



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Poverty, Morality & Our Society

Dr. Kajal Dey, Assistant Professor, Department of Geography, Lalbagh, Murshidabad, West Bengal, India.

Abstract:

One of the main problems of all nations, or for whole world, is the problem of poverty. In the midst of plenty there are those who suffer dire misery. According to the World Bank, more than half the world's population is poor. In this paper I will raise the question that, do the affluent have any obligations or moral responsibility in alleviating poverty. I will also focus on the ethical basis for our concern for poverty as a global issue.

Key Words: Poverty, Morality, Society, Food&Society.

Introduction

The first fact of life in the world economy is that a thousand million human beings fifth of the world's population live in absolute poverty. Hunger, malnutrition, widespread disease, high infant mortality, squalid living conditions, fear and insecurity are the common conditions of the poor. Over twenty percent of the world people do not get enough food to meet their energy needs. Most of these people live in the poorer countries of the world, often referred to as 'developing countries'. The Gross Domestic Product [GDP measures the value of the goods and services that a country produces] of the 41 Heavily Indebted Poor nations (i.e., about a quarter of the world's countries) is less than the wealth of the world's seven richest people combined. In developed countries more than a hundred million people live below the poverty line, more than five million people are homeless and 37 million people are jobless. In developed countries, deep and persistent poverty is a serious social problem but is less widespread than in developing countries. Poverty is often concentrated in certain segments of society, generally defined by region, by age, or by social group. In this paper our discussion will be centered on the ethical aspect of the duty of ours to alleviate poverty.

Definition of Poverty:

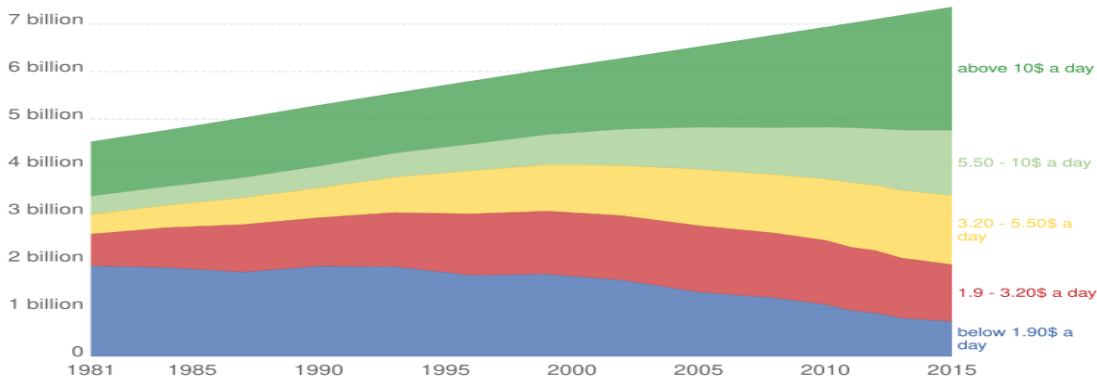
Poverty is the state of being without the necessities of daily living, often associated with need, hardship and lack of resources across a wide range of circumstances. Fundamentally, poverty is a denial of choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity. It means lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society (UN,2022). Poverty is hunger and not knowing where from the next meal is coming. Poverty is not having a proper roof over head and having nowhere to go. Poverty is being sick and not being able to see a doctor. It includes low incomes and the inability to acquire the basic goods and services necessary for survival with dignity (World Bank,2011). Poverty is not being able to read and not being able to go to school. Poverty is being unemployed and having little chance of getting a job even if there are any because having no training. Poverty is powerlessness, lack of representation and freedom with no hope of change.

For some, poverty is a subjective and comparative term; for others, it is moral and evaluative; and for others, scientifically established. The term 'poverty' involves the description of material need, including deprivation of essential goods and services, economic circumstances, lack of wealth (usually understood as money, material goods, or resources, especially natural resources). In short, poverty is said to exist when people lack the means to satisfy their basic needs.

Distribution of population between different poverty thresholds, World

Poverty thresholds are all in 'international dollars' at constant 2011 PPP prices. This means all figures account for cross-country differences in price levels, as well as for inflation. Estimates rely on a combination of income and consumption data (see sources for details).

Our World
in Data



Source: World Bank, PovcalNet 2019

Note: Estimates for high-income countries are included, but are not always comparable with those from other countries because of differences between income and consumption data.

CC BY

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poverty#/media/File:The_number_of_people_below_different_poverty_lines.svg

Demands of the poor:

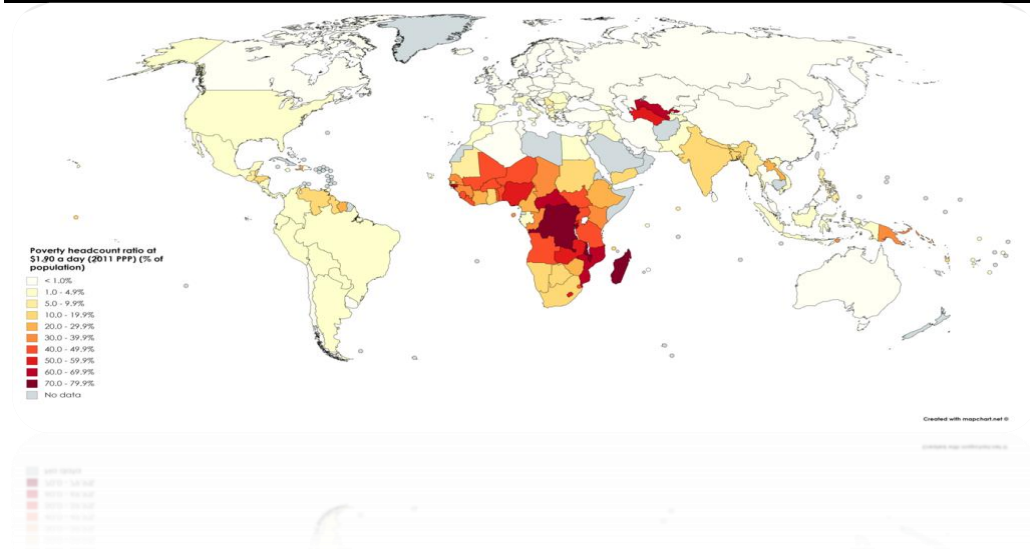
In the context of poverty, the identification of poor people first requires a determination of what constitutes basic needs. These may be defined as narrowly as "those necessary for survival" or as broadly as "those reflecting the prevailing standard of living in the community". The first criterion would cover only those people near the borderline of starvation or death from exposure; the second would extend to people whose nutrition, housing, and clothing, though adequate to preserve life, do not measure up to those of the population as a whole.

Poverty has been associated, for example, with poor health, low levels of education or skills, an inability or an unwillingness to work, high rates of disruptive or disorderly behaviour, and improvidence. While those attributes have often been found to exist with poverty, their inclusion in a definition of poverty would obscure the relation between them and the inability to provide for one's basic needs. The basic needs approach to poverty measurement includes access to such necessities as food, shelter, schooling services, drinking water and sanitation facilities and employment opportunities, and even touches on opportunities for community participation. These provide a sense of human wellbeing, but there is no aggregate them meaningfully.

Determination of poor:

Rural-The majority of the world's poor live in rural areas, and are disproportionately dependent on natural resources for their livelihood. They are especially vulnerable to climate changes and natural resource degradation. They have to travel big distances on poor roads to markets and health and education services, which are often lower in quality.

Women and Girls-most societies, women are more likely to be poorer than men, even though they may contribute more to the economy. From an early age, they perform all domestic duties including carrying water long distances, cooking the food and caring for younger children and the aged. They often work other jobs, some involving hard labour, and often for less pay than men, and the heavier workload affects their health. They are less likely to go to school, or for as many years, as boys. Often cultural constraints mean that they have limited legal rights, lack opportunities for training or a say in community affairs, and lack access to land, credit and employment.

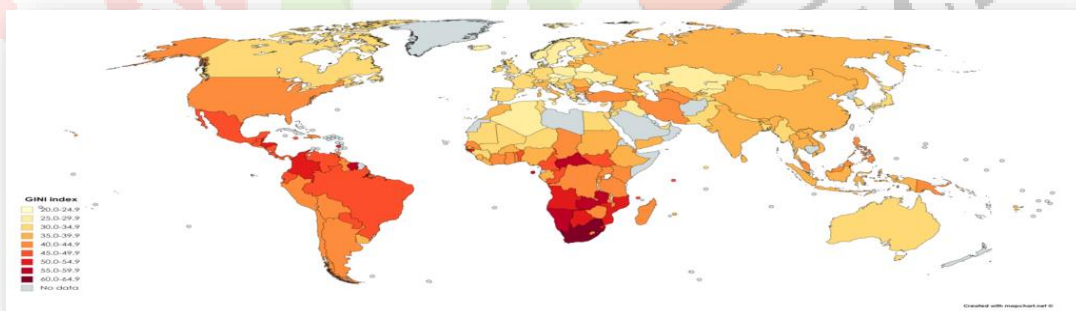


Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poverty#/media/File:Poverty_headcount_ratio_at_1.90_a_day.png

Children-More than a half a billion children representing a staggering 40 percent of all children in developing countries live in poverty. Poverty causes of millions of preventable child deaths through hunger and disease each year. Millions of children miss out on school or are forced into child labour, causing lifelong damage to children's minds and bodies and continuing the cycle of poverty into the next generation. Marginalized groups- The aged, disabled, indigenous and displaced people generally lack education and social connections to earn an adequate income. In developing countries there are few social services to protect these groups.

Types of poverty:

- **Absolute Poverty:** It is also called extreme poverty. The situation when there exists the huge lack of basic needs of foods, drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, education and information.
- **Relative Poverty:** It is the concept that relates to social context. It is the percentage of population income less than from the fixed proportion of median income. It is one of the main indicators for measuring poverty in European Union.



fundamental elements of good governance, such as social norms and legal systems that respect contract and property rights, will provide a solid foundation on which to implement activities aimed at poverty reduction.

Economic growth supported by public policies which enable the poor to access the benefits of growth is an important factor in reducing poverty. Enabling the poor to increase their productivity, through access to credit, markets, property rights, technology and health and education system is important. So, too, strengthening systems of governance to improve accountability and provide better access to services, resources and decision making by the poor. Addressing the vulnerability of the poor to illness, conflict, natural disasters and economic crisis is also necessary to ensure that development gains are not undermined.

The world is heading for ecological catastrophes, produced by vastly increased population, which is more because of the damage done by rich nations through 'overdevelopment' and the consequences affluent consumer society, than because of the effects of underdevelopment, such as soil erosion and desertification. No doubt there is an upper limit of sustainability to what the world can carry in the way of human population. But the general empirical assumption made by many is that if rich nations take serious measures to reduce consumption and environmental damage and if poor nations can achieve the kinds of basic development which give poor people the confidence to reduce sizes of families and make sustainable use of land, then the world's consumption and population could stabilize at a level which would allow 'sustainable development' for all countries. So, in order to control the increase of population, it needs to provide the information on sexual health, and reproductive health and control to all.

The duty of our society:

Do we have any duty to help alleviate poverty? This is a question which often comes to our mind when we see extreme suffering of others before our eyes. If we think from a moral perspective, we would find that not only the governments, but all the affluent have a moral responsibility to the starving few. In answer to this kind of question, Peter Singer, who championed the philosophical turn to applied ethics, argues in two stages. In his first principle, he states that suffering and death from lack of food, shelter and medical care are bad. His second principal claims that "if it is in our power to prevent something bad from happening without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance, we ought morally to do it". Invoking the view that there is no intrinsic moral difference between acts such as killing and omissions, Singer argues that, the relatively affluent have an obligation to help those in absolute poverty, which is as strong as their obligation to rescue a drowning child from a pond. Failing to save the child (omission to act), without sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance would in Singer's view, be morally equivalent to murder (i.e., killing). Although Singer's negative action thesis presses on us the need to take seriously that we do have an obligation to intervene as much as we can, yet this idea of benevolence seems to be too demanding.

The special moral significance of extreme poverty can be registered by invoking the idea of human rights. It is certainly the case that many who advocate concern for world poverty would wish to couch their position in terms of a right to subsistence, a right to basic needs, or a right to life (meaning a right not just not to be attacked but to have the conditions necessary for a satisfactory life). The right to food, shelter and clothing are that which are constitutive of a person's basic rights, is essential to a human leading a life as a human. In fact, such socially basic rights are the minimum demand of all humanity. The question of rights suggests that we have a positive duty to protect people from being deprived of these basic rights.

The further question arises, in this context, is, whether we may have a duty to care for others, who are beyond our own country's border? Generally, we would not suppose that one normally had a duty to help alleviate poverty in other countries. But I think that a so-called rich country has the resources to alleviate poverty and other forms of serious suffering within its own borders and has further resources which it can use to help alleviate poverty in other countries which lack the resources to alleviate extreme suffering. The general force of this argument is not weakened if one accepts that in practice public services and private caring do not in fact adequately meet all the needs of people in rich countries and that government and rich people within poor countries do not do all they can either. The argument here, I am concerned with, is resources and what could be done, not with what is done.

Justice, Morality & Social Duty:

In the context of alleviation of poverty, a point which often arises is the issue of justice, not charity for the poverty much in terms of the responses of individuals, whereas the idea of justice does not simply cover why individuals do to one another but also covers the general structure and relationships which exist, or ought to exist, in a society. For instance, many people would accept it as part of 'social justice' that a society should be so organized, with progressive taxation to finance it, to ensure that the basic needs of all people are met. If this is accepted for individual societies, why not accept it for the world as a whole? International institution, and agreements should then reflect this goal. 'A fair distribution of the world's resources' requires at the Very least that all should have enough to meet basic needs, since the problem here is essentially one of distribution rather than production.

But for many people a fair distribution of the world's resources requires a lot more than this. It requires that many things which are done in the world of international trade and economic activity should be changed because they are in themselves unjust. What is done in and to developing countries may be seen as unjust, because of the exploitation of resources and of cheap labour. So the demand for justice is not merely a forward-looking demand that the world be so organized as to meet basic needs. It is the demand that we active injustice as well, and also make recompense for what has been done. Of course, most of 'us' are not directly involved in all this, but we are all part of, and beneficiaries of, the system that does this.

Conclusion:

We have to realize that the basic needs of food, shelter and clothing, without which a proper human existence is impossible, is the minimum necessity, demand and right of all humanity. We have a positive duty to care for those people who are deprived from those basic rights. We ought to prevent all preventable evils those are affecting the vivacity of life of the people in poverty. The governments and the rich people of all countries should have to help alleviate the problem of extreme suffering or poverty from their own country first, and later, they should extend their helping hand of aid to those of other countries belong below the poverty level. They should take both short-term and long-term poverty reduction strategies to fight against poverty. We should have an unquantifiable dimension of caring to moral responsibility to help alleviate world poverty. If we have a proper appreciation of the facts of world poverty, of our global moral identities, of the moral seriousness of responding to extreme suffering, of what quality of life really consists in, and of the duty of caring as much as we can consistent with our quality of life, then we will care as we ought.

A society, nation, or world cannot do progress unless there establish harmony and justice in the society. In order to get a peaceful and progressive society, we first need to alleviate poverty from the heart of the world. As the great Nelson Mandela said: "Together we live in a global neighbourhood and it is not to the long-term benefit of any if there are islands of wealth in a sea of poverty. We need a globalization of responsibility as well".

References:

1. Aiken.W & Lafollette.H, 1977." World Hunger and Moral Obligation, Englewood Cliffs
2. "Indicators of Poverty & Hunger" . United Nations. Archived (PDF) from the original on 28 June 2011.
3. McCuen. G.1986. "World Hunger and Social Justice".
4. "Poverty and Inequality Analysis". *worldbank.org*. Archived from the original on 3 June 2011. Retrieved 27 May 2011.
5. Singer.P.1991." A Companion to Ethics".
6. Singer P.1993. "Rich and Poor in Practical Ethics."
7. Thomas A. & Jane S.1987." Social Ethics: Morality and Social Policy."