

URBANISATION: MAKING INDIA'S CITIES WORK FOR ITS CITIZENS

Kamal Das Manikpuri and Dr. Bhuvnesh Kumari

¹Research Scholar, Department of Geography, SunRise University, Alwar, Rajasthan (India)²Professor, Department of Geography, SunRise University, Alwar, Rajasthan (India)

Abstract: India's cities shape how millions of people live, work, travel, and earn their livelihoods every day. They are engines of growth, magnets for talent, and crucibles of innovation. At the same time, they are sites of daily strain: long commutes, uneven services, and shared spaces that often fall short of collective expectations. This chapter argues that India's urban story is therefore neither one of decline nor adequacy, but of unfinished promise. The central idea is simple: cities are not merely habitats; they are a form of critical economic infrastructure. Density and proximity power productivity, deepen labour markets, and enable learning. Yet the same forces that create dynamism also generate congestion, environmental stress, and institutional complexity. India is already deeply urban in economic terms, with the majority of its national output generated in cities and in urban areas. The task now is to make that urbanisation work better for citizens in tangible and intangible ways.

[Manikpuri, K.D. and Kumari, B. **URBANISATION: MAKING INDIA'S CITIES WORK FOR ITS CITIZENS**. *The International Journal of Interpretation, Observation and Analysis*, 2023; Volume 2, Issue 1:35-37 (April-June). ISSN 2349-0713, Peer-reviewed (online/offline), Refereed, Indexed and International Journal (Since 2013), Global Impact Factor: 5.776

Keywords: URBANISATION, INDIA'S CITIES WORK, CITIZENS

Introduction:

Many urban pressures stem from persistent supply-side constraints in land, housing and mobility. Restricted density, unclear titles and limited land recycling constrain affordable housing, while transport systems remain overly reliant on private vehicles. Core services such as sanitation, waste, and water services have expanded markedly but must now evolve from expansion to reliability, circularity and efficiency. However, beneath these sectoral stresses lies a deeper institutional issue: fragmented metropolitan governance and limited fiscal autonomy for cities – to plan, finance and deliver at scale. Beyond infrastructure, there is a need to improve the intangible foundations of urban life, such as civic norms, shared responsibility, and respect for public spaces. As Elinor Ostrom's work on the commons reminds us, shared spaces and services depend as much on norms, trust, and collective behaviour as on formal rules. Similarly, Indian economic thought echoes this insight: D. R. Gadgil argued that development outcomes are ultimately shaped by institutions and social organisation, not investment alone. The quality of urban experience depends as much on collective behaviour as on budgets and bridges. Strengthening civic consciousness, alongside better institutions, is essential to creating cities that feel not only efficient but also welcoming.

Trends in India's urbanisation

The Census of India requires settlements to be marked by three conditions to be classified as urban:

(a) The settlement population must be greater than 5,000; (b) 75 per cent of male employment should be non-agricultural; (c) Minimum population density of 400 persons/square kilometre. The definition also adds those towns that have been administratively classified as statutory towns³. India's urbanisation pattern is strongly shaped by its largest cities. Over 70 per cent of the urban population resided in Class I cities (those with more than one lakh people) in 2011, and the country's 52 metropolitan cities (more than 10 lakh population) alone accounted for 42.3 per cent of all urban residents. Higher population growth rates in these large agglomerations have driven rapid metropolitan expansion, highlighting India's distinctly top-heavy urban system⁴

The images above illustrate the changes in NTL across eight major urban centres between 2012 and 2023. Red shading indicates major urban zones, commercial districts, and densely populated regions with considerable artificial lighting. Pale yellow marks semi-urban or peri-urban areas, while grey indicates small villages and less-populated suburban zones. Black areas represent rural regions with minimal artificial lighting. It is observed that older cities, such as Mumbai and Bangalore, exhibit smaller increases in highly dense regions but have expanded notably into semi-urban or peri-urban zones. Cities such as Pune and Hyderabad have experienced substantial growth in their densely populated areas, while also undergoing significant expansion into peri-urban regions. These

observations are substantiated by the results of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) analysis on the dynamics of periphery-core growth. The periphery-to-core growth ratios provide deeper insights into how spatial expansion is distributed within metropolitan regions. In 16 cities⁷, the ratio exceeds one, indicating that peripheral areas have consistently grown faster than the urban core between 2000 and 2020. This confirms that India's metropolitan expansion is overwhelmingly outward, with new growth increasingly concentrated in urban fringes beyond municipal boundaries. Debroy & Misra (2024)⁸ confirm this using novel high-frequency data. They find that across Mumbai, Chennai, Delhi, and Kolkata, urban growth is closely aligned with transport corridors and is accompanied by rapid conversion of agricultural land to non-agricultural uses. These patterns highlight the growing importance of suburban regions in shaping urban labour markets, housing demand, and infrastructure needs.

The aim of this section is to critically examine the growth trends in the urbanization pattern of India over the last five decades. The population totals from 1961 to 1981 reveal a significant acceleration in the urban growth of the country. However, this rate declined slightly after 1990, and between 2001 to 2011 the growth rate of the urban population again increased. In absolute numbers, the urban population of India has increased almost fivefold in the past five decades. Presently, about 32% of the total percentage of population is classified as "urban" in India. This rate is much lower than in other major developing countries; for example, rates are 45% in China and 87% in Brazil (Ministry of Urban Development, 2011). Even though the level of urbanization is comparatively slow, India is still considered as having an "urban avalanche" with the shift of urbanization being most pronounced in developing countries (Kundu, 2014; Mathur, 1984; Planning Commission, 1983). A major problem in interpreting the urban data in India is the definition anomalies of the "urban area." The Census of India defines an urban area as "places which meet the following criteria; a minimum population of 5,000; at least 75 percent of male working population is engaged in non-agricultural activities; a population density of at least 400 persons per square kilometer." The arbitrariness of this definition arises in terms of administrative notions in two main ways. First, large towns and cities extend their boundaries to include villages. Second, with the increase in population large villages grow and acquire the status to town.

This generic problem of defining an urban area has impacted the spatial distribution of population across the size classes of cities and towns in India.

Urbanization Policy in India

The national economic development of India started with the establishment of a Planning Commission in 1951. The successive plans focused on massive investments on core sectors like industry, agriculture, power, and irrigation but the issues of urbanization were largely ignored. During the first three phases of planning (1951–1966) there was a lack of vision for urban processes. The focus was on housing and land development, preparation of master plans, development of new towns and cities, and new industrial policy (formulated in 1956) and not necessarily the strengthening of more integrated rural-urban linkages. Therefore, the problem of spatial imbalances subsequently became visible. The new industrial policy led to the rapid growth of large metropolitan cities. The development of large cities incurred higher costs of urban infrastructure and industrial development. Due to higher levels of employment in industries, in-migration to urban areas increased the growth of slums and put increased pressure on basic services. On the other hand, small and medium towns received little attention or investments. In order to release the employment pressure on large cities, the industrial policy of 1956 then shifted to the development of lower order towns by promoting smallscale and agro-based industries. Small and medium towns began to see the relationship between dispersed urbanization and rural development. Hence, these towns increasingly became growth foci, generally acting as market centers through various functions like marketing of the agricultural produce, distribution of consumer goods, and other services (Nath, 1986). Basically, the third five-year plan focused on "balanced urban and regional development" through the development of small and medium towns. However, this goal was not achieved due to a wider range and higher quality of infrastructure, greater growth potential, and more investments in large cities. The multi-service role of small and medium towns was not recognized, and the little attention given was generally focused on the importance of agriculture, which led to their stagnation. Hence, effective planned development of urban and rural areas was not achieved due to this fragmented approach (Gnaneshwar, 1995). Post-1970s urban development and policy formation gained attention in India. The first National Urbanization Policy was formulated in 1975. This policy focused on balanced development of

settlements ensuring functional linkages, optimum utilization of resources, distribution of economic activities, and the maintenance of a minimum level of basic services. In the sixth plan (1980-1985), the scheme for the integrated development of small and medium towns was formulated (IDSMT). The components of the scheme included land acquisition and services, construction of new markets, provision of industrial estates, provision of other services, and processing facilities for the benefit of agricultural and rural development in the hinterland, and low-cost sanitation (Various plan documents, Planning Commission of India, 1983). The IDSMT scheme continued until the eighth plan (1992-1997) when it was dismantled, a topic that will be further discussed in subsequent paragraphs of this section. The constitution of National Commission on Urbanization (NCU) in the year 1985 was an important step towards urban policy formulation in India. This commission identified 329 cities called GEMs (Generator of Economic Momentum) which were further divided into NPCs (National Priority Centers), SPC (State Priority Centers), and 49 Spatial Priority Urban Regions (SPURs). It was expected that the future growth in urbanization would take place in these centers and adjacent areas (Batra, 2012). However, the Commission failed to order its priorities and did not advocate proper solutions. Moreover, the Commission excluded any analytical assessment of the processes of urban growth or forces behind this growth. They did not analyze the impact of urban policies or assess the adequacy of investments made in basic services such as water supply, electricity, transport, and other necessities (Kundu, 1989; Mehta & Mehta, 1989).

Urban Development and Mobilisation

A review of the literature was done to look at how urban mobilization affects urban development. To identify the gaps or deficiencies, a thorough evaluation of the literature has been conducted using content analysis of secondary data sources, including research papers, articles, reports, and databases pertaining to urban development and urban mobilization in the context of Pune city. A few reports from commissions or government agencies are also available, and these aid in understanding the field of study. This review of the literature is helpful in determining the elements that contribute to urban growth and are associated with urban mobilization. Urban mobilization in the context of Jabalpur city has gained significant attention in the field of urban studies, as the city faces rapid growth, urbanization challenges, and evolving infrastructure needs. A

comprehensive review of existing literature reveals insights into how urban mobilization has influenced Pune's urban development across various dimensions, such as infrastructure, transport, social inclusion, and sustainability. Below is a detailed literature review based on various studies, theoretical perspectives, and case studies related to urban mobilization in Pune.

References

- Batra, L. (2012). A Review of Urbanization and Urban Policy in Post – Independent India, Working paper (CSLG/WP/12), Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.
- Becker, C. M., Williamson, Jeffery, G. & Mills, Edwin, S. (1992). Indian Urbanization and Economic Growth since 1960. Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press.
- Chakravarty, Sanjoy (2012). Regional Development in India: Paradigms Lost in a Period of Great Change. *Eurasian Geography and Economic* 53 (1). 21- 43.
- Census of India. (2011). A - 4 Towns and Urban Agglomerations Classified by Population Size Class in 2011 with Variation Since 1901. Retrieved from <http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011census/PCA/A4.html> Purva Sharma 89
- Colmer, J. (2015). Urbanization Growth and Development: Evidence from India. London, England: London School of Economics.
- Gilbert, A. (1993). Third World Cities: The Changing National Urban Settlement System. *Urban Studies* 30 (4-5). 721-740.
- Gnaneshwar, V. (1995). Urban Policies in India – Paradoxes and Predicaments. *Habitat International* 19. 293-316.
- Gore, Christopher, D. & Gopakumar, Govind. (2014). Infrastructure and Metropolitan Reorganization: An Exploration of the Relationship in Africa and India. *Journal of Urban Affairs* 37(5). 548-567.
- Haque, I., & Patel, P. (2017). Growth of Metro Cities in India: Trends, Patterns & Determinants. *Urban Research & Practice* 11(4). 1-40.
- Imbert, C., & Papp, J. (2014). Short-Term Migration, Rural Workforce Programs and Urban Labour Markets: Evidence from India. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- India Infrastructure Report. (2006). Report on Urban Infrastructure Oxford University Press. New Delhi.
- Kamath, Lalitha, & Zacharia, Yacoub. (2015). Impact of JNNURM/UIDSSMT/IHSDP Programs on Infrastructure and Governance Outcomes in Cities / Towns in India (Paper no. 7