

Dimensions of Urban Poverty in Bihar A Case Study of Patna Municipal Corporation Area

Maushami*, Nalini*, Khusboo Sharma*, Debjani Sarkar**

*B.A. III Year, 2010, Geography Honours, Patna Women's College, P.U., Patna

**Lecturer, Department of Geography, Patna Women's College, P.U., Patna

'Poverty' can be defined as a condition in which a substantial segment of a society is having insufficient resources or income. In its most basic form, 'poverty' is a lack of basic human needs such as adequate and nutritional foods, clothing, housing and clean water. Urban India has a high incidence of poverty despite hailed as an engine of growth and instrument of globalization. Eighty-one million people or 25.7 % people (2004-2005) subsist in urban areas on incomes that are below poverty line. Even in Bihar, growing urban population due to migration has enhanced the problem of urban poverty as 2.56 lakh people (32.9%) live below poverty line in Patna Municipal Corporation area (2004). The urban poor of this locality is vulnerable in all aspects of quality of life including economic, social, educational, health, living condition etc. Eighty per cent of their meager earnings go towards obtaining food and energy, leaving very little for meeting the costs of living in an increasingly monetized society. Deprivation of education has forced them to employment in informal sectors of low income which further worsen their situation. In urban areas, they work as street vendor, rag picker, vegetable seller, rickshaw puller, maid servant, construction worker etc. and are termed as 'blue collared workers'. In the backdrop of the above mentioned scenario, an attempt have been made in the present paper to study different dimensions of urban poverty in Bihar with special reference to Patna Municipal Corporation area. The study is mostly based on primary survey. Altogether different dimensions of hundred urban poor have been investigated with the help of questionnaire method and collected data was tabulated and analysed. At the end, government effort to ameliorate their conditions was examined and some suggestions have been given to improve their situation.

Key words: *Urban Poverty, Blue Collared Workers, BPL families, Nutritional dimension.*

Introduction : 'Urban Poverty' is that socio-economic condition of poor living in urban areas facing vulnerability and has feeling of discrepancy between 'what one has' and 'what one should have'. An estimate indicates that in Bihar urban poverty accounts for 32.9% of the total population of the State in comparison to 25.7% of National average. It ranks 11th position in India in respect of the urban poverty (according to NSS survey, 2004). The 'poverty line' is an imaginary line of demarcation which has divided the society into groups of two, one as below poverty line or B.P.L. or one as above poverty line or A.P.L. Planning Commission of India from November 2009 has considered monthly income of Rs. 450 in rural areas and Rs. 600 per person in urban areas as minimum level per month, which clarifies the mid point or the poverty line. In Patna about 2.56 lakh people are living below poverty line. Repeated

flood and unemployment problem in rural Bihar pushes the poor towards city in search of jobs. But low level of education forces them in the field of unskilled informal sector which further worsen their situation. Here, they work as street vendor, rag picker, vegetable seller, rickshaw puller, daily wage labourer or maid servant. With limited income and increasing expenditure, they have to struggle for two square meals. Most of them are victim of vicious cycle of poverty and urgent efforts are needed to ameliorate their condition.

Objectives of the Study :

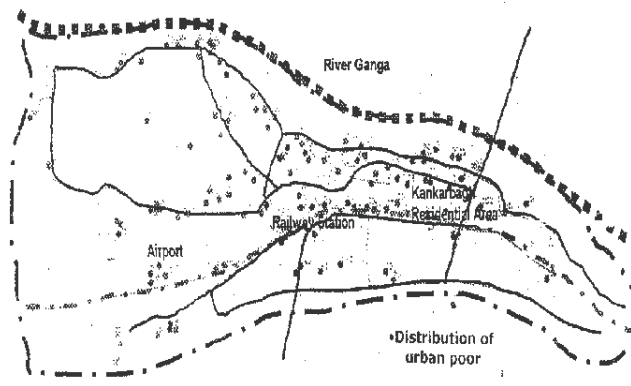
In the light of the above mentioned scenario, a humble attempt has been made i) to study different dimensions of urban poverty like economic dimension, educational dimension, health dimension, infrastructural facilities available to them etc. ii) to

examine how far Government schemes are helping them and iii) to provide some suggestions to improve their quality of life.

Study Area :

The study area of the present paper is Patna Municipal Corporation Area. Located at a crossroad of 25° 37' N latitudes and 82° 12' E longitudes, Patna happens to be the capital city of Bihar and incidentally is one of the ancient cities of India as well. The city of Patna is situated on the southern levee of river Ganga backed by a curvilinear depression. It is the administrative, judicial and legislative focus of the state; and is equipped with various essential services. The total area under PMC is around 57 sq. kms. With a population size of 14,42,992 (Census 2001), it is the largest city of the state (fig 1).

PATNA MUNICIPAL CORPORATION



Database and Methodology :

The study is mainly based on analytical study of primary data. Altogether 100 poor people have been surveyed on the basis of questionnaire survey method. Most of them live below poverty line. Even though some of them have more family income than the official poverty line of Rs. 3000 per month of a family of 5, their income is meager enough to be considered as urban poor. After collection of the data, they have been tabulated and statistical treatments have been given to them. Further, necessary diagrams have been drawn. To supplement the study, the published data and report regarding urban poor of Patna and India have been consulted. The study concluded with some suggestive measures to ameliorate the condition of the urban poor in Patna Municipal Corporation area.

Analysis :

In the last two decades, urban workers are increasingly pushed into the informal sector, even as the space for informal activities in the towns and cities is gradually shrinking. The 'urban poor', therefore is increasing. A street vendor, a rickshaw puller, a rag picker, a cleaner, a washer, a plumber, an electrician or a worker in a small unorganized industry, hotels, restaurants or a construction sites termed as a 'blue collared workers' are part of **urban poor**. Their workplaces are often public spaces like footpaths, streets, vacant places and parks. While blue collared workers contribute to the growth of the city, there is a growing tendency to push the poor to the urban periphery. Thus, the urban poor are struggling with minimal amenities, a near absence of rights to land and livelihood and more commuting time to travel to the place of work.

In next few paragraphs, a comprehensive study will be done on different dimensions of urban poverty in Bihar.

Demographic Composition :

Demographic composition holds a prime place in population study as it helps in various type of planning and analysis of demographic characteristics. Demographic composition of sample population has been presented in the table 1.

Table 1
Demographic Composition of Urban Poor in Patna
(% of Total)*

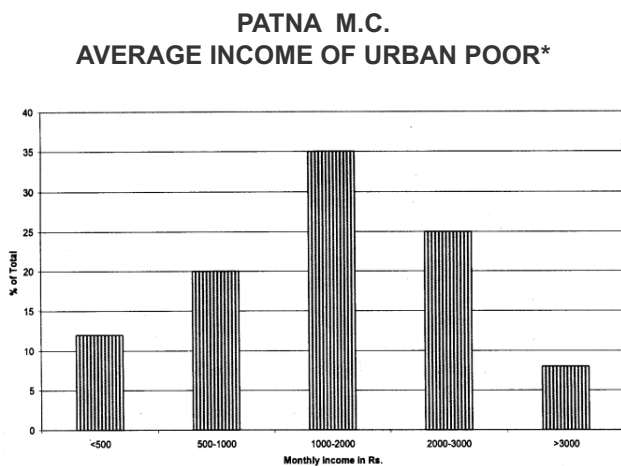
Sex Composition		Age Composition			Marital Status			Migrant	Population
Male	Female	10-30 yrs.	30-50 yrs.	> 50 yrs.	Married	Unmarried	Widow	Migrant	Local
68	32	33.2	35.3	19.2	72	21	7	66	34

*Based on Sample Survey

From table 1, it is clear that 68% of sample populations are male and 32% are female. Majority of urban poor are of 30-50 years of age. Marriage is almost universal among them. 72% of them are married. Most of them have migrated from different districts within the State. Some of them have migrated from Jharkhand, U.P. and even from Rajasthan. 65% of them are selective male migrant while 35% have moved with their families or with some relatives. In Hindu predominant society of Bihar, the urban poor of Patna are mostly Hindus (69%) followed by Muslims (15%) and Christians (16%). Further, most of them belong to scheduled caste category (46%), followed by other backward caste (OBC), general and scheduled tribe category.

Economic Dimension

The urban poor of Patna are struggling for their day to day survival since their income is very low. Planning Commission from November 2009 have suggested monthly income of less than 3000 in a family of five in urban areas as family living **below poverty line**. Average family income of the sample population has been presented in figure 2.



*Based on sample survey
Fig. 2.

From figure 2, pathetic condition of urban poor can be easily anticipated. 92% of them are living below poverty line. Even the rest 8% are poor enough in an urban setting. With limited income and increasing expenditure, their quality of life is deteriorating everyday. Majority of them (60%) are doing some sort of private jobs, While 23% of them are self-employed and 17% of them are engaged in low paying government jobs like job of a sweeper or a peon. Since, most of them are engaged either in private jobs or self employed, their

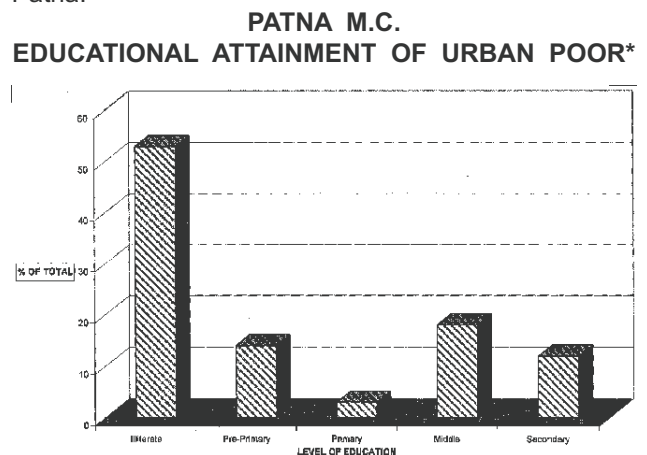
working hours extends between 10-12 hours. The working hour of part time maidservants varies between 5-6 hours. The extended working hours do not help them much to improve their economic situation. 15% of sample families cannot even afford two square meals. Even those who can afford it, nutritious food or balanced diet are dream for them. Much of their income is spent on purchasing food items followed by cloth. Even in such precarious condition, some families send their children to government schools with the hope of improving the economic condition of the next generation.

Saving and investment looks like a dream for most of the urban poor people. Around 75% of people do not have any saving account, while the rest saves the money in Post Office for future use.

Despite low level of income, 90% of the sample populations do not have any debt. Since they do not have capacity to repay the debt, they avoid taking loan despite extreme impoverishment. Rest 10% of population has taken credit during emergencies either from local money lenders or from relatives or employers. Lack of assets do not help them to take any loan from bank to improve their economic condition.

Educational Dimension

Education is an enlightenment which helps to generate awareness among the poor people regarding their vulnerability, and can generate an urge to improve the situation. Education can lead to health awareness, chances to get better jobs, empowerment and better quality of life. Educational attainment refers to the level of education a person receives. Figure 3 shows educational attainment of sample poor population of Patna.



*Based on sample survey
Fig. 3.

From the fig 3, it is clear that literacy rate is abnormally low (47%) among sample population. Even if they are educated, their level of education is extremely low. Only 12% of them have secondary education. Most of these people are either employed in low paying government jobs or some private jobs. But surprisingly, few (8.3%) children of these poor families have completed graduation and some (8.3%) have studied till intermediate level. Even then, they are not of much help to enhance the family income.

School Going Children of poor families - Despite such meager income, some parents of the sample families are sending their children to school. Among 305 children of school going age, 53% are attending schools. Rest of the children do not attend schools. Majority of them are girl children who are deprived of education despite numerous schemes of Government to attract them to school, irrespective of their financial background. Most of them looks after the younger siblings and do the family chores while their parents are out for the work.

Health Dimension

The unhealthy and unhygienic environmental conditions of the poor put their health at severe risk. Lack of access to basic amenities, unavailability of balanced diet and malnutrition are common among them. Women and children suffer from chronic energy deficiency. The sanitation facilities are very poor in slums and in most cases there are open drains choked with the solid waste which tend to overflow, thus polluting the locality. The unhygienic environment leads to various waterborne diseases like diarrhea, pneumonia, typhoid, cholera, polio etc. Apart from that, low and high blood pressure, piles, kidney stones, asthma, arthritis, and diabetes are also common among them. From the sample survey, it is clear that among sample population, 45% are prone to diseases, 55% do not suffer from any diseases. Despite the illness, most of them do not go to the hospital or health centres unless and until it is extremely urgent. They take medicines from the medical shop itself, stating their problems. Food deficiency and malnutrition among the children leads to diseases like Karamus and Kwashiorkor. Thus, the urban poor like their rural counterpart are trapped in poverty and deprivation. Lack of health and energy among children leads to low level of education. Thus, they are deprived of good jobs and improve their economic condition or take the opportunities of different government schemes.

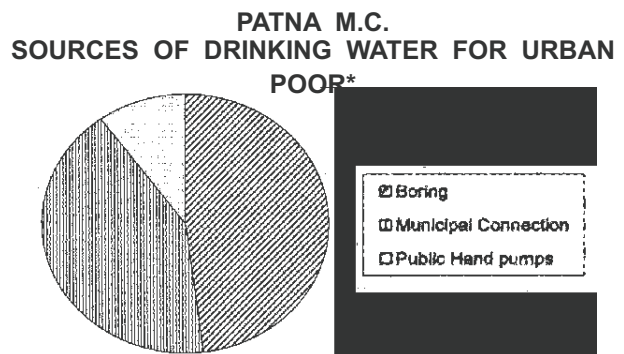
Housing and Living Condition

Housing and living condition of the poor is one of the important dimensions of urban poverty. According to Bihar Government Report on urban poverty, around 65% of population of Patna resides in slums, squatters and other poor quality settlements. The problem is further aggravated due to continuous migration of rural population to Patna in search of jobs. This pressurizes the existing housing and infrastructural facilities available to urban poor. High room density, poor sanitation facilities, lack of proper garbage disposal system are major areas of concern. Improper municipal waste disposal system and absence of sewerage system are common features that lead to water logging and environmental pollution in the locality.

The urban poor in Patna live in a very deplorable condition. They do not have any means to reside in a decent house. Among sample population, 60% of them live in semipucca houses while 40% of them live in kuchha houses. The building material varies from asbestos, thatch or plastic for roof, mud or brick with improper ventilation for wall. Most of the urban poor (90%) are tenants. Even though some of them proclaim to be owner of the house, are generally illegal occupants and live in squatter settlements.

Room density is extremely high. 92% of the sample population resides in single room while only 8% of them possess two rooms. With average family size of 5-6 persons, the room density is as high as 6 persons per room.

Availability of drinking water within the premises is one of the basic needs to life. But, majority of urban poor cannot imagine this amenity and are dependent upon public stand posts (PSP) for their daily needs. The following figure shows availability of water from different sources.



*Based on sample survey

Fig. 4.

From figure 4, it can be said that 48% of urban poor use common boring water facilities in the premises, 42% of them use common municipal connection while 10% of them are dependent on public hand pumps.

Toilet facilities available within the premises of the household lead to better health, better satisfaction, and better quality of life. But, only 20% of urban poor have toilet facilities within the premise, while the rest 80% avail public toilet facilities. Lack of this basic facility is responsible for transmission of various communicable diseases and loss of valuable work hours.

Availability of electricity is one of the basic amenities required for modern day living. All the sample households of Patna have electric connection within the premises. 40% of them have illegal connection while the rest proclaim to have legal electric connection.

Availability of proper disposal of garbage prevents degradation of the environment. 60% do not have any garbage dumping system while 40% live in relatively good areas to have access to some garbage disposal system.

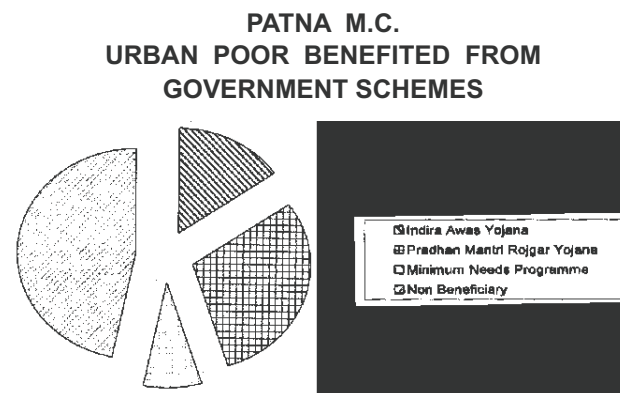
Thus urban poor of Patna live in overcrowded rooms with inadequate provision for drinking water, sanitation and garbage disposal system. They are continually at risk of various diseases. Living in dehumanized condition, they are deprived of good quality of life, better health, better education etc. Thus, housing and living conditions occupy a major dimensions of urban poverty and a pre-requisite of good quality of life.

Government Schemes

Urban poor constitutes 34.6% of the total population of the State. The above study shows that they are the victims of vicious cycle of poverty. Officially, lot of efforts have been made through different programmes for their development, but their pathetic condition is clear from the sample survey.

Several schemes have been launched by the Government for the all round development of the urban poor, such as Indira Awas Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Rojgar Yojana, Minimum Needs Programmes, Employment Assurance Programme, Self Employment Programme for urban poor, Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission, Slum Housing Development Project (SHDP) etc. The surveyed data show that out of 100 sample population in Patna Municipal Corporation

Area, only 53% have benefited from the government schemes; some in the city while some in their village. Rest of them is deprived of any governmental assistance. Following figure shows the proportion of sample population benefiting from different government schemes.



*Based on sample survey

Fig. 5.

From the above figure, it is clear that majority of sample population have been benefited from Pradhan Mantri Rojgar Yojana, followed by Indira Awas Yojana and Minimum Needs Programme. But most recently launched programme like Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission has not benefited any of the urban poor among sample population. The Nitish Kumar Government will provide 24,000 dwelling Units to the Urban Poor in the ten towns of the State. The basic service for urban poor (BSUP) scheme under the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission envisages provisions of 14,592 dwelling Units with amenities of light and clean environment for the urban poor. Further, they are planning to replace the slums with low cost housing that will be constructed under the Integrated Slum Housing Development Project (SHDP). Hindustan Prefabricator Limited has been asked to prepare low cost housing, so that SHDP would be implemented on a massive scale. Very serious efforts are needed to bring all the urban poor under the purview of government schemes.

Findings and Suggestions

From the above discussion, it can be said that urban poverty is the most discouraging factor in the effort of improved urbanization process of the State. There has been a declining trend in urban poverty in India (from 49% in 1973-74 to 23.6% in 1999-2000) while in Bihar it is 39.91% against the national average.

Urban Poor, though, an integral part of the development of the State, are struggling for their daily survival. With limited income and increasing expenditure, their quality of life is deteriorating every day. Many BPL families can not even afford two square meals a day. Not all of them even possess a Red Card that would help them to procure monthly food items at a cheap rate. Nutritious food or a balanced diet is a dream for them. Further, meager incomes have deprived them from basic amenities and other basic necessities of life. The health of the urban poor is pitiable. Lack of nutritious food and balanced diet is responsible for chronic energy deficiency, anemia, low blood pressure among women and adolescent girls. While unhygienic environmental condition is to blame for diseases like diarrhea, respiratory trouble, jaundice etc. Children are suffering from diseases related to malnutrition. Under such precarious condition, there is no doubt literacy rate will be low and educational attainment will be minimal. Literacy rate among sample population is 53%, while 15% have received education till middle level. 42% of the urban poor are sending their children to school while rest of them mostly girl children are busy in houseworks or looking after younger siblings when their parents are busy at work. Thus, gender discrimination is clear among the poor families. The lack of access to safe and secure home is an important dimension of urban poverty. The urban poor of Patna are living in overcrowded rooms with inadequate provision of drinking water, sanitation and garbage disposal system. Living in dehumanized condition, these urban poor are being deprived of good quality of life, better, health, better education and are victims of vicious cycle of poverty.

Urgent efforts are needed to improve the overall quality of life of urban poor. Some of these are to provide 'Red Card' to all the urban poor to procure cereals and pulses at lower prices. Public Distribution System (PDS) should be properly implemented with better coverage. The Government should take various measures for slum improvement and will provide better houses with basic amenities to urban poor as a part of JNNURM scheme. With increasing number of houseless population, more public toilets like Sulabh Sauchalaya and public stand posts (PSPs) for water collection is also the need of the hour. There should be micro level planning for solid waste management in different wards of Patna Municipal Corporation Area.

Social necessities and amenities like primary education, adult education, female education, vocational education, maternity relief immunization for children and primary health care must be implemented at a large scale. Skill training should be given to youth in different services. Handicrafts and vocational training will help them to become self sufficient. Meritorious students should be given special scholarships to continue their studies.

There must be assistance to urban poor women in groups for economic activities suited to their skills, training, attitude and local condition. Training in nursing, beautician or computer will help the school going girl child to be economically self sufficient. Further, improvement of small scale and agro-based industry in rural areas and growth of development clusters like PURA (Providing Urban Amenities in rural Areas) , proper implementation of NREGA will definitely check internal migration of rural poor to urban areas.

All these schemes if implemented properly will definitely improve urban poor's condition. These might help many of them to break vicious cycle of poverty and become a part of the mainstream population.

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