The Provisional Population Totals of the 1931 Census reveal a marked acceleration in the pace of urbanisation in India during the decade 1921-1931. This paper seeks to place this development in its proper perspective, both in relation to past trends in India as well as in relation to the urbanisation experience of other developing countries. Further understanding of the emerging pattern of urbanisation is sought by the disaggregation of trends up to the state and sub-regional level.

It is evident that there has been a marked acceleration in the rate of urban growth in India according to all conventional measurements but that it is still slow as compared with the rest of the world. It is striking that India exhibits a very stable settlement structure such that much of the urban growth that has occurred has been because of the accretion to existing towns and settlements and only marginally because of the emergence of new towns. As a result, the proportion of urban population residing in towns above a certain population cut-off point continues to increase, but there is little evidence of correlation between city size and rates of population growth.

Examination of regional and state level data are quite illuminating. The relatively poorer states have urbanised faster than the old industrially advanced states like West Bengal, Tamilnadu and Maharashtra. There are diversities within the large poor states such as UP, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh. The sub-regions with heavy industrial investments such as southern Bihar and eastern Madhya Pradesh show very high urban growth rates and correspondingly low rural growth rates. Agriculturally stagnating regions like eastern UP and northern Bihar in the Northern Gangetic Plain also show high rates of urban growth but along with relatively high rural growth rates as well Agriculturally prosperous regions like Punjab, Haryana and Western UP exhibit marked declines in rural population growth rates along with an acceleration in urban growth. Hence the phenomenon of overall acceleration in urban growth in India has rather diverse causes which have to be understood at the regional level.

This paper is published in two parts. The first part, published below, examines the urbanisation record in India since 1901 and the pattern of growth of towns and cities. The second part of the paper, which will appear next week, will analyse the regional pattern of urban growth and also attempt an interpretation of urbanisation in India.

Morphology of Urbanisation in India

Some Results from 1981 Census

Rakesh Mohan

Chandrashekhar Pant

Problems of Interpretation

The Provisional population totals of the 1981 census reveal a significant acceleration in the speed of urbanisation in the country. This is true whether comparison is made with the historical record since the beginning of this century, or with what was expected as recently as in 1979. The Sixth Five Year Plan projected the level of urban population to be about 148 million in 1981 and the level of urbanisation to be 22.04 per cent. In fact, the 1981 census shows that the level is about 156 million (but this number excludes Jammu and Kashmir and Assam not enumerated at the time of publication of the census results). This paper attempts to map out the components of this unexpected urban growth. Has it occurred in certain regions more than in others? Has it occurred in large cities more than in smaller towns? Is it merely because of classification differences? Once the morphology of the growth that has occurred is clear, better attempts may be made at understanding the causes of the emerging pattern.

Table 1 gives the record since 1901. The facts are essentially familiar. India has had a relatively slow but stable rate of growth in its urban population since about 1921, during which the level of urbanisation has slowly increased from about 11.3 per cent of total population to about 23.7 per cent now. During the same time, however, because of overall increases in population, the population residing in urban areas has increased almost six-fold in absolute numbers. In the last decade, in particular, the increase has been particularly large: of about 50 million people. The increase itself is larger than the total urban population of most countries and the total urban population of India in 1981 is larger than the urban population of all countries except China, the USSR and the USA. Indeed, by 1985, India's urban population is likely to surpass those of both the US and the USSR (each about 170 million people). Hence, even though India's level of urbanisation continues to be low and its rate of growth is also not high by contemporary world standards, it is important to understand the phenomenon of urbanisation in India.

One of the problems in the interpretation of data related to urbanisation is that the growth of the urban population, as revealed in any census, has three distinct components. First, is the natural growth of population...
already residing in urban areas. Second, is the net rural-urban in-
migration that takes place. Third, is
the reclassification as ‘urban areas’
of settlements hitherto classified as
‘rural areas’. This happens in two
ways. Large towns and cities extend
their boundaries to include villages.
Secondly, with population increases,
as large villages grow and acquire
‘urban characteristics’, they get re­
classified as towns. It is important to
disaggregate these three components
in order to understand the process
underlying urbanisation, ie, the rises
in the proportion of population classi-
fied as ‘urban’. The Indian census
now has a relatively strict definition
of places classified as urban areas.

The key ideas underlying the con­cept ‘urban’ are: (i) high density of
population and (ii) dominance of non-
agricultural pursuits. The census com­
bines these two ideas, and settlements
are classified as urban areas if either;

(a) they have a municipality, cor­
poration, cantonment board,
nominated town area committee, etc.

or

(b) they have (i) a minimum popu­
lation of 5.000 and (ii) a den­
sity of at least 400 people per
sq km and (Hi) at least 75 per
cent of their male labour force
in non-agriculture.

The arbitrariness arises as a result
of definition (a) since that is subject
to administrative as well as political
vagaries. Definition problems1 only
arise at the margin, but it is impor­
tant to keep them in mind in the
interpretation of data — especially at
the regional level.

Urbanisation can be measured in a
number of different ways. The first is
to examine the changes in the level
of urbanisation — ie, changes in the

---

**Table 1: Growth of Urban Population in India 1901-1981**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census Year</th>
<th>Number of Towns</th>
<th>Total Urban Population (in mn)</th>
<th>Population in Towns above 20,000 (in mn)</th>
<th>Level of Urbanisation</th>
<th>Annual Growth Rate of Total Urban Population (per cent per year)</th>
<th>Annual Growth Rate of Rural Population (per cent per year)</th>
<th>URGD4 (Col 6 - Col 7)</th>
<th>Annual Growth Rate of Population in Towns above 20,000 (per cent per year)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>1834</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>1776</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>1920</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>2049</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>2.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>2210</td>
<td>43.6</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>2844</td>
<td>61.6</td>
<td>43.2</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>4.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>2330</td>
<td>77.6</td>
<td>61.4</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>3.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>2531</td>
<td>107.0</td>
<td>89.6</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>3.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>3245</td>
<td>156.2</td>
<td>134.9</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Census of India 1981-Provisional Population Total Series I-Paper 2 of 1981.

**Notes:**
1 Excluding Assam and Jammu & Kashmir.
2 Constituent towns of urban agglomerations are not counted as separate units.
3 Proportion of urban to total population.
4 Urban-Rural Growth Differential.

---

**Table 2: Distribution and Growth of Urban Population by Size Classes in India**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Town Classification</th>
<th>Per Cent Population in Size Class (\times 1961)</th>
<th>Per Cent Population in Size Class (\times 1971)</th>
<th>Per Cent Population in Size Class (\times 1981)</th>
<th>Growth Rate in 1961-71</th>
<th>Per Cent Per Year</th>
<th>Growth Rate in 1971-81</th>
<th>Per Cent Per Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class I</td>
<td>50.8</td>
<td>56.2</td>
<td>60.4</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>4.60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class II</td>
<td>(102)</td>
<td>(145)</td>
<td>(216)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(50,000 to 100,000)</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class III</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(20,000 to 50,000)</td>
<td>(649)</td>
<td>(570)</td>
<td>(739)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class IV</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(10,000 to 20,000)</td>
<td>(732)</td>
<td>(732)</td>
<td>(1048)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class V</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>-1.09</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5,000 to 10,000)</td>
<td>(739)</td>
<td>(641)</td>
<td>(742)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class VI</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>-2.18</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Less than 5,000)</td>
<td>(179)</td>
<td>(150)</td>
<td>(230)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Urban Population (in million)</td>
<td>77.6</td>
<td>107.0</td>
<td>156.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:**
1 Excluding Assam and Jammu & Kashmir.
2 Constituent towns of urban agglomerations are not counted as separate units.
3 Figures in brackets are the number of towns in each size class.

**Source:** Census of India 1981, Provisional Population Totals.
Series I-Paper 2 of 1981.
proportion of population living in urban areas. A second measure is the 'urban-rural growth differential' (URGD). This is merely the difference between the rates of annual population growth between urban and rural areas. Since urban and rural natural population growth rates are not very different now, this measure gives a good sense of the magnitude of the rural-urban transformation that is taking place. A third measure of urbanisation is the share of net migration in the total growth in urban population. This, of course, is a direct measure of the transfer of population from rural to urban areas. The fourth measure is the growth or urban population itself. This paper utilises the first, second and fourth measures to illuminate the process of urbanisation that is taking place. The third measure could not be computed because those data are not yet available for 1981.

A problem generic in any interpretation of urbanisation trends is that growth rates of urban population are usually computed between two quantities that have somewhat different bases. To illustrate: the urban population of India in 1971 resided in 2,531 towns (see Table 1) while in 1981 it resided in 3,245 towns. Thus the base for 1981 is different from that in 1971. Similarly, when the growth of big cities is computed, it often includes the addition due to extension of boundaries. In this paper, we attempt to distinguish increases in urban population as a result of population increases in already existing towns and that which result from additions of new towns or extensions of boundaries. This is done by computing growth rates excluding towns newly classified as such. Similarly, in computing growth rates of cities, city size is kept constant — either within the earlier boundaries or within the new boundaries. This information is not available yet for 1981, so only some approximations can be made.

It must be recognised that, despite the recent acceleration in the rate of growth of urbanisation in India, it is still one of the slower in the world. Of 124 countries tabulated, the level of urbanisation (23.7 per cent) in India in 1981 is 91st in rank — ie, only 33 countries have levels of urbanisation lower than ours. Of these, 27 are countries in the low income group with per capita incomes less than about $400. The urban-rural growth differential in India for 1OT1-81 was about 2.1 per cent, which places India at about the 97th rank in 124 countries. In terms of the rate of growth of urban population, India is placed about 70 to 75th in rank. Of the 50 odd countries which have lower rates of urban population growth, about 30 are developed industrialised countries, where the levels of urbanisation are so high and fertility so low that urban and total population growth rates are both very low. Another 15 are what might be termed 'high-middle-income' countries with annual per capita income higher than $1,500. India is one of the 5-10 slowest urbanising countries.

A glance at the different indices given in Table 1 indicates that the pace of urbanisation accelerated regularly from the turn of the century until about 1951. It then decreased in the 1951 to 1961 decade. The latest census shows an acceleration once again. Although the picture revealed by the different measures is broadly similar, there are some differences between the measures that are worthy of note. Because of the large variation in the rate of growth of the rural population between the decades, the URGD measure (column 8) also shows large variations between decades. According to this measure, the pace of urbanisation was higher in the 1941 to 1951 decade than in all the others. The acceleration in urbanisation that has occurred in the past decade is also brought out much more sharply by this measure: 2.11 for 1971-81, as compared with 1.29 in 1961-71, and 0.46 in 1951-1961.

The slowing down of urbanisation during 1951-61 has sometimes been explained in terms of the declassification of about 800 towns in 1961 as a result of a stricter application of the criterion for urban places. Indeed, it is only since the 1961 census that the definition of urban areas has been systematised and made uniform across
all states. Moreover, as we have already mentioned, the classification itself has an element of arbitrariness and is subject to administrative and political pressures.

This problem would be particularly severe in the classification of towns in the lower end of the scale, since at his level the distinction between village and town would necessarily evolve judgment and discretion even in applying the more rigorous definition of urbanisation. Since the urban character of bigger towns is more easily recognisable, classification problems are not likely to be as important for them. We have, therefore, recomputed the rate of growth of urban population for a more restrictive definition of urban areas as towns over 20,000 population (that is Cass class II) in column 9 of Table 1. The picture is again broadly similar to that of the usual definition, except that the rates of change are somewhat higher. Two points stand out First, the deceleration in the pace of urbanisation takes place is largely by accretion to existing existing towns rather than by emergence of new towns. In reality, the increasing proportion of the urban population in larger cities is merely a result of progressive accretion to existing settlements of all sizes which are well spread out spatially. There is then less need for the emergence of entirely new settlements.

II
Pattern of Growth of Towns and Cities

SIZE DISTRIBUTION OF TOWNS AND CITIES

There is a widespread erroneous belief that large towns and cities have been growing much faster than smaller cities and towns in India and that the latter have suffered and even declined as a result. This is simply not true. What is true is, as mentioned above, that the proportion of total urban population which lives in cities and towns above any cut-off point continues to increase because of the relatively stable structure of the Indian settlements. Thus most of the urban growth takes place by accretion to existing towns and only a small

---

**Table 4: Pattern of Growth of Class I Cities, 1961-1981**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of Towns</td>
<td>Population (000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 million +1</td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>9,887</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-4 million</td>
<td>5&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>7,983</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/2-1 million</td>
<td>5&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>7,378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>250,000-500,000</td>
<td>5&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>7,157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100,000-25,000</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>10,772</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>39,636</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Bombay and Calcutta.

Delhi, Madras, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad, Bangalore.
Kanpur, Poona, Nagpur, Lucknow, Agra.
Delhi, Madras, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad, Bangalore, Kanpur, Poona.
Nagpur, Lucknow, Coimbatore, Madurai, Jalipur, Agra, Varanasi, Indore, Jabalpur, Allahabad.
Table 5: Frequency Distribution of Annual Growth Rates of Towns and Cities between 1971 and 1981

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Annual Rate of</th>
<th>Class I</th>
<th>Class II</th>
<th>Class III</th>
<th>Class IV</th>
<th>Class V</th>
<th>All Classes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Growth</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 to 2%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 to 3%</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 to 4%</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 to 5%</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 to 7%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7% and above</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of towns in size class</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>560</td>
<td>818</td>
<td>594</td>
<td>2295</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
1. Class according to 1971 census classification.
2. For details on towns omitted from the 1971 census list because of non-availability of data in 1981. The number of towns omitted by size class are: class I-3 cities, class II-3 cities, class III-22 towns, class IV-56 towns, class V-84 towns.
3. Constituent towns of urban agglomerations are not counted as separated units.

proportion by the reclassification of villages into towns in general, although there is naturally a great variety of growth experience between cities and regions. The belief about faster growth of larger cities persists, because tabulations are usually based not on individual cities but on size classes.

Table 2 is an example of the kind of table that is usually used to show that larger cities are growing faster than smaller towns. It may be observed that the number of cities in each size class changes between censuses. Naturally, in the highest size class (class I cities), no cities devolve out of it while many graduate into it. Hence an illusion is created that cities in the highest size class are growing very fast. Thus, in comparing growth rates of any size class of cities across decades we are in effect comparing non-comparable entities. For example, the growth rate computed for class I cities is between the population of 145 cities in 1971 and the population of 216 cities in 1981. It will then naturally be high. For each lower size classes it is true some towns graduate into them and some devolve out into the next higher class. But the new additions to the lower size classes are at the bottom of the population range, and hence add much less to the class than is lost by the graduation of towns to upper size classes. Over a long period of time, there is also the phenomenon that all the fast-growing towns continue to graduate into the higher Mze classes, while only the slow growing ones remain behind. Thus the use of such tables gives the illusion that larger towns and cities are growing much faster than the smaller ones.

Table 3 gives the tabulation that should be used in comparing the growth experience of different sized cities and towns. Table 3 takes towns according to their classification in 1971, and computes growth rates by comparing the total population of towns in each class in 1971, with the total population of the same towns in 1981, irrespective of their classification in the 1981 census. (All towns in Assam and Jammu and Kashmir have had to be excluded from these tabulations since they have not been reported yet.)

In the lower size classes, particularly classes IV and V, there are a number of towns that could not be traced in the 1981 census: 56 in class IV and 84 in class V. Of 56 in class IV, 27 were accounted for by Assam and Jammu and Kashmir and 7 in Kerala. There seems to have been a large-scale reclassification of towns in Kerala so that these missing towns are either reclassified or amalgamated into larger units. There are no details available on this at present. Since the total population of the missing class IV towns was about 3 per cent of the total tabulated and for class V about 7 per cent, their non-inclusion would not alter the results appreciably.

Table 3 gives the results for the 1971-81 experience and it is clear that the picture emerging is quite different from that in Table 2. While the class I cities have grown somewhat faster than the smaller towns, the differences are not very large in general. Moreover, class V towns show the highest rate of growth on average. Hence it is clear that no general statement can be made on the growth trends of different sized towns and cities. Similar results were found in an earlier study by M K Iain (1977), which showed that there was no appreciable difference between the growth rates of different size cities between 1951 and 1961 and between 1961 and 1971. There has, however, been an acceleration in the overall rate of growth of population in each size class between each census since 1951.

Since about 60 per cent of the total urban population now resides in class I cities, it is useful to disaggregate this class further. Table 4 gives the results for 1961-71 and 1971-81. Once again, there is no striking pattern of growth according to the disaggregated size classes. It cannot be said that the metropolitan cities (million-plus cities) have been growing much faster than the smaller cities, nor vice versa. Indeed, between 1971 and 1981, the fastest growth was recorded by the group of 33 cities in the 250,000 to 500,000 population range. It must be concluded that there are no statistically significant differences between the rates of growth between small and large towns and between small cities and metropolitan cities. Moreover, it is of interest that the share of million-plus cities in the total population of class I cities has not increased appreciably since 1951. The proportions have been

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Proportion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>42.7 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>45.3 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>45.6 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>44.6 per cent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is despite the fact that the number of million-plus cities has increased progressively from five in 1951 to 12 now. It is, therefore, incorrect to say that the Indian settlement structure is becoming top heavy; in particular that metropolitan cities are growing much faster than others. These results are not very different for the world as a whole. The share of million-plus cities in all cities over 100,000 population was about 51 per cent in 1975 (Renaud, 1979, p 28). The Indian settlement structure is, therefore, better distributed. Preston (1979) tabulated the growth pattern of all 100,000-plus cities for the world as a whole and classified by different regions in the world. The overall pattern observed was a U-shaped pattern, indicating that cities between 100,000 and 500,000 and those above 4 million grew fast, while those in between grew somewhat more slowly.
Table 6: Growth of Large Cities and Their Hinterland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Population (1000)</th>
<th>Annual Growth Rates (% Per Year)</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Hinterland</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cityb Hinterland</td>
<td>1951-61</td>
<td>1961-71</td>
<td>1971-81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calcutta</td>
<td>9165</td>
<td>1377</td>
<td>2.26</td>
<td>2.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bombay</td>
<td>8277</td>
<td>1273</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>3.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delhi</td>
<td>5713</td>
<td>2073</td>
<td>5.08</td>
<td>4.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madras</td>
<td>4276</td>
<td>972</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>5.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangalore</td>
<td>2913</td>
<td>1127</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>3.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyderabad</td>
<td>2528</td>
<td>642</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>3.71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: (1) The hinterland for each city is taken as all towns with 20,000 or more population in 1971 within roughly a 100 km radius of the city measure as straight line distance.


One more method of analysing the differential growth pattern of different sized cities is to observe the frequency distribution of towns and cities according to ranges of growth rate. Table 5 tabulates this frequency distribution. In may be noted that there is a higher proportion of class I cities in the higher growth ranges, but that the distributions of towns in the other size classes are remarkably similar to one another. Although the differences between the distributions of the growth rates of towns in classes II, III, IV and V are not statistically significant, there is a slight tendency for a larger proportion of small towns to be slow-growing. In fact, the variances of the Class IV and Class V towns are somewhat higher. Thus, although on average there are no significant differences between the growth of large towns and cities, the frequency distributions reveal a slight tendency for larger towns and cities to grow somewhat faster. This is consistent with the idea of a stable settlement structure suggested earlier. The towns which are now large (class I and class II) are essentially those which might be called 'success stories over the ages. It is those small towns which grew fast over sustained periods of time that are now large towns and cities. Hence it is likely that it is the larger towns which have a comparative advantage in the settlement structure. The sample of towns which are large is in that sense a biased sample of successes among all towns. 'Successes' keep on moving up while it is only 'failures' and new 'successes' which are found in the smaller size classes. At the lowest end, towns arc more unstable and occupy a less important place, in the settlement structure. Thus, the variance of growth rates is much higher at the low end of the settlement scale.

GROWTH EXPERIENCE OF THE SIX LARGEST CITIES

Since particular attention is usually given to the largest metropolitan cities in the urbanisation process, it is of interest to examine the growth experience of the six largest cities (given in Table 6). As with the problems of classification of the urban population as a whole, the analysis of cities also suffers from similar problems. The boundaries of large cities are characterized as they grow. Thus the population in 1981 may be for an area much larger than the area covered in 1971. The correct growth rate would be for the population in the same area for both the years — either 1971 or 1981. These details, however, are available only much later when the final population totals are published. Even then it is not easy to disentangle these definitional problems. The actual error caused is often not much because the newly urbanised area is usually almost uninhabited in the previous census year. Errors are large when boundaries are shifted to include existing towns on the periphery. Thus these growth rates have to be interpreted with caution.

The main feature of Table 6 is that the experience has been a varied one and that no generalisation can be made for these cities taken as a group. It is only Delhi that has grown with a consistently high rate of growth over the three decades. Despite the dislocations caused in Bengal at the time of partition and later in 1971 because of the Bangladesh war, the rate of growth of Calcutta has been consistently low — about at par with the growth rate of the population of the country as a whole, i.e., not very different from the natural population growth rate, specially when definitional adjustments are accounted for. In 1981, in particular, it appears that about 20 towns which were listed independently in 1971 have been included in the urban agglomeration of Calcutta. Their total population was about 400,000 in 1971, and about 500,000 in 1981. Thus with the 1971 definition, the corrected 1981 population for Calcutta would be about 8.6 million. The growth rate would be just over 2 per cent a year — a rate similar to the 1961 to 1971 growth rate. Alternatively, if the 1981 definition is taken, the 1971 population would be about 7.45 million (7.03 million according to 1971 definition) and the growth rate would be about 2.1 per cent per year. In any case, the speed-up in Calcutta's growth in the past decade is illusory, caused by definitional changes. It was not possible to make similar adjustments for the other cities with the data at hand.

Hence, as compared with the previous decade, among the six largest cities in the country, it is only Bangalore which has grown at a rate significantly higher than in the previous decade. The 5.82 per cent a year rate of growth is, indeed, extremely high by any standards, and it appears that the national population growth of 1.5 per cent a year would be about 2.1 per cent per year. Given the national population growth of about 2.2 per cent a year, it is only Delhi and Bangalore which would appear to be growing because of atypically high levels of migration.

One manifestation of the concern with city bigness has been repeated suggestions for greater attention to the small and medium towns in the immediate hinterland of these cities. In Delhi, in particular, a 'National Capital Region' has been identified. The suggestion that is made is that higher public investments on these surrounding towns would help them to attract migrants who would otherwise go to the metropolitan city itself. In order to assess the practicability of these suggestions, Table 6 also shows the growth experiences of the hinterlands of these six cities. The hinterlands has been defined as an area within a roughly 100 km radius of
the city. It is found that it is only in
the case of Bangalore that the rate of
growth of the urban population in the
hinterland was significantly lower than
that of the city itself. The rates of
growth of the hinterlands of Bombay,
Delhi and Hyderabad are very high —
all over 5 per cent a year, with Delhi
being almost 6 per cent Any further
acceleration of these surrounding towns
would probably be difficult.

One other feature of this issue that
needs consideration is the difference
between the absolute sizes of the popu-
lation in the hinterland as compared
with the city. The ratio varies from
about 15 per cent for Calcutta and
Bombay to about 40 per cent for
Bangalore. It is about 35 per cent for
Delhi. Hence, in the case of Delhi, if
it is desired to reduce the rate of
growth of population from 4.8 per
cent to about 3.6 per cent, by diverting
migrants to the surrounding towns,
their rate of growth would have to
increase on average from about 5.8 per
cent in a year to an astronomical
8.5 per cent a year. Thus it would be
reasonable to conclude that it is
unlikely that the growth problems of
big cities, such as they are, would be
solved by a diversion of interest to
their urban hinterlands.

In summary, it should be clear
from all the evidence presented above
that the record of growth of different
size cities has been very stable over
the different decades. Towns and
cities of all sizes have been grow-
ing at similar rates since at least
1951, and there are no startling
differences between large and small
towns and cities. The main
difference between 1971 and 1981 is
that there has been a significant ac-
celeration in the growth of all towns
and cities. But the overall settlement
pattern continues to be stable and
well distributed.

Notes
1 Census of India 1971. India Series
1. Report of the Expert Committee

2 All India figures in this paper will
refer to India excluding Jammu
and Kashmir and Assam, since the
data on states are not available
yet.

3 Only China, Brazil, Japan, the
United States and the Soviet Union
have urban populations greater
than 50 million people.

4 For a good discussion of defini-
tional problems in the classification
of settlements as 'town' in the
Indian Census, see Bose (1981),
chapter 1.

5 International data taken from
World Bank (1981), Tables 18 and
20.

6 URGD International data taken
from Renaud (1979).

7 But about 500 towns were added
at the same time which had not
been classified as towns earlier.

8 That this could make a signifi-
cant difference is evident from the
fact that, in 1971, there were a
many as 55 million people resid-
ing in settlements classified as
rural but with populations greater
than 5,000. A figure comprising
about half the total urban popu-
lation in the country in 1971. Of
these, about 22 million lived in
1,358 villages with a population
greater than 10,000 (15 million
in Kerala alone) and the rest in
about 5,000 villages in the 5,000-
10,000 size range.