

# URBANIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN NORTH-EAST INDIA

TRENDS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS



*Edited by*

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## The Book

The North Eastern Region consists of seven States, namely, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura. The process of economic development and that of urbanization are in many respects interrelated. The urbanites generally have greater access to modern amenities of life, education, health and other civic services than the ruralities. Employment opportunities are also much more diversified and numerous than in the villages. But urbanization may also give rise to a host of problems like over-crowding and scarcities in housing, water-supply, educational and training facilities, pollution of environment, lack of proper sanitation and health care services and even unemployment.

Studies of various scholars and experts included in this book have thrown up the problems commonly facing the North Eastern States. The most common urban problems like overcrowding and growth of slums, scarcity of water-supply, inadequacies of public health and sanitation system, growing unemployment among the educated youths and the consequent frustration among them, etc. are increasing fast in the towns of North East India. The management structure must be streamlined by abolishing the system of multiplicity of authorities dealing with urban planning and execution thereof. Appropriate legislative measures for this purpose need to be taken by the State Governments concerned before it becomes too late.

**Contents include:** Pattern of Urbanization in the North-East; Migration Statistics; Urbanization and Underdevelopment; Trend; Social Consequences; Social Unrest in North-East India; Urban Poverty; Problems of Urbanization and Care of Elder Citizens; Impact on Fresh Water Systems; Post-war Urban Growth; Effects on Birth Rate and Death Rate; Urbanization in North East: Trends and Policy Implications; Urbanization in Arunachal Pradesh; A District-wise Study; Peripheral Urbanization; Urbanization and Growth Centres; Urban Development in Assam; Growth Centres in Assam; Issues Related to Guwahati City; Impact on the Karbis of Assam; Urbanization in Manipur; Urban Growth in Meghalaya; Peripheral Urban Development in Shillong; Rural to Urban Migration; Urban Administration; Urbanization Pattern in Mizoram; Urbanization Process in Nagaland; Urbanization Pattern and Problems in Tripura; etc.

A must reading for all interested in the study of Urbanization and Development problems and solutions.

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URBANIZATION AND  
DEVELOPMENT IN  
NORTH-EAST INDIA  
TRENDS AND PROSPECTS



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## *Preface*

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Towns are the focal points of trade and administration in history. Administrative compulsions, economic policies and interests and social attitudes determine the location and growth of urban centres. When the British occupied the country, India had a feudal economy, mainly agrarian in character, bulk of the people groaning in dire poverty. British trading centres became centres of economic activities and old administrative centres continued for the time being as before. Strategic requirements also determined the setting up and growth of new towns.

Low productivity of the traditional agriculture and the new administrative and economic activities in and around existing urban centres led to the migration on a large scale since 1950 to the urban areas in search of better employment opportunities. New administrative towns also grew. Number of towns grew in North-East by 27% during 1981-91 against less than 16% else-where in the country. New towns are extended villages with a minimum of urban outfit. The new towns are mostly trading centres with some rural development administrative offices. There are hardly any agricultural surplus in north-east India to sustain the urban life and its expansion with better facilities. Most of the people in the new urban centres do not get modern sanitation and potable and safe water for their minimum daily requirements. North-East India in 1991 had 195 towns of various categories. Of the total of 31.54 million people in North-East 4.38 million (13.88%) live in urban areas (1991), most of them living in slum like situation. Socio-economic forces compel people to migrate to the urban areas and a number of extended villages acquired the character of census towns to serve as service centres for the surrounding settlements having crossed the rural-urban threshold. What we need today is strengthening and upgrading the urban infrastructure to withstand the increasing

population migration from the rural areas and inter-state migration to north-east India.

Professor M.G. Michael, the then Vice-Chancellor, North Eastern Hill University, inaugurated NEICSSR seminar on Pattern, Problems and Prospects of Urbanization in North-East India on 22-23 November 1991. North-East India Council for Social Science Research requested Professor J.B. Ganguly, the then Vice-Chancellor, Tripura University, an eminent economist of the country, to edit the volume. We are grateful to Ministry of Urban Affairs, Govt. of India, particularly to Mr. C.D. Tripathi, the then Additional Secretary to the Ministry, and to Mr. L. Menezes, the then Secretary, North Eastern Council and to the Government of Meghalaya for giving support to hold the seminar. We take this opportunity to thank Mr. G.S. Bhatia and Deep & Deep Publications, New Delhi-110027 for undertaking the expeditious publication of the volume.

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B. DATTA RAY

## *Introduction*

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The North Eastern Region consists of seven States, namely, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura. During the colonial period, large parts of this Region were kept as "Excluded Areas" or "Partially Excluded Areas". Further, under the Inner Line Regulation outsiders were prohibited from entering into the tribal area beyond the Inner Line without an 'Inner Line Pass' issued by the competent executive authority. The British rulers, through such measures, sought to protect the tribals from so-called exploitation by the non-tribals. The tribals were also largely left to themselves to pursue their traditional methods of livelihood and manage their affairs in accordance with their ancestral customs. Consequently, the level of urbanization in the region was very low. But after Independence and particularly since the planning era began, substantial amounts of investments have been made in building up and expanding the basic infrastructure in the region and setting up of a large number of administrative centres at different levels. For the development of agriculture and allied activities and industries also considerable amounts of resources have been spent for the balanced development of this region. Such developments have been resulting in the growth of urban centres in the region at quite a rapid pace.

The process of economic development and that of urbanization are in many respects interrelated. The urbanites generally have greater access to modern amenities of life, education, health and other civic services than the ruralites. Employment opportunities are also much more diversified and numerous than in the villages. But urbanization may also give rise to a host of problems like over-crowding and scarcities in housing, water-supply, and educational and training facilities, pollution of environment, lack of proper sanitation and health care services and even unemployment. On account of historical and

geographical factors the rates of urban growth and the pattern of urbanization as also the nature and extent of urban problems vary from State to State in the region. The challenges of proper management of civic services in the urban centres of the different States are also not uniform. Consequently, the implications for planning of development of urban areas and social, cultural and economic activities therein are different for the different States. A seminar on "Urbanization in the North Eastern Region: Trends and Policy Implications" was therefore organized by the North-East India Council for Social Science Research in Shillong on 22 and 23 November 1991 to analyse the trends in the growth and pattern of urbanization and the problems faced by the urban-dwellers as also the prospects for future urban growth.

This book is a collection of papers presented at this seminar excepting for the three papers—one each on Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura—written by the authors concerned on the request of the editor.

Debendra Kumar Nayak, Sukla Chakravorty and Subrata Chakravorty have pointed out that the pattern of urbanization in the NER presents a paradoxical situation; while the hilly areas, 'with their quasi-subsistent tribal economies' have been going through the phase of an urban explosion in the recent years, the valley areas having surplus-producing peasant economy have been experiencing stagnation in respect of the growth of urban areas. Reckoning literacy rate, death rate, infant mortality rate, per capita consumption per month of the urban population as the indices of their quality of life, P.C. Dey shows that the quality of urban life in the NER is much better than that of the country as a whole. Examining the Census data about migration of population to urban areas, P.R. Bhattacharjee concludes that, in the initial phase inter-State migration of population acted as the exogenous impetus for the urbanization process in the NER. Of late, however, 'the endogenous factors of urban growth', that is, natural growth of urban population, increased flow of intra-State rural-urban population, etc. are becoming more significant in contributing to the pace of urban growth.

To B.S. Butola urbanization is a process of perpetuating spatial and sectoral dependencies and it is 'antithetical to development and regional balance'. The phenomenon of high rate of growth of urbanization in the NER in the face of relative stagnation in its economic growth, according to him, has been 'strengthening the bonds of regional dependency and the process of its underdevelopment'.

P.H. John has noted the severe shortages of housing facilities and

other civic amenities as also the erosion of values suffered by the indigenous people as they had increasing interactions with the 'business-minded communities' coming from outside the region. Saifun Nessa is distressed by the fact that in the wake of the growth of urban centres, the rural areas have been suffering from the drainage of brain as well as scarce physical resources. The urban areas have been also facing innumerable problems but their solution, she thinks, can come only through the solution of the basic rural problems. After analysing the causes of social tension in the region Biman Kar concludes that persistent social tensions in Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura are partly attributable to 'the immigration dominated urban growth' in these States. A.K. Neog opines that studies in urban poverty should be 'regional and location-specific'. For the all India surveys like those conducted by the NSSO generate data which are too general to enable the policy makers to draw inference about the different regions on account of their socio-economic diversities. Pointing out the need for the society to take care of the elder citizens Mathew George has given details about the working of the 'Mercy Home' in Shillong as 'a home away from home' for the elder citizens.

Facts marshalled by Abhik Gupta indicate that "the majority of the towns and cities of North-Eastern India have so far remained mere centres of trade and administration, and not of industry, even then grossly unplanned development combined with increasing population have resulted in degradation of water bodies in or near them". M.P. Bezbaruah considers the low level of urbanization and industrial and economic backwardness of the NER is 'a blessing in disguise' since it provides for the opportunity of launching a development process "programmed to achieve balanced expansion of rural and urban sectors". Sarit Kumar Chaudhuri, Dipak Kumar Adak and Anirudhya Dey have confirmed by referring to Census data that both the birth and death rates in urban areas are lower than that in rural areas. J.B. Ganguly surveys the rate and pattern of urban growth since 1951 and the different problems faced by the urbanites in the NER and discusses their implications for formulating the policy frame for regulating the directions of future urban growth and tackling the growing urban problems.

All the five papers on Arunachal Pradesh have noted that the process of urbanization in the State has been linked with the setting up of administrative headquarters at different levels. R.P. Bhattacharjee has emphasized the communication bottleneck as the basic constraint

of development of urban centres in the State. He has suggested the building up of a lateral road running from the eastern to western parts of Arunachal Pradesh linking all the district towns which will augment production of agricultural goods and disposal of marketable surplus by the local producers. This will ultimately help the growth of towns. Anticipating that the trends of urbanization in Arunachal Pradesh will be further accelerated in the coming decades and considering the fact that the terrain of the State is hilly, A. Mitra suggests that "instead of population cogglomerating in or two large towns, there should be an increased number of medium and small-sized towns in the different districts of Arunachal Pradesh." Gurudas Das characterizes the process of urbanization in Arunachal Pradesh as an induced one in the sense that it 'has been superimposed on a comparatively simple tribal socio-economic structure'. The urban centres, according to him, "absorb and transmit the consumerist culture and consumer goods of the metropolis to the surrounding rural areas." No wonder, an important fall-out of this development has been the virtual extinction of the indigenous crafts. A.K. Agarwal has particularly studied the variations in the growth of population in rural and urban areas in the circles of six existing towns between 1971 and 1981 and found that the rates of growth of population in the rural areas adjoining urban areas were also high excepting for the Along Circle. This has been so, according to him, on account of the fact that growing number of persons have migrated from the remote interiors to the villages in the vicinity of the towns. M.C. Behera has shown that not only the share of scheduled tribe population in the total urban population has been increasing but also that, under the impact of urbanization, literacy rates among both the male and female scheduled tribe population have been rising and, what is more, significant shifts in occupation of the tribal population from primary to secondary and tertiary sectors have been taking place.

P.L. Bhuyan and N.C. Das observe that most of the urban areas in Assam are continua of rural areas and, therefore, 'it becomes difficult to demarcate the actual town area from that of village area.' The process of urbanization is also marked by lack of proper planning of development of urban infrastructure and productive activities. Kailash Sharma has constructed a model to explain with illustrations how quite a good number of growth centres in Assam have evolved over time into busy and crowded urban centres. Based on his field work and the available secondary data Dipankar Banerjee has highlighted the fact that immigration of population from different parts of the country and

even abroad substantially accounts for the population boom in Guwahati city which is the premier urban agglomeration not only for Assam but for the NER as a whole. In fact, it is the gateway to the seven North Eastern States. He has brought out the glaring deficiencies in the basic amenities particularly in respect of sanitation and drainage systems. He urges upon the preparation and implementation of the plan of development of Guwahati by involving the city-dwellers shunning too much of bureaucratization and having one centralized authority to formulate and carry out the plan instead of relying on too many agencies as at present.

Karbi Anglong district in Assam is the home of the Karbis. There are only two towns in the district, namely, Diphu and Hamren. The process of urbanization in the district, even as its pace is still a slow one, has already set in motion as S.S. Mishra and R.P. Athparia point out, the process of detribalization among the Karbis living in urban areas.

In Manipur 28 per cent of the total population lives in towns. It is the second highest urbanized State in the NER. Tombi Singh has, however, noted that the problems of unemployment, air pollution, emergence of slum areas, violence, shortage of housing, proper medical facilities, etc. have been afflicting the process of urbanization in Manipur though not in a very acute form as yet.

Reviewing the trend of urban growth in Meghalaya, Siddheswar Sharma has emphasised the fact that development of urban amenities has been lagging far behind the growth of each of the seven urban centres in Meghalaya. Nandini Chakraborty, A.C. Mahapatra and D.K. Nayak have formulated a model of peripheral urban development to explain the emergence and development of Shillong as an urban centre. They have highlighted the enclave character of the city as it had no organic link with its 'quasi-foraging and quasi-peasant' hinterland. The city's early growth, they have shown, was 'linked with the region's growing contact and integration with the colonial metropolitan economy'. Danny D. Nengnong, Debendra K. Nayak and A.C. Mahapatra have analysed the spatial pattern of migration in Meghalaya, particularly migration from rural to urban areas and have observed that, contrary to the all-India pattern, a very high percentage of rural to urban migrants in the State, i.e., 46.5 per cent, consists of women, which, according to them, is a reflection of the 'higher overall status' enjoyed by the women. S.K. Agnihotri has brought out the weaknesses in the structure of urban administration in Meghalaya. He opines that

inadequacies of legislative enactments for ensuring proper planning of urban development, deficiencies in the functioning of the local boards and municipalities in managing civic affairs in their respective domains, meagreness of investments made in the urban sector and *ad hocism* in implementation of development schemes, etc. are responsible for tardy development of urban amenities and infrastructure in Meghalaya.

Urban population constitutes 46.20 per cent of the total population in Mizoram. This is the highest proportion among the States in India. A.K. Agarwal in his study of the urbanization pattern in Mizoram has cited the disquieting feature of 'exorbitantly higher rate of growth of the large metropolitan urban centres without any proportionate increase in housing and infrastructural facilities'.

In bringing out the main features of the process of urbanization in Nagaland, Jogamaya K.K. Saikia has highlighted the characteristics of the two premier towns of Nagaland, namely, Kohima and Dimapur. She has identified the factors contributing to the growth of these two towns very fast and their impacts on the social, cultural and economic life of the people.

Reviewing the pattern and problems of urbanization in Tripura, P.R. Bhattacharjee opines that the urban areas in the State still reflect some traits of rural areas and that 'the urban culture, amenities and opportunities are yet to grow' in the towns of Tripura.

Studies made by the participants in the seminar have thrown up the problems commonly facing the North Eastern States. The process of urbanization had a late start in these States, but its pace in the recent decades has accelerated so much so that expansion of essential urban amenities and civic services has been severely lagging behind the growth of urban population. The most common urban problems like overcrowding and growth of slums, scarcity of water-supply, inadequacies of public health and sanitation system, growing unemployment among the educated youths and the consequent frustration among them, etc. are already in evidence in the towns of North East India. In such a milieu it is the urban poor who suffer most. Secondly, this also breeds social and political tensions. But in the North-Eastern States these problems are not yet as acute as in many other parts of the country. By formulating appropriate planning of development of urban infrastructure and civic services and implementing them for benefiting all classes of urbanites these problems need to be tackled. But for this purpose, as pointed out by

several participants, the management structure must be streamlined by abolishing the system of multiplicity of authorities dealing with urban planning and execution thereof. Appropriate legislative measures for this purpose need to be taken by the State Governments concerned before it becomes too late.

No plan of urban development can be carried out without mobilization of adequate resources for this purpose. And in this respect these States will have to heavily depend on the resource transfers from the Centre. But they must also raise resources locally. The municipal tax structure should be a progressive one and the households belonging to the upper and middle income groups should be required to pay for the civic amenities they enjoy at the least possible subsidised rates. In the ultimate analysis, the possibility of generating resources locally will depend on the extent of participation of the people in the process of planning and execution of planned schemes that can be ensured by installing popularly elected local self-governing authorities.

Some participants view the urbanization process in the NER as a process of development of underdevelopment. For the region's economic backwardness still persists and the growth of urbanization is not being backed by growing diversification of productive activities, particularly, development of manufacturing activities utilizing locally available natural resources. The actual process of development has been a lopsided one as this is sectorally unbalanced and therefore cannot be sustained. In 1991, more than two-thirds of the main workers in the region were engaged in the primary sector consisting of agriculture and allied activities. The secondary sector including cottage industries accounted for 7 per cent of main workers in Manipur, 2.5 per cent in Assam and 1.95 per cent in Tripura. In the remaining States this ratio is less than one per cent. Roughly one-third of the main workers were occupied in the service sector, that is, mostly in government offices, institutions and government-aided bodies. But the scope for further absorption of educated youths in government jobs is extremely limited. No wonder the region is faced with steeply growing problem of urban unemployment.

Urbanization has also been affecting the rural productive activities, particularly, rural crafts. Shifts in demand from indigenous to imported products have been causing leakage of incomes out of the region, sucking away of natural resources and destruction of some indigenous productive enterprises. Yet the process of urbanization, like the process of modernization, cannot be halted as the trend of migration

from rural to urban areas is likely to continue, more and more new towns are likely to come up and the existing towns are likely to continue to spread into the adjoining rural areas. Therefore, planning of development of the NER should integrate into it the planning of development of urban infrastructure and civic services which are the prerequisites of development and diversification of productive activities for generating more employment opportunities and income.

The upshot of the matter is that, in terms of the territorial dimension of organizing productive activities, the urban sector in the NER has assumed much importance and it needs to be given considerable weightage in making allocations for planned development of this sector, without, of course, undermining the importance of the rural sector. Basically the two sectors are symbiotically related with each other and neither sector can advance steadily at the cost of the other : the two sectors need to grow in a mutually balanced manner.

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**Professor J.B. Ganguly**, retired Vice-chancellor of Tripura University, has a Ph.D. in Economics of the Calcutta University. He has long experience of doing field work in different parts of North-East India and has an intimate knowledge of the developments taking place in the different spheres in that part of the country.

Professor Ganguly has authored three books and edited one collection of papers on Rural Marketing in North-East India. He has published research papers in reputed journals and anthologies and presented papers at a number of regional and national seminars and two international conferences. Even after retiring from active university service he has been engaged in research work in the fields of his interest.

● **Agricultural Development in North-East India**

*K. Alam*

This book studies the various problems, constraints and prospects of agricultural development in not only North-Eastern region as a whole, but also in individual states of the region.

● **Urbanization and Development in North-East India**

*J.B. Ganguly*

An outstanding book dealing with problems related with rapid urbanization and development of North-East region of India and gives concrete solutions and suggestions.

● **North-East India 2000 A.D.**

*B. Datta Ray*

This book makes a systematic analysis of the total north-east India through a futurological perspective examining the basic issues of ecology, population, resources, planning management and institutional frame-work.

● **Emerging Pattern of North-Eastern Economy**

*V.S. Mahajan*

This book deals with a variety of areas of the regional development and brings out the main issues that have emerged or are likely to emerge as a consequence of such development.

● **The Nagas of Nagaland**

*K. Randip Singh*

This outstanding book gives a vivid description about the Nagas, their villages, their tribes, customs, traditions, social life and the emergence of insurgency. It gives a brief picture of the ghastly deeds and blood curdling stories about Naga heroes of peace who fought and died for peace in Nagaland.

● **Economic Development of Border States of India**

*V.S. Mahajan*

This book is a study of the border economies of India especially the sensitive areas in North-East and North-West and looks into the key economic issues as well as levels of development achieved by different states in these areas.

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