

## HS4.108 Making of Contemporary India

### Course Project:

#### Urbanisation and Migration in 20<sup>th</sup> century India

The human population, since its inception, has travelled from place to place for better living. The reasons for this movement changed from searching for fertile land, moderate weather conditions and preventing natural hazards such as drought and floods to better services, employment, or studies over time. This phenomenon of the movement of people from one region to another with intentions of permanent or temporary settlement is known as **migration**. With this search for better living conditions for individuals, communities, and societies, migration became a universal historical phenomenon. It was essential in shaping human history, culture, and socio-economic conditions.

Migration can broadly be defined into two types, i.e., **external** and **internal**.

- External migration refers to the movement of people from their own country to another country.
- Internal migration refers to the movement of people to a different region, zone, or state within the same country.

And of these two, internal migration is the dominant one in India. When India gained independence in 1947, a considerable population emigrated from India to Pakistan after the partition, and many people immigrated to India. A stable economy was already a massive task for the newly independent India, and settling the refugee population was also a big challenge. Most refugees settled in villages in the country's northern region, with only a tiny fraction of people going to economic centres such as Bombay, Kolkata, or Madras.

In independent India, with unequal infrastructural growth and the slow growth of Indian GDP for the first four decades of independence, the gap between rural and urban living conditions widened. These gaps are evident even today when comparing electricity distribution, water supply, healthcare, employment opportunities and other basic amenities in both regions. As a result, a large population started to move from rural to urban areas for various reasons, such as limiting the green revolution to Haryana, Punjab and western Uttar Pradesh in an agriculture-dependent country with an uneven spread of industrialisation.

The migration, or the population shift from rural areas to urban areas, thereby increasing the proportion of people living in urban areas, is called **urbanisation**. Urbanisation is closely related to various ideas, such as modernisation and industrialisation. Migration from rural to urban areas helps in urban growth, but urban growth and urbanisation differ. Urban growth refers to the increase in the number of people living in urban areas, but urbanisation is the proportion of people living in urban areas of a country.

The earliest evidence of urbanisation is the development of early cities such as Harappa and Lothal in the Indus Valley and Mesopotamian civilisations. And the concept of urbanisation is not new to India. In early modern history, India's urbanisation rate peaked at 15% during the Mughal Period, and Europe stood at 10%. Coming to the current situation of India, according to the 2011 Census, the urbanisation rate in India was just above 30%, with cities like New Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad, and Kolkata having an urban population of more than 10 million. Also, the exact data for European Union in 2011 was 74%. European urbanisation can be widely credited to the Industrial Revolution and colossal capital inflow from the colonial nations. The British urbanisation rate increased from 17% to 54% in the 19th century only. However, urbanisation in India can not be credited to any single phenomenon.

#### Regional and Temporal Trends of Urbanisation and Migration in India:

The Census Authority of India identifies urban areas in the country based on either of the following two criteria:

1. All the settlements having any form of local government are called **statutory towns**.
2. Apart from the statutory towns, the Census Authority of India declares some areas as census towns if they satisfy the following three criteria simultaneously:
  - a. **Size criterion:** The population of the area must be at least 5000.
  - b. **Density criterion:** The population density in the area should be at least 1000 persons per sq. kilometre.
  - c. **Occupation criterion:** At least 75 per cent of the male workforce should be engaged in non-agricultural activities.

Also, there are four main components of urban growth, namely:

1. Natural increase.
2. Net migration to urban areas.
3. Reclassification of settlements as towns or declassification resulted from changes like economic activities and the acquisition of urban characteristics.
4. By the extension of cities' and towns' boundaries

India's urbanisation increased from 11% in 1911 to 30% in 2011. Compared to other developing countries, it is a slow rate but accelerating as per the last census. For the first time after independence, the rate of urban population increase has become more significant than that of the rural population. India has enormous diversity in terms of landforms, natural resources, climate, vegetation, historical background etc., which leads to the formation of various attractive urbanisation and migration trends that differ from region to region, and this section tries to mark some broad patterns in these trends and to find some reasons behind them:

**Table 1: Level of Urbanisation and District-level Variation:**

Sl. No.	State	Level of Urbanisation	No. of Districts	Large States (2011)		Districts with LOU			
				Mean	Standard Deviation	<10%	10-20%	20-30%	>30%
1	Jammu & Kashmir	27.38	22	19.55	20.11	7	11	1	3
2	Himachal Pradesh	10.03	12	8.64	6.86	9	2	1	0
3	Punjab	37.48	20	33.44	12.84	1	8	7	4
4	Haryana	34.87	21	33.61	17.04	0	4	7	10
5	Uttaranchal	30.23	13	20.29	15.43	1	6	0	4
6	Rajasthan	24.87	33	21.87	11.66	5	12	11	5
7	Uttar Pradesh	22.26	71	20.52	15.07	19	24	15	13
8	Bihar	11.29	38	10.59	7.56	26	10	1	1
9	Assam	14.09	27	13.85	14.55	15	9	2	1
10	West Bengal	31.87	19	28.78	23.03	1	9	3	6
11	Orissa	16.69	30	14.84	10.04	13	11	3	3
12	Jharkhand	24.05	24	19.00	17.94	11	7	1	5
13	Chhattishgarh	23.24	18	23.03	19.04	1	12	2	4
14	Madhya Pradesh	27.63	50	24.14	15.19	4	21	18	7
15	Gujarat	42.60	26	32.88	19.87	2	5	5	14
16	Maharashtra	45.22	35	33.42	22.41	0	12	7	16
17	Andhra Pradesh	33.36	23	31.72	18.96	0	4	13	6
18	Karnataka	38.67	30	29.84	14.94	0	6	13	11
19	Kerala	47.70	14	41.11	23.33	2	1	2	9
20	Tamilnadu	48.40	32	43.18	31.37	0	5	4	23

Source: Calculated from Census 2011 (Primary Census Abstract) Electronic version

**Table 2: Level of Urbanisation and District-level Variation:**

Sl. No.	State	Level of Urbanisation	Small States and UTs (2011)						
			No. of Districts	Mean	Standard Deviation	<10%	10-20%	20-30%	>30%
1	Chandigarh	97.25	1						
2	Delhi	97.50	9	98.22	2.51	0	0	0	9
3	Sikkim	25.15	4	18.02	15.02	1	2	0	1
4	Arunachal Pradesh	22.94	16	20.72	11.63	2	6	7	1
5	Tripura	26.14	4	20.34	12.91	0	3	0	1
6	Meghalaya	20.17	7	25.11	19.6	2	3	0	4
7	Mizoram	52.11	8	43.03	20.00	0	2	0	6
8	Manipur	32.45	9	25.11	19.60	2	3	0	4
9	Nagaland	28.86	11	20.72	11.63	0	6	3	2
10	Pondicherry	68.33	4	79.54	25.03	0	0	0	4
11	Goa	62.17	2	62.43	3.95	0	0	0	2
12	Daman & Diu	75.17	2	64.58	26.18	0	0	0	2
13	Dadra & Nagar Haveli	46.72	1						
14	Lakshadweep	78.13	1						
15	Andaman & Nicobar	37.70	3	20.57	33.40	2	0	0	1

Source: Calculated from Census 2011 (Primary Census Abstract) Electronic version

- From the tables above, the Indian states had very different experiences regarding urbanisation, with Goa having 62% of its population living in urban settings on one side of the spectrum and Himachal Pradesh having only 10% on the other.
- In general, eastern states like Bihar and Orissa (not West Bengal), North-Eastern states like Tripura, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, and Assam (not Mizoram), and hilly states like Himachal Pradesh have a lower level of urbanisation.
- All southern states have a high level of urbanisation, with Andhra Pradesh (before division) (which, by the way, has 33.36% of urbanisation) having the least of the bunch.
- Northern and western states have a moderate degree of urbanisation, with Maharashtra having the largest (at 45.22%) among the group and Uttar Pradesh (at 22.26%) having the least.
- But one exciting trend to mention is that even within the states, the level of urbanisation is not uniform, and it varies from district to district. It is apparent that the average urbanisation level in many districts is lower than the state level. The respective figures for standard deviation are also relatively high.
- This overall trend of heterogeneity of the urban structure becomes more prominent if we consider the share of the urban population by the states. For example, Uttar Pradesh, which has a much lower level of urbanisation, is second in population share.
- One key aspect of India that sets it apart from other urbanised countries is that many people live in large cities here compared to other countries. This characteristic is referred to as 'top-heaviness', and it best reflects in the fact that even though the degree of urbanisation in India (i.e., 30% as of 2011) is way less than the degree of urbanisation in the world (51%, as per 2011), 6 of the 34 Megacities (i.e., cities with a population of more than 10 million people) of the world are in India.
- We can further drive this point home by considering the following two tables:

**Table 4: Percentage Share of Population and Number of  
Towns across City-size (1901-2011)**

Census Year	Percentage Share of Population across size-classes of urban areas						Percentage Distribution of Number of Towns across size-classes					
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	I	II	III	IV	V	VI
1901	21.68	11.47	16.92	22.76	20.75	6.42	1.25	2.30	7.47	22.30	40.26	26.27
1911	23.38	9.63	18.92	20.97	20.21	6.88	1.34	2.04	8.42	20.82	39.91	27.31
1921	24.17	11.34	18.26	19.40	19.42	7.41	1.39	2.43	8.47	19.57	38.01	29.98
1931	24.12	12.54	19.83	19.75	18.12	5.65	1.37	2.70	9.92	21.80	38.67	25.41
1941	31.64	12.97	18.41	17.54	15.99	3.45	2.01	3.64	11.41	23.04	40.80	18.98
1951	37.88	12.18	17.93	15.05	13.65	3.30	2.47	3.62	12.32	22.14	39.14	20.30
1961	44.34	12.16	20.08	14.35	8.05	1.03	3.95	5.23	19.46	30.71	31.69	8.96
1971	48.78	13.59	18.35	12.87	5.62	0.79	4.84	7.11	21.06	31.97	26.06	8.96
1981	52.57	14.09	17.08	11.24	4.34	0.68	5.76	8.35	22.56	31.87	23.13	8.33
1991	56.68	13.33	16.35	9.77	3.43	0.45	6.98	9.12	25.16	31.44	21.04	6.26
2001	62.29	12.04	14.72	7.90	2.76	0.29	8.54	9.61	26.87	30.30	20.19	4.48

Now comparing the percentage share of the population across size classes of urban areas and the percentage distribution of the number of towns across size classes, we can see that having a more significant number of towns does not necessarily correspond to having a more significant number of people in them and that increasing the number of urban settlements might not be the best way to go about increasing the rate of urbanisation as for Class III and IV towns, their share in the number increased.

However, their share in the population decreased, and thus, by contemplating all this data, one can say that large cities are growing at the cost of small ones. But one should also observe that in the decade of 2001-2011, the increase in the percentage distribution of towns is followed by an increase in the percentage share of the population (in classes V and VI) and vice-versa (in class I and II) if this trend goes on to continue India can get rid of its "Top-Heaviness" which could reduce the pressure of resources that some of its major cities are experiencing.

Now, let us try to explain these variations in urbanisation trends in India in the light of the following events and phenomena:

#### 1. Colonial History

The colonial regime could attribute to some of the significant urbanisation trends we observe in modern India. Uneven urbanisation of significant metropolises like Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, and Kolkata compared to other regions was the direct result of deliberate British policies like making these cities the epicentre of the railway and other transportation networks and allowing small-scale industries to settle in these regions. It attracted a sizeable migrant population due to the economic incentives in the form of these cities' job opportunities. Other places that got urbanised in the colonial era were the regions of direct British interests like mineral-rich areas, hill areas for plantation, areas with significant ports near them, etc. Whereas the other places in the country, where the colonial power did not directly interest, the urbanisation and increase in urban centres were entirely compatible with their economic system.

2. Geography:

The geography that offers comfortable living conditions is a significant feature of large human settlements like cities, towns etc. It is the same reason why regions that have rugged terrain, harsh climate, and complex transportation routes like the northern and north-eastern hills of Himachal Pradesh (only 10% of the population is urban), Meghalaya (20.17%), Arunachal Pradesh (22.94%) etc., deserts of the west in Rajasthan (24.87%), and hilly barren hills of Deccan are sparsely populated. Thus, less urbanised regions with fertile soil and pleasant climates, like eastern and western ghats and Gangetic plains, are highly populated and urbanised to a greater extent.

3. Modes of Production and its changes:

India has been described as a rural country because most of its population and resources are in agriculture. But even in agriculture, two tenure systems were prominent in India. The first one was the Zamindari system in eastern parts of the country, which implied land being concentrated with a few people, who migrated to cities and reinvested their surplus there only, instead of rural areas from where it was accumulated in the first place, this leads to the formation of an urbanisation pattern with a high degree of importance in it and is apparent by the low level of urbanisation in the states like Bihar (11.29%), Assam (14.09%), Orissa (16.69%) etc., which lie in these regions and the second one was ryotwari system of tenure which was introduced in states of southern India. This system had a more equitable distribution of land and other resources, which led to more diffused urbanisation, and is apparent in a high level of urbanisation in the states like Tamil Nadu (48.40%), Kerala (47.70%) etc.

4. Agrarian Economic Policies of the country:

After independence, India tried to change the agricultural nature of its economy by pushing for industrial growth, which led to implementing planned development policies. And one of how they manifested themselves was by creating new towns and urban centres near mineral-rich areas to accommodate heavy industries, capital towns and other government activities. However, most of these towns had a low spread effect, and they did not impact the urbanisation process of the surrounding regions, as shown by a low level of urbanisation in mineral-rich areas like Jharkhand (24.05%) and Chhattisgarh (23.24%). On the other hand, the green revolution around the same era led to more diffused urbanisation in the north-western states, which is apparent from their urbanisation level, with Punjab having 37.48% and Haryana 34.87% of their population in urban centres.

5. The 1991 Liberalisation of the Economy:

India privatised its economy in 1991, intending to increase industrial output and displace the population from the primary sector to the secondary sector. As three decades have passed by since then, one can see that the population from the primary sector has got displaced not to the secondary (industrial) sector but to the tertiary (service) sector (which has seen massive growth in these last three decades both in terms of the population involved and in GDP output). It remains the current trend all over India, with the population percentage in the primary sector decreasing, seeing slow growth in the industrial sector and increasing rapidly in the tertiary sector. With this transformation going on, India is bound to get urbanised at a growing pace because of the apparent connection between the tertiary sector and urban centres

### Social, Political, Cultural and Economic Effects of Urbanisation and Migration:

Like any other complex socio-economic phenomenon, urbanisation and migration also came with various social, economic, political, and cultural effects in India. Urbanisation, as discussed above, did not spread evenly throughout India. Thus, it had different effects in different regions (i.e., the urbanisation experience for a migrant in Mumbai was very different from that of a migrant in Kerala). These effects negatively impacted the lives of the cities and migrants, which this section entails.

Urbanisation brought many problems such as overpopulation, a shortage of houses, critical inadequacies in public utilities viz, power, water, health facilities, sanitation etc. (for example, water scarcity in Chennai), Deteriorating urban environment (for example, high levels of pollution in Delhi), urban unemployment, congestion, acute poverty and slum's proliferation with itself to the cities. Some alarming facts about these lights:

- According to Tenth Five-Year Plan, the nation needed twenty-two million additional houses.
- According to the Urbanization Report of the World Bank, only fifty-eight per cent of India's urban population has access to improved sanitation facilities.
- It found that around one out of every six households in urban India (17.4%) is in a slum and that well over one-third of all slum households in the country (38%) are in cities with a population of over a million.
- Environmental degradation due to cities' overpopulation also makes people more vulnerable to infectious diseases and congestion.

Rapid urbanisations in some cities have spurred the debate of "Do natives have the first right over the resources of that region, and should the law protect it against the coming influx of migrants". One specific example is ShivSena (a major political party in Maharashtra) getting prominence in the state by bringing up the issue of the first right of Marathis on the state's resources.

Migrants in India are attracted mainly by the higher income incentives, which better employment opportunities of the cities bring with them. However, when migrants walk this road to urbanisation, they realise that this city of opportunities often entails a jungle of failures like unemployment. The informal sector mostly entertains them to meet the industries' labour demands. But the oppression that comes with the informal sector's lack of labour rights and proper working conditions has a concerning impact on the lives of migrants, the migrants often face discrimination in the cities, and many times these daily wage earners end up living a life of poverty as data shows vast differences between the average income of a migrant and that of the average citizen of the city. The most considerable evidence is that the world's largest slum is in our country's financial capital, i.e. Dharavi.

Even many well-to-do migrants face discrimination. One such example is discrimination faced by Tamilians and south Indians in Mumbai, the main reason for which is the narrative propagated by regional parties of "them" stealing the jobs of an average Marathi. However, in Delhi, where the number of migrants from UP and Bihar is high, political parties often try to woo them for their vote bank. Life in urban areas is ruthless for the daily wage earners. That millions of migrants were forced to return to their homes during the Covid-19 outbreak in India when the industries were forced to shut down.

A large proportion of the migrants end up in slums, which sometimes entails the people's most brutal and inhuman living conditions, with most people living in squatter settlements. People in slums live a life of multiple deprivations. Overpopulation, poverty, discrimination and oppression lead to social evils such as

violence, drug abuse and increased crime rate. Some other facts state that the number of murders, rapes, kidnappings, thefts, robberies and riots in the cities is much larger than in rural areas in India.

Major metropolitans have become a melting pot of many diverse cultures and traditions. It might be common now for a Mumbaikar or a Haryanvi to witness the procession of Chath Puja. Still, this influx of different cultures sets in the debate of protecting the original culture of the land, which sometimes ends up being another reason for a migrant to face discrimination.

That's why many consider urbanisation a result of development failure and uneven urbanisation as a product of globalisation and the increasing inequalities in the global economy in the secondary and tertiary sectors. But with all these harms, urbanisation and migration are still very live and kicking phenomena, so instead of discouraging them, we should try to understand these shortcomings and overcome them by placing policies to deal with them in a positive light.

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