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EDITOR

Dr. Vinay Shankarrao Hatole

Assistant Professor, International Center of Excellence in Engineering
& Management (ICEEM) College, Waluj, Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar. (MS)

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3. Recent Trends in Poverty and Income Inequality in India

Dr. Jaydeep Uttamrao Dixit

Assistant Professor, Department of Economics,
Venutai Chavan College, Karad, Dist. Satara, Maharashtra.

Abstract

This paper examines the evolving dynamics of poverty and income inequality in India during the post-globalization era, focusing on recent trends and patterns over the past two decades. Utilizing secondary data from reliable sources such as the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), the World Bank, and the World Inequality Database, this study highlights the complex interplay between economic growth, structural transformations, and socio-political factors. While poverty levels have shown a consistent decline, the pace of reduction has slowed in recent years, exacerbated by external shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Simultaneously, income inequality has surged, as evidenced by the rising Gini coefficient, reflecting deepening disparities in wealth distribution.

The study also sheds light on regional disparities, with states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu exhibiting lower poverty rates compared to economically lagging states like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Sectoral imbalances and the concentration of growth in industrial and service hubs have further widened the rural-urban divide. Additionally, the paper underscores the role of gender and social inequality, particularly the challenges faced by marginalized communities and women in accessing resources and opportunities.

Through statistical analysis and visual representations, this paper aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the drivers and implications of poverty and inequality in India. Policy interventions, including targeted welfare programs, universal basic services, and redistributive measures, are explored as potential pathways to foster inclusive growth and equitable development. The findings underscore the urgency of addressing these disparities to ensure sustainable and inclusive progress in the Indian economy.

Key Words: Poverty, Income, Inequality, Gini Coefficient, Head count ratio, wealth distribution

1. Introduction

India has witnessed significant economic transformations over the last two decades. While poverty levels have declined, income inequality has risen, leading to concerns about inclusive growth. This paper explores these dynamics, drawing on secondary data to identify recent trends and their underlying causes.

2. Background

2.1 Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction

India's economic growth accelerated in the 2000s, driven by reforms and globalization. However, the distribution of benefits has been uneven, leading to varying impacts on poverty and inequality.

2.2 Pre-Existing Conditions

Historical patterns of inequality and the structural challenges in sectors such as agriculture and informal labour continue to influence current trends.

3. Data

This study relies on

- Data from the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO).
- Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS).
- Research from academic journals and policy papers.

4. Findings

4.1 Poverty Trends

Decline in Poverty

- The poverty headcount ratio fell from 37.2% in 2004-05 to 21.9% in 2011-12 (World Bank).
- The pace of poverty reduction has slowed in recent years, partly due to economic shocks like COVID-19.

Rural vs. Urban

- Rural poverty remains higher, with inadequate access to resources and employment opportunities.

Multidimensional Poverty

- Non-income dimensions, such as health and education, show slower progress.

4.2 Income Inequality

Rising Gini Coefficient

- Increased from 0.34 in 2005 to 0.48 in 2021 (World Inequality Database).
- Urban inequality is more pronounced due to sectoral shifts favoring high-skill industries.

Wealth Distribution

- The top 10% of the population holds over 77% of national wealth.
- Widening income gaps between organized and unorganized sectors.

4.3 Regional Disparities

- States like Kerala and Tamil Nadu have lower poverty rates compared to Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.
- Growth has been concentrated in industrial and service hubs, deepening regional inequality.

4.4 Sectoral Inequality

- The service sector's growth disproportionately benefits skilled urban workers.
- Agricultural stagnation has perpetuated rural poverty.

4.5 Gender and Social Inequality

- Female labour force participation remains low at 19.9% (PLFS, 2021).
- Marginalized communities face systemic barriers to income and resource access.

5. Analysis

5.1 Factors Driving Trends

Policy Gaps: Skewed investment priorities favouring urban-industrial growth.

Technological Change: Automation and digitization have widened skill-based wage gaps.

Economic Shocks: The pandemic exacerbated vulnerabilities in informal employment.

5.2 Impacts of Inequality

Economic: Reduced aggregate demand and slower growth.

Social: Increased polarization and reduced social mobility.

Political: Challenges to democratic governance and stability.

5.3 Policy Interventions

Targeted Welfare: Programs like MGNREGA have mitigated rural poverty but require scaling.

Universal Basic Services: Investment in education, health, and infrastructure is essential.

Redistributive Measures: Tax reforms and direct transfers can address wealth concentration**6. Statistical Representations****6.1 Figures**

1. Poverty Headcount Ratio (2004-2021): Trends in rural and urban poverty levels over time (Source: World Bank, NSSO).

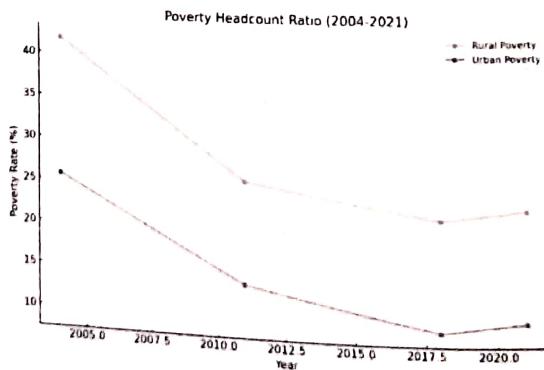
- Rural poverty declined from 41.8% in 2004 to 23.0% in 2021.
- Urban poverty declined from 25.7% in 2004 to 10.2% in 2021.

2. Income Inequality: Rising Gini Coefficient (2005-2021)

- The Gini coefficient increased from 0.34 in 2005 to 0.48 in 2021, reflecting a sharp rise in income inequality.
- Data source: World Inequality Database.

3. Regional Disparities: State-wise Poverty Rates (Latest Data):**Kerala:** 9.7%**Tamil Nadu:** 11.6%**Maharashtra:** 17.4%**Bihar:** 32.5%**Uttar Pradesh:** 29.2%**Source:** NSSO, PLFS.**6.2 Tables****Table 1 Poverty Trends (2004-2021)**

Year	Rural Poverty (%)	Urban Poverty (%)
2004	41.8	25.7
2011	25.7	13.7
2018	21.9	9.1
2021	23.0	10.2



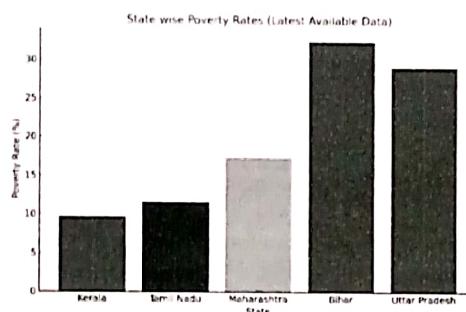
Analysis

Trends

Rural poverty showed a significant decline from 41.8% in 2004 to 21.9% in 2018 but slightly increased to 23.0% by 2021, reflecting economic disruptions caused by events such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Urban poverty also declined consistently but at a slower rate.

Table 2 Regional Poverty Disparities

State	Poverty Rate (%)
Kerala	9.7
Tamil Nadu	11.6
Maharashtra	17.4
Bihar	32.5
Uttar Pradesh	29.2



Analysis

Trends

Southern states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu exhibit much lower poverty rates due to effective welfare schemes and higher human development indices. In contrast, states like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh continue to struggle with poverty due to structural challenges and lack of equitable growth distribution.

7. Conclusion

The trends in poverty and income inequality in India underscore a complex and evolving economic narrative. On the one hand, significant strides have been made in poverty reduction, largely driven by robust economic growth, targeted welfare schemes, and improvements in human development indicators. Yet, the simultaneous rise in income inequality presents a sobering contrast, highlighting the unequal distribution of economic gains and the persistence of structural barriers that marginalize vulnerable sections of society.

The rural-urban divide remains a significant challenge, with rural poverty reduction lagging behind urban areas. Regional disparities further compound this issue, as economically lagging states struggle to match the progress of more developed regions. Moreover, sectoral imbalances favouring high-skill industries and urban centers exacerbate inequality, leaving rural and informal sectors vulnerable.

The findings emphasize the need for a multi-pronged approach to foster inclusive growth. Enhancing social safety nets, investing in education and healthcare, and addressing gender and social inequities are critical steps. Policymakers must prioritize balanced regional development, support rural economies, and focus on job creation in labour-intensive sectors. Redistributive measures, such as progressive taxation and direct income transfers, could play a pivotal role in mitigating wealth concentration.

As India aspires to achieve sustainable development goals, bridging the gaps in poverty and inequality is not just a social imperative but an economic necessity. Inclusive growth strategies must be integrated into the broader framework of economic planning to ensure that the benefits of development are equitably shared, paving the way for a more just and resilient society.

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Dr. Vinay S. Hatole

Ajanta Prakashan

Jaisingpura, Near University Gate, Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar (Aurangabad), Maharashtra - 431 004.
Mob. No. 9579260877, 9822620877 | ajanta2023@gmail.com | www.ajantaprakashan.in



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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that

Mr./ Mrs./ Ms./ Prof./ Dr. Jaydeep Uttamrao Dixit
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