CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING POVERTY AND MARGINALISATION

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Humans are always in the process of ‘becoming’. To define them in terms of what they are now is like defining the stream as a handful of static, non-flowing water at the time of scooping it into our hands. In the social universe that people occupy, this continuous process of ‘becoming’ is not, by necessity, in one singular direction, characterized by the prevailing wisdom as a forward moment, with all the positive connotations attached to it - namely, betterment, growth, improvement and development. People in society are multi-directionally ‘becoming’.

Individuals occupy various points of intersections where several social forces meet and converge. In this, they are ‘becoming’ rich from ‘being’ poor, ‘becoming’ poor from ‘being’ economically better-off, ‘becoming’ poorer from ‘being’ poor and so on and so forth (Baulch and McCulloc, 1998). This swirl of human ‘becoming’ is becoming pulled in two directions under the influence of modern processes. There is a vast majority of people in the globe who only ‘become’ poorer from ‘being’ poor across generations, years, months and even days. Simultaneously, there is a significant minority ‘becoming’ richer from being rich on an everyday basis (Narayan et al, 2000a & 2000b). And there are those who are amongst the poorest, who remain frozen in time and excluded from becoming. These poorest people experience social processes with all its crushing intensity across all the three grammatical divisions of time, viz., past, present and future.

This chapter attempts to evolve a framework that captures the various processes structuring a particular way of ‘becoming’ of individuals in the world in general and in India in particular - ‘being’ poor to ‘becoming’ poorer, and perpetuate a particular way of ‘being’, namely, the poorest, who are congealed in poverty forever and caught in some sort of a time warp, as it were. The framework thus formulated here is only indicative and not exhaustive. It aspires to capture the predominant tendencies observable in the lives of the people. In this sense it is very specific to the experiences narrated in the whole array of stories.
In understanding the various impoverishing processes, it is imperative that we spell out our understanding of poverty here and the key concepts used in evolving the framework.

3.1. Prevailing Understandings of Poverty

Almost all poverty-specific research is principally conducted under the banner of different Social Sciences in general and Development Studies in particular. Although Development Studies (it also includes policy studies) aspires to claim a place in the fold of social sciences, there is a crucial difference in their treatment of their respective objects of study, both in approach and in emphasis. For the former poverty is a primary and avowed concern, whereas for the latter it is incidental that knowledge about poverty is added. Thus the present research undertaken here has to clarify whether it brackets itself in the category of Development Research conducted in the fashion normalized by Development Studies discipline or in the category of a social science research. The difference between them is decisive as some mutually challenging and reciprocally critical foundational notions guide them. Choosing one over the other is not just a matter of research focus but also expressive of the values and worldview we stand by. Much of the research conducted under the umbrella of Development Studies in the form of poverty research tends to proceed by taking some crucial notions as given while Social science research would treat them as contestable and problematic. One can think of even “poverty” here. In the same way, the foundational conceptions of “society” and “human person” that underlay these two disciplines are different in a significant way. In a manner of saying, one might argue that social sciences have not dealt with poverty as exclusively as perhaps the Development Studies. The causes are political in both camps, albeit the good that has happened in either of the camps. However in the final analysis, poverty research not tempered by the debates and insights of the social sciences tends to produce conclusions and results that are incomplete and superficial, when not self-serving.

In the remaining pages, the researcher will dwell upon the problems of social sciences vis-a-vis their concerns with poverty. Since this research stands precariously in the middle path between social sciences and Development Studies, it is presumed that the comments offered on both will bear on both.
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The comments are organised as follows:

1. Why social sciences particularly Sociology, Anthropology Political Science and Psychology - do not concern themselves with poverty exclusively and what are the positive lessons we can take from them

2. What are the problems of conceptualizing poverty in poverty research and how development research can do away with them?

3. If social sciences have any thing to say about poverty what can they be and how they are relevant to development research.

3.2. Poverty Studies and Social sciences

Poverty studies in all their manifestations within the Development Studies fold, are seemingly immune to the critical inputs from the by social sciences. Pitching their significance only in relation to policy influencing and policy making, they sacrifice research rigour and critical inquiry for the sake of arriving at spectacularly grand generalizations that are amenable to policy formulations. In the same spirit, they seldom engage in a self-reflexive inquiry into their own ways of constructing the categories that are now taken as ‘given’, for example ‘poverty’ as a construct. Since their very existence and relevance rest on postulating a foundational reality called ‘poverty’, they present it as a well-rounded singular object and as an ever-persisting reality. Our study should be sensitive to this lacuna in poverty studies. Even though it is not our primary purpose in our endeavour here to elaborate on the benefits of reflexive exercise in the research we are carrying out, we should remain tempered by the spirit of reflexive inquiry through out research exercise.

Even in this research such an opportunity to bring in the insights offered by social sciences, particularly anthropology is duly tapped. It is only in the light of anthropology, we realize that poverty studies have never benefited from an intense ethnographic research on the poverty experiences of individuals. Much of the participatory approaches within Development Studies are short-term engagement with acquiring people's perception on poverty. It is incumbent upon development research to complement the survey-based and PRA-based poverty research with ethnographic research. This not only has high degree of intellectual value but also political value,
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since the later concerns the politics of poverty research. The inferences we can make from anthropological ethnographic research tell us many striking things about what is absent and overly present in poverty studies, though it may be instructive to remember that Social sciences including anthropology are not overtly concerned about poverty for reasons delineated below. Therefore asking poverty studies to behave like social sciences is not only overambitious but even questionable. However there are certain tendencies in social sciences that have to be emulated in poverty studies as much as there are certain practices and conceptual shortcuts in poverty studies that have to be abandoned. Indeed the problems of poverty studies become more glaring only in the light of the spirit of reflexivity that so wonderfully characterizes social sciences. Thus we are going to benefit immensely by knowing why poverty is not studied by social sciences with the same intensity as poverty studies, as much as by the awareness as to why poverty studies do it obsessively.

3.3. The Poverty-Focus or the Lack of It in Social sciences

In what follows, let us try to grapple with the question of why poverty was not the proclaimed object of study for mainstream social science disciplines such anthropology, sociology and political science. There are two kinds of reasons on may attribute: One, those concerning the inherent politics and methodological rigidities of social sciences and the other, the politics intrinsic to conceptualizing poverty itself.

3.4. Historical Legacies

The first kind of reasons flows from the historical and methodological legacies of social sciences. Historically social sciences were born in times when the western hegemony was establishing itself through colonialism very stridently. As the products of modernity these disciplines mostly sided with the colonial empires and furthered their agendas. Though there were dissenting voices within social science fold, the dominant voices were supportive of the colonizing forces as they saw the latter as the harbingers of modernity. Though the criminal intentions of the colonizing forces were taken note of by the most conscientious among the social scientists, they were pardoned for they were treated as necessary costs to be paid for promoting and disseminating modernity. In this sense the social scientists were willingly missing the trees of criminal acts of colonialism for the wood of modernizing intentions of the imperial forces.
Thus the social sciences were more focused at the processes that contributed to the dissemination and effects of modernity. As a result poverty was treated as the reality specific only to the non-modern societies, and poverty was regarded as the manifestation of the deadweight of the traditions. Hence social science research was obsessively fixated with modernity and the factors that promote it. If caste, race, agrarian economy, village power relations etc were studied by Social sciences it was not so much for the impoverishment they caused but for the challenges they posed for the spread of modernity. Poverty and other social ills were thought to melt into air with the arrival of modernity. The untrammeled optimism for modernity and the redemptions it will bring upon the societies mired in traditions had persuaded the social scientists to give scant attention to poverty. If any thing, poverty was regarded as a problem coming in the way of modernity marching successfully. By strengthening modernity, poverty was thought to disappear.

3.5. Methodological Rigidities

Secondly, on the methodological front too there was least encouragement for grappling with poverty, let alone conceptualizing it. Much of social science disciplines particularly sociology, political sciences, and anthropology, were steeped in functionalist and systemic paradigm due to which they were intensely concerned about normal state of affairs in the society and about the processes and means for maintaining it. Poverty and all its manifestations were regarded as abnormal and therefore dysfunctional to the society. While the social scientist were alarmed at the higher incidences of abnormality in society they still treated them as the excreta that would be washed away by the oncoming waves of normalcy achieved by the engulfment of the entire society by modernity. The social scientists’ persuasive recommendations for social engineering were aimed at working on the reinstatement of normalcy. It was believed that normalcy defined in modernist spirit will establish the equilibrium and will banish abnormality in theirs wake. This resulted in the whole focus centering on social engineering and the effects of it on the wider society.

Poverty thus was consigned to the status of the crust on the surface of the society that will have to be eliminated forthwith through social engineering efforts. Social sciences, as they were growing in the shadow of the supremacy of scientific rigour in natural sciences, had assigned the task of studying poverty to less theoretical
disciplines like social work and development studies. However the latter were 20th century phenomena and very much the product of the social engineering orientation of the social sciences. While Social Work has come as an answer to the concern of the mainstream society to integrate many ‘marginal’ (read deviant) groups into mainstream modernity, Development Studies aspired to objectify poverty so that doing so would help development professionals and the agencies they belong to have a “problem” that can be “managed”. The results: social work located the problem of marginalization and impoverishment in the groups that were marginalized, rather than in the forces that marginalized them in the first place. Development studies, on the other hand, solidified the multifaceted experience of impoverishment into a managerial issue for the development sector. Impoverished persons too were understood in the same sense. Poor are persons who failed to integrate themselves into the redeeming processes of modernity, for reasons mostly personal - personal incapacity, inability and inadequacy. Many of the development studies disciplines in various incarnations too took this up uncritically and went about understanding, assessing and measuring poverty without ever problematising it as a relational product. Poverty was understood by the Development studies only with a biomedical perspective, which treated poverty as a disease that has crept into society like a germ into the human body. It was in the manner of going to war that poverty was approached.

3.6. The Concern with Processes

It does not however mean that social sciences were not concerned with poverty. Social sciences too studied poverty in the sense of grappling with the experiences and various ways of coping with it. This was happening, even while social sciences grew out of their modernity fixations, crossed on to post-modern territories and became critical of social engineering as such.

The post-colonial period saw social sciences becoming characterised by their reflexivity about their own practices and the politics they had normalized. This brought to light how social sciences were engaged as pamphleteers for modernity and in the process invented the backwardness of non-modern societies. This brought the curtain down on even the peripheral possibility of studying poverty per se, as it itself was the invention of a modern mind to suit and privilege the colonizing modern mind.
And also as ever, with the primary concern centering on understanding social, political and cultural processes, social sciences virtually ceased to engage with creating an object called poverty that could be measured and grasped tangibly. If anything, they only became critical of such objectification of poverty. Their interest in processes led them to study how social actors deal with and became part of social processes. Simultaneously another camp within social sciences was engaged in studying the institutions and structures that sustain and maintain the social processes. Accordingly, in social sciences the understanding of poverty begins from the processes and leads to people who are impacted by these processes. This is the inverse of what transpires in development studies in which such understanding proceeds from and ends with the poor and what happens to them.

Curiously, despite the dearth of exclusive attention paid to poverty per se, much of the alternative conceptions of poverty have come from social sciences. Particularly the contribution of anthropology in highlighting alternative conceptions of poverty is immense. It has to be remembered, however, that anthropology was the handmaiden of colonial forces throughout the period when imperial forces were riding roughshod over many third world societies. However in their concern with understanding the cultures of many third world societies, they brought to limelight many new ways and perspectives of experiences of poverty. More significantly their contribution towards the cross-cultural understanding of poverty and the differential experiences of poverty in different cultural settings is very valuable.

Therefore, various categories of people identified to be among the poorest population such as disabled, widows, beggars etc were not studied in the same way as development disciplines studied them. For the latter it was a ‘given’ that they are poor because their life circumstances fit into models already developed to identify poor persons. But in the case of social sciences what is more important are the social processes that operate in relation to them. In that sense these groups of population are as significant for study as the groups development studies would have qualified as non-poor. Moreover for social sciences, the development studies’ cardinal division of the population into poor and non-poor is immaterial as they are interested in the interaction among social actors in the generic sense of the term.
3.7. Development as Elimination of Poverty

The absence of poverty discourses in social sciences can also be explained in terms of how they conceptualize development. Development in social sciences is understood in mostly positive terms in that it was treated in terms of several presences that affirmed development. For example development was measured in terms of what have to be established rather than in terms of what have to be eliminated. A society was regarded as developed if it has acquired scientific spirit, rational attitude and economic prosperity. It was believed that the establishment of these traits would drive away all other problems and social ills. With this understanding, social sciences had taken upon themselves the task of informing various social forces as to how these presences can be brought in. Such conception of development compelled them to study those processes that maintain or facilitate or act as impediments to these traits. Most of the social sciences’ energies were spent on the functional aspects and other equilibrium-maintaining processes. Sadly those absences and dysfunctional elements were treated with contempt and were thought to disappear in the face of modernizing forces.

However the heightened attention given to poverty in International development studies had a lot to do again with their conception of development. In their conception, development was understood in terms of the elimination of negative presences. Development is such a state in society when poverty and other such ‘social ills’ are eliminated. In the development studies’ perspective poverty and other such phenomenon were given the kind of place that disease occupied in biomedical disciplines. Therefore maintenance of normalcy calls for singling out the disease and bringing it under the microscope for analysis, measurement and management. Poverty was a disease and it was studied in the same spirit in which diseases were studied in medical sciences. For these disciplines development is the ‘normal’ state that every society has to strive for. However, now there is an easy way out to achieve development (easy way out only conceptually but not in reality where poverty elimination proves to be an elusive task) - eliminate poverty and there comes development! The easy equivalence of development with the absence of poverty triggered off unfettered interest in poverty, its kinds and types.
This explains why social development knowledge is all about poverty. Yet the generation of such knowledge has an instrumental purpose. The politics of such equivalence between development and elimination of poverty will be elaborated later. However it suffices here to say that the arrival of international development studies has a lot to do with sudden concern with poverty in the last three decades. It all began with the World Bank becoming actively engaged in poverty eradication after few decades of wishful thinking that economic growth leads to the elimination of social ills like poverty. The linkage of this knowledge to management-of-poverty-anxiety is quite evident in the way many development organisations and state agencies use them for control and evolving interventions strategies. The proliferation of knowledge about poverty soon reached its crescendo with the institutionalisation of Development Studies across the globe, promoted and sponsored by international finance organisations, among other big forces. What was missing in Development studies discipline was the kind of reflexivity that became so crucial for social sciences. Hence the politics of studying poverty never came to light until social scientists probed into it. The next section will deal with it.

3.8. The Politics of Understanding Poverty

Poverty became an issue of grave importance only in the last three decades. Ever since human and social development was no longer assumed to be an automatic concomitant of economic development and as something that had to be actively pursued and established, social development has become a big techno-managerial concern of the development agencies, both that of the state and non-state. This shift has bred a different understanding of poverty and who the poor are. This shift has also legitimized the arrival and continued presence of an army of development institutions, organisations and professionals that have assumed the mandate of facilitating, achieving and consolidating development in the societies and groups deemed underdeveloped by them. They have all come together to create a particular reality called poverty in a fashion that validates their interventions in the society and the lives of the impoverished members in it. The way, in which international development organisations, particularly World Bank, have suddenly brought poverty at centre of the development discourse, hides certain self-serving intentions of these institutions, rather than just the noble concerns for the poor. At once, poverty was very extensively
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and vigorously studied by Development Studies. Many poverty studies soon ensued. In the long run, both the noble and not-so-noble intentions of poverty studies have conspired and worked overtime to establish a distinct ontological reality of being poor and poverty. It is as if they have carved out a new species of human - the one who is in poverty. Presently let us examine a series of assumptions that have acquired axiomatic proportions in Development research and have gone great length to invest species-specific qualities in poor, as it were.

3.9. Convenient Assumptions - Insinuating the inevitability of Development Interventions

One such convenient assumption is that persons in poverty cannot cope with poverty without the support of the development sector, be it the state or NGOs. These Development actors justify their interventions into the lives of the persons in poverty without taking into account those people’s abilities of self-help and coping. Development studies and even practices conveniently gloss over the truth that the poor have always coped with poverty and survived it in history. If anything, it is only with the arrival many of those very forces that seek to remove poverty in lives of the poor, that poverty has become an unmanageable challenge in the lives of the poor to a large extent. That is why in many of the anthropological research undertaken in Africa we find that the essential component of the actions that the poor undertake to deal with poverty involves moving beyond the perimeters of the circles within which both the state and development organisations operate and influence. Even in Indian contexts a sensitive researcher may discover the desire of those being poor to evaluate their capabilities to deal with poverty outside the support, parameters and definitions provided by the development actors of both the state and non-state variety. In other words, modern forces, including the development actors such as the state and development organisations of all varieties, have incapacitated the poor not only by what they omitted to do, but also by what they committed to do.

This is true even in those individuals, categories of populations and communities that have decided to selectively relate to the state and development organisations. In their poverty-confronting efforts of the poor, there are many situations that do not have any scope for the involvement of either the state or the development organisations. It may thus be said that, in many aspects of the lives of those being the poorest, the development actors may not have any relevance at all, or
at best only a marginal presence. It should awaken the development personnel from their delusions that poverty cannot be eradicated without their active support, involvement and presence. As a matter of fact, in specific situations, the poor are well served by the development sector when they do not serve them at all. This is because these development actors bring in their train a whole lot of value system, moral frameworks and cultural scales (in this context, they are that of modern or other dominant paradigms such as Brahminical Hindutva) that not only define them poor or the poorest before commencing their poverty elimination work, but also by a stroke of definition and conceptual jugglery push them to the peripheries by locating the centres in some other places other than the ones that are the native to the people they choose to work with.

It is exactly for these reasons development is conceived of by some sensitive minds, not as the product of the expansion and influence of development sector, but by banishing their influence from the respective territories. Gandhian vision was one such alternative conception of development that visualized the return of self-worth and self-sufficiency in the people the moment they abandon the civilizational attributes of modern western societies.

It is a matter for lengthy debate whether development research has been sensitive to the above accusation. But if one considers even the attempts by it to document the self-supporting and coping abilities of the poor, one notices it having serious problems that nullify such sensitivity they may have had to the criticism above. What are the problems of development research’s understanding of people’s abilities of self-help? We will consider them below.

3.10. The skewed concerns of PRA Approaches with Human Agency

When participatory approaches do take note of these indigenous strategies of coping with difficult situations, in the absence of a long-term ethnographic research, they fail to comprehensively stand by and incorporate the highly inventive coping abilities of those in poverty. Even if they were captured by the PRA or PPA processes, they have been removed from the people’s living contexts, and blindly accorded heroic status or, at worst, condemned as inconsequential.
Even the most sympathetic and sensitive of the studies documenting the coping strategies of the persons in poverty and aspiring to evolve grounds-up perspectives of poverty has kept a very narrow operational definition for understanding human agency. These studies, in their drive to capture the indigenous strategies of the poor in dealing with poverty, split the social creativity of the poor into discrete behaviours and dispositions, and romanticize them as extraordinary feats, to say the least. There is this danger of predicking such creative responses of the poor on a highly individual and rationalist paradigm, and explain them away in terms of the means-end relationship.

There is another greater risk of validating the social creativity of the people-in-poverty in terms of the needs it fulfills, both for the poor who deploy theses strategies and for the development sector that have an easy way out of the top-heavy and expertise-dependency accusations leveled at them. These need-based explanations of creativity are grossly unfair to the essential genius of the humans, leave alone the one who are being poor. People do not express creativity and engage in creative endeavours in order to fulfill certain constitutional needs of their body, nor even psyche. The mobilization of creative energies in humans happens as a matter of natural responses of living life as humans. In other words, expression of creativity is not like the work we engage for survival. The latter happens in response to the need to sustain oneself, whereas the former is an integral aspect of living.

To say that poor tribals in Africa take part in carnivals as a response to the lack of grandiosity in their normal regular life, is to say that the intensity with which they express their creativity in carnival is directly proportionate to the intensity of meaninglessness in real life. This is as unfair to the poor who would continue to take part in the carnivals even after getting out of poverty, as it is to the non-poor who, as humans, express creativity in these carnivals as an organic response. In a similar vein, to cite one example, the film-viewing behaviours of the poor in India cannot be explained away in terms of the lack of meaning and grandiosity in real life, against the drabness of which film is said to offer fantasy as an escape.
This is what happens even in highly sensitive pro-poor studies. They abstract singular behavioural traits of the poor out of the larger social process spanning across both time and space, and pit them against the immediate personal and even spiritual needs allegedly felt by the poor persons. This sort of positing cause and effect relationship fails to invest the poor with the energy, curiosity and right to deal with broader social challenges, other than poverty. One of the most unfair and gross reduction that has happened (and continues to happen) in much of the poverty research is to depict poor as perennially engaged with poverty alone in life, as if they are not actively and creatively engaged in confronting challenges other than that which concerns their mere bodily survival. As elaborated below, for many individuals characterized as poor, being poor it is just one among many social positions they occupy, though mostly as a compulsion. Similarly dealing with bodily survival - what would otherwise be named poverty, is just one among many of the challenges facing those being poor now.

This is here that the absence of ethnographic insights into the lives of the poor becomes glaringly conspicuous. The few such unintended-to-study-poverty anthropological studies rescue poor from their dealing-with-poverty obsession, into which development research has fixed them forever. The ethnographic research confirms that, just like the non-poor, poor are also engaged in negotiations with other challenges that range from constructing their own forms of modernity, to defining their own place in globalisation and national culture at the macro level, as well as earning for their own significance in their kin-network and concerning with question of power in their communities at the micro-levels. All these are beyond the issues of poverty and survival.

3.11. Convenient Assumption - The Singular Social Identity of the Poor

Another crucial self-serving assumption that poverty studies have valorized in the discourses of poverty is the singular social identity for the poor. Indeed the cursory perusal of many poverty studies points to the way they have variously confirmed, very unfairly, that for the persons they have studied, being poor is the only social identity. By fixing and freezing the impoverished people in the identity of poor, through its deployment of externally evolved indices, poverty research has served its personal interest well, even while obviating other social identities which people move
into and out from. It is exactly because of this congealment of individual identities in their beings as poor, poverty studies have largely lost sight of the processual aspects of both poverty and being poor.

Ethnographic research of various varieties in anthropology confirms the fact that being poor is one among the many social identities people possess. And it is not that on all occasions they call themselves poor, even when the external variables evolved by development professional would label them so almost oppressively. Many such policy formulations also aim at trapping them in their poor status across all times and space. In contrast, in many of the life stories the researcher has collected as part of this research study, one is often struck by the interest and concern of the persons interviewed, to deal with many other things in life, other than just poverty. This was, notwithstanding the story collection process obsessively relapsing into asking poverty-specific questions. Those persons interviewed were aspiring to represent themselves as being equally, if not more, concerned about other challenges in life, than about poverty alone.

3.12. The Plea for Different Ontological Conception of Human Person

The arguments should not be construed to mean that development research should not be aimed studying poverty at all. Far from it, such efforts should take into account the processes that trap as well as free people from fixed social locations. This will also help us to move towards those sections of population which do not have the luxury of even such fluidity, and gets fixed in such poor status forever even by their own definitions. Nevertheless we have to be very cautious in positing such idea of person with singular identity, for the sociological wisdom warns us that social actors can never be trapped into a singular identity consistently as they always move from one social region to another, while assuming varying identities as they move through. Thus our understanding of the poor and poverty can benefit from the qualification we have mentioned above. This would boil down to mean that the poorest person would be one who continues to treat oneself as being poor despite moving across different social regions or, even worse, would not be able to move into different regions at all, other than the one that locates that person as poor in the given moment.
Therefore, firstly, our commitment to treat people as an end in themselves and not as a means for enhancing economic productivity should be based on our vision to see ‘being poor’ as one of the many ways of being persons by the people we work with. Such commitment behooves us to move beyond the much-vaunted conceptualization of poverty as multidimensional experience and phenomenon. We should proceed to the multidimensional nature of poverty, from the decisive premise that being a person in society is a multidimensional experience, within which being poor is an experience that certain individuals undergo recurrently. Our focus is on these individuals who by their own definitions move into and occupy the identity of poor more often than others and more permanently than others.

Secondly such commitment should also be informed by the learning that the multidimensional aspects of poverty are socially embedded in relationships and processes. Therefore locating poverty experiences and poverty processes in the terrain of social relationship is supremely essential. Therefore a proper analysis of the social relationship and social processes assumes importance. Sadly most of the participatory approaches have failed to capture the relational and processual aspects of being poor, for even the longest of the PRA or PPA exercises, is short when measured by ethnographic research standards. The latter guide us to focus on social processes and patterns of social relations that constitute an individual experiences and sense of identity.

3.13. Poor are not in Groups

In the same breadth one has to critically reflect on the practice of poverty studies to categorize people into groups that are labeled as poor. For example, the classic understanding of disabled, homeless, widows, beggars, street children and other as groups of poor population is, in true sociological sense, problematic and even questionable. For one thing, they do not share the essential characteristic of groups or communities, as, apart from that which we attribute to them, they do not necessarily have common experiences specific to being disabled, street children, homeless etc. If, anything many of the attributes are applicable to all these groups. Such groupings tend also to gloss over their socially embedded experiences of being poor, as well as their singular strategies to deal with that identity of being poor. For example in the case of the disabled and elderly, that person’s experiences of poverty is not so much to do
with being elderly and disabled but rather to do with whether or not s/he has family members or other forms of social support to turn to. Thus, there is a great deal of variability as to how the persons being poor use the social relationship and make meanings out of the social processes. This may be common between ones classified as poor with that of other ones from another category, and not necessarily common with another person like him/her.

It is not being argued here that these classifications are not important, but they must be treated as such, and not attributed an uncritical commonality, thereby flattening the multiplicity of experiences of being the same type of poor, as arising out of differing relational contexts occupied by them. The danger is by reifying these classifications, a whole array of development efforts and policymaking is made that eventually end up causing more distress than they seek to eliminate. It is instructive to remember that much more than poverty, it is the solutions to get out of poverty that have proved problematic to people.

3.14 Poverty as causal and symptomatic

The departure against the dominant understanding of poverty was made when we read the life histories of the people closely. The life histories critically challenge the belief that lack of resources causes human distress and death. While it is true that lack of resources does exacerbate distress people face, it is symptomatic (Michael and Nunn, 1994) of the relations that people have, and the extent to which they can value, access, control and negotiate resources within these relations. Thus agency - the ability of the individual to create and maintain relations of their own volition - becomes central to addressing poverty issues. These life stories emphatically place the cause of their distress in the decimation of their agency in accessing and controlling resources, and the kind of relations within which this decimation occurs. Attacks on poverty therefore are merely attacks on the symptoms of the global malaise and not on the causes that created the malaise. Much of the solutions focusing on merely attacking lack of money are therefore also symptomatic. These reflections and solutions tend to provide short-term relief rather than long-term transformation.
Impoverishment is therefore the consequence of disempowering people by depleting their physical energies and devaluing their knowledge; and by constricting their access and control to resources, by rendering useless the resources they already possess or by denying their traditional access to natural / common resources (EPW, 2000). This ensures that people can be controlled and directed by powerful interests to maintain inequitable distribution and for individual profit. These processes are created through relations that deny the ability of people to participate and own the institutions that operate in their lives and value the resources that they have access and control to within their social and economic transactions. Impoverishing processes are authored and maintained by powerful institutions and are translated into day to day relationships that disempowered people are forced to have.

Individuals and institutions interact through relationships. If the majority of these relationships are exploitative or contractual rather than affirmative, it eventually leads to distress, disempowerment and impoverishment. Ultimately for a world that is free from poverty, there is need for not merely symptomatic relief but of individual, personal and societal transformation - one that is based on honest reflections on the kind of relations that each human being creates. One that is able to see the kinds of relations that are predominant today, and the effects of these relations and a push towards transformations into better forms of relating. This then would open the possibilities of creating realities where it does not become necessary to disempower or impoverish many to fatten a few.

3.15 Poverty as uni-dimensional and Poverty as multi-dimensional

With modernisation, resources have been homogenised into numbers. Thus complex resources that people control and access when homogenised into their monetary income offers no insights into processes that disempower people, limit their agency and therefore impoverish them. In real life, people use resources that they have access to and control in multiple ways in order to negotiate their environment. In order to understand impoverishment, the idea of money has to be unpacked into the resources it has come to represent in a monetised world (Hart, 1999). Thus the economic well-being of a person is closely related to their control of different kinds of resources related to knowledge, time and space. For a person to make choices that allow her to negotiate her life freely, she must have knowledge about the various
actors and their institutions that affect her life, the time to reflect on her/his past experiences, the knowledge and skills that are useful to her/him and the space to feel capable of living these choices. These resources are evaluated by exploitative and powerful interests and their institutions, homogenised and monetised so as to allow their accumulation by individual interests. Thus indigenous knowledge, metis, physical labour, reproductive labour, time and many other resources are all reduced into purely monetary, contractual exchanges, trivialised and underpaid.

In daily transactions, impoverishment is due to the depletion of the bodily resources and devaluation of metis - knowledge acquired through praxis and is based on intensive local understanding with the environment which people have traditionally used to survive. Under the reduced circumstances, people who live in poverty are compelled by immediate necessities to operate in the present, leaving no oppurtunity to reflect on the past and to plan for the future. The space allowed for privacy, movement and transaction constricted by different institutions within which the person operates.

3.16 Poverty as individual experience and Poverty as a collective experience

The third is the process of compartmentalizing and individualizing impoverishment - blaming the victim. Thus, economic well-being is seen as a consequence of individual merit and capacities (sometimes accumulated in previous lives through karmal). These processes reflect on the experiences and realities of the disempowered as if the phenomenon occurs independently of the lives and experiences of the powerful. Social institutions controlled by powerful stakeholders that author larger processes within which an individual acts escape scrutiny and reflection. Thus, they do not have to be accountable for their actions and change. Simultaneously, attempts to ‘eradicate’ poverty augment the process of individualization by reducing impoverished people to mere welfare beneficiaries.

The third insight relates to the need for structural transformation that is located in the reality of individual experience and her relations and transcends into the structures and processes that these individuals create or forced to be part of. Thus reflections about poverty cannot happen in isolation, independent of the values of the society and world in large and the translation into institutions and processes that the
individual operates within. Unless the values of reflection, of mutual dignity, justice and non-violence are encoded in the larger social institutions, the state and the global forces, unless there is transformation within the larger power structures - merely expecting this reflection within the poor person places undue pressures of change on people who are already burdened by survival.

3.17 A Framework for Understanding Impoverishing Processes

In the backdrop of this, the reading of the life histories of the marginalised people entailed a thorough and deep reflection on the voices of the people, the variety of processes affecting them and the strategies and solutions evolved by them to overcome them. This provided data about poverty as well as understanding about the causes for their impoverishment. The central question in the reflection process was: how can the fundamental rights of the most vulnerable be protected? The related questions were: who is excluded from accessing means to realise their rights? What are the structures and processes that exclude people from accessing resources needed to exercise their rights? Why and how does this marginalisation occur? Who benefits? How do people who have been forced to live without freedom and dignity endure it? what is the nature of agency that people who have lived in poverty have? How can the transformation of human structures and processes be directed so as to ensure that the rights of the all people can be protected?

This reflection on poverty focuses on the relations that marginalised people are forced or choose to have with the current structures and processes. It is structured around the agency of the people, the institutions that they are forced / choose to live within and the relations between the two.

Agency is the ability of the individual to express herself freely as long as it does not harm others and is able to create and maintain relations of her own volition. It allows her to determine the value of the resources she accesses and controls in transactions within these relations; and to access resources that is essential for her self-expression and creativity when she wishes to. It is the extent to which she is able to be autonomous - to create, own and transform institutions that she belongs to, is able to regulate herself and is able to seek justice for violations of her freedoms and person. Underpinning the notion of personal agency is the recognition of the diversity that exist in the human experience and expression. (Giddens, A, 1984).
Institutions form the web of relations within which the individual exerts her agency. Institutions are both formal and informal structures that have definite values and rules operationalised through structures and processes (WDR, 2001/2002). Thus, institutions depend on the values of inclusion and exclusion that they acknowledge and operationalise. The orientation of the institution depend on its positions and values along different axes: the extent to which the institution supports its members to freely express themselves and make their life choices; recognition and negotiation of difference and dissent within the institutional collective; the degree of equity in the distribution of knowledge and other resources; the extent of effectiveness and inclusion of justice and grievance redressal mechanisms; the ability to self-reflect honestly and transform through the process.

The life stories of people who live in poverty offer the possibility of a different framework of reflection. This framework holds that in order to understand poverty, it is essential to understand the kinds of the relations that people who live in poverty are forced to have. The categories outlined are indicative, and not comprehensive. As human relations and processes are multi-layered, complex interactions cannot be completely represented through any single framework. Given this, this framework merely aims to look at one set of possible interactions between the individual and the institutions that she is embedded within.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutional orientation</th>
<th>Kind of relation</th>
<th>Agency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>Exploitative/ Violent</td>
<td>Inward-Directed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern</td>
<td>Contractual</td>
<td>Outer-Directed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affirmative</td>
<td>Constructive</td>
<td>Inner-Directed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.18 Institutional Orientation

Institutions are both formal and informal structures that have definite values and rules operationalised through structures and processes (WDR, 2001/2002). Three kinds of institutions have been outlined here based the way they exist and operate.
3.19 Exploitative and Violent Institutions

To understand the violent nature of the institutions, this study uses Galtung’s perspectives on violences. Though he has elaborated on three types of violences, this study finds it relevant to use two types of violences, namely, Structural Violence and Cultural Violence.

3.19.1 Structural Violence

Galtung moves away from the actor-oriented explanation of peace and violence to structure-oriented explanation where the central idea is that violence exists because of the structure and the actors merely carry out that violence. Galtung (1969) defines violence as being “present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realisations are below their potential realisation” (p. 168). This definition is much wider than violence as being merely somatic or direct and includes structural violence (Figure 1). Structural violence stems from violence in the structure of society, rather than the actor-generated personal and direct violence. By relating violence to the structure of society, Galtung created a connection between peace, conflict and development research. The notion of structural violence is also relevant in conflict theory and development research because of its social justice connotations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Violence</th>
<th>Survival needs</th>
<th>Well-being needs</th>
<th>Identity needs</th>
<th>Freedom needs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Structural</td>
<td>Exploitation A</td>
<td>Exploitation B (pen)</td>
<td>Penetration</td>
<td>Marginalisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>violence</td>
<td>(starve, waste</td>
<td>(permanent, unwanted</td>
<td>Segmentation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>away from</td>
<td>misery)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>diseases)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Galtung (1990, 292)

3.19.2. Cultural Violence

More than twenty years after coining structural violence, Galtung (1990) wrote the foundation of the concept of cultural violence. This violence encapsulates “those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence […], that can be used to justify or legitimise direct cultural or structural violence. […] Cultural violence
makes direct and structural violence look, even feel, right - or at least not wrong’ (ibid., 291). Among the examples given, I will only reiterate one, is nationalism. What nationalism essentially does is creating a feeling of *chosenness*. Because there is an Us, there is also a Them (that is foreigners). Them is a subtle deprivation of humaneness and lowers the inhibition to hurt or kill Them. It becomes less grave and can be done in the name of the some higher goal - the nation-state.

In this study, the presence of structural violence in traced to the variety of social institutions. These institutions are premised on threat, survival and maintenance of status quo. They value their members differentially based on differences of birth, culture and resources, and place importance on the survival of its most powerful ‘important’ members. They emphasise punitiveness to ensure that their members conform to their norms and rules.

These institutions acknowledge and hierarchalise differences thus creating discriminatory, marginalising and excluding patterns of interaction. They also hierarchalise information and forms of knowing, and prevent most of their members from accessing the ‘higher’ forms of knowing, while devaluing their own knowledge. Individual and collective expression is seen as possible sources of dissent and threatening status quo and therefore is silenced/punished or labeled irrelevant. They compel their members into actions that prove inimical to their interests and survival. They distribute resources based on discriminatory/marginal positions. The discriminatory practices are encoded in the justice systems ensuring that there is no recourse to justice, beyond the boundaries laid down by them. Those who move or are pushed beyond these boundaries are not protected and/or punished. The system is owned by a few and influences or forces other members to work in the interests of those few. The self-reflection of these institutions is usually a mere documentation of their own achievements and do not include the experiences of all their members. The concern for the future is restricted to merely the survival of those who are powerholders within the institution. Many of them have a long existence historically and have already impoverished and disempowered many of its members.

These institutions tend to have had an historical presence and carry considerable weight because of it. The most significant of these institutions is patriarchy operationalised through the family foremost. Consistently women are held
inferior to men across different patriarchal societies. Other social institutions are those regarding caste and ethnicity. Most of these relations have been encoded economically over time through labour practices, that are for most part exploitative. The other important institutions are those of religion - particularly the caste system and ethnic and minority groupings. Tradtional Market orientations are the fourth major group in particular - child labour, bonded labour and informal sector workers.¹

3.20 Contractual (Equal) Institutions

These institutions are premised on “objective” truths and values existing independent of their members. They place importance on performance and management and tend to be task oriented, with instrumental relations with their members. They seek uniformity and homogenise individual experiences and differences according to “objective” truths and values so as to measure, consolidate and distribute the resources within. The institution makes no difference between knowledge and information and sees both as bits of commodities to be owned, bought and sold to the person who can pay the most money, without value underpinnings. These institutions presume a ‘level playing field’ that allows their members to own the institution equally based on their inclination to do so; in reality, these institutions exacerbate existing inequities and allow the accumulation of homogenised resources by power holders within traditional exploitive institutions. They support individual and collective expression, creativity and agency only as fqr as its increases efficiency of their performance.

The members of these institutions feel isolated and are forced to look to their own survival even if such action in inimical to themselves in the future and to others in the present. The emphasis on individualism places the burden on structural inequities on the individual, resulting in “blaming the victim.” These institutions focus on their members as numbers and aim to distribute their resources equally and protect the rights of their members, with no special consideration of past / historical inequities. The systems of distribution and protection are often biased and insensitive to the needs of all, since they tend to be created by those who have historically been powerful. The institutional reflections focus on task delivery and are limited to their own maintenance and ongoing survival in current situations. This kind of reflection also ensures that the biases towards the powerful remain hidden behind the ‘objectivity’ of their values and the compulsions of the immediate.
These institutions are relatively new phenomena. Most of the modern institutions fall into this category - including the modern states and the corporate market institutions. Though these institutions have become more powerful only in the last two hundred or so years - with the use of modern, western science - they have rapidly consumed and eradicated many of the globe’s non-renewable natural resources. They have created unprecedented, unaccounted accumulation of capital in the last few decades and have served to isolate and alienate many of its members by commodifying and trading on all human experience to an unprecedented degree.

The two major institutions include the state and capitalist structures including credit groups who have now come to span the globe.

3.21 Affirmative (Equitable) Institutions

These institutions are premised on affirmative values. They place importance on individuals and their experiences and as well as the relations that they form with their members. They consider differences as being crucial for transformation and seek to engage with differences positively. They do not hierarchialise their members respecting each of them for the different contributions they make. They consider it necessary for information and knowledge to be freely available and circulated and seek to reflect on and add value to information collected with an open consideration of the ethics involved. They recognise the importance of the metis of the members and place significance on this form of knowing. They actively foster individual and collective self-expression, creativity and agency. They aim to distribute resources equitably taking into consideration historical inequities as well as individual differences. They protect the rights of all their members paying special attention to the vulnerabilities caused by past inequities. They are owned by their members and exist as support mechanisms for the better functioning of individual and collective interests. Their survival is dependent on the will of all their members. The institution is part of the creative lives of its members and provides the infrastructure for its members to fulfill their creative potential. They are willing to be self-reflective and they transform into new forms depending on the needs of their members. Their reflection includes both their past actions as well as the consequences to the future. Such affirmative institutions are often very young; they often co-exist within other exploitative and liberal institutions and are still riddled with contradictions that exist in the larger world. Sadly these institutions are rare in worlds of experience of poor people and if ever present very transitory, like the movement of Anna Hazarre against corruption.
3.22. Agency

Agency is the ability of the individual to create and maintain relations of her own volition, to determine the value of the resources she accesses and controls in transactions within these relations, and to be able to access resources that is essential for her self-expression and creativity when she wishes to. It is the extent to which she is able to create, own and transform institutions that she belongs to and is able to seek justice for violations of her freedoms and person.

Hence, it evident from a qualitative perspective that the responses of the poor to the impoverishing conditions have been varied. Despite the flattening effects produced by the impoverishing forces, the poor have been evolving strategies and adding a sense of aliveness to their living. The various types of responses and strategies that poor evolve to engage with the structures around them and institutional contexts, in which these occur, as well the directions into which their agencies are moved can be diagrammatically represented as follows:

From the above diagram, it is possible to conceive of three kinds of agencies.
3.23. **Inward-Directed Agency**\(^1\)

The various strategies adopted by the poor are acutely inward-directed, for the harshness of the outer world would immediately punish them for externalizing them in the real world. It is inwardly-directed

1. In the sense of their operational terrain being limited only to boundaries of the acts and situation within which the poor operate.

2. In that these strategies are highly personal acts that do not seek the approval and consensus from the outer world, thus removing possibilities of collective action.

3. In one more sense viz., the burden of finding meaning for all these strategies rests only on the individual actor who adopts these strategies and not derivative of the organic external relationship.

All these somehow ensure that they are discrete, fragmented and inconsistent. They do not alter the boundaries in the real world, but create boundaries and division in the inner world of the poor to give themselves a sense of aliveness and forward movement. The various strategies adopted under this type of agency can be characterized as coping strategies.

3.24. **Other-Directed Agency**

The other directed agency here refers to any situation in which the person realizes her agency only in relation to the structure whose normative order is conformed with and unchallenged. The consummation of agency is achieved only in compliance with disciplinary practices and procedures normalized by the structure. The structure may be traditional or modern. Here in the context of our present concern, we see the poor’s willing assumption of non-poor virtues and adherence to the standards of the very same forces and institution that impoverish them. In other

\(^1\) The inspiration for this scheme of analysis comes from David Riesman’s book *The Lonely Crowd; A study of changing American Character* (1970). Although he uses the phrase *inner-directed* person and *outer-directed* person in a different context in the book, the sense with which it is used here and by Riesman remains the same.
words, the poor adopt those strategies that would enable them to survive, even if it means subjecting themselves to the same disciplining procedures and practices of precisely the same institutions and collectivities that impoverished them in the first instance. Here they adopt the moral frameworks, ethical standards and other scales of evaluation of human worth, more as a strategy than as a worldview. The desire for realizing the individual agency comes from within, though meanings for such acts arise from outside Thus they may undergo a training programme or migrate to a new place as demanded by the State so that they may become eligible for the rewards and resources, albeit their refusal to take part in them soulfully as a worldview. There may be other instances in which they may respond positively and willingly to the very manner of construction of the ‘good’ servant, ‘good’ daughter, ‘good’ daughter-in-law etc so as to qualify themselves for the social rewards and economic resources. In all these cases there is a willingness to be co-opted by the very same systems and institutions that impoverish them in absolute terms. Thus if the poor can ever have their presence established and significantly noticed, it would be only when they fit into the frameworks held up as appropriate by the non-poor.

3.25. Inner-Directed Agency

Inner-directed agency is the product of inner realization about one’s unfreedom and lack of control over one’s time, space and means. This realization is also accompanied by the inner desire and urge for alternative conditions of freedom. So inner-directed agency creates and deploys a set of strategies aimed at transformation. Here the poor engage with the system critically and aspire to transform it through collective action. At the individual level they may work to undercut the hegemony of the system through the creative damaging they could cause to it by their acts of commission and omission. The end products of these strategies are many: One, establishment of control over their time and the right to structure, distribute and translate it in ways that would benefit them cumulatively; Second the reclamation of lost spaces and the freedom to access all other available social spaces for productive purposes; and thirdly and finally, the recuperation of credibility and economic significance for their wisdom, both inherited and acquired through experiences.
3.26. Gandhian Understating of Poverty

Poverty studies in all their manifestations are seemingly immune to the critical inputs from social sciences, particularly the post-modern and Gandhian visions. Pitching their significance only in relation to policy influencing and policy making, they sacrifice research rigour and critical inquiry for the sake of arriving at spectacularly grand generalizations that are amenable to policy formulations. In the same spirit, they seldom engage in a self-reflexive inquiry into their own ways of constructing the categories that are now taken as ‘given’, for example ‘poverty’ as a construct. Since their very existence and relevance rest on postulating a foundational reality called ‘poverty’, they present it as a well-rounded singular object and as an ever-persisting reality.

The present research should be sensitive to this lacuna in poverty studies. Even though it is not our primary purpose in our endeavour here to elaborate on the benefits of reflexive exercise in the research we are carrying out, we should remain tempered by the spirit of reflexive inquiry throughout research exercise.

Even in the research we propose to undertake we wish to grab such an opportunity to bring in the insights offered by social sciences, particularly anthropology with both tempered by eastern world view. It is only in the light of such world-view we realize that poverty studies have never benefited from an intense ethnographic research on the poverty experiences of individuals. Much of the participatory approaches within Development Studies are short-term engagement with acquiring people's perception on poverty. It is incumbent upon development research to complement the survey-based and PRA-based poverty research with ethnographic research. This not only has high degree of intellectual value but also political value, since the later concerns the politics of poverty research. The inferences we can make from anthropological ethnographic research tell us many striking things about what is absent and overly present in poverty studies, though it may be instructive to remember that Social sciences including anthropology are not overtly concerned about poverty for reasons delineated below. Therefore asking poverty studies to behave like social sciences is not only overambitious but even questionable. However there are certain tendencies in social sciences that have to be emulated in poverty studies as much as there are certain practices and conceptual shortcuts in poverty studies that have to be abandoned. Indeed the problems of poverty studies become more glaring only in the light of the spirit of reflexivity that so wonderfully characterizes social sciences. Thus we
are going to benefit immensely by knowing why poverty is not studied by social sciences with the same intensity as poverty studies, as much as by the awareness as to why poverty studies do it obsessively.

However, with the arrival of post-structuralist approach to social reality, which is seen as a construct, poverty too is being viewed as a construct with political and ideological underpinnings. Once again it is through extrapolation that we come to such understanding. But inquiring directly into poverty as a social construct is few. One among them is Majid Rahmema, who argues, "Global poverty is an entirely new and modern construct. The basic materials which have gone into the construct are essentially the economization of life and the forceful integrations of vernacular societies into the world economy."

Once poverty is understood as a 'construct', the deconstruction of it leads to the reinvention of human as free individuals, who do not define themselves in terms of lack and deficiency. Such is the power of this construct that by successfully amalgamating local conditions of absence of material wealth with the global conception of material wealth as the necessary and sufficient condition of good life, the social majority of humanity has been reduced to non-humans in need of assistance. What is worse, instilling that sense of such social majority, it has made "seeking assistance" as part of their self-definition. When the non-rich (materially) believes that they are 'poor' and only through external assistance they can overcome their being poor, what gets valorized is the whole army of development experts and their institutional apparatuses-they alone can eradicate poverty.

What the development studies has done, or what the mainstream social sciences has failed to question, is absolutisation of 'poverty' as material deficiency. While material deficiency was definitely part of people’s expectation of distress and destitution in the pre-modern societies they were deeply embedded in their culture and linked to spatial-temporal specialties.

How each culture or even each category of people went about constituting non-materiality, differed from one society to another or even within a society? In a similar manner, a whole host of non-material aspects too were considered as constituting destitution. This non-materiality too was culturally embedded. In some cultures, not having neighbours to live close-by gave them a sense of deficiency, whereas in certain
other societies and groups having too many neighbours living in close proximity was distressing. Besides these, other culturally deemed notion too come to define inability, such as abandonment, not having people to love and be loved, neglect, not having respect, domination by others, discrimination, oppression, deprivation, hunger, malnutrition, homelessness ill-health and exclusion from educational possibilities etc. had been considered as constituting their experience of “meaningless-ness”.

The deconstruction of poverty will also lead to rescue of human from a whole gamut of reductionism to which he/she has been subjected to. It may also result in the triumph of local versus the global, because, at present, the latter seems to have imposed its abstraction on the lived experience of the vernacular societies.

We argue that it can rescue human, because, the existing discourse on poverty has devalued human beings as meaning-seeking individuals and indeed reduced them as saleable commodities through the notion of labour-as-essence, as in the same way as the earth has become a saleable product through the notion of land. What it has entailed is that the poor is one who in unable to sell himself/herself to meet his/her requirements.

The equation of man with labour and nature with land has its origin in the economization of society, whereby resourcelessness came to be defined as a problem. And resourcefulness acquired extraordinary significance. Therefore economic resourcefulness largely in the form of material resources became identified with being ‘developed’ and the lack or absence of which is being ‘underdeveloped’. It gets further individualized when such resourcefulness is equated with personal possessions. Those without individual possessions in abundance need to emulate the ones with lots of such individual possessions.

In this scheme of things what is available to the community or group as a whole does not qualify the members of such group or community as ‘resourceful’ people. For instance as individual with unusual quantity of wealth even in the midst of the community of people suffering from hunger or malnutrition or oppressions and dominations is still wealthy, whereas the eastern worldview before being influenced by modernity saw meaningless not at the individual level but at the collective community level. The suffering of one’s community or another member thereof is also the suffering of the evaluating individual. The state of existence of any of his/her
caste member is also extended upon the evaluating individual of the same caste. Echoing his Gandhi locates the poverty of the community or society not the poor but in the greedy rich and their thieving nature, Gandhi said, "I suggest that we [the resourceful people] are thieves in a way. If I take anything that I do not need for my own immediate use, and keep it, I steal it from somebody else. I venture to suggest that it is the fundamental law of Nature, without exception, that Nature produces enough for our wants from day to day, and if only everybody took enough for himself and nothing more, there would be no pauperism in this world, there would be no man dying of starvation in this world." In another place Gandhi again emphasizes the collectivist vision thus, “Welfare of the country is certainly included in the welfare of the world, and individual welfare is included in the welfare of the country. On the other hand, individual welfare should include the welfare of the world” (Gandhi, 1934, 22 March).

But what modern/capitalistic logic has done is to subjugate the collective consciousness to quantified individualized global abstractions. In the same way, the cultural understanding of self gets subordinated to the economic understanding of self. This consequently has led to subjugation of local by national and even more dangerously of national by global. What emerged from such series of subjugations is that materiality has got triumphed over non-materiality.

The death of diversity in understanding one’s existence occurs exactly at the point when singular global-level abstract definition of poverty is imposed on the psyche of everyone. Thus in contrast to societies that valued detachment over attachment to material possessions, “having more” material wealth come to be privileged. In place of societies that united individual with communities when defining their selves, releasing of the individuals from the holds of the communities got prioritized. The reversal of hierarchies ended up privileging a whole host of development experts who can be trained only in western/modern knowledge system. Similarly the right to judge whether someone is poor has been divested of concerned individuals or their communities and has got vested in global institutional apparatuses located in western world. Curiously these institutions are the creations of the western nations that privilege themselves only on account of possessing more material wealth, though concentrated in the individual hands.
Chapter- 3: Theoritical Framework For Understanding Poverty And Marginalisation

Here once sees a curious paradox: While the western world treats the unusual wealth of one individual/individuals as generalizable to the healthiness of their societies, they refuse to generalize the wealth/ resourcefulness of the society or communities to the individuals in the eastern societies or the impoverished in their own societies. This paradox is sustained only because wealth is quantified in the form of GDPs and per-capita incomes, rather than seen as an experience whose quality and necessity is left to the assessment and judgment of individuals/communities. It is true that the so called rich nations like USA has vast oceans of improvised people, yet the country remains a rich nation. If one goes by Mandela’s understanding of freedom or Gandhian understanding of liberation, then the so called rich nations will have to lose all their moral authorities to judge other humanities as ‘poor’. Mandela in one of the profound statements he has made says "Freedom is indivisible; the chains on any one of my people were the chains on all of them, the chains on all of my people were the chains on me". Gandhi in his own refreshing way says that the dawn of freedom will not occur if the last man in India is not liberated. And it is a public knowledge that Gandhi refused to enjoy any luxuries of the world, until such luxuries reached the last man on the earth. He has advocated the same for all the resourceful people in the world. He said “all people having money or property should hold it in trust for the society” (Gandhi, 1939). ”

But such sense of shame and guilt has been made to vapourize with the arrival of experts and expert institutions on the one hand and compartmentalization of individual psyche as conterminous to individual body and experience on the other. The very moment of acceptance of oneself as resourceful, is also the very moment at which the moral responsibility and joint humanity with the existence of the other get dispelled from the vision.

In this effort the role of social sciences is decisive. Particularly the science of psychology has contributed immensely to the atomization of individual mind, by inventing such compartmentalized psyche as emerging and dying with the birth and death of such individual.

In Gandhian and Buddhist view of poverty on can see the tendency to culturalise and moralise poverty in contrast to the overly secularized and abstracted conception of poverty enunciated by western paradigms. In social science framework too such culturalised understanding of poverty was absent until the arrival of Amartya Sen-whose eastern sensibilities aiding that cannot be exaggerated.
The strength of Gandhian vision is that the cultural context of poverty is called into question rather than mere condition of poverty. In such a vision one avoids the tragic tendency of locating poverty in the poor - his/her lack of initiative and effort (Rosen, George. 1982: p.437). In the secularized understanding of poverty, not only the poverty of the individual is traced to the individual psyche, but even the poverty of the entire society gets traced to the individual poor. It is through this unfair tracing the poor gets solidified into a group, though they themselves are a highly variegated people in their own right. But this location of poverty in poor becomes necessary for the experts to rescue themselves as the cause of poverty.

But, by locating poverty in the cultural context and seeing it as the product of the prevailing structure of unequal relationship, Gandhian vision calls into question the issue of dominance, oppression and inequality in power and conceptual categories organized in favour of the most powerful. Thus, poverty is seen as the outcome of conceptual shifts as well as the result of relationship patterns. Here the blame is laid at the doorsteps of knowledge producers and dominant groups.

But this uncomfortable vision must be laid to rest and put to relegation. As new scapegoat has to be found so that the ‘resourceful’ group can exonerate itself, it becomes all the more necessary to locate the scapegoat that has ‘frustrated’ every well-meaning attempt at development. Excluded a priori were those experts that had prepared or advised the general strategies for the eradication of poverty. On the other hand it was equally embarrassing to accuse the intellectually bankrupt governments of most of the southern nations for the continued troubled state of affairs.

Those left open that final, easily available common target for the abuses of despair - the low-income groups, including the landless labourer the small farmer, the unemployed craftsman. And since they could be calculated upon not to react or return the attack, experts and government set about the task at will.

But what is forgotten and swept under the carpet is the truth that “the principal obstacles set in the path of the emancipation of the poor came not from below but from above -- from the ruling groups at the village, regional, national and international levels, who only allowed change on their own terms”.
In the Gandhian vision we can note the problematisation of, both material and culture of wealth-making as the cause of poverty, rather than poor. It is immensely significant to remember that when Gandhi talks of trusteeship, he lists out prescription for the so called ‘resourceful’ to re-vision their wealth-making and their relationship with wealth (Appadorai, 1969, p.326). Throughout his writing/thinking he formulated lessons for the rich and other resourceful groups change their ways of being. This is a highly ethicised version of poverty. Elaborating further, Jeevan Kumar writes, “Basically, Gandhi suggested this concept as an answer to the economic inequalities of ownership and income, a kind of non-violent way of resolving all social and economic conflicts prevalent in the world. Therefore, man’s dignity, and not his material prosperity, is the centre of Gandhian economics. Gandhian economics aims at a distribution of material prosperity, keeping only human dignity in view. Thus it is dominated more by moral values than by economic ideas. According to Gandhi, Trusteeship is the only ground on which one can work out an ideal combination of economics and morality (Jeevan Kumar 2007, pp 1-3).

In sum Gandhi provides enough scope for the social origins of poverty and clearly argues that poverty as scarcity as socially-produced rather than as objectively existing.

3.27. Conclusion

In the following pages the way the life circumstances of the poor are produced as a result of the interplay of the three axes namely, agency, institutions and the interactions between the two constitute impoverishing processes will be described analytically.