

Avoidance behavior was also observed among people living in poverty. Resorting to alcohol in the face of problems was common as far as the participants in the study were concerned. Linkappa, from Dhakshina Kannada district of Karnataka, most of the time finds relief in alcohol. He started drinking when his share of land was given for cultivation. His income was nowhere near enough to meet the needs of his big family; he has 6 children- five girls and one boy – two from his first wife and four from his second wife. His mother said, "He never makes enough money to feed his children. Whatever, he makes goes to the local arrack shop". There are other cases also where participants described this type of avoidance behavior. Upendra Singh is a farmer from Gaya district of Bihar. His wife said, "He started excessive drinking after crop failure".

The above cases provide reasons to think that shame may be solved by alcohol (Nathanson, 1992). While Linkappa could never earn enough to meet the needs of his family, Upendra Singh's financial back up was completely destroyed after the crop failure. Presumably to forget the reality, both of them resorted to alcohol. The intoxicated state might be a good option for them to free them from all anxieties and tensions. Since happiness is the phenomenological experience when intoxicated, the person is undoubtedly free from shame. Therefore, such behaviors may be considered as avoidance mechanisms used by the farmers in order to escape from the severity of shame. Another defense presented in the study was *attacking others*.

Thomman is a 40 year old farmer from Wynadu district of Kerala. He lost his main chunk of land by investing in business. Being a farmer, he could not succeed in business and faced great loss. Whenever someone made a remark about this, he

became angry and shouted back. Thomman's sisters often bore the brunt of his anger. Thomman's case is a clear example of how shame triggers unwanted behavior in people. When Thomman directed his anger towards his sisters, who are far away, he developed more self-esteem. It seemed Thomman sensed relief from shame while shouting at or attacking others. In this way he protected himself from being exposed to further shame.

In the present study, some poor people who feared exclusion as a result of withdrawal (Nathanson, 1992), moved to the opposite pole of *attacking self* by becoming subservient to the money lender or a higher authority. For example, rather than hiding from the money lender, few participants in the study started decided to labor in the money lenders' farm. In this case, they were saved from the harassment, they may be saved from not repaying the loan and they also acquired a strong relationship with the money lender, which might have helped save them from further humiliation.

Other person's perception oriented: An additional coping strategy observed among the poor people in the present study was that of "try to-be good in others' eyes". The aim was for a person to present himself at his best in others' eyes. This may be a contradiction when talking about the negative consequences of inadequate responses to the feeling of shame. The actions in this style are oriented towards 'pleasing others' in order to obtain a good reaction and to help poor people surmount feelings of being inferior and powerless (table 2) owing to severe financial loss. Like any other defensive coping mechanism, the actions in this style also protect the person from further self - disintegration. The ultimate goal in this position is to develop a positive self-image, by developing a positive value of the 'self' in the eyes of others. Thus the judgment of the value of the self is through the evaluation of others. This is exactly what Mead (1934) explained in his 'self theory' that a person's self-image is the reflection she sees in her fellow-beings' reaction.

We have already seen that crop failures and other related factors lock a family into debt and shame of poverty. However, some farmers with others' perception oriented coping

Draft – not to be cited without prior permission of the authors

were drawn into debt and poverty primarily due to inadequacy in handling money and land. Jaisingh Valvi, once a large landholder, from Nandurbar district of Maharashtra, now owns six acres of land. Since he sold off his land for one or other purpose, he lost the status of a 'big farmer'. He has replaced this shame with his exemplary helping nature. For Paulose, talking and advising helps replace the lost status of a 'rich farmer'. Paulose was once the richest farmer in the region, but now owns very little and is in debt. Although he lost all his property, he engages in long conversations with others. In his words, "I can speak to anyone; everyone likes my way of talking". The shame of losing all their possessions and mounting debt seem to have put them in a state of weakness. Therefore, fulfilling actions which are socially recognized compensate and provide self-esteem. The study showed seven farmers of this kind..

5. Counter-Indicators to poverty-related shame from the perspectives of the poor people

Through talking to people in poverty, we observed a number of mechanisms which run counter to the strong connection between shame and poverty. This section summarises those mechanisms.

Survival instincts make people shameless to receive help in poverty

Though receiving help from relatives, friends or neighbours was a common practice in collective communities like that of rural contexts in India, shamelessly seeking help was often distinguished. This distinction has roots in the informal rules, (informed by the moral norms of a particular community) which are used while monitoring the needs of its members (O'Brien and Penna, 1998:196; Mosse, 2004). Without this distinction, it is easy to identify many of our members as shameless at times to receive help from others. Rather than shamelessness, this may be argued as their urge to survive or overcome the hardship they face. Rajamma reported that on the instance where she was most ashamed, "*I think it was the time when I went to meet the nun to request her help. I was feeling very uncomfortable when I met the sister after my husband quarreled with her and left the work*". The help that is sought is definitely not sought as 'right'. The

Draft – not to be cited without prior permission of the authors

mixed emotions that the seeker experiences is an indication of the same. When Moly was asked about how she felt about the teacher paying her daughter's school fees, she said, *"I cannot say what my feelings in those days were. All I could feel is gratitude to the teachers. May be, if I am not able to pay the fees now, I may be embarrassed. But in those days, it was a struggle for survival. So any help from any one was welcomed and I have never felt reluctant in accepting it"*.

No shame experienced while branded as poor in the context of accessing government schemes

Throughout the research, we observed a competition among people to get onto the Below Poverty Line list. Below Poverty Line list is prepared by government every five years and often inclusion and exclusion errors are politically motivated (Hirway, 2003). One of our respondents said that if a household *"feels shame and don't want to appear in the BPL list, loss is theirs. Households which have hundreds of acres of land are in BPL list. So, why to be ashamed of?"*. To another household we asked a question: *"Since you are in the BPL list, it is almost like someone coming and writing on your wall of the house that you are poor (garib). Does it shame you?"*. The respondent laughed and answered: *"In the village everyone knows each other's economic status. There is nothing to hide. Getting into BPL also shows how capable you are. Village leader will voluntarily put your name in BPL list if you are voiceful, belonging to his party or if he has some support of your population such as caste leader. It is when you have nothing of these that you have to beg to him to add your name in BPL list"*.

Caste induces much more shame than poverty

Many of our respondent pointed out that caste is more powerful than poverty in inducing shame. Moly is a Roman Catholic (RC) woman from Wayanad district of Kerala. During the interview it was observed that she is a member of a Latin Catholic group (LC). When asked she said, *"Many LCs doesn't join the group. I think they are like SC/ST who won't accept the benefits given to them by govt"*. She further said, *"LCs are to a large extent ashamed of their status as LC, because LCs are converts from lower castes. The way they behave is like they do not want to accept any of the help that is*

given to them except if it is given in cash. If the help is basically in an individual level, everyone wants to have it, but if it is in a group very few opt for it. For example, last year a tuition program with scholarship was organized for poor students in the church. The program was for 50 students, but only 12 students turned up. May be this is because of their shame”.

Moly feels that the shame related to caste is more powerful than the shame associated with poverty. According to her, *“My feeling is that the ways this LC people behave make us feel that they have some kind of inferiority complex. What I have seen is that if there is any help given like distributing study aid to students, or some classes for parents etc, the number of LCs who turn up for these is very few. Last year, the Church provided LC students with notebooks, school bags and umbrellas. But very few approached to avail this benefit. But I know a number of parents who struggle to buy these for their school going children. Don’t you think that it is because of their feeling of shame of being categorized as SC/ST that they do not go and accept this support?”*

Anil’s response on the question of discrimination based on financial background in the school also points to this argument. Anil said, *“On the basis of financial background there is no ill treatment in the class. But the way they (students) talk to us make us feel that they (the higher castes) expect that we should not go and speak to them. They are thinking that they may be talking things which are beyond our understanding or concepts”.*

Children frequently get into identity related issues due to social exclusion arising from poverty and lower caste. Many children of lower castes avoid social functions with other castes due to caste discrimination. This was observed during the interviews with Anil, a lower caste boy of 16 years. He reported being insulted and looked down on by others. Therefore, in his responses he appeared confused and struggling to get a proper identity in the community where he lives and belongs. He says, *“I am hurt with the insults... I experience their contempt towards my community. They behave towards us in such a way at any situation even when we are walking on the road. I experience this in all situations, including any social function. I feel it from their looks. They even say*

Draft – not to be cited without prior permission of the authors

the same just straight to our face. They say you are in this way and that way even now. ... You still live in the old style...How am I supposed to live?"

He went on to explain that at his present school, he doesn't experience much caste-based discrimination. However, in a previous school he described facing lots of difficulty due to insults from his classmates.

Anil's mother reported that he doesn't have many friends in the school and the reason Anil said was a clear indication of his issues with his identity in the school. He said, "*I have friendship in my heart. I don't like to mingle or get socialized very fast. I keep my friendship within me. All are not my friends. If there are 50 students, only a few of them are my friends*". On a further question about whether he had experienced any prejudice from the behavior of other students, he said, "*Yes I have felt some times. The behavior is not shown outwardly, but it is shown in their conversation. Suppose when I ask them some things, they just say one word and go away without continuing the conversation, sometimes they don't even respond. So I feel it is better not to speak to these students*".

Conclusion

In an important way, the question of poverty-induced shame challenges the very basic notion of 'social'. One needs to reinvent the question of 'what is social' in a significant way to comprehensively understand the layers of human experience such as shame. The competing schools of 'social consists in interaction' and 'social consists in communication (meanings)' converge in a significant way while studying shame. The eagerness that poor people showed to meet social obligations, despite their poverty, is directly relevant. The symbolic meanings hidden in carrying out social obligations clearly indicated the ways in which social interaction could be carried forward. If people stopped being able to carry out symbolic social interactions, then they became excluded. Thus, though to an outsider the extravagance of marriage ceremonies and death rituals appeared to be unnecessary spending for a poor household, in effect people's participation in these rituals were an exercise of agency which enabled them to redeem their honour and status in the community.

This paper has shown that in collective societies and traditional contexts, poverty-induced shame is mixed with the shaming components of the moral norms of society. For instance, shame generating circumstances such as male children preferences, caste, dowry, women's need to appear gracefully at social functions, are experienced by non-poor households too. For the poor households, these experiences become more intense. While for the non-poor households, there could be other methods of coping with such experiences by diverting attention to other matters, the non-poor houses often fall into fighting and accusing each other (thus, denting the cooperative ways of getting out of poverty).

As evidenced in the paper, we further noticed that continued exposure to shame often paralyses the agency of the person experiencing it and thus forces him/her to accept that as part of the social structure. Society legitimizes this through its process of categorization into lower-case/upper-caste, rural-urban, poor/non-poor, vernacular-universal etc. Eventually, people find their comfort zones within such socially defined structures. We observed children's attempts to transcend these structures (at symbolic level by being friends with 'other') while at the same time being limited by their given ontologies (physical circumstances).

References

- Arnold, F., Minja, K. C. & Roy, T.K. (1996). *Son preference, the family building process, and child mortality in India*. East-West Center Working Papers, Population Series, No. 85. Honolulu: East-West Center.
- Bhai, L. T. (2004). *Widows in India*. Delhi: B. R. Publishing Corporation.
- Breed, W. (1972) "Five components of a basic suicide syndrome", *Life-Threatening Behaviour* 2 (1) 4-18.

Draft – not to be cited without prior permission of the authors

- Chakravarti, U. (2004). Gender, caste and labour: The ideological and material structure of widowhood. In M. A. Chen (Ed.), *Widows in India: Social neglect and public action* (pp. 63-92). New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Giddens, A. (1984). *The constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hirway, I. (2003). Identification of BPL households for poverty alleviation programmes. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 38(45).
- Axel Honneth, A. (1995) *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Kalafat, J. & Lester, D. (2000) "Shame and Suicide: A case study", *Death Studies* 24 (2) 157-162.
- Lazarus, R. & Folkman, S. (1984) *Stress, appraisal and coping*, New York: Springer Publishing Company.
- Mead, G. H. (1934) *Mind, self and society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Mosse, D. (2004). Is good policy unimplementable? Reflections on the ethnography of aid policy and practice. *Development and Change*, 35(4), 639-671.
- Nathanson, D. (1992) *Shame and Pride: Affect, sex and the birth of the self*. New York: W. W. Norton and Company.
- O'Brien, M., & Penna, S. (1998). *Theorising welfare: Enlightenment and modern society*. London: Sage publications.
- Visaria, L., Ramachandran, V., Ganatra, B. & Kalyanwala, S. (2004). Abortion in India: Emerging Issues from qualitative studies. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 39(46/47), 5044-5052.
- Williamson, N.E. (1976). *Sons or daughters: A cross-cultural survey of parental preferences*. Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications.

Appendix 1: Data collection

This appendix provides detailed information on the way data collection was conducted in two states of India – Kerala and Gujarat – for the WP2 of the Shame of Poverty project. A total of 60 interviews were carried out and details of these interviewees are provided in Table 1.

Table 1: The table showing the total number of interviews

Region	Adults		Children		Senior citizens	Combined	Total
	Male	Female	Boys	Girls			
Gujarat	5	8	8	5	1	Parent 1	27
Kerala	6	10	7	8	2	Parent 1	33
Total	11	18	15	13	3	4	60

Selection of adults and children for the purpose of interviews were done differently. The nature of data collection also varied for both these groups. First, we will briefly explain how the selection was done. Then the nature of interview process will be explained in this appendix.

Selection of respondents

We decided to treat household as unit of data collection. A household may be a joint family – generations living together, or a nuclear family, or an extended family. While selecting the households, looked into two dimensions 1) How government anti-poverty policies may be shaping shame. 2) In contexts where government intrusion is not happening what sort of shame is taking place. For the first aim, we selected households availing social welfare schemes. For the second aim, we decided to ask additional questions to farmers in economic distress (additional list of questions are provided at the end of this appendix).⁷

⁷⁷ In total it is estimated that 199, 132 farmers have committed suicide since 1997, according to National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB). A number of studies have shown how shame is closely attached with processes of debt-death cycle. A typical case from these studies is as follows: “This family belongs to the de-notified community. They own six-acres of land out of which one acre is irrigated. This farmer incurred an expenditure of Rs.40000 on the marriage of his daughter five years back. After that, due to repeated crop failure of pulse tur, cotton and the cereal jowar, he incurred a term loan of Rs. 35000 from a bank.

Our first challenge was to identify households which are availing social welfare schemes such as National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS)⁸, Public Distribution System (PDS)⁹, or other pension schemes. From our previous experience of collecting data by using the existing database with government, we knew such database is often very thin and did not provide required information to reach a respondent. Many times such database also includes well-off households who have gained access to such schemes by paying bribe or similar strategies. So, we adopted an approach in which we built rapport with the village community (from where we intended to do respondents) through frequent visit. We explained we were interested to carry out a research on poverty and community perceptions about anti-poverty programmes at this stage. Our frequent visit was helpful to establish links with important community institutions such as school, local government office, public distribution system, shop keepers etc.

During these visits we kept an eye as to who could be potential interviews. In rural areas of India, poor households are often visible by way of poor housing amenities, dressing pattern etc. We directly approached these households to establish connections with them and to gain their confidence to talk to them. This ground work is very important in Indian rural context –with limited education and awareness, where poor people distrust outsiders, who are perceived as government officials who may be coming to ‘prey’ them or business people who may be using some exploitative tactics. Some of the adult respondents came through this approach. Our rapport building also led to a situation where government officials and shopkeepers pointed to us who are perceived to be poor people in the community. This was a good solution given the information asymmetry about the scope of poverty. We systematically visited these

He also had a crop loan that was a regular account. He had to sell off his gold, three buffaloes, and utensils. While the cost of cultivation increased, output reduced by 50% and he still had two daughters to be married. It was reported that a 10% bribe had to be paid to get the bank loan. He committed suicide on 24th June 2004. The family received government compensation of Rs. one lakh.” (YASHADA, 2006).

⁸ A scheme that turned typical public works programmes into a guarantee by an act of parliament in 2005. The aim is to provide cash for skilled persons seeking work, as well as to generate assets (roads, dams etc) through the work in rural areas.

⁹ PDS is primarily a social welfare and antipoverty program of the government of India, but managed by state governments. PDS provides rationed amounts of basic food items (rice, wheat, sugar, soft cakes, and edible oils) and other non-food products (kerosene, coal, standard cloth) at below market prices to consumers through a network of fair price shops disseminated across the country.

households are checked whether this community perception was correct or not. Some adult respondents were selected in this fashion.

As we had said earlier, in the stage of rapport building, schools were point of contact that was built relationship with. In the schools teachers came from outside the community, and they enjoyed conversing with outside researchers. This provided an opportunity for us to unobtrusively engage in conversation with the teachers about poor children and how they were treated. We also expressed interest to interact with those children in whose houses we already had visited as part of selecting adult respondents. However, took the responsibility to inform the parents of the concerned children.

Method of Interviews

A semi-structured interview schedule was used to discipline the conversation with adults (see interview schedules at the end of this appendix). The participants were encouraged to talk freely on the experience of poverty driven shame. Some of the interviews lasted for 60-70 minutes. However, many interviews were as short as 30 minutes. Generally, the interviews were short with men, who was pressed with going for work. Most of the interviews were held inside the house. This was extremely difficult. In the Indian context neighbours and relatives gather when an outsider speaks. Thus, to get the respondent in suitable time (mostly around noon) inside the house required fixing the appointment many times. Most of the interviews, especially with women were of difficult nature. Many of them broke down as they described their poverty situation and how loss of face had happened.

The age group of children we interviewed varied between 8-14. With children, we adopted a different approach. We allowed the children (whom we had selected) to organically gather (but with some prompting) either at the school or near the panchayat (local government) office. They gathered at different points of time in groups of 3-4. We gave paper and colour pencils and asked them to draw pictures which are strong in their memories. Our intention was to use this picture as a starting point of conversation. However, we found the method was not successful. Very often children drew pictures

Draft – not to be cited without prior permission of the authors

which they had been made to draw in their schools – such as a house or a peacock. So, picture actually did not have anything to do with their memory. However, we started the conversation with whatever they drew. If it was house, we asked who all are in their house, what kind of house they have and what kind of house they would like to live. Thus, slowly we went through the desired check list of interviews with children (provided at the end of this appendix).

Interview Schedule for Adult's experiences

Introduction

I am a researcher from IRMA, and doing some research to learn more about the lives of adults and children who face financial difficulties. Therefore, I visit some of the households in this locality to talk to the family members. I will be using the same questions with everyone. The information will help us understand the sorts of things that our government and governments in other countries could do to help families when they are dealing with families with same issues. Besides, the information provided here will be used only for research purpose. Your name will never be written anywhere and nobody will be able to identify that you told me these. Do you have any questions at this stage?

Topic guide

(a) Daily experiences

1. Their views on their normal day (morning to evening – daily work, watching TV, reading, praying, gambling, social drinking, meeting friends gang)
2. What are the things they like to do most in the day? Why?
3. Their views on the place they live and how long they have been living in the area (also take them back to the place where they grew up)

(b) Current financial situation

4. An overview of the current financial situation and for how long things have been as they are
5. What are the conditions that led to this financial hardship? (crop failure, debt, high interest on loan, health expense, social expense, educational expense, increased demands on income, etc)
6. Are they generationally poor or sudden poor? Instances may take them back to their familial history of poverty
7. How do they perceive their status of living with that of their parents/their children? (across generations)

(c) The issues arising from lack of income

8. Their perception on the way they live compared to that of others (friends, relatives, neighbors, people in other geographical regions etc)
9. Their perception on how they are viewed by others (the feeling of shame)
10. Their views on the differences that they have of others (effects/impacts –not going for a festival, etc)
11. Their views on if they have been discriminated anywhere for being a poor –in the community, in the larger society (ridiculed, left out)

Food

12. Their views on their affordability of food (how many times they eat in a day, any starvation)
13. Are they able to afford special food on special occasions? (if not, what do they feel about it?)

Health

14. The nature of health expenses they met in the last year.
15. Any instances where they did not go to seek medical help because of low income/no income

16. How do they feel if they could not make a good medical aid because of poverty (impact physical/mental)

Educational

17. Their views on sending children to school for education. Are they able to afford to send their children to school?

18. Why some of their children stopped school? (how are they viewed by the community people)

Social

19. Their views on the nature and type of functions/traditional practices they have in the village (birth ceremony, marriage, death ceremony, festivals, treating guests)

20. Their views on the impact of a failure to meet the expected practices (excluded from the community, feel embarrassment and shame, hide/does not appear in the public)

(d) Coping with the issues arising from that of lack of resources

21. Their views on how they can contribute to the family to make more income

22. How they have been managing to make the end meet (e.g. experiences of looking for other jobs, taking loan from various sources, sending children for work, informal work, engaging in some unacceptable work – eg. prostitution, family support)

23. Their various response strategies to the negative impact of discrimination (eg: hiding, sitting inside, not talking, any suicide attempt in the family, etc)

(e) Resources for support

24. The sorts of social assistance (PDS, NREG, NGOs, others) they are eligible for and which they receive. Their experiences while becoming a social welfare recipient (e.g. corruption, abuse, shame experiences)

25. Experiences with these programs (PDS - the quality of available items, feeling of shame to queue up for grocery, the treatment shop owner, the behaviour of other card holders; & NREG - unavailability of work, issues in getting eligible wage, corruption, the behaviour of the contractors/co-workers, shame experiences in taking up work)

26. Their views on government welfare policies for poor people (policies could be strengthened, eligible persons do not receive welfare)

27. The sorts of informal assistance they receive (from friends, neighbors, relatives, co-workers, money lenders)

(f) The future

28. Their plans for the future; aspirations; dreams. What they would like to do with their lives and why?

(g) Happiness

29. What is happiness according to them? Their perception on their state of happiness

(h) Extremes

30. The situation where they felt “pride” the most

31. The situation where they felt “shame” the most

Demographic questions:

Name	
Age	
Sex	
Village	
District	
State	
Occupation	
Number of children (F/M)	
Total number of family members and relationship with the participant	
Health status of the family	
Income (Monthly/annual)	
Approximate expenditure (Monthly/annual)	
PDS card? APL/BPL	
Assets : house, land, vehicle, any other	
Type of cultivation	
Own toilet	

Interview Schedule for Children’s experience

Introduction

I work at IRMA where I am doing some research to learn more about children studying in this school. Therefore, I collect information from children to understand how you handle financial difficulties. This information will help us more about the sorts of things that our government and governments in other countries could do to help families. Besides, the information provided here will be used only for research purpose. Your name will never be written anywhere and nobody will be able to identify that you told me these. Do you have any questions at this stage?

Children (10 – 18 years old)

Topic guide

(a) Daily experiences

1. Their views on their normal day (morning to evening)
2. The things they do at home and in the village (anything they particularly enjoy/don’t enjoy, any work, sports, games, other activities)
3. Experiences and views on school (location, mode of travel, how they like their school, the things which attracts them most in the school, things they don’t enjoy in the school, etc)
4. Their views on the place they live (do they like or don’t like, if so why?, any other views)

(b) Awareness of the financial difficulties of the family

5. Their views on their relationship with their family members (parents, siblings, any other family members)
6. Their views on their relationship and the family’s relationship with the neighbours
7. Their views on their family’s status in the village/community
8. What are the reasons they think led to the condition of this financial difficulty in the family?
9. Their views and awareness of the sources of income

10. Any difficulties they see their parent(s) having in getting everything the family needs

(c) The issues arising from lack of income

11. Their views on the type and frequency of food available to them – at home, in the school (starvation at any time, being punished for asking more food, etc)

12. Perception on how they live/what resources they have compared to other children – in school, in the community, on the TV, etc (some of their desires are not met because of financial difficulty – not having a good clothing, lack of enough ornaments, lack of pocket money for festivals, etc)

13. Does this difference really matter? Their views on the differences (effects/impacts – thought of dropping out from the school, not going for a festival, etc)

14. Their views on if they have been discriminated anywhere for being a poor – in school, in the community (ridiculed, left out)

15. Their views on positive discrimination due to poverty (accepting a pair of clothes in the school assembly, availing school lunch, taking provisional rice, being a beneficiary of lump-sum grant, etc)

16. What sources of income or money they have for themselves? (no income, do some work, parents provide, any other like some grant from the school, etc)

17. Their views on their parents expectation of them to bring a share of income to the family (forcing them to work, asking them to stop school, etc)

(d) Coping with the issues arising from lack of money

18. Their views on how they can help their parents to reduce their financial burden. Or how far they think they should help their parents?

19. Their views on how they handle a situation when they are being discriminated – in the school, community, etc (left out, humiliated,

(e) The future

20. Their plans for the future; aspirations; dreams. What they would like to do with their lives and why?

(f) Demographic questions

Additional Questions to Farmers in Distress

These interviews will focus on the experiences of crop failure, financial crisis and the resultant shame. The following topic guide (to be pre-tested) will be used for interviews. It is anticipated that the topic guide will enable participants to share their experiences more meaningfully and systematically.

1. An overview of the current financial situation and for how long things have been as they are.
2. What are the conditions that led to this financial hardship? (crop failure, debt, high interest on loan, health expense, social expense, traditionally poor)
3. How their lives have been changed after the crop loss/financial difficulty? (e.g. attending a social function before and after the crop failure/loss)
4. What are the ways the financial situation has impacted children and other family members?
5. Perceptions on how they live compared to others (friends, relatives, neighbours, people in other geographical regions)
6. Their views on how they are viewed by others?
7. How they have been managing to make the end meet (e.g. experiences of looking for other jobs, taking loan from various sources, informal work, engaging in some unacceptable work, family support)
8. Any experiences of being ignored (or put down) in the community/friends/relatives on account of your poverty/financial crisis?
9. Their general behavior and interest in approaching/withdrawing from a social gathering and why
10. Have they been cut down some of the general family expenditure?
11. Their views on how their situation is portrayed through the media/news
12. Experiences of seeking informal support (from friends, neighbours, relatives, co-workers)
13. Experiences with private money lenders/ banks to avail loan and any repayment issues (e.g. confiscating the pledged land/house/ornaments/furniture, mounting interest)
14. The sorts of interventions they received so far (e.g. government, self-help groups, other community groups-*Farmers' relief forum* etc)
15. Experiences while availing the welfare services (e.g. corruption, abuse, shame experiences)
16. Their views on government welfare policies for farmers (e.g. require more help from govt)
17. How would you perceive your future for the next few years/months?
18. What are the measures you've taken to cope up with the situation?

Draft – not to be cited without prior permission of the authors