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India**

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I. Introduction

Urbanization and agricultural change are closely interrelated. Agricultural development generating surplus and increasing the growth of urban centres, increasing the increased demand for food and growing urban population and for various inputs of the urban categories. The growth of the latter is also considerably dependent upon increased demand for food and surplus. The relationship will do so if their interaction leading to the increased agricultural production for such a mutually dependent and interrelated pattern.

**Urbanization and Agricultural Change in
North-Eastern India**

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URBANIZATION AND AGRICULTURAL CHANGE IN NORTH-EASTERN INDIA

J.B. Ganguly

I. Introduction

Urbanization and agricultural change are closely interrelated. Agricultural development generating surplus production supports the growth of urban centers by meeting the increased demand for food of the growing urban population and for agricultural inputs of the urban industries. The growth of the latter is also considerably dependent on the increased demand for their products by the rural population, who will do so if their income rises owing to the increased agricultural production. For such a mutually dependent and synchronized pattern of growth of the urban and rural sectors to be effective, two important conditions must be fulfilled. The urban demand for the agricultural products will grow steadily if the demands for such products are income-elastic. Similarly, rural demands for the urban products will grow if the agricultural sector expands and more income is generated there, and rural demands for goods produced in the urban industries are income-elastic.

On another plane also, there is interdependence of rural-urban growth impulses. Growth of urbanization means growth of industries, trade, commerce, communication and administrative and social services, all of which are non-agricultural occupations. The growing demand for manpower for handling these activities can be largely met by the supply of immigrant labour population from rural areas. Such migration can take place if the technological and structural changes in the productive activities in the rural areas render a part of the growing agricultural labour force as surplus. Even otherwise, as population grows and the pressure of population on land rises and the scope for further employment of labour in the rural economy gets exhausted migration of population from rural to urban areas swells urban population.

Such a simplified model of balanced rural-urban development is a closed one in the sense that exogenous factors of growth of urbanization have not been taken account of. But in reality the exogenous forces emanating from outside the region may play a crucial role in pushing up the process of urbanization of the region concerned. In fact in the case of the

North Eastern Region the process of urbanization has been greatly influenced by exogenous forces.

The process of urbanization in North-East India has been also a process of modernization, spread of literacy and education, diversification and specialization in productive activities, adoption of higher technology of production in agriculture, etc. As the towns expanded and the contact of the ruralites grew with the urbanites they felt the urge for enjoying urban amenities and new goods and services. To fulfill these urges they had to produce more and sell the surplus to the urbanites to earn higher incomes to be able to buy new goods and services. Higher productivity per unit of land in agriculture could not be ensured without the adoption of higher technology of production. In North-East India replacement of the system of shifting cultivation by that of settled wet-rice cultivation was such an improvement. Agricultural production also grew through extension of cultivation to new areas and use of better tools and better cultural practices in growing rice. Production of new cash crops and commercialization of agriculture, that is, production for the market rather than only for self-consumption, also helped the process of urbanization.

An important characteristic of the process of urbanization in North-East India has been that it has not been associated with growth of industries in a significant manner. No wonder many of the urban-dwellers maintain close connections with agricultural occupations. One such connection is the ownership of farm lands by some urbanites in their respective home villages. A good number of town-dwellers working in government and non-government offices and institutions maintain their links with their rural homes which they visit from time to time and where they go back to live permanently after retirement from service. Since the scope for industrial and institutional investment is yet very limited in North-East India, the urbanites, who are also shy of investing in stocks and shares of companies operating outside the region, prefer to invest their savings, if any, in land and land-based productive activities in their respective villages. This has been possible because many of the urban centers in this part of the country are just overgrown villages. In such a milieu of rural-urban continuum it is quite obvious that symbiotic relationship between the process of urbanization and agricultural change will prevail.

II. Urbanization In Assam During The Early Colonial Period

In 1826, when the East India Company annexed Assam, there was no urban center, worth its name, either in the plains of Assam nor in the adjoining hills. Before the coming of the British this part of the country was ruled by the Ahoms, a branch of the MaO-shan sub-tribe of this Tais of South Asia, for nearly six centuries. They had built up a moderately prosperous empire by the medieval standard based on the rice economy. (Even as under that regime considerable amount of surplus rice was produced, in the absence of a market economy and specialization in productive activities there was no effective accumulation of surplus and capital formation leading to diversification and commercialization of growing volume of production.) Therefore, even the headquarters of the Ahom kings 'appeared to the invaders as a mere aggregation of irregularly laid-out villages and tillage' as noted by Amalendu Gupta (1983, p. 6) while referring to the account of the Mughal General, Mir Jumla, who occupied the Ahom capital Garhgaon in 1662. H.K. Barpujari (1992, p. 342) has similarly observed that under the Ahom government 'no distinction existed between the urban and rural population'.

The decline of the Ahom rule was caused by the prolonged civil wars (Moamaria uprisings) during the second half of the eighteenth century and the repeated Burmese invasions of Assam since 1816. These extremely cruel, bloody and violent incursions were followed by severe famine and pestilence of epidemic proportions. As a result the whole of the Brahmaputra valley became desolate and depopulated. In the wake of these disastrous events the capitals of the Ahom rulers, such as, Pragjyotishpur (Guwahati), Gargaon, Rangpur, etc. were in ruins or had undergone 'a process of decay overgrown with deep and impenetrable jungles' (Barpujari, *ibid.*, p. 327).

At the time of British annexation of Assam the stage of urbanization in Assam and the nearby hills can, therefore, be taken as at the zero level. As the colonial power set itself to consolidate its rule over Assam for restoring peace and law and order in the trouble-torn territory, several administrative headquarters and army camps and cantonments were set up. (On consideration of the existing facilities of transport and communication and the potential for development of these facilities and the possibility of getting supplies of food and other necessities to meet the needs of the civil and military officers and men and other staff, etc. such centers were located on the bank of the Brahmaputra or that of a tributary of that mighty river. These places gradually took shape as urban centers having the usual urban amenities

like paved roads, conservancy services, water-supply, street-lighting, communication services, etc. Gradual rise in the proportion of population pursuing non-agricultural occupations was also an urban phenomenon. The pace at which these centers grew and the urban services expanded depended on the pace of structural changes occurring in the economy.)

After annexing Assam, the British rulers started bringing about significant changes in the structure of Assam's economy in pursuance of the colonial form of extortionist revenue policy. (By introducing the political and legal system of defining and guaranteeing the enjoyment of property rights and the enforcement of contracts of transactions and payments and security of life and property the new regime created the possibilities of achieving growth in production of food and other agricultural crops and trading activities. Market economy slowly emerged. Growth of market led to monetization of production and exchange that called for the provision of increased supply of money and credit. Specialization in production and division of population into agricultural and non-agricultural occupations were also the outcome of such developments. These changes tended to bring about concentration of trading activities, marketing of surplus produce by the middlemen, transport and communication facilities, etc. in and around the administrative centers where certain essential facilities had already been created by the government for meeting administrative needs.) This way the process of urbanization got started in Assam under the colonial rule in the first half of the nineteenth century.

(But the rate of growth of urbanization was extremely slow during the whole of the nineteenth century as the agrarian changes under the colonial rule did not lead to the generation of increasing volume of surpluses in the traditional rural economy. In fact the government assessed and collected land revenue from the peasants at very high rates leaving practically no surplus produce in the hands of the growers) Guha (1991, p. 234) has depicted the condition in the following words:

"The result of peasant-squeezing over the years was inhibiting. The total land revenue demand more than quadrupled between 1865-66 and 1897-98 (from about Rs. 1 million to more than Rs. 4 million), while the growth of cultivated acreage under all crops other than tea remained, according to Sir Henry Cotton, Chief Commissioner of Assam (1896-1902), as low as a little over seven per cent, with no visible increase in productivity meanwhile".

Note

(Growth of tea plantations in Assam since the 1930's also did not boost the overall urbanization process in the province. The government-patronized capitalist form of land-based and export-oriented plantation system of tea production was developed against the background of a predominantly subsistence form of agrarian economy. And the tea industry did not bring about any basic structural change in the traditional agricultural sector. The growth of this industry helped the growth of towns like Dibrugarh, Jorhat and later Tinsukia, no doubt, but in a sense it thwarted the growth of the established urban centers in the province as observed by B.C. Allen in the Census Report of Assam for 1901:

“There are no manufactures of any importance in the province, and tea, which is the one industry in which capital has been invested, tends to prevent the growth of towns, each large garden forming a center in itself with its own Kayah (Marwari trader), who acts as general merchant and money-lender, and, if possible, its own market where the coolies can obtain their supplies from the neighbouring villages. The natives of the province are almost all agriculturists; in the Assam valley, at any rate, trade and crafts are almost entirely in the hands of foreigners, and there is nothing to attract the people to the small towns which do exist. Everyone of these is the headquarters of a district of subdivision....” (p. 6).

In another sense also tea plantations have depressed the level of urbanization in Assam. Tea garden workers were mostly immigrants from other provinces. In 1901 total population counted in census on tea gardens was 657331 out of whom 623417 were ‘labourers and subordinates’ (Census Report for 1901, p. 163). These immigrants constituted 19 percent of the total population of Assam (3290 thousand). Since tea garden population was treated as ruralites the proportion of urban population was lower than it would be had there been no such immigration. And in 1901 the level of urbanization in Assam was only 1.9 percent, as against 1.8 percent in 1891.)

(The growth of tea industry, of course, helped the growth of some other industries in Assam and thus augmented the process of occupational diversification and specialization in production, all of which facilitated the process of urbanization and growth of agricultural production.) A steamer service was first started on the Brahmaputra in 1847 but it was ‘at uncertain intervals’. Subsequently on the pressing demand of the tea planters a regular steamer service on the Brahmaputra was opened in 1883. In 1885 two small state railways

were constructed. But the main railway called the Assam-Bengal State Railway 'was opened for traffic in 1905' (Gait 1967, p. 399). (Following such developments of transport facilities, production of coal from the coalfields in the foothills of Naga Hills was started in 1882 and production of petroleum at Digboi in 1889. A Public Works Department was established in 1868 and Local Boards in 1880. (These steps led to the building of roads and development of road transport in Assam.)

There were significant advances in the field of modern education in the province. Though the first English school was started at Guwahati in 1835, by 1872 the number of such schools rose to six. The first 'degree' college in North-East was opened at Gauhati in 1901 by the government. Until then, students were given scholarships to prosecute their higher studies at Calcutta. The progress of modern education can be assessed from the fact that between 1869 and 1899, 1117 students from Assam passed the Entrance examination of the Calcutta University and 150 passed the B.A. examination of the same university (Barpujari 1992, pp. 376-7). School education was organized right from the primary level. Most of the educated youths got government jobs.

(Under the impact of these changes there were shifts from agricultural to non-agricultural occupations and the slow rise of the middle class. This caused a steady rise in the number of tenant cultivators.) In Assam the government maintained the *ryotwari* system of land tenure, excepting for Goalpara district where zamindari system obtained. Land was held by the peasants on *ryotwari* tenure on payment of revenue to the government. Initially the *ryots* themselves cultivated the lands settled in their names. But over the years some *ryots* started letting out their land on lease to 'tenant cultivators'. As occupational diversification progressed and immigration of cultivating class of people continued and the demand for land on lease increased, number of 'tenant cultivators' also went up. This process led to extension of cultivation and rise in agricultural production as also the emergence of a rentier class which could pursue non-agricultural occupation in urban centers and also earn income from holding land settled in their name by letting them out to the tenants. Of course many peasants cultivated a part of the settled lands themselves and let out the remaining part to the tenant cultivators. From the Census Report for 1901 (p. 162) it is noted that in the six Brahmaputra Valley districts (Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang, Nowgong, Sibsagar and Lakhimpur) there were 443465 tenant cultivators in 1901 as against 160836 in 1891. Such a big increase was largely accounted for by steep rises in the number of tenants in the three tea districts namely,

States
Assam
Manipur
Meghalaya
Nagaland
Tripura

Sources

biggest
popula
Tripur
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Darrang, Sibsagar and Lakhimpur. On this new development Allen observes (Census Report 1901, p. 162):

“The increase (in the number of tenants) in the three districts of Darrang, Sibsagar and Lakhimpur, is very significant, and is apparently due to a practice which is growing up amongst the Assamese of leasing out the land lying near a tea garden to the coolies, and moving further afield themselves for their own cultivation. The profits are considerable, as the rent is sometimes as much as three times the Government revenue, but as the coolie must have land near the factory, while the cultivator is not so fettered in his choice, the transaction is for the benefit of both parties”.

In the non-tea producing districts also immigration of landless cultivators from the neighbouring districts of Bengal was taking place. But such immigration assumed serious proportions in the early decades of the twentieth century. The impact of such immigration on the process of urbanization and agricultural change will be discussed below.

III. Urbanization and Agricultural Change From 1901 To 1941

State-wise break-up of data about urbanization in the North-Eastern States is available for the period since 1901, which are given in Table 1.

Table 1: Number of towns and percentages variation in urban population

States	No. of towns					% variation of urban population			
	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941	1901-11	1911-21	1921-31	1931-41
Assam	12	14	22	22	24	+20.55	+36.80	+27.58	+28.30
Manipur	1	1	1	1	1	+ 3.34	+ 7.17	+ 7.25	+16.21
Meghalaya	1	1	1	2	2	+41.75	+26.13	+54.25	+43.93
Nagaland	1	1	1	1	1	-21.66	+15.15	- 1.11	+27.40
Tripura	1	1	1	1	1	+ 6.48	+13.33	+23.72	+84.69

- Sources:* 1. North Eastern Council, Basic Statistics of North Eastern Region, 1992, p. 4.
2. North Eastern Council, Report of the Working Group on Development of NER during the Seventh Five Year Plan, 1985, p. 310.

In 1901 all the 12 towns in Assam were in the Brahmaputra Valley. Guwahati was the biggest town having a population of 14,244. The second biggest town was Dibrugarh with a population of 11227 (Census Report for 1901, p. 6). Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Tripura had only one town each in 1901, namely, Imphal, Shillong, Kohima and Agartala respectively. All these towns were administrative headquarters. Both in terms of number of towns and the proportion of urban population the overall level of urbanization was quite low

during the period under review. Table 2 shows rural-urban distribution of population for the NER as a whole.

Table 2: Rural-urban distribution of population in NER

Year	Population (in thousands)		
	Rural	Urban	Total
1901	4104 (93.7)	168 (6.3)	4272 (100)
1911	4869 (96.2)	190 (3.8)	5059 (100)
1921	5769 (96.1)	235 (3.9)	6004 (100)
1931	6886 (95.9)	287 (4.1)	7173 (100)
1941	8251 (95.7)	367 (4.3)	8618 (100)

Note: Figures in bracket show the percentages

Source: NEC, *op. cit.*, 1985, p. 309.

In Assam, although the decadal rate of increase of urban population has been substantial, the level of urbanization has been low. This has been so because total population increased considerably and, to a large extent, it was so on account of immigration of population on a large scale during this period. The biggest group of immigrants was the landless cultivators coming from Bengal who settled down in the rural areas and thus swelled the proportion of rural population. These immigrants brought about significant changes in the agrarian economy of Assam. According to census enumerations of persons born in Bengal and living in the six districts of the Brahmaputra Valley in 1911, 1921 and 1931 total number of such immigrants was 576000 (Census Report, 1931, p. 50).

“They have opened up vast tracts of dense jungles along the south bank of the Brahmaputra and have occupied nearly all the lands which are open for settlement in this tract. These people have brought in their wake wealth, industry, and general prosperity to the whole district (Nowgong) ... improved the health of the countryside by clearing the jungles and converting the wilderness into prosperous villages. Their industry as agriculturists has become almost proverbial and they extract from their fields the utmost that they can yield. Their love and care of cattle is also an object lesson to others. Government revenue has increased. Trade and commerce have prospered”.

This quotation from the 1931 Census Report about the position in Nowgong district also applies to the conditions in other districts.

Economic consequences of the settlement of the cultivators from Bengal in Assam have been explained by P.C. Goswami as follows:

“One welcome result of the influx of these farm settlers is the improvement of the farming practices in the province. The new settlers developed the whole agricultural system in Assam, helped to improve the health of the countryside by clearing the jungles and marshes, and also converted the wild areas into prosperous agricultural regions. The introduction of jute, vegetables, etc. as commercial crops in Assam has largely been due to the immigrants. The local people began to take to other crops besides paddy on commercial basis only after witnessing the success achieved by the immigrants” (1994, p. 25).

Extension of cultivation to new areas through reclamation of waste lands brought about substantial rise in the production of food-grains and cash crops like jute, oilseeds, sugarcane, etc. and in employment and income in the rural areas. These changes also boosted income and employment in urban areas. The report on Nowgong district as published in the Census Report, 1931 (already referred to above) brings out such spread effects as follows (*op. cit.* p. 51):

“The lakhs of rupees which annually pour into the district to buy their jute pass out from their pockets into those of the lawyers and *mahajans* who look after their litigation and finance”.

Besides, surplus paddy and oilseeds produced in the villages followed into the towns where rice and oil mills grew up for processing these crops.

Immigration of Nepalis in considerable numbers into Assam also took place during this period. Number of persons born in Nepal and counted in census in Assam was 88306 in 1931 as against 70344 in 1921 and 47654 in 1911. Including the children born of Nepali parents in Assam total population of persons speaking Nepali languages (Rai, Gurung, Limbu, Magari, etc.) was enumerated at 140000 (Census Report, 1931, p. 53). The districts where they mainly migrated were Khasi and Jaintia Hills, Darrang, Lakhimpur and Kamrup. Most of them were graziers who reared buffaloes and cows in the outskirts of towns and supplied the urban-dwellers with their requirements of milk and other dairy products. They also cut and processed fuel wood in the nearby forests for sale to the townsmen. Many Nepalis even worked as labourers and porters in Shillong. Immigration of Nepalis has indeed

been an integral part of the process of urbanization in Assam and the hill areas in the North East.

Figures gleaned from the Census Reports of Assam (including Manipur) indicate the proportion of urban population as given in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Proportion of urban population in Assam hill areas

Year	Proportion of urban population (%)	
	Total	In hills
1911	3.0	
1921	3.2	9.2
1931	3.4	9.1 (including Manipur)
1941	3.7	4.5 (in Manipur 19.5)

Sources : Respective Census Reports for Assam

A striking feature of the process of urbanization in the North-Eastern Region is that the hill areas with shifting cultivation, generating little surplus food production, as the predominant form of farming practice, had a higher level of urbanization compared to the plains of Assam, where surplus food was produced (Table 3). This trend might be attributed to three contributing factors. The urban centers in the hills did not emerge from below but were created by the government to serve as administrative headquarters. Secondly, these towns were cantonment towns and so were mainly populated by the civil and military personnel. Superimposed on sparsely populated hills the populations of urban centers represented quite a high proportion of total (small) population size of which was small. Thirdly, these hill towns were sustained by supply of food and other necessities from the adjoining plains. This was quite natural because the economies of the hills and the plains were very much interdependent.)

The urban centers in the hills, however, played an important role in bringing about agricultural change in these areas. In the pre-independence period there were two urban centers in Assam, namely Shillong, which was the capital of Assam, and Kohima, which was the headquarters of Naga Hills district. In 1874 when Assam was made a Chief Commissioner's province the capital was shifted from Guwahati to Shillong. It is a beautiful hill station having a salubrious climate. Good educational institutions and hospitals were set

up in the town. All these developments attracted a large number of non-tribals to settle down in Shillong. The growing needs of food for the rising population of Shillong was, of course, met by supplies coming from the plains of Assam and not the adjoining villages in the hills.

But Shillong became the focal point for potato cultivation as a cash crop in the Khasi Hills. David Scott, Agent to the Governor General in Assam, introduced potato to these hills in the early decades of the nineteenth century. While potato cultivation as a cash crop in the terraces on the hill slopes was taken up by the Khasis with enthusiasm, it was not so for the Assamese cultivators in the plains. The importance of potato cultivation in the economy of the Khasi Hills may be realized from the following statement of Major Butler in 1847:

“In the Khasi Hills a large supply of potatoes is annually raised and sold in the Gauhati market, realizing to the Khasis no inconsiderable profit. The effect of this traffic being to promote a more frequent intercourse with the people of the plains, it is hoped that in course of time the Khasis may learn the value of peaceable commercial pursuits, and become a prosperous and civilized race” (Quoted in Govt. of India 1960, pp. 274-275).

Kohima

Kohima developed as an urban center being the administrative head quarters of the Naga Hills district. On account of the Inner Line Regulations outsiders could not ordinarily enter and settle down in Nagaland. Therefore, the population of Kohima consisted of the local tribal people besides the civil and military personnel. The Angamis and the Chakesangs who are the local tribal people in and around Kohima, practiced the system of settled cultivation by terracing their fields on hill slopes near their villages. They irrigate the terraced fields by skillfully constructing channels for irrigating each terrace one by one. This system gave higher yields yet food production was not sufficient to meet the urban demand. The position has been narrated by the National Council of Applied Economic Research in its Techno-Economic Survey of Nagaland as quoted below (1968, p. 20):

“Food grains are marketed in some villages near urban settlements but the amount is negligible both in relation to output and consumption in the urban settlements. Nagaland, however, is a net receiver of foodgrains. Foodgrains obtained from outside are mainly consumed by the urban settlements and the armed forces stationed within the Nagaland territory”.

The villagers around Kohima practiced settled cultivation in individually owned terraced fields and had established some trade connections with Kohima where they sold their surplus food and wherefrom they purchased their consumption goods although in small quantities. But such interactions between the town and the adjoining villages acted as incentives for raising production in their fields.

Manipur: Imphal

Topographically Manipur state is divided into two parts: the Manipur valley and the hills surrounding the valley. The valley is inhabited by the Meitheis (Manipuris) and the hills by the Naga, Kuki and other tribes. The valley accommodates nearly 70 percent of the total population while it comprises only about 8 percent of the total land area. Imphal, located at the center of the valley, has been the capital of Manipur since the time of the Rajas. Until 1971 Imphal was the only town in the State. In the pre-Independence days Imphal including the cantonment area was a big town having a population exceeding 20000. The Manipur valley is very fertile. Even in those days the lands in the valley were intensively cultivated. The area of the valley-lands was about 1.8 lakh hectares and 50 percent of this area was under cultivation.

During the rule of the Rajas an officer was appointed, called the Phunam Salungba, who supervised all matters connected with cultivation of land. The Raja treated all land as belonging to him and he was free to give away land for cultivation by his subjects and to take back lands from them if he wished. More than one-third of the cultivated land was under the control of the members of the ruling family, Brahmins and Sepoys (Roy Burman, 1970, p. 206). Since tax on agriculture was the main source of revenue the king encouraged the extension of cultivation to new areas. But because of the feudal system of control over land and cultivation of land by the actual tillers of the soil as tenants of the jobless and officers of the royal court productivity of land was low. "In spite of natural advantages for paddy cultivation in the valley", writes the National Council of Applied Economic Research (1961, p. 3), "the yield per acre is low, being 615 lbs. per acre as compared with 844 lbs. in Assam and with 715 lbs. in all-India, on average, during 1957-58".

The main bottleneck in the extension of cultivated area in the valley was the Loktak Lake with an area of 10000 hectares. In the rainy season, water from Loktak lake in spate

flooded a large area (27000 hectares) of land in the valley making it impossible to cultivate the lands.

(Rice was the staple food and 80% of the total production of rice came from the valley. Manipur State as a whole was self-sufficient in rice production. The State also produced some surplus rice, which was supplied to meet the demand of the neighbouring deficit areas of the Naga Hills.)

Impact of the Second World War

(The process of urbanization in Assam including its hill districts and Manipur was accelerated under the impact of the Second World War. During that period wars were actually fought in some parts of the region. There was heavy mobilization and movement of armed forces and war materials in the area. New roads were quickly built road, river and railway transport systems were strengthened. All this led to the establishment of direct links between rural areas and the urban centers. Urban population went up. People's isolation was broken and a lot of cash came into the hands of the local people as they worked as labourers in the construction works and even worked as small contractors. A good number of tribesmen as well as plainsmen joined the army and earned salary. The local producers sold some of their products to the government and members of the armed forces. They also consumed many new goods with which they were not familiar before the war. All these changes led to demand-pulled growth in agricultural production. The 'grow more food' campaign also had some effect. Trade and commerce got a fillip and occupational diversification became somewhat pronounced.)

III. Urbanization And Agricultural Change Since Independence

At the time of Independence the level of economic development of North-Eastern India was very low and so also was the level of urbanization. But after Independence, particularly since the launching of the First Five Year Plan in 1951, substantial amounts of investment have been made in the building up of the basic infrastructure in the region and opening of a large number of administrative centers at different levels. For the development of agriculture and allied activities and industries also considerable amounts of resources have been put in with the objective of achieving balanced development of the region. The reorganization of the North-Eastern States, constitution of Autonomous District Councils, etc. have made it necessary to create new administrative head quarters and expansion of many

existing ones. Consequently both the number of urban centers and the level of urbanization has been steadily rising. This will be clear from the data about rural-urban distribution of population, number of towns, etc. given in Table 4.

Table 4 : Total number of towns and rural-urban distribution of population in NER

Year	Population (in thousands)			No. of towns*
	Rural	Urban	Total	
1951	9803 (95.5)	460 (4.5)	10263 (100)	30
1961	13398 (92.4)	1102 (7.6)	14500 (100)	72
1971	17734 (90.5)	1847 (9.5)	19581 (100)	101
1981	23698 (89.1)	2908 (10.9)	26607 (100)	153
1991	27030 (86.1)	4356 (13.9)	31386 (100)	195
2001	32523 (84.5)	5972 (15.5)	38495 (100)	245

* Number of towns is computed taking constituents of Urban Agglomerations as separate units.

- Sources : 1. N.E.C. (1985), p. 302.
2. Census of India 1991, India, Series 1, Paper 2 of 1991.
3. Census of India 2001.

Table 4A: Level of urbanization in North Eastern India

State	2001	1991	1981	1971	1961	1951	1941	1931
Arunachal Pradesh	12.80	20.41	6.56	3.70	0.00	**		
Assam	12.72	11.10	9.88#	8.82	7.21	4.29	3.11	2.92
Manipur	23.88	27.52	26.42	13.19	8.68	0.50*	19.47	19.26
Meghalaya	19.63	18.60	18.07	14.55	15.27	9.66	6.87	5.52
Mizoram	49.50	46.10	24.67	11.36	5.36	3.54	0.00	0.00
Nagaland	17.74	17.21	15.52	9.95	5.19	1.94	1.85	1.54
Tripura	17.02	15.30	10.99	10.43	9.02	6.67	3.45	2.50
North-Eastern India	15.53	13.90	11.75	9.43	7.61	4.48	4.26	4.00

** In Arunachal Pradesh census was first conducted in 1961.

* Only a fraction of Imphal, till then the only town in Manipur, was treated as urban.

The urbanisation level for 1981 is computed on the basis of projected total and urban population in Assam, as the state could not be covered in the Census of India 1981.

- Sources : (i) Census of India, 1981, Series 1 (India) Part 2A(i), General Population Tables;
(ii) Census of India, 1991; and (iii) Census of India, 2001.

Table 4A reveals that while in 1951 only 4.5 percent of the population of North-Eastern India lived in towns, in 1991, 13.88 percent of the population were urbanites. But this level of urbanization was still much below the all-India level of 25.72 percent. Even more importantly, state-wise variations in this level are very much pronounced. In Assam only 11.8 percent of the population live in towns as against 46.2 percent in Mizoram, 27.69 percent in Manipur, 18.69 percent in Meghalaya, 17.28 percent in Nagaland, 15.26 percent in Tripura and 12.21 percent in Arunachal Pradesh. Since Assam accounts for nearly 58 percent of the total population of the region, the overall level of urbanization is only 13.88 percent. For comprehending the reasons for marked state-wise variations in the current level of urbanization we may consider the state-wise annual exponential growth rates of the urban and rural population and urban-rural growth differentials as given in Table 5 and Table 5A.

Table 5: Annual exponential growth rate: urban and rural

State	Average annual growth rate of population							
	Urban				Rural			
	1961-71	1971-81	1981-91	1991-2001	1961-71	1971-81	1981-91	1991-2001
Arunachal Pradesh*	-	8.74	9.28	10.12	3.26	2.71	2.44	1.52
Assam	5.01	3.27**	3.27	3.62	2.82	2.00	1.98	1.67
Manipur	7.37	9.76	2.98	1.28	2.68	1.16	2.34	3.65
Meghalaya	2.25	4.95	2.74	3.71	2.82	2.36	2.77	2.83
Mizoram	9.74	11.71	9.57	3.87	1.53	2.37	-0.07	2.02
Nagaland	9.87	8.50	5.58	6.94	2.84	3.42	4.29	6.34
Tripura	4.55	3.29	6.19	2.88	2.94	2.71	2.41	1.34

Table 5A: Annual exponential growth rate difference

	Urban-rural growth differential			
	1961-71	1971-81	1981-91	1991-2001
Arunachal Pradesh*	-	6.03	6.84	8.60
Assam	2.19	1.27**	1.29**	1.95
Manipur	4.69	8.60	0.64	-2.37
Meghalaya	-0.57	2.59	-0.03	0.88
Mizoram	8.21	9.34	9.64	1.85
Nagaland	7.03	5.08	1.29	0.60
Tripura	1.61	0.58	3.78	1.54

*In Arunachal Pradesh there was no urban area in 1961.

** Interpolated using 1971 and 1991 Census figures.

Source : Census of India 1991, Series 1, India, paper 2 of 1991, p. 51.

(The quantum of growth of urban population is generally decomposed into three contributing factors, namely, natural increase, migration from rural to urban areas and 'change in the status of an area as a result of reclassification and declassification, horizontal extension or the change in the territorial jurisdiction of towns'. In the case of the North-Eastern States migration of population from other states outside this region has also been an important component of the growth of urban population. In the wake of the partition of the country heavy migration of population from across the international border took place. And a high proportion of these migrants settled down in urban areas. Secondly, for manning the administrative and social services, transport and communication systems, development projects, construction works, etc. a large number of persons from outside the region had to be recruited.

In the recent decades, however, it is the migration from rural areas within the region that has been largely contributing to the process of urbanization here. Excepting for Nagaland, Meghalaya and Manipur, the urban-rural growth differential have increased in 1981-91 decade. In Manipur the fall in the difference is attributable to the fact that in 1971-81 there was a very large addition to urban population owing to area reclassification. This factor was absent in 1981-91 decade, hence a fall in the rate of increase. In Meghalaya and Nagaland, according to Nanda (1991, p. 55), 'relatively less contribution to urban population growth due to reclassification during 1981-91 compared to 1971-81 seems to be an important factor in reduction of urban population growth rate'.

(At the time of Independence, Assam, Manipur and Tripura were self-sufficient in food production (rice). Surplus of rice produced in the plains met the deficits in the hills. But the rate at which the population increased in the post Independence decades agricultural production failed to grow at the matching rate. Moreover, as urban areas and urban population grew substantially, occupational distribution of population also changed such that the proportion of non-agricultural population increased significantly. These developments put a severe pressure on the agricultural sector that was required to produce more food grains, pulses, vegetables and fruits to meet the growing demand for these products. Although the total area sown expanded, productivity, that is, yield of crops per hectare did not increase significantly, and, as a result, the States became deficits in food production. Every year about 10 lakh tonnes of food grains are imported from outside the region (NEC, 1985, p.104).

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Despite the fact that some shift in occupational distribution in favour of non-agricultural occupations has taken place, agriculture and allied activities constituting the primary sector is still the mainstay of the economies of each of the North-Eastern States. 77.20 percent of the total workers in these states depended on the primary sector for their work in 1971. In 1981 (excepting for Assam) this proportion was 71 percent. In terms of contribution to the SDP, the primary sector accounted for 61 percent in 1984-85 at constant prices. The region's domestic product (sum-total of SDPs of all the seven states) and its sectoral distribution and the sectoral annual growth rates between 1970-71 and 1984-85 are indicated in Table 6.

Table 6: North-Eastern Region's Domestic Product And Its Sectoral Distribution

Year	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary	Total
1970-71	580.00 (60.88)	95.60 (10.03)	277.18 (29.09)	952.78 (100.00)
1984-85	885.87 (49.68)	196.05 (10.99)	701.23 (39.33)	1783.15 (100.00)
Annual growth rates	3.07	5.26	6.85	4.58

Note : Sectoral domestic product figures are in Rs.lakhs.

Source : NEC, A Perspective Plan for NER (prepared by Tata Consultancy Services) Phase I, Annexure I.

From Table 6 it may be noted that between 1970-71 and 1984-85 the annual rate of growth of the primary sector was 3.07 percent as against the aggregate rate of growth of 4.58 percent. There have been wide variations in the rates of growth of the primary sector in the different states - in Arunachal Pradesh it was 6.17 percent while in Mizoram it was (-) 0.03 percent and in Meghalaya 0.19 percent.

The SDP estimates are based on certain simplifying assumptions. Subject to such limitations, it may be safely observed that the tertiary sector has grown fast, on account of expansion of public administration and other services. This has been possible because there has been liberal flow of resources from the Centre in this region. But a large proportion of the region's income flows out of the region being spent on imports of essential consumer goods including foodgrains. The primary sector consisting of agriculture and allied activities is the largest sector that has vast scope for growth and expansion. At present the productivity per unit of land and also that per unit of labour are in most cases below the national average. The

rate of growth of the primary sector needs to be accelerated so that it can generate enough surplus for its own growth and that of other sectors.

Growth of towns without being organically linked with the development of the adjoining rural areas has been led to a lopsided process of urbanization in the NER. Such a pattern of urbanization has been tending to perpetuate the region's underdevelopment and denudation of natural resources. Shifting cultivation is still being widely practiced in the region. According to the Report of the Task Force on Shifting Cultivation appointed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India (1983), 14660 sq. km. area representing 5.7 percent of the total area of the region is subjected to shifting cultivation (NEC 1985, p.90). This type of land use and the growing pressure of demand for timber products, mainly from the urbanites and trading in timber, have been causing denudation of forests, degeneration in vegetative cover over hill slopes, soil erosion and fall in agricultural productivity.

One of the reasons for fall in agricultural production in the plains of Assam, Manipur and Tripura is that floods cause severe damage to agricultural crops almost every year. The main reason why the rivers in these states recurrently inundate the valleys is that the water retaining capacity of the hills and hill slopes in the upper reaches of these rivers has been steadily falling on account of deforestation and soil erosion. Unless the system of land-use in the hills is based on the principle of what the ecology can sustain, the plains cannot be effectively protected against floods. Therefore, it is important to note that, there is evolving specialization in some measure - the plains specialize in the production of foodgrains and the hills in horticultural crops and forest products - in the North-Eastern States. This trend needs to be strengthened by formulating land use planning for agriculture, horticulture, etc. in an integrated manner covering the hills and the plains.

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Annexure A

The process of urbanization following the annexation of Assam by the British in 1826 was closely associated with the establishment of administrative headquarters. The colonial rulers effected wide-ranging changes in administrative, economic and social institutional structures in replacement of the feudal and antiquated ones. The modern systems of medical and educational facilities were introduced. Local self-governing bodies for towns and cantonments were created. The thrusts for these changes emanated from the seats of administrative headquarters.

The *ryotwari* land revenue system was promulgated and revenue charges payable in cash were so levied as to maximize revenue collections. Thereby the *ryots* were compelled to produce surplus for meeting increasing government demands. The processes of monetization of transactions and commercialization of agricultural production got under way as the marketing facilities improved and new markets were accessed for agricultural, horticultural and animal husbandry products. Growing of new food and cash crops enhanced the incomes of cultivators. For example, the *Khasis* took to potato cultivation, mainly as a cash crop, in the terraces on the hill slopes around Shillong.

The Christian missionaries opened schools and hospitals in Shillong, Guwahati, Dibrugarh and a few other towns and established centers for providing training facilities to the local people for acquiring skills in manufacturing activities. Therefore, in a sense, the processes of urbanization, modernization, agricultural expansion, improvement of technologies of production, etc. went on in unison in several parts of this region.

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Annexure B

The pace of urban growth in North-East India has been quite rapid in the recent decades both on account of pull and push factors. Towns and cities are becoming more and more overcrowded causing shortages of essential civic amenities like water-supply, public health services, etc. and giving rise to acute housing problems. Slums are also coming up in several cities. Such problems are being further aggravated by the ongoing ethnic insurgencies that are impelling many rural people to migrate to urban areas in search of security of life and property.

Some planned urban settlements have recently come up with the opening of several centrally sponsored and financed universities: one IIT (Guwahati), one Institute of Science and Technology (Naharlagan, Arunachal Pradesh), two regional medical institutes-cum-hospitals for teaching, research and the latest modes of treatment of diseases (one in Imphal and another in Shillong) and some other regional level organizations.

The recent trend of encouraging growth of the information technology in towns and cities has been easing some of the problems earlier faced by the north-east urban population on account of the remote peripheral location of the region.