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The Rural Urban Dichotomy in India

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Abstract:
In India the classification of settlements is done by the census organizations as rural and urban. This status becomes very important as it plays a vital role in the provision of services and civic amenities to the settlements. The census uses certain criteria like total population, density and occupation for classifying these settlements. But today the world is transforming rapidly and as rural areas get connected by network of communication, rural areas are getting transformed rapidly with urban characteristics. So it is high time that census organizations wake up and bring about the classification of an intermediary centre between the strictly rural and urban area and identity the rurban centers and give them legal status and a statutory body for the governance .

The "Census Towns" identified by the Census organization fall in this category where it does not get the legal status of a town. So they hang in the middle without any civic amenities and are often governed by village panchayat though they possess distinct urban characteristics. If proper governance is provided to these census towns or rurban units it can play an important role in sustainable urban development in India. Most of these rurban units have distinct urban consumption behavior pattern and changing occupation from agriculture to service sector. Apart from the population characteristics other criteria like built up form, consumption pattern should be taken into consideration. It is noteworthy that in 2001, and for the first time in India, official statistics showed that the number of "villages" with more than 10,000 inhabitants exceeded the number of "towns" and "urban areas" with comparable populations. (Denis, E and Gnanau.M, 2011) If these can be added in the category of prospective urban centers as "Rurban centers" it can go a long way in creating better places to live in. Now the question arise is whether to categorize these villages as rural, Urban or Rurban?

This paper will look at this situation with a case study from Barddhman District of West Bengal which one of the most urbanized district of West Bengal outside the Kolkata Metropolitan Area. According to the 2011 census nearly 40% of the population of Barddhman is urban.

Keywords: Census classification of settlements, semi rural /Rurban, Census Towns, Governance

1. Introduction

Settlements in most parts of the world are differentiated on basis of population, occupation, social infrastructure or amenities and consumption patterns. It forms the basis for classifying them as rural or urban .This rural urban dichotomy in India like other developing countries is related to the agricultural –industrial dichotomy. The recent changes brought about in the economy due to economic reforms adopted between 1991 and 1993 has led to an blurring of the difference in urban and rural population in most countries particularly visible in the developing countries with a convergence between urban and rural lifestyles in the type of services available in the economic, social and demographic characteristics and levels of personal mobility.

So the very definition of rural and urban is undergoing a sea change and needs to be redefined. This is very essential because these two areas are governed by different local institutions panchayat in rural areas and urban local bodies like municipal corporation, municipality or notified area authority in urban areas. Moreover the change in status of settlement has many economic implications.

2. Objectives

The main objectives of this study are:
- To evaluate the role of India census in designating rural –urban status to settlements over the years
- Why is urban status being denied to certain category of urban settlements?
- To find out invisible and denied urban areas in the study area

3. Rural Urban Definition and Role of Indian Census

The agricultural –industrial dichotomy has been the corner stone of rural urban classification across many countries of the world (Bhagat, 2002). The definition of rural and urban varies among different countries of the world. Most countries use population and administrative criteria for designation an area as urban. But six countries of the world have used economic criteria for identifying urban areas and India is one among them. In India the inclusion of work force in defining urban areas is however gender biased. If

we see the developing countries where the agricultural base is relatively large and so the labour in it, most of them have used population and administrative criteria for defining urban areas as for e.g. in Thailand , Pakistan , Sri Lanka and Indonesia urban areas are identified only on the basis of administrative criteria, while Nepal uses only the population factor and Japan has used both administrative and population criteria.

In India the definition of settlements is accorded by the Census of India. The method of identifying an urban area was first specified in the 1901 census under British India. This has undergone changes during the successive census but the core method has been more or less similar. According to the 1901 census all urban areas included municipalities of whatever population and every other continuous collection of houses permanently inhabited by not less than 5000 persons. In 1911 the same definition was adopted with the inclusion of civil lines not included in municipal limits and cantonment areas. The same definition was used in the 1951 census. During this period the definition of urban areas varied among different states and provinces of India. In the 1961 census a uniform definition was adopted for defining urban and rural areas. In 1961 the uniform definition for an urban area as

A) All places with a city corporation, municipality, cantonment board or Notified Town area committee

B) All other places which satisfied the following criteria

- A minimum population of 5000,
- A density of population of at least 1000 per sq. Mile (390 per sq. Km.)
- At least $3/4^{th}$ of the male working population engaged in non-agricultural activities.

So two types of urban areas or towns were identified , those which satisfied A and also b were designated as statutory towns and those which satisfied only B were known as Census towns, the implication being that these census towns had the potential to become statutory towns. So this universal definition of urban area not only tried to apply strict criteria but also tried to clearly dichotomize space into rural and urban categories along the agricultural –industrial continuum (Bhagat, 2002). This definition continued till 1981 when two distinct changes were brought about

namely in the work force where only male main workers were taken into account and this had to more than 75% of the total male main workforce. Secondly among the occupational categories workers in the fourth census category that is fishing, livestock, lumbering etc were excluded from the non agricultural work force. This definition continues till date.

As urbanization takes place there will be spatial spread and urban areas will engulf adjoining villages or villages come in contact with urban areas and may gain urban characteristics. So there will be transitional zones between the rural and urban areas. This fact was first pointed out by the superintendent of Punjab in the 1961 census to bring in a threefold classification of settlements to include these transitional areas between the two poles of urban and rural. Another fact is that in the labour force only the male workers are considered why leave out the females has not been justified. So redefining of the settlements by the census is essential. There seems to be a resistance in becoming urban in India. There is also a dichotomy in the governance of urban settlements were statutory towns have municipal governance while census towns and outgrowths are outside the purview of municipal governance and are governed by rural institutions like panchayat. The transitional areas have no specific governance and often neglected by municipal and rural governance.

4. The Case of Barddhaman District and Supressed Urbanization

Bardhhaman district extends between 22o56' to 23o53' north latitude and 86o48' to 88o25' East longitudes. The district is bounded on the north by Dumka (of Jharkhand), Birbhum and Murshidabad, on the east by Nadia, on the south by Hooghly, Bankura and Purulia and on the west by Dhanbad (of Jharkhand) districts.

Bardhhaman is one of the developed districts of West Bengal with a high rate of urbanization. The percentage of urban population was 39.97 in 2011 higher than the state average of 31.89. West Bengal recorded the highest number of census towns in 2011 which was 780. Bardhhaman district also recorded the highest number of census towns and statutory towns outside Kolkata Metropolitan Area districts. It is one of the most urbanized districts of West Bengal outside Kolkata Metropolitan Area. The district has also shown steady increase in urban population since 1951 as shown in table no.1

Year	Rural	Urban
1951	85.2	14.8
1961	81.8	18.2
1971	77.2	22.8
1981	70.6	29.4
1991	64.9	35.1
2001	63.1	36.9
2011	60.1	39.9

Table 1: Percentage of Rural Urban population in Bardhhaman District
Source: Different Census Reports

In spite of the increase in the urban population in the district the status of towns in the district has not undergone much change. This is one of the reasons for the underrating of urbanization in the district. In fact an analysis of the 2011 data reveals that much of the urbanization in the district has gone un - captured by the census because of the rural urban dichotomy in census enumeration. According to the 2011 census data the district has 131 villages with a population of more than 5000 persons and 18 large villages with more than 10,000 persons. Now if we consider the census criteria for qualifying these villages as urban areas it can be seen that 8 of these villages satisfy the entire requirement to be termed urban that is census towns, but they have not be

classified as census town that is urbanization denied .If only the population and density criteria are taken into consideration then all the 131 villages can be termed as urban. So it is clear that the level of urbanization in Bardhhaman district is suppressed or underestimated.

5. Undrestimation of Urbanization in Barddhman District

The census and the administrative authorities have underestimated the level of urbanization in India which according to Denis, Mukhopadhyay and Zerah (2012) due to invisible and denied urbanization. Invisible urbanization are the large villages which are not recognized as urban by census or administration authorities in spite of the fact that they have distinctive urban characteristics while denied urbanization are those settlements which satisfy all the three census criteria to become urban but are not give the statutory status.

6. Denied Urbanization

In Bardhhaman district statutory status or municipal status has been denied to Chittaranjan census town whose population in 2011 is 45957 persons, a density of 2332 persons /sq Km and 99 % of the male main workers engaged in non agricultural activities. This is on the basis of the norm for attaining statutory status for towns according to the West Bengal Municipal Act 1993. But if the Government of India, municipal law is taken into consideration then municipal status is accorded to settlements in transitional areas with population less than 25,000 but with 85% or more in non agricultural activities, then 19 of the towns classified as census towns in 2011 would be eligible to have municipal status. All these 19 towns have population ranging from 10,000 to 25,000 and have more than 85% work force in non agricultural activities.

7. Invisible Urbanization

In 2011 census there are 131 villages which have a population of more than 5000 persons and a density of more than 400 persons per sq km, thus they satisfy two of the census criteria for becoming urban. Of these 27 villages have more than 50% of their male work force in non agricultural activities which have distinctive urban characteristics. So if the census is liberal in defining settlements as urban and consider these invisible settlements then the level of urbanization would be much higher in Bardhhaman district.

If only population and density criteria as required by census is considered the urban population of Bardhhaman would be 52.20 %. If we consider population of large villages satisfying all three criteria according to census that is denied urbanization then it would be 40.63 %. The third is if we consider settlements which have more than 50% but less than 75% in non agricultural activities then the urbanization rate of Bardhhaman district would be 42.41 %. Thus it is clear that the rate of urbanization in the district is underrated. This is true not only for Barddhaman district but in many parts of India.

Today with rapid development in the economic sphere and with the impact of globalization this boundary between rural and urban is blurring. In the last three decades India has witnessed some structural transformations whose impact is clearly seen both in the urban and rural areas and particularly in the fringe of urban areas. Social changes particularly with respect to education and health have been on an increase in the rural areas and this has had an impact on the economic structure of rural areas. Most important the consumption pattern of rural areas has witnessed rapid change and many have urban type of consumer preferences. So when classifying a settlement as rural and urban not only population and occupation but other parameters should be taken into account such as social development, infrastructure, consumer pattern and if necessary a third category of settlement should be introduced between the rural and urban category.

8. Suggestions

- The census should include the female working population when taking the percentage of work force in non agricultural activities
- Identify a third category of settlements in the census say rurban centers which have prospect of becoming urban

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