Poverty has been assuming newer forms in the contemporary times. The people in poverty are faced with newer challenges too. Drawing upon 250 odd stories from five different categorises of most marginalised groups this study found that most of the existing categories and theoretical models were running out of their utility and explanatory value. This study is most sensitive to the need for deploying completely new phrases, frameworks and methodologies. Methodologically, this study used life-histories, as the need for listening sincerely and democratically has to accompany and come at the heart of all social science research exercises and initiatives, more so when such research is Gandhian in spirit.

This study reveals the enormous and intense dynamism of the poor and their engagement with life at such an untiring pace. The poor often demand us not to judge them lazy because they are not participating in productive activities that result in proportionate amount of resources generated. In keeping with, these, this study also accords centrality to human person - her experiences, and perceptions. Thus it could bring out in vivid details the impact of poverty on individual body and soul. Over a period of time as impoverishing processes become most oppressive, one notices a gross reduction of poor to their mere working bodies. Here one sees the most alarming trend of extreme poverty pushing the poor to move from exchanging the labour of the body at the cheapest rate to exchanging/risking the body itself for survival.

There are clear evidences from the stories that the war against poverty is turning out to become a war against poor. This is confirmed by the fact that poor people’s life choices are criminalised at an increased degree and intensity more than ever and more number of poor people is being custodialised than before. It is not that the poor are engaged in criminal activities voluntarily and willingly. It is just that the definition of what constitutes crime has become dangerously expansive to encompass most of the life-sustaining strategies adopted by poor which were not criminal before.
Unfortunately both the state and the public opinion tend to not only perpetuate the definition of criminality but even go to the length of evolving laws, programmes and strategies to punish the poor and throw them away from the visibility. One can see the accompaniment of criminalisation and invisibilisation of the poor as part of the war against the poor here. However even as this is happening, poor people have less and less structures and sources for associational life. There is this increasing atomisation and individualisation of poor. This is in part attributed to the gradual (and even deliberate) withdrawal and retreat of intermediate structures/institutions/organisation (from family to state) that had negotiated the shocks and jolts of rapid changes and sudden falls, has meant that the poor are directly impacted by oppressive and exploitative forces as individuated units. While this has rendered already impoverished people poorer, even the non-poor are also being rapidly plunged into poverty.

However in the face of all these soul-crushing tendencies and processes, there is this astounding creativity of mind and demonstration of the power of human agency of the poor. Even in the midst of all these debilitating effect of impoverishing processes, one is struck by the aliveness and continuous exercising of human agency of the poor. Their strategies of organising meaningful social universes are many and immensely creative. However, all these they do albeit their inability to bring about structural transformation leading to a just and equitable social order. This is because they are discrete individual acts of coping and meaning-making. In fact the constant debate over whether moving out of poverty is an individual or a collective effort is addressed by the poor themselves—and the conclusions are startling. The poor themselves need* opportunities and expanded choices for exercising agency—the power to act—individually. But it is only by acting in concert with others that they can definitively make a difference.

Keywords: Poverty, Life-History, Human Agency, Coping Strategies, Impoverishment