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India's Urban Future

URBANISATION—the gradual shift of scattered rural population to settlements of several thousand people—is *a fairly* recent development *in our* social evolution. "Rural to urban migration is by far the major component of urbanisation and is the chief mechanism by which all of the world's great urbanisation trends have been accomplished (Bogue and Zachariah 1961)." India's urbanisation has been rapid during the last few decades, especially during the last two decades as a result of remarkable increase in the number of metropolitan, large and small, state capital, industrial and port cities. In relation to India's urbanisation, the magnitude of population and their role in economic development emerge as important issues of urgent concern. Similar concern has emerged in most other developing countries. The experience of economic growth and transformation gained in the developed countries of the world suggest that urbanisation can be used as *an instrument of economic* progress and modernization. However, the Indian experience harbinger the emergence of several factors counter-productive for national development.

The excessive concentration of urban population in large cities creates acute problems for physical planning. The growth of population in the core cities and adjoining towns has led to proliferating conurbations characterised by serious administrative problems in the provision of civic amenities and services.

Further, in India, while the urban population grows, the rural population seems nowhere to decrease. A demographic analysis of urbanisation shows that though the level of urbanisation in terms of the proportion of urban population (23.3 per cent according to 1981 Census) is low in India, the urban population in absolute terms is enormous (159.73 million—1981 Census), *that exceeds the* total population of the developed industrialised countries on the world. This startling dimensional growth of urban population is not uniformly shared by

The two biggest problems facing our country are poverty and population

growth, and these two are reflected in the problems approaching crisis dimensions facing many of the Indian cities. The efforts of the government have failed to benefit the majority of urban population, in particular the urban poor which, after all, is an extension of rural poor. In the last two decades, several studies have been carried out by academic institutions as well as local and foreign scholars. However, no viable urban development policy suited to India has been formulated, accepted and adopted for implementation.

The future of urban India, the problems of urban India today, the urban needs in 2001 A.D. and an alternative strategy for urban development including projections upto 2001 A.D. have all been examined with available statistics in these academic works. However, much remains to be done. Here, we undertake a modest analysis of several issues related to India's urbanisation including the relevant more recent policy decisions. It seeks also to make some constructive suggestions for an alternative developmental strategy for the future of urban India.

Growth of Urban India

Urbanisation as a process of population concentration involves two elements: (i) the multiplication of points of concentration and (ii) the increase in the size of individual concentration (Bridge, 1956).

The definition of urban is not however, simple. It varies greatly from country to country and within the same country from time to time. The Indian census authorities have often modified the definition of urban areas in order presumably to facilitate a comprehensive study of trends of urbanisation.

In any case, a brief glance into the growth of urban population during the last eight decades in the order. Table 1 gives the percentage variation in total, urban and rural population separately for each of the eight decades. The urban population growth rates have varied from decade to decade. The percent increase during 1901-11 was only 0.3; it which increased to 19.1 during 1921-31. The decade 1941-51 witnessed a remarkable growth rate of 41.4 per cent.

An interesting feature of the decade 1951-61 is that while the decadal increase in rural population, shot upto 20.6 per cent from 8.8 per cent in the previous decade, the decadal increase of urban population had decreased to 26.4 per cent from 41.4 per cent in the previous decade. This can be partly attributed to the change of definition in 1961 census and its rigorous application. The urban population as reported by the 1981 census is 159.73 million; the decade 1971-81 recorded the highest ever growth rate of 46.4 per cent. Over the last eight decades, the rural population has grown to about $2\frac{1}{2}$ times while the urban population had grown to a six-fold. It is also notable that the growth rate of rural population showed in 1971-81 a decrease of 2.1 per cent points, in contrast to an increase of 1.3 per cent points recorded by the previous decade.

TABLE 1—GROWTH OF TOTAL, URBAN AND RURAL POPULATION
IN INDIA, 1901-1981

Census Year	Total Population (in millions)	Decade Change (Percentage)	Urban Population (in millions)	Decade Change (Percentage)	Percentage of the urban to Total Population	Rural Population (in million)	Decade change (Percentage)
1901	238.40	—	25.85	—	10.8	212.55	—
1911	252.09	3.8	25.94	0.3	10.3	226.15	6.40
1921	252.32	-0.3	28.09	8.3	11.2	223.23	-1.3
1931	278.98	11.0	33.46	19.1	12.0	245.52	10.0
1941	318.66	14.2	44.15	32.0	13.9	274.51	11.8
1951	361.09	12.3	62.44	41.4	17.6	296.65	8.8
1961	439.24	21.6	78.74	26.4	18.0	360.30	20.6
1971	548.16	24.8	109.09	38.2	19.9	439.05	21.9
1981	685.18*	25.0	159.73	46.4	23.3	525.46	19.7

SOURCES : 1. Ashish Bose. *India's Urbanisation**, 1901-2001, New Delhi. Tata McGraw Hill, 1980, pp. 341-342.

2. Census of India, 1981, *Primary Census Abstract p. iv.*

*includes projected population of Assam.

The level of urbanisation is indicated by the proportion of the urban to total population. The pace of increase in this proportion over the period from 1901 to 1981 has been rather slow, measuring on the average only about 1.5 per cent a decade. It had increased from only 10.8 per cent in 1901 to 23.3 per cent in 1981. This apparently moderate increase has significant implications when viewed in absolute terms.

The growth of urban population can be viewed as having two components, migration and natural increase. These two together account for major changes in the level of urbanisation. Zachariah and Ambarmavar point out that during 1941-51 the volume of rural-urban migration was 8.2 million and it fell to 5.2 million during 1951-61. According to an estimate by Bose (1980) during 1951-61, the natural increase in the urban population was of the order 10-12 million. Other changes in the levels of urbanisation occur because of changes in the definition of urban areas and also when urban areas are reorganised to envelope peripheral rural areas.

The differing patterns of population growth in different size classes of towns are brought in much sharper focus by data presented in Table 2. In 1901, 51.2 per cent of the total urban population lived in big towns and cities (Class I-III); this rose to 83.5 per cent in 1971. Correspondingly, the smaller towns

TABLE 2—**GROWTH OF CITIES, PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF URBAN POPULATION AMONG SMALL TOWNS AND BIG CITIES, AND DENSITY IN INDIA, 1901-81**

Census Year	Big Towns and Cities Class (I-III)	Small Towns Class (IV- VI)	Growth of Towns	Density per Sq. Mile		Decade Change of Urban Population
				Rural	Urban	
1901	51.2	46.8	1834	179	1739	—
1911	52.7	47.3	1776	186	1745	0.3
1921	54.7	45.3	1920	184	1889	8.3
1931	58.1	41.9	2049	202	2250	19.1
1941	64.8	35.2	2210	226	2970	32.0
1951	69.6	30.4	2844	246	4200	41.4
1961	78.8	21.2	2330	297	5310	26.6
1971	83.5	16.5	2531	383	6488	38.2
1981	N.A.	N.A.	3245	433*	7778*	46.4*

SOURCES : 1. Ashish **Bose**, *India's Urbanisations, 1901-2001*, *op. cit* p. 347.

2. L.B. Venkatarangan. Small Towns for National Development *Social Science Digest* (Annamalainagar), 2 (182), July 83 and Jan., 1984 : 7-8.

*Compiled from Census of India 1981.

N.A.—Not available.

(Class IV-VI) steadily lost their share in the total urban population till it reached 16.5 per cent in 1971. In the 1971 census, class-I alone accounted for 55.8 per cent of urban population. This indicates that a majority of our urban population live in big cities.

Table 2 also reveals that the number of towns has not increased *pari pasu* with the increase in urban population and so the density of urban population has kept on increasing during the period. It increased from 1739 to 7778 persons per square mile between 1901 and 1981. Net addition to the number of towns over the period was 1411. In contrast, the rural density too has increased but at much slower pace.

Projection of Urban Population for 2001 A.D.

The projection of population is a difficult task. However, to discuss the future trend of urbanisation, the most probable projection of urban population in 2001 A.D. has been considered and the problems involved there in have also been

briefly analysed. The urban projection made by Registrar General (Table 3) and the desirable urban population proposed by C. S. Chandrasckhara (GOI, Registrar General, 1974) have been taken into consideration to have a deeper understanding of the future trend of urbanisation.

TABLE 3—REGISTRAR GENERAL'S ESTIMATE

<i>Year</i>	<i>Urban Population (in millions)</i>	<i>Percentage of Urban Population to Total Population</i>	<i>Decade Increase (Percentage)</i>	<i>Consequent Rural Population</i>
1981	150	22.5	26.4	518
1991	205	25.6	38.2	596
2001	278	29.6	37.5	667

SOURCE : Govt. of India, Towns and Country Planning Organisation, *A Model of India's Organisation Pattern for 2000 A.D.* December, 1974.

The urban population projected in Table 4 is based on the trend of the previous two decades (1961-71 and 1971-81). It is estimated that the urban population would grow to 328.2 million in 2001 A.D. The decade change of urban

TABLE 4—PROBABLE PROJECTION OF URBAN POPULATION IN 2001 A.D.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Urban Population (in millions)</i>	<i>Decade Change (Percentage)</i>	<i>Percentage of Urban Population to Total Population</i>
1981	159.73	46.4	23.3
1991	227.29	42.3	27.3
2001	328.20	44.4	32.9

Figures for 1981 are actuals.

population is first calculated using the recent trends in the urban population. The fact that the actual urban population in 1981 census is more by 9.7 million than the estimated 150 million by experts requires serious attention. The decade change of rural population has declined from 21.9 per cent in 1971 to 19.7 per cent in 1981. This is naturally an interesting feature in the history of our urbanisation which can be used to determine the future urban population. It must be noted that during the decade 1971-81 the proportion of urban popula-

tion to total population has shown a significant increase by 3.4 per cent. Assuming a rate of increase of 4 per cent and 5 per cent (based on the estimated growth rates of urban population for 1991 and 2001) for the years 1991 and 2001 respectively, it is estimated that the proportion of urban population to total population would increase to 32.3 per cent in 2001 A.D. Though the rural population has not stabilised at 500 million as desired by many experts, it can be expected to stabilise around 650-700 million in 2001 A.D. Therefore, the whole strategy of urbanisation depends upon the achievement of a declining trend in the rural population.

Problems of Urban India

Urban problems and urban development have become admittedly national issues in India. It is worthwhile to highlight that problems of urban and physical environment are rooted in the economic and social situations of cities and towns. At this time of rapid urbanisation, the problem facing many of our urban centres are approaching explosive dimensions. The rapid industrialisation in few selected centres also create several urban problems. While there is more unemployment and underemployment all round, the large cities face problems of extremely crowded housing conditions, inadequate water and power supply, insanitation and pollution arising from accelerating growth of slums. Besides this, inadequacy of transportation, chronic poverty and inequality, and socio-economic and political disorders tend to increase.

Poverty

Poverty and population growth are, of course, known to be closely related. Urban India is characterised by large hordes of people pushed out from the rural areas by the pressure on land; these people are mostly unskilled and without any adequate source of livelihood. A study by Dandekar and Rath revealed that 50 per cent of the urban population live much below the subsistence level as compared to 40 per cent in the rural (Dandekar & Rath, 1971). It is evident that the urban poor are only an overflow of rural poor. Dandekar and Rath observed that while the condition of bottom 20 per cent rural poor has remained more or less stable, the conditions of bottom 20 per cent urban poor has definitely deteriorated and for another 20 per cent of the urban population, it has remained more or less stagnant (Bose, Ashish, 1980). Thus while the intensity of rural poverty has remained the same as before, urban poverty has deepened further. The urban poor are at a greater disadvantage with respect to income, education and employment.

Slums

An alarming consequence of rapid urbanisation is the mushroom growth of slums in cities and towns. The problem of a city is that it attracts many mig-

rants from surrounding districts, causing a massive and unchecked population expansion, leading to the creation of the worst of slums.

As Jagendra Sahai points out, "a concomitant of urbanisation in India has been the continuous growth of slum population as most internal migration has been concentrated in the slums" (Sahai, J., 1980). It has been estimated that the slum population in the large Indian cities runs from 7 per cent to as high as 60 per cent of the total city population (Ministry of Works, Housing & Supply, 1957).

Unemployment

Urban unemployment is worse than rural unemployment. Studies conducted in metropolitan cities like Delhi, Calcutta, and Madras have shown that the magnitude of urban poverty is because of the alarming size of unemployment and widening disparities in income levels. If new employment opportunities are created in the urban areas, the first to offer themselves for employment are the marginally employed persons already residing in urban areas. If so, where is the scope for employment of fresh rural migrants? Because of difficult conditions of living in rural areas, people migrate to urban areas in the hope of finding a better life. They believe that economic conditions of urban centres are likely to provide a comfortable life. This kind of large scale migration from rural to urban areas has led to what is termed as "over-urbanisation." As this phenomenon of over-urbanisation causes concern for India's urban future, the government has no comprehensive programmes to employ and settle the enlarging pools of unemployment.

Housing and Urban Development

Urban housing and urban development are closely related. The problem of housing shortage in the cities is probably more acute than any other problem. Housing is in fact the bug-bear of all urban development. According to a survey in 1974, the total shortage of houses in urban areas was as much as 3.8 million and according to another study, the shortage would increase to about 12 million units by 2001. The country has an overall rate of construction of mere 2 houses per 1000 persons annually, 3.5 in urban areas and 0.44 in rural areas (Mehta, J.B., 1981). Against this an expert body of United Nations has recommended construction of minimum of 10 houses per year per 1000 persons. The housing problem accentuates as there is no increase in the supply of new housing. Nearly 30 per cent of the urban population lives in hutments and according to futurologists, this proportion will be about 70 per cent by the turn of the century.

Prohibitive rents, advances and 'Pagadi' demanded even for congested and unhealthy accommodation are a threat to the urban way of life. As a result of this, even middle class families are forced to resort to slum living. Besides this, our housing and urban development plans and policies operate under several constraints—political, economic and administrative. As a result, the

shortage of housing and the absence of a positive housing policy have led to the continuous rise and expansion of slums.

Transportation and Land Use

Another important aspect of urbanisation is the interrelation between transportation and land use. The greatest transportation problem in cities is created while commuting between home and work place. The creation of residential zones away from work zones has created a pendulum movement from home to work and back. The mass transportation problem is mainly a peak hour problem. The transportation planning must go hand in hand with the entire land use planning.

In determining future target of land use for an urban centre, two distinct elements should be considered: (a) the locational decisions of the commercial and industrial activity; and (b) the locational decisions of the residential space (Patankar, P.G.).

Health in the City

The preservation of health in the city has become a costly business. It depends on a variety of factors—the permitted congestion and crowding, the public and private amenities such as sanitation, sewerage and water supply, public health, health awareness, public open spaces such as parks and playgrounds, amongst others. The rapid population growth will continue to impose great strain on existing health and medical facilities and services unless massive improvements in the qualitative and quantitative aspects of health are made. Epidemiological studies (Malcolm, S.W., 1980) show that life in cities is associated with increasing incidence and prevalence rates of chronic health problems, heart disease, and suicide.

Environmental Decay

The urban environment is a highly complex phenomenon. There has been an unprecedented assault on urban environs because of the toxic effect of pollution of industry, water, air, noise, waste discharge and population congestion. In the great surge towards "progress" the environmental problems have increased manifold. Poor environmental sanitation particularly in the cities is responsible for a number of diseases. Exposure to infection comes mainly from pollution. Moreover, the ecology of the city continues to suffer from chaotic traffic conditions, unbearable air pollution and appalling squatter housing. The urban water supply faces problem mainly of environmental pollution. And the impact of residential and social environments on health in the city is enormous.

Social Problems

The co-existence of filthy slums and rich enclaves in all medium and major cities of India has gone on virtually for decades without raising so much as a mentionable commotion, let alone an accelerating ferment or tension. The city has become an uncongenial place due to the existence of two groups of population opposite to each other namely, the rich and the poor. The lack of their access to social amenities and security have put the urban poor at a continuing and growing disadvantage, intensifying in sense of deprivation and alienation and involvement into the anti-social activities. Poverty, unemployment, and poor access to amenities and higher population density consistently show greater prevalence of alcoholism, immorality and violence among the slum populations. Most of the youths from the slums become 'juvenile delinquents'. Social conflicts are often seen in these localities. In the slums of the cities, ethical and moral values have suffered a continuous degradation. The slum has become the origin of all political exploitation for the ends of the diverse political interest groups. And some politicians of the nationalist movements articulate anti-urban images among the masses. There have been politically or parochially motivated campaigns stemming from a sense of deprivation on the part of the urban poor. The urban poor suffer many long standing disabilities; these disabilities may accentuate to pose a real threat to the urban way of life.

Demographic Aspects

In addition to other types of problems, urbanisation has produced new forms of population problems, that is problems relating to fertility, mortality, internal migration and composition of population. In urban setting, birth rates tend to be lower than in rural areas in many parts of the world, although not uniformly so (Unesco, 1965). But according to Nigel Crook and Tim Dyson (1982) as observed from Sample Registration System, 'the difference between birth and death rates (rate of natural increase) is about the same in both urban and rural areas'. Two tentative conclusions emerge from this: first, the proportion of urban growth due to rural-urban migration has increased substantially since the past three decades; second, migration from rural to urban areas probably accounted for roughly half the growth of urban population during 1971-81. The maintenance of natural increase of urban population on par with that of the rural areas can be attributed to the higher growth rates among the urban poor. The family size of the urban poor has continued to be higher than the middle and rich class. Unless effective steps are taken (1) to curb rural-urban migration, and (2) to develop the urban poor, the demographic implications of urbanisation in the future could be worse.

Urbanisation in 2001 A.D.

The 1981 census data of the rural-urban distribution of the population provide some interesting insights into the country's recent urbanisation. In short, urban growth in India over the last 10 years has been somewhat greater than was generally anticipated. Broadly speaking the following projections seem highly possible in the year 2001 A.D.

1. The rate of urban growth is expected to continue at the present rate of 4 per cent a year, but in the last decade it will increase to 5 per cent a year. Thus, by the turn of the century there will be approximately 350 million people in urban centres. In other words, the urban size will more than double itself in another sixteen years.
2. The slum population will continue to grow at the present rate. To quote Rashmi Mayur, "The magnetic strength and pull of the present metropolitan areas will continue to grow, leading consequently to selected megapolitan areas with the concentration of enormous masses of people in ugly agglomeration."

The Challenges of Urban India in 2001 A.D.

Bearing in mind the projection of urban population, that is about 300-350 million, the outstanding features of the urban situation in 2001 A.D. could be as follows:

- (i) The problem of proverty is the biggest task before urban India. Already in the urban areas 50 per cent of people are in absolute poverty. The proportion may increase if urbanisation is not regulated,
- (ii) To provide shelter to the anticipated 350 million urban population in the year 2001 A.D. about 70-80 million dwellings will be required for the projected population. Considering the acute housing shortage in the urban India today witli enormous number of slums, squatters and pavement dwellers, high cost of construction, and land, the housing situation will become an intractable gordian-knot.
- (iii) If the trends continue as they have been in the recent years, the problem of transportation for the rest of the 16 years will be shocking and unsolvabl. The massive movement of people will involve enormous disruptions and dislocations of the transport systems that are unable to cope with the large number of passengers today.
- (iv) The unhygienic conditions in which the majority of people will live, in addition to the high cost of instituting pollution control devices will bring in the paradoxical trap of poverty and pollution. And the environmental pollution problems will plague Indian cities and towns even more seriously than it has so far been recognised.

- (v) The major cities are already over-grown. The strains on their resources will reduce the quality and quantity of services they are able to provide.
- (vi) The literacy rate which is at 55 per cent level today in the urban areas will reach 70 per cent by the turn of the century. This will lead to enormous problem of educated unemployment.
- (vii) Probably the most difficult problem will be that of energy. Unless alternative sources are invented, increasingly urbanised masses cannot solely depend on the existing energy sources.
- (viii) The cost of health will grow in geometrical progression, but for a large number of people ill-health will be the way of life. There will be continuous decline of urban life that will be reflected in health, proliferating slums, pollution, decline in quality of water, hypertension, malnutrition and general decline in living conditions that will lead to various diseases and health hazards.
- (ix) The implications of urbanisation will enlarge the scale of individual crimes and social evils. "Urban bureaucracy will grow thrice over to unmanageable proportions. Difficulties concerning law and order and political instability, particularly in urban areas, will determine the future course of Indian society as a whole" (Rashmi Mayur).

A New Strategy for Urban Development

Decentralisation

There should be a deliberate policy to decentralise industry, health services and educational institutions. Public administration should also be decentralised. The structure and power of the city government should be altered to meet the complex demand of urban life.

Need to Stop the Influx into the Urban Areas

Urban development in our present stage of economic development is essentially a problem in conservation surgery. A city or town is like an emergency hospital or a refugee camp which has to receive ever increasing hordes from rural areas and small towns. Unless steps are taken to check or at least reduce these hordes, no amount of money will suffice for urban development. An employment guarantee scheme should be introduced to meet the problem of rural population.

Small Towns

A definite policy should be evolved for developing small and medium sized-class towns to curb city-ward migration and for fertility decline in these areas.

Environment

Attention must be given to control water, air and noise pollution as also to

disposal and recycling of waste and garbage. Where cheap labour is available tree planting should be taken up as a measure of effective and economical way to improve the urban environment.

Housing

Adequate land and resources must be allocated to provide housing for the urban poor. At the stage of economic development self-help, low-cost and low-rise housing should be actively promoted.

Transport

Priority should be given to provide better, safer and cheap public transport. More facilities should be provided for two-wheelers and pedestrians,

Health

Health education needs to be introduced at all level of schooling, including the preprimary stage. Emphasis be also given to preventive medicine. Numerous health clinics must be provided at convenient locations to serve the urban poor. The budding structure of these clinics can be inexpensive, and the services provided, simple and effective.

Poverty—A Significant Component

A significant component of higher growth rates both in urban and rural areas is poverty. A massive attack on rural, urban poverty by development planning could be right way to secure a substantial reduction in birth rates.

The scenario in cities and towns of India in 2001 and coming years seems pretty grim. We can not hope for a powerful technology to suddenly change the gloom. A new urban strategy will need to be formulated first by the policy makers before it can be presented convincingly to the public for involvement and to the administrators for adoption and implementation,

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