

**Understanding Poverty through Social Stratification: A Case Study from Akkarawatta  
Village in the Central Province of Sri Lanka**

**Paper presented by M. A. Shantha Wijesinghe,  
Senior Lecturer, Department of Geography,  
University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka.**

**1. Introduction**

Poverty is defined and interpreted in different ways. It is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon with many forms and causes. Academic debates on the subject are packed with controversies over how to differentiate the 'poor' from the 'non-poor'. A poverty line is generally taken to be a threshold, in terms of income, below which people can be considered to be 'poor'. Researchers, scientists and policy makers attempt to ascertain different levels and causes of poverty. In describing and conceptualising poverty they often use such terms as vulnerability, deprivation, isolation, powerlessness etc.

As noted by Robert Chamber a single poverty line that divides the population into the 'poor' and the 'non-poor' is often inaccurate because it simplifies and standardises what is complex and varied (Chambers 1995). According to Beck (1984) the policies that are formulated to alleviate poverty will be more relevant to the manipulation of statistics than to the needs of people. It is very essential to place considerable value on qualitative aspects such as independence, security, self-respect, identity, close and non exploitative relationships and legal and political rights (Wratten 1995 and Chamber 1995). As Chambers has described, there are many more aspects of deprivation other than income poverty including vulnerability, powerlessness, isolation and humiliation.

Even though poverty has many dimensions the most commonly discussed concept of poverty is income poverty. The lack of adequate income to command basic necessities is the most widely known and accepted definition of poverty in Sri Lanka. Poverty thus defined, is generally related to a poverty line. The scale of poverty is measured by the number of households whose income falls below a government-defined poverty line. Such a poverty line is set at income levels that appear unrealistically low in relation to living costs and it has not paid attention to other aspects of poverty. On the basis of income criterion about one forth of population in Sri Lanka live below the poverty line. It is salient that most of these poor people live in rural areas, as about 70 per cent of the population live in rural villages. It has been estimated that about 27 per cent of the rural population live below the income based poverty line. The relevant figure of urban population reports 14 per cent. Percentage below the poverty line in the estate sector is somewhat lower than rural sector.

In Sri Lanka a considerable proportion of the population who are above the poverty line still lack the income that they need to cover the cost of basic necessities. Most of the people who have income that places them above the poverty line live in very poor quality housing, usually in unsuitable conditions with a great lack of infrastructure and services. There is evidence from all developing countries to show that seasonally induced poverty contributes to the deprivation and impoverishment of the poor.

The most widely adopted definition of poverty, which is based on the income criterion, is not inclusive enough. Understanding poverty only in terms of adequate income can misrepresent its nature and its underlying causes. It is a much broader and deeper issue of deprivation than having an income below a 'poverty line'. Poverty in many ways is a relationship and a relative phenomenon. 'I'm poor because you're rich' and has to be looked at holistically as it is often psychological and sociological. It is essential to review and analyse it in different ways to understand the reality of 'poor'. Thus, identification of 'poor' through social stratification may be useful and essential in understanding their nature and the reality based on various criteria.

There may be various social strata in an area, a region or wherever the place is. These different strata provide a socio-economic profile of the people living in that area. A more useful device that can be used to identify such strata is to examine how people living the same area view and analyse each household. This view and analysis may be based on the perception of individual, group of people or some key informants. Based on their view they themselves try to demarcate each household into visible social strata such as poorest of the poor, poor, rich etc. For such kind of demarcation they use various criteria. Understanding the nature of poor on the basis of such highlighted different criteria may be worthwhile rather than quantifying the extent of poverty on the income criterion alone. Moreover, there is a need to strengthen poverty assessments incorporating poor people's view on the determinants and processes leading to poverty. Here, it is important to examine why some have become poor while others are rich. Answer to this question is the examination of processes leading to poverty and social inequality.

A comprehensive understanding who and where the poor are and what prevents them from coming out of poverty is at the core of an effective poverty strategy in Sri Lanka. As explained above the attempt to understand the poor through social stratification and to examine the processes leading to poverty provide some answers to the questions; who are the poor and what prevents them from coming out of poverty. Moreover, it is important to address where the poor are. In Sri Lanka as well as other developing countries majority of poor people

live in rural villages. Thus, this study directly focuses on a rural village in the Central Province of Sri Lanka.

## **2. Objectives of the Study**

Based on the above-mentioned framework this paper attempts

- i) to demarcate poor group in the selected village through social stratification
- ii) to understand the nature of poverty in the selected village and
- iii) to examine the processes leading to poverty and social inequality

## **3. Methodology**

Methodology of this research paper starts from the selection of a village for the study and extends over application of techniques, data collection, analysis and the interpretation of collected data. Methods followed in each step can be rationalised as follows.

### **3.1 Village selection:**

There was a need to select a village well representing poor, as the paper attempted to understand poverty in a different perspective. Village called Akkarawatta, which is concerned in this research paper, is located in Kandy district in the Central Province of Sri Lanka (Figure1). The said province contains three districts named Kandy, Matale and Nuwara Eliya. Compared to other provinces in the country Central Province indicates somewhat backward development in terms of important development indicators. In this province Infant Mortality Rate is higher than the national average (16) and the Life Expectancy at Birth is also below the national figure (74). Particularly Kandy district located in the province reports the lowest life expectancy at birth in Sri Lanka. According to the regional pattern of human development in 1994, out of the seven provinces concerned, the Central Province is ranked in the 6<sup>th</sup> position in terms of Human Development Index (HDI). In 1994, district wise figures of HDI ranged from 0.649 to 0.864. The highest value was recorded by Colombo district: the central capital in the country. Kandy district located in the Central Province reported the lowest figure. The HDI of two out of three districts in this province is below the national average. On the other hand lower value of Human Poverty also confirms inadequate development of different sectors in the province. As a whole out of the seven provinces concerned, the Central Province ranked forth place in the Human Poverty Index in 1994.

In selecting Akkarawatta village for the study several steps were followed. First, it was decided to focus the study on a village located in Kandy district, as it has many rural backward villages, which perfectly deficit the nature of poor people. As an initial step

government defined income based poverty line was used to demarcate such villages in Kandy district. Such government-defined poverty line is set on the basis of number of families that earn monthly income less than Rs.1500. Thus, percentage of the families below poverty line was calculated regarding each village in the Kandy district. Comparatively Akkarawatta village reported a higher percentage (78%) regarding the families below official poverty line. Selecting a more suitable village for the study was further focused on the discussions with relevant government officers, as the income based official poverty line may not be useful at every time to determine a poorer village. Different matters such as nature of village, unemployment, education, infrastructure facilities available, percentage of rural population etc. pointed out by the officers of Divisional Secretariats in Kandy district were also taken into consideration for the selection. Thus, Akkarawatta village was finally selected as a better village for the study, as it helps to achieve the aims of the research in all aspects.

### **3.2 Techniques applied:**

In this research, the main technique applied to understand the nature of poor is social stratification. Social stratification is here done by the people living in the village itself. At the first step villagers were asked to highlight noticeable different social strata existing in their village according to their view. This view and analysis was based on the perception of individual, group of people and some key informants. Based on their view they themselves tried to demarcate each household into visible social strata such as poorest of the poor, poor, rich etc. From the stratified groups they were asked to demarcate poor group or groups. Their own ideas, voice, concepts, language, the mental picture etc. were taken into consideration in this regard. Secondly they were allowed to highlight and explain the characteristics or the dimensions, which they used to differentiate poor group. On the basis of these dimensions, ideas and the voice of poor people and also on the researcher's field experience an attempt was made to understand the nature poor in the selected village.

In addition, different types of qualitative research techniques were applied in collecting primary data. Those methods are described under the next sub heading.

### **3.3 Data collection:**

Except secondary data, which were used to select a village for the study this research is completely based on primary data. As explained above different socio economic secondary data were used in selecting and understanding the village. Thus, poverty figures, employment, income, education and different demographic data were extracted from Divisional Secretariats in the Kandy District. In addition, primary data sources were also used in selecting the village

for the study. Interviews and the discussions made with local and regional level officers in Divisional Secretariats are important here.

Different types of qualitative research techniques were completely applied in collecting primary data. Table 1.1 explains these methods and the purpose of applying them in the research process.

**Table 1.1**  
**Methods Applied in Collecting Primary Data**

<b>Method</b>	<b>Purpose of applying</b>
Formal and informal discussions with local, regional and village level officers	To select and understand the nature of the village To understand socio economic background of the village To identify the poor group to some extent
Formal and informal discussions with villagers, group of people and key informants	For social stratification To demarcate poor or poorer group To identify the characteristics or the dimensions used to demarcate poor To understand the processes leading to poverty and social inequality
Transact walks	To understand the nature of village To identify and observe poorer households
In-depth interviews and discussions with individual, group of people in the village	In order to further confirm the nature of stratified social groups In order to understand the nature of poor To understand characteristics relating to the nature of poor To clarify and confirm the processes leading to poverty
Observation	In order to understand the nature of poor To view the reality of poor and the nature of their households
Note down the important statements	To emphasise the voice of the poor To understand how poor see them

### **3.4 Analysis and Interpretation:**

As the research is completely based on the qualitative data, analysis and the interpretation of the paper are in a descriptive manner. No specific statistical methods were used except calculating percentages or proportions. It is believed that the best way of understanding the poor is to study and describe their way of living and nature as it is. Their own words and statements have been quoted to emphasise their view and the voice where necessary. Thus, the analysis and the interpretation follow reporting and descriptive way of writing.

## **4. Background of the Village**

### **4.1 Location:**

Akkarawatta village is situated in Kandy District in the Central Province of Sri Lanka. It belongs to Thumpane Divisional Secretariat. It is located at a distance of 25km from Kandy. The village is bounded by Kandy-Kurunegala road in the North, Pethigewela GN Division in the South, Nuge Ela stream in the East and Akkarawatta road in the West. Compared to most of the villages in the district it is very rural and backward area. The village is located adjoining to the Kandy – Kurunegala road.

### **4.2 Demographic and socio economic background:**

Total population of the village is 320. Number of families living in the village is 77 and they live in 70 houses. A slight difference can be seen between male and female population. Male population (184) is somewhat higher than the female population (136). This is completely a rural area and about 90% of the total employed persons are seasonal or temporary employees. Percentage of the families below poverty line is 58 per cent. Only one Muslim family is living in this village and all others are Singhalese.

This village has originated in 1954. Earlier it was a scrubland with some rubber plants. In 1954 landless people from different parts of the country have come to the village and settled down. They have come to the village from the districts like Kurunegala, Polonnaruwa, Anuradhapura etc. At the outset they have encroached the land. To avoid further encroachments and to award deeds to the villagers successive governments from time to time have attempted to survey and partition the area. But it has not happened until 1985 and so far most of the families did not have any ownership to the land. According to the villagers' view some families have got licences to their land in an illegal way by getting the support from politicians and government officers. Anyhow in 1984/85 the government has given land ownership to all villagers under a specific deed-awarding system called *Swarna Buumi*. Thus,

0.25 acres of land has been allocated to each family. By now some of these plots have separated into small pieces, as the next generation of these people is also living in the same plots.

Employment pattern in the village indicates that 75 per cent of the population are doing casual work. Breadwinners mainly maintain their families by doing different type of casual work. In addition, there are Army soldiers, girls working in the garment sector, persons doing masonry and carpentry and some government employees. Most of those who are employed in the government and private sector are working as labourers. There are only two teachers living in the village. One is still working and the other is retired.

Among the micro and small enterprises found from the village food making enterprises, retail shops, dress and bra making enterprises, boarding house, breeding chicken and goats, ice cream making and the enterprise making small kerosene oil lamps are important. Distilling illegal type of liqueur called *Kasippu* is also a well-established profitable business in the village. Within their home gardens they have mainly cultivated cash crops like pepper, ginger and turmeric, vegetables like brinjal, ladies fingers, long beans, tomato, ash plantain, winged bean and some edible leaves, fruits like durian, banana, soursop, custard apple, king coconuts, jack fruit, avocado, guava, papaw, lime, pomelo, mandarin and some other crops like coconut, jack etc. Cultivation of these crops is very poor particularly within the homesteads of marginal hill slope areas, which poorer people mainly live. Slope of the land and the infertility of soil have mainly affected in this regard.

Age structure in the village highlights that 52 per cent of total population belong to the labour force. Percentage of infants and the children below 15 years is 39 and the adult population is 9 per cent of the total population. Out of the total labour force only 10 per cent have permanent employments and 20 per cent is completely unemployed. Others are doing self, seasonal or temporary jobs. Average family size in the village is 5 persons per family.

Of those who have passed or are passing school going age, majority (52%) have only studied up to Ordinary Level. Percentage of the people studying or studied up to primary level is 28. Persons who have studied up to Advanced Level are 15 per cent. There are also 3 persons who have attained higher educational qualifications. No schooling rate is also high in the village and 17 persons were found as those who have never gone to school. No schooling persons and the villagers who have only studied up to primary level are mainly the elder people in the village.

For co-operation and to abide by some of their necessities villagers have set up some societies like Funeral Society, Rural Development Society, Young Sports Club, *Samurdhi* Society etc.

*Samurdhi* society has been set up by a special poverty alleviation programme. Members of this society are the people of the households below government-defined poverty line. According to the view of active participants of these societies, people like at least to participate in the said societies if only some material or financial benefits are given. Accordingly villagers' participation in *Samurdhi* Society is in a higher state, as they can expect and get some benefits from it. Yet the participation in other societies is in a very poor level.

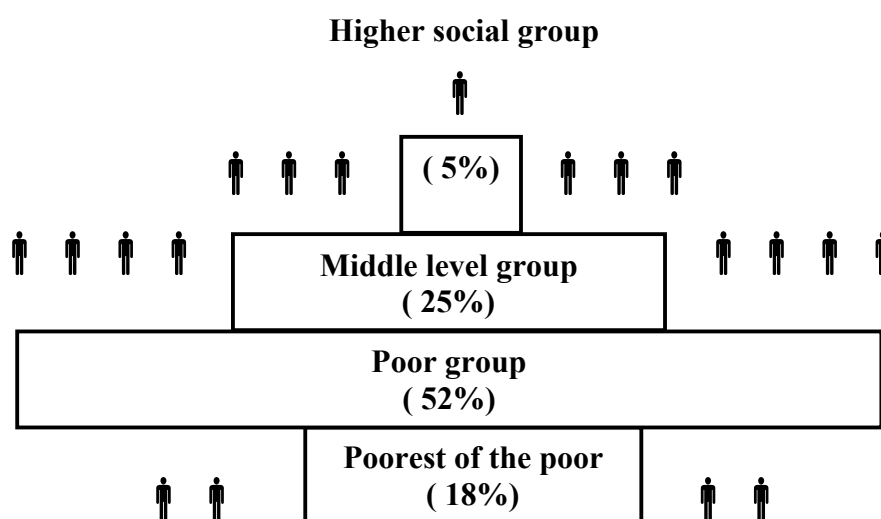
## **5. Social Stratification and the Nature of Poverty in Akkarawatta**

### **5.1 Social Stratification:**

By following the above-mentioned qualitative research techniques an attempt was made to understand different social strata existing in the village. Accordingly, the villagers highlighted four main social classes within their social stratification. Figure 2 depicts these different stratified groups. Those are;

1. Poorest of the poor - 18 per cent of total households fall to this category.
2. Poor group - 52 per cent of total households belong to this category
3. Middle level group – about 25 per cent of total households belong to this category.
4. Higher social group - According to their view 5 per cent of total households in the village fall to this category.

**Figure 2**  
**Social Stratification in Akkarawatta**





As a whole, they have demarcated 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> group (poorest of the poor and poorer group) as poor people in the village. They have also identified middle level and the higher social group as the rich people. Villagers used different characteristics to demarcate these two poor groups. On the basis of these highlighted characteristics, dimensions, researcher's field experience, view and the voice of these people nature of poor can be discussed under the following sub headings. But it is important to keep in mind that all these characteristics are inter-related and perform together in creating and establishing poverty and social inequality.

## **6. Nature of Poorest of the Poor and Poor in Akkarawatta:**

### **6.1 Poorest of the poor:**

Basic features of the poorest of the poor people in Akkarawatta are salient. Compared to other identified groups they are the most suffering part in the village. Their pattern of behaving, dressing, eating and the way of living etc. are completely different from other three groups. It is important to describe their way of living and other characteristics in understanding the nature of these people. All these characteristics can be discussed under the following sub headings.

#### **Expose to illnesses:**

According to the view of these people they feel that they always expose to illnesses. This matter is salient particularly regarding their children. Their children are exposed to some kind of illnesses at least once a month. They normally suffer from fever, cold, vomiting, diarrhoea or influenza. Not only their children but also the elder people of this group are also exposed to the same diseases. Different matters can be pointed out of why these people always expose to different illnesses. This phenomenon is directly or indirectly related with different variables like family income, nutritional condition of food, cleanliness, ignorance, health and sanitary facilities etc. It is obvious that the children in the poorest of the poor group do not get sufficient and nutritional food. Their parents are not so concerned of the nutritional condition of their food. What they do is that they get whatever foods going with their daily earnings. Even though their income is sometime sufficient to get nutritional foods they have hardly paid attention to this matter because of their ignorance and negligence. Consequently their children are suffering from under or mal-nutrition. These under or mal-nourished children always expose to different diseases as they have lost the capacity of immunization.

#### **Household environment and the use of water:**

Use of unclean water and dirty household environment are also identical reasons for these illnesses. These poor people in Akkarawatta live in hill slope areas and they use water flowing

from upper streams in the area. Particularly in rainy seasons this water is mixed with mud and sand but they do not get used to boil or purify water before use. Consequently children of these poor people are suffering from the illnesses like vomiting and diarrhoea from time to time. Even though mid-wife in the village has advised several times to be aware of these matters they have not taken them seriously because of their ignorance and negligence. On the other hand they do not have time to think of these health factors, as they give priority to earn something for day-to-day living. They are the hard working people and they get tired after working. They eat something and go to bed by thinking of how to earn something for living tomorrow. If quoted some expression in their own words in this regard.

*“ We are doing casual work. We have to work hard to earn something for living. We leave home early morning and come back about to getting dark. So we have no time to think of other matters. We are very tired by evening. We eat whatever we have and go to bed. Even though we want to be concerned of our children we have no time. Our main problem is living for tomorrow”. (Siridara and his wife in Akkarawatta).*

People in this village have pointed out another reason for the illnesses like fever and cold causing to elders. They mentioned that they have to hard work daily to earn something for living. Consequently every day by evening they suffer from fever or body pain. As a remedy to these illnesses women get used to take Paracetamol and the men addict to illegal type of liqueur called *Kassippu*. Under this situation people in this village are losing their capability of working and productivity day by day. On the other hand distilling illegal type of liqueur called *Kassippu* has become a wide spread disaster in the village.

#### **Nature of houses:**

When explaining nature of houses of the poorest of the poor it is obvious that their houses are in a very dilapidated condition. Their houses are under risk and made of clay. Roofs of these houses are made of either metal sheets or dried leaves of coconut called *kajang*. When constructing their houses they use their own resources getting from the surrounding environment. Particularly they use clay obtained from their own gardens to build in walls of the houses. They themselves convert clay into bricks by burning in very small furnaces constructed in their gardens. Clay dug from their own environment is suitable for making bricks but they are not in reddish colour like normal bricks. They are in brown mixed muddy colour and also not as strong as normal bricks. Even though they make bricks for their own purposes no one is carrying out brick making as an enterprise, which produces bricks for selling purpose. According to villagers view their bricks have nowhere in the market as they

are in low quality and low standards. On the other hand there is no demand for this product at least from the villagers, as they themselves dig clay and make bricks to meet their own needs. Laziness of poor people has affected to certain extent for the dilapidated condition of their houses. For instance in this village there are some poor families, which have not used bricks even to construct their houses by using available clay resource. These houses are in a very poor condition and sometime walls of their houses are made of wood or polythene.

Floor of these houses is also made of clay and as mentioned above they have been roofed either by kajang or metal sheets. Dirty and dusty floor environment has greatly affected health condition of the children. This is also one of the reasons for their usual exposure to illnesses. Poor roofing and the number of holes in the roof depict their living condition. Even for a slight rain it looks like drizzling by coming water inside through these holes. If quoted one woman's expression in this regard;

*"See the number of holes in the roof of our house. Even for a slight rain, water comes inside. We are not in a position to put asbestos or tiles. Our income is hardly enough even for a hand to mouth life. So what could we do besides looking at these holes..." (Karunawathi in Akkarawatta)*

#### **Use of equipment for living:**

Use of very simple equipments for living is also one of the characteristics of this group. Particularly for cooking they use very simple kitchen utensils like clay pots and vessels. Way of cooking and the type of kitchen are very traditional. Water pot, hearth made of three stones, rack frame to keep vessels above the hearth are the identical features in their kitchens. They use firewood for cooking and most of the cooking pots and vessels are made of clay. A metal kettle is normally used for boiling water. They are not using electricity or gas at all for cooking and boiling. At least for getting light at night their houses do not have the electricity. They use very simple equipments not only in the kitchen but also in other parts of the house. They have very simple electrical equipments and most probably it is limited to a small radio. Equipments like TV, settee and other better furniture cannot be seen in their houses. For ironing their children's school clothes, they use very simple non-electric iron. Even though they can afford an electric iron their houses do not have electricity to use it. They have only one or two beds for sleeping. It is normally given for their children but there are no mosquito nets over the beds. For living and sleeping rooming is not enough at all. Some houses have only one room but some do not.

**Pattern of household setting:**

Disordered pattern of their household setting is also one of the identical characteristics of poorest of the poor group. It is clear that they have not built up their houses according to a plan. One or two rooms have been constructed according to the space available in marginal lands and the household structure is very irregular. Kitchen is a small hut and it is made of wood or clay. It is normally separated from the main part of the house. It is obvious that these houses have been constructed by adding part by part. Not only the houses but also their garden and surrounding environment depict a disordered pattern. Gardens are very small. Those are limited to three to five feet because of the slope of the land. Appearance of their gardens is horrible to see. Some gardens are water or muddy pits supporting to breed mosquitoes. At least very simply planned homestead cannot be seen regarding the households belonging to this group.

**Liqueur addiction:**

It is obvious that male persons of these households have addicted liqueur. It is important to mention here why they have got used to take liqueur every day. According to their view they are hard working people. By evening they are suffering from body pain. Paracetamol does not react to this sickness and as a remedy they have got used to take liqueur. Even though they are trying to give reasonable matters in this regard, drug addiction and distilling illegal type of liqueur called *Kassippu* have become a wide spread disaster in the village. It is evident that number of problems has been created by this phenomenon. One problem is that the liqueur taken by them is not up to standards. Its quality is very poor causing very serious damages to liver of the body. Materials, which are used to distil this illegal type of liqueur, are very harmful to human body. Consequently these poorer people have been losing their working capacity, healthiness and productivity day by day. This is very obvious when looking at their body shapes. Their skeletons have come out and the eyes have submerged and they look pale. Another problem of drug addiction is related with poverty. In this village poverty and the drug addiction have a close relationship. Even though male persons of these households earn something by hard working they spend large part of their earnings for liqueur. On average it is about 30 per cent of their daily income. They are wasting that sum for liqueur that can be used for their family welfare. Spending money on liqueur has worse affected family income, dietary and nutritional condition of family members. If quoted one woman's expression in this regard.

*"Every day my husband comes home after drinking. After work he directly goes to Kasippu Pola (A place where illegal liqueur is sold). At the beginning he started drinking slightly but*

*now he has addicted. He spends about half of his daily earnings on drinks. He does not want to think how we eat and drink. It does not matter if he spends that sum at least for his welfare. In vain our money.....(Muthu Banda's wife at Akkarawatta)''.*

As mentioned above distilling illegal type of liqueur called *Kasippu* has become a wide spread disaster in the village. Even though people in this village do not like to reveal directly there are three places distilling and selling *Kasippu*. Almost all male persons of poorer households go to these places to drink *Kasippu* by evening. Distilling this illegal type of liqueur is carried out by somewhat rich and thug people in the village. They are extracting money of the poorer people by selling this illegal liqueur. It has affected further widen the gap between haves and have not. According to people's view police has several time taken these distilling persons into custody but they continue that business after getting release. On the other hand there are some policemen who are supporting to continue this illegal business by getting bribery from distillers.

#### **Ability to move with people:**

Another characteristic relating to poorer people of this village is that they are afraid and ashamed to talk with people. Particularly with government officers and outsiders they are afraid and ashamed to talk directly. Lack of personality and their inferiority have affected not to move with the persons at official level. Under this mental background they are not tending to discuss and present their problems. They may have some inborn talents but those are not coming out because of different problems. Even though government officers or some out side supporters are trying to help them, propensity to discuss their problems is very poor. Because of this backwardness it has not been possible to identify their real problems, capabilities and possibilities.

Going behind someone to get something done is also one of the features of this poorest of the poor group. As they are uneducated and backward people they do not have real guts to go to the government officers directly. When they need to get some thing done they always try to get help from a middleman. That middleman is either a politician or a person having contacts with the politicians and government officers. In order to get their things done these poorer people are helping to the middlemen in different ways. Some time they give money to these persons. Most salient factor found in this regard is that men and women of this poorest of the poor group go to the houses of these middlemen as workers or helpers. Particularly men do some hard work like weeding, plucking coconuts etc. and their wives do some kitchen work at their homes. Some time they get money for their work but usually do not. Instead these

middlemen help them to get their work done by introducing government officers and politicians.

### **Type of occupation:**

These poorer people are doing casual work. Those are primary level high risk earning activities. Those are not the activities providing fixed source of income. They face very difficulties in finding even a casual work. Consequently workable members of these households are unemployed or under employed. They have to do whatever they get daily. Most common works done by men are weeding, plucking coconuts, working as helpers to masonry and carpentry and sawing coconut wood in closer village. Women normally engage in the work like weeding, cooking, and cleaning houses. All these are casual work and those are very uncertain. For some days they do not have any work to earn something. Then they eat whatever they have. When eating they give priority for children and male elders of the household. Reason for giving priority for male elders is that they are the persons who earn something by hard working for the living of following day. Therefore the stress is mainly transferred to women of the households.

Because of the uncertainty of their casual work they do not have fixed source of income. Even though they earn something for some days that is not sufficient to meet basic minimum needs. According to their view they are struggling with their lives to survive day by day. If quoted woman's expression in this regard.

*"For some days my husband comes home with empty hand. Then I breathe by looking at the hearth. For some days I have some hidden foodstuff to cook but that is hardly enough for my two children and husband. Any way I try to share it. I drink a cup of tea and go to bed by thinking that I can eat some thing tomorrow. What shall we do without a permanent job either to me or to my husband....." (Biso Menike at Akkarawatta)*

### **Monthly income:**

Monthly household income of these poorer people is very low. It is less than Rs. 4000 and most of the families earn Rs. 2000 or less per month. All these families have *Samurdhi* benefits even though they earn more or less than Rs. 1500, which is the cut off point for getting that benefit. According to their view *Samurdhi* benefits have contributed to a greater extent for their family income but it seems that the dependency syndrome is performing behind it. For example it was found that of all the families belonging to this group five families were completely trying to depend on *Samurdhi* benefits. Even though they are

capable of hard working they wait until the government provides benefits and facilities to them. It is very clear when talking with them. They always accuse to the government and try to depend on government benefits but they are not thinking what they can do for their survival.

### **Food consumption:**

Another feature of this poorest of the poor group is that they are not getting sufficient food with minimum calorie consumption. Low-income level and their employment uncertainty have mainly affected it. As explained above their daily income varies according to the casual work available day by day. When their daily income is higher for some days they get sufficient food in quantity but there are days that their income is hardly enough for their survival. Even though they take sufficient food for some days depending on their daily income they are not so concerned of the quality of foods. On the other hand they are also not thinking of their future life. Whatever they earn daily they spend all on the day itself without any provision for future days. Consequently they are fasting for some days without getting any meal either for breakfast, lunch or dinner. On one way they do not earn enough daily income to save foodstuff and other assets for future life. Family size of these households is large and the breadwinner has to maintain a large number of dependants. According to their view their income is hardly enough even for a hand to mouth life. As their low-income level prevents accumulating adequate stock of foodstuff and assets, they have to completely depend on the government subsidies and donations for adverse shocks and emergency situations.

*“Our hearth only knows how we eat. For the days my husband does not get any work we have to be in hungry. For some days we all eat bread for all meals. Our income is hardly enough to save sufficient foodstuff. Particularly for rainy days my husband does not get any work. I cannot imagine what we do with these three children. In all aspects I have owed to Mudalali (Retail shop owner) to feed these children”. (Yasawathi at Akkarawatta)*

### **Pattern of dressing:**

Compared to other people in the village they wear dirty cloths. This is particularly identical regarding women and children of these households. Women are not dressing properly at home and they are always in ragged clothes. They dress for the sake of dressing and their dress always mixed with mud, smut and other dirty substances. Their children are also normally in dirty clothes. Their parents do not want to keep their children in proper dressing. They are not cleaning the children regularly. Household environment of these poor people has also affected to the uncleanness of their children. Floor of these houses is made of mud and cow dung, and the dust always goes up polluting the inside. Consequently children's clothes always get dirty.

Compared to women and children of these households, men wear somewhat well as they are always out of home to find some work for their living.

**Educational background:**

Elder people of these households have very poor educational background. Among adults no schooling rate is high. It is found that eight adults of this group cannot read and write at all. Among those who have gone school, almost all elders have only studied up to grade five. Their poor educational background, negligence and ignorance have also affected their concern on children's education. They are not giving proper attention to the education of their children. They send their children to very closer primary level schools in the village. It is obvious that their children are not doing schoolwork properly. Some children have to be at home to look after their brothers and sisters, as both of their parents go to work. Therefore children are not going school regularly and the school leaving is also high among children. They do not have sufficient time to pay attention on the education of their children, as they have to give priority for livelihood strategies. Every day they think how to find some work and how they live today. Consequently children's education does not come to the top of their priority list.

**Nature of living land:**

Compared to other parts of the village these poorer people live in marginal lands. Their houses are located in very degraded hill slope areas. Soil of these lands is infertile as it always exposes to erosion. These lands are not suitable not only for cultivating but also for constructing houses. Enough space is not available for constructing houses, as the land slope is somewhat steep. They have to invest more money to convert the land to a more usable position but these poorer people are not in a position to do that kind of change at all. There are also very small footpaths proceeding to their houses and those are slippery. Even though they try to cultivate various types of crops in these marginal lands, fertile substances of the soil wash away even for a slight rain. Soil erosion and land degradation can be prevented to some extent by following proper soil management methods but these poorer people are not economically, socially and politically capable of following those methods.

**Institutional support:**

According to the view of these poorer people they feel that they are always ill treated by government officers and institutions. They have various problems but they have not been able to get them solved for years. Even though they live in marginal lands without basic minimum facilities government officers or institutions have not made any attempt to provide facilities to raise their living standards. They do not have fixed income earning employment



opportunities. As pointed out by these people, politicians only come to their village when an election is closer. They give promises to solve various problems by taking out even the problems concealed but they vanish after the election. Government officers are also not interfering to solve their problems in a favourable manner. When providing *Samurdhi* loan and benefits, housing loans, allowance for constructing toilets, food and other ration, government officers are supporting to those who have political power and the influence of responsible persons. Therefore these poorer people are always powerless to influence on key decisions affecting their lives.

## **6.2 Nature of poorer group:**

Compared to the poorest of the poor there are some similarities and differences regarding poorer group in this village. But in many cases it is obvious that their characteristics are completely different from those of the poorest of the poor. The aim of this section is to explain these similarities and differences emphasising why people in this village tended to distinguish 'poorer' from 'poorest of the poor'.

### **Housing structure:**

Housing structure of poorer people is somewhat different from that of the poorest of the poor. Their houses have been made of cement blocks but those have not been smoothened with cement. Roofs are covered with either tin sheets or local tiles. There could not be seen big holes in the roof as those in the roof of the households of the poorest of the poor. Size of each house is same as that of poorest of the poor group. Number of rooms in each house limits one or two. Their houses are also not so good but they are enough for them to live without getting wet.

### **Use of equipment for living:**

As the people in poorest of the poor group they use very simple equipment for cooking and living. No one is using gas for cooking and boiling water. Firewood is used for this purpose. Their kitchens have very simple equipments. They use coal coloured mettles for boiling water, clay pots and coconut spoons for cooking. Wooden rack is the main structure for keeping bottles and vessels. As in modern kitchens pantry cupboards and modern kitchen equipment cannot be seen at all in their kitchens.

Even in other parts of their houses modern household equipment cannot be seen. In most of the houses there is only one or two beds for sleeping. Among the furniture and equipment displaying in the main part of the house, small cupboard and table, few plastic or wooden chairs, and a small radio are salient. They use main part of the house as the visiting room and

some have kept even a bed in this part. Even though furniture and equipment used by this poorer group are same as those used by poorest of the poor, there is a difference between two groups regarding their outlook appearance, household setting and the way of displaying. Furniture and equipment of poorer group look somewhat modern and they have displayed them in the visiting room by setting orderly.

### **Liqueur addiction:**

Of the total households belonging to this poorer group 25 per cent is woman headed households. Regarding the rest of the households it is also salient that the head of household has addicted to illegal type of liqueur called *Kassippu*. It can be observed that every head of the household and other elder male people have drunk by evening. According to their view they have to take liqueur, as they are working hard and their muscles are paining by evening. Thus, they have got used to take liqueur, as a solution to their body ache but that is not the case regarding all liqueur addicted persons. Some have addicted liqueur, as they are not in a position to face household problems. Some men are facing great difficulties in meeting both ends of the household and it has been a terrible headache to them. In many occasions their financial embarrassment has led to a quarrel between husband and wife. If quoted one man's expression in this regard.

*"I do not like to go home without money in the evening. At least I must have Rs.100 to give my wife every day. Otherwise she eats my head. When I go home in the evening my wife is always chattering and quarrelling with me by pointing out household problems. It is a terrible headache to me. So I take some liqueur every day before going home in the evening. It gives me a some mental relief to forget all these problems at least for a while". (Somasena at Akkarawatta)*

### **Ability to move with people:**

It can be observed that the people of poorer group are not afraid and ashamed to talk and move with people in the village. They are not behaving as the people of the poorest of the poor. They are not completely isolated living. They like to move and socialise with people in the village. But it clearly seems that they have also fear and shy when talking with the outsiders and with the persons at official level. As the people in the poorest of the poor group they pay respect to officers and high-class people. When they need to get some official matter done they are also going behind someone but they are not completely depend on them. According to them they are performing as the active persons while getting the support from politicians and responsible persons. Regarding their official matters, to some extent, they have

the ability to go and talk directly with the officers and politicians. Until their purpose completes they try their best to get it succeeded.

### **Type of occupation and the income:**

As the people in poorest of the poor group they are also doing primary level high risk earning activities. They are also doing the same activities as those done by the people of the poorest of the poor group but they earn much more than those people. According to them there are several reasons for their ability of earning much. People in this poorer group are not lazy. They are not waiting until the work comes to their foot. They try their best to find some work for daily dependence by going here and there. They have also the ability of handling the work more efficiently whatever they accept. Consequently villagers and outsiders hand over their work to them without any fear. On the other hand they go out side work particularly for sawing coconut wood in closer village. They are working there on contract basis but they mentioned that they couldn't satisfy with the amount paid. Anyhow, average household monthly income of these poorer people is higher than that of the poorest of the poor people. It ranges from Rs.4000 – Rs.6000. Even though they earn somewhat higher amount they are also spending a hand to mouth life without any provision for the future. Each family of this group also has *Samurdhi* benefits but they mentioned that the monthly income is hardly enough to meet both ends of the household. To meet household necessities they have to owe to informal creditors every month. Sometime they have borrowed money on high interest rate that ranges between 10 - 20% per month.

### **Pattern of dressing:**

Regarding poorer people pattern of dressing is also salient. It is obvious that male persons and the children of this group wear somewhat better clothes but women are not so much concerned of their dress. Particularly the dress that they wear at home is very dirty. They wear the same clothes for kitchen and other work. When talking with visitors or outsiders they come front in ragged clothes. According to the women of these households they are not thinking so much of their clothes, as they have to sacrifice the amount spending for their clothes to other household activities. Particularly women of these households give priority for their children's necessities. They always try to satisfy their children by sacrificing their needs, as the monthly income is not sufficient to meet all requirements. Some women said that they have several times collected money to buy a new piece of clothes but they had to give even that money when their children asked. If quoted one woman's expression in this regard.

*“See what I am wearing now. We are poor to that extent. Our income is not enough even to buy a piece of cloths to me. Several times I collected money with an idea of buying a piece of*

*cloths. Yet, when household problems come I cannot wait. I spend what I have collected. How can we wait when our children cry in fast.....(Premawathei at Akkarawatta)*

### **Educational background:**

Very poor educational background of elder people is also an important characteristic of this poorer group. Among those elders who have ever gone school only two persons have studied beyond primary level. No schooling is also at a considerable level among elders. It was found that 13 elder people belonging to this group have never gone to school. In those days they have not felt its need so much but today they regret of their inability to read and write. They mentioned that if they had at least studied up to grade ten in those days they could have got a job easily. When the household problems come they are now frustrated of their life. Sometime they blame to their parents for not encouraging and sending them to school.

However, by now they have understood the significance of education. They are making every effort to make their children educated but it is clear that their poor economic background does not allow winning their goals. Their children are going to very primary level schools in the village. They do not have sufficient income to send their children to tuition classes. These people are doing very primary level jobs. As wealthier persons in the village they do not have any contacts with the politicians and other responsible persons. Consequently they are helpless of admitting their children to the schools in town. The schools, which their children are going, do not have at least minimum basic facilities. According to them they have bright children with different capabilities but the facilities of schools are not enough at all to sharpen their talents to go ahead.

### **Institutional support:**

As the people in the poorest of the poor group they are also ill treated by government officers and politicians. When they go to some institutions to get some official matters done they are not regarded well unless they have some political push or any other support. Some people of this group said that they had to go behind some politicians even to get *Samurdhi* benefits. They further mentioned that they condemn and criticise such unfair matters. According to their talk it was clear that they were somewhat strait forward than the people in the poorest of the poor group. Not like the people in the poorest of the poor group these people are so concerned of any official matter affecting them. For example when they need to get such matters as obtaining a loan from a bank and getting some benefits from the government etc. done, they have the ability of directly going and talking with the relevant officers whether those are successful or not. When talking with them they emphasize the unity and co-operation of people to get their problems solved. According to their talk they are trying to

create some ability to take decisions affecting their lives but their social recognition is not enough to establish such an environment.

**Nature of land:**

These poorer people are also living in marginal lands as those of the poorest of the poor group. They have built up houses on slope areas, which are greatly exposed to soil erosion. Even for a slight rain minerals are washed away and consequently the soil has become less fertile. They have attempted to block soil erosion by putting wood logs but it has not been successful as expected. They are also not economically capable and educationally knowledgeable of following better soil management methods.

**Nature of the family:**

As the families in poorest of the poor group number of dependants of each family of these people is also higher. Each family has to maintain 4 to 6 dependants, as the family size is large. Almost all these dependants are at school going age. In addition to their basic minimum needs, they have to meet their other necessities. In these families there is only one breadwinner and all burdens are on his head. As mentioned above he also does not have a fixed income earning activity. Regarding these families it is very clear that the breadwinner has mentally and physically ruined by thinking the way of solving their household problems.

**Social status:**

These poorer people particularly mentioned that they are socially isolated from other higher social classes. They feel that they do not have a proper social recognition in the village. Particularly rich people do not care them and their economic and social capabilities are not powerful enough to move with higher social groups. However, the people in poorest of the poor group have not felt that matter at all, as they do not attempt to move with the people in higher society in the village. It seems as well that these poorer villagers attempt to look at the people in higher social groups with anger and hate. If it is explained in one's own words.

*We feel that we are separated from rich people. They do not care us, as we have to go behind them. They think that they are the leaders in the village, as they have money. But they have forgotten that they came to this position by extracting our labour. They do not know whenever we will also come to their status. Who cares them when our time comes. We are waiting for our turn.....(Siripala at Akkarawatta).*

## **7. Processes leading to poverty in Akkarawatta**

Social stratification and the characteristics discussed above, explained the nature of poor people living in the village. In understanding the addressed poverty and social inequality in-depth, it is useful to examine why these people have become poor while others are rich. There may be some historical, socio-economic and other reasons behind this phenomenon. Sometime those are inter-related and perform as processes leading to poverty and social inequality. In getting the answer to the question of why these people have become poor while others are spending a better socio-economic life, it is clear that a comprehensive understanding of the processes leading to poverty is essential. The following sub themes attempt to highlight those processes.

### **Historical background:**

It is evident that some historical reasons have affected to create these social inequalities and also to widen the gap between the haves and have not. As pointed out by the villagers they have come and settled down in this village in 1954. Before coming they were landless people. They have mainly come to this village from Kurunegala, Anuradhapura, Polonaruwa and Badulla Districts. Some have directly come alone and some have come with their relatives or friends. Those who came first have been able to attain the most suitable lands, which are closer to the main and by roads. Those lands are flat and not marginalized areas.

According to poor people's view, in those days government and authorised officers have also helped them to attain better lands, as they had some connections with them before coming. For example there are families, that have come to the village first together with other families living in better lands but they have not been allowed to settle down in better lands. As no one helped them they had to settle down in marginal areas. Some other families have come to the village later and they had also to settle down in marginal areas as the suitable areas had already been occupied. Those who settled down in better lands have easy access to any kind of activity. Those areas are the popularised part of the village. Therefore some families have started businesses like retail shops and bakeries and reached to some standard of their quality of life. On the other hand their living areas are not marginalized hill slopes. Compared to other parts of the village those areas have fertile soil. Being a plain area families living in this part have some homestead for the cultivation. Within these homestead they cultivate different kind of vegetables and other crops, which are particularly useful for their household needs. Consequently they have been able to some extent to reduce their cost of living and maintain their life well.

**Nature of land:**

People who had to settle down in marginal lands are living in those parts with great difficulties. They are not in a position to cultivate, as their lands are hill slopes. They do not have electricity and water facilities. They are impossible to start businesses like retail shops, as the location is not suitable for that kind of activity. As the slope of the land is very steep their houses do not have sufficient homesteads. To some extent their laziness has also affected in this regard. At least for these 40 years they have not made any attempt to utilise the land by applying some suitable land practice. They could have converted those lands into terrace, which is normally followed by the people living in hill slope areas. But these people have at least not thought of that kind of method. Their economic, political and social background has also not enabled them to develop the living area for cultivation and other purposes. Consequently they are becoming poorer and poorer and the difference between the haves and have not is widening.

Even though these poor people came to the village and settled down they had not thought of how to live and maintain their families. According to their view in those days their sole objective had been to find some piece of land for living. Before coming they had thought that they could be able to cultivate something for their living but they have given up that idea later because of the inappropriateness of land. Ultimately they had to do some casual works for living and according to their view they were ready to do whatever they get. They had no income earning opportunities as those who had attained better parts of the village. Since their arrival to the village they have been doing casual work supplying their labour to wealthier people in the village. They have not been able to come out of that environment, as the background around them has not set up according to their requirements.

**Dependency syndrome:**

It is obvious that these poor people always try to depend on what is given by the government and other people or organizations. They are not making any effort to come out of their difficulties. Now they have adapted to that environment. They are not thinking of how to come out of the difficulties except they raise their problems. If someone goes to them and attempts to discuss their living background they are always very keen to present their problems. But they do not have any response if that person asks what they can do to solve their problems. According to the peoples' view most of the poorer families in the village are very lazy and do not try to use their capabilities. They are only doing some casual work and their minds have also adapted to do those works to earn something for daily needs. They have also no any co-operation with other people at their same level. No one thinks that they should

get together and try to make their voice. Except each family thinks alone of their survival strategies they do not want to work together. On the other hand they are always expecting and trying to depend on what is given by the government. They have stuck in that dependency syndrome and it is very difficult to rescue them from that environment by changing their attitudes.

### **Over exploitation of labour:**

Almost all poor people in the village are doing casual work for their dependence. They are doing whatever the casual work they get. For day-to-day-work they are paid very low wage by rich people but they have to work hard to satisfy them by spending more time. According to their view, wealthier people in the village always attempt to over exploit their labour. Rich people are mainly cultivating tea and doing some contract work like repairing roads, making bridges and culverts. Poor people are working as labourers in these tea lands and in contract work. According to the view of poor people they only get very low daily payments but have to work very hard. Rich people are getting more profit from their tea cultivation and contract work. The process of over extracting labour of poor people is continuing. Wealthier people are becoming more richer and richer and the vice versa happens regarding poorer people.

### **Borrowing money for consumption:**

Poorer people do not have fixed income-earning opportunities. Their daily and monthly income greatly varies. They do not have sufficient income and assets to attain at least basic necessities such as food, shelter, clothing and the acceptable levels in health and education. Therefore, even for day-to-day living they get credit from wealthier persons by mortgaging what they have. Particularly they mortgage their wearing jewellerys such as ear-studs, chain etc., as they are the only assets that they have for mortgaging. They pay high interests on the sum that they borrow and the interest rate normally ranges between 10 to 20 per cent per month. On the other hand these people should be ready to go for work whenever the money-lending people ask. Otherwise they refuse to give money to the poor people even on the interest. Sometime they are not in a position to repay the loan and the interest. Then they have to supply their labour to compensate the interest and the property is possessed by the moneylender. Process of lending money is very common in this village. Particularly it is evident that retail shop owners are doing this business at greater scale. Worst effect of this process is borrowing money from the informal sector for the consumption. On one way poor people borrow money for the consumption purpose and on the other way wealthier persons lend money in an investment view. Finally financial and other resources of poorer people accumulate in the hands of wealthier people.



**Liqueur addiction:**

It is salient that almost all male elders of poor households have addicted liqueur. They waste large amount of their earnings for liqueur and sometime that amount is more than 50 per cent of their daily earnings. As pointed out earlier, the most dangerous fact is that they take locally distilled very harmful illegal type of liqueur called *Kasippu*. It destroys not only the money of poor people but also their capability of working. They have physically and mentally lost their productivity and it is clear even by looking at their complexion. They look pale and have grown thin and the eyes of these people have submerged. These people are not in a position to understand that their drink addiction to *Kasippu* has pulled them into a trap on every hand. They are not thinking and they do not want to think that the money wasting on this illegal liqueur can help to economise at least a meal for their family. Every day by evening they come home with dead drunk and sometime quarrel with wife or other family members even by disturbing to their children's education. Within this routine they do not have a plan of coming out of this disaster. They destroy not only their lives but also the future of their children.

Particularly distilling *Kasippu* is mainly handled by some rich families in the village. Poor people are supporting them to distil by working on casual basis. They get only low-level daily payments for their labour and instead they get *Kasippu* as much as they want. Profit margin completely goes to the hands of rich people in the village. Some villagers mentioned that there are situations, which police took these distilling people into custody but the people who are handling this business got them released by getting the support from politicians and other responsible officers. Anyhow, according to some villagers' view wealthier people are becoming richer and richer but the living standard of poorer people is further deteriorating because of this illegal business.

**Betting:**

Betting for horse races is also one of the important reasons to increase poverty in the village. Male persons of poor families have got used to bet from the money they earn daily. They spend at least some part of their daily earnings for betting. They waste what they have to attain basic necessities for the family. According to people's view, after drinking some poorer people directly go to betting centres. Then they are unconscious of what they are doing for their daily earnings. Because of the un-education and ignorance of these people they cannot understand the consequences of what they are doing. Anyhow finally the misuse of their earnings has worse affected to the living standards of their households.

**Educational background:**

As mentioned above, particularly poor older people in the village are uneducated. They are not in a position to understand the importance of the education. In those days what they have done is that they have told their children to stop their schooling and to support their household activities. This phenomenon is particularly common in Akkarawatta. Consequently they have never been able to raise their living standards. Not only the poorer parents but also their children have not been able to come out of the poverty circle under this situation. However it can be seen that younger generation has understood to some extent the importance of education.

**Disregarding poor:**

It can also be noticeable that poor people are isolated and get out of the way regarding the very important village level activities. For the official level meetings, which are held to facilitate the village they participate for the sake of participating. People belonging to higher social groups think that they are un-educated and ignorant people and their ideas are unimportant and worthless. Every thing is attempted to control and handle by the people belonging to higher social classes. On one side poorer people do not have power to present their own ideas and to activate their own decisions, as the common activities are directed and controlled by the politicians and rich people in the village. According to some villagers view, the concepts like Peer Groups, Participatory Development etc. have limited to the words itself and the reality is completely different. On the other hand, even among poor people there is no better co-operation even for the activities, which directly affect to their life. They do not want to get together and discuss their own problems. At a meeting they are not coming to a compromise even regarding the decisions, which directly affect to their lives. Instead what some poor people do is that they are supporting to the high-class people by cutting down their own people. Ultimately all happens to the interest of rich people and the problems of poor are stagnating forever.

**8. Conclusion**

On the basis of the above discussion an attempt was made to understand the nature of poor and the processes leading to poverty and social inequality in the selected village. Even though for the study purpose, characteristics and the processes are discussed under separate themes, it is clear that all these are inter-related. According to the above-described characteristics and the processes it is evident that poor people in this village have various problems rather than having income below or above official defined poverty line. Mainly they are vulnerable, voiceless or powerless and also they do not have security or opportunity to come out of the

poverty trap. They are isolated and the empowerment has not happened so far by enhancing the capacity of these poor people.

Poor people in this village are always vulnerable. They are often exposed to various kinds of risks. Regarding the poor in this village it is visible, as they have no fixed source of income. They are the casual workers and they do not have enough money to take not only the quality foods but also the sufficient quantity. They are not in a position to store sufficient foodstuffs to take for an emergency situation. Their vulnerability is confirmed by the above-mentioned characteristics relating to income, nature of employment, exposure to different illnesses, way of consuming food, living in marginal lands, institutional disregard of poor etc. Some historical factors relating to land occupation has also affected to make them vulnerable.

Voicelessness and powerlessness are deprived feel acutely their lack of voice, power and independence. The above discussed points confirms that the absence of rules, lack of social status, lack of protection against violence and institutional support all together have placed a large burden on poor people in the village. Lack of assets and income earning opportunities and borrowing money from wealthier persons have tied poor people to rich people leading to powerlessness. Over exploitation of labour of poor people has also been possible under this situation.

Poor people in the village have also lost security in different ways. They are always exposed to different illnesses and the dirty household environment and the use of unclean water have directed to lose that security. Safety nets have not been designed to support immediate consumption needs of these poor people. Consequently poor people in the village have tended to borrow money from wealthier persons even for consumption. They pay high interest and do not have any security for the property they mortgage. They do not have fixed income earning opportunities and permanent jobs. Government institutions have also not been possible to enhance security for poor. As explained, public interventions and institutional work do not happen in the interest of poor people. They are disregarding poor people's view and there is no any security to reduce vulnerability to various risks and adverse shocks.

In this village there are also no expanding economic opportunities for the poor. They are the casual labourers. There are no economic opportunities assisting them to build up their assets. They have very poor educational background. Their human capabilities such as health and nutrition, education, nature of houses, pattern of living and access to better land, infrastructure and financial services are also in a very poor condition. Lack of financial services has lead them to borrow money from informal money lenders even by mortgaging their property. As explained above they are socially isolated and the institutions also discriminate against them.

Thus, these poor people are not in a position to attain different assets that are essential to their lives.

Enhancing the capacity of people to influence institutions has not happened regarding the poor people in this village. As mentioned above their participation in decision-making has also been avoided, as they are powerless. On the other hand they are shy and afraid to move with outsiders. All the decisions affecting their lives, are taken by the politicians and wealthier persons in the village. Government institutions have also disregarded them. Therefore, removing these barriers is essential to establish empowerment among the poor in the village.

These research findings confirm that poverty is not a single or an isolated phenomenon. It is multi faceted and should be viewed in different perspectives rather than understanding poor by the official income based poverty line. It is further confirms by comparing the income figures and the percentage of the households below poverty line. As explained above, average monthly household income of the poorest of the poor ranges in between Rs.2000 – 4000 and the relevant range of the poor group is Rs.4000 – 6000. Both these figures are above the government defined official poverty line, which is Rs.1500 household income per month. Thus, on the income criterion no one should have been found in this village as the poorest of the poor or poor people but that is not the reality. On the other hand government defined income based poverty line reveals that 58 per cent of the total households in the village are below this line. But social stratification and the in-depth interviews and discussions confirm that 70 per cent of total households (18+52) belong to the poor group. That is the reality regarding the extent of poverty in the village.

Facts discussed in the processes leading to poverty also verify that poverty is not an isolated phenomenon. It is a process generated and being regenerated by different socio-economic, political and other co-related factors. Historical background, dependency syndrome, over exploitation of labour, liqueur addiction, betting, borrowing money for consumption, educational background and disregarding poor are the important elements, which generated and regenerate poverty and social inequality in the village. It is clear that social stratification initially provided the guidelines to understand all these characteristics and the processes leading to poverty. Thus, understanding poverty through social stratification is useful and essential. It will definitely provide some guidelines for the formulation of development strategies regarding the rural poor in future.

## References:

1. Beck, T. (1984), "The Experience of Poverty: Fighting for Respect and Resource in Village India: London", Intermediate Technology Publications.
2. Chambers, R. (1983), "Rural Development: Putting the Last First", Essex: Longman Scientific and Technical.
3. Chambers, R., (1989), Editorial Introduction: "Vulnerability, Coping and Policy, Vulnerability: How the poor cope", IDS Bulletin, Vol.20 No.2: 1-7
4. Chambers, R. (1995) "Poverty and Livelihoods; Whose reality counts?", An overview paper prepared for the Stockholm Round Table on Global Change, 22-24, July 1994 and subsequently published in Environment and Urbanisation, Vol.7, No.1, April: 173-204.
5. David, S. (1997), "Urban Poverty", Reconsidering its Scale and Nature, IDS Bulletin Vol.28, No.2
6. Dias H.D. and Silva W.P.T. (1981), "Strategy without Ideology: Experience of Rural Development in Sri Lanka", The Human Settlements Division, Asian Institute of Technology.
7. Jain, L.C. (1985), "Grass without Roots: Rural Development under Government Auspicious", Sage Publications, New Delhi.
8. Joseph M. (1995), "Rural Poverty Alleviation, International Development Perspectives" Development Studies Association, Antony Rome Ltd. Great Britain.
9. Karunanayake, M.M. (1986), "The Poor Revisited: Reflections on the Rural Development Experience in Sri Lanka" Proceedings of the Sri Lanka Association for the Advancement of Science.
10. Karunanayake, M.M. (1989), "Priorities in Rural Development: An Agenda for Action", Adult Education and Development and Peace, ANATE-DVV-ASPBE sponsored publication.
11. Lindberg, C. (1986), "Society and Environment Eroded", Resource Use in Two Tanzanian Villages, Stockholm, Sweden.
12. National Human Development Report (1998), Regional Dimensions of Human Development, UNDP, Sri Lanka.
13. Quibria, M.G. (1993), "Rural Poverty in Asia", Priority Issues and Policy Options", The Asian Development Bank, Oxford University Press.
14. Rao, V.M., Peiris, G.H., Tilakarathne, S. (1984), "Planning for Rural Development", The Experience of the District Integrated Rural Development Programme of Sri

Lanka, International Labour Organization, Asian Employment Programme (ARTEP), Bangkok.

15. World Development Report, (1990) World Development Indicators published for the World Bank, Oxford University Press.
16. World Development Report, (2000/2001), Attracting Poverty, World Bank, Oxford University Press.
17. Wratten, E. (1995), “ Conceptualising Urban Poverty”, Environment and Urbanisation, Vol.7, No.1, April: 1-36.