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**AN UNDERSTANDING OF URBANIZATION AND
POLITICAL CHALLENGES IN INDIA: A
RESEARCH ON TRENDS, PROCESSES AND
EMERGING PATTERN**

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An Understanding of Urbanization and Political Challenges in India: A Research on Trends, Processes and Emerging Pattern

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Abstract – The main objective of this paper is to analyze the recent past trends and patterns of urbanization, urban economic growth, and urban equity measured by urban poverty and inequality in India. In addition, it reviews the different urban development policies and programmes which are undertaken in different Plan Periods in India. The analysis shows that higher rate of urbanization is associated with higher economic growth, lower level of poverty and higher extent of inequality in urban India. Finally, the study suggests that Indian government needs to speed up the urbanization rate as it contributes higher share of national GDP by reducing urban poverty and inequality.

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INTRODUCTION

Political parties are considered by many as intermediate organizations between the citizen and the state. They are regarded as having an important place in a democracy, carrying the weight of expectations and aspirations upwards from citizen to state. Similarly they also take the responsibility of formulating the public policy for the betterment of their citizens downwards, from state to citizen. This in the words of political science is known as interest articulation and interest aggregation. In this process, they perform multiple functions and develop multiple personalities as one can notice.

In recent years, reputation of both parties and leaders are in a state of disarray. Parties and politicians have been accused of eroding the democratic system by practicing and maximizing their personal gains and influence. In short, political parties willfully pursue their own narrow political interest at the expense of the greater common good, which is actually a departure from theory. However, without their political organization and mobilization, the democratic system would not have worked. Major transformations have taken place since Independence in India's party system. The writings on these in fact examine and evaluate changes both within political parties and the party system. At the centre of the change in the party system, the rise of the BJP in India and in Karnataka, actually have contributed to a shift in politics in India should begin with an understanding of the role of political parties in democratic systems in general.

This in other words reiterate that parties are undoubtedly essential to the functioning of democracy; they perform varied functions within and outside the realm of politics. Their leadership and policies, internal

practices, and the patterns of interaction with other parties and institutions can have profound consequences for the system of governance. As a keystone political institution in representative regime, the modern political party regularly fulfils three critical functions: nominating candidates for public offices; formulating and setting the agenda for public; and mobilizing support for candidates and policies in an election. Other institutions perform some of these functions too. What, however, distinguishes parties is their emphasis on linkage. Parties are seen, both by their members and by others, as agencies for forging links between citizens and policy makers. Their raison d'être is to create a substantive connection between the ruler and ruled.

Political parties are central to Indian political life. Their role in political mobilization, governance, the formulation and implementation of economic and social policy, ethnic conflict, separatist movements, and the working of democracy has long been the focus of analysis. Their centrality arises from the fact that they are the key link between individual and state, and society. Political parties provide the crucial connection between social process and policy makers, and influence debates and policies on issues affecting the interests of various social groups in the political system.

One of the most recent phenomena observed in India is the formation of urban agglomerations, which is defined as geographic concentration of urban population and economic activities. This implies that urban agglomeration includes but not equal to urbanization. Urban India has been experiencing a steady increase in the share of its urban population, emergence of new cities or towns, sizeable contribution to the country's national income,

reduction of poverty, increasing inequality, and lower level of inclusive growth.

We describe urbanization trends from Census period 1961 to 2011. Urban economic growth is described from 1971 to latest available years. To measure urban equity in terms of urban poverty and inequality, the year 2009-10 is specifically chosen for the availability of latest 66th Round of National Sample Survey Organisation's (NSSO) Household Consumer Expenditure Survey in India for that year. The consideration of study periods is mainly based on following reasons:

First, the availability of full information for the various urban indicators used in this paper. Second, as for the first time 1961 Census has adopted the uniform and rigid definition of urban areas. Third, to present the recent past scenarios of urbanization for the relevant policy implications.

The Indian subcontinent shares, with Mesopotamia and the Nile valley, a long history of urbanization. The first phase of urbanization in the Indus valley is associated with the Harappan civilization dating back to 2350BC. The cities of this civilization flourished over a period of more than 600 years up to about 1700 BC and this was followed by a prolonged period of over a thousand years in which we have no evidence of urban development. From around 600BC, we again come across towns and cities associated with the two major, but closely related, cultural streams of India, namely the Aryan civilization of the North and the Dravidian civilization of the South. From this period onwards, for about 2500 years, India has had a more or less continuous history of urbanization. However, we know from historical evidence that there were both periods of urban growth and periods of urban decline. Thus cities grew in number and in size during the Mauryan and post-Mauryan periods (from 300 BC to AD 600) both in northern India as well as in the extreme south. Cities declined and were largely neglected during the post Gupta period, that is from AD 600 to 1200. Urbanization on a subdued scale flourished in northern India under the influence of Muslim rulers, who came to India from Afghanistan and beyond from around AD 1200, and attained a second climax during the Mughal period, when many of India's cities were established. The British came to India at a time when India was perhaps the most urbanized nation in the world, and the early part of British rule saw a decline in the level of Indian urbanization. During the later half of British rule, Indian cities regained some of their lost importance; further, the British added several new towns and cities, in addition to generating newer urban forms in the existing cities. The post-Independence period has witnessed urbanization in India on a scale never before achieved.

As per 2011 figures, the state has a total population of 72,597,565 persons of which the urban population comprises of 20,059,666 persons accounting for an

urban population of 27.6 percent which is an increase from the urban population of 26.5 percent reported in 2001. The number of towns in the state have increased from 394 in 2001 to 476 in 2011. A look at the decennial status of towns, from 1901-2011, reveals that the number of towns in Madhya Pradesh have grown more rapidly in comparison to the national average figures.

TRENDS IN URBANIZATION

The Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India projected the urban population for the year 2011 to 358 million, and estimated that urban population growth rates would decline from 2.75% per annum observed during 1991-2001 to 2.23 during 2001-2011 (Registrar General and Census Commissioner 2006). Urban experts also believed that India's urbanisation would slow down because of its exclusionary nature and its inability to spur rural-to-urban migration (Kundu 2007, 2011). However, the 2011 Census shows some unexpected results. According to the 2011 Census, the urban population grew to 377 million showing a growth rate of 2.76% per annum during 2001-2011. The level of urbanisation in the country as a whole increased from 27.7% in 2001 to 31.1% in 2011 – an increase of 3.3 percentage points during 2001-2011 compared to an increase of 2.1 percentage points during 1991-2001. It may be noted that the Indian economy has grown from about 6% per annum during the 1990s to about 8% during the first decade of the 2000s (Ahluwalia 2011). This clearly reflects the power of economic growth in bringing about faster urbanisation during 2001-2011.

It is worthwhile to note that urban population growth alone cannot speed up urbanisation. More importantly, if urbanisation has to occur, the urban population growth rate needs to be higher than the rural population growth rate. Thus, it is the urban-rural population growth differential that is critical to the process of urbanisation.

PROBLEM OF URBANIZATION

Problem of urbanization is manifestation of lopsided urbanization, faulty urban planning, urbanization with poor economic base and without having functional categories. Hence India's urbanization is followed by some basic problems in the field of : 1) housing, 2) slums, 3) transport 4) water supply and sanitation, 5) water pollution and air pollution, 6) inadequate provision for social infrastructure (school, hospital, etc). Class I cities such as Calcutta , Bombay, Delhi, Madras etc have reached saturation level of employment generating capacity (Kundu,1997). Since these cities are suffering from of urban poverty, unemployment, housing shortage, crisis in urban infra-structural services these large cities can not absorb these distressed rural migrants i.e poor landless illiterate and unskilled agricultural labourers. Hence this migration to urban class I cities causes urban crisis more acute.

Most of these cities using capital intensive technologies can not generate employment for these distress rural poor. So there is transfer of rural poverty to urban poverty. Poverty induced migration of illiterate and unskilled labourer occurs in class I cities addressing urban involution and urban decay.

Indian urbanization is involuted not evolved (Mukherji, 1995). Poverty induced migration occurs due to rural push. Megacities grow in urban population (Nayak, 1962) not in urban prosperity, and culture. Hence it is urbanization without urban functional characteristics. These mega cities are subject to extreme filthy slum and very cruel mega city denying shelter, drinking water, electricity, sanitation (Kundu, Bagchi and Kundu, 1999) to the extreme poor and rural migrants.

Urbanisation is degenerating social and economic inequalities (Kundu and Gupta, 1996) which warrants social conflicts, crimes and anti-social activities. Lopsided and uncontrolled urbanization led to environmental degradation and degradation in the quality of urban life-pollution in sound, air, water, created by disposal of hazardous waste. Illiterate, low-skill or no-skill migrants from rural areas are absorbed in poor low grade urban informal sector at a very low wage rate and urban informal sector becomes inefficient and unproductive.

URBAN GOVERNMENTS IN INDIA

Local Government in the urban or rural form are here to stay. The need for local government was realized even in the ancient times. Local institutions in ancient Greece, China and India, played a vital role in the socio economic life of the people. One of the marked features of ancient Hindu civilization was the remarkable development of associated life that grand independently of king dorms and yet achieved completeness in different spheres of life. Different spheres of life like religion, learning, politics, civics and economics; organizations grew up on a democratic basis with natural respect and tolerance for the betterment of national life. Urban Local governments in fact played a vital role in this.¹ Professor M. Venkatarangaiya is of the opinion that the local self-government bodies in those days were far more real, for more widespread and far more successful than during British rule.

Local government is an important component of every system of governmental system irrespective of its political form of governance. It is recognized and created under law for the management of local affairs by the concerned governments in a given geographic boundary. Local government is a realization of Decentralization concept like other levels of government. Local government embraces the principle of sharing power, among the totality of its residents. It

also embodies authority in relation to local residents but unlike other levels of government, its authority is Jurisdictional in content. The jurisdiction of local government is limited to a delimited area and its functions largely relate to the provision of civic amenities to the population within its jurisdiction. It is subordinate to the state or provincial government which exercises control and supervision over it. Under certain circumstances, the state government can suspend or dissolve a local government.

According to William A. Robson, Local Self Government may be said to involve the conception of a territorial, non sovereign community possessing the legal right and the necessary organization to regulate its own affairs. This in turn presupposes the existence of local authority with power to act independently of external control as well as the participation of the local community in the administration of its own affairs.

It is only through participation in local government at all levels that political education of this sort can be obtained by the citizens in a democracy. A high power central committee in India has rightly summed up the place of local bodies in the government structure in the following words: Local bodies are important units to help achieve the decentralization of political power and promotion of democratic values. They are also an indispensable part of governmental machinery contributing to the efficiency at the higher echelons of government by relieving them of purely local tasks.

Local government can also be more efficient in routine matters by avoiding the inflexibilities inherent in a centralized system. As against departmental specialization at the central and state levels local bodies are the media through which functional compartmentalization can be channelised into a co-ordinate plan of all-round development at the community level.

URBANIZATION PATTERN

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 massive increase in the percentage share of urban population in class I cities from 26.0 in 1901 to 68.7 in 2001 has often been attributed to faster growth of large cities, without taking into

consideration the increase in the number of these cities.

The growth pattern of metro cities—cities having population of a million or more—corroborate further the thesis of concentrated urban development. The demographic growth in metro cities has been higher than that of common towns or even the class I cities in recent decades.

The growth would have been even higher but for the location of large industrial units outside the municipal limits, thanks to the pressures exerted by the environment lobby. This is facilitated by easy availability of land, access to unorganized labour market, besides lesser awareness and less stringent implementation of environmental regulations in the rural settlements at the urban periphery. The poor are able to build shelters in these 'degenerated peripheries' and find jobs in the industries located therein or commute to the central city for work.

THEORETICAL FACTORS OF POLITICAL PARTIES

As system, the Indian Political system is distinctive. Certainly, it does not correspond to its European and American counterparts. Writing about it, Paul Brass noted the difference: 'party politics in India display numerous paradoxical features, which reveal the blending of Western and modern forms of bureaucratic organization and participatory politics with indigenous practices and institutions, India's leading political party, the Indian National Congress, is one of the oldest in the world, yet it has not succeeded in providing the nucleus for an institutionalized party system which can be fitted easily into any one of the conventional categories of party systems known in the West.

Political parties are complex, multi-faceted organizations with multiple linkages to organizations in civil society and the institutions of the state, typically spanning both. This is because parties arise in civil society or are rooted in civil society even if they may have originated in the legislature as legislative factions as in 18th and 19th century Britain and the United States. However, they are not purely civil society organizations. They overlap the institutions of the state or at least its legislative branch if they are represented in the national, regional (in a federal polity) or local legislatures, and also overlap the executive branch of the state if they are in power at the nation, regional or local level. They are variously, and at times overlapping, organizations embodying ideologies and programmatic visions, organizations that are at the same time social movements, organizations representing the interests of sections of civil society, whether secular/economic or in parts of it as organizations holding power in the institutions of the state, or in parts of it as in a federal state, and lastly, organizations with their own corporate interests, organizational structure and functioning which have consequences for political outcomes. They can be

organizationally 'thin' or 'thick', deeply rooted and penetrative in civil society or superstructure, highly ideological or purely electoral list, strongly linked to particular sections of society is character.

The term political party, in view of the recent studies, has assumed its own meaning making it different from every other organisation whether it is a group, faction, club, association etc. even if the objective of any such gathering may be the 'seizure of power'. A plausible definition of political party is thus furnished: "However, when we speak of political parties in this essay, we do not mean a loosely knit group of notables with limited and intermittent relationships to local counterparts. Our definition requires instead, (1) continuity in organisation that is organization whose expected life span is not dependent upon the life span of current leaders; (2) manifest and presumably permanent organisation at the local level, with regularized communications and other relationships between local and national units; (3) self conscious determination of leaders at both national and local levels to capture and to hold decision making power alone or in coalition with others, not simply to influence the exercise of power; and (4) the concern on the part of the organisation for seeking followers at the polls or in some manner striving for popular support.

CONCLUSION

An understanding of the urbanization process in India reveals that the pre-existing system of settlements, based on interactions between a large number of handicraft-, service- and commerce-based towns and their hinterland of primary production, as well as between large cities and smaller towns, was disrupted during the colonial period. The country was gradually drawn into the orbit of the capitalistic system during two centuries of colonial rule, but the political economy of the regime became an impediment to technological advancement in different sectors of the economy and led to a top-heavy urban structure.

The process of urbanization 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 (which, though based on lower fertility than in rural areas and smaller towns, still brings huge increments because of the size of the base 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 globalization, the small and medium towns, located away from the „emerging global centers of growth“, particularly those in backward regions, have not attracted much private investment. In view of the conflicting claims, an attempt is made here to assess the rates and pattern of urbanization and their implications for accessing urban resources and overall economic growth by

analyzing urbanization trends and fractionalizing urban growth into various components at the macro level.

The story of urbanization in India in historical times is a story of spatial and temporal discontinuities. The earliest urban developments were confined to the Indus valley and the adjoining parts of Rajasthan, Punjab and to some extent western Uttar Pradesh. Other parts of the country remained outside the pale of urbanization. In the early historical period, urbanization took place in the middle Ganaga plains and in the southern part of the Indian peninsula, while the areas in between and no know cities. During much of the historical period, vast parts of the country were untouched or only partly affected by urbanization. Spatial discontinuities in urbanization continue to be an important aspect even in modern India.

It is very common to invoke the term 'party system' in any discussion of Indian politics. But more often than not a discussion of the party system tends to be a loose and generalized way of discussing shred attributes of parties in a given political system. Or else, it is a simple numeric description of the number of relevant parties in a given polity: one party systems, two party or bipolar systems and multi party systems. Both these prevalent ways of discussing the party system lose sight of the basic point behind the idea of a party system: that it is a 'system' that conditions and constrains all the parties that operate within it, that it is more than the sum of the parts.

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