

UDC:656.12-05:316.35]:303.6(540)"2010"

SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE OF CYCLE RICKSHAW PULLERS: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

The present paper is an attempt to analyze the socio-economic characteristics of cycle rickshaw pullers and to find out the causes of rickshaw pulling. The adverse effects of this profession on the health of the rickshaw pullers, the problems faced by them and their remedial measures have been also taken into account. The study is based on primary data collected through the field survey and direct questionnaire to the respondents in Aligarh city. The survey was carried out during the months of February and March, 2010. The overall analysis of the study reveals that the rickshaw pullers are one of the poorest sections of the society, living in abject poverty but play a pivotal role in intra-city transportation system. Neither is their working environment regulated nor their social security issues are addressed. They are also unaware about the governmental schemes launched for poverty alleviation and their accessibility in basic amenities and infrastructural facilities is also very poor.

Keywords: Abject poverty, breadwinners, cycle rickshaw pullers, disadvantageous, intra-city transport, vulnerability

Introduction:

The word rickshaw originates from the Japanese word 'jinrikisha', which literally means human-powered vehicle (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1993). Rickshaws originally developed in Japan in the late 1860s (Saito, T., 1979: 52), represented a clear technological advancement on its major predecessor, the Sedan chair. It came into view in Shanghai in 1873 (Chen, 1955: 26 and Zheng, 1957: 17), and became the predominant mode of short-distance individual mode of transport by the early 1900s (Peng, S., 1935: 201). These rickshaws are called by different names in different countries such as 'becak' in Indonesia, 'cyclo' in *Phnom Penh* of Cambodia and in Vietnam (Pacione, 2005: 584). In India, the term rickshaw usually refers to a cycle rickshaw, appeared around 1870s, first in Shimla and then, 20 years later, in Kolkata (Dainik Jagran: 2009). Until the 1980s plying of rickshaws were found mainly in the walled or old cities of the country, middle-class neighborhoods and in the outlying colonies of cities. Now one can see them plying in virtually all elite colonies of big cities of the country (Kishwar, 2009: 310).

Cycle rickshaws have been used as a means of transportation for social elite but, since 1880s, they play a pivotal role in the intra-city transport system, especially in the towns and cities of the third world countries, where, the streets connecting the roads are very narrow on which motor vehicles cannot be easily driven. Probably they are the only transport system to provide point to point travel (Rajvanshi, 2002: 1).

Cycle rickshaw pullers are the most disadvantageous section of the people who are engaged in transportation activities for getting their means of livelihood, because pulling of rickshaw is a menial and hazardous occupation (Warren, 1985: 4). Despite the engagement of the rickshaw pullers either in waiting for the passengers/commodities or in pulling the rickshaws to carry the passengers and the commodities from one place to another from early morning to late evening or in whole night and even, sometimes, round the clock, they are not in position to earn the needed amount of money to fulfill their basic needs of life. Cycling on an empty stomach is a common experience among them. The vulnerability of rickshaw pullers further accentuated by the fact that the majority of those who ride rickshaws are not owners as well as there is constant struggle and increased competition among the rickshaw pullers.

According to the current estimates, there are currently 8 million rickshaw pullers in India of whom 95 percent do not own their vehicle due to lack of funds (Poirier, 2009), whose life is tough, the work is arduous and the living condition is shoddier. As miserable as

pulling a rickshaw may have been, it offered an income better than that available in the villages (Strand, 1989: 29), because urban rickshaw pullers come from a very poor economic background consistent with the characteristics of chronic poverty (Begum, S. & Binayak, S., 2004: 2), thereby most of them migrate to cities from rural areas in search of employment for getting better means of livelihood (Khan, 2010:112), but in reality their expectations are rarely realized (Warren, 1985: 4). After arrival in cities, they subsist on very little as they try and save money as much as they can to send back to their families in their villages and live a miserable life where their extent of accessibility in housing, electricity, water and other amenities is very poor.

These deprived and exploited sections are not explicitly recognized in policy documents by the government and very little attention has been paid in humanizing the livelihood of the rickshaw pullers. It is, therefore, necessary to collect relevant information to study the socio-economic composition, causes, problems and the implications of such occupation on the health and overall life of the rickshaw pullers, which could be brought before the society and appropriate policies may be framed to solve their problems.

Aims and Objectives:

The present study aims to examine the socio-economic status, causes and the problems of rickshaw pullers in Aligarh city. The specific objectives of the study are:

To study and analyze the socio-economic composition and structure of rickshaw pullers in Aligarh city.

To find out the socio-economic causes of rickshaw pulling.

To examine the living condition by analyzing their accessibility in housing and other infrastructural facilities.

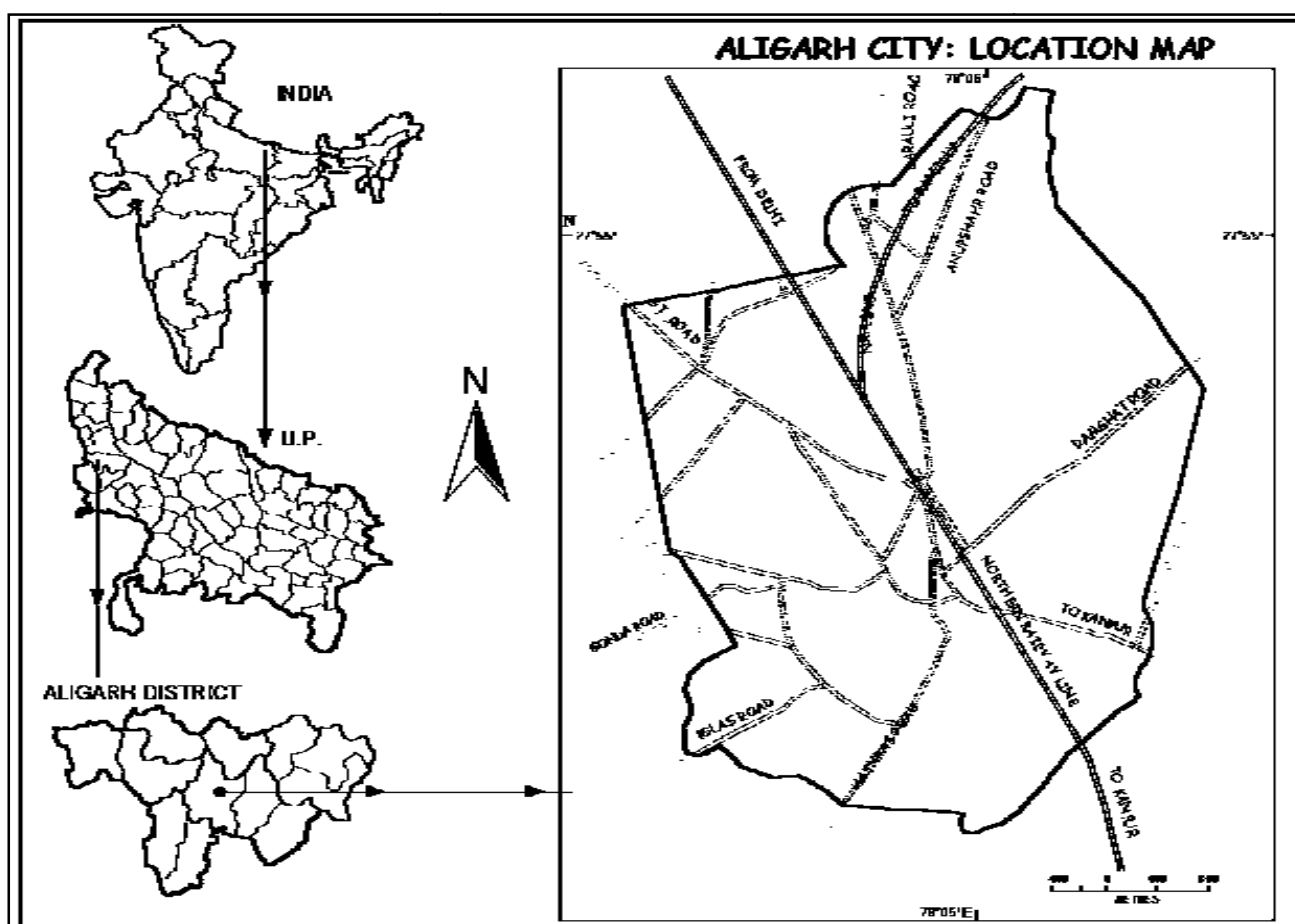
To highlight the implications arises out of this profession on the health of rickshaw pullers.

To identify socio-economic problems faced by rickshaw pullers and to suggest remedial measures to overcome them.

Study Area:

Aligarh city as a whole has been chosen as study area for the present research work. The city extending from 27° 52' to 27° 56' north latitude and 78° 3' to 78 ° 6' east longitudes, lies in the western part of Uttar Pradesh and takes up a geographical area of about 36.10 square kilometers. It comprises of 60 wards, accommodates a residential population of 6,

69,087 of which 3, 56,725 are males and 3, 12,362 females (Annual Report 2004, Lucknow). According to the 2001 Indian census, in the city 63.92 percent population was literate. The literacy rate among males was 70.63 percent and among females it was 56.23 percent. Muslims constitute nearly one-third of the total population of Aligarh city. Since independence, Aligarh city has grown from a small town to an important centre for industry and education. There are three factors, which have contributed to the development of Aligarh city, i.e., the establishment of Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) in 1920, development of light industries and its demarcation as the district headquarters. Moreover, in the last twodecades, a number of new schools and colleges have been also established in the city. The city bus services are very limited and are available on only some main roads, therefore, rickshaws are mostly used as an important means in the intra-city transportation.



Source: Nagar Nigam Aligarh, 2010. Fig. 1

Data and Methodology:

The study is based on the primary data generated through field survey and direct questionnaire to the respondents in Aligarh city. The survey was carried out during the months of February and March, 2010. Firstly, a pilot survey was made to identify the main areas of rickshaw pulling in the city. From the selected areas, 100 rickshaw pullers were interviewed (see Table 1) for collection of information about their socio-economic characteristics, causes of rickshaw pulling and problems faced by them etc. After the field work was over, the data collected by using individual slips were scrutinized and were processed in tabular forms according to the requirements of the various facets of the study.

Table 1

Distribution of Places of Interview and Number of Rickshaw Pullers Interviewed at these Places in Aligarh City

Places of Interview	No. of Rickshaw Pullers Interviewed
Railway Station	17
Centre Point	13
J.N. Medical College	12
Masoodabad Bus Stand	10
G.T. Road	08
Old Bus Stand	08
Rasal Ganj	08
Jamalpur	07
Ramghat Road	06
Dodhpur	05
Railway Road	06
Total	100

Source: Based on field survey, 2010.

Socio-Economic and Structural Analysis of Cycle Rickshaw Pullers:

Table 2 depicts the age structure of rickshaw pullers in Aligarh city. Rickshaw pulling is an arduous nature of job which requires hard labour and physical strength in which age plays a vital role. The highest proportion of rickshaw pullers, 45 percent has been recorded in 20-30 age-group, it is only because they are young and energetic in this age-group. After 30 years of age the data given in the Table 2 shows the declining trend in the proportion of rickshaw pullers in various age-groups. The proportion has been recorded 25 percent in 30-40 age-group, 14 percent in 41-50 age-group and only 6 percent above 50 years of age. However, 10 percent of rickshaw pullers were teenagers (14-19 age-group).

On the basis of above analysis of the data given in Table 2, it may be inferred that the community of cycle rickshaw pullers is dominated by the persons in young and productive age-groups and have a very little share in the juvenile and senile age-groups. All rickshaw pullers were males because no female was found to be engaged in the cycle rickshaw pulling.

Table 2

Age Structure of Rickshaw Pullers Population in Aligarh City

Age-groups	Percent
14-19	10
20-30	45
31-40	25
41-50	14
More than 50	06
Total	100

Source: Based on field survey, 2010.

Table 3 provides information about the marital status of rickshaw pullers. An examination of Table 3 indicates that nearly three-fourth (71 percent) of the rickshaw pullers are married whereas 23 percent are unmarried and remaining 6 percent are widowers. However, the most

of the married rickshaw pullers reported that they migrated alone from rural areas in the city in search of jobs and their wives are still staying in rural areas.

Table 3

Marital Status of Rickshaw Pullers in Aligarh city

Status	Percent
Married	71
Unmarried	23
Widower	06
Total	100

Source: Based on field survey, 2010.

Table 4 presents distribution of educational status of rickshaw pullers in Aligarh city. The analysis of Table 4 shows that, out of 100 rickshaw pullers, 68 percent are illiterate and only 32 percent are literate. Out of 32 percent literates, 24 percent got education upto primary level, 04 percent upto middle level, 03 percent upto secondary level and only 01 percent up to graduation. According to 2001 Indian census, the general male illiteracy

Table 4

Educational Status of Rickshaw Pullers in Aligarh City

Educational status	Percent
Illiterate	68
Primary	24
Middle	04
Secondary	03
Graduate	01
Total	100

Source: Based on field survey, 2010.

Rate in India is 24.15 percent, but the high mass-illiteracy (68 percent) among rickshaw pullers itself tells their pitiable story of mass-poverty, inaccessibility in the educational facilities and various other types of basic amenities and facilities. Truly speaking, due to their illiteracy and unskillness, the poverty stricken persons do not have any other alternative to earn the means of livelihood but to get easily engaged themselves in rickshaw pulling.

Table 5

Percent Distribution of Rickshaw Pullers by their Places of Birth in Aligarh City

State/Districts	Percent
Within Aligarh	46
U.P.(excluding Aligarh)	31
Bihar	18
West Bengal	03
Madhya Pradesh	02
Total	100

Source: Based on field survey, 2010.

The distribution of rickshaw pullers by places of their birth is given in Table 5. It can be seen in the Table 5 that the majority of the rickshaw pullers (46 percent) has their place of birth within the Aligarh district, and 31 percent migrated from other districts of Uttar Pradesh to Aligarh city for rickshaw pulling. The migration of rickshaw pullers from the states beyond Uttar Pradesh to Aligarh city has been recorded 18 percent, 3 percent and 2 percent from Bihar, West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh respectively.

Table 6 provides data about the socio-economic causes which compelled the poor people to engage themselves in rickshaw pulling. Unemployment, poverty, low income and small size of land holdings are the major economic causes which forced to about 53.30 percent of the rickshaw pullers to involve themselves in the rickshaw pulling, whereas among the social

factors, large family size, illiteracy, early marriage, family disintegration and migration pushed to 23.02 percent of them to pull rickshaws. Moreover, unskillness, cash payment, debt and uncertainty in production of crops, desire of work/self respect and death of parents derived 23.68 percent of the rickshaw pullers towards the pulling of the rickshaws.

Table 6

Percentage Distribution of Socio-Economic Causes of Rickshaw Pulling in

Aligarh City

Causes	Percent
Unemployment	22.45
Poverty	18.36
Unskilled	12.06
Low income	10.42
Large size of family	08.70
Illiteracy	07.75
Cash payment	05.72
Debt and uncertainty in production of crops	03.26
Early marriage	02.59
Family disintegration	02.48
Small size of land holding	02.07
Desire for Work /self respect	01.64
Migration	01.50
Orphanage	01.00
Total	100.00

Source: Based on field survey, 2010.

Table 7 presents the percentage distribution of average daily income earned by rickshaw pullers in rickshaw pulling in Aligarh city. An analysis of data given in Table 7 shows that 36 percent rickshaw pullers earned rupees 100-150 per day, 23 percent gained between 50-100 rupees in a day and 14 percent could get less than rupees 50 in a day. Moreover, the average daily income of 15 percent rickshaw pullers has been recorded between rupees 151-200 and only 12 percent managed to earn more than rupees 201-250 in a day.

The percentage distribution of average daily working hours and average monthly working days of the rickshaw pullers has been given in Table 8. The data given in

Table 7

Percentage Distribution of Average Daily Income of Rickshaw Pullers Earned by them in Rickshaw pulling in Aligarh City

Daily Income (Rupees)	Percent
Less than 50	14
50-100	23
101-150	36
151-200	15
201-250	12
Total	100

Source: Based on field survey, 2010.

Table 8 reveals that 38 percent of rickshaw pullers do the arduous work of rickshaw pulling for more than 10 hours in a day and 30 percent ply their rickshaws between 8 to 10 hours in a day. Moreover, the average daily working hours of 18 percent rickshaw pullers have been reported between 5 to 7 hours and of 14 percent less than 5 hours. The further

analysis of data provided in Table 8 shows that average monthly working days of 42 percent rickshaw pullers are more than 25 days and 32 percent were found to be engaged in rickshaw pulling between 20 to 25 days in a month. However, 8 percent rickshaw pullers reported to pull the rickshaws on roads for less than 15 days in a month.

Table 8

Percentage Distribution of Average Daily Working Hours and Average

Monthly Working Days of Rickshaw Pullers in Aligarh City

1- Daily working hours	Percent
Less than 5	14
5-7	18
8-10	30
More than 10	38
Total	100
2- Monthly working days	Percent
Less than 15	08
15-20	18
20-25	32
More than 25	42
Total	100

Source: Based on field survey, 2010.

Table 9 shows the percentage distribution of housing condition and the type of facilities available in the dwellings of rickshaw pullers. Out of total sampled rickshaw pullers, 44 percent have their own houses and 42 percent stay in rented houses. Moreover

Table 9**Percentage Distribution of Housing Condition and Type of Facilities****Available in the Dwellings of Rickshaw pullers in Aligarh City**

1- Status of House	Percent
a) Own	44
b) Rented	42
c) slum	09
d) footpath and other	05
Total	100
2- Type of Dwelling	Percent
a) Pucca	32
b) Kachcha	34
c) Slums	20
d) Semi-pucca	14
Total	100
3- Facilities in the dwellings	Percent
Means of drinking water	
a) Public hand pumps	40
b) Private hand pumps	31
c) Public taps	12
d) Private taps	09
e) Others	08

Total	100
4- Means of fuel	Percent
a) Fuel wood	55.65
b) Cow dung	20.88
c) Leaves	06.08
d) Kerosene	06.08
e) LPG.	05.22
f) Electricity	04.35
g) Eat in hotels	01.74
Total	100.00
5- Types of latrine	Percent
b) Field	48
a) Flush	43
c) Public toilets	09
Total	100

Source: Based on field survey, 2010.

(9 percent) rickshaw pullers households are slum-dwellers and remaining (5 percent) live in either garages or sleep at footpaths. The data regarding type of dwelling by construction revealsthat more than one and half of the rickshaw puller households live in kachcha or slum type of dwellings and 32 percent, staying generally in rented houses, have pucca houses. The further analysis of data shows that the main sources of drinking water among rickshaw pullers are the public hand pumps which constituteabout 40 percent of the totalsampled rickshaw pullers' households while 31 percent have their own hand pumps and 12 percent of use the public taps for drinking water, 4 percent have their own taps and

remaining 8 percent, staying in the rented houses, have submersibles as a means of drinking water.

The data collected pertaining to the means of fuel used for cooking show that the majority of rickshaw puller households, around 55.65 percent use fuel wood for cooking, 20.88 percent reported using cow dung as a fuel, 6.08 percent cooked by burning the leaves of trees, 5.22 percent used small L.P.G. cylinders for cooking and 10.17 percent of them used kerosene oil and electricity, while 1.74 percent do not cook at their homes but they eat in hotels.

An examination of data on the type of latrine facility available to households makes it clear that most of the rickshaw pullers do not have this facility within the premises of their dwellings and about 48 percent of them go to fields for night soil, 43 percent have flush and only 9 percent used public toilets on payments.

The percentage distribution of rickshaw puller households which possess durable goods has been given in Table 10. The infrastructural facilities are important for better living, but the rickshaw pullers who live in abject poverty, do not have accessibility in these facilities. The analysis of data given in the Table 10 reveals that the highest proportion of rickshaw pullers (60 per cent) has wrist watches because they have to strictly follow the school timings in carrying the school children. The next dominating item possessed by the rickshaw pullers is radio (30 percent), followed by cooker 28 percent, mobile 20 percent, television 18 percent, tape recorder 13 percent and C.D. player 7 percent, while 20 percent of them have no durable goods. However, no one possesses the costly items like electric fan, air and water coolers, fridge and scooter etc.

Table 10

Percentage Distribution of Rickshaw Puller Households which possess Durable Goods in Aligarh City

Items	Percent
Wrist watch	60
Radio	30

Cooker	28
Cycle	21
Mobile	20
Television	18
Tape recorder	13
C.D. player	07
Others	02
No item	20

Source: Based on field survey, 2010.

Table 11 presents the percentage distribution of practices of bad habits among rickshaw pullers. The bad habits like drinking, drug addiction, gambling etc. deteriorate the social values, dignity, and quality of life but, now, such evils have percolated upto to the lowest stratum of the society, and, consequently, the socio-economic problems of poor have further got multiplied and intensified. Out of total sampled rickshaw pullers, 47 percent are smokers, 43 percent gutka and tobacco users, 7 percent drinkers, 6 percent gamblers and 4 percent of them have the addiction of drugs. However, 30 percent of them have no bad habits.

Table 11

Percentage Distribution of Practices of Bad Habits among Rickshaw Pullers in

Aligarh city

Bad habits	Percent
Smoking	47
Gutka and Tobacco	43
Drinking	07
Gambling	06

Drugs	04
No bad habits	30

Source: Based on field survey, 2010.

Table 12 depicts the percentage distribution of incidence of diseases among rickshaw pullers. Health is an important indicator of levels of socio- economic development and determines the quality of life. Most of the rickshaw pullers have been reported to be suffering from various diseases due to their unhygienic living conditions, arduous nature of work, poor nutrition and bad habits. An examination of data given in Table 12 shows

Table 12

**Percentage Distribution of Incidence of Diseases among Rickshaw Pullers in
Aligarh City**

Incidence of Diseases	Percent
Cough and cold	30
Joint pain	27
Back pain	21
Chest pain	20
Asthma	10
Gastroenteritis	05
Tuberculosis	04
Stone in gall bladder	04
Diabetes	03
Blood pressure	02

Source: Based on field survey, 2010.

that 30 percent of the rickshaw pullers has cough and cold. The problem of joint, back, and chest pains are very common among the rickshaw pullers, their proportion suffered by these diseases have been recorded 27 percent, 21 percent, and 20 percent respectively. In addition, 10 percent of them have asthma, 9 percent tuberculosis and gastroenteritis and 9 percent reported that they have the diseases like diabetes, blood pressure and stone in gall bladder.

The percentage distribution of types of problems faced by the rickshaw pullers has been given in Table 13. The table depicts that lack of rickshaw stands in the city is the most common problem faced by the rickshaw pullers. Out of total sampled rickshaw pullers, 28 percent reported about the problem of rickshaw stands because there is no rickshaw stand for them in the whole city excluding one situated near the old bus stand without having the basic facilities like drinking water and lavatory. The next major problem of rickshaw pullers is the rude behavior of police and shopkeepers with them because 22 percent of them complained that they have been either misbehaved/abused or beaten by traffic police/ shopkeepers or the seats of their rickshaw were confiscated by them. Moreover, 18 percent rickshaw pullers faced the problem like unsatisfactory fare and rude behaviors of passengers with them. While 13 percent had the problem of weakness and 7 percent reported about the inconvenience in issuance of license & pass of the rickshaws. However, 25 percent of rickshaw pullers have no problem in pulling their cycle rickshaws.

Table 13

Percentage Distribution of Types of Problems Faced by Rickshaw Pullers in

Aligarh City

Problems	Percent
Lack of Rickshaw stands	28
Rude behaviors of Police and shopkeepers	22
Unsatisfactory fare	18
Weakness	13
Problem of License and pass	07

Poor condition of Roads	05
Vision problem	05
No problem	25

Source: Based on field survey, 2010.

Conclusion and Suggestions

The overall analysis of the study reveals that the rickshaw pullers are one of the poorest sections of the society, living in abject poverty but play a pivotal role in intra-city transportation system. Neither is their working environment regulated nor their social security issues are addressed. In rickshaw-pulling neither there is need to invest money nor to have any special skill to drive it (Khan, 2010: 98). Unemployment, low and uncertain income, debt, problem of housing, sanitation and health, lack of rickshaw stands, torture of police, poor condition of roads, corruption in the issuance of rickshaw's licenses, unsatisfactory fare etc. are their major problems. Because of their miseries they generally indulge themselves in bad habits like smoking, drinking, drug addiction, gambling, etc.

The major causes which compelled them to engage themselves in pulling rickshaws are poverty, unemployment, large family size, family disintegration, illiteracy, desire of work, debt, small size of land holdings etc. Majority of them suffer from cough and cold, joint, back and chest pains, asthma, gastroenteritis and tuberculosis which lead to their untimely deaths. They are also unaware about the governmental schemes launched for poverty alleviation. Out of 100 rickshaw pullers interviewed, only 32 percent were literate. They earn very low income, their average daily income ranges from rupees 100 to150. Their housing conditions are very poor and most of them live in house made up of mud. They do not have potable drinking water and their accessibility in infrastructural facilities is also very poor.

Planners and governing authorities should recognize that rickshaws are non-polluting, cheap and efficient mode of transportation which provides employment and self-sustenance for thousands of people in Aligarh city. To save many of them from a dark desolate future and to settle the tempestuous tides in their storm-wreaked lives, it is imperative to collaborate

and mass-practice such solutions and find a right combination that take into account all situations and vicissitudes (Jain, 2008).

Cycle rickshaws create traffic congestion on the roads of big cities (Replogle, 1991: 19), as a result many of the rickshaws are seized by the traffic police (Ahmed, 2005), which has been creating the problem of unemployment (Ganguly, 1982: 1636). Therefore, it is necessary that, separate tracks should be constructed for non-motorized vehicles and stop seizing of cycle rickshaws. Moreover, corruption in the issuance of the licenses of cycle rickshaws has further accentuated the problem of cycle rickshaw pullers because getting a license is almost impossible for a poor person (Kishwar, 2006: 29). It can be checked by a simple act of registration by any means and by the payment of a nominal fee to cover costs for issue of a photo identification card or to replace the license quota system with on the spot registration, as given in the prime minister's policy draft (Kishwar, 2001).

To economically empower the rickshaw pullers, declare all congested market areas i.e., Amir Nishan, Centre Point, Dodhpur, Railway Road, Rasal Ganj, Phool Chauraha, etc. 'No Entry Zones' for motorized vehicles, because it can create more employment opportunities to the rickshaw pullers and simultaneously reduce the traffic congestion and environmental pollution in the city.

The rickshaw banks should be established in all the cities, in which the rickshaws are still the main mode of transportation, to sanction the loans on easy installments to the rickshaw pullers, so that, they can purchase their own rickshaws and also can get repaired them without being dependent on money lenders. The rickshaw pulling is an arduous job and cannot be continued for hours, so that being tired rickshaw pullers need rest, therefore, at least one rickshaw stand with basic facilities like, drinking water and lavatory has to be constructed near every main market, Aligarh Railway Junction, bus stands, etc.

Moreover, there should be the provision of dispensary, medical insurance at cheap and easy premium and housing facilities for the families of rickshaw pullers, and special drives have to be taken to improve the literacy level, with special emphasis on vocational education for the children and other family members of the rickshaw pullers. However, efficient extension services have to be provided that the rickshaw pullers and other disadvantageous sections of the society may get benefited by the various governmental poverty alleviation programmes.

Notwithstanding, it is the need of hour to frame such policies and programmes that the widening gap between the haves and have nots and extending regional imbalances in the level of development may be minimized. Surely, it will pave the way in solving the problems like poverty, hunger, poor health and hygiene, illiteracy and ignorance, begging, swarming number of rickshaw pullers in cities, heavy influx of rural migrants in urban areas, slum and squatter settlements, houselessness, child labour, gender discrimination, injustice, drug addiction and alcoholism, environmental pollution, etc. in the developing countries of the world.

Endnotes

- i. *Cycle rickshaw are the three wheeled manually pulled vehicles, used for the intra-city transport system for transporting people and commodities from one place to another.*
- ii. *Makeshift Dhabas are the temporary restaurants along the roads where people take meals under the open sky.*

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