# URBANIZATION AND URBANISM: IN THE CONTEXT OF ENVIRONMENT AND CULTURE OF INDIA

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**ABSTRACT**

Urbanization is a process while urbanism is the attitudes of people. India is moving towards more and more urbanization but is it moving towards more and more urbanism? India, with a rich cultural heritage and unique resource potentiality, is passing through a transition phase where the ultimate goal is to achieve urbanism, i.e., a particular way of life. Demographic changes leading to the increase in number of million cities is responsible for significant changes in socio-cultural setup of the country. All such changes affect on the environment, both- rural and urban. The paper shows how continuous urbanization has changed the cultural values and the regional environment of the country.

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## INTRODUCTION

Development is a phenomenon which is time-specific, region-specific and dynamic. It generally varies from person to person and region to region. According to A.P. Thirlwall (2011), "if the process of economic and social development is defined in terms of an increase in society's welfare, a concept of development is required which embraces not only economic variables and objectives, but also social objectives and values for which societies thrive". Thus development means the up gradation of a country's economy and society to get a positive effect on society's wellbeing. For any country, the economic and social development is perhaps the greatest challenge. The total amount of goods and services produced per head of the population is generally termed as the standard of living of people of a region. In other way, it is determined by the number of people who work and their productivity. Productivity depends on various other factors including education, training, levels of technology, levels of capital accumulations etc. On the regional scale, it is also determined by rural and urban areas as there is huge gap at all levels of social and economic development among these two.

Urbanization is the shift of population from rural to urban settings, which is changing the face of India for the last few decades. During 1951, only about 17 percent of the total population of the country were urban dwellers, which have grown to about 31 percent in 2011 census (Provisional data, 2011). Urbanization and its accompanying problems are well-known on which the developed world has accumulated a wealth of experience. Urbanism and health issues are mainly related to the process of urbanization in recent years. Studying rural-urban differentials in mortality, morbidity and their causes become significant along with imperative to recognize and understand the ongoing interaction between rural and urban areas. The influence of urbanization and urbanism goes beyond the limits of towns and cities, which influences on the living conditions, behaviours, values, cultures, political, social and economic processes and on surrounding environment of the urban population.

This paper aims at finding the relationship between the process of urbanization and the issues of cultural change among urban population. The discussion will focus on various aspects of urbanism including urban values, urban cultures, spatial divisions and social differences which effect significantly on the urban life style.

## URBANIZATION IN INDIA

As mentioned by Perry and Perry, Urbanism is generally a condition or attitudes while urbanization is a process[1]. With the movement of people from rural to urban areas, along with the increase in number of population in the latter region, there is change in values, change in way of life among migrant people which in return change the whole environment of the recipient area. When a young boy come from village area and starts residing in the town after getting admission in a well-known College or University, his attitudes take a different shape which is a mixture of his native village culture and the new urban environment. When he gets job in that town, his attitudes and values again undergo some different form in a more confident and strong manner. During his visit to his native village, his new vision and way of thinking causes major change in the village environment. Here the environment is not merely a physical one; rather it covers the social and cultural spheres of the region.

Thus, with the numerical increase in urban areas, movement can cause a major change in the social and cultural domain of both – rural and urban areas.

## ROLE OF CULTURE IN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

As according to Louis Wirth, an "urban way of life" results in an "urban type" of character and personality.[2] Wirth developed a pioneering body of urban sociological theory which is still an important aspect of the study of Urban Sociology. According to Ralph Linton, "The culture of a society is the key of life of its members; the collection of ideas and habits which they learn, share and transmit from generation to generation." [3] Actually, culture is the way of life and it provides the guideline which is shared by the members of a society. Communication and interaction among members of a society is based on the culture which people acquire from their earlier generations. Learning the cultural attributes from elderly people of the society and sharing such acquired culture with the present fellow-members and transmit this to younger family members to make the new generation to think and feel in a right direction- are the major characteristics of a society and its cultures.

The process, by which an individual learns the attributes of the cultures of a society, is called the socialization. At the infancy, a child learns the basic behavioural patterns of its society from the

family members. This is the most important stage of socialization. It is a life-long process which starts from infancy and operates till death of an individual. Ethnocentrism is the belief that ones own society or culture is superior to the others. Such an attribute is based mainly on judgement in relation to other society with the standard of an individual's own society and culture. It reflects ones "cultural indoctrination that all customs that differ from our own are somehow abnormal – strange at best, uncivilized at worst."[4] In this present age of globalization, such an attitude exerts positive impact of promoting unity within one group or society. But, in other way, it leads to conflicts and tensions among various groups or society and cultures. However, to counter these negative effects of ethnocentrism, proponents of cultural relativity suggest that, 'cultures must be analysed on their own terms, in the context of their own societal setting'.[5] In other words, any society or any individual has no right to use their own values and norms to judge the other society or culture. It merely means that other cultures should be approached with attitudes of tolerance, respect and understanding."[6]

In urban centres, life is very busy and very fast. An individual in an urban centre keeps contact only with those persons who are of interest to the individual. In contrast, in rural areas, the relationships are personal, intimate, long lasting and without a motive of personal benefit.

## HISTORY OF INDIAN URBANIZATION

India has a long history of urbanization. Apart from the highlands of India, there are three important ecological units in the country which experiences the growth of urban population since ancient past. These are the North-west India, the Gangetic Plain land and the south Indian Plain. The first one enjoys the pioneering role in Indian urbanization including Harappan civilization. The second one with a dense monsoonal forest used the iron technology to establish the Gangetic Plain urbanization. The third unit of Southern India used iron technology to usher a new dawn in urban growth from the earlier Neolithic pattern of techniques.

The urbanization of India can be divided into several phases. The first phase is traced back in the Indus Valley civilization. The first set of urban centres in India came out from the agricultural villages in the river valley of the Indus as early as about 5000 years ago. During this period, cities were flourished for about 600 years. Though the two most important cities (Harappa and

mohenjodaro) of this period are now in Pakistan, but some other towns like Lothal, Rangpur, Rojdi, Kalibanga, Rupur etc are located in the states of Gujarat, Rajasthan and Punjab of present day Indian Territory. These towns were developed to cater to the economic, religious as well as the administrative needs of the villagers.

This period was followed by a prolonged period of about 1000 years when there is no evidence of urbanization in India.[7] Since about 600 B.C., towns and cities grew in association with two cultural streams which are the Aryan Civilization in the northern part of the country and the Dravidian Civilization in the southern part of the country. As mentioned by Khullar (2006), cities grew in number and size in both - north and south India during the Mouryan and post-Mouryan periods. Northern part of the country experienced a decline in urban growth during the post-Gupta period which was restored during the Sultanate rule. This phase continued till the fall of the Mughal Empire.

With the arrival of the British East India Company, the nature of urbanization of India changed remarkably. Major changes were-

1. The creation of three metropolitan port cities of Mumbai (Bombay), Kolkata (Calcutta) and Chennai (Madras),
2. Creation of a chain of hill stations in the Himalayan region and in parts of South India,
3. The modification of the urban landscape of the existing cities with the introduction of civil lines and cantonments,
4. The introduction of railways,
5. The establishments of modern industry in various places,
6. The initiation of modern education by establishing some colleges and universities in major urban centres and
7. The improvements in urban amenities and urban administrative setups.

Hence, the above analysis reveals that since the Indus Valley Civilization, urbanization in India passed through different phases of urban development and around the year 1800, the country had 16 cities with a population of one lakh or more and about 1500 towns. About 11 per cent of the

total population of the country lived in urban areas at that time. However, at the time of first census in 1872, the urban population declined to 8.7 per cent.

Redfield and Singer evolved two hypothetical stages in the acceleration of urbanization. The first phase of urbanization is characterised by the transformation of pre-civilized folk society into a partially urbanized society. It is the primary phase as it takes place within the framework of the core of local cultures which becomes urbanized and transformed into an indigenous civilization. The second phase of urbanization occurs when the core culture dominated indigenous civilization is destroyed by the intrusion of foreign people and culture and form a new culture.[8]

## INDIAN URBANIZATION: PRESENT SCENERIO

Growth of urban population is determined by various factors. The increasing tendency towards natural demographic growth of urban populations, the migratory movement of rural people towards towns and cities, the development of small and medium rural towns in the form of urban centres, the absorption of rural clusters into the outskirts of growing towns and so on.

Trends in urbanization in India show that the number of towns and urban centres has increased almost three times from 1827 in 1901 to 5161 in 2001. There was a steady increase in the number of towns till 1951, but due to change in definition of urban centres and towns, many urban places were declassified and as a result, the number of towns declined from 2853 in 1951 to 2365 in 1961.

The percentage of urban population to total population has also increased from one decade to another with the only exception of a decline during 1901-1911 which was attributed due to plague epidemic in urban areas. Apart from this, the partition of the country was responsible for a sudden spurt in urban growth during 1931-'41 and 1941-'51.

**Table 1: - Trends of Urbanization in India, 1901-2001**

| Year | Number of towns/ Urban Areas | Percentage of Urban Population to Total Population | Decennial Growth (in %) |
|------|------|------|------|
| **1901** | 1827 | 10.84 | - |
| **1911** | 1815 | 10.29 | 0.35 |
| **1921** | 1949 | 11.18 | 8.27 |
| **1931** | 2072 | 11.99 | 19.12 |
| **1941** | 2250 | 13.86 | 31.97 |
| **1951** | 2843 | 17.29 | 41.42 |
| **1961** | 2365 | 17.97 | 26.41 |
| **1971** | 2590 | 19.91 | 38.23 |
| **1981** | 3378 | 23.34 | 46.14 |
| **1991** | 4689 | 25.71 | 36.47 |
| **2001** | 5161 | 27.78 | 31.13 |

 Source: - Census of India, 2001

### Table 2: - Growth Rate of Population in India, 1901-2011

|  | **1991-2001** | **2001-2011** | **Difference** |
|------|------|------|------|
| **Total Areas** | 21.5 | 17.6 | -3.9 |
| **Rural Areas** | 18.1 | 12.2 | -5.9 |
| **Urban Areas** | 31.5 | 31.8 | +0.3 |

Source: - Provisional Population Totals, Census of India, 2011

Table 1 shows that the percentage of urban population has increased continuously. Table 2 reveals the fact that, though there is negative growth rate of population in rural areas of the country, but urban areas record positive change in the growth of population in the decades 1991-2001 and 2001-2011.

## CULTURAL CHANGE DUE TO URBANIZATION

As mentioned by Perry and Perry (2011), any type of change may be experienced either on macro level or middle level or on a micro level. Cultural change on a macro level is generated by large-

scale and revolutionary social forces which affect the entire society and a large region. Urbanization is the most important example of such type of forces which have the ability to transform the structures and institutions of the society. At the middle level of change, communities experience alterations in the economic and political field. As for example, with the establishment of any industry, there is a huge demographic as well as economic change in the whole region as more and more people started to move towards the industrial region. It should be mentioned here that, the urban setting provides more opportunities to individual or to a society which was formerly excluded from the political process. Finally, on a micro level, change is generally felt through new patterns of interactions where an individual or a small group interact with each other. As for example, some changes are experienced by a family as a result of adoption of new norms, new values and new manners by some of the family members.

If we consider the Neolithic period as the first phase of development with agricultural revolution, then urbanization can be considered as the second phase of development with a marked socio-economic revolution. The urbanization process is quite an old process of cultural change.

## URBAN ENVIRONMENT

Among the most significant environmental challenges we are facing now-a-days, is the global climate change, excessive fossil fuel dependency and growing demand for energy. 'Tertiarization' of productive economic activities has significant repercussions on socio-cultural setup of the urban area. Household expenditure requirements and economic opportunities increase with the size of urban centres. The size of city also affects on the average productivity of the various informal activity and hierarchy of the modern activity. Hence, urbanization is considered as a condition and also as an expression of economic development.

The development in communication sector has totally changed the rural-urban condition of interaction. Extension of peri-urban areas helps in the changing socio-economic way of life in rural and urban areas. Urbanization is characterised by growth in rural sector productivity generated by an increase in the demand to be made.

With a rapid rush to adopt urban way of life, most of the youngsters of surrounding rural areas or suburb areas are trying to convince their earning family members to invest some portion of their

income in various socio-cultural activities. Increase in private transport is one important change in this direction. Such a tendency can also be seen among slum dwellers. When earning members are unable to fulfil such requirements, then some type of disturbances generate within the family.

Increase in number of vehicles in towns and cities, help in increase the atmospheric pollution within the urban centres. A large numbers of health and mental disorder generate from such type of pollution.

The proper disposal of human waste is a huge problem in urban areas. Traditional technologies are unable to solve in this regard. Besides, existing toilets are extremely dirty and unhygienic. As a result, most urban slum dwellers relieve themselves in open air surrounding their locality. These results in extremely dirty and unhealthy conditions, with streets and lanes dotted with human excrements. Such a habit creates lots of problems for women members of the area.

## MIGRANT POPULATION

Migration is an important component in the growth of population of an area while the other is natural growth. Migration leads to addition of population in destination areas, on the one hand, and the depopulation of the sending areas on the other. Hence, it is not only affects the migrant population but also the population of the absorbing areas directly and the population of source area indirectly. In this way, it has become an important socio-economic issue especially in the areas of destination as this area receives population disproportionate to the amenities provided for the dwellers. History tells us that, in the past, only landless people used to migrate to other agriculturally fertile areas, but today even people with high status migrate. This phenomenon increase social tension and consequently changes the social structure and traditional face of receiving centres.

Migration was such a process in which, surplus labour was gradually withdrawn from the rural farm sector to provide manpower which were absorbed in urban industrial sectors. Initially, this was quite beneficial, as it involves the shifting of human resources from one place to the other that is from the place where their social marginal product was assumed to be negative to the place where this marginal product was treated to be positive and rapidly growing[9].

The paradox of high urban growth and low urbanization in India has occurred more due to the influx of rural poor than that of demand for rural labour. In 1960s and 1970s, the policy looked towards the mushrooming slums as the result of a momentary phenomenon of rural immigration. These slums would disappear with the development of the urban centre as the growing city absorbs the poor slum dwellers into the mainstream of the urban society. But, afterwards, these slum areas have become permanent fixtures in all cities of the country. The millions of children living in the slum and clearly-identifiable low income neighbourhoods or on the streets of every city are not recent immigrants. In fact, most of them are second or third generation citizens in their neighbourhood. But still, they are neglected and denied access to even basic amenities of health, sanitation and education[10]. The phenomenon of migration leads to misallocation of labour between rural and urban sectors and raises urban unemployment, underemployment and poverty which in turn increases the social cost of providing amenities to urban migrants.

## URBAN FAMILY STRUCTURE

Family has been considered as a universal social institution which is the most necessary part of human society. In many small and illiterate primitive societies, relationship between family structure and kinship are the basic principles of society and cultural life. The family is embedded in a web of such kinship relationship. Within the family, socio-economic roles are connected and ascribed by family members.

The joint family structure has been one of the salient features of the Indian society for long time. But in recent decades, the process of urbanization has made enormous changes in the traditional family system. In villages, the size of joint family has substantially reduced and sometimes it is found in fragmented form. Some have spilt into several nuclear families while others have taken the form of extended family. We can see the joint families of native villages to take shapes of nuclear families in the towns. Such changes in family structure exert huge change in the cultural set-up of the family.

## URBAN POVERTY

Urban poverty is a common feature in India. In any urban planning system, poor people are traditionally neglected. Such policies have led to emergence of informal settlements across the

city economy. This ultimately leads to increasing socio-economic gaps in cities. There is always a strong requirement of housing in urban centres. It makes Government unable to implement proper planning methods in growing cities. City planning proposals are thus over-ridden due to either ignorance or as a result of need for housing and income. Apart from this, registration procedures and obtaining approval from Government Offices are so time consuming which results in increase in housing costs and limited supply[11]. Poverty essentially has three closely interrelated aspects which are 'poverty of money', 'poverty of access' and 'poverty of power'[12]. All types of poverty make the living and environments of the poor extremely insecure and problematic which limit the options available to them to improve their lives and way of living. Insecure life and poverty makes the life of urban poor marginalize and isolation from the mainstream of the society.

The urban poor, though live in close proximity of good health facilities, are often unable to access them. As a consequence of living in degraded environment, urban poor suffer from inaccessibility to health care, irregular employment, widespread illiteracy and lack of negotiating capacity to demand services. They suffer from adverse outcomes that are not reflected in commonly available health statistics. The health statistics of the urban poor are worse than the urban averages[13]. The interplay of a number of poor socio-economic conditions, sub-optimal living environment, poor access and use of public health facilities, illegal status, rapid mobility and poor negotiation capacity are the main characteristic features of these poor people.

## URBAN INCOME INEQUALITY

Differences in income arise generally from three sources which are-

- ➢ Firstly, variations in earnings from personal services,
- ➢ Secondly, differences in the amounts of property owned and
- ➢ Thirdly, variations in transfer payments from Government.

However, demand and supply are the two most important reasons in income differences between occupational groups. Occupations where unskilled labour can enter are generally poorly paid or in other words, based on skill and training, there are huge differences in wages in urban employment sector (Hunt and Colander, 2011).

## URBAN CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

The level of urbanization in India has increased from about 17 percent in 1951 to about 31 percent in 2011(Provisional Totals, 2011) and will be 50 percent within two decades (Bateman, USAID, India 2007). Rapid urbanization is witnessed in the country where the urban population ratios doubled. This, with a high population growth, has exerted enormous pressure on urban centres throughout the country. Access to labour, capital and markets, basic infrastructure, skills, technical know-how, networks and market linkages etc are the characteristic feature of efficient cities. But, for urban poor all these facilities are not equally distributed.

In urban areas, the slums represent a huge economic failure. Sprawling urbanization has failed to produce corresponding economic growth which leads to huge gap between urban dwellers. Alcoholism is a disease endemic to slums and it leads to moral and economic degradation. Consuming alcohol by men restricts the amount of income that can be spent for their family which again leads to social diseases of domestic abuse and as serious health disorder.

In countries like India, rural to urban migration and the resulting urbanization in related with a vertical shift in the labour force from the agricultural sector to the urban-industrial sector. These urban people, mostly slum dwellers, after recognizing themselves as 'temporary workers' in the urban work field, tend to neglect the importance of economic and social changes- though it would improve their lives.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a strong need to engage the informal sector in urban planning processes by making them an equal stakeholder in it. Integration of informal settlements into city planning exercise through parallel efforts of regularization and up gradation of informally developed areas should be taken as utmost importance in urban planning procedures. It is necessary to include the following-

- ➤ Construction of trunk infrastructure to attract investments in preferred locations,
- ➤ Opting measures of land development in environmentally sustainable areas which will ensure future expansion of lands. Such areas are generally identified 20-30 years before and be defined by a grid of secondary roads following neighbourhood principles staying

clear of areas where development is not desired like ecologically sensitive areas. After identifying, these areas are provided with main infrastructure in a phased manner.

- Provision of land re-adjustment in some parcels of land, which are consolidated for effective provision of services through mutually beneficial agreements with landowners.

- Provision of transport, energy, water and communication with urban development is also necessary. The availability of trunk infrastructure for water, sewage, roads, electric and telecommunication lines which influence significantly the spatial pattern of growth of urban centres.

- Access to a range of facilities for urban dwellers irrespective of caste, class, gender, and religion including education, hospitals, markets, community halls, clinics, safe space for recreation, safe space for religious and cultural practices, regional markets and so on.

- Urban centres should provide a general ground for people to meet people of diverse cultures, ethnic characteristics, and socio-economic backgrounds.

- Monitoring and evaluation needs to be integrated into the system of urban planning of the country. Only formulation the policy measures or implementation of them are not enough. There should be continuous maintenance and up gradation of applied planning procedures at all levels. There should be participation of all stakeholders in the whole process of formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of urban planning all over the country.

- Capacity gaps need to be effectively bridged by the strengthening urban planning academic systems in India. Specialized planning cadre is necessary to develop urban development plans which will keep pace with current challenges and emerging issues.

## CONCLUSION

While India is undergoing a rapid rate of urbanization and urban development, urban related problems must be addressed. Proper policy should prepare to address all kinds of negative values and sub-cultures, crimes and violence, poverty, deprivation, social ills, environmental degradation, socio-cultural relations etc. From psychological point of view, all types of urban problems, directly or indirectly, have caused certain form of value change among urban residents. The issue is how to improve the existing urban environment into such a place which is peaceful, safe and conducive for each and every single urban resident. Within limited space and resource,

all parties concerned will have to continue to make our cities a better place for the benefit of our next generation. It is necessary to formulate the policy to achieve sustainable urbanization in India.

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### Notes-

[1] As mentioned by John Perry and Erna Perry, 2011: 311

[2] For further information on urban character and personality, see LeGates, 2011: 88

[3] As cited by M. Haralambos and R.M. Heald, 2010: 2-8.

[4] For more detailed study on ethnocentrism and socialization, see Perry and Perry, 2011: 67-68

[5] Op cit.

[6] Op. cit.

[7] More information on Indian urbanization in Khullar, 2006: 420-444

[8] As cited by Makhan Jha : 127-128

[9] See also Mukherji and Phadke, 2011

[10] Rangachar Govinda has illustrated the condition of Primary Education of the Urban Poor in India, 1995: 105,

[11] See Sustainable Urban Form for Indian Cities, NIUA, March 2011.

[12] Donial, 2009: 145-160.

[13] For more information, see USAID Report on India, March 29, 2007 : 1-15.

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