Urbanisation in India: An Appraisal of 2011 Census Data

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Introduction:

Urbanisation has been rapid in most of the countries during the twentieth century. A merely 13 per cent of the global population was urban in 1900, which increased to 29 per cent in 1950 and crossed the 50 percent mark (50.1 percent) in 2009 (U.N. 2009). On the other hand, the pattern of urbanization is found to be very uneven between the more developed and less developed world. At the present, seventy five percent people of developed world lives in urban areas compared to 45 percent in the less developed ones. In Asia and Africa, merely 4 out 10 persons live in urban areas, whereas in India only 3 out 10 persons lived in urban areas. In most parts of Asia and Africa not only have very low level of per capita income, but also the pace of urbanization has been modest in the recent past. This is even true for India, but in the last two decades India has experienced an accelerated economic growth after the Central Government launched economic reforms in 1991. The economic reforms aimed at loosening the control of the Govt and encouraged entrepreneurs to participate actively in India’s economic development. The economic growth reached about 8 percent per annum during the first decade of the new millennium compared to just 3 percent rate of growth in the early 1980s. This has also led a very spectacular change in the perception of the Central Government about urbanization. In Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007-2012), it is argued that urbanization should be seen as a positive factor in the overall development. This change in the thinking is coincidental with the fact that urban areas presently contributes to about 65 percent of GDP, and a realisation that an ambitious goal of 9 to10 percent growth in GDP cannot be achieved without vibrant (Planning Commission 2008). As the country is on the verge of preparing the 12th Five Year Plan (2012-2017), the urban transition is considered as one of the major challenges which require a massive expansion in urban infrastructure and services. With this backdrop, the results of the 2011 census on urban population growth assume enormous significance in enhancing our understanding about the magnitude, growth and inter-state variations in the levels and tempo of urbanization in the
country. This paper presents an assessment of the emerging pattern of urbanization, its spatial pattern and the components of urban growth namely the contribution of natural increase, classification of rural into urban areas and the contribution of rural to urban migration. This paper particularly would be helpful to researchers who are interested to understand the demographic dynamics of urbanization in India.

**Definition of Urban**

Census adopted since 1981 the following definition which continued in 2011 Census as well.

i) All places with a municipality, corporation, cantonment board or notified town area committee etc.

ii) All other places which satisfy the following criteria:

   a) Minimum population of 5000

   b) At least 75 % of the male working population engaged in non-agricultural pursuits and

   c) A density of population of at least 400 persons per square km.

Besides, the directors of census operations in states/union territories were allowed to include in consultation with the concerned state governments, union territory administration and the census commissioner of India, some places having distinct urban characteristics as urban even if such places did not strictly satisfy all the criteria. There are also places like railway colony, university campus, port area, military camps, etc., which have come up near a statutory town outside its statutory limits but within limits of village or villages contiguous to the town. Such places are defined as Out Growths which together with the adjoining town or towns constitute an Urban Agglomeration (UA). An UA must consist of at least a statutory town and its total population (i.e. all the constituents put together) should not be less than 20,000 as per the 2001 Census.

**Conclusion:**

The speed of urbanization has slowed down during the 1980s and 1990s as urban population growth rate declined consecutively; on the other hand, there has been a turnaround in the speed of urbanization during 2000s. The turnaround in India’s urbanization is consistent with higher economic growth in the country during 2001-2011. However, this is not the result of rural to urban migration but due to higher rural-urban classification. The contribution of net rural to urban migration continues to be only one-fifth of the urban growth during 2001-2011. On the whole, the faster urbanisation shows geographical expansion through the emergence of small towns and spill over from the existing big cities to its peripheral areas. The core areas of the mega cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata show deceleration in their growth rates. Overall, the emerging form of urbanisation is spatially distributed dominated by large number of medium and small towns.