

## A comprehensive analysis of poverty in India

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### Abstract

India, like other third world countries is a low income developing economy. There is no doubt that nearly one-fourth of its population lives in conditions of misery. Poverty is not only acute, but is also a chronic malady in India. At the same time, there exist unutilized natural resources. The Planning Commission is the nodal agency in the government of India for estimation of poverty at national and state levels. The estimates of poverty are made using the large sample survey data on household consumer expenditure constituted by the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) of the Ministry of Statistics and Programme implementation. The Planning Commission has provided estimates of the incidence of poverty since the early 1970s. On the criteria using official methodology, the Planning Commission estimated incidence of poverty for several years during the period from 1977-78 to 1994-95. These estimates of the planning commission suggest spectacular decline in the incidence of poverty during 17 years period from 1977-78 to 1994-95. During the 11 year period 1993-94 to 2004-05, the average decline in the poverty ratio was 0.74 percentage points per year. It accelerated to 2.18 percentage points per year during the 7-year period 2004-05 to 2011-12. Therefore, it can be concluded that the rate of decline in poverty ratio during the most recent 7-year period 2004-05 to 2011-12 was about three times of that experienced in the 11-year period 1993-94 to 2004-05. Eradication of poverty from a level of 47.8% in 1990 to 21.8% in 2011-12 has been a major achievement of India's growth strategy. However, there is no room for complacency on this issue as the incidence of poverty as well as the number of poor has gone up. Besides the growth has been uneven when comparing social groups, economic groups, geographical regions, and rural and urban areas.

**Keywords:** Poverty, India, Colonial period, Poverty estimates, Per capita income, Planning Commission, NSS

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1. Poverty in India: An Analysis

India, like other third world countries is a low income developing economy. There is no doubt that nearly one-fourth of its population lives in conditions of misery. Poverty is not only acute, but is also a chronic malady in India. At the same time, there exist unutilized natural resources. The process of economic stagnation in India has been attributed by the economic historians of colonial school to the restrictive role of the state structure, religious orthodoxy & social attitudes. There are others who explain the economic backwardness in terms of shortage of capital, lack of enterprise, heavy pressure of population and so on. Still there are many others who attribute the underdevelopment of India to the exploitation by the British during their two hundred year rule.

After the battle of Plassey, the British East India Company had succeeded in establishing its rule over the major part of India and with it began the period of colonial exploitation of the country. In this period there was massive drain of wealth from India to England and it resulted in pauperization of the country. Even the transfer of power from the East India Company to the British did not materially alter the situation. The colonial exploitation had continued; only its form had changed.

Indian economy during the British rule was characterized by low per capita income, inequitable distribution of wealth, high incidence of poverty, predominance of agriculture and low level of human development. During the pre-independence period, National income accounts were not prepared and thus no official estimates of the national income of India are available for the British period. The first estimates of the national income were provided by Dadabhai Naoroji for 1867-68 in his 'Poverty

and Un British Rule in India'. According to him, the national income of British India in this year was Rs.340 core. Since the population of the country was about 17 core, the per capita income turned out to be Rs.20 per annum. Apart from Naoroji, F.J. Atkinson, Major Baring, T. Richard, Horne, W. Digby, Lord Curzon and R. Giffen also provided their estimates of national income for different years in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Monu Mukherji, pointing out the limitation of these estimates of national income, has clearly stated that much reliance should not be placed on these for assessing the performance of the Indian economy during the period. To make these estimates more reliable & more useful, Monu Mukherji attempted readjustments in these estimates which are shown in table below.

**Table 1:** Adjusted Per Capita Income

Author of the estimate	Year	Per capita income at current prices (Rs)	Per capita income at 1948-49 prices (Rs)
Naoroji	1867-68	23.5	142
Atkinson	1875	23.4	172
Major Baring	1881	27	184
Horne	1891	28	158
Atkinson	1895	31.5	178
Curzon	1902	30	148
Giffen	1903	30	167

**Source:** M. Mukherjee, National income in V.B. Singh (ed.), Economic History of India: 1875-1956 (New Delhi, 1975), P.672

After independence, the government wanted to give a 'big push' to the stand- still economy and for this purpose, it employed the technique of "democratic planning". With the efforts of the government, some development has indeed taken place during six and the half decades of planning, but barring a few countries, the per capita income of the Indian people is the lowest in the world.

The Planning Commission is the nodal agency in the government of India for estimation of poverty at national and state levels. The estimates of poverty are made using the large sample survey data on household consumer expenditure constituted by the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) of the Ministry of Statistics and Programme implementation. The state-specific poverty ratios are worked out from state- specific poverty lines and distribution of persons by expenditure groups obtained from the NSS data on consumer expenditure. The poverty ratio at all-India level is obtained as the weighted average of the state wise poverty ratios.

A working group was formed in 1962 to attempt to set a poverty line for India. This working group used calories required for survival, and income needed to buy those calories in different parts of India, to derive an average poverty line of Rs.20 per months at 1960-61 prices. Several economists and organizations have conducted studies on the extent of poverty in India. Estimates of poverty in India during the 1960s varied widely. Dr. V.M Dandekar and Mr. Nilkantha Rath, on behalf of the then Indian government, estimated that the poverty rate in India in 1960s remained generally constant at 41%. Ojha in contrast, estimated that there were 190 million people (44%) in India below official poverty limit in 1961, and that this below-poverty line number increased to 28 million (70%) in 1967. Dr. P.K. Bardhan also concluded that Indian poverty rates increased through the 1960s, reaching a high of 54%. Those above the 1960s poverty level of Rs.240 per year were in fragile economic groups as well as not doing well either. Min has estimated that 37.1% of Indian people live below poverty line in 1967-68. Montek Ahluwalia, using the same concept of poverty line found that 56.5% of people lived below poverty line in 1967.

**Table 2:** Estimates of Poverty in India, Percent of Population

Year	Author of the estimate	Incidence of poverty
1968-69	Dandekar and N.K. Rath	41
1967	P.D. Ojha	70
1967-68	P.K. Bardhan	54
1967-68	B.S. Minhas	37.1
1967-68	Montek Ahluwalia	56.5

Poverty alleviation has been a driver for India's Planning Commission's Task Force on Projections of Minimum Needs and Effective Consumption Demand of the Perspective Planning Divisions. This division, in 1979 took into account differences in calorie requirements for different age groups, activity levels and sex. They determined that the average rural dweller needed around 2400 calories and those in urban areas required about 2100 calories per person per day. To satisfy the food requirement, the Task Force estimated that a consumer spending in 1973-34 of Rs.49.09 per person per month in rural areas and Rs.56.64 in urban areas was appropriate measure to

estimate its poverty line. The Planning Commission has provided estimates of the incidence of poverty since the early 1970s. On the criteria using official methodology, the Planning Commission estimated incidence of poverty for several years during the period from 1977-78 to 1994-95. These estimates of the planning commission suggest spectacular decline in the incidence of poverty during 17 years period from 1977-78 to 1994-95. This success on poverty front was attributed by the Planning Commission mainly to the higher rate of growth, the increase in agricultural production and a substantial effort at providing employment on rural works. However, some economists point out serious flaws in the Planning Commission's methodology to estimate poverty and have thus raised doubts about the claims of the planning commission.

In view of the criticism of the methodology followed by the Planning Commission to estimate the incidence of poverty, the need was felt to re-examine the whole issue of poverty estimation. Hence, the Planning Commission constituted in September 1989 an "Expert Group" to consider methodological and computational aspects of estimation of proportion and number of poor in India. Prof. D.T. Lakdawala was the chairman of the Expert Group. The report of the expert group was submitted in July 1993.

Taking into account various considerations, the Expert Group recommended the following criteria for determining the poverty line:

1. The poverty line recommended by the Task Force on projection of minimum needs and effective consumption demands, namely a monthly per capita total expenditure of Rs.49.09 (rural) and Rs.56.64 (urban) rounded respectively to Rs.49 and Rs.57 at all India level at 1973-74 prices be adopted as the baseline.
2. Regarding the choice of the base year, the Expert Group was of the opinion that since much systematic work has already been done with the base 1973-74, this base year may be continued for estimating the poverty line.
3. For the choice of the deflator, the Expert Group came to the conclusion that it would be most suitable to rely on the disaggregated commodity indices for Consumer Price Index for Agricultural Laborers (CPIAL) to update the rural poverty line and a simple average of suitably weighted commodity indices of Consumer Price Index for Industrial Workers (CPIIW) and Consumer Price Index of Non-manual employees (CPINM) for updating the poverty line.

The Expert Group estimated the proportion and number of poor below the poverty line at five points covering the 21- year period 1973-74 to 1993-94. These estimates reveal that the rural poverty ratio has declined from 56.4 percent in 1973-74 to 39.3 percent in 1993-94. As compared with this, there is relatively smaller decline in the urban poverty ratio which has come down from 49.2 percent in 1973-74 to 32.4 percent in 1993-94. An important revelation of the study is that for the first time, the urban poverty ratio has been estimated to be higher than rural poverty ratio.

The poverty lines and the number and percentage of population below poverty line based on Expert Group methodology of the Planning Commission is shown in table below:

**Table 3: Poverty Line and percentage of Poor (Expert Group Methodology)**

Poverty lines with base 1973-74 (Rs Per capita per month) Expert Group methodology			Population below poverty line (Expert Group methodology)		
Year	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Total
1973-74	49.09	56.96	56.4	49.2	54.9
1977-78	56.84	72.50	53.1	47.4	51.8
1983	89.45	117.64	45.6	42.2	44.8
1987-88	115.43	165.58	39.1	40.1	39.3
1993-94	211.3	274.88	37.3	32.4	36.0

**Source:** Planning Commission (1993): Report of the Expert Group on Estimation of Proportion and Number of Poor People; and Govt. of India, Planning Commission, Ninth Five year plan 1997-2002, volume I (Delhi, 1991, page, 28)

The 55<sup>th</sup> Round of the National Sample Survey (NSS) (July 1999-june 2000) was a quinquennial large sample survey and was thus expected to generate data useful to prepare poverty estimates comparable with those from the previous large sample surveys. The Planning Commission made use of these data to prepare two separate estimates of the incidence of poverty. These are provided in the table below:

**Table 4: Poverty estimates based on the 55<sup>th</sup> NSS Round, 1999-2000 (% of population)**

Reference period	All India	Rural	Urban
30 day recall	26.10	27.09	23.62
7 day recall	23.33	24.02	21.59

**Source:** Planning Commission results reproduced in government of India ministry of finance economic survey 2000-2001.

The consumer expenditure data of the 55<sup>th</sup> round on a 30 day recall basis yields the poverty ratios for 1999-2000 of 27.09 percent in rural areas, 23.62 percent in urban areas and 26.1 percent for the country as a whole. The corresponding figure from the 7day recall period is 24.02 percent in rural areas, 21.59 percent in urban areas & 23.33 percent for the country as a whole. The estimates based on 55<sup>th</sup> NSS round has been criticized as being incomparable with the earlier estimates of poverty due to the change in methodology of data collection. Keeping in mind the lack of comparability in the methodology of the 55<sup>th</sup> round with the earlier large sample surveys, some studies have attempted to generate adjusted poverty estimates. Prominent among these are by K. Sundaram and S.D Tendulkar, Augus Deaton & Gaurav Datt, Valeria Kozel and Martin Ravallion.

All these studies show a decline in poverty between 1993-94 and 1999-2000 in varying degrees. At the same time, as emphasized by August Deaton and Jean Dreze, regional disparities as well as economic inequality within states increased during this period. According to them, “the overall decline of poverty in the nineties does not rule out the possibility of impoverishment among specific regions and social groups”. NSSO results on the basis of large sample survey data on household consumer expenditure (NSS 61<sup>st</sup> round) for 2004-05 are the basis of poverty estimate. The data were collected on Uniform Recall Period (URP) using 30 days for all items. The data was also available using 360 days for frequently purchased non-food items namely, clothing, footwear, durable goods, education and institutional medical expenses and 30-days recall period for the remaining items, known as Mixed Recall Period (MRP). The Planning Commission, using the Expert Group methodology has estimated poverty in 2004-05 using both the distributions. The following results were obtained:

1. Poverty estimates based on URP indicate 28.3 percent of rural population and 25.7 percent of the urban population

was below the poverty line. For the country as a whole, 27.5 percent of total population was below the poverty line in 2004-05.

2. The corresponding figure from MRP indicate 21.8 percent in rural areas, 21.7 percent in urban areas and 21.8 percent for the country as a whole was in poverty in 2004-05.

**Table 5: Poverty estimates based on 61<sup>st</sup> NSS round year-2004-05 (percent)**

Reference period	All India	Rural	Urban
Uniform Recall Period (URP) method	27.5	28.3	25.7
Mixed Recall Period (MRP) method	21.8	21.8	21.7

**Source:** Government of India, Economic Survey, 2007-08 (Delhi, 2008)

The estimates of poverty given by NSSO 61<sup>st</sup> round were heavily criticized by many experts. The estimated urban share of the poor population in 2004-05, namely 25.7 percent at the all-India level is generally accepted as being less controversial than its rural counterpart at 28.3 percent that has been heavily criticized as being too low. Since the appropriateness of the poverty line was questioned in some quarters, the government appointed an Expert Committee under the chairmanship of late Prof. Suresh Tendulkar to review the methodology for estimation of poverty. The Tendulkar Committee submitted its report in December 2009 and computed poverty lines and poverty ratios for 2004-05. For comparison they also computed poverty lines and poverty ratios for 1993-94 with identical methodology.

The Planning Commission periodically estimates poverty lines and poverty ratios for each of the years for which large sample surveys on Household Consumer Expenditure have been conducted by the NSSO of the Ministry of Statistics and Programme implementation. These surveys are normally conducted on quinquennial basis. The last quinquennial survey in this series was conducted in 2009-10 (NSS 66<sup>th</sup> round). However, since 2009-10 was not a normal year because of a severe drought, the NSSO repeated the large scale survey in 2011-12 (NSS 68<sup>th</sup> round). The summary results of this survey were released on 20<sup>th</sup> June 2013.

Since several representations were made suggesting that the Tendulkar poverty line was too low, the Planning Commission in June 2012, constituted an Expert Group under the chairmanship of Dr. C. Rangarajan to once again review the methodology for the measurement of poverty. The Rangarajan committee is deliberating on this issue and is expected to submit its report by middle of 2014. Since the data from the NSS 68<sup>th</sup> round (2011-12) of Household Consumer Expenditure Survey is now available, and the Rangarajan Committee recommendations will only be available a few months later, the

Planning Commission has updated the poverty estimates for the year 2011-12 as per the methodology recommended by Tendulkar methodology.

The NSSO tabulates expenditure of about 1.20 lakh households. Since these households have different number of members, the NSSO for purpose of comparison divides the household expenditure by the number of members to arrive at per capita consumption expenditure per month. This is called Monthly Per Capita consumption Expenditure (MPCE) and is computed on the basis of three different concepts:

- a. Uniform Reference Period (URP),
- b. Mixed Reference Period (MRP), and

c. Modified Mixed Reference Period (MMRP).

For 2011-12, for rural areas, the national poverty line using the Tendulkar methodology is estimated at Rs.816 per capita per month and Rs.1,000 per capita per month in urban areas.

Based on the estimates for 1993-94 & 2004-05, the Head Count Ratio (HCR) for the year 1990 has been estimated both at national and state levels. At the national level the HCR was estimated to 47.8 percent in 1990.

The percentage and number of persons in rural and urban areas at the national level as per Tendulkar methodology are given in the take below

**Table 6:** Poverty Estimates based on Tendulkar Methodology

Year	Percentage of poor			No. of poor(Millions)		
	Rural	Urban	All India	Rural	Urban	All India
1990			47.8			
1993-94	50.1	31.8	45.3	328.6	74.5	403.7
2004-05	41.8	25.7	37.2	326.3	80.8	407.1
2011-12	25.7	13.7	21.9	216.5	52.8	269.3
Annual average decline(%) 1993-94: 2004-05	0.75	0.55	0.74			
Annual average decline(%) 2004-05: 2011-12	2.32	1.69	2.18			

Source: Planning Commission

Based on the new estimate of HCR at the national level (47.8%), the country was required to achieve a HCR level of 23.9% by 2015 in order that MDG target 1 is achieved. The incidence of poverty declined from 47.8 percent in 1990 to 45.3 percent in 1993-94, to 37.2 percent in 2004-05 and further to 21.9 percent in 2011-12, suggesting that the country has already achieved the MDG target of halving the proportion of population living below national poverty line. The percentage of persons below the poverty line in 2011-12 has been estimated as 25.7 percent in rural areas, 13.7 percent in urban areas and 21.9 percent for the country as a whole. The respective ratios for the rural and urban areas were 41.8 percent and 25.7 percent and 37.2 percent for country as a whole in 2004-05. It was 50.1 percent in rural areas, 31.8 percent in urban areas and 45.3 percent for the country as a whole in 1993-94. In 2011-12, India

had 270 million persons below the Tendulkar poverty line as compared to 407 million in 2004-05, that is a reduction of 137 million persons over the seven year period.

During the 11year period 1993-94 to 2004-05, the average decline in the poverty ratio was 0.74 percentage points per year. It accelerated to 2.18 percentage points per year during the 7-year period 2004-05 to 2011-12. Therefore, it can be concluded that the rate of decline in poverty ratio during the most recent 7-year period 2004-05 to 2011-12 was about three times of that experienced in the 11-year period 1993-94 to 2004-05.

Indian economy has grown steadily over the last two decades, its growth has been uneven when comparing social groups, economic groups, geographical regions, and rural and urban areas.

**Table 7:** No. & %age of Population below poverty line by States, 199-93 to 2011-12 (Tendulkar Methodology)

S. No.	States	Poverty Ratio (%) 1993-94			Poverty Ratio (%) 2011-12		
		Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
1	Andhra Pradesh	48.14	35.22	44.61	10.96	5.81	9.20
2	Arunachal Pradesh	60.00	22.61	54.54	38.93	20.33	34.67
3	Assam	54.92	27.73	51.83	33.89	20.49	31.98
4	Bihar	62.35	44.70	60.55	34.06	31.23	33.74
5	Chhattisgarh	55.97	28.17	50.92	44.61	24.75	39.93
6	Delhi	16.28	15.74	15.73	12.92	9.84	9.91
7	Goa	25.54	14.63	20.81	6.81	4.09	5.09
8	Gujarat	43.16	28.04	37.86	21.54	10.14	16.63
9	Haryana	40.00	24.23	35.93	11.64	10.28	11.16
10	Himachal Pradesh	36.70	13.61	34.65	8.48	4.33	8.06
11	Jammu & Kashmir	32.51	6.94	26.37	11.54	7.20	10.35
12	Jharkhand	65.95	41.84	60.73	40.84	24.83	36.96
13	Karnataka	56.64	34.22	49.56	24.53	15.25	20.91
14	Kerala	33.92	23.93	31.33	9.14	4.97	7.05
15	Madhya Pradesh	49.00	31.86	44.62	35.74	21.00	31.65
16	Maharashtra	59.34	30.37	47.82	24.22	9.12	17.35
17	Manipur	64.45	67.24	65.13	38.80	32.59	36.89
18	Meghalaya	38.00	23.00	35.24	12.53	9.26	11.87
19	Mizoram	16.60	6.36	11.82	35.43	6.36	20.40
20	Nagaland	20.13	21.83	20.44	19.93	16.48	18.88
21	Odisha	63.00	34.52	59.16	35.69	17.29	32.59
22	Punjab	20.33	27.27	22.47	7.66	9.24	8.26

23	Rajasthan	40.85	29.91	38.36	16.05	10.69	14.71
24	Sikkim	33.00	20.44	31.84	9.85	3.66	8.19
25	Tamil Nadu	51.04	33.73	44.67	15.83	6.54	11.28
26	Tripura	34.37	25.41	32.93	16.53	7.42	14.05
27	Uttarakhand	36.71	18.71	32.00	11.62	10.48	11.26
28	Uttar Pradesh	50.94	38.34	48.42	30.40	26.06	29.43
29	West Bengal	42.52	31.25	39.46	22.52	14.66	19.98
30	Pondicherry	28.10	32.43	30.90	17.06	6.30	9.69
31	All India	50.10	31.80	45.30	25.70	13.70	21.92

Source: Planning Commission

A wide disparity in poverty across Indian States and their uneven progress in poverty reduction is a key feature of the evolution of poverty in India. Over seventy percent of India's poor reside in eight States: Bihar, Arunachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Odhisa, Uttaranchal, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh. In four of these states- Bihar, Odhisa, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, plus Assam, persistently high levels of poverty in excess of 30 percent have occurred for several decades. In most instances, better-off states remained relatively affluent and reduced poverty, while poorer states remained poor and made less progress in poverty reduction. But there are also cases where poorer states made major progress in poverty reduction and growth. In Kerala, for example, rural poverty declined at 1.5 per cent per annum between 1993-94 and 2011-12. Other states where poverty incidence fell substantially include Maharashtra, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Odhisa, Manipur, Gujrat, and Tamil Nadu. Notably poor performers include Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Though there was a decline in percentage of population in urban and rural areas, the huge rural-urban gap continues. The rural poor in India are highly concentrated in select states of the country viz., Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Assam, Odisha, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh. Besides, while some states have shown a declining trend in poverty ratio during 1993-2012, the above discussed states had poverty ratios above the national estimate in 2011-12. The table below provides information on geographical profile and concentration of rural poor in select states and the overall poverty statistics:

**Table 7:** Geographical concentration of rural poor in select states and total poverty ratio at the state level (%)

Name of the state	Rural	Urban	Total
Arunachal Pradesh	38.93	20.33	34.67
Bihar	34.06	31.23	33.74
Chhattisgarh	44.61	24.75	39.93
Assam	33.89	20.49	31.98
Jharkhand	40.84	24.83	36.96
Madhya Pradesh	35.74	21.00	31.65
Manipur	38.80	32.59	36.89
Odisha	35.69	17.29	32.59
Uttar Pradesh	30.40	26.06	29.43
Dadra and Nagar Haveli	62.59	15.38	39.31

Source: Planning Commission

**2. Conclusion:** India is a low income developing state Indian economy during the British rule was characterized by low per capital income, inequitable distribution of wealth, high incidence of poverty, predominance of agriculture and low level of human development. After independence, the government wanted to give a 'big push' to the stand- still economy and for this purpose, it employed the technique of "democratic planning". With the efforts of the government, some

development has indeed taken place during six and the half decades of planning, but barring a few countries, the per capita income of the Indian people is the lowest in the world. While there has been a year on year decline in poverty ratio in states and at the national level, the development progress has varied across states with some states having poverty levels above national average.

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