

Nature of Urbanization in West Bengal in The Post- independence Period

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Abstract

It is a fact that one of the most significant aspects of all post-war demographic phenomena all over the world is the rapid growth of cities in the developing countries. About sixty years ago in 1950, 275 million people had been living only in the cities of the Third World countries: this was merely 37.98 per cent of 724 million total urban people of the world. According to the estimates of the United Nations, the world's population of the urban areas had reached 1.56 billion by 1975 and more than half of those people had lived in metropolitan areas of the developing countries. From another estimate made by the United Nations it is known that in 2000 over 2.12 billion or 66 per cent of the urban dwellers of the world will take shelter in less developed countries. This is the overall trend of urbanization across the world. Undoubtedly, India and for that matter West Bengal is no exception to this common trend. In reality, West Bengal has also been following the same track. After independence, urbanization in West Bengal had progressed at a higher rate than what was followed at the all-India level. Of late, however, the two rates have almost coincided. Urbanization has brought some benign effects, no doubt. But simultaneously, it has brought some bad effects also. There is scarcity of water, housing problem has been very serious and there is the environmental problem. To lead a happy and peaceful life in urban areas we should keep a watchful eye not only in urban areas but also in the rural areas, otherwise, there will be a continuous flow of migration from rural areas to urban areas.

Introduction

There can be no denying the fact that one of the most significant aspects of all post-war demographic phenomena all over the world is the rapid growth of cities in the developing countries. About sixty years ago in 1950, 275 million people had been living only in the cities of the Third World countries: this was merely 37.98 per cent of 724 million total urban people of the world. According to the estimates of the United Nations, the world's population of the urban areas had reached 1.56 billion by 1975 and more than half of those people had lived in metropolitan areas of the developing countries. From another estimate made by the United Nations it is known that in 2000 over 2.12 billion or 66 per cent of the urban dwellers of the world will take shelter in less developed countries. This is the overall trend of urbanization across the world. Undoubtedly, India and for that matter West Bengal is no exception to this common trend. In reality, West Bengal has also been following the same track.

Trend of Urbanization in West Bengal

Economic development is, generally, associated with the growth of urbanization. Some economists observe that the acid test of development of a country lies in the shift of population from the rural areas to the urban areas. In the following paragraphs we shall demonstrate the trend of urbanization in West Bengal during the last

one hundred spanning between 1901 and 2001. According to census of 2001, there lived, in West Bengal, a population of 80176197 of which 57748946 lived in rural areas while the remaining 22427251 lived in urban areas. It is a matter of great surprise to see that nearly 72 per cent of the population of the State of West Bengal lived in the city of Kolkata and towns like Asansol, Kharagpur, Andal, Durgapur, Habra, Englishbazar, Raiganj, Nabadwip, Raniganj, Ranaghat, Krishnagar, Berhampore, Balurghat, Shiliguri, Shiliguri, Alipurduar and some other towns. Again, according to the latest census of 2001, in West Bengal there were fifty eight towns, each having a population of at least one lakh. In 1991, the number of such towns was forty eight. Besides, as per the 2001 census, in India, there are thirty five urban agglomerations having a minimum population of one million. These include our capital, Kolkata and Asansol, having a population of 1090171. Let us now concentrate on the trend of urbanization in West Bengal between 1901 and 2001 as revealed through Table 1.

Table1 Percentage Distribution of Urban and Rural Population of West Bengal between 1901 and 2001

Census Years	Percentage of Population in Urban Areas	Percentage of Population in Rural Areas
1901	12.20	87.80
1911	13.05	86.95
1921	14.41	85.59
1931	15.32	84.68
1941	20.41	79.59
1951	23.88	76.12
1961	24.45	75.55
1971	24.75	75.25
1981	26.47	73.53
1991	27.48	72.52
2001	28.03	71.97

Source: Census of India, 19981 and 2001

It is seen from Table1 that till 1931 the extent of urbanization was very much limited in West Bengal. Between 1901 and 1931 the percentage of people living in urban areas increased only by three, from 12.20 to 15.32. However, between 1931 and 1941 there was a quick improvement in urbanization in this state as during this inter-censal period there was more than five percentage increase in the rate of urbanization. The first post-independent census taking place in 1951 reveals that about 24 percent of total population of West Bengal lived in urban areas. This percentage improved nominally in the subsequent two censuses and became 26.47 and 27.48 respectively in the censuses of 1981 and 1991. In fine, according to the census of 2001, more than 28 percent of total population of West Bengal lived in the urban areas. It may be mentioned that the level of urbanization in the state of West Bengal had kept well ahead of India during the first ninety years of the last century. However, the latest census (2001) data reveal that the two rates have almost converged in 2001.

TREND OF URBANIZATION IN WEST BENGAL ACROSS THE DISTRICTS

We have seen that in West Bengal about 28 percent of total population lives in the urban areas. However, the trend of urbanization in West Bengal across the districts is not at all encouraging. Table 2 will display this phenomenon.

Table 2 displays that the urban expansion in the state of West Bengal centered, as it was, on the single metropolis of Kolkata. In reality, the districts in the neighborhood of

Table 2 Percentage of Urban People Living in Districts of West Bengal in 1991 and 2001 and Ranks Attained by these Districts

Districts	% of urban people	Rank	% of urban people	Rank
Darjeeling	30.47	6	32.44	6
Jalpaiguri	16.36	8	17.74	8
Cooch Behar	7.81	17	9.10	15
North Dinajpur	13.34	10	12.06	12
South Dinajpur	13.35	9	13.09	10
Maldah	7.07	18	7.32	18
Murshidabad	10.43	12	12.79	11
Nadia	22.63	7	21.27	7
North 24-Parganas	51.23	2	54.30	2
South 24-Parganas	13.03	11	15.77	9
Kolkata	100.00	1	100.00	1
Howrah	49.58	3	50.39	3
Hooghly	31.19	5	33.48	5
Burdwan	35.09	4	37.18	4
Birbhum	8.98	15	8.58	16
Bankura	8.29	16	7.37	17
Midnapore*	9.85	13	10.49	13
Purulia	9.44	14	10.07	14
West Bengal	27.48	-	28.03	-

Source: Calculated from Censuses of India, 1991 and 2001.

(The Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient: +0.98)

We have considered undivided Midnapore because this historic district was divided into East and West Midnapore only on January 1, 2002.

Kolkata, namely North 24-Parganas, Howrah, Burdwan and Hooghly had experienced rapid urbanization in both 1991 and 2001. In this race the solitary exception is Darjeeling which is very highly attractive and alluring to the tourists all over the world. Table 2 just portrays the information that these districts have occupied the supreme ranks in both 1991 and 2001. Besides, the Spearman's rank correlation coefficient between ranks attained by eighteen districts of the state in 1991 and 2001 has been found to be +0.98. This signifies the fact that the relative position of the

Districts of the state in the field of urbanization between 1991 and 2001 have remained almost unaltered. A very surprising aspect of the district-wise spread of urbanization in the state of West Bengal is that though the rate of urbanization in this state in 2001 was slightly higher than that in 1991, some other districts, namely North and

South Dinajpur, Nadia, Birbhum and Bankura had experienced a relatively lower rate of urbanization in 2001 than the corresponding figures attained by these in 1991. On the other hand, some other districts, viz. North 24-Parganas, Howrah, Burdwan and Hooghly had experienced a higher rate of urbanization in 2001 than in 1991. The hilly district of the state, that is, Darjeeling, had also experienced an improvement in urbanization in 2001.

The Table also discloses that in both 1991 and 2001 the rate of urbanization in as many as twelve districts has been less than the corresponding figure of the state as a whole. This, obviously, signifies a great disparity in the growth of urbanization in West Bengal. Let us now portray the growth of towns in West Bengal, which has been done in the following section.

GROWTH OF TOWNS IN WEST BENGAL

The total number of towns in West Bengal has been growing at a rapid speed. Table3 will give a hint to this direction.

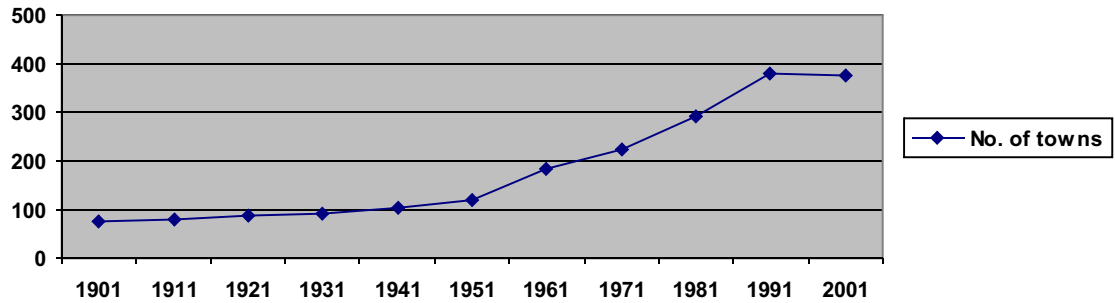
Table3 Number of Towns in West Bengal between 1901 and 2001

Census Years	Number of Towns	Rate of growth over the previous census
1901	78	-
1911	81	3.85
1921	89	9.88
1931	94	5.62
1941	105	11.70
1951	120	14.28
1961	184	53.33
1971	223	21.20
1981	291	30.49
1991	382	31.27
2001	375	-1.83

Source: Censuses of India, Relevant Issues

Table3 displays that between 1901 and 1951 there was a relatively slow growth in the number of towns in this state. In fact, the decadal trend growth rate of towns in the first half of the last century was calculated to be 8.91 percent. However, in the second half of that century the growth rate proceeded to 26.24 per cent. In the entire period of 100 years between 1901 and 2001 the decadal growth rate of towns in West Bengal was 20.86 per cent. However, the slow growth of towns in the first half of the twentieth century was subsequently broken and in the inter-censal decade 1951-1961, there were more than fifty three per cent increases in the number of towns here. Between 1961 and 1971, 39 new towns and between 1971 and 1981, 68 such towns had been added to the map of towns in the state. The total number of towns in the state in 1991 increased to 382 and that in 2001 it became 372. According to the latest available information there are, in West Bengal, 126 Municipalities.

The following diagram measuring census years along the horizontal axis and the number of towns along the vertical axis, will display the trend of growth of towns in West Bengal between 1901 and 2001. The line diagram clearly demonstrates that there is a visible increment in the number of towns in West Bengal after 1931. Between 1951 and 1961 there was a



steep growth in the number of towns and this trend continued till 1991, in 2001, however, there was a declining trend in the growth of this trend.

We now wish to discuss the number of different types of towns in West Bengal at the district level. In our censuses towns have been grouped into six classes on the basis of the number of population living in a particular town. Such a classification has been demonstrated in Table 4.

Table4 Classification of Towns on the Basis of Population

Number of Population	Nature of Towns
100000 and more	Class-1
50000 to 99999	Class-2
20000 to 49999	Class-3
10000 to 19999	Class-4
5000 to 9999	Class-5
Below 5000	Class-6

Source: Censuses of India, Relevant Issues

On the basis of this classification of towns in our censuses let us now present the district-wise number of six classes of towns in the state of West Bengal in the last two censuses, namely 1991 and 2001. Table 5 will reflect such a feature.

A scrutiny of Table5 displays that the number of Class 1 Towns in West Bengal had increased from 44 in 1991 to 58 in 2001, an increment of about 32 per cent. Of these additional towns increased in the inter-censal decade, 1991-2001, North 24-Parganas alone had shared as many as six, Hooghly had done three. Such towns though non-existent in South 24-Parganas in 1991 had sprang in 2001 and numbered two, there sprang an additional town of this type in Darjeeling and in Purulia there was a new development of this town. It is also noted from Table 5 that the total number of Class 2 towns, Class 3 and Class 4 Towns in the state as a whole declined in 2001, while the number of Class 5 and Class 6 Towns had slightly increased. The rate of decline in Class 2 Towns in two 24-Parganas is really noticeable. In North 24-Parganas the number of Class 3 Towns in 2001 declined to 4 from 10 in 1991 and the number of Class 4 Towns declined to 7 in 2001 from 13 in 1991. In case of South 24-Parganas the number of Class 4 and Class 5 Towns in 2001 had reduced almost to one-third of their number in 1991. All these information suggest that due to high pressure of population many towns, specially in 24-Parganas, have upgraded their Class, that is, Class 2 Towns have been tipped to the status of Class 1 Towns, Class 3 Towns have been tipped to the status of Class 2 towns and so on. However, there can be no denying the

fact that the main attraction of the people is to throng into Class I Towns. We would, therefore, stipulate that the urban structure in West Bengal like all other states and Union Territories in India has become more and more skewed due to higher demographic growth in larger cities. Higher demographic growth in Class I Towns is partially due to the natural growth rate of population and immigration. It may also be said that a large number of satellite towns has emerged in the vicinity of these cities. These have become part of the city agglomeration over time. There are also outgrowths that have been treated as parts of the agglomeration by the census. Further, here has been expansion in the municipal boundaries of the Class I Towns, contributing to urban growth. All these facts have been responsible for the higher growth rate of Class I Towns in West Bengal.

Table 5 District-wise Classification of Towns in West Bengal in 1991 and 2001

Districts	Class I		Class II		Class III		Class IV		Class V		Class VI	
	1991	2001	1991	2001	1991	2001	1991	2001	1991	2001	1991	2001
Darjeeling	1	2	1	-	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	1
Jalpaiguri	1	1	2	1	3	4	5	7	4	2	-	1
Cooch Behar	-	-	1	1	-	2	5	5	3	1	-	1
North Dinajpur	1	1	-	1	2	1	1	1	1	2	-	-
South Dinajpur	1	1	-	1	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	-
Maldah	1	1	-	1	1	-	1	-	1	3	-	-
Murshidabad	1	1	1	3	9	7	1	5	6	13	-	-
Nadia	3	3	4	5	4	3	4	4	11	10	1	-
North 24-Parganas	16	22	7	2	10	4	13	7	11	12	2	1
South 24-Parganas	-	2	4	1	6	6	11	4	19	6	2	2
Kolkata	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Howrah	3	3	1	1	3	7	17	14	22	23	1	5
Hooghly	6	9	4	2	5	4	7	6	12	16	2	3
Burdwan	5	6	4	2	8	6	15	14	23	27	6	11
Birbhum	-	-	2	3	4	2	-	-	-	1	1	-
Bankura	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	-
Midnapore	3	3	2	4	4	4	9	4	1	4	3	2
Purulia	-	1	1	-	1	3	4	2	3	5	1	1
West Bengal	44	58	35	29	64	56	96	76	121	128	22	28

Source: Census of India, Relevant Issues

Let us now dwell something on the process of urbanization in West Bengal. Here we have inserted three concepts, namely, (a) level of urbanization, (b) rate of urbanization and (c) urban growth rate.

By level of urbanization we have meant percentage of urban population in total population. By rate of urbanization we have meant the changes in the percentage of urban population in the following year in terms of that of the previous year. By urban growth rate we have meant percentage change in total population in the following year in terms of that in the previous year. These have been calculated in the following manner:

Level of urbanization = (urban population / total population) x 100.

Rate of urbanization (say) between 1901 and 1911 = (% of urban people in 1911 - % of urban population in 1901) x 100.

Urban growth rate (say) between 1901 and 1911 = (Urban people in 1911 - Urban people in 1901) x 100 / Urban people in 1901. All these matters in case of West Bengal have been calculated and presented in Table 6.

Table6 The Process of Urbanization in West Bengal

Census Years	Level of Urbanization	Rate of Urbanization	Urban Growth Rate
1901	12.20	-	-
1911	13.05	6.97	13.70
1921	14.41	10.42	7.16
1931	15.32	6.32	15.01
1941	20.41	33.23	63.69
1951	23.88	13.00	32.52
1961	24.45	2.39	35.97
1971	24.75	1.23	28.41
1981	26.47	6.95	31.73
1991	27.43	3.63	29.49
2001	28.03	2.19	20.20

Source: Computed from information collected from relevant censuses.

REASONS BEHIND GROWING URBANIZATION IN WEST BENGAL

It is now the turn for finding the reasons behind the growing urbanization in West Bengal. From various enquiry and different sources we have found out a number of reasons behind a relatively high growth rate of urbanization in this state. These reasons have been discussed in the following paragraphs.

1. Natural Increase in Urban Population in the state itself.

A very fundamental reason behind a high growth rate of urbanization in West Bengal is the natural increase in urban population, which is given by the number by which the birth rate exceeds the death rate in the urban areas. This is, probably, higher than the rate prevailing in the rural areas. Besides, because of the health and medical facilities the net survival rate is also higher. We know that West Bengal has been passing through a period of high population growth which will appear at the Table 7.

Table7 Growth of Population in West Bengal between 1951 and 2001

Census Years	Rural	Urban	Total
1951	20018338	6281648	26299980
1961	26385437	8540842	34926279
1971	33344978	10967033	44312011
1981	40133926	14446721	54580647
1991	49370364	18707601	68077965
2001	57734690	22486481	80221171

Source: Census of India, Relevant Issues

Since in West Bengal population has been increasing at a high rate, the natural increase of population in the urban areas is also expected to be high. There is a steady increase in the size of urban centers as well as the level of urbanization in West Bengal. Between 1951 and 2001 urban population increased from 23.88% to 28.03%.

1. INFLUX OF POPULATION IN WEST BENGAL FROM NEIGHBOURING STATES

One vital cause behind rapid urbanization in West Bengal between 1941 and 1951 (when urban people in West

Bengal increased from 20.41 per cent to 23.88 per cent) is the growing refugee population who mostly got settled in urban areas. So just after independence on 15th August, 1947 when India was divided, a large portion of population coming continuously from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) used to come to Kolkata and other urban areas. This had a tremendous impact upon urbanization in the state in general and Kolkata in particular.

2. MIGRATION FROM RURAL AREAS TO URBAN AREAS

Migration means the shifting or settlement of a person or a group of persons from one cultural area or place of habitation to another, more or less permanently. The term “migration” has been defined in New Webster's Dictionary as “The act or an instance of moving from one area to another in search of work. The word “urban” indicates civilized and polished citizens who reside in a city or town, while “rural” emphasizes rustic, pastoral or agricultural. There is, no doubt, that migration plays an important role in the life of rural as well as urban residents, but the causes or factors are more significant. The factors influencing rural-urban migration are varied and complex. In earlier times migration from rural to urban areas was largely on account of non-economic factors such as social, physical, demographic, cultural and communication factors. In villages, social organizations are rigid and in the past people who wanted to break away from these organizations used to migrate to cities. Climatic conditions and meteorological disasters like floods and droughts compelled people to leave villages. In recent times with the decline in mortality rates which resulted in rapid population growth in rural areas, young people have shown a tendency to look for jobs in the cities.

Improved transportation, urban-oriented education and modernizing impact of cinemas, radios and television have also induced migration of people from rural to urban areas. The chief reason for voluntary migration is, obviously, economic. Mostly, people have migrated themselves in search of better economic opportunities.

So a very important factor causing high growth of urbanization in the state of West Bengal (and, obviously, in other parts of India as well) lies in massive migration from rural areas to the urban areas. It is reported from some source that the day time population of Kolkata is about 10 per cent of total population (0.681 million) of the state. People of all walks of life from different parts of the state from early dawn continuously move to the city of Kolkata in search of job, business, official works, and hospital facilities and even for begging. This being the picture of Kolkata, the picture of urban areas in the state can, easily, be guessed. The information contained in Table 8 will reveal the extent of migration from rural areas to the urban areas.

Table 8 Pattern of Migration (from rural to urban areas) in West Bengal

Nature of migration	Within India inter-state			Within West Bengal			From other States to West Bengal		
	1971	1981	1991	1971	1981	1991	1971	1981	1991
Total Migrated people('000)	158663	201247	232112	8230	112221	13144	1851	2108	2005
Percentage of Total Migration	14.58	16.62	17.19	8.98	11.61	13.35	40.19	49.45	48.48

Source: Human Development, Poverty, Migration and Urban Informal Sector in west Bengal: A Systems Approach by Basabi Bhattacharyya, pp121.

Table 8 demonstrates that with the passage of time more and more percentage of rural people has been migrating to urban areas. This is true within West Bengal, within India (inter-state migration) and from other states. Naturally, such migration has a serious impact upon urban life.

Let us now dwell on the district-wise nature of migration as has been presented in Table 9.

Table9 Percentage of rural and urban share of migration within state to districts

Migration to Districts	1971(from other districts)		1981(from other districts)		1991(from other districts)	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Darjeeling	18.97	71.16	37.83	61.60	47.30	52.15
Jalpaiguri	27.74	61.77	35.65	63.94	44.87	51.63
Coochbehar	21.72	66.76	44.02	55.37	41.00	57.06
West Dinajpur	25.26	66.38	40.45	59.03	45.06	54.74
Malda	29.19	66.69	44.62	55.36	49.33	50.72
Murshidabad	39.91	56.94	44.43	55.55	50.33	48.90
Nadia	26.54	69.52	38.85	59.30	43.73	56.01
24-Parganas	16.37	76.91	24.36	74.26	52.27	47.05
Kolkata	69.27	19.93	64.35	32.99	71.43	28.55
Howrah	37.17	49.95	47.43	51.82	62.76	35.65
Hooghly	-	-	36.08	63.82	56.72	41.18
Burdwan	40.72	50.77	59.84	39.96	60.65	8.33
Birbhum	44.12	55.88	48.59	51.13	52.98	45.73
Bankura	33.88	59.99	44.41	55.57	49.59	49.89
Midnapur	37.25	58.88	47.44	51.19	48.17	51.83
Purulia	37.02	61.21	38.33	60.20	44,32	55.57

Source: *Human Development, Poverty, Migration and Urban Informal Sector in West Bengal: A systems Approach* by Bhattacharyya pp.124.

There are a good number of reasons behind this migration. Some of these reasons have been discussed in the following paragraphs:

(I) POOR QUALITY OF INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE RURAL AREAS:

Poor quality of infrastructure in the rural areas has allowed massive migration from the rural areas to the urban ones. One such poor quality is revealed by the deplorable condition of roads. Table 10 displays that of the six states having villages with metalled roads in 1995-96 the least had been in the state of West Bengal. The picture of villages having metalled roads in West Bengal vis-à-vis some other states of our country will appear in Table 10.

Table 10 Villages with Metalled Roads in 1995-96.

STATES	NUMBER
Karnataka	17732
Maharashtra	17260
Madhya Pradesh	16059
Tamil Nadu	11952
Andhra Pradesh	13567
West Bengal	9391

Source: Taken from Dhanadhanye(Yojana), October 2002.

The Table illustrates the pathetic scene of villages of West Bengal in respect of metalled roads in 1995-96. With respect to road length also West Bengal cuts a very sorry figure as has been illustrated in Table 11.

The Table indicates that over a period of about twenty years West Bengal had seen the least increase of road length. The condition of most road of West Bengal in both urban and rural areas, specially in the rainy season, is extremely difficult, if not impossible and naturally passengers are put to considerable discomfort, It may be added that among the mega cities of India Kolkata has the least percentage of space kept for roads and open space, 'barely 8% of the total area of Kolkata has been used for roads and open space'. In this respect the position of Salt Lake City, the newly developed township in west Bengal, is better, having about 30% of total area kept for roads and open space.

TABLE 11 Road Length (in'000 km.) of Some States of India.

States	Road Length '000 km.	
	1975-76	1994-95
Maharashtra	113	225
Uttar Pradesh	192	214
Orissa	48	210
Andhra Pradesh	104	172
Karnataka	101	140
Kerala	87	139
West Bengal	54	62
Tamil Nadu	110	205
Madhya Pradesh	94	211

Source: Taken from Dhanadhanye(Yojana), October 2002.

((II) A RELATIVELY POOR LITERACY RATE IN RURAL BENGAL:

From the last two censuses it is known that the literacy rate in West Bengal has improved, no doubt, but there is much to be attained. In 1991 only 57.70% of the people of West Bengal were literate while in 2001 this figure rose to 69.22%. In 1991 on the all-India perspective in the sphere of literacy rate West Bengal had the rank of 13th, while in 2001 west Bengal had the rank of 11th. In Kerala, the literacy rate was 89.81% in 1991 and 90.91% in 2001. Naturally, Kerala is much more advanced than West Bengal in the sphere of education.

Even in West Bengal there is wide disparity in literacy rate between rural areas and urban areas. The following Tables 12 and 13 will highlight this phenomenon.

((III) POOR HEALTH SERVICES PREVAILING IN RURAL AREAS:

From both Tables 12 and 13 it is noticed that in comparison to literacy rate prevailing in rural areas is deplorable. So many people who can afford the cost of expenditure of education (at school level and also at higher level) are coming to the urban areas for giving for better education to their near and dear ones.

In general, health services in West Bengal are not at all satisfactory. In this respect many indicators of good health, namely (i) Birth Rate, (ii) Death Rate, (iii) Total Fertility Rate, (iv) Infant Mortality Rate (IMR), (v) Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) (vi) Life Expectancy at birth, (vii) Sex Ratio, (viii) Working Children in the age group of 5-14, (ix) Anaemia among women and (x) Anaemia among children. Considering all these

indicators of good health it has been examined that Kerala, one of the 15 major states of India, has attained the top rank while West Bengal's rank is more or less of the median type.

TABLE 12 Literacy Rate in West Bengal Across Districts (Rural vis-à-vis Urban) in 1991.

Districts	Literacy Rate (1991)			Rank Attained	
	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban
Darjeeling	49.17	76.82	57.95	8	6
Jalpaiguri	39.70	71.07	45.09	14	14
Cooch Behar	42.89	77.23	45.78	11	5
Dinajpur (N)	27.78	74.49	34.58	17	8
Dinajpur(N)	40.96	79.93	46.40	12	1
Malda	32.57	73.11	35.62	16	12
Murshidabad	35.52	60.80	38.28	15	18
Nadia	46.06	73.53	52.50	10	11
24-Parganas (N)	53.36	78.48	66.81	5	2
24-Parganas (S)	52.30	72.02	55.10	6	13
Kolkata	--	77.61	77.61	--	4
Howrah	61.28	73.72	67.62	3	9
Hooghly	62.29	76.16	66.78	2	7
Burdwan	56.83	70.86	61.88	4	15
Birbhum	46.60	67.42	48.56	9	17
Bankura	50.01	73.70	52.04	7	10
Midnapur	68.27	78.42	69.32	1	3
Purulia	40.32	70.58	43.29	13	16
West Bengal	50.50	75.27	67.81	--	--

Source: *Census of India*, Relevant Issues.

TABLE 13 Literacy Rate in West Bengal Across Districts (Rural vis-à-vis Urban) in 2001.

Districts	Literacy Rate (2001)			Rank Attained	
	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban
Darjeeling	66.00	83.34	71.79	6	3
Jalpaiguri	58.93	80.02	62.85	13	12
Cooch Behar	64.27	85.18	66.30	8	2
Dinajpur (N)	42.86	80.50	47.89	17	10
Dinajpur(N)	60.38	83.28	63.59	11	4
Malda	47.76	79.28	50.28	16	14
Murshidabad	52.28	86.34	54.35	15	18
Nadia	61.82	81.41	66.14	10	7
24-Parganas (N)	69.07	85.19	78.05	4	1
24-Parganas (S)	67.40	79.84	69.45	5	13
Kolkata	--	80.86	80.86	--	9
Howrah	72.81	81.02	77.01	2	8
Hooghly	71.02	82.95	75.11	3	5
Burdwan	65.83	77.39	70.18	7	16
Birbhum	59.88	77.65	61.48	12	15
Bankura	62.04	80.22	63.44	9	11
Midnapur	73.95	82.91	74.90	1	6
Purulia	53.24	75.40	55.57	14	17
West Bengal	63.42	81.25	68.64	--	--

Source: *Census of India*, Relevant Issues.

Again, in comparison to health services prevailing in urban Bengal, those services prevailing in rural Bengal are very precarious. It is known that in West Bengal there are 830 urban people (corresponding figure at all-India level being 182) per doctor and 4727 rural people per doctor. Besides, the condition of rural health centers, Sub-Divisional Hospitals etc. is anybody's guess.

One such disparity in rural and urban health services has been presented in Table 14.

Table 14 District-wise number of hospitals and beds in West Bengal in 1991

Districts	Number of Hospitals			Number of beds available		
	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
Darjeeling	21	16	37	734	1598	2332
Jalpaiguri	43	7	50	878	1025	1903
Coochbehar	2	7	9	122	790	912
West Dinajpur	2	5	7	30	600	630
Malda	1	5	6	75	657	732
Murshidabad	1	12	13	43	1984	2027
Nadia	7	14	21	1327	2910	4237
24-Parganas	2	46	48	180	4674	4854
Kolkata	-	73	73	-	17452	17452
Howrah	2	20	22	128	2538	2666
Hooghly	5	19	24	295	2642	2937
Burdwan	9	25	34	975	4199	5174
Birbhum	4	6	10	445	795	1240
Bankura	5	4	9	915	1153	2068
Midnapur	4	14	18	441	2397	2898
Purulia	5	6	11	898	557	1455
West Bengal	113	279	392	7486	46961	54447

Source: Human Development, Poverty, Migration and Urban Informal Sector in West Bengal: A Systems Approach, Basabi Bhattacharyya, pp94

From the information contained in Table 14 we see that in 1991 the number of hospitals in urban Bengal was 279 while that in rural Bengal was 115 which are just 40.5 percent of the urban hospitals. Besides, the district-wise record of these hospitals reveals that the number of hospitals in urban areas is greater than those existing in rural areas. This is especially true for 24-Parganas, Howrah, Hooghly, Midnapur, Nadia, Murshidabad and Burdwan. Similar is the case with the number of beds available in both rural and urban Bengal. The Table demonstrates that the number of beds available in urban Bengal was 46961 which are more than 6.27 times 7486 beds prevailing in rural Bengal. The district-wise situation of beds available in rural and urban centers can, easily, be understood by minutely going through the above Table. Such wide disparity in the number of hospitals and also in the number of beds in urban and rural areas inspires many people to leave rural areas and to settle in urban areas. Because of the very poor quality of health services prevailing in rural Bengal, persons having affordable income are bound to leave their shelter in rural areas for making permanent residence there. Naturally, people of rural areas are getting more and more urbanized.

Table 15 District-wise number of hospitals and beds in West Bengal in 2005

Districts	Number of Hospitals			Number of beds available		
	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
Darjeeling	20	18	38	705	1762	2467
Jalpaiguri	43	8	51	918	1085	2003
Coochbehar	3	8	11	137	990	1127
Dinajpur(N)	1	4	5	10	498	508
Dinajpur(S)	1	3	4	20	600	620
Malda	0	5	5	0	657	657
Murshidabad	4	11	15	129	1931	2060
Nadia	8	17	25	1389	3175	4564
24-Parganas(N)	1	46	47	10	3874	3884
24-Parganas(S)	1	20	21	143	2486	2629
Kolkata	-	71	71	-	17846	17846
Howrah	4	21	25	238	2638	2876
Hooghly	4	21	25	289	2680	2968
Burdwan	5	30	35	230	5223	5453
Birbhum	3	7	10	306	1032	1338
Bankura	6	4	10	970	1289	2259
Midnapur(E)	1	5	6	24	809	833
Midnapur(W)	3	12	15	384	1991	2375
Purulia	7	7	14	947	897	1844
West Bengal	115	318	433	6849	51463	58312

Source: West Bengal, October2006, pp23-24

A comparative study of the information in Tables 14 and 15 shows that the number of hospitals in Kolkata in 2005 declined to 71 from 73 in 1991. There may be a number of causes behind this. In 1991 when census was taken, physical verification of hospitals (Govt., Private and the like) was made. Subsequently, some hospitals might have fallen sick, or there may be some dispute or some may, temporarily, be closed. In case of Malda district in 1991 there was one hospital in rural areas. However, in 2005 it can not be traced. This rural hospital may remain closed.

(IV) UNEMPLOYMENT AND EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

For the last three decades or so the people of rural Bengal are not interested in reviving their traditional occupations which were so long cherished by their ancestors. Modernity has entered into the mind of young people. Many young people are not looking after their cultivable land and traditional occupations (for example, priesthood, carpentry, barber, grazing of cattle *etc.*) and they are moving to the urban areas in search of jobs at whatever low wage they get. The expanding employment opportunities for skilled and unskilled workers are found in growing cities. Poor labor class persons are shifting to the towns and metropolitan cities in search of trivial jobs like cobbler, carpenter, barber, factory workers, labor for construction, tailors, washer man, domestic servants and also odd jobs in organized firms and public establishments while there is a growing demand for labor in all these activities associated with the economic growth of the city. There is increasing unemployment and underemployment in different degrees in rural areas. According to Sinha (1983) employment opportunities generated in the manufacturing sector is the most important determinant of rural-urban migration in India. West Bengal is not an exception. It has been known for a long time that agricultural

laborers are the worst victims of unemployment and underemployment. According to the 11th and 12th rounds of “Indian National Sample Survey” the incidence of unemployment among male agricultural labor

Was four times that of other males, while among the female agricultural workers, it was seven times that of other females. The position of landless laborers was still worse, since their employment was open and they have no protection against economic crisis. In West Bengal agricultural unemployment and underemployment are the major factors pushing migrants towards areas with greater job opportunities. Those who can complete their school education are also coming to urban areas for making themselves ready for getting employment through various competitive examinations.

(V) BOUNDARY CHANGES

At times the boundaries of the towns have been extended. The areas previously designed as rural areas have passed into urban category by satisfying some criteria. As cities expanded, the outlying rural areas have been included in the urban areas. It is not that these rural areas have all, on a sudden, become urban areas. They may, even, continue to retain most of the characteristics of villages. However, their inclusion in the expanding cities put them under the areas classified as towns. Of course, at the time of reclassification these areas hold rural population. But they are counted as urban population by virtue of being classified as urban areas. In future these are bound to acquire the features of urban life. However, rural population falling in these areas swells the number of urban population.

(VI) CONCENTRATION OF FACILITIES

The places where various facilities like cheap transport and communication system, educational institutions like schools, colleges, and universities are located turned into urban centers. Cities like Kolkata, Howrah, Asansol, Siliguri, Burdwan, Durgapur have turned into big urban centers due to these facilities, which, in turn, induce further growth of urban centers. Side by side, trading and industrial activities agglomerate and urban centers grow.

(VII) MISCELLANEOUS CAUSES

Besides the above-mentioned prominent causes leading to growing urbanization in West Bengal, there are some important causes, though, not of high significance, behind it.

It is, usually, stated that gone are the days of the past when there was a deep sense of neighbourhood. At that time people with due respect and fellow feeling used to remain present in the house of the neighbour at their beck and call. Now, people want to have a calm and peaceful life, which, according to the old people, is not possible at present and is, thus, the story of the past. So whenever opportunities arrive, people try to leave their land, home and so on and make a shelter in the vicinity of urban areas. There are many instances which reveal that many people, being dishonored and disrespected in rural areas, move to urban areas by sacrificing all their belongings in the rural areas. Moreover, the people so long used to take recourse to their traditional profession like carpentry, cobbling, drumming *etc.* are not getting interest in these because these, in modern society, have become highly irrelevant. So, finding no alternative they proceed towards the urban areas in search of getting a continuous source of income.

In addition to those the so-called educated young persons do not want to pursue agriculture where a large number of women have been working. These young persons are finding some shelters in the urban areas and by doing a number of jobs at a time they have been supplementing their family income. Diversification of occupational structure in the urban centers is the magnetic force of attracting rural young people. In this way

also a large number of urban people have been migrating to urban areas.

The so-called small towns like Asansol, Durgapur, Krishnagar, Ranaghat, Siliguri, Balurghat, Berhampur and so on have registered a phenomenal growth due to these towns' magnetic force of attracting a large crowd.

PROBLEMS OF URBANIZATION IN WEST BENGAL

Basically, there are two major problems of urbanization in West Bengal. The first one is the high degree of urban concentration in and around Kolkata. The second problem is the absence of a strong base of small and medium urban centers. Kolkata is, in fact, a three-in-one city: an administrative head quarter, a business center and a center higher education. Kolkata being the best center of trade and administration and the peculiar nature of employment that job seekers like bureaucrats, military men, office employees, transport workers, mechanics, plumbers, porters, domestic servants, middlemen etc. usually take up, has attracted many people not only from various parts of India but also from different parts of the globe. Besides, Kolkata has become the cheapest metropolis of the India. Naturally, after Greater Mumbai, Kolkata has become the largest Urban Agglomeration in India. It may be mentioned here that between 1991 and 2001 the annual compound growth rate of population in Kolkata Agglomeration has been 1.93 percent.

The basic reason behind the high degree of concentration in and around Kolkata is that living in the countryside has become more difficult for thousands of people who constitute the rural labor force. The small and medium-sized towns of Kolkata's hinterland are hardly in a better position to offer employment to millions of our rural people. The growth of Kolkata's population is, thus, only partially due to the natural increase in the city's population but mainly due to the influx from outside. It is surprising to note that in this core city with an area of 104 sq.km had lived a population of 1.02million in 1911 and in this very city with the same area lived a population of 4.6 million in 2001. In this context it will be worth while to mention that since our villages are very underdeveloped, people are forced to come to Kolkata during the day time to earn their livelihood, making the city's day-time population about 10 per cent of the state's total population. Many of these people swarm the pavements and kerbs throughout the day. It is worth mentioning that 32.55 per cent of total population of Kolkata live in the bustees (census, 2001).

Besides, the infrastructural facilities are extremely concentrated in Kolkata and there is a vast gap between Kolkata and other cities and towns with respect to the quality and level of such facilities. Obviously, in the absence of a few intermediate size cities, it is difficult to reduce the burden of Kolkata without sustained government effort to develop the smaller cities.

CONCLUSION

It is a fact that the rate of urbanization in West Bengal has been slightly greater than that of India. But there has not been proper dispersal of urbanization in this state. Urbanization has been centered basically on Kolkata and on the districts in the neighbourhood of this great city. Unless there is adequate dispersal of the urban centers, Kolkata and some twenty towns of the state will have to bear the tremendous burden of population and this will lead huge damage to environment and related matters. Moreover, there will be lots of problems related to urbanization in Calcutta and the twenty towns we have been referring to.

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