1 in 5 Mumbaikars below poverty line

Linah Baliga | TNN

Twenty percent of people in the country's most populous city are below the poverty line (BPL). For Mumbai's population of about 1.25 crore, that means 25 lakh BPL people. This makes the number of those living in abject poverty in the city 4 lakh more than the population of say Nashik.

The BPL figure comes from a survey carried out by the BMC in 2005-06. The criterion was an income of Rs 20 or less per day per person. The findings were not made public till late this year, after slum activists Jammela Begum and Simpreet Singh of the Ghar Banao Ghar Bachao Andolan filed a case in the Bombay high court.

The city's high BPL percentage is despite Maharashtra receiving Rs 80 crore in poverty alleviation funds—more than any other state.

The BMC last carried out a BPL survey in 1998-99, and found 13,600 families matching the criterion. The number of families as per the 2005-06 survey is 494,000 (the BPL population of 25 lakh is a rounding off of 494,000 multiplied by a factor of 5, considering an average of five members per family). This means that in just seven years, the number of BPL families has grown by more than 36 times.

1.25 cr
Mumbai's population

25 L
City's BPL population

36
The factor by which the number of BPL families grew in Mumbai from 1998-99 to 2005-06

BPL figure as per BMC survey of 2005-06. Criterion: Income of Rs 20 or less per day per person

"The 2005-06 figure points towards misplaced policies for the urban poor. For Mumbai, it shows an unequal distribution of economic wealth. The poverty statistics of other cities are not as bad as they are of Mumbai," said Singh, adding that there is a need to redefine poverty, as on the face of it, the number of BPL people in the city appears to be much more than 20% of the population, given that about 60% of the city's people live in slums.

Is migration into Mumbai the reason for the high percentage of poor in the city? "No," Singh said. "This reason would have held true only till the1970s. But going by every census after 1970, we can see that migration has stabilized. So, the growth of poverty in recent years cannot be attributed to it."

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