

Houseless Population in India: Trends, Patterns and Characteristics

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Extended Abstract

Houseless population many a time are invisible which renders them a difficult group to work with. Although many may have lived several years, sometimes even a generation or two on the streets, they are seldom noticed by officials. They lack a formal address, and also are rendered anonymous because they usually lack even the elementary markers of citizenship of poor people in India, like ration cards and voters' identity cards. Many homeless people keep their possessions with them because they have no access to storage. They use laundry facilities, their hygiene and toilets at public places which up surge a band of diseases in urban areas (Atkinson, 1993). Homeless people freely enjoy toilet of public and religious places such as temples/mosque/churches for purpose of washing and bathing. The homeless population grows larger and increasingly congregated. As a result, many churches closed their doors when services were not being held and most places hired private security guards. Many public toilets were closed; this banishes the homeless population to sidewalk, parks, under bridges flyovers and so on (Dessalegn and Aklilu, 2003). The study on the homeless population in the context of India is important as it is a home of 1.7 million population living without any support roof cover. The present study attempts to explore the changing trends and patterns in houseless population in India, tries to find out the factors responsible for houseless population in India. Apart from this the study explores the hidden characteristics of houseless population in India.

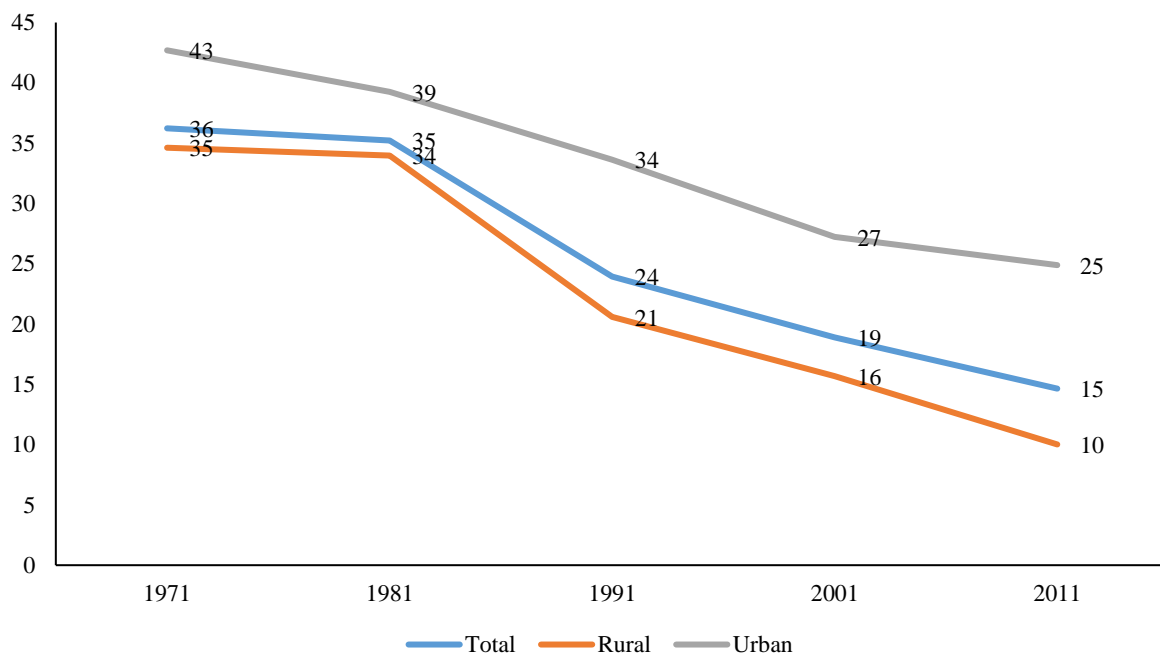
Data for the study have been drawn from Census of India 1971-2011. Census of India collects information on houseless population which was published in General Population Tables 1971-1991. For 2001 and 2011, the information has been extracted from Table HH -2 Houseless Households by Household Size and Primary Census Abstract for Total population and Houseless Population. To examine the relationship between houseless population and related factors, multiple regression analysis has been carried out by taking percent of households owned their house, percent of population residing in urban areas and annual exponential growth rate of the population.

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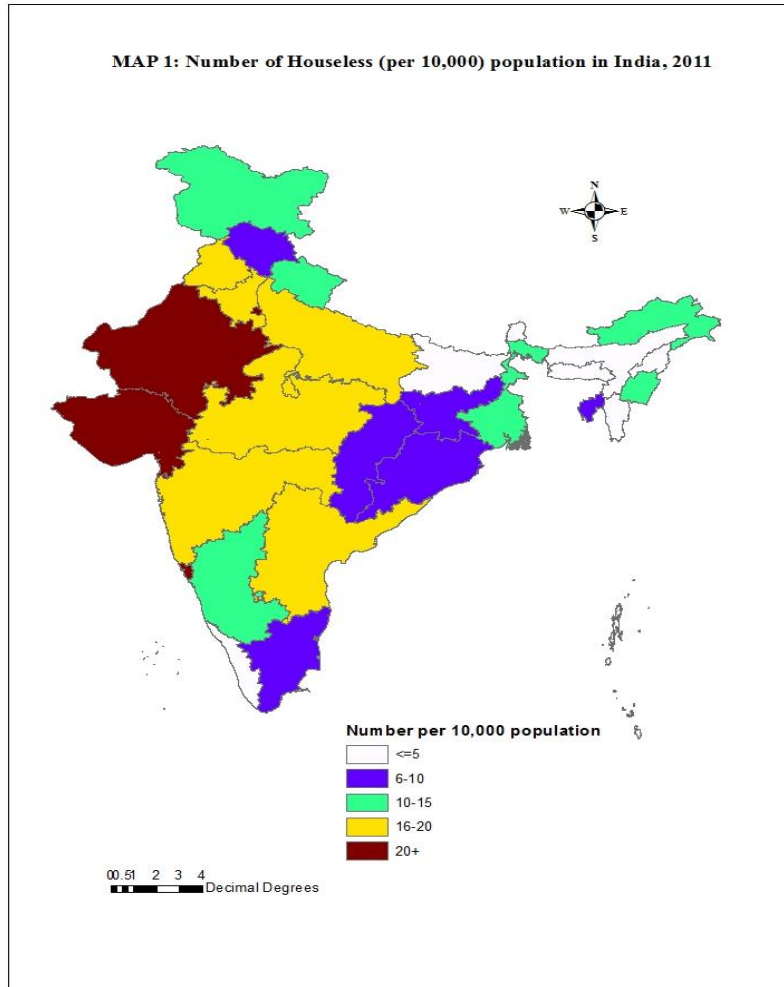
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The study on homeless population is important as they carry direct consequences on the health aspect of the population. Urban slums are not categorized under houseless population, but pragmatically they can be the same as they do live in a shabby condition with no proper sanitation, electricity and drinking water facilities. The houseless population per 10,000 populations has reduced in due course of time. The proportion has decrease consistently since 1971 till it falls to 15 persons in 2011 (Table 1). The situation is more in urban areas compared to rural areas.

Figure 1: Number of Houseless (per 10,000) population in India by Residence, 1971-2011



Comparing 2001 and 2011 census data, we observed a decline which is not worth to signify as a declining rate. The condition varies across states. With the exception of Union Territories (UTs) where a high proportion of houseless population are reported, states such as Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Chandigarh and Maharashtra reported above 30 per 10,000 populations in 2001. However, most of the UTs recorded a significant declined in 2011 census data, Daman & Diu, and Dadra & Nagar Haveli reported a figure approaching 70 persons per ten thousand populations and which drastically reduces to 30 persons within a decade (Map 1).



Although this is not comforting as it suggests a high proportion of homeless population, but the decline is a positive aspect of human development. Chandigarh and Delhi on the other hand recorded a higher proportion in 2011 compared to the preceding census. A minimum of 10 persons was added in 2011 suggesting the high urbanization and migration rate in Chandigarh and NCT Delhi. The recent situation in the metropolis is selective migration which means only the skilled population are welcome, therefore the unskilled population remain homeless.

Whereas economic consideration is the most important factor for houseless population, we also deduced the social factors leading to houseless population. Social factors such as ostracizing a family from the village due to wrong doings can end up in urban areas with no employment and shelter. In India there are 15 houseless populations for every 10,000 persons and is higher in urban areas according to 2011 census. This means that 1.77 million or 0.15 percent of the country's total population are houseless (Jha, 2016). Promising employment opportunities in million plus cities was thought to be comforting and therefore families with no employment

but to work for the landowner in rural areas compelled them to migrate to urban areas. However, the urbanization process in recent times is unwelcoming for unskilled population and as a result they remained without proper shelter and food.

All the Union Territories of India reported the highest houseless population. Although large reduction from 2001 to 2011 is observed, still the trend continues. Among states, Rajasthan reported 26 houseless populations per 10,000 populations. This probably can be explained by the desertification process leaving them with no agricultural land. Therefore, the various urban areas in Rajasthan attract the population only to end up in such misery. Madhya Pradesh which reported 38/10,000 population in 2001 were able to drastically reduced to 20/10,000 population in 2011. States of Gujarat and Maharashtra phenomenally reduced the proportion of houseless population from 2001 to 2011 census. The regime if continues will indeed wipe out the houseless population in future. Out of the total population in India, Uttar Pradesh recorded the largest population followed by Maharashtra. They are also states with large houseless population according to 2011 census. While most states in India reported houseless population to some proportion, states such as Nagaland, Mizoram, Lakshadweep and Andaman and Nicobar Island recorded nil in 2011 census. In contrast with the economic factor as the most determining variable, the Northeastern states however displayed a different picture. It is popularly known that higher the economic scale follows lower houseless population. But the Northeastern states dominated by scheduled tribe are defined with poor economy and backwardness. Therefore, if we follow the relationship, the Northeast India should have the highest houseless population. But this is not so as we see a very low percent of houseless population. Urban areas such as Guwahati and Dimapur are noted with few slums along railway lines indicating the relationship between railway networks and slum population. However, the low percent of houseless population in the Northeast can be interpreted because of the low share of population in India. Notably the Northeast societal structure is egalitarian in nature and with few rail networks they are devoid of houseless population and slums. The houseless population in India is rather complicated as they are closely associated with health variable, nutrition and economy. Homelessness is not simply a housing problem. It also has profound health implications (Victor, 1992). According to Ku. et al. (2010) homelessness is associated with significant morbidity and mortality and homeless patients are likely to have multiple acute and chronic health issues. According to the study of Hibbs J.R. et al. (1994) age-adjusted mortality was 3.5 times greater for homeless compared with non- homeless individuals. Homeless people often have mental illness and substance abuse issues in addition to being

subjected to trauma (Heslin et al., 2007). Homeless people are often uninsured and face significant barriers to accessing health care (Kushel et al, 2001). Although various housing schemes are introduced in the country, but they have failed to address the issue especially in urban areas. Therefore, this call for inclusive policies and programs in order to completely erase houseless population in the near future.

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