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EMERGING TRENDS AND STRUCTURE OF URBANIZATION IN INDIA: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES*

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Esteemed.....

Few socio-economic institutions have been evaluated by social scientists in such a contradictory manner as cities and the incumbent process of urbanization which these represent. Cities have been heralded as the harbingers of human achievement and at the same time as the root cause of decline in social and cultural values, degradation of environment and increasing social and economic disparities.

Higher levels of urbanization and the presence of large cities are often taken as an indicator of the degree of economic prosperity. At the same time the incidence of poverty, crime, absence of decent standards of housing, hygiene, incidence of slums and other types of destitution provide sufficient ground to question the very nature of this socio-economic process which - the history of development of human civilizations tells us - is an inevitable part of the process of organic growth of societies.

Urban India in Present and Future Global Perspective

According to the 2009 Revision of World Urbanization Prospects by United Nations, the world urbanization crossed the 50

per cent mark in 2009. Between 2009 and 2050 the urban population in urban areas of the world is expected to account for the entire population growth and at the same time drawing in some of the rural population also. The growth rate of world urban population is slowing down - the average annual percent growth rate was 2.6 per cent during 1950-2009, it is projected to be 1.8 per cent during 2009-2025 and 1.3 per cent during 2025-2050.

Most of the population growth expected in urban areas will be concentrated in cities of the less developed region, particularly Asia. Population growth is therefore, going to become a largely urban phenomena concentrated in the developing world. By mid-21st century the world urban population size is likely to be equal to the total world population in 2004.

The world urban population is not evenly distributed among cities of different sizes and there is a clear pattern of its concentration in mega-cities (cities with a population of 10 million or more) and a trend of an increase in the number of mega-cities. Since 1975, when there were only 3 mega-cities in the world, their number has increased markedly to 21 in 2009. Most of the new mega-cities have emerged in developing countries - Asia (11), Latin America (4), Africa, Europe and N.

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America (2 each). The number of mega-cities is expected to be 29 by 2025, an increase of 8, of which five will be in Asia, 2 in Latin America and one in Africa.

In most cases the mega-cities emerge due to an fusion of several cities/urban areas that are functionally linked and form an Urban Agglomeration (UA). In the case of India, Delhi, Mumbai and Kolkata ranked 2nd, 4th and 8th in 2009. In 2025 Delhi and Mumbai are expected to occupy 2nd and 3rd ranks in the world while Kolkata will continue to be the 8th largest mega-city.

Although, because of their population size and geographical complexity mega-cities attract considerable attention, the next lower class of cities (population of 5 million to about 10 million) are no less important and may be considered as “mega-cities in waiting”. Of the 32 such mega-cities in waiting” two thirds are located in developing countries. These account for 7.2 per cent of world urban population as compared to 8.8 per cent in the already identified mega-cities.

Future Growth

Between 2009 and 2025 the world urban population is expected to increase by 1.1 billion persons. Of these 231 million will be from China, and 167 million from India (together these two countries will account for 36 per cent of total increase). During 2025-2050 India will be the major contributor (352 million persons) followed by China (186 million persons) accounting for 31 per cent of the total 1.7 billion increase in world urban population. However, in terms of absolute numbers China will have one billion and India 0.9 billion urban residents.

In 2050 the ranking of these two countries would remain the same but the share of China in world urban population will be 16.5 per cent (decrease of 1.6 per cent) and that of India will be 13.9 per cent (increase of 3.5 per

cent) in spite of a decrease in the average annual per cent rate of change in its urban population from 2.93 per cent during 1975-2009 to 2.19 percent during 2009-2050.

In 2009 the proportion of urban population of India in the total population of the country was 29.7 per cent as per the UN estimate, which is quite close to 27.78 per cent according to 2001 Census of India. As per 2011 census this value has increased to 31.61 per cent. It is expected to increase to 54.2 per cent in 2025 as per 2009 UN estimates.

Urbanization in India

A distinguishing feature of urbanization in India is its long tradition going back to nearly 5000 years, and the impact it carries of the successive historical periods in succession - ancient, medieval and modern. In the 20th century the growth of urban population started from a small base of 10.84 per cent of total population in 1901 which increased to 13.65 per cent in 1941. In absolute terms the urban population of India doubled itself between 1901 and approximately 1947, over a period of 47 years.

The post-independence period in India marked the beginning of a phase of accelerated growth in urban population extending over the next 30 years i.e. between 1951 and 1981. This period is also important for refinements in the census definitions of many aspects of urban growth. In 1951 the proportion of urban population in total population of the country was 17.29 per cent which increased to 23.34 per cent in 1981. In absolute terms the urban population doubled itself since 1951 around 1974 covering a period of 24 years as compared to 47 years it had taken in the first half of the 20th century.

From 1981 onwards may be considered a period of slow down in the growth of urban population in India. In 1981 the proportion of

urban population in total population was 23.34 per cent which increased to 27.78 per cent in 2001. The annual exponential growth rates of urban population during this period reflect this slowing down i.e. 3.83, 3.09 and 2.73 percent in 1981, 1991 and 2001 respectively. The figure for 2001-11 is 2.76 per cent/annum.

Three worth noting features about this period are:

- i.) though there has been a slowing down in growth rate the absolute increase in numbers continues to be substantial. The urban population has increased by 91 million from 286 million in 2001 to 377 million in 2011;
- ii.) a strong trend of concentration of urban population in Class I cities from 60.32 per cent in 1981 to 68.67 per cent in 2001. The 35 million plus cities/UAs in 2001 contained 36.31 per cent of the urban population of Class I cities and;
- iii.) the annual exponential growth rate of Class I cities reveals a declining trend (4.34, 3.84 and 3.42 per cent in 1981, 1991 and 2001 respectively).

The current trend of concentration of urban population in large cities is best reflected in (a) an increase in the number of million plus urban agglomerations from 12 in 1981, containing 26.41 per cent of total urban population of the country, to 35 in 2001, containing 36.31 per cent of the total urban population; (b) in absolute terms the population of million plus urban agglomerations has increased by almost 2.5 times during this 20 year period.

The level of urbanization among various states of India, of course, has not been uniform. Interestingly, if we use another measure- which is not very common- to understand the pattern of distribution of urban

population i.e. per cent share of each state in India's urban population, an interesting feature can be noted, viz., there has not been a marked change in the proportion of contribution to urban population of the country by different states. Does it indicate some kind of stabilization with higher urbanization some states? (Figs.1 and 2). Further, does this pattern suggest a core-periphery pattern? Does this core-periphery pattern replicate itself in the pattern of level of urbanization among states and is indicative of persistence of regional disparities?

Two aspects of urbanization need to be considered more intensively : (a) Is India over-urbanized? and (b) has there been a change in the magnitude of contribution of different components of growth of urban population ? The answer to the first requires an in-depth analysis of various socio-economic processes - particularly on employment, income and industrialization- related to urbanization in India. A comparison of these with other countries in the middle and low income group on the basis of data for recent decades does not suggest a state of over urbanization in India.

A disaggregation of contribution of various components to incremental increase in total urban population since 1981 shows that:

- i) the per cent contribution of natural increase to total urban population has declined from 61.30 per cent in 1981-1991 to 59.40 per cent during 1991-2001. This is related to the declining birth rates;
- ii) the increase in population due to addition /declassification of towns has decreased from 9.40 per cent during 1981-1991 to 6.20 per cent during 1991-2001;
- iii) the increase due to expansion of urban area/agglomeration has increased from 7.60 per cent during

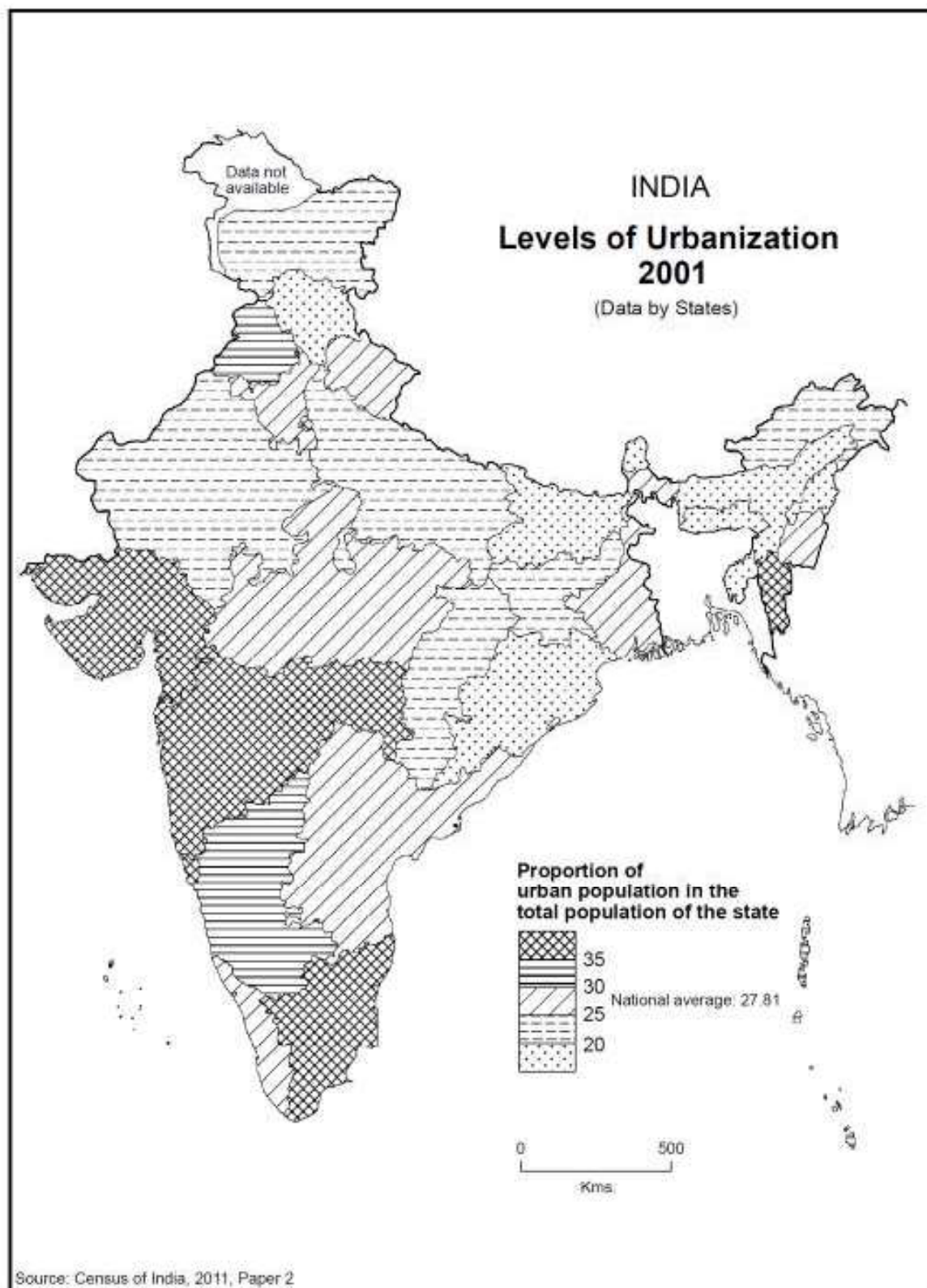


Fig. 1

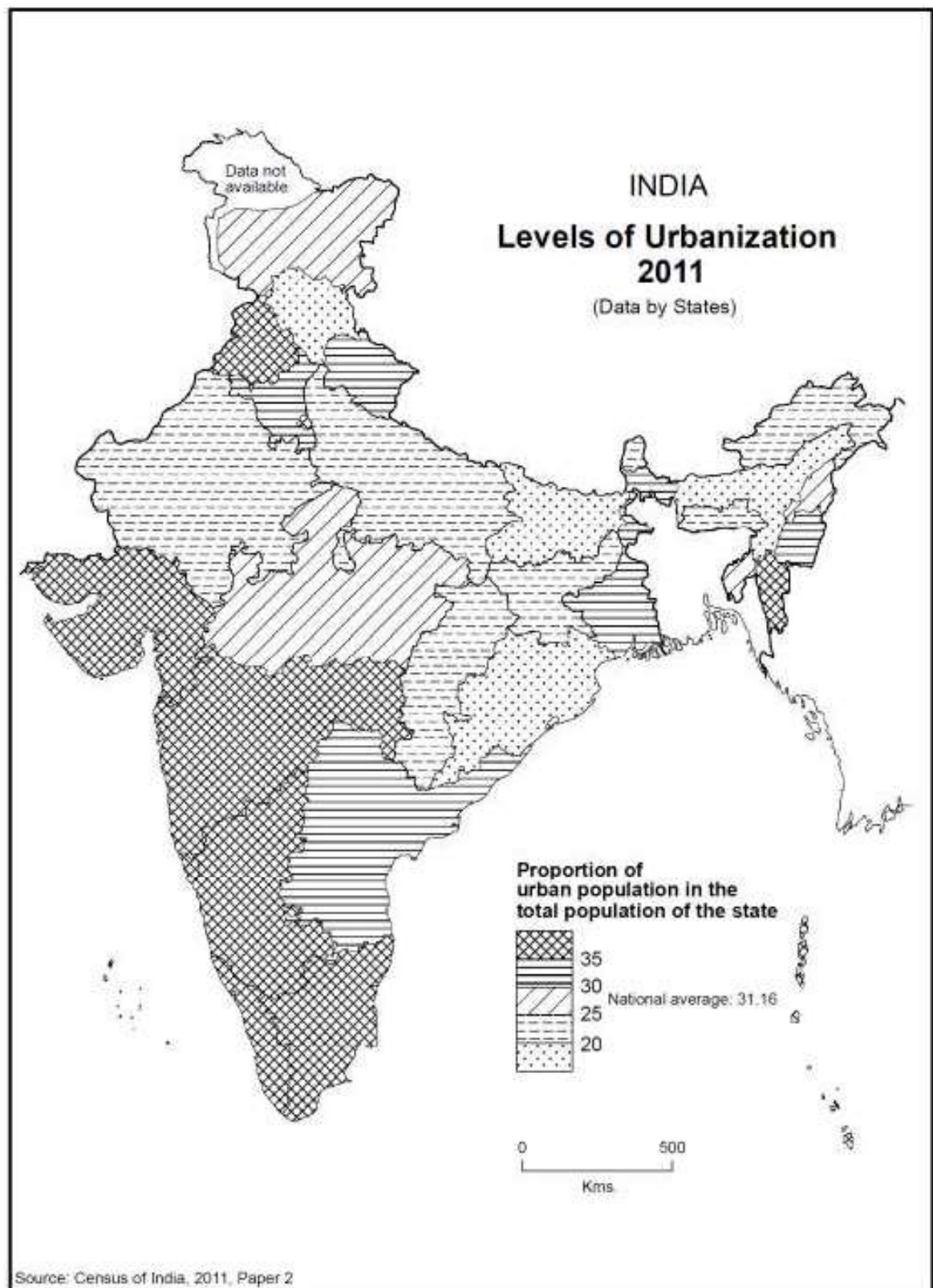


Fig. 2

1981-1991 to 9.70 per cent during 1991-2001 (estimate) and;

- iv) the share of rural-urban migration has increased from 21.70 per cent during 1981-91 to 24.20 per cent during 1991-2001 (estimate). This aspect however needs a more intensive analysis since contribution of migration can only be estimated as a residual, because of the nature of census data on migration.

Lateral Spread of Large Cities

The data pertaining to lateral spread of large cities indicate that the area for urban uses has increased sharply since 1971. The decadal growth rate of urban land area was 8.72 per cent during 1961-71, 20.54 per cent during 1971-1981 and 21.81 per cent during 1981-91. The concept of urban agglomerations was introduced in 1971 by the Census of India. The contribution of lateral spread of cities can be understood by way of merging of towns and jurisdictional changes in urban agglomerations. In 2001 the number of towns merged with neighbouring cities/towns was 221 - double the number in 1991. Due to this process the increase in urban population was 7.6 per cent in 1991 and 13 per cent in 2001. During 1961-71 it was only 2.6 per cent.

The trend of concentration of urban population in large cities has already been pointed out earlier. The 393 Class I cities contain 68.67 per cent of total urban population while only 35 million plus UA's were home to 36.31 per cent of this figure in 2001. In addition to this, we must also consider the fact that there are at least 10 more cities, each with a population of above 0.8 million in 2001 which may be considered as million plus UA's "in waiting" having a combined population of 8.8 million. Among these Srinagar (J&K) is the largest and Guwahati ranks 10th.

Growth Behaviour of Million-plus UA's

The million cities invariably contain several cities/urban areas that are functionally linked and form an urban agglomeration. These require considerable attention by scholars because of their considerable population size and geographical complexity. These two attributes also bring together disparate socio-economic process in the core and periphery of metropolitan cities, because, these represent different historical, political, economic and regional processes. It is, therefore, natural that their growth behaviour would also be different. Thus it is worth examining the growth behaviour of such cities in terms of core and periphery development.

On the basis of growth trends during 1981-91 and 1991-2001 in the core and periphery of metropolitan cities in India the following typology can be suggested:

1. Growing Core and Periphery e.g. Bangalore, Kanpur and Pune.
2. Growing Core - Declining Periphery e.g. Patna, Surat and Indore.
3. Declining Core - Growing Periphery e.g. Delhi, Nagpur, Lucknow.
4. Declining Core - Declining Periphery e.g. Kolkata, Greater Mumbai, Hyderabad, Ahmadabad.

Corridor Development

The spatial distribution of million plus UA's also suggests a trend of urban corridor development e.g. proximal location of Amritsar- Jalandhar - Ludhiana; Vadodara - Ahmadabad - Surat; and Kolkata - Dhanbad - Jamshedpur etc. The impact of the emergence of this linearity, in addition to the ripple effect of large concentrations, needs to be understood comprehensively. On the face of it this development is likely to extend the frontiers of invasion by urban processes into the countryside more intensively. The pushing

back of the limits of agricultural land away from the highways, through real estate development is just one such example having far reaching implications.

Emerging Issues

In view of the features of urbanization in India in recent decades the following issues can be noted:

1. It is necessary to move beyond the study of urbanization per se and undertake more in depth studies on different facets of this process.
2. The definitional aspects of Census of India and their implications must be understood clearly and applied while studying urban processes.
3. The cities - specially the larger ones - are undergoing significant changes in their internal structure as well as outer forms. These changes need to be identified and analyzed e.g. peri-urban development particularly outside the municipal limits.
4. In view of the impending urban era in the near future there is a need to provide useful scientific guidance to policy makers. For this it is necessary that we refine our data sets and develop new indicators to include spatial factors, urban vital rates and improve forecasting methods currently in use.
5. There is an urgent need to look in to the growth behaviour of small towns vis a vis rural development, particularly because the former represent forces of concentration and the later represent the forces of dispersal. It would appear that rural development processes are impeding the growth of small towns to a greater extent than the metropolitan shadow effects.

Challenges

1. The emergence of a predominantly urban population juxtaposed in a complex pattern of functional inter-dependence is perhaps the biggest challenge from the social point of view. The existing city is in fact not one but many cities in terms of intra-urban characteristics/disparities.
2. The large young urban population - their aspirations and requirements - pose another social and development challenge.
3. The governance of large urban areas in addition to tackling the problems of employment, poverty, provision of amenities and utilities is another difficult task, particularly in view of the partial withdrawal of state intervention under liberalization, privatization and globalization processes.
4. The question of urban environment is a basic aspect that needs to be addressed at different levels e.g. change in land use, water depletion due to expanding built up surfaces, land degradation, disposal of increased solid and liquid waste. The contrast in environmental hygiene between outlying areas and the built-up city in terms of socio-economic indicators and amenities (except perhaps electricity and water) is resulting in the creation a "degenerated periphery".
5. The question of rural urban disparities needs to be addressed more rigorously. The city - hinterland relations need to be strengthened with more vigour. There is of course considerable vertical integration due to the advances in communication technology. This has to be matched

with horizontal functional integration. The trend of decline in demographic growth in the districts comprising the periphery of million plus cities is a case in point. In addition, the intra-district disparities in development levels around such metros as Hyderabad, Ranchi and Patna (forming part of the red-corridor) needs to be looked into.

Friends, we may become a predominantly urban society soon and take pride in it, the vast numbers that will continue to reside in the countryside can not be left behind in this process. Provide for the urban as well as the rural worlds. Good governance and comprehensive planning are the only means for achieving this.

I am greatly beholden to the organizers of the 11th APG for giving me this opportunity to share some of my ideas.

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