



# Urbanization trends in India: A Retrospective View

Bhavik Panchal<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Post Graduate Student, Town and Country Planning, Sarvajanic College of Engineering and Technology (Surat, Gujarat)

## ABSTRACT

*More than half of population in world lives in cities. Developing countries like India still in transition. This paper present the trends of urbanisation in India. India is one of those few countries who still maintain the ratio of rural and urban population with 5.5 villages in 2008. India's level of urbanization remain low (31% in 2011) as compared to china. This paper present the trends of urbanization in India. Economic reformation in 1990 increased urbanization in India. This paper presents how urbanization process increased in metro cities due rural-urban migration and growth of industries.*

**Keywords**—India, Rural-urban migration, Urbanization trends

## 1. Introduction

Urbanization is defined as the physical growth of urban areas due to the concentration of people and economic activity. It represents the most important social transformation in the history of civilization [1]. Urbanization is central to the development process. The process of urbanisation has been transforming the developing countries from ‘countries of villages’ to ‘countries of cities and town’. The share of the world’s population living in urban areas increased from just 3 percent in 1800 to 14 percent in 1900. By 1950, it had reached 30 percent [2]. In 2011, for the first time, more than half of the globe’s population (52%) is living in towns and cities. Today more than half the world's population lives in urban areas. It has been projected that by 2050 this figure will reach to 70% at which point 6.3 billion people will be living in cities [3]. The latest Indian Census of 2011 has revealed some crucial facts such as for the first time since independence, the absolute urban population has grown more than its rural counterpart and is slightly higher than expected [4][5][6]. Furthermore, India is now in an escalating phase of urbanization and the pace will become even more rapid in the times ahead [7]. Then huge increase in the number of the Census Towns from 1362 to 3894, while the number of Statutory Towns increased only marginally from 3799 to 4041. Simultaneously, the quantum jump in the number of metro cities (cities with population greater than one million) during 2001–2011 to 52, compared to there being just 35 in 2001. As a result, the regional patterns of growth and urbanization are heavily influenced by these large cities, as they are India’s engines of growth and its magnets, attracting people from the adjoining rural areas, small and medium towns, and from comparatively regressive regions [8].

## 2. Literature review

In India, settlements are classified as “urban” when these display certain Demographic and economic qualities. Settlements not displaying similar qualities are classified as “rural”. A, settlements are classified as “urban” when these display certain Demographic and economic qualities. Settlements not displaying similar qualities are



Classified as “rural”. There are two definitions in use for declaring Indian settlements as “urban”. These are described below.

### 2.1. State government definition:

Since urban development is a subject under the purview of state governments, the governor of the state declares by public notification an area as “urban” based on certain parameters, such as “population of the area, the density of the population therein, the revenue generated for local administration, the percentage of employment in non-agricultural activities, the economic importance or such other factors”. In such specified areas, an urban local government/municipality is constituted under the law for the purpose of governance. All settlements having an urban local government are known as ‘statutory towns’.

### 2.2. National government (census office) Definition

In view of the absence of an objective criteria from the state government for classifying a settlement as “urban”, the national government (represented by the Office of Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India), considers a settlement as “urban” based on the following criteria: (a) if it has an urban local government (i.e., statutory towns notified by the state government); and (b) any place that satisfies the following three criteria: (i) minimum population of 5,000; (ii) at least 75 percent of 5 male main working population engaged in non-agricultural pursuits; and (iii) population density of at least 400 persons per sq. km (1,000 persons per sq. mile). Settlements fulfilling the above-mentioned three census criteria (of population size, workers, and population density) are designated by the census office as ‘census towns’.

As per the approach followed by the state governments, India technically has 4,041 statutory towns (as per census 2011) where 323 million persons live, and the share of urban population in India’s total population is about 27 percent (Table 1).

**TABLE 1: Number of Towns and Urban Population in India, 2011[9]**

Parameter	Statutory Town	Census Town	Total Town
Number of towns	4,041	3,892	7,933
Population (in million)	323	54	377
Share of urban population in total population	26.69	4.46	31.15

### 3. The evolution of urbanization in India

The transition from an agriculture dependent society to modern economy there are mainly three transformation in India. The workforce of India moves from agriculture sector to industrial sector. Second there is a gradual shift from the informal sector to formal sector and third stage is an increase in urbanization in response to shift towards formal sector to manufacturing and services.[10]. Though there is significant decline in agricultural share of GDP, the employment share of agriculture has remained very high in India and if we plot the graph from the census data before independence (1901 to 1947) to after independence (1947 to 1990) and economic reformation of country (1990 to 2011) the pace of urbanization is slow. Fig1 provide graphical representation of



India’s demographic trends since 1901, between 1901 to 1951 urban population of India is growing by 88% and it took the rural population until 1991 to double in size. [10]

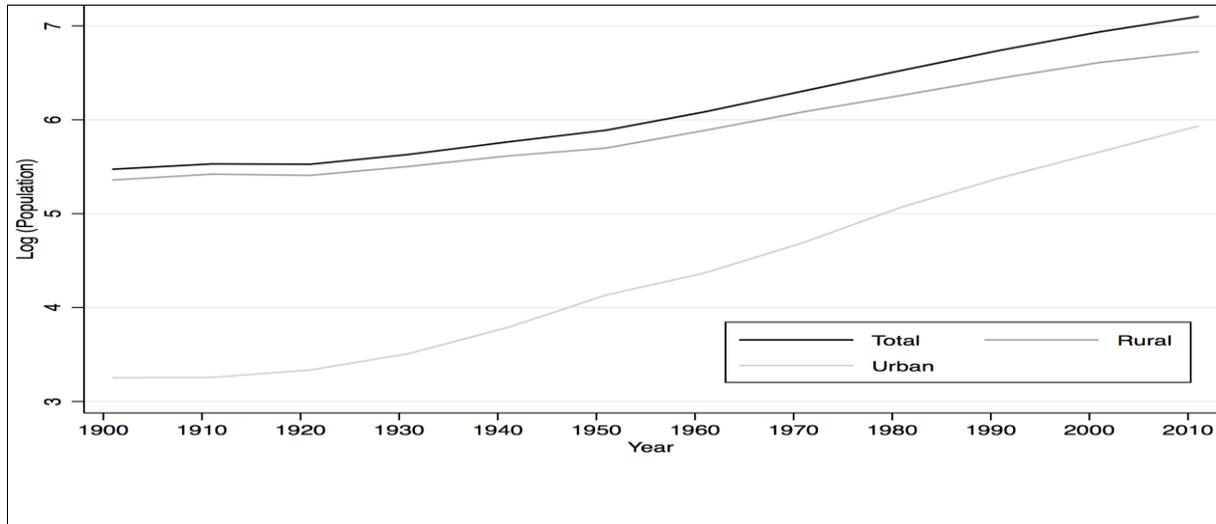


Fig 1: Population growth in India (1901-2011) [10]

Despite the significant growth is observed in urban population, the share of urban population is very low as compared to other developing countries with similar income and economy.

Table 2 present the evolution of India’s urban population share. In last 40 years India’s urban population share increased by less than 30% and After economic reformation in 1990,share of urban population is increased by around 6%.

TABLE 2: India’s urban population share [10]

	1901	1951	1991	2001	2011
Total population (million)	238	361	846	1,028	1,211
Urban share (%)	10.84	17.30	25.72	27.71	31.15

#### 4. Trends of urbanisation in India

From the beginning of twentieth century, India had been undergoing to lower pace of urbanisation compared to other developing countries this is because of fact that India’s rural population was also significant. In 2011 total number of villages is 5.9 million villages (census of India, 2011) and for the first time in history of India’s urbanization, India’s urban population is more than rural population during the period of 2001-2011. Table 3 shows that urban population is increasing with lower pace. In 2001 urban population was 286.12 million with total population 1028.61 million and it was increased by 377.11 million in 2011 with total population 1210.19 million. In beginning of twentieth century the number of urban town was only 1915 and it was 7935 in beginning of twenty first century which shows that urban transformation has begun in India. This increased in



number of populations is due to rural urban migration and Indian work force moves from agriculture sector to industrial sector.

At beginning of twentieth century Kolkata is the only one metro city in India. Kolkata rose as metro city because in the first phase of industrialization chemical industries, jute industries were located in Kolkata and wholesale and retail market also developed because of major ports located in Kolkata. In 1911, Mumbai became metro city with 1.52 million population and Mumbai became the economic capital of India and Mumbai. Up to 1951, Mumbai and Kolkata dominated as major population lived in urban area. The concentration of population in metro cities increased over the time because of its surrounding natural geography and development of industries. After independence Delhi, Hyderabad and Chennai become metro city.

**TABLE 3 : Process of urbanisation in India since 1901[11]**

Census year	Total population	Urban population	Level of urbanization (%)	No. of urban Centre
1901	238.4	25.85	10.84	1915
1911	252.09	25.94	10.29	1864
1921	251.32	28.09	11.18	2018
1931	278.98	33.46	11.99	2188
1941	318.66	44.15	13.85	2392
1951	361.1	62.44	17.29	3035
1961	439.09	78.94	17.98	2657
1971	548.23	109.11	19.90	3081
1981	683.33	159.46	23.34	3981
1991	846.39	217.55	25.70	4615
2001	1028.61	286.12	27.82	5161
2011	1210.19	377.11	31.16	7935

Globalization, liberalization and privatization makes new metropolitan development in India. And subsequently number of metro cities increased to 52 in 2011. These cities were Patna from eastern region, Ludhiana and Varanasi from northern region, Bhopal and Indore from central region and Surat and Vadodara from west and Coimbatore, Vishakhapatnam, Kochi and Madurai from south. The trends in these cities are they occupy coastal location or they are located at east to north-west corridors.

Besides this in 1990 economic reforms makes easy imports and exports which attracts industries to locate near port cities. The tendency of corridor development is also affect the growth pattern of such metropolises. The proximity of city for example, Kolkata-Asansol-Dhanbad, Allahabad –Kanpur -Lucknow, Amritsar-Jalandhar-Ludhiana and Ahmedabad-Vadodara-Surat highlights the spatial concentration of population along these urban corridors. Such kind of regional development also makes urban agglomeration in India.

Another trend is that in India rural and urban areas are not independent of each other. They are connected by material and non-material things. The lack of natural resources in small and intermediate town grow slowly in early phase of urbanisation. Though they are dependent on each other large metro city grows faster than medium town. This trend was developed earlier in 1990s and it indicates that rural population migrating for better opportunities and better living conditions in metro cities. After globalisation, privatization and liberation is only



benefited to metro cities compared to small town and rural population have to migrate to nearby metro cities for employment as their destination this makes urban agglomeration in metro cities and it creates urban pressures in metro cities.

## 5. Conclusion

In India urbanisation is increased due to after economic reformation in 1990 major Indian work force moves toward industrial sector. Major industries are located nearby port cities and this makes urbanisation in port cities like Mumbai, Kolkata. Most of older metro cities have high pace of urbanisation as compared to new metro cities. The cities which are located at coastal area or have sound natural resources developed faster due to high investment and resource utilisation this attract rural population for employment and better living condition. Thus it creates urbanization in metro cities. Consequently people have tendency to move near city periphery, this creates agglomerated trend in metropolitan area.

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