



## **POVERTY, YOUTH AND POLITICS; A THREE DIMENSIONAL VIEW OF YOUTH IN SLUM AREAS OF SOLAPUR CITY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The present study is an empirical study conducted in selected slum areas of Solapur city in the Maharashtra State of India. The study was conducted to find out the relationship between poverty, politics and youth development, and has employed the participatory observation method. The aim of the study was to find out the problems and consequences of poverty in slum areas with reference to youth. In this regard, the study had made an attempt to examine the political involvement of youths in slum areas to determine the degree to which politics and politicians influence the dynamics of youth poverty in slums, and also to suggest possible solutions for the problem of slum youth poverty being manipulated by politicians to serve socially costly ends. Towards this end, three hypotheses were tested using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) which are as follows: 1) There is no relationship between poverty and youth development 2) Youth and politics are correlated with each other 3) Slum youth are misguided by politicians. The findings of the study reveal that youth from slums are misled by politicians in slum areas and that youth are largely unaware of the results of their deeds and get knowingly or unknowingly involved in socially harmful activities. Further, youth who are poverty stricken are used in the name of religion and caste for propaganda purposes to serve the vested interests of politicians. This research paper will discuss in detail the various dimensions of pauperism amongst slum youth, most of who live on less than a dollar a day.

**Keywords:** Poverty, Politics, Youth, Slums

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Poverty in the Indian context is not entirely an economic phenomenon. According to Turner (1972) the vision of poverty is not wrong,

merely incomplete. It is a complex social reality and it is associated with different structures of society that are affected by various deprivations in the educational, employment, political and religious aspects. According to the theory of Cycle of Poverty by Moynihan (1969) "poverty is a viscous cycle, where the problems are interrelated and thus rooted within themselves" (p. 9). Further, the theory reveals that people who live in poverty often face several cultural and environmental obstacles that keep them from improving their own economic status and that of their children. Thus, the poor are not poor only because their parents are poor. There is a lot more to be highlighted. According to Lewis's (1970) theory of 'Culture of Poverty' poor people live in a culture of poverty which instills in each generation a distinctive set of values, attitudes and behavioral norms, which make it difficult for the poor to take advantage of any opportunities they may have to climb out of poverty. Hence poverty can be seen institutionalized through the structures and their functions in society. Both the theories 'Cycle of Poverty' and 'Culture of Poverty' suggest that there are built in barriers which discourage the poor from attempting to improve their economic, political and social positions. The study has synthesized both these theories to understand the implications of poverty on youth development and the youth involved in local politics.

According to Bhatnagar (2010) the political mechanism operates through ideologies and political power which tend to be manipulated for exploitative purposes in the interests of certain groups. Exploitation is easier in conditions where poverty is prevalent. Given the huge presence of poverty in slum areas, it is relevant to explore the relationship between various facets of poverty and politics in the attempt to understand their individual as well as collective impact on youth.

### ***Indian Slum Studies so far***

Urban slums have attracted the attention of some sociologists and social anthropologists in India in fairly recent times. M.S. Gore in 1970 and Desai and Pillai in 1972 conducted their studies on slum and pavement dwellers of the city of Mumbai. Ashish Bose in 1973 analytically evaluated the studies conducted during 1901-71 on the themes of urbanization in India. The Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board conducted a socio-economic survey of Madras slums in 1971, and presented a report in 1975. Bhat in 1978 brought forth the slum details of Bangalore city. These studies have emphasized only on the physical attributes and socio-economic factors of slums (Bhatnagar 2010). Though these studies have examined the poor and the slum dwellers that are living with very limited resources in a thorough manner, they explore only one dimension of the story. Madan (1969) holds that "under condition of poverty, we cannot have healthy individuals, educated children, socialized men and women interested in the progressive development of our social organization" (p. 257). Thus, the question arises as to what the other dimensions of poverty can be. Does poverty, particularly poverty among youth, have anything to do with politics and/or slum development? In this regard, what role do youth play in slum development? Do youth development and politics have any relationship? What can be the implications of poverty on youth? In order to find possible answers to the questions the study has formulated and tested some hypotheses as follows;

- 1) There is no relationship between poverty and youth development
- 2) Youth and politics are correlated with each other
- 3) Slum youth are misled by politicians

### **India and Its Youth**

India aspires to produce young people who are empowered, able to realize their full potential, and understand their roles and responsibilities in making a meaningful contribution to the development of the nation. This perception underpins Indian youth policies. Recognizing the youth as a potential human resource in the dynamic task of nation-building, national youth policies consider youth development as a comprehensive and multifaceted approach, that provides opportunities and support for young people to maximize their individual and collective creative energies for personal development as well as development of the society and the nation at large. Youth all over the world today constitute a significant category for policymakers, governments, marketing specialists, politicians and social scientists alike. Yet one notices a relative silence in the Social Sciences when it comes

to concerns of the youth, especially in the context of India (Mukherjee and Choudhury 2010). There are studies which primarily focus on the youth, in particular historical moments and conjunctures, or as a category with a specific set of problems. However, an in-depth and nuanced understanding of the contemporary issues pertaining to the youth in India is strongly called for. Why do the youth need to be given special attention all of a sudden? Mukherjee and Choudhury (2010) explain that the youth in India today, under the age of 34 years, constitute about 41 percent of the total population according to the 2001 Census. It is estimated that by 2020, the average age of an Indian will be 29 years, compared to 37 years for China and 48 years for Japan. According to Curtin (2004) almost half a billion young people aged 15 to 24 years, according to world population estimates for 2000, live in low-income countries, representing nearly half

**Table 1: Youth in proportion to the total population in different countries.**

<b>Income level of Country</b>	<b>Total population 2000</b>	<b>Youth population aged 15 to 24 yrs</b>	<b>Youth share of total population %</b>
Low	2,492,712,000	486,605,957	45.91
Lower middle	2,178,021,000	361,576,779	34.11
Upper middle	487,622,000	92,755,912	8.75
High income 903	903,147,500	118,958,602	11.22
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,061,502,500</b>	<b>1,059,897,250</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: UN population estimates 2000 and World Bank, 2002**

(46 percent) of all young people in this age group in the world, and a significant amount of this population lives in India.

Thus the researcher has especially focused on youth in relation to poverty, one of India's most pressing problems, and also the political implications of poverty on youth and youth development.

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Research Aim**

The aim of this research is to determine the implications of poverty and local politics on slum youth development in selected slums of Solapur city in the state of Maharashtra, India.

### ***Universe and Sampling***

The population of this study involved seventy youth from the five slum areas in Solapur city. Samples were drawn from five slum areas selected using a purposive sampling method. The slums are as follows:

- Shastrinagar Slum Area
- Indiranagar Slum Area
- Maddivasti Slum Area
- Takshilnagar Slum Area
- Ambedkarnagar Slum Area

The researcher has been working in the selected slum areas under the fieldwork placement trainings of a Master of Social Work (MSW) course for four years. In order to comprehend the ground realities of slums and acquire primary information, intensive fieldwork was carried out in all five slums throughout this period. Data was collected with the use of semi-structured interviews. To supplement the information, a concise schedule was also administered. The respondents were mainly youth between 15 to 24 years of age (the age range declared as the age of youth by the UN and World Bank).

### ***Tools of data collection***

A detailed check list was prepared in order to ensure that the execution of the study was smoothly facilitated. Semi-structured interview schedules were used to collect primary data, while focus group discussions were conducted to gain more personal insights into the situation and make the research more qualitative in nature.

### ***Research design***

As mentioned earlier, Bhatnagar (2010) has opined that there are no or very few researches conducted on slums with a holistic social work approach. This vacuum has resulted in a lack of understanding of the slum life and its many dynamics. In order to

address this issue, an exploratory research design was used to reveal the relationship between various variables which have implications on slum youth development.

### ***Variables***

Considering the encompassing nature of the subject, a number of variables were studied to explore the relationship between poverty, politics and youth development. These variables were education, employment, literacy, per-capita income, interest in politics, and physical health which constitute the thrust areas of development as outlined in the 2011 Youth Development Plan published by the Department of Youth Affairs of India.

### ***Operational Definitions***

#### **Poverty**

“Fundamentally, poverty is a denial of choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity. It means lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society. It means not having enough to feed and provide clothing to a family, not having a school or clinic to go to; not having the land on which to grow one’s food or a job to earn one’s living, not having access to credit. It means insecurity, powerlessness and exclusion of individuals, households and communities. It means susceptibility to violence, and it often implies living on marginal or fragile environments, without access to clean water or sanitation” (United Nations).

#### **Youth**

The United Nations Organization has defined youth as persons between the ages of 15 and 24. The same definition is used for the study.

#### **Politics**

According to the Oxford dictionary, the complex or aggregate of relationships

of people in society, especially those relationships involving authority or power is considered as politics. It denotes activities concerned with gaining or using power within an organization or a group.

### Slum

For the purpose of the study the definition given by the Census of India (2001) is used for the study: "A compact area of at least 300 populations or about 60-70 households of poorly built congested tenements, in unhygienic environment usually with inadequate infrastructure and lacking in proper sanitary and drinking water facilities".

### Techniques of analysis

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (16) was used for analyzing the primary data collected. Correlations, t-tests, and cross tabulations were also used to make the study more nuanced and objective.

### Limitations of the study

As the research was not a sponsored study,

**Table 2: The sample**

Sl.no	Name of Slum Area	No. of Youth
1	Shastrinagar Slum	13
2	Indiranagar Slum	12
3	Maddivasti Slum	18
4	Takshilnagar Slum	15
5	Ambedkarnagar Slum	12
	<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>

### Testing of Hypothesis

The testing of hypotheses was done using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (16)

1) First Hypothesis:

there were limitations in terms of man and money. Most of the research work was done with the help of social work students placed for their fieldwork in said slums areas, which made it possible to reach out to the youth. Politicians, parents, other elderly people, and children residing in these slums were not reached so as to focus only on the youth. These categories can be new thrust areas for researchers doing slum studies in future.

### RESEARCH FINDINGS

#### Demographic Profiles

Seventy youth from five slum areas were selected for the study. The researcher, along with other social work students, has been working in the aforementioned slum areas as part of a social work fieldwork curriculum for more than four years. The respondents were selected from some groups put together by social work students for a previous group work activity. Table no.1 shows the respondent composition based on the slum areas they represented.

(H<sub>0</sub>) Null Hypothesis: There is no relationship between poverty and youth development

(H<sub>A</sub>) Alternative hypothesis: There is a relationship between poverty and youth development

Table no. 3 gives the main matrix of the

**Table 3: Correlation**

		Family Type	Monthly Income	Per Capital Income	House Type	Earnings	Education	Type of Education	Addiction
Family Type	Pearson Correlation	1	-.249*	.022	-.154	-.271*	.082	.102	-.100
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.038	.860	.202	.023	.502	.399	.409
	N	70	70	70	70	70	70	70	70
Monthly Income	Pearson Correlation	-.249*	1	.401**	.123	.028	-.209	-.281*	.198
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.038		.001	.309	.816	.083	.018	.100
	N	70	70	70	70	70	70	70	70
Per Capital Income	Pearson Correlation	.022	.401**	1	.299*	-.266*	.037	-.368**	.164
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.860	.001		.012	.026	.763	.002	.174
	N	70	70	70	70	70	70	70	70
House Type	Pearson Correlation	-.154	.123	.299*	1	-.158	.333**	.037	.088
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.202	.309	.012		.193	.005	.762	.471
	N	70	70	70	70	70	70	70	70
Earnings	Pearson Correlation	-.271*	.028	-.266*	-.158	1	-.100	.280*	-.275*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.023	.816	.026	.193		.410	.019	.021
	N	70	70	70	70	70	70	70	70
Education	Pearson Correlation	.082	-.209	.037	.333**	-.100	1	.192	.164
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.502	.083	.763	.005	.410		.111	.174
	N	70	70	70	70	70	70	70	70
Type of Education	Pearson Correlation	.102	-.281*	-.368**	.037	.280*	.192	1	-.356**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.399	.018	.002	.762	.019	.111		.002
	N	70	70	70	70	70	70	70	70
Are you addicted	Pearson Correlation	-.100	.198	.164	.088	-.275*	.164	-.356**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.409	.100	.174	.471	.021	.174	.002	
		70	70	70	70	70	70	70	70

\*\*Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed), \*Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed)



Pearson's correlation coefficient. Variables that were studied in relation to the poverty of youth and youth development have been arranged in the matrix such that their columns and rows intersect. In the cells there are numbers which tell us about the statistical interaction between the variables. Three types of variables are provided in each cell namely Pearson's correlation,

significance level, and the number of cases. The variables determining the poverty of youth were family type i.e. families above poverty line and families below poverty line, per capita income, and monthly income of the family. The variables chosen to be studied in relation to youth development were type of house, earnings, educational qualifications, type of education, and addiction among the

**Table 4: Correlation**

		Religion	Interest in Politics	Conflicts between Political Parties	Per Capita Income	Caste	Voting
Religion	Pearson Correlation	1	.163	-.015	-.167	.145	-.267*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.178	.899	.166	.231	.025
	N	70	70.	70	70	70.	70
Interest in Politics	Pearson Correlation	.163	1	.077	-.305*	.234	-.002
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.178		.524	.010	.052	.989
	N	70	70.	70	70	70	70
Conflicts in Political Parties	Pearson Correlation	-.015	.077	1	-.154	.266*	.122
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.899	.524		.202	.026	.316
	N	70	70	70	70	70	70
Per Capital Income	Pearson Correlation	-.167	-.305*	-.154	1	-.108	-.006
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.166	.010	.202		.372	.961
	N	70	70	70	70	70	70
Caste	Pearson Correlation	.145	.234	.266*	-.108	1	-.114
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.231	.052	.026	.372		.345
	N	70	70	70	70	70	70
Voting	Pearson Correlation	-.267*	-.002	.122	-.006	-.114	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.025	.989	.316	.961	.345	
		70	70	70	70	70	70

\*\*Corelation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed), \*Corelation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed)

youth. It was revealed that the type of family and earnings of youth shows a p-value of 0.023; monthly income and type of education shows a p-value of 0.018; per capita income and type of house shows a p-value of 0.012, and earnings and type of education showed p-values of 0.019.

The p-value between poverty and youth development shows a significant (2-tailed) correlation that is below 0.05 ( $p < 0.05$ ), thus the ( $H_0$ ) null hypothesis was rejected and the ( $H_A$ ) alternate hypothesis was accepted. The inference is that there is a relationship between poverty and youth development.

2) Second Hypothesis:

( $H_0$ ) Null Hypothesis: Youth and Politics are not correlated with each other

( $H_A$ ) Alternative hypothesis: Youth and Politics are correlated with each other

significance level, and the number of cases. Variables determining youth interest in, knowledge of, and awareness about politics were tested. Factors such as religion, caste

and per capita income were statistically intersected using Pearson' correlation with voting, conflicts among political parties and interest in politics. The results showed that the religion of youth and their voting decision highlights ap-value of 0.025, while the caste of youth and conflicts in polices showsap-value of 0.026, and the per capita income of youth and their interest in politics shows a p-value of 0.01.

Thus, it can be seen that the variables of youth and politics showap-value below 0.05, encouraging the researcher to reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis. Therefore it can be inferred that youth and politics are correlated with each other.

3) Third Hypothesis :

( $H_0$ ) Null Hypothesis: Slum youth are not misled by politicians

( $H_A$ ) Alternative hypothesis: Slum youth are misled by politicians

Table no. 5 shows a t-value of 10.173, degree

**Table 5: Correlation**

	Test Value = 1					
	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95 percent Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Youth misled by Politicians	10.173	69	0.000	0.60000	0.4823	0.7177

of freedom 69, significant level 0.000, and 95 percent confident interval for the mean. A t-value of 10.173 for 69 degree of freedom (df) is highly significant as the significant value is 0.000, and therefore the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis was accepted. Henceit can be inferred that slum

youth are misled by politicians.

**DISCUSSION**

**Poverty and Youth Development**

From the results highlighted in Table no.3 it can be inferred that there is a relationship



between poverty and youth development. Variables defining the poverty line, per capita income, type of house and families living below poverty line were seen intersecting youth development indicators namely education of youth, employment of youth, whether youth are getting technical education or traditional education and addiction seen in youth, all of which have been laid down by the United Nations as criteria of youth development. This gives the clear picture that poverty in the slums has implications on the development process of youth. The results also support the 'Culture of Poverty' theory of Lewis (1970) that says poor people live in a culture of poverty which instills in each generation a distinctive set of values, attitudes and behavioral norms, which makes it difficult for the poor to take advantage of any opportunities they may have to climb out of poverty.

As seen in the results it can be concluded that per capita income and the type of education received by the youth shows a significant correlation. This is because non-professional traditional education usually leaves those who receive it unemployed due to the lack of marketable skills inherent in that type of education, whereas those who receive technical education are more likely to secure employment quickly.

The results also reveal a correlation between youth living in poor quality houses, and the type of education they receive. Those who were living in such houses tended to have received a relatively poor quality of education. This could very well be due to the lack of economic capacity which has significantly barred their access to satisfactory housing conditions and education.

According to Nagpaul (1996) the standard of living depends primarily on the fundamental factors of food, shelter, clothing and education and an individual's ability to get them. The inability to access these basic amenities, or

poverty, especially among youth is deeply embedded in the structures and functions of Indian society, particularly in the slums. Since the youth comprises a critical component of any society, even in the slums there will be no development without consideration of youth development.

### ***Youth politics***

Mukherjee and Choudhury (2010) hold that with the emerging complexities in national life, the country needs young minds that can generate new ideas of good governance. Ironically, some of the questions regarding slum youth are: Do they have an interest in local politics? Do they have faith in present political leaders? Does their economic condition have any relationship with politics in the slums? Does the cultural demography of youth, i.e. their religion, caste, per capita income, etc. have any relationship with politics in the slums?

The results show that the religion of youth and the decision of voting for a particular political party show a correlation, which means that certain youth religious groups have become vote banks of certain political parties that have religious agendas. It was also revealed that the youth has nothing to do with the charters of political parties; Table no.6 shows that the majority of the youth who are voting for a particular party (more than 84 percent) does not know the charter of that political party.

Further, Table no.4 reveals a significant correlation between caste and conflicts between political parties. The implication is that political parties based on caste have conflicts with other political parties formed also on the basis of caste in the slums. Taken together, these data portray a picture where slum youth are pitted against each other in the name of religion, caste, and economy. Politics in slum areas is based upon religion, caste and the economy of youth.

These findings affirm the significance of youth empowerment in the socio-economic, cultural and political spheres. Thus, it is a need of the hour to work with the youth and ensure that they are equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills and capabilities to deliver their responsibilities while simultaneously enjoying their rights.

### ***Politicizing Youth***

Actively engaging in community affairs, younger generations reinterpret the

principles of the social contract and the ties that bind citizens to their polity for their generation. In so doing, they create both stability and change in the system (Flanagan 2003). Politicians seem to be very clever in capitalizing on this potential of the youth. In most cases, local political leaders mislead the youth – particularly slum youth – for their vested interests, and the task is made easier by the general lack of awareness of slum youth about such strategies of politicians. However, it is unwise to assume

**Table 6: Do you know the Charter of Political Party?**

		Frequency	%
Valid	Yes	11	15.7
	No	59	84.3
	Total	70	100.0

that slum youth are always 'innocent' in the sense that they do not engage in any socially harmful activities whatsoever. Most often the case is that they are not conscious of the consequences of their actions due to persistent poverty and the resultant lack of education, which leads to continuous engagement in such activities. From a rights perspective, these developments are indeed very harmful because on the one hand the violation of slum youth rights persists, and on the other such violation leads to the violation of the society's rights at large.

Harkness (2004) opines that political and civil rights have a fundamental impact on individuals' well-being. As Sen has argued, the ability of people to play an active and critical role in their choice of leaders, to express opinions, and to be protected from abuse and other environmental factors is critical in shaping welfare and thereby wellbeing. Indeed, Sen (1999) has gone so far as to claim that the spread of democracy has been the greatest achievement of the twentieth century

in this regard. The present study throws into relief the fact that youth competency should be strengthened and youth, particularly slum youth, should be made aware of their socio-economic and political rights and duties so that the many harmful effects of manipulation of slum youth poverty can be mitigated.

### **CONCLUSION**

Attention to slum youth, their poverty and its social consequences tends to increase when there are concerns about political stability and the younger generation's commitment to the preservation of the political system. The situation of youth in relation to local politics in slums has been the subject of extensive research, policy recommendations and practical initiatives. However in slums, particularly in the slums of Solapur, socio-economic and political youth empowerment is not on the local political agenda to the same degree. This is despite the major problems specifically slums are facing such as youth involvement in armed conflict, crime, social exclusion, poverty, politicizing the youth by

involving them in socially harmful activities by local political leaders, and political leaders using the youth for their political propaganda.

To combat these trends, it is necessary to improve the economic conditions of slum youth primarily by presenting them with more employment opportunities. Developing a comprehensive employment strategy for young people, however, faces a number of obstacles, not least of which is the perceptions held by governments and international agencies about “youth” as a high risk group (Mkandawire2000). It is seen in slums that the poverty of youth is politicized by local political leaders by involving the youth in conservative hard-line groups in the name of religion and caste. These often result in policies that view young people as persons with problems by government programs and not as active agents able to participate in and respond to slum community development. The challenge for governments and non-government agencies is to take a holistic approach to empower youth themselves to implement a comprehensive political, social, cultural, educational and employment strategy that would constructively engage the youth in slums.

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