

URBANIZATION IN NORTHEAST INDIA

Issues and Concerns

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Edited By
H. Sudhir

The present work discusses meaning, extent, dynamics, issues and overall impact of urbanization in the northeast region. It suggests strategies for effective response to the problems of urban phenomenon. This will help policy makers, social scientists, academicians and research scholars to have an idea on the emergent urban problems of the region.

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in
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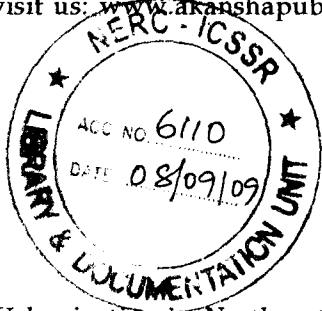
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Urbanization in Manipur: From Soft Underbelly of Development to Fiercest Agendum

Amar Yumnam

Introduction

As we all know, we follow the census definition of urban area, and on it we generally base our discussions of urbanization. This has the advantage of comparability over time and space. But this is not what I would like to dwell on. I would rather be concerned with the political economy aspects of the urban phenomenon in Manipur.

Nevertheless, for the sake of convenience, let me reproduce below some statistics that might be repeated in various papers in the Workshop.

Issues

The figures (Table 1.1) throw up some interesting issues. They are:

1. The urbanization process in Manipur has followed rather a pattern of arrested or stunted growth. This is evident from the lack of growth in the ratios during the last three Censuses.

Table 1.1
Urban Population Ratio of Manipur

<i>Census Year</i>	<i>Urban population ratio to total population</i>		
	<i>Persons</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
1901	25.40	25.41	25.37
1911	21.56	21.32	21.79
1921	20.83	20.34	21.31
1931	19.26	18.61	19.87
1941	19.47	19.04	19.88
1951	0.5	0.62	0.38
1961	8.68	8.82	8.55
1971	13.19	13.19	13.19
1981	26.42	26.45	34.79
1991	27.52	27.48	27.56
2001	23.88	23.51	24.25

2. Secondly, the gender figures are uniquely interesting. Unlike urban centres elsewhere where male proportion exceeds female proportion, the ratio of urban women exceeds male ratio in six of the last eleven censuses covering a century. This must be a reflection of the active participation of women in the economic affairs, particularly market processes, in the State.

These are some of the issues, which need to be examined in the context of pattern of overall macro growth of the economy. I would, however, like everyone to go beyond these conventional approaches of urban analysis. In other words, my plea is for appreciating the urbanization phenomena in the State from three contextual realities. They are:

- (a) The distinctiveness of the urbanization process in the State as different from the urbanization processes in global development history;
- (b) The ethnic plurality of the State; and
- (c) The conflict situation in the State.

Let me try to elaborate on these three; all these have connected dynamics and implications. First, allow me to explain

what I mean by distinctiveness of the urban phenomenon in the State. Here I am reminded of the analysis of the causes of opulence in the *Inquiry in to the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. This is but the relationship between manufacturing and urban growth. Though there have been shifts in the importance of urban centres according to emerging and shifting importance of different manufacturing items, the relationship between manufacture and urban growth has been unequivocal. Even this historical relationship has undergone transformation in the sense of a divorce between manufacturing and urban growth since the adoption of structural adjustment programmes around the globe from about the 1980s. This historical pattern is observable across the globe from Pittsburg to Glasgow to Mumbai.

But urbanization in the State is absolutely different from this stylized scenario. The urban centres in the State are basically administrative centres. So, urban centres in the State are— (a) fundamentally centres for worshipping government, and (b) platforms for political competitions rather than centres for development transformation. We should remember the historical role of urban centres as sources of technological change and ultimately of economic growth anywhere else in the world. We can take up any sectoral issue, like health, education or infrastructure, and the peculiarity of our urbanization would immediately become visible. These definitely have had deleterious implications for the multi-ethnic society like ours. The situation has further had both causal and effect relationships for the conflict atmosphere in the State.

The Implications

The most disturbing implication of the urbanization process in the State is the inability so far of it to take the whole State along. First, the market penetration and social change has been very limited in space and community categories. Secondly, the market process has failed to monetise the economy for an effective modern exchange. This, one may say a blessing in disguise, is evident from the non-collapse of the economy despite the various blows to the polity. In other words, in Manipur we find an absolute lack of connectivity between overall economic growth and urbanization process in the State.

The results emerging from the various rounds of economic censuses convey equally disturbing picture. We find a declining growth rate of non-agricultural enterprises and declining employment-intensity of these enterprises, though there has been no rise in capital-intensity. This implies that the few enterprises we have got in our urban areas lack dynamicity.

All these failures of our urban centres have had their telling effect in terms of the deepening ethnic divide in the State. If we appreciate this in the context of (a) non-falling transportation costs; and (b) dangerously rising political transaction costs of any policy or programme, one will definitely lose one's sleep. Further, all these are happening in an economy where urbanization has been founded on agglomeration economies arising out of production, but rather on political conveniences.

Here we are made to strongly miss the Manipur of 1950s and 1960s when the state enjoyed a high level of social capital, high level of community and individual initiatives for public goods and very low level of political transaction costs. But cumulative administration and governance failures and institutional and political lapses have made all these dissipated. It is in such atmosphere that urbanization has turned into a fiercest agendum from the earlier soft underbelly of development. But the pattern of worshipping government has not led to the emergence of any coherent policy for development intervention. People now worship government for enhancing personal benefits or reducing damages, whereas this is not governed by any logical or coherent policy. So this has led to the high incidence and rising density of corruption in an atmosphere of rising political transaction costs. While political competition had led to Schumpeterian innovation in Europe and the United States, political fragmentation in Manipur has not had any positive impact on development milieu.

We are encountering all this when the current thinking about urban and city planning has moved away from the *Age of Master Plans* to the *Age of Consensus*. The challenge of urban research is indeed gigantic and unique in our State. But the rewards both socially and academically would be even greater.