

Editorial

In India, for several decades post-Independence, elimination of poverty superseded all other priorities of government. This policy, however, had a rural perspective. India lived in her villages and rural poverty was pervasive. Millions of villagers did not have enough food to eat and suffered from hunger and malnutrition. What we understand as ‘absolute poverty,’ the existence of a person below poverty line where he or she is unable to afford the minimum prescribed calorific intake, deserved the highest care. However, concentrated attention on the rural did not stop the country’s urbanisation. In 2021, urban population for India was 35.4%. Over the last 50 years, urban population of India grew substantially from 20.3 to 35.4% rising at an increasing annual rate that reached a maximum of 1.64% in 1974 and then decreased to 1.34% in 2021. One of the principal factors assisting this transition has been the migration of the rural poor into cities in search of a better livelihood. This phenomenon is universally acknowledged as the urbanisation of poverty. The visible face of such poverty became manifest in the growth of massive slums that by 2011 were housing 65.5 million Indians. It also began to be accepted, with experience, that cities imposed certain characteristics on urban poverty that differentiated it from the rural. Urban areas, by all accounts, have skimmed off the fruits of development at least during 2015-16, the year of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS), on which the NITI Aayog’s multidimensional poverty report is based. While 25.01 per cent of the population was multidimensionally poor in the country, the poverty ratio was as high as 32.75 per cent in rural areas during that year. This was against 8.81 per cent of the population in urban areas. The pattern was the same in states and Union Territories in varying degrees i.e., a greater proportion of the poor in villages than in urban areas except for Delhi, which is predominantly a city state. The population of India is estimated to be 1.39 billion in 2021. Of this, around 65 per cent were in rural areas and the rest in urban parts. Extrapolating the multidimensional poverty as given by the NITI Aayog would mean that a large number of people in rural and urban areas are poor. The difference between the poverty ratio in rural and urban areas was not as stark if one looks at different published reports of the erstwhile Planning Commission, Tendulkar method of poverty. The Rangarajan-led panel came up with another report. According to it, the poor constituted 30.9 per cent of the rural population during 2011-12 against 39.6 per cent during 2009-10. On the other hand, the urban poverty ratio fell to 29.5 per cent from 38.2 per cent over this period. The report took a person spending less than ₹ 47 a day in cities and below ₹ 32 a day in villages as poor. This poverty line approach was abandoned by the NITI Aayog, which replaced the Planning Commission on January 1, 2015. The current report calculated the ratio on the multidimensional poverty index, which is based on three dimensions i.e., health, education, and standard of living with each

having a weighting of one-third in the index. These dimensions are further based on 12 segments like nutrition, child and adolescent mortality, antenatal care, years of schooling, school attendance, cooking fuel, sanitation, drinking water, electricity, housing, assets, and bank accounts. The Aayog has clarified the NHFS for 2015-16 preceded the full roll-out of flagship schemes of the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, Jal Jeevan Mission, Swachh Bharat Mission, Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, and the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana. It is expected that a significant departure of this pattern will take place in the near future.

Editor-in-Chief

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Debashis Sarkar', written in a cursive style.

Debashis Sarkar