



A Study on Urbanization in North: Eastern Region of India

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Abstract

Urbanization can be defined as a process whereby people leave countryside and move to cities and towns and thereby enhancing the urban areas to grow. It is a complex phenomenon. Although a lot of factors are responsible for growing urbanization in a country, rapid industrialization and economic development are considered as most significant among them. India is known as the 'land of villages' as majority of its population is living in villages. India is far behind in case of the level of urbanization in comparison to developed countries like U.K., U.S.A., Japan, Australia etc. The North Eastern Region (NER) of India comprises eight states namely Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Manipur, Nagaland, Mizoram, Tripura and Sikkim. It is known as the land of seven sisters and one brother. Geographically, this region stands in isolation from the rest of India. The process of urbanization and economic development is positively correlated. This region is one of the most backward regions of India. Therefore, urbanization in NER of India is relatively very low in comparison to mainstream India. The present study attempts to analyze the trend and pattern of urbanization in NER of India and tries to make a comparative analysis with all India level.

Keywords: Urbanization, North-East India, Trend, Pattern, Urban Agglomeration

1. Introduction

The process of urbanization and economic development is positively correlated. With the gradual growth of an economy a tendency of shift of the working population are noticed from rural to urban areas. The definition of 'an urban area' is different from country to country. The Census of India defined 'an urban area' in the following way: a) All places with municipality, corporation, cantonment board or notified town area committee; b) All other places which include the following features –

1. A minimum population of 5000.
2. At least 75 percent working population (male) engaged in non-agricultural activities; and
3. A minimum density of population with 400 persons per sq. km.

The urban populations get greater opportunities to enjoy modern facilities of life, better health and education, more employment opportunities than the rural population. At the same time, however, urbanization leads to various problems like environmental pollution, scarcity of water supply, lack of health facilities and proper sanitation, and also creates the problem of over – crowding. India is known as the 'land of villages' as majority of its population is living in villages from the very beginning to till today. The reason behind this reality is related to the occupational structure of its population. More than two-third of the population of the country is engaged in agriculture for their livelihood. The economy was more village-centric before the adoption of new economic policy, 1991. However, after 1991, percentage of urban population to total population showed significant improvement.

From the very beginning, urbanization is very slow in India. For instance, in 1901 only 11 percent of the population of the country was living in urban areas. After 50 years, the percentage of urban population increased only to 17.6 percent and in 1971, it slightly increased to 20 percent.

However in 2001 and 2011, percentage of urban population to total population increased relatively greater to 27.8 percent and 31.2 percent respectively. Despite this improvement, India is far behind in case of the level of urbanization in comparison to developed countries. For example, the percentage of urban population to total population in 2001 was 91 percent in Australia, 89 percent in U.K., 77 percent in USA, and 79 percent in Japan.

The renowned land of natural beauty North Eastern Region (NER) of India comprises eight states namely Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Manipur, Nagaland, Mizoram, Tripura and Sikkim. It is also known as the land of seven sisters and one brother. Geographically, this region stands in isolation from the rest of India. The process of urbanization in this region started lately. But after 1971 however, it gained momentum. During the colonial period, NER was kept isolated from mainstream India and this area was regarded as 'excluded area'. The area was also under inner line permit regulation because of which outsiders were not allowed to enter into the tribal area. The tribes of this region were largely practicing their ancestral customs and traditional methods of livelihood. Today also they are very conscious about their customs and rituals. Because of these reasons, the level of urbanization was comparatively very slow in this region. However, after independence, huge amount of investments have been made to expand administrative centers and to improve the basic infrastructural facilities. Under different five year plans, considerable amount of resources were invested for the development of primary and secondary sectors. Consequently after many years, especially after 1971, significant growth of urbanization was noticed in this region.

2. Review of Related Literature

Bhagat and Mohanty (2009) ^[1] made an analytical study on the trend and pattern of urbanization in India along with state level analysis since the year 1901. The study also discussed about the causes of urbanization in India and gave importance on the migration factor as the significant one enhancing urbanization. The researchers concluded by expressing their predictions about trend, pattern, and vital causes of future urbanization. Bhagabati (1996) ^[5] have broadly analyzed the pattern of urbanization in North – Eastern Region of India including the border regions. The researcher emphasized about the growth of urban centers in this region and also made a hierarchy of towns based on larger towns. The study found low level of urbanization in this particular region and also viewed that isolated as well as land locked nature of the North – Eastern Region is the main cause behind low level of urbanization. Sharma (2014) ^[9] comprehensively made an analysis on the social structure and its change, processes of change and also social problems due to its change in Indian society. In describing all these aspects, the author distinguished between rural and urban communities and investigated about the difference between rural and urban communities on some particular aspects like religion, family structure, caste etc. Bhattacharya (1991) ^[6] emphasized the pattern of urban development in India during the period of 1901 – 1981. In analyzing urban development in India, the researcher considers many aspects like urban agglomeration, urban deconcentration, and also on forms and quality of urban lives. The study found that due to increasing tendency of urban agglomeration, the pressures on environment has been increasing and also the quality of urban life is degrading continuously.

Khawas (2005) ^[7], Nayak, Chakravorty & Chakravorty (1995) ^[8], Pautunthang, N. (2018) ^[3], Tufail, M. (2014) ^[4] etc.

have analyzed the various aspects of urbanization in the context of India and most specifically on North – East India. The existence of these research on urbanization in North – Eastern Region of India, is however cannot be regarded as sufficient. More studies are needed in this field to investigate new things on this area. Therefore, in this paper an attempt has been made to analyze the trend and pattern of urbanization in North – East India.

3. Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is:

- To analyze the trend and pattern of urbanization in North – Eastern Region of India and to make a comparative analysis with all India level.

4. Methodology

The present study is based entirely on secondary data and these are collected from various sources like books, journals, research articles, and census reports of India (1961, 1971, 1981, 1991, 2001 and 2011) and also from the Handbook of Urban Statistics, 2019. Descriptive and analytical methods of research are used to analyze the data. Tables, trend lines etc. are used in order to present the data in a constructive and simple way and to make the analysis understandable.

5. Findings and Analysis

Since the study is based on the urbanization of NER of India, therefore data on urbanization which are collected from Census reports (1961, 1971, 1981, 1991, 2001 and 2011) are presented in the Table -1 and Table – 2. Table -1 describes the percentages of urban population in all the states of North – East India. Table-1 not only explains the trend of urbanization in North East India, but also explains the trend of urbanization in India. Figure-1 is based on the data of Table-1 where horizontal axis measures the census years and vertical axis measures the percentages of urban population. Table-2 tries to give a demographic profile of urban and rural population of India as a whole and North Eastern States of India. In short, table-1 and table-2 and Fig – 1 are used here to analyze the trend and pattern of urbanization in NER of India and also an attempt has been made to make a comparative analysis with India. From the very beginning Sikkim was not a part of NER. In 2002, Sikkim become a part of this region and after that Sikkim is known as the brother state of North East India. However, in this study, data on urbanization of this state is collected for the study period.

Table 1: Trends of Urbanization in North-East India (Percentage of Urban Population to Total Population)

States	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
Arunachal Pradesh	0.0	3.7	6.6	12.2	20.41	22.67
Assam	8.4	8.9	10.3	11.1	12.72	14.08
Manipur	8.7	13.2	26.4	27.7	27.69	30.21
Meghalaya	15.3	14.6	18.1	18.7	18.69	20.08
Mizoram	5.4	11.4	24.7	46.2	46.2	51.51
Nagaland	5.2	10.0	15.5	17.3	17.28	28.97
Tripura	9.0	10.4	11.0	15.3	15.26	26.18
Sikkim	4.22	9.37	16.23	9.12	11.1	24.97
India	18.4	19.9	23.3	25.7	25.72	31.16

Source: Census of India

During the first 30 years (1961 – 1991) as displayed in the table – 1 reveals a dramatic shift of the level of urbanization. The table clearly reveals that in the year 1961, the level of urbanization in all the states of NER of India was below the national average, 18.4 percent. The people of Arunachal Pradesh were entirely rural in 1961. Meghalaya was the only

state where 15.3 percent population of the state was living in urban area. Only Meghalaya's level of urbanization in this

region was relatively closer to the national average although it had approximately 3 percent gap.

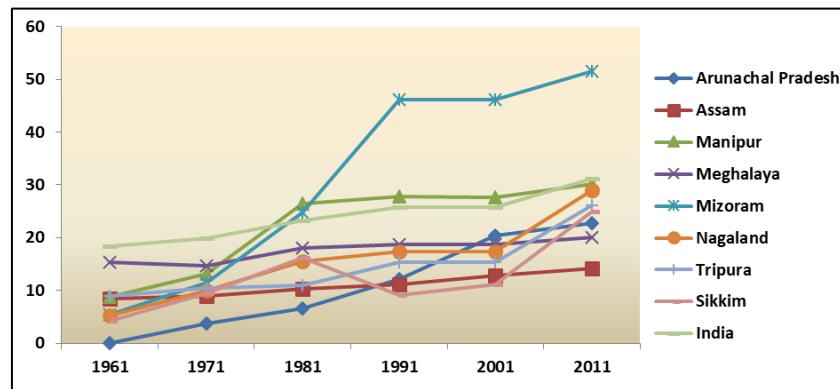


Fig 1: Trend of Urbanization in North – Eastern States of India (as % of total population)

The degree of urbanization did not show any significant change in 1971 in this region. However, a small proportion of the people of Arunachal Pradesh (3.7 percent) were considered as urban. Small growth of urbanization was noticed in Assam (8.9 percent), Manipur (13.2 percent), Mizoram (11.4 percent), Nagaland (10.0 percent), Tripura (10.4 percent) and Sikkim (9.37 percent) except Meghalaya (reduced from 15.3 percent to 14.6 percent), but the level of urbanization in all the states was still below the national average of 19.9 percent.

In 1981, significant changes in the level of urbanization was noticed in Manipur and Mizoram where urbanization increased to 26.4 percent and 24.7 percent respectively and percentage differences in comparison to 1971 were (+) 13.2 percent and (+) 13.3 percent. In these two states, level of urbanization was become higher than the national average

(23.3 percent). In 1991, the most spectacular change in the level of urbanization among the all states was noticed in Mizoram where 46.2 percent (little less than the half of the population of the state) was living in urban areas. In Manipur also the degree of urbanization was high in comparison to All India average (25.7 percent). In case of other states of this region, the amount increased in the level of urbanization in 1991 was not as much significant to explain and the level of urbanization was far behind the national average.

The important point needs much attention here is – despite having plain areas, the level of urbanization in Assam was very low and growth in the level of urbanization was not significant during 1961-1991. The surprising fact here is the highland dominating states like Meghalaya, Manipur, and Mizoram have comparatively higher level of urbanization than Assam.

Table 2: Demographic Profile of Urban and Rural Population in North-East India

States	Population in 2001			
	Rural	Urban	Total	Percentage of urban population
Arunachal Pradesh	868,429	222,688	1,091,117	20.41
Assam	23,248,994	3,389,413	26,638,407	12.72
Manipur	1,818,224	570,410	2,388,634	27.69
Meghalaya	1,853,457	452,612	2,306,069	18.69
Mizoram	450,018	441,040	891,058	46.2
Nagaland	1,635,815	352,821	1,988,636	17.28
Sikkim	480,488	60,005	540,493	9.12
Tripura	2,648,074	543,094	3,191,168	15.26
India	742,490,639	286,119,689	1,028,737,436	25.72
States	Population in 2011			
	Rural	Urban	Total	Percentage of urban population
Arunachal Pradesh	1,069,165	3,134,46	1,382,611	22.67
Assam	26,780,516	4,388,756	31,169,272	14.08
Manipur	1,899,624	8,22,132	2,721,756	30.21
Meghalaya	2,368,971	595,036	2,964,007	20.08
Mizoram	529,037	561,977	1,091,014	51.51
Nagaland	1,406,861	5,73,741	1,980,602	28.97
Sikkim	455,962	151,726	607,688	24.97
Tripura	2,710,051	9,60,981	3,671,032	26.18
India	83,30,87,662	37,71,05,760	1,210,193,442	31.16

Source: Census of India

In 2001, an increasing trend in the level of urbanization was noticed in case of all the North- East states (including India also) except the state Manipur, where a small dropdown was noticed. Due to this dropdown, Manipur showed a slight declining trend (in fig-1). However, in 2011 in all the states of the region, the level of urbanization was seen to be increased in a significant way. More than half of the

population of Mizoram (51.51 percent) used to live in urban areas. Growth in the level of urbanization was very spectacular in three states – Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim. In Nagaland, 28.97 percent population lived in urban areas. In Tripura and Sikkim, these percentages were 26.18 percent and 24.97 percent respectively. However, in 2011 census, Mizoram ranked top in the level of urbanization among the

states of NER. Mizoram's level of urbanization was higher than the national average (31.16 percent) by almost 20 percent.

Over the study period (from 1961 to 2011) as shown in the Fig-1, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim able to maintain an increasing trend in the level of urbanization. However, the trend lines are not smooth and homogenous. From 1981, Mizoram always maintained an upper position with huge gap. Although Assam also shows an increasing trend, but the growth rate of urbanization in comparison to other neighbor states are not

satisfactory. Manipur and Meghalaya break their increasing trend by falling down in 2001 (in case of Manipur) and in 1971 and 2001 (in case of Meghalaya). Regarding the level of urbanization, Assam ranked lowest position (14.08 percent) in 2011 and it is followed by Meghalaya (20.08 Percent), Arunachal Pradesh (22.67 percent) and Sikkim (24.97 percent).

According to Population Census of India (2011), the percentage of urban population in NER of India as a whole is 18.36 percent and this rate is still lower than the national average, 31.16 percent during the mentioned year.

Table 3: Annual Exponential Growth Rates of Urban Population in North East India

States	Annual Exponential Growth Rate (AEGR)	
	1991-2001	2001-2011
Arunachal Pradesh	7.49	3.31
Assam	3.29	2.46
Manipur	1.31	3.70
Meghalaya	3.24	2.71
Mizoram	3.33	2.60
Nagaland	5.11	5.10
Sikkim	4.93	9.42
Tripura	2.61	5.66
India	2.73	2.76

Source: Handbook of Urban Statistics, 2019

Table-3 explains the annual exponential growth rate (AEGR) of urban population in North Eastern states of India over the periods 1991-2001 and 2001-2011. Table-2 clearly reveals that India is rapidly urbanizing. According to 2011 census (India), urban population of the country increased to 377.1 million which was 286.1 million in 2001 (as per the census report, 2001). The Census 2011 showed annual exponential growth rate of urban population of the country as 2.76 percent during 2001-2011. Before, this growth rate was 2.73 percent during 1991-2001. Among the states of North East India, in

2011, Sikkim's total urban population was 151,726 in 2011 which was increased from 60,005 in 2001. Sikkim witnessed the highest AEGR of urban population (9.42percent) in 2001-2011 not only in North – East India but also in overall India. Besides, Assam experienced the slowest growth of urban population by registering an AEGR of 2.46 percent during the decade 2001-2011. During 1991-2001, Assam's position was better with 3.29 percent AEGR. In comparison to “1991-2001” period, Manipur, Sikkim and Tripura experienced greater AEGR during 2001-2011.

Table 4: Number of Urban Agglomeration (UA) in North East India

States	1991	2001	2011
Arunachal Pradesh	-	NA	NA
Assam	6	10	12
Manipur	1	1	1
Meghalaya	1	1	1
Mizoram	-	NA	NA
Nagaland	-	NA	NA
Sikkim	-	NA	NA
Tripura	-	NA	NA
India	374	384	474

Source: Handbook of Urban Statistics, 2019

As mentioned in the Handbook of Urban Statistics (2019), “A town together with its growth(s) is treated as an integrated urban area and is designated as Urban Agglomeration.” According to Census 2011, the number of urban agglomeration in India stood at 474. In 2001, India's total number of urban agglomeration was 384. Assam has the largest number of urban agglomeration (12) among the North Eastern states in 2011 followed by Manipur (1) and also Meghalaya (1). In 1991 and 2001 also Assam and other state's position in this region regarding the number of urban agglomeration was the same. In 1991 and in 2001, Assam's total number of urban agglomeration was 6 and 10 respectively.

6. Summary and Conclusion

NER of India is one of the most backward regions of India. The process of urbanization and economic development are closely and positively correlated. Therefore, urbanization in

this region is relatively very low in comparison to mainstream India. The level of urbanization in all the North – Eastern states are not similar. Mizoram attained the highest level of urbanization in this region. It is noteworthy that from 1981, Mizoram's level of urbanization is greater than the national average. Assam's level of urbanization is lowest in 2011. Manipur, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim's level of urbanization is also closer to the India's level of urbanization. Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim are maintaining an increasing trend in the level of urbanization during the study period. However, together North Eastern Region's level of urbanization is lower than the national average. Sikkim witnessed the largest 9.42 percent AEGR of urban population during 2001-2011 and Assam experienced the slowest growth per annum during the same decade. The number of urban agglomeration is highest in Assam among the states of North-Eastern states. North – East India is not a homogenous region. Except Assam

and Tripura, all other states of this region are dominated by hilly areas. But, the higher level and growth of urbanization is mostly noticed in highland dominating states. Despite having plain areas, the level of urbanization in Assam is very slow.

No doubt, the process of urbanization in the states of North-East India had a late start and level of urbanization is also low in comparison to other developed states of India. But another noticing fact of this region is that the pace of urbanization in the recent decades has accelerated so much. The prevailing level of urbanization in this region is attained without significant industrial growth. Economic backwardness still persists and level of urbanization is growing day by day which is not supported by growing diversification of productive activities and expansion of essential urban amenities. As a result, the common urban problems like overcrowding, scarcity of water supply, unemployment problem, growth of slums, inadequacy of public health facilities etc. are noticed in the towns of North-East India. Therefore, appropriate planned policy intervention must be needed for the development of North Eastern Region. More attention should be given in the development of urban infrastructure and civic services. These are the pre-requisite for the development of productive activities through which employment and income generation could be possible in a huge amount. In short, planning for development of urban basic facilities and development of North Eastern region should be integrated in a balanced manner for the greater benefit of this region.

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