

# Comprehensive Analysis of Poverty in India: A Spatio-Temporal Dimension

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## Abstract:

Poverty has been a serious issue in the development process across the world for quite a long period of time and alleviation of poverty has been one of the major challenges faced by India too. In India, poverty is widely spread throughout the country and it has a historical past. After independence several efforts have been made at national and state level to overcome the curse of poverty in our country, still almost 22% people (as per 2011 data) of our country are poor at present time. The situation is worse for rural areas than the urban areas. Even there is a large interstate variation in the concentration of poor throughout the country. With this in mind, the present paper is an attempt to make a comprehensive analysis of poverty through different periods of time to understand the overall trend of poverty in our country. Besides we have also tried to put a view about the trend of intensity and severity of poverty in our country during different decades using Poverty Gap Index and Squared Poverty Gap Index. In the later half of the paper, we have tried to explain the changes in spatial concentration of poverty during different time frames throughout the nation. The study is based on secondary data collected from different sources like Reports of the Expert Group, Planning Commission, NSSO reports etc. For better analysis and representation we have consulted relevant literatures and prepared several tables, graphs, and maps. The present study explores that with the number poor, the intensity and severity of poverty have also been declining day by day though the rate of declination is different during several time frames. The study also delimitates that like the national poverty both rural and urban poverty have also been declining in our country with the progress of time. The study also shows that there is a large- scale spatial variation in the concentration of poor among the states and the rate of declination is also quite different from state to state.

**Keywords:** Trend of Poverty, Head Count Ratio, Spatial Pattern of Poverty, Below Poverty Line, Rural and Urban Poverty, Poverty Reduction.

## Introduction

The persistence of poverty is as old as human civilization. It is a social phenomenon in which a particular section of a society is unable to fulfill its basic needs of life and suffers from deprivation (Datt and Sundharam, 1998). Like other developing countries, poverty is one of the most important and pressing problems facing Indian economy today. It is a socio-economic problem that goes beyond the boundaries of economic arena and covers other aspects such as the inability to participate in social and political life (United Nations Report, 2010).

The very idea of poverty is a complex one since it is very difficult, though not impossible to define and measure in a straightjacket and since the study of poverty must include subjective and objective considerations. Therefore, better understanding of the concept, pattern and depth of poverty, certainly matters for alleviation. As Alcock (1997) states: 'it is the issue of definition that lies at the task of understanding poverty, one must first know what poverty is before one can begin to do anything to measure it and before one can begin to do anything to alleviate it'. This statement depicts the unquestionable problem of finding a definition of poverty because it is multidimensional. According to the World Bank (1990) a person is considered to be in state of poverty if he or she is deprived of well-being, has a very low income and fails to procure the basic needs of life. To be more elaborate, poverty is characterized in terms of poor condition of health and education, deprivation of clean water and sanitation, inability to manage physical security and lack of opportunities to promote life of betterment. Amartya Sen has given a very comprehensive definition of poverty. According to him, poverty is not merely insufficient income, but also lack of opportunities to participate in the economic and political system of the country (Sen, A, 2010). Thus poverty is an extremely complex phenomenon, which manifests itself in a range of overlapping and interwoven economic, political and social deprivations. These include lack of assets, low income levels, hunger, poor health, insecurity, physical and psychological hardship, social exclusion, degradation and discrimination, and political powerlessness and disarticulation (More and Singh, 2014). Like other countries of the world in India also Poverty line is considered as the yardstick for estimating poverty. This line depends on the ability or inability of an individual to meet the expenses for the fulfilment of his or her fundamental necessities. For calculating and measuring the condition of poverty of a country at first a base line is constructed and this is called poverty line. It is nothing but the consideration of ability of an individual to procure the goods and services required to fulfill the basic needs of one's life. Poverty line is determined by the Planning Commission on the basis of data provided by 'National Sample Statistical Organization' (NSSO). It was in 1957 when the concept of poverty line was introduced in India by Indian Labour Conference (ILC). Afterwards in 1962 the poverty line was practically applied for the first time in our country by the Working Group of the Planning Commission. Later on the concept of poverty line and the measurement of poverty have been evolved from time to time. Various efforts have been made at different levels by the government to alleviate the curse of poverty in our country. Still as per the report of the planning commission, 2011 almost 21.9% people of our country are considered as poor. If we consider \$2 a day as global poverty line, then in India almost 68% people will fall under poverty line. While over 30% even have less than \$1.25 per day available and will fall under extreme poverty. Besides according to the Human Development Index (HDI), India is ranked 129<sup>th</sup> out of 189 nations with HDI value of 0.647. Even there is observed a large interstate disparity in the concentration of poverty throughout the country. Despite high rates of economic growth that exceeded expectations and led to India being placed in third-largest world economy in terms of PPP (Purchasing Power Parity) and positioned in the category of lower middle income countries. The grassroots' reality makes it clear that the country still has a long way to go in eradicating poverty and ensuring acceptable minimum standards of living for all citizens (Aasha Kapur Mehta, et al., 2011). In light of the aforementioned reasons, various studies have already been performed during different time periods to study poverty trend in India to get a clear idea about the progress of our country in poverty eradication. Gaurav Datt (1998) presented the evolution of poverty at national and interstate level spanning the period 1951–1994. Fox (2002) prepared a report on the trend of poverty in terms of HCI, and consumption expenditure since 1974 to 2000. Panagariya and Mukim (2014)

made comprehensive up-to-date estimates of poverty by social and religious groups in the rural and urban areas of the largest 17 states in India. Thomas (2015) made a comparative assessment of statewise poverty in India between 2004-05 and 2011-12 on the basis of per capita income and consumption expenditure. While Melkamu and Singh in 2015 analysed trend of poverty in our country during seven decades from 1951 to 2011 applying graphical and semi-log growth model to find out the impact of economic growth on poverty reduction (cf. Melkamu and Singh, 2016). Akshu et al. (2017) in their paper put a view about the statewise changes in absolute number of poor from 1972 to 2012 to understand interstate disparities in the concentration of poverty. In this present paper, we have tried to make a comprehensive analysis about the trend of national, rural and urban poverty in our country from 1951 to 2011 on the basis of several indices like HCR, PGI and SPGI to distinguish whether the level of poverty situation has increased or decreased over time using graphical and tabular analysis. Because it is quantitatively important to evaluate overall performance of the country's development plans. Besides we have also put a view about the decadal changes in the spatial distribution of poverty among various states in our country from 1972-73 to 2011-12 to understand interstate regional disparities in the concentration of poor people throughout the country.

### Objectives:

The main objectives of the present paper are as follows –

1. To assess the trend of National, Rural and Urban poverty in our country from 1951 to 2011.
2. To analyse the interstate variation in the spatial pattern of poverty throughout the country during different time periods.

### Database and Methodology:

The entire work has been done using secondary data collected from various sources like Reports of the Expert Group on Programme for Alleviation of Poverty, Planning Commission, Government of India, Economic Survey of India, NSSO reports etc. Besides relevant scholarly articles, reports of newspapers and literatures have also been consulted for better analysis and understanding. The major analytical tool employed for the study is tabular analysis to facilitate easy comparison. For deriving the result both qualitative and quantitative techniques have been implemented throughout the study. For detailed analysis aggregate data have been compiled into percentage. For better understanding and to portray spatial and temporal dimensions of poverty, spatial maps and graphs have been drawn through ArcGIS 10.5.

### Results and Discussion:

#### *Trend of Poverty in India (1951-2011):*

The availability of the longest series of data in India created opportunity to see the impact of development policy on poverty. Such a time series of data also present a unique opportunity to study the relationship between poverty and policy that is fundamentally time-based in nature. In the course of the discussion, we will realize about the period of significant changes in India's poverty rate. Nobody can deny the fact that poverty alleviation programmes and schemes have affected the poverty in varying degrees not only at national level but also at inter and intra-state level. As a result of the various policies and programmes introduced by the Government of India, the level of poverty in the country has come down. The number of poor below poverty line decreased

continuously but in varying degrees and there are large differences across the states of India. Some states performed well in terms of poverty reduction while some states did not perform well. Though In our country the number of population below the poverty line has oscillated to the full extent in the past, but the trend taken as a whole shows that there is positively a sharp fall. To get a clear idea about the temporal dimension and progress of poverty in our country, the whole time period has been divided into three time frames –

### 1. Poverty during 1951-1971:

There were wide fluctuations in the trends of poverty during this period. In 1951, out of the total population of our country 45.31% was below the poverty line. Afterwards it reached to 61% in 1954-55 and again it came down to 45.27% during 1960-61. But almost after a decade in 1971, it rose to 52.88%. The 1954-55 and 1966-67 were the two significant years in the study of poverty when Indian poverty rate has reached maximum, 61.1% and 62% respectively. 1966-67 was not only the year in which poverty reached maximum but year of reference for continuous decline in poverty. Between 1952 and 1967, the share of the population in poverty moved up and down cyclically, most importantly in response to good or bad monsoons. Hence in our country till the period of mid-1960 the number of poor was fluctuating instead of following a particular trend. Fox (2002) in his study concluded that the slow economic growth between 1950 and the mid-1970s (averaging only 1.4% per capita) has been blamed for this poor performance. Table 1 also depicts a clear view about the rate of rural and urban poverty during 1951 to 1971. Like the total number of poor, both rural and urban poverty have also increased during this period. In 1951, 47.37% people were below the poverty line which came down to 45.40% in 1961 but it again rose to 54.84% in 1971. From this trend we can state that all India poverty and the rural poverty rate were almost similar during these periods. While the urban poverty maintained an increasing trend during the same time span. In 1951, 35.46% people were considered as urban poor. The number of the urban poor arrived to 44.65% in 1961 with 2.59% annual growth rate which was quite alarming. During the period of 1961-1971 though the urban poor have increased, the growth rate was modest i.e. 0.07% per year. It means that the growth rate of rural poverty was quite higher than the urban poverty during 1951 to 1971. To understand the depth and intensity of poverty, we have also analysed the trend of poverty through Poverty Gap Index (PGI) and Squared Poverty Gap Index (SPGI). Poverty Gap Index is a measure of poverty by which we can estimate the depth of poverty i.e. how poor the poor actually are, while on the other hand the Squared Poverty Gap Index is used to find out the severity of poverty by providing more weight to the poorest of the poor. From the table 1, it is clearly observed that in 1951, poverty gap index was 15.20 and it reduced to 13.64 in 1961 which was a positive aspect but again after a decade it increased to 15.91 during 1971. Similar trend is also found in case of Rural Poverty Gap Index. While in case of Urban Poverty Gap Index, the depth of poverty has increased from 11.14 in 1951 to 13.35 in 1971 which was quite alarming. It means the depth of poverty has changed cyclically during 1951-1971 periods and it does not maintain a particular trend rather a fluctuating trend. In case of Squared Poverty Gap index, it is observed from the table 1 that the severity of poverty has also maintained a similar trend like HCR and PGI in terms of total poverty and rural poverty. Both were reduced in 1971 compared to 1951. But in case of urban poverty, the severity of poverty has increased from 4.82 in 1951 to 5.35 in 1971. Thus we can state that during the period of 1951 and 1971, the poverty rate has maintained both upward and downward trends in terms of all three indices of poverty measurement i.e. HCI, PGI and SPGI.

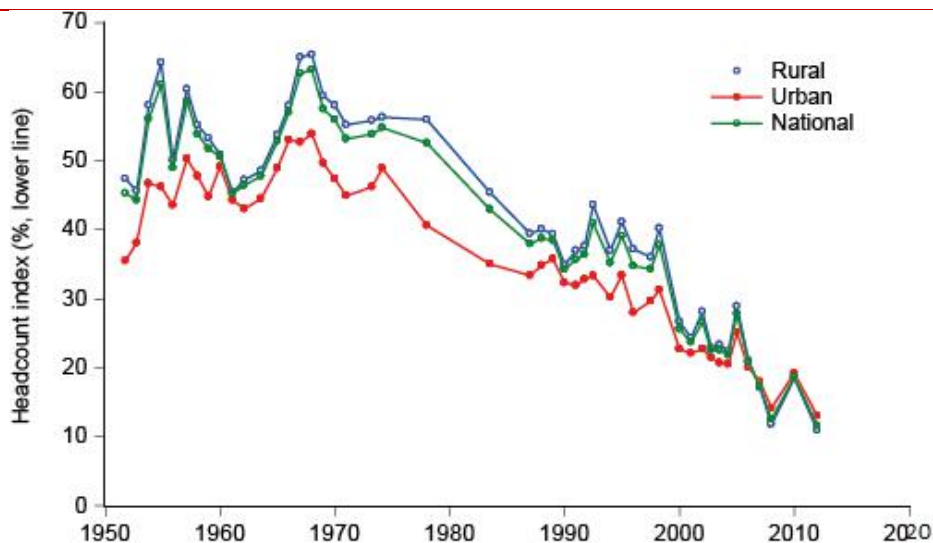
Table 1: Trends of Poverty in India (1951-2011)

Year	Headcount Index			Poverty Gap Index			Squared Poverty Gap Index		
	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban
1951	45.31	47.37	35.46	15.20	16.05	11.14	7.06	7.53	4.82
1961	45.27	45.40	44.65	13.64	13.60	13.84	5.59	5.53	5.83
1971	52.88	54.84	44.98	15.91	16.55	13.35	6.51	6.80	5.35
1983	43.00	45.31	35.65	11.90	12.65	9.52	4.53	4.84	3.56
1991	35.49	36.43	32.76	8.61	8.64	8.51	2.98	2.93	3.12
2005	37.2	41.8	25.7	8.91	9.64	6.08	1.71	1.76	2.0
2011	21.9	25.70	13.70	4.5	5.05	2.70	1.9	2.1	1.4

**Source:** Planning commission, Government of India and Indian Economic Survey, RBI

## 2. Poverty during 1971-1991:

The rate of poverty reduction during the period of 1971 to 1991 was sizeable. In 1971, 52.88% of people of our country were below the poverty line while in 1983 the number of BPL population came down to 43.00% with 1.91% annual per cent declination rate. In 1991, 35.49% people belonged to below poverty line in our country. The annual rate of declination was 2.65%. Improvements in 1980s support a continuation of a long-term secular decline of poverty under way in India since the 1970s. The expansion of anti-poverty programmes by the Government contributed for this outcome. But it took nearly 30 years for India's poverty measures to fall appreciably below their levels from the early 1950s. Like the national poverty rate, both the rural and urban poverty have also declined during this period. In 1971, almost 54.84% rural people were below the poverty line which came down to 45.31% in 1983 with 1.44% per year negative growth rate and it further reduced to 36.43% with 2.45% annual declination rate which was quite significant for the overall development of our country. Like the total number of poor, the depth and severity of poverty have also declined significantly during 1971 to 1991. In 1971, the national value of Poverty Gap Index was 15.91 which reduced to 11.90 in 1983 and further came down to 8.61 in 1991. The rural and urban depth of poverty have also declined in this period at a very sizeable rate. It is found from the table that the rate of declination in depth of poverty is much higher in case of rural poverty than the urban poverty. Like the depth of poverty, the severity of poverty has also reduced during the same period. In 1971, the value of Squared Poverty Gap Index was 6.51 which declined to 4.53 in 1983 and further it came down to 2.98 in 1991 which is quite appreciable.



**Figure 1: Trend of National, Rural and Urban Poverty in India from 1951-2011**

### 3. Poverty during 1991-2011:

The rate of poverty has been declined sharply from 35.49% in 1991 to 21.90% in 2011. Its decline after 1991 contributed much more for overall decline than previously. Annual percentage declination rate was 3.10% during this period. Apparently reliable survey data indicate that there was a sharp increase in measured poverty rate from 35.49% in 1991 to 37.20% in 2005 because of bad weather or drought. Tendulkar and Jain (1995) in their study indicated that the fact of sharp increase in poverty rate in 1992 in the country was relatively due to bad agricultural year. However, it is worth mentioning that there is a change in the methodology of estimation of poverty since 1999-2000. But during the period from 1993-94 to 1999-2000, poverty reduced very rapidly as compared to previous years. The fall in the poverty rate was counterbalanced by a rise in total population. Between 1994 and 2000, however, the number of poor people began to fall sharply—by 60 million people over the six-year period. From the table 1, it is clearly visible that almost 36.43% rural people were below the poverty line in 1991 but it increased to 41.80% in 2005 with 1.05% annual growth rate which hindered the development of our country. But a significant reduction was observed in rural poverty in 2011 which was 25.70%. The rate of declination in rural poverty during the period of 2005 to 2011 was 6.42% which is the highest for the past six decades. It is also interesting to note that not only the number of rural poor but also the number of urban poor has also declined from 25.70% in 2005 to 13.70% in 2011 with a significant rate of 7.78% per year. Like the total proportion of poor in our country, the depth and severity of poverty have also declined significantly during this time span. From the table 1, it is noticed that the intensity of poverty at national level has risen from 1991 (8.61) to 2005 (8.91) but it came down to 4.5 in 2011 which is quite commendable. Similar trend is also found in terms of intensity of poverty in rural areas. Whereas in case of urban poverty, the intensity of poverty has also declined at a sizeable rate from 8.51 in 1991 to 6.08 in 2005 and again it reduced to 2.70 in 2011. While the severity of poverty at national, rural and urban level has maintained a downward trend during the period of 1991 to 2011 in a systematic way which is quite relevant in poverty eradication and overall development of our nation.

***Spatial Changing Pattern of Poverty in India:***

Poverty is not concentrated equally throughout the country. There is a large scale spatial and temporal variation in the concentration of poverty in our country during different decades. In some parts the proportion of the poor to the total population is quite high whereas in some parts it is quite low. Besides the rate of poverty reduction also varies from states to states during different time periods. Some states have made commendable progress in poverty reduction while some states have lagged far behind in case of poverty eradication. To understand the changing dimension in the concentration of poverty throughout the country, it is essential to analyse the spatial pattern of poverty during several time periods. In the present paper, we have analysed the spatial concentration of poverty during three time periods with twenty years of interval i.e. 1972-73, 1993-94 and 2011-12. We have considered these years to understand spatially changing dimension of poverty in several states during pre-liberalization and post-liberalization period.

**Table 2: Spatial Pattern of poverty in India**

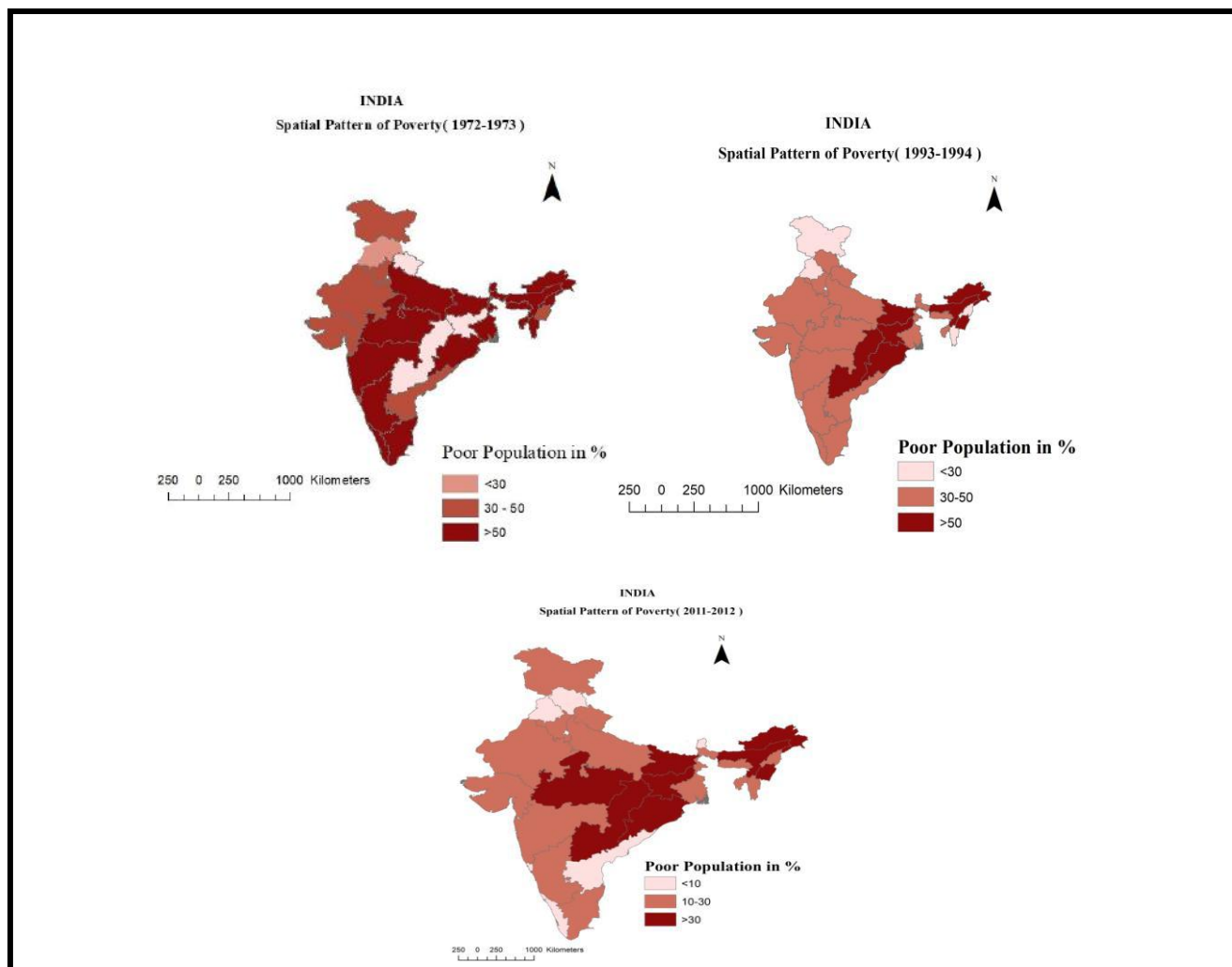
<b>Year</b>			
<b>States</b>	<b>1972-73</b>	<b>1993-94</b>	<b>2011-12</b>
Andhra Pradesh	49.20	44.60	9.20
Arunachal Pradesh	51.90	54.50	34.67
Assam	51.20	51.80	31.98
Bihar	61.70	61.50	33.74
Chhattisgarh	-	50.90	39.93
Goa	44.00	20.80	5.09
Gujarat	47.20	37.80	16.63
Haryana	35.20	35.90	11.16
Himachal Pradesh	26.40	34.60	8.06
Jammu & Kashmir	42.50	26.30	10.35
Jharkhand	-	60.70	36.96
Karnataka	54.30	49.50	20.91
Kerala	59.70	31.30	7.05
Madhya Pradesh	61.90	44.60	31.65
Maharashtra	52.90	47.80	17.35
Manipur	50.00	65.10	36.89
Meghalaya	50.20	35.20	11.87
Mizoram	50.30	11.80	20.40
Nagaland	50.80	20.40	18.88
Odisha	66.20	59.10	32.59
Punjab	28.00	22.40	8.26
Rajasthan	46.30	38.30	14.71
Sikkim	50.90	31.80	8.19
Tamil Nadu	56.50	44.60	11.28



Tripura	51.00	32.90	14.05
Uttar Pradesh	56.90	48.40	29.43
Uttarakhand	-	32.00	11.26
West Bengal	63.10	39.40	19.98

**Source:** Planning commission, Government of India (cf. <http://niti.gov.in/state-statistics>)

Table 2 portrays spatial pattern of poverty during several time periods to depict statewise trend in absolute number of poverty in our country. To understand the trend of poverty among different states, we have considered three different time frames i.e. 1972-73, 1991-92 and 2011-12. During 1972-73, maximum number of poor people were found in Odisha (66.20%) followed by West Bengal (63.10%) and Bihar (61.70%). Besides these three states more than half of the states' total population were under BPL in Kerala, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Tripura, Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Sikkim and Manipur which is clearly visible in figure 2. While poverty rate was significantly low during this period in some other states like Himachal Pradesh (26.40%), Punjab (28.00%), Haryana (35.20%). The main reason behind this trend in these states is the effect of green revolution during the last half of 1960s. Table 2 also describes the spatial pattern of poverty in different parts of our country during 1993-94. During post liberalization period, the poverty rate has declined at a commendable rate in several states of our country. Some states like Mizoram, Kerala, West Bengal, Goa, Sikkim, Nagaland, Madhya Pradesh etc. have made an outstanding progress to reduce total number of poor during 1993-94 compared to 1971-72 period.





Whereas in some states like Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana instead of reducing poverty the number of poor increased. Among the states, maximum proportion of BPL population was observed in Bihar (61.50%) followed by Jharkhand (60.70%) and Odisha (59.10%). Whereas minimum proportion of poor people belonged to Mizoram (11.80%) followed by Nagaland (20.40%), Goa (20.80%) and Punjab (22.40%). Like the national trend of poverty, similar pattern in poverty reduction is also found during 2011-12 compared to 1993-94. During this time period, various poverty eradication programmes have been undertaken by the Government in our country in different planning eras for the betterment of the poor. In most of the states, proportion of the poor people to the total population has fallen sharply during these periods. Among the states Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra have been able to reduce the number of poor people at a very appreciable rate. Besides these states, some other states like Karnataka, Manipur, Bihar, Himachal Pradesh and Odisha have also performed very well in reducing the number of poor in 2011-12 from 1993-94. If we concentrate on the present (2011-12) spatial pattern of poverty among different states in our country, then it is clearly observed from the figure 2 that there is a large spatial variation in concentration of poor people in several parts of our country. In some states, the proportion of poor to the total population is very low while in some other states the amount of poverty is quite alarming. From the table 2, it is clearly visible that in nine states out of the 28 states (As per 2011 data) of our country, Head Count Ratio (HCR) has crossed the value of national Head Count Ratio (HCR) which is 21.9%. During 2011-12, maximum proportion of poor people to the total population is found in Chhattisgarh (39.93%) followed by Jharkhand (36.96%), Manipur (36.89%), Arunachal Pradesh (34.67%), Bihar (33.74%), Odisha (32.59%) and Madhya Pradesh (31.65%). Even after six decades of independence, more than 30% of the population in these states have fallen below poverty line which is really a matter of concern. While, on the other hand, minimum proportion of poor people is found in Goa (5.09%) followed by Kerala (7.05%), Himachal Pradesh (8.06%), Sikkim (8.19%), Punjab (8.26%) and Andhra Pradesh (9.20%). From this pattern we can state that concentration of poor people is much more in the central eastern part of our country than the southern and western region.

### Conclusion:

The above analysis provides a comprehensive state of poverty during different decades in our country. The study clearly reveals that poverty rate has been declining day by day with the progress of time. Over the last six decades, poverty has come down from 45.31% to 21.9% with 0.86% per year declination rate. From the analysis, it has been observed that during the period of 1951 to 1971, the poverty rate did not maintain any proper trend rather it was fluctuating in nature and also cyclical. Compared to 1951, poverty rate increased significantly during 1971 and was maximum in 1966-67 when almost 62% of the country's total population were considered as poor. Many scholars claimed that the slow economic growth between 1950 and the mid-1970s (averaging only 1.4 per cent per capita) was mainly responsible for this poor performance. During the later half of 1970s, poverty rate has started to decline mainly due to the impact of green revolution and improvisation of some poverty eradication schemes. From the analysis, we can state that after 1971, poverty rate has started to decline at a sizeable rate and maintained a downward trend. After 1991, due to the impact of liberalization and globalization, economic growth has been taken place and as a result poverty rate has started to fall throughout the country. Though due to some climatic hazards and low agricultural growth, poverty rate

increased slightly from 1991 to 2005 in our country. Some social scientists also claimed that the changing methodology of poverty estimation is responsible for this upward trend of poverty during this time frame. After 2005, the poverty rate has come down to 21.9% in 2011 at a very commendable rate of 6.85% per year. From the analysis, we can also state that in India from the very beginning of time, the trend of poverty has been very similar with the trend of rural poverty. It has also been observed that during all the decades the proportion of rural poor has overcome the national number of the poor. On the other hand, in case of urban poverty the scenario is opposite. The analysis also depicts that the depth and severity of poverty both in rural and urban areas have also come down throughout the time. Poverty reduction during 1973-74 to 2011-12 also shows that most of the poverty reduction at national level is caused and contributed by sharp poverty reduction in some states which had a poverty reduction rate much greater than the national average. In the later half of the study, we have analysed the statewide spatial pattern of poverty in India from 1972-73 to 2011-12. From the analysis, we can tell that there is a large-scale regional variation in the concentration of the poor throughout the country. From the study, it has been observed that during 1971-72, except some states like Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Goa, Gujarat etc. in rest of the states more than half of the total state's population were under the poverty line. Even during 1991, the situation was not very prosperous in some states because of low economic development. While after 1991, poverty rate has started to fall down sharply in most of the states of our country. As per the report of the planning commission, during 2011 in nine states out of the 28 states of our country, Head Count Ratio (HCR) has crossed the national value which is 21.9%. It has also been revealed from the study that during present time poverty is mainly concentrated in the central eastern region (Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and Uttar Pradesh) of our country than the other parts. Besides various physiographic, social, economic and political factors, some historical and colonial factors may be responsible for this present state of underdevelopment and high concentration of poverty in these regions which should be addressed by the social scientists, policy makers and development planners in future. These ground realities are serious crises that need special attention by the Government so that in near future the inequality and intensity of poverty may reduce throughout the country.

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