



প্রতিধ্বনি the Echo

Pratidhwani the Echo

A Peer-Reviewed Indexed International Journal of Humanities & Social Science

Published by: Dept. of Bengali

Karimganj College, Karimganj, Assam, India

Website: <https://www.thecho.in>

ISSN: 2278-5264 (Online) 2321-9319 (Print)

Trends and Pattern of Urbanization in West Bengal

Nasim Aktar and Chand Sultana

Research Scholars, Department of Geography, A.M.U. ALIGARH U.P, India

Abstract

The present paper is an attempt to analyse the trend and pattern of urbanization in West Bengal. Urbanization has been viewed as an important factor in the areas of economic transformation, orchestrating the breakdown of the feudal order and taking societies to higher levels of social transformation. The term urban population has been defined differently in different country depending on the local condition and criteria. With 31.89 per cent urban population, West Bengal is at a low level of urbanization as compared with the rural population which is 68.11 per cent in 2011 census. The decadal growth of urban population in West Bengal has been found to be a shade higher than the national average. While the national average is 31.16 per cent, the decadal growth rate in the state is 31.89 per cent which plays an significant role in the country's economy. Level of urbanization increased from 27.81 per cent in 2001 Census to 31.16 per cent in 2011 Census in West Bengal.

Keywords: *Urbanization, Urban population, Growth of Towns, Decadal growth rate of urban population*

Introduction: Urbanization refers to the increasing amount of people that live in urban areas. It predominantly results in the physical growth of urban areas, be it horizontal or vertical. By 2050, it is predicted that 64.1 per cent and 85.9 per cent of the developing and developed world respectively will be urbanized. Urbanization is closely linked to modernization, industrialization and the sociological process of rationalization. Urbanization can be described as a specific condition at a set time. The term urbanization can represent the level of urban development relative to overall population. Urbanization is considered to be an inevitable part of economic development. Urbanization has been viewed as an important factor in the areas of economic transformation, orchestrating the breakdown of the feudal order and taking societies to higher levels of social transformation. Urbanization is intrinsically connected and irrevocably enlaced with the development process, as an essential strand in the contemporary economic system. Population residing in urban areas in India according to 1901 census was 11.4 per cent. This count increased to 28.35 per cent according to 2001 census and crossing 30 per cent as per 2011 census, standing at 31.16 per cent. Undoubtedly India and for that matter West Bengal is no exception to this trend. In reality West Bengal has also been following the same track. Level of urbanization increased from 27.81 per cent in 2001 Census to 31.16 per cent in 2011 Census. Among the

most significant changes now affecting mankind of developing countries is the ever-increasing level of urbanization as well as the number of urban centres. Thus the number of urban centres is necessarily a factor in the study of urbanization and national development as well. Small urban centres on the other hand, have already achieved utmost importance particularly in developing countries. Because these small towns act as growth and service centres for the rural hinterland and thus assist in the development of rural economy and also reverse the growth of large cities which in turn mitigate the urban problems. Historically, the process of urbanisation speeded up in the wake of industrial revolution in the western world leading to the expansion of infrastructure such as transport and communication, which propelled increased rural to urban migration. The agglomeration of population, predominance of non-agricultural activities and better provision of social amenities including health and educational infrastructure emerged as distinguishing features of settlements following the industrialization of agrarian economies. In the contemporary times, however, the settlements have become increasingly complex. Thus, in the study of urbanisation it is pertinent to know how urban areas are defined because, from the demographic point of view, the level of urbanisation is measured in terms of percentage of population living in urban areas. An area is classified as rural and urban depending upon various criteria such as population size, density, occupational composition and civic status. There is no thumb rule to divide rural and urban, and the practice is followed diversely across the countries of the world. It is often argued that the process of economic liberalization and associated structural reform would accelerate rural-urban (RU) migration and boost the pace of urbanization. Linking of India with global economy would lead to massive inflow of foreign capital as also rise in indigenous investment resulting in an increase in employment opportunities within or around the existing urban centres. The critics of globalization, however, argue that employment generation in the formal urban economy might not be high due to the capital intensive nature of industrialization under the new policy regime¹. A low rate of infrastructural investment in the public sector in the attempt to control budgetary deficits would slow down both agricultural as well as agro-industrial growth, resulting in high unemployment and exodus from rural areas. This would lead to rapid growth in urban population leading to the unregulated expansion of the urban informal sector. Recent data from Population Census, however, question the proposition of accelerated urban growth. An important feature of urbanization in India is dualism urban growth at macro level is decelerating but in class I cities it is growing. An analysis of the distribution of urban population across size categories reveals that the process of urbanization in India has been large city oriented. This is manifested in a high percentage of urban population being concentrated in class I cities, which has gone up systematically over the decades in the last century. The Government of India has identified urbanization as a key priority area to meet growth targets for the Twelfth Five Year Plan. It points out that over 300 million will be added to India's urban population in the next 20-25 years and identifies the need to provide low-income housing as a key ingredient of a Five point multi-pronged approach needed to manage this transition. The process of urbanisation in India has continued to be top-heavy, oriented towards large cities. This is because of higher demographic growth in larger cities, attributable to both natural increase in the resident population and higher net in-migration. In turn, this is consistent with the fact that larger cities are generally more efficient in generating growth and attracting investments, thus attracting more population. Given the new dynamics of urban industrial development associated with the strategy of globalisation, the small and medium towns, located away from the emerging global centres of growth, particularly those in backward

regions, have not attracted much private investment. Moreover, many of these towns were declassified during the 1990s.

A considerable section of West Bengal's population is increasingly opting for the non-agricultural way of life resulting in rapid urbanization in each of the 19 district of the state is substantiated by provisional data of census 2011 released by the States Directorate of Census Operations here. The data shows that since 2001 there has been a huge increase in urban centres across the state against a decline in the number of villages. The decadal growth of urban population in West Bengal has been found to be a shade higher than the national average. While the national average is 31.16 per cent, the decadal growth rate in the state is 31.89 per cent. A sharp rise of the number of 'census towns' since 2001 is a clear indication that people from rural backgrounds are increasingly decarding agriculture as a livelihood option and opting for more urban alternatives. A census town is defined as a semi-urban centre with a minimum population of 5000 people, a population density of 400 persons per sq. km. and where over 75 per cent of the male population is engaged in non-agricultural activities. The number no of such census towns has gone up from 255 in 2001 to 780 in 2011 and the number of towns has increased from 378 to 909. Meanwhile, the number of villages has come down from 40,782 in 2001 to 40,203 in 2011.

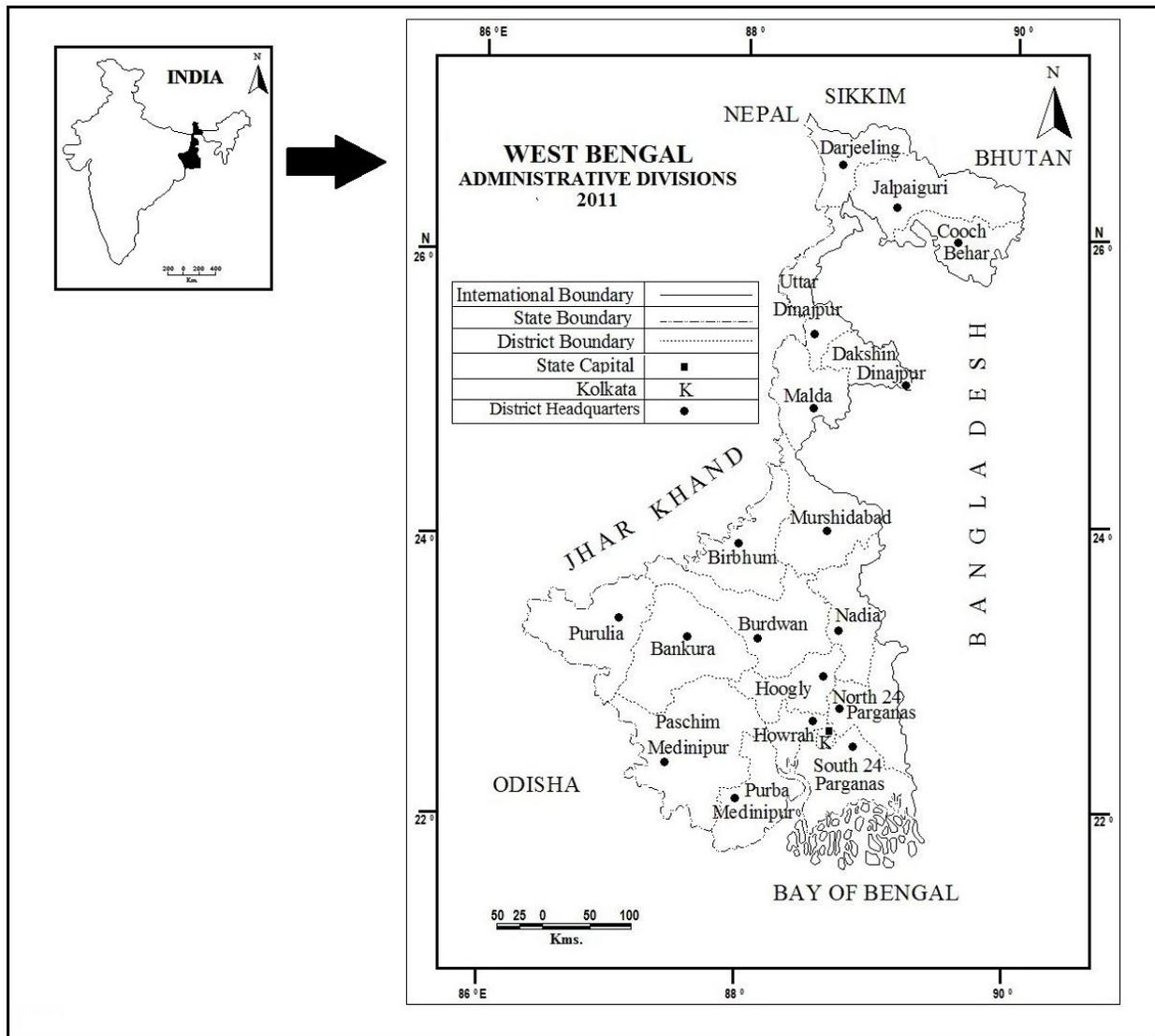
Objectives: Since the study is exploratory in nature, hypothesis could be formulated for testing the results; however, following objectives were aimed at:

1. To find out the existing levels of urbanization in terms of emerging spatial patters in West Bengal.
2. To prove into the process of urbanization in West Bengal with the help of given indicators.
3. To evaluate the regional variation in levels of urbanization in West Bengal and assign plausible cause for the marked regional imbalances in the degree of urbanization in West Bengal.
4. To demarcate the areas suffering from either under urbanization or over urbanization with resultant levels of urban development and urban decay.
5. To suggest, if any, plan strategies to cope up with the distortions introduced in the patterns of urbanization of West Bengal.

Database and Methodology: The study is based on the secondary data obtained from the census of India. District is taken as a unit of study, for analysis and mapping purpose. Data thus collected, interpreted and represented cartographically by using choropleth technique. The spatial patterns emerging from the maps are analysed and interpreted by corelating the degree of urbanization with various demographic, socio- economic and cultural variaables.

Study Area: The state of West Bengal has been selected as a study area which is located between 21°25' North to 26°50' North latitudes and 86°30' East to 89°58' East longitudes with three international boundaries i.e., Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan. It occupies a geographical area of about 88,752 sq. km. (2.70 per cent of the India's total geographical area) and extending from the Himalayas in the north to the Bay of Bengal in the south. It is surrounded by Sikkim and Bhutan in the north, Assam and Bangladesh in the east, the Bay of Bengal in the south and Orissa, Jharkhand, Bihar and Nepal in the west. The agriculture area of the state is 51,675.40 sq. kms. in 2008-09 and ranking the first in production of rice and jute, and second in production of tea in the country viz., 16.10 per cent of the total rice production from the 13.43 per cent total rice producing area, 79.53 per cent of the total jute production from 68.13 per cent of total jute producing area and 19.56 per cent of total tea production from about one-fourth of the area of the country respectively. The total

population of the state is 91347736 and density of population is 1029 in 2011. According to it, 62,213,676 (68.11 per cent) of the State's population resides in rural areas and 29,134,060 (31.89 per cent) lives in urban areas. While the rural population has grown by only 7.73 per cent since 2001, the urban population has leapt up by 29.90 per cent in 10 years with each of the 19 districts showing a higher population growth in urban areas. There are five main seasons in West Bengal, spring, summer, rainy season, a short autumn, and winter. The summer temperatures in the state ranges between 26⁰C and 40⁰C while the winter temperatures ranges from 13⁰C to 19⁰C. The annual rainfall varies in the different parts of the state. North Bengal receives the highest rainfall, 200 to 400 cm. In the coastal areas rainfall is about 200 cm, in the Ganga plain and in the central part of the state



rainfall is 150 to 200 cm. Drought is a common phenomenon in the Bankura and Purulia districts.

Fig.1

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. According to 2011 census, a population of 91,347,736 of which 62183113 lived in rural areas and while remaining 29093002 lived in urban areas.

Table 1: Percentage distribution of urban and rural population in West Bengal (1901-2011)

Census Year	Percentage of Urban population to Total population	Percentage of Rural population to Total population
1901	12.2	87.8
1911	13.05	86.95
1921	14.41	85.59
1931	15.32	84.68
1941	20.41	79.59
1951	23.38	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
2011	31.89	68.11

Source: Census of India

The table-1 clearly indicates that the extent of urbanization was very much limited in West Bengal. between 1901 to 1931 the percentage of people living in urban areas increased only by three, from 12.20 per cent to 15.32 per cent. However, between 1931 and 1941 there was a quick improvement in urbanization in this state as during this inter census period there was more than five percentage increase in the rate of urbanization. The first independent census taking place in 1951 which reveals that about 24 per cent of total population of West Bengal lived in urban areas. This percentage improved nominally in the sequent of two censuses and became 26.47 per cent and 27.48 per cent respectively in the censuses of 1981 and 1991. according to the 2001 census data, more than 28 per cent of total population lived in urban areas. In 2011 census, the level of urbanization had kept well ahead in India and reached up to 31.89 per cent.

Trend of Urbanization in West Bengal across the districts: Urbanization is measured by two ways: First, level and growth of urban share of total population and its distribution by size classes of cities and towns. This is called demographic approach. Second, changes in number and growth of urban centers and an expansion of geographical boundaries of existing urban areas. This is called geographical approach. We have seen that in west bengal 31.89 per cent of total population lives in urban area. However, the trend of urbanization in west bengal across the districts is not at all encouraging. Following table-2 depicts the reality:

Table-2 District-wise levels of Urbanization in West Bengal in 2001 and 2011 and their respective growth

State/District	% of Urban population to total population (2001)	% of Urban population to total population (2011)	Difference/ Growth
Darjeeling	32.34	38.99	6.65
Jalpaiguri	17.84	27	9.16
Cooch Behar	9.1	10.25	1.15
Uttar Dinajpur	12.06	12.07	0.01
Dakshin Dinajpur	13.1	14.13	1.03
Malda	7.32	13.8	6.48
Murshidabad	12.49	19.78	7.29
Birbhum	8.57	12.8	4.23
Burdwan	36.94	39.87	2.93
Nadia	21.27	27.81	6.54
North 24- Parganas	54.3	57.03	2.73
Hoogli	33.47	38.62	5.15
Bankura	7.37	8.36	0.99
Purulia	10.07	12.75	2.68
Howrah	50.36	63.3	12.94
Kolkata	100	100	0
South 24- Parganas	15.73	25.61	9.88
Paschim Medinipur	11.9	12.03	0.13
Purba Medinipur	8.29	11.65	3.36
West Bengal	27.97	31.89	3.92

Source: Census of India

Kolkata, Howrah, North-24 Parganas, Burdwan, and Darjeeling considerably had experienced a rapid urbanization during 2011 census. Howrah had experienced a tremendous rate of urbanization i.e. 12.94 per cent. In this regard South-24 Parganas experienced 9.88 per cent increase of urbanization from 2001 census. Jaipalguri, Murshidabad, Malda had shown a great increase in this regard. 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 is slightly higher than that in 2001 but some other districts like Bankura, Paschim Medinipur, Cooch Behar had experienced a lower rate of urbanization. The hilly area like Darjeeling had experienced an improvement in urbanization during 2011 census.

Growth of Towns in West Bengal:

Table-3: Number of Towns in West Bengal between 1901 and 2011

Census Year	No. of Towns	Rate of Growth over previous Year
1901	78	-
1911	81	3.85
1921	89	9.88

1931	94	5.62
1941	105	11.7
1951	120	14.28
1961	184	53.33
1971	223	21.2
1981	291	30.49
1991	382	31.27
2001	375	-1.83
2011	909	142.4

Source: Census of India

Table 3 display 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 percent. In the entire period of 100 years between 1901 and 2001 the decadal growth rate of towns in West Bengal was 20.68 percent. 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 53 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, in 2001 it became 372 and that in 2011 it rose to 909.

The following figure-2 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 number in the number of towns in West Bengal after 1931. Between 1931 and 1961 there was a steep growth in the number of towns and this trend continued till 1991. However, there was a declining in the growth of this trend in 2001 and again there is steep growth in 2011.

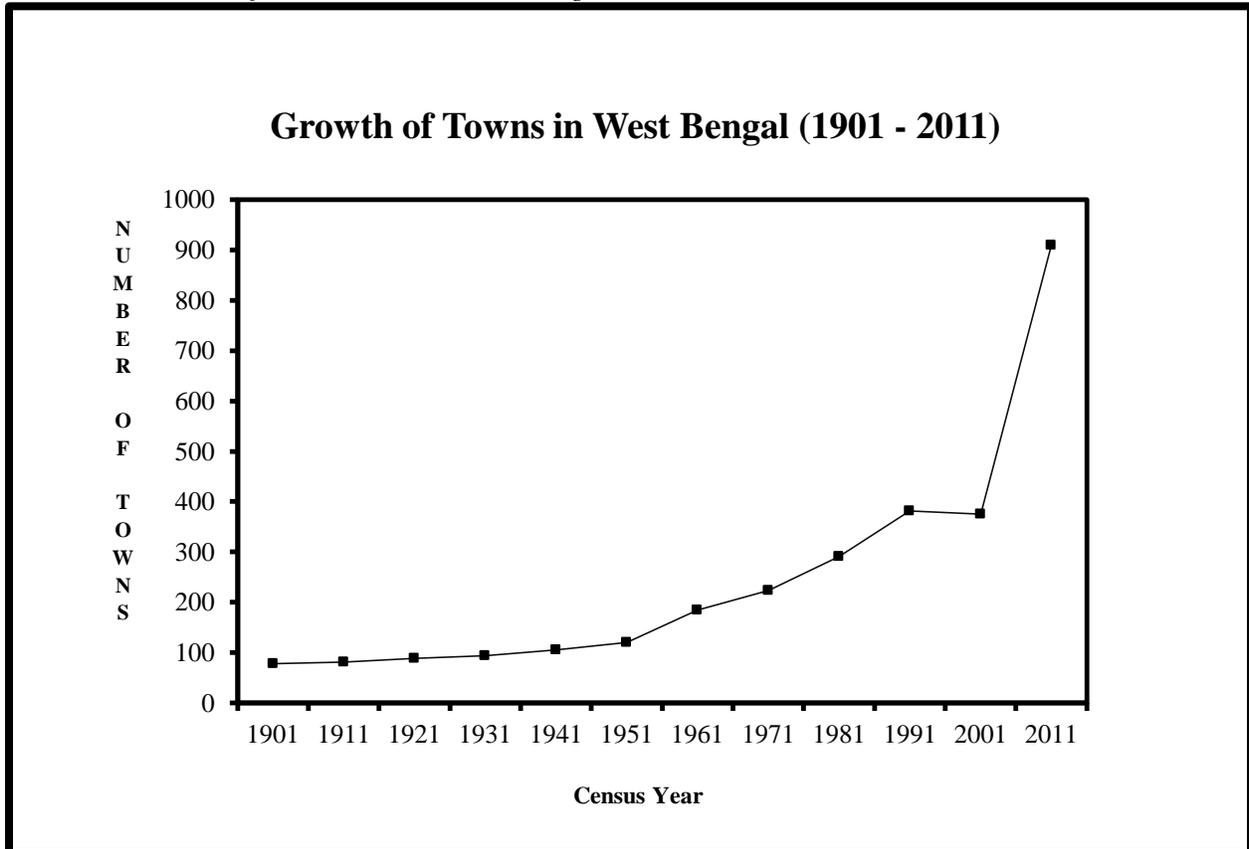
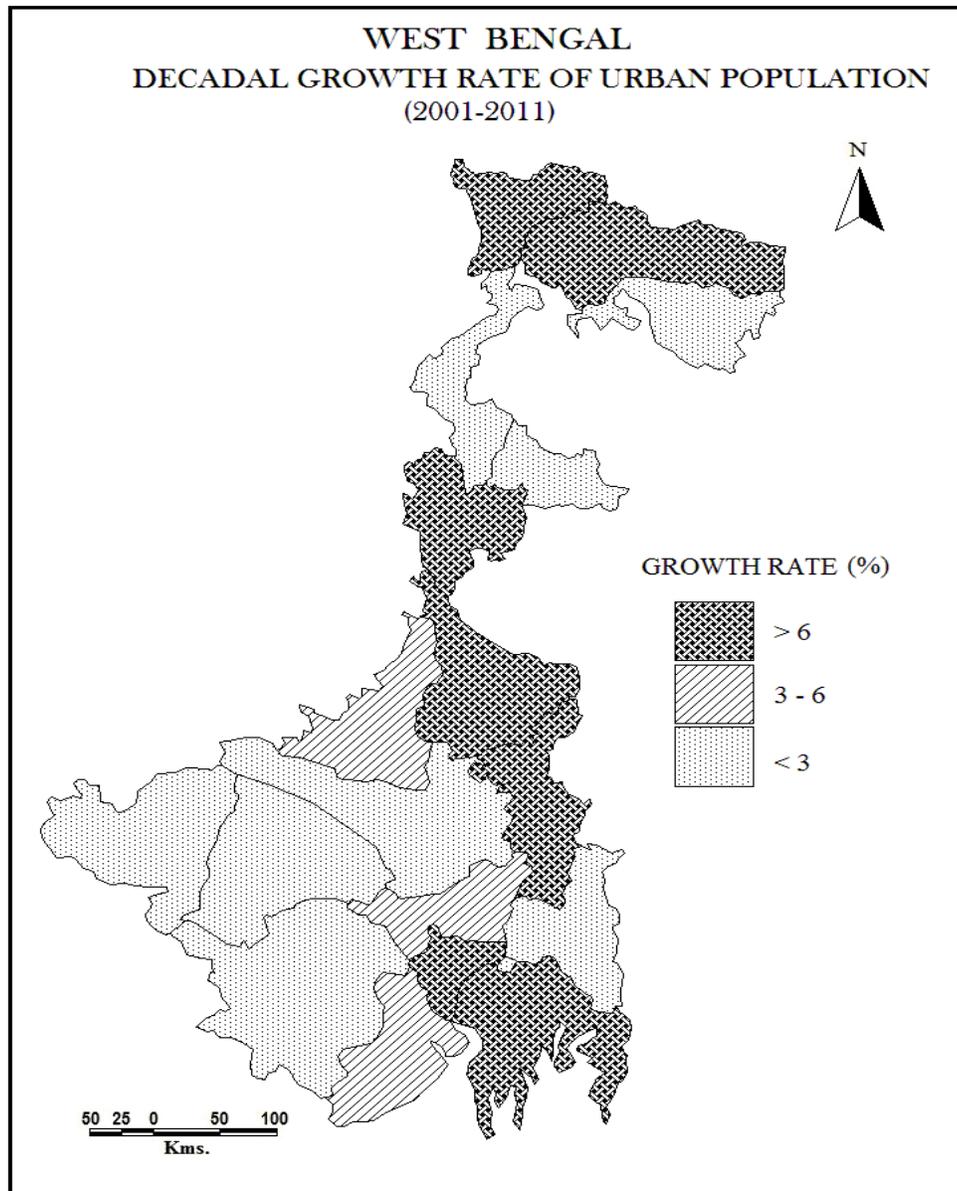


Fig.2

Decadal Growth Rate of Urban Population in West Bengal (2001-2011)

From table 2 it is clear that the growth of urban population during 2001-11 is 3.92 per cent in West Bengal. The highest growth rate of urban population is found in Howrah district i.e. 12.94 per cent and lowest in Kolkata district because it is a metropolitan city and it is the capital of West Bengal where urban population is 100 per cent. During this period the growth of urban population has been categorised into three category i.e. high (>6), medium (3-6) and low (<3) (Fig. 3). There are seven districts where the growth of urban population is more than 6 per cent namely, Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Malda, Murshidabad, Nadia, Howrah and South 24 paraganas. Only three districts having the growth of urban population between 3-6 per cent namely, Birbhum, Hoogly and Purba Medinipur. The remaining nine districts where the growth rate of urban population is less than 3 per cent.

**Fig.3**

Pattern of Urbanization of West Bengal: District wise pattern of urbanization (Fig.4) depicted that out of 19 districts of West Bengal Kolkata recorded the highest degree of urbanization, where 100 per cent of total population lived in urban areas in both the census year of 2001 and 2011. On the basis of levels of urbanization, the state can be divided into three broad categories, as following:

- A. Areas having high degree of urbanization, having more than 30.00 per cent of the total population as urban.
- B. Areas having moderate degree of urbanization, having 20.00 to 30.00 per cent of the total population as urban.
- C. Areas having low degree of urbanization, having less than 20.00 per cent of the total population as urban.

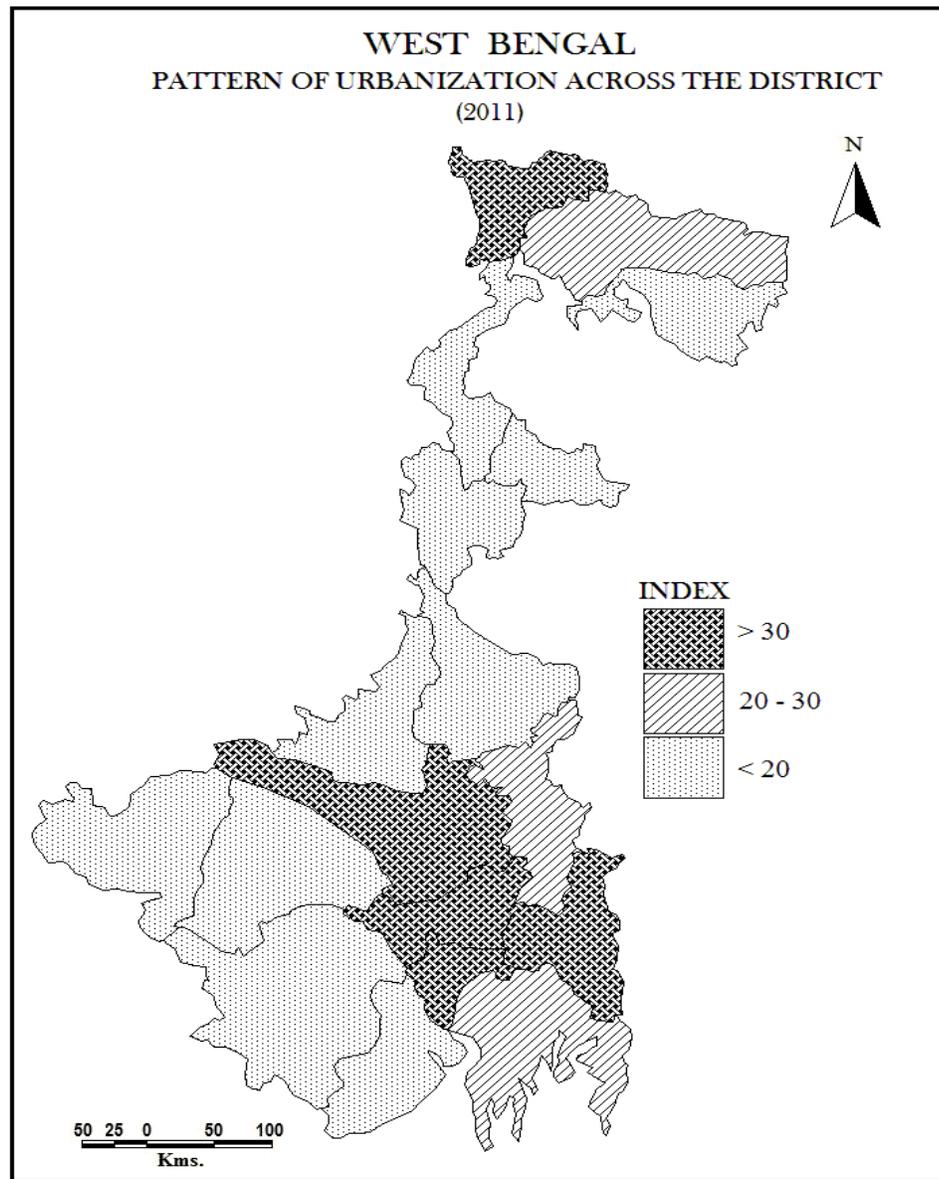
Table 4: Pattern of Urbanization among the districts of West Bengal (2011)

Category	Index	Number of the District	Name of the District
High	>30	Six	Darjeeling, Burdwan, North 24 parganas, Hoogli, Howrah, and kolkata
Medium	20-30	Three	Jalpaiguri, Nadia and South 24 parganas
Low	<20	Ten	Cooch Behar, Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur, Malda, Murshidabad, Birbhum, Bankura, Purulia, Paschim Medinipur and Purba Medinipur

Computed by Authors

Areas with high degree of urbanization: Table-2 and 4 depict that all the areas where more than 30.00 per cent of the total population lived in urban centres, were classified as areas with high degree of urbanization. In all 19 districts, there are six districts in this category. These are Darjeeling, Burdwan, North 24 parganas, Hoogli, Howrah. It is observed that kolkata has the highest degree of urbanization among all the district of West Bengal as it is metropolitan town of West Bengal. All the district which are under the high degree of urbanization having the facility of roadway, railways. High concentration of urban population may be attributed to a very high level of industrial development, their strategic location along the well-developed roads and railway lines and high level so social awakening due to high level of male and female literacy rates.

Areas with moderate degree of urbanization: This category included the entire district having a proportion of between 20.00 to 30.00 per cent of urban population to total population. Out of total districts three districts come under this category. These are Jalpaiguri, Nadia and South 24 parganas. A moderate degree of urbanization was due to impact of urban shadow, urban to urban migration, moderate level of industrial development, location along the major transportation routes and establishment of some small and medium scale industries.

**Fig.4**

Areas with low degree of urbanization: All those areas which had a proportion less than 20.00 per cent of urban population were classified under low degree of urbanization. Rest of the ten districts out of nineteen are under the low degree of urbanization. These are Cooch Behar, Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur, Malda, Murshidabad, Birbhum, Bankura, Purulia, Paschim Medinipur and Purba Medinipur. All these areas are very poor in terms of agricultural and industrial development. Socio-cultural backwardness, low level of diversification, low literacy level among male and female both specially in rural areas of the district are responsible for the low degree of urbanization. The areas of low degree of urbanization are mainly located in the north central part and western and south western part of the state.

Conclusion: A low level of urbanization was due to mainly agriculture based economy. The partition of the country in 1947 stimulated the process of urbanization in this part of the country. A large number of refugees migrated from Pakistan and Bangladesh to West Bengal and settled down in different parts of the state. This led to the explosive growth of cities and towns in the state. West Bengal experienced a rapid acceleration in its process of urbanization. There are some problems arises due to rapid urbanization in the state, like Urban sprawl, Overcrowding, Housing, Unemployment, Slums and squatter settlement, Transportation problems, Water supply, Sewerage problem, Trash disposal, Urban crimes, Urban pollution, Widening socio economic gap, Lack of social responsibility. It is the 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 centred basically on Kolkata and on the districts in neighbourhood of this great city. Unless there is adequate dispersal of the urban centres, 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. Particularly, small and medium towns in such districts need to be supported in their infrastructural projects as their economic bases are not strong to generate adequate revenues for the purpose. Broadly speaking, the areas with a high level of urbanization, relatively high level of socio-economic development, nearness to the major transportation routes, rapid industrial development and in-migration of workers from the surrounding areas recorded a high growth in their urban population. Contrary to this, areas with a low level degree of urbanization, low level of socio-economic development, peripheral location, low level of industrial development, and areas experiencing continuous out-migration recorded a slow growth in their urban population. Infact, the areas of moderate growth in urban population can be identified as areas of transition from low to high level of urbanization and played an important role in diffusion of ideas and cultural values from urban to rural areas and vice-versa.

Reference:

1. Chakravorty, S. and M. Dasgupta 2011. 'Some aspects of urbanization in Eastern India' Discussion Paper, 35(2), Centre for Urban Economic Studies, University of Calcutta.
2. Chandra, N. K. 2008. 'Tata Motors in Singur: A step towards industrialisation or pauperization?' *Economic and Political Weekly*, December 13, pp. 36-51.
3. Chaudhuri, B., M. Mazumdar, M. Teachout and V. Marimoutou 2012. 'Growth, regional disparity and convergence clubs in India: A sectoral level analysis and decomposition, paper presented in 32nd general conference of the international association for research in Income and Wealth, 5-11 August, Boston
4. Denis, E., P. Mukhopadhyay and M.H. Zerah 2012. 'Subaltern urbanization in India' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 47: 52-62.
5. Denis, E. and K. Marius-Gnanou 2011. 'Towards a Better appraisal of urbanization in India' *Cybergeo: European Journal of Geography* 569.
6. ILGUS 2002. *Urban West Bengal*, Institute of Local Government and Urban Studies, Calcutta.
7. Khasnabis, R. 2008. 'The economy of West Bengal' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 43(52): 103-115.
8. Mitra, S. 2010. 'Urban settlements in West Bengal: Twentieth century and after' *Asian Studies*, 28(28): 57-65.

9. Mitra, S. and K. Mukherjee 2008. 'Integrated and inclusive development of urban West Bengal: The KUSP perspective', *Urban Management*, 13: 31-54.
10. Pradhan, K. C. 2012. 'Unacknowledged urbanization: The census towns of India' *CPR Urban Working Paper 2*, Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi.
11. Roy, A. 2012. Transformation of Urban Agglomeration in an Agricultural Belt- Malda, Unpublished dissertation, Department of Regional Planning, School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi.
12. Roy, D. 2008. 'Whither the subaltern domain: An ethnographic enquiry' *Economic and Political Weekly*, June 7, pp. 31-38.
13. Saha, S. 2012. Urbanization in West Bengal: Temporal (1901-2011) and spatial pattern, Unpublished dissertation, Dept. of Geography, The University of Burdwan.
14. Samanta, G. 2010. The Globalizing State, Public Services and the New Governance of Urban Local Communities in India: A Case study of West Bengal, Final Technical Report, Research Project funded by Ford Foundation.
15. Sarkar, A. 2011. 'Urbanization and city size distribution of West Bengal' *Indian Journal of Regional Sciences*, 43(1): 9-16.
16. Show, P. 2012. Barjora as an emerging industrial urban centre in Bankura, Unpublished Dissertation, Dept. of Geography, The University of Burdwan.
17. Bhattacharya, B. 1991. "Urbanization and Human Development", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 33 (47 and 48).
18. Census of India, Relevant Issues.
19. Economic Review, Govt. of West Bengal, Relevant Issues.
20. Bandyopadhyay, D. 2008. 'Singur: What happened, what next and time to pay the cost' *Economic and Political Weekly*, November 29, pp. 13-16.
21. Banerjee, A. 2012. Impact of transport link in regional development-Baramohan Singh, Unpublished dissertation, Department of Regional Planning, School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi.