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Poverty trends in India: A study with reference to SDGs

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Abstract

Sustainable development is the development to meet our present needs without compromising the needs of future generation. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), formed by United Nations in 2015, lay out a uniquely ambitious and comprehensive agenda for global development by 2030. This is a collection of 17 global goals aimed at improving the planet and quality of human life around the world. National Institution for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog is the nodal institution for achieving SDGs in India. For achieving SDGs it is essential to remove poverty, hunger, all types of inequalities, to provide education, to promote peace and harmony, cooperation etc. The estimation and incidence of poverty in India is a matter of key concern since independence for policy analysts and academic researchers both because of its score and intensity. On the other hand, increasing population and changing consumption patterns is raising demand for food in India. With the given stable agricultural productivity, the supply of food has failed to meet the ever rising demand. As a result of which problem of food shortage has been facing by India. National poverty line estimates indicates that there has been a decrease in poverty incidence from 59.9 percent in 1973-74 to 36 percent in 1993-94 to 27.5 percent in 2004-05, though poverty numbers remains high. This is due to the lack of continuous monitoring, unawareness among people, defective planning and coordination among various employment generation and poverty alleviation programmes, leakages of funds etc. Therefore, the main objective of this paper is to analyse the trends in poverty in India with reference to SDGs. Further, the paper advocates poverty reduction a fundamental goal to attain SDGs.

Keywords: Poverty, rural, sustainable development, urban

Introduction

Sustainable development is the development to meet our present needs without compromising the needs of future generation. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aims to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity and peace for all by 2030. There are 17 sustainable development goals – (1) No Poverty, (2) Zero Hunger, (3) Good Health and Well-being, (4) Quality Education, (5) Gender Equality, (6) Clean Water and Sanitation, (7) Affordable and Clean Energy, (8) Decent Work and Economic Growth, (9) Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, (10) Reduced Inequality, (11) Sustainable Cities and Communities, (12) Responsible Consumption and Production, (13) Climate Action, (14) Life Below Water, (15) Life on Land, (16) Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions, and (17) Partnerships for the Goals. India monitors SDGs through National Institution for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog's SDG India Index. Major focus areas are poverty eradications, health, education, gender equality and climate action and the top performing states are Kerala, Himachal Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu. Programmes like Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Ayushman Bharat and Mahatma Gandhi National Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) align with different SDGs.

In almost all underdeveloped countries where per capita income is very low, income inequality has resulted in a number of evils, of which poverty is certainly the most serious one. In India, even now in spite of all the development during the period of planning, 41.6 percent of the population was getting less than \$1.25 Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) a day in 2004-05 (World Bank, 2011). This percentage of population was considered to be poor on an international criterion suggested by World Development Report. Most of the time this population suffered from extreme destitution (Misra and Puri, 2020) [4]. Poverty is the inability to get the minimum consumption requirements for life, health and efficiency.

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The estimation and incidence of poverty in India is a matter of key concern since independence for policy analysts and academic researchers both because of its score and intensity. Economic growth is not possible in India unless and until poverty prevails. This is a major challenge for Indian government to tackle the problem of poverty. Though there has been a decline in BPL (Below Poverty Line) population in India since independence yet there is a problem of inter-state disparities prevailing in India. This is the reason why some states remain backward and some states are performing well and are progressing. The core reason for poverty in India is heavy pressure of population that reached to 121 crore as per the census of 2011. Increasing population and changing consumption patterns is raising demand for food in India. With the given stable agricultural productivity, the supply of food has failed to meet the ever rising demand. As a result of which problem of food shortage has been facing by India. Therefore, the main objective of this paper is to analyse the trends in poverty in India with reference to SDGs. The paper is divided into eight sections. Following introduction second section presents objectives of the study. Third section gives the meaning, estimates and extent of poverty in India. Inter-state

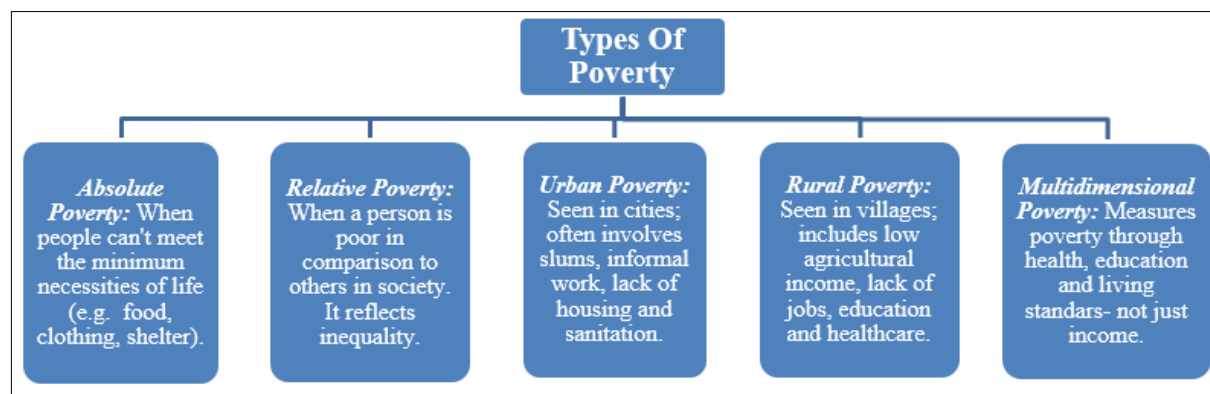
disparities of poverty in India are analysed in section four. Section five presents trends in rural and urban poverty. Some of the government schemes to alleviate poverty in India are discussed in section six. The importance of poverty eradication for sustainable development is discussed in section seven and the paper concludes in section eight.

Objectives of study

- To examine the trends of poverty in India
- To identify key government programs and policy interventions addressing poverty
- To analyze India's performance in achieving SDGs and related goals
- To highlight the challenges in poverty eradication and suggest strategic recommendations

Meaning, estimates and extent of poverty in India

Poverty is a condition in which a person is unable to maintain a basic standard of living. This includes access to food, shelter, healthcare, education and clean water. There are various types of poverty namely, absolute poverty, relative poverty, urban poverty, rural poverty and multidimensional poverty (Figure 1).



Source: Author.

Fig 1: Types of Poverty

Poverty estimation in India has been a major concern since independence. The concept of poverty line was introduced by a working group of the Planning Commission. The most acceptable report of the expert committees which have reviewed the methodology of poverty estimation is the one chaired by Suresh D. Tendulkar. According to Planning Commission, a person getting below 2400 calories per day in rural areas and 2100 calories per day in urban areas is treated as BPL. According to Tendulkar Committee (Year 2004-05) a person whose monthly per capita consumption expenditure (MPCE) at 2004-05 prices is below ₹446.68 in rural area and ₹578.80 in urban area is considered as BPL. According to poverty estimation based on 68th Round of NSSO a person who's MPCE at 2011-12 prices is below ₹816 in rural area and ₹1000 in urban area is considered as BPL.

The incidence of poverty is measured by the poverty ratio, which is the ratio of the poor to the total population expressed as a percentage. This is also known as head count ratio. From the 19th century – British colonial rule – poverty rate in India was at its peak. However, since 1991, rapid economic growth has led to a sharp reduction in extreme poverty in India as shown in the Table 1.

Table 1: Rural-Urban BPL Population in India (%)

Year	Rural	Urban	All	Method
1993-94	50.1	31.8	45.3	Rural: ₹ 446.68 p.m. Urban: ₹ 578.80 p.m. (Tendulkar Methodology)
2004-05	41.8	25.7	37.2	Rural: ₹ 446.68 p.m. Urban: ₹ 578.80 p.m. (Tendulkar Methodology)
2011-12	25.7	13.7	21.9	Rural: ₹ 816 p.m. Urban: ₹ 1000 p.m. (68 th Round of NSSO)
2019	-	-	27.5	c>= 33.3% (MPI, HDR)

Source: Misra and Puri (2020) [4].

Table 1 depicts that, according to Tendulkar Committee, the rural poverty declined from 50.1 percent in 1993-94 to 41.8 percent in 2004-05. On the other hand urban poverty declined from 31.8 percent in 1993-94 to 25.7 percent in 2004-05. As a whole, in the country poverty declined from 45.3 percent in 1993-94 to 37.2 percent in 2004-05.

The Planning Commission released the estimates of poverty for the year 2011-12 computed from the 68th Round of NSSO, found that in 2011-12 it was 25.7 percent in rural

areas, 13.7 percent in urban areas and 21.9 percent in the country as a whole (Table 1).

Human Development Report 2010 introduced the concept of Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI). MPI is comprehensive measure of poverty as it includes various dimensions of poverty like years of schooling, child enrolment, mortality, nutrition, electricity, sanitation, drinking water, flooring, cooking fuel and asset ownership. To identify the multidimensionally poor, the deprivation scores for each household are summed to obtain the household deprivation score (c). A cut-off of 33.3 percent, which is the equivalent of one-third of the weighted indicators, is used to distinguish between the poor and non-poor. If c is 33.3 percent or greater, that household (and everyone in it) is multidimensionally poor. Households with a deprivation score greater than or equal to 20 percent but less than 33.3 percent are vulnerable to or at risk of becoming multidimensionally poor. Households with a deprivation score of 50 percent or higher are severely multidimensionally poor (Misra and Puri, 2020) [4]. In 2019, India's estimate of MPI is 27.5 percent (Table 1).

Inter-state disparities of poverty

Inter-state disparities of poverty can be noticed in India. It means the proportion of poor people is not the same in every state. Effective implementation of poverty and employment alleviation programmes in various states and the presence of factors like literacy, growth rate and employment opportunities are the main reasons for disparities in the poverty ratio existing in different states of India. Table 2

and Figure 2 shows state-wise poverty estimate for 2004-05 and 2011-12. It shows that on one hand while there is a decrease in poverty from 2004-05 to 2011-12, but on the other hand there are wide inter-state disparities in the percentage of BPL population and the rate at which poverty levels are declining.

Table 2: Inter- State BPL Population in 2004-05 and 2011-12 (%)

State	2004-05	2011-12	Change in % of BPL Population ^a
Chhattisgarh	49.5	39.9	-9.5
Jharkhand	45.3	37.0	-8.3
Odisha	57.2	32.6	-24.6
Bihar	54.4	33.7	-20.7
UP	40.9	29.4	-11.5
Rajasthan	34.4	14.7	-19.7
Haryana	24.1	11.2	-12.9
Punjab	20.9	8.3	-12.6
Madhya Pradesh	48.6	31.7	-16.9
Maharashtra	38.1	17.4	-20.7
Kerala	19.7	7.1	-12.6
Goa	25	5.1	-19.9
West Bengal	34.3	20	-14.3
Himachal Pradesh	22.9	8.1	-14.8
Gujarat	31.8	16.6	-15.2
Assam	34.4	32	-2.4
All India	37.2	21.9	-15.3

a. Percent of BPL population in 2004-05 minus percent of BPL population in 2011-12.

Source: Internet (2024).

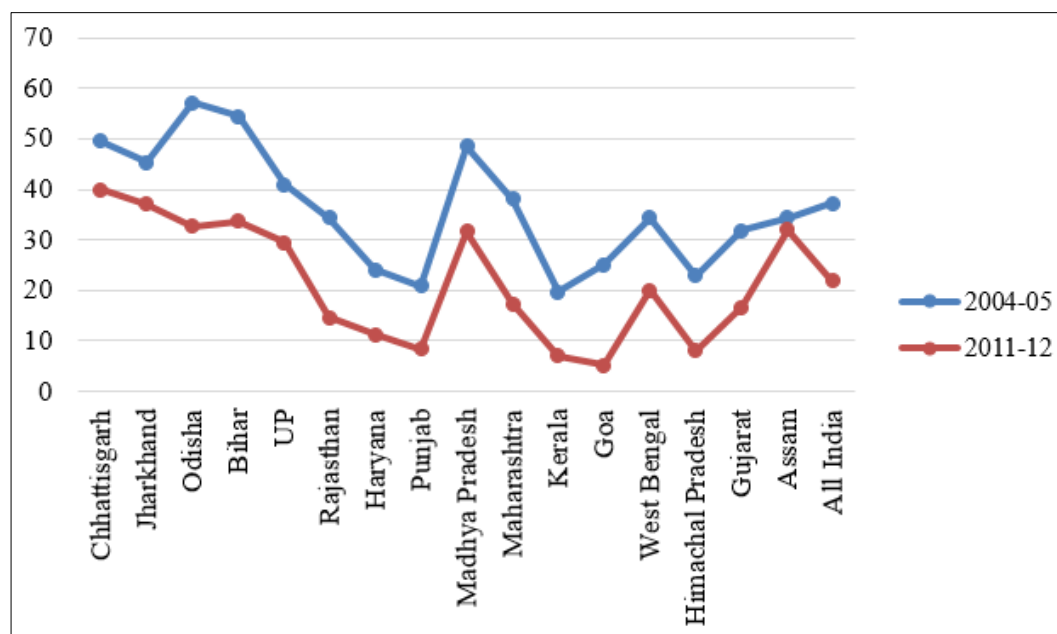


Fig 2: Inter-state BPL population in 2004-05 and 2011-12

Table 2 and Figure 2 shows that in India percentage of BPL population decreased by 15.3 percent during the period between 2004-05 to 2011-12. State-wise percentage of BPL population in Odisha was very high which was 57.2 percent in 2004-05 and 32.6 percent in 2011-12; thereby decreased by 24.6 percent, in Bihar it was 54.4 percent in 2004-05 and 33.7 percent in 2011-12, in Chhattisgarh it was 49.5 percent and 39.9 percent in 2004-05 and 2011-12 respectively. In Uttar Pradesh (UP) it was 40.9 percent and 29.4 in 2004-05 and 2011-12 respectively. On the other hand, in the states

like Haryana and Punjab, BPL population in 2004-05 was 24.1 percent and 20.9 percent respectively and in 2011-12 it was 11.2 percent and 8.3 percent respectively. In Kerala it was 19.7 percent in 2004-05 and 7.1 percent in 2011-12. These imbalances in figures of different states show inter-state disparities in poverty.

Trends in rural and urban poverty

Figure 3 summarizes that percentage of BPL population in rural areas in India is much more than that of urban areas.

Superstitions among farmers, rural indebtedness, illiteracy, seasonal and disguised unemployment, poor access to education, healthcare, portable water and sanitation, infrastructure are some of the reasons that the percentage of BPL population is higher in rural areas than that of urban areas. In 2004-05, Gujarat has 39.1 percent BPL population in rural areas and 20.1 percent in urban areas. While in 2009-10 it has reduced to 26.7 percent in rural areas and 17.9 percent in urban areas, whereas in 2011-12 and 2019-21 in rural areas BPL population again declined to 21.5 percent and 17.15 percent respectively whereas in urban areas it has declined to 10.14 percent to 3.81 percent. This trend shows that on one hand percentage of BPL population is on declining in rural areas and in urban areas; on the other

hand in 2004-05, 2009-10, 2011-12 and 2019-21 there is a wide gap between percentage of BPL population in rural and urban areas. In Chandigarh, percentage of BPL population in 2004-05 in rural and urban areas is 34.7 percent and 10.10 percent whereas in 2009-10 this figure decreased to 10.3 percent and 9.2 percent in rural and urban areas respectively. In 2011-12 there has been a sharp decline in rural percentage of BPL population to 1.64 percent but in urban areas there has been a sharp rise to 22.31 percent of BPL population. In 2019-21 in rural areas it has decreased to 3.51 percent. This also shows that there is a wide difference between the percentage of BPL population in rural and urban areas in different years.

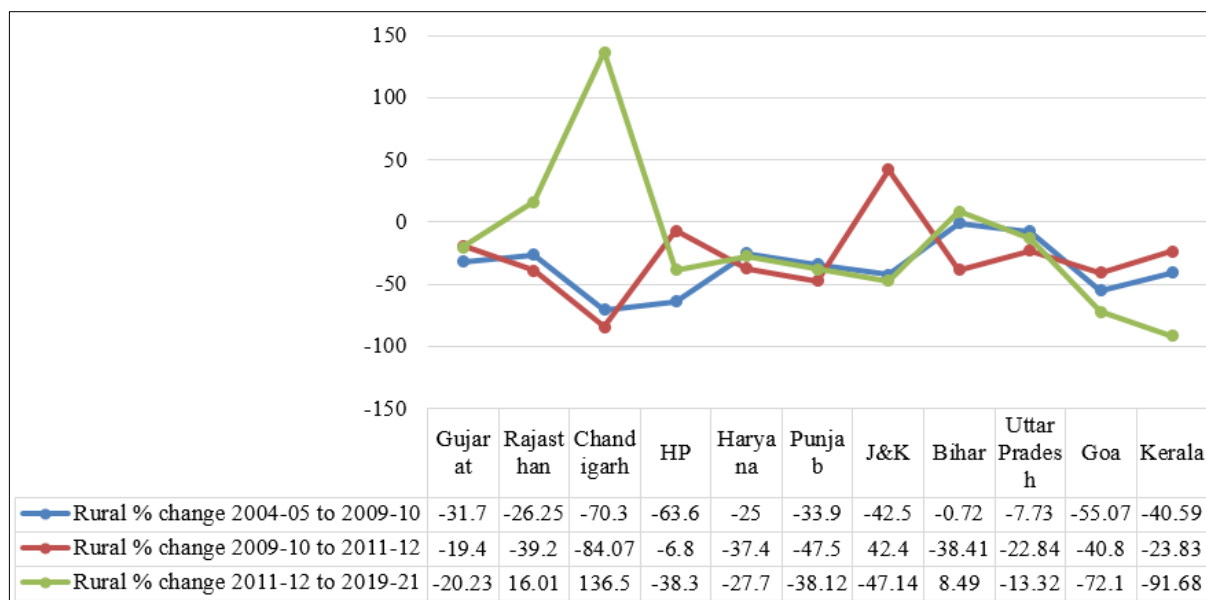


Source: Internet (2024a), Wikipedia (2024a).

Fig 3: Trends in Rural and Urban Poverty

Figure 4 shows the percentage change in BPL population in different states in India of rural areas. This data depicts that during the period between 2004-05 to 2009-10 in Gujarat percentage of BPL population declines by 31.7 percent whereas in Rajasthan it has decreased by 26.25 percent, Haryana (-25%) and Punjab (-33.9%) whereas in UTs/ states like Chandigarh it has declined by 70.3 percent, J&K (-42.5%) and in H.P. (-63.5%) which is more than that of states like Gujarat, Rajasthan, Haryana and Punjab. During 2009-10 to 2011-12 states like Gujarat and H.P. percentage of BPL population declined by less than 20 percent; on the other hand in the states like Haryana, Punjab, J&K it has

declined by more than 40 percent and in Chandigarh it showed a sharp decline by 84.07 percent which is a good indicator of economic growth. In Rajasthan percentage of BPL population declined by 16.01 during 2011-12 to 2019-21 whereas states like Gujarat, H.P., Haryana, Punjab, J&K it has declined by more than 20 percent; in Chandigarh there has been a sharp increase in percentage of BPL population by 136.5 percent. This trend shows that in some states poverty declined by more percentage and in some states it has declined by less percentage and even sometimes poverty percentage showed increasing trend.

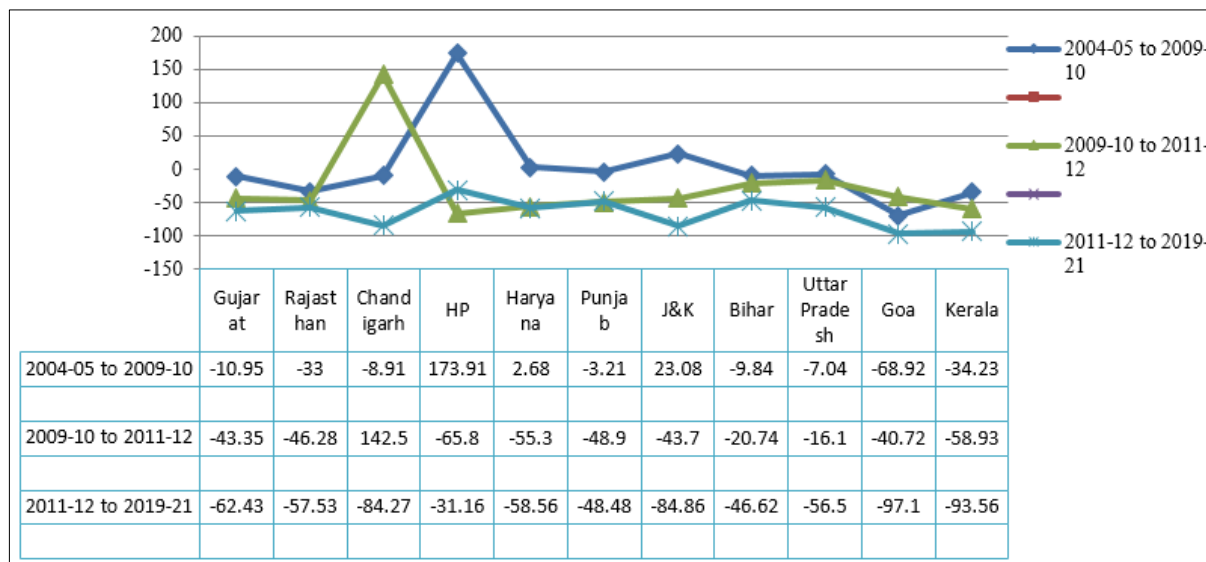


Source: Authors' Calculations

Fig 4: Percentage Change in BPL Population in Rural Areas of India

Figure 5 summarises the percentage change in BPL population in urban areas of India in different years. It shows that during the period between 2004-05 to 2009-10 in Gujarat (-10.95%), Rajasthan (-33%), Chandigarh (-8.91%) and Punjab (-3.21%) percentage of BPL population has declined but in H.P. it has increased by 173.91 percent and in J&K it has also increased by 23.08 percent. Whereas from 2009-10 to 2011-12 there has been a sharp decline in percentage of BPL population in Gujarat (-43.35), Rajasthan

(-46.28), H.P. (-55.3%) on the other hand in Chandigarh it has increased by 142.5 percent. From 2011-12 to 2019-21 BPL population has declined by 62.43 percent in Gujarat, 57.53 percent in Rajasthan, 84.27 percent in Chandigarh, 31.16 percent in H.P., 58.56 percent in Haryana, in Punjab it has declined by 48.48 percent and J&K (-84.86%). This decline in percentage of BPL population during 2011-12 to 2019-21 is a good indicator for social well-being and rise in the standard of living of poor.



Source: Authors' Calculations

Fig 5: Percentage Change in BPL Population in Urban Areas of India

Government measures to alleviate poverty from India

Unemployment and underemployment, low literacy and skill levels, rapid population growth, inequality of income and wealth, poor health and malnutrition, lack of land and assets, social exclusion (caste, gender, and religion), corruption and poor governance are some of the major causes of poverty in India. Some of the solutions to eradicate poverty in India are- education and skill development, employment generation, women empowerment, improved healthcare access, strengthening

social and welfare schemes, reducing corruption and balanced rural and urban development.

Due to high incidence of poverty in India, the removal of poverty has been one of the primary objectives of Indian developmental strategy. In order to alleviate poverty from a country there are set of steps taken in an economic and humanitarian way. Some of them are check on increasing population, special schemes for rural development (road construction, bridges, irrigation etc.), development of agriculture, increase in productivity of poor, stability in

prices, effective public distribution system, provisions for meeting the minimum needs of the poor, effective implementation of poverty alleviation programmes, change in technique of production (both labour-intensive and intermediate technique should be promoted), increase in employment, increase in economic growth, reduction in inequality of income and wealth, change in social outlook, provision for meeting minimum needs of the poor etc. In every country Government plays an important role in overall

development of the country. In India also government plays an important role for smooth functioning of an economy through various government schemes. In order to alleviate poverty from India, Indian government has taken various initiatives for poverty eradication in India like Minimum Needs Programme, Indira Awas Yojana, National Social Assistance Programme, Mid-Day Meal Scheme, Antyodaya Anna Yojana, Annapurna etc. All these schemes are briefly pointed in Table 3.

Table 3: Some of the Government Schemes for Alleviation of Poverty in India

MNP: Minimum Needs Programme	1974-75	(i) To raise standard of living of poor. (ii) The programme covers primary education, adult education, rural health, rural water supply, rural roads, rural electrification, rural housing and ecological improvement of urban slums.
IAY: Indira Awas Yojana	1985	(i) To provide financial assistance for construction/upgradation of houses to BPL rural households, widows, physically handicapped persons living in rural areas. (ii) Under the housing scheme, 60 percent assistance is provided to SC/ST BPL cardholders and the rest 40 percent assistance is for non-SC/ST BPL cardholders.
PMRY: Pradhan Mantri Rozgar Yojana	1993	(i) To provide self-employment to educated youth by setting up micro enterprises. (ii) This scheme offers subsidised financial assistance to set up self-employment ventures in the manufacturing, trading and service sectors. (iii) It assists with projects with an overall cost of ₹2lakh, if in the business sector and ₹5lakh if in the service or industry sectors.
NSAP: National Social Assistance Programme	1995	It has following components: (i) Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme: ₹400permonth as pension to BPL 60+ aged people. (ii) Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension Scheme: ₹300p.m. as pension to BPL widows in the age group of 40-59 years. (iii) Indira Gandhi National Disability Pension Scheme: ₹300p.m. as pension to BPL persons with severe and multiple disabilities in the age group of 18-59 years. (iv) Atal Pension Yojana: launched in 2015-16,(a) To ensure old age income security of poor working persons.
MDMS: Mid-Day Meal Scheme	1995	(i) To attract kids of poor families in schools. (ii) To provide free meals to children from class I to V.
SGSY: Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana	1999	(i) Under this scheme self-help groups (SHGs) organised for bringing poor families above the poverty line. (ii) In 2011, SGSY names as NRLM (National Rural Livelihood Mission), also known as Aajeevika. (iii) Now merged with DAY (DeenDayal Antyodaya Yojana).
PMGY: Pradhan Mantri Gramodya Yojana	2000	(i) To give concessional loans to villagers for the purchase of cattle and other productive assets. (ii) Additional central assistance is given to states for basic services such as primary health, primary education, rural shelter, rural drinking water and rural electrification.
PMGSY: Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana	August 2000	To provide all weather roads to rural areas.
AAV: Antyodaya Anna Yojana	December 2000	(i) It is a Public Distribution System scheme to provide food security to the people and thus to end hunger. (ii) To provide 35kg foodgrains p.m. (₹2/kg Wheat and ₹3/kg.Rice) to BPL families through PDS.
Annapurna	2000-01	(i) To provide food security especially to senior citizen above 65 years of age. (ii) To provide 10kg. of foodgrains p.m. to BPL citizens.
MGNREGA: Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act	2005	(i) To provide at least 100 days of guaranteed wage-employment to at least one adult of every household in rural areas in every year. (ii) At least 33 percent of work is provided to women.
RSBY: Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana	April 2008	Under this scheme, workers of unrecognised sectors belonging to BPL families provided with health insurance coverage.
DBT: Direct Benefit Transfer Scheme	January 2013	(i) Aims to make payments directly into the Aadhaar linked bank accounts thus reducing leakages, duplicity, delay and the new processes will increase transparency and accountability. (ii) To directly give welfare subsidies to BPL in their bank accounts.
Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY)	2014	To provide universal access to banking facilities- ensuring that every household in India especially the economically weaker sections has access to basic bank account, financial literacy, credit, insurance and pension.
PMAY: Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana	2016-17	To provide housing for all by 2022.
Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY)	2016	To provide LPG (Liquefied Petroleum Gas) connections to Below Poverty Line (BPL) households, especially targeting rural and poor women.

Source: Misra and Puri (2020) [4].

Poverty eradication for sustainable development

Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) or Global Goals are a collection of 17 interlinked objectives designed to serve as a “shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into future”; leave no one behind and to achieve them all by 2030. SDGs initiative of United Nations is a non-profit motive project established in 2015. NITI (National Institution for Transforming India) Aayog is the nodal institution for achieving SDGs in India, leading the 2030 Agenda with the spirit of cooperative and competitive federalism.

First three of the 17 SDGs deal with No Poverty, Zero Hunger, and Good Health and Well-being respectively. Goal 1 has five targets namely, no extreme poverty, reduce by half national levels of poverty, providing social protection, access to basic services, financial services and technology and building resilience, reducing risk to shocks and disasters. Goal 2 states that by 2030 end hunger; provide access to safe, nutritious and sufficient food for all and especially for poor, people in vulnerable situations and infants; reduce malnutrition, stunting and wasting; meet nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant women and lactating women and older persons; raise agriculture production and incomes of small-scale food producers; promote sustainable food production and resilient agriculture practices; maintain the genetic diversity of seeds, cultivated plants and farmed and domesticated animals; limit extreme food price volatility.

Goal 3 aspires to ensure health and well-being for all, including a bold commitment to end epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and other communicable diseases by 2030. It also aims to achieve universal health coverage and provide access to safe and effective medicines and vaccines for all. The outcome targets of third goal are to reduce maternal mortality; to end all preventable deaths under five years of age; to fight communicable diseases; to reduce mortality from non-communicable diseases and promote mental health; to prevent and treat substance abuse; to reduce road injuries and deaths; to grant universal access to sexual and reproductive care, family planning and education; to achieve universal health coverage; and to reduce illness and deaths from hazardous chemicals and pollution.

These goals are somehow related with poverty eradication in India. Other strategies for rural poverty eradications are agricultural reforms, skill development, financial inclusion, infrastructural development, social protection etc. whereas, affordable housing, employment and skill training, public services access, social safety nets, urban planning are some of the strategies for urban poverty eradication in India.

Conclusion

This paper studies the estimates, extent, trends in rural-urban poverty and some of the government measures to alleviate poverty from India. From the 19th century poverty rate is at the peak. Since 1991, rapid economic growth has led to a sharp reduction in extreme poverty in India. While there is a decrease in poverty in India, there are wide inter-state disparities in the percentage of poor below the poverty line and the rate at which poverty levels are declining. This is due to various reasons like heavy pressure of population, chronic unemployment and underdevelopment, corruption, natural calamities, increase in prices, unequal distribution of income, slow economic growth etc. Thus, high economic

growth is meaningless unless the core problems like poverty, unemployment, hunger etc. prevails in India. The Indian Government has taken various measures for poverty alleviations in India namely Minimum Needs Programme, Indira Awas Yojana, National Social Assistance Programme, Mid-Day Meal Scheme, Antyodaya Anna Yojana, Annapurna etc., which results in substantial poverty reduction in India. As a whole in the country poverty declined from 45.3 percent in 1993-94 to 37.2 percent in 2004-05 (Methodology Tendulkar Committee). According to Planning Commission in 2011-12 poverty declined to 21.9 percent in the country. There has been a decrease in poverty incidence, though poverty numbers remain high due to various reasons like ineffective employment generation programmes, unawareness and illiteracy among people etc. Thus, there is an urgent need to eradicate poverty so as to lead a good economic growth in India.

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