



Widening Rural Urban divide: Census 2011, some new perspectives”

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A land of 17.5 per cent people of the world on only 2.4 per cent share of land, India is the second most populous country. All poised to overtake china in few decades, India for the first time registered sharpest decline in total population growth rate since independence. For the first time in the recent past the decadal growth rate of India has indicated significant slowing down, which is an important step towards achieving total fertility rate of 2.1(as envisaged as one of the major objectives of National Population Policy,2000 to be attained by year 2010) commonly understood as zero population growth rate ,during 2001-2011.

The population enumeration for census 2011 has just been concluded, the final and complete results of the world largest population census is expected not before the last quarter of the next year. However, the trends trickling through media reporting and governmental briefings and also through official release of data on census of India official web site, point towards many new dynamics and far reaching implications.

Just picking a leaf out of the book, the present paper investigates very specifically one aspect of socio-demographic significance of rural urban statistics in census 2011. The précis focus of the current paper on a specific finding of the latest census report has some digression just in order to comprehensively analyse and understand the changing socio-economic dynamics in new age India, where the rural- urban divide is blurring or widening depends upon the perspective one looks at the phenomenon with. One thing nevertheless stood firm all the statistical analysis is the fact that there has been a drastic departure from the previous years which cannot be overlooked or tugged under the carpet and which warrants a sincere effort to look into the causes, consequences and implications in coming future.

The results and reports of the recently concluded population enumeration (9th February to 28th February, 2011) though yet to be completely released a few trends have already been uploaded officially by the office of the registrar general of India. The provisional population data for census 2011 available as of now is arrived at by adding the population as reported by each enumerator for the enumeration block assigned to him/her. There could be some error of omission/duplication of enumeration blocks, however, these errors (possible) are factored in before the release of the final data.

For the first time since the population census of 1921, India has more people added to its urban fold compared to its rural counterpart. The total or absolute person added is larger in urban India than the rural India. Census 2011 release indicates that almost 5 lakhs people more than the rural area are added in urban India. The total population growth has majorly declined at national level and the decline is more pronounced and taken cognizance of at village level. This is something which not only raises eyebrows of many but also opens wider vistas for analysis.

The following table gives a statistical idea of the new socio-economic demography emerging in year 2011.

Table No. 1

Population in Crores			
	2001	2011	Difference
India	102.9	121.0	18.1
Rural	74.3	83.3	9.0
Urban	28.6	37.7	9.1

Source: Census of India, 2011, provisional Population table

The above table shows that since last census urban India has added more number to its population than rural India. Though the difference is not mammoth but certainly striking and hence needs the possible explanations.

It can be further elaborated the trend at national level in terms of socio-economic paradigm shift in census 2011 by the following related statistics.

Table No. 2

Growth Rate of Population in Per cent			
	1991-2001	2001-2011	Difference
India	21.5	17.6	-3.9
Rural	18.1	12.2	-5.9
Urban	31.5	31.8	Plus 0.3

Source: Census of India, 2011, Provisional Population table

It is clear that whereas at national level India has registered sharpest decline in population growth rate since independence and it's a matter of rejoice for both the policy makers and the statesmen of the nation. Though, still farther from attaining the larger goal total fertility rate of 2.1 in order to stabilise the population growth, nevertheless the latest census report has brought sense of assurance in governmental efforts and policies.

The more striking feature however, is the declining rate of growth in rural areas and correspondingly positive urban growth. It cannot be stated at the onset that India is gradually urbanizing and its healthy economic trend. Things are not in black and white there can be many unsaid and tacit dynamics of such result which may cloud the correct analysis of the situation.

The growth rate in urban India though is very slender (a total of 9.1 million people are added in urban India in comparison to 9.0 million in rural India during a period of last ten years) yet it assumes immense significance in the perspective of changing paradigm shift in India where even today vast majority lives in villages.

This change in trend could be the result of interplay of many factors, the paper dares to investigate a few of them, however, in want of complete release of relevant corroborating information in by the census 2011, is a severe handicap and the scholar has to rely heavily on older data to make some assertions.

The Census cites three possible causes for the urban population to have risen by more than the rural: 'migration,' 'natural increase' and 'inclusion of new areas as 'urban.'

But all three factors applied in earlier decades too, when additions to the rural population far outstripped those to the urban. Why then is the last decade so different? While valid in themselves, these factors cannot fully explain this huge urban increase, more so, in a census in which the decadal growth percentage of population, records the sharpest decline since India's independence.

Taking into consideration the 2001 Census, it showed that the rural population had grown by more than 113 million since 1991 and the urban by over 68 million. So, rural India had added 45 million people more than urban. In 2011, urban India's increase was greater than that of rural India's by nearly half a million, a significant change. The last time the urban increase surpassed the rural was 90 years ago, in 1921. Then, the rural total actually fell by close to three million compared to the 1911 Census.

However, the 1921 Census was unique. The 1918 Influenza epidemic that killed 50-100 million people world-wide, ravaged India. There was also the smaller impact of World War I in which tens of thousands of Indian soldiers died as cannon fodder for Imperial Britain in Europe and elsewhere. (The Hindu). If Influenza left its fatal imprint on the 1921 enumeration, the story behind the numbers of the 2011 Census speaks of another tragedy: the collapse of millions of livelihoods in agriculture and its related occupations and the ongoing, despair-driven exodus that this sparked in the countryside.

The 2011 Census captures only the tip of an iceberg in terms of rural upheaval. The last time urban India added more numbers to its population than rural India was 90 years ago and that followed giant calamities in public health and war. Yet, without such conditions, urban India added 91 million to its 2001 total, against rural India's 90.6 million is a not as perplexing as it may sound. This striking trend emerging is not a healthier sign and is perhaps the indicator of 'all is not well with Indian economy' and our economic policy makers should stand up and take notice of.

The main stay of our economy has kept on declining from bad to worse, agriculture used to play pivotal role and its contribution in total national GDP once exceeded 50 per cent now contributes roughly 26 per cent. This decline in agricultural output in terms of contribution in GDP has inversely affected the rural folks across the nation. The spill-over workforce from farm sector could not get accommodated in non-farm secondary sector of the economy, creating a vast pool of unemployed and unemployable persons. The rural urban migration though highest in number was undertaken during 1971-1981, remains a major cause of increasing urban population. The only difference during this census period is that the city oriented migration as it seems has turned into a 'distress migration' towards urban places in want of better life. The statement gets strength by the fact that almost 7 million people left farming whose main livelihood was agriculture to look for better option during 1991-2001 (census, 2001), almost 2000 persons were abandoning their mainstay of livelihood on daily basis, and there is no reason to believe that this trend is reversed or arrested during 2001-2011.

There is no official data available to what happened to these people, the employment table, economic census statistics nowhere suggest that such huge number of persons were absorbed in other sector of Indian economy. The complexities of Indian migration pattern is not captured by any kind of enumeration be it Census or National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO). The multiple migration, foot loose migration and leap frogging migration is only very common in Indian context and perhaps have no parallel elsewhere.

The footloose migration generally prevalent in the states not high on industrialization index and have continued to rely heavily on agriculture. Such migrating trend is not only depleting the rural areas (source) of able bodied, young male work force, leaving behind women, children, old, vulnerable and hapless people. Their flight from farm sector not only

costing dear but also proving detrimental for already tottering agricultural sector. The other side of the coin is also not very encouraging, the prospective migrants virtually end up perhaps in more pathetic socio-economic girdle than he was at his native place, at least there was a solace of living together with the family. The issue of real benefits accruing by the immigrants has currently become heavily politicized, yet the fact remains that of all the three (the source region, the migrants themselves and the place of destination) the place of destination stands clear beneficiary in economic terms. However, the pros and cons of migration is not the core focus of the present write up it is the complexities of migration and its inability to be captured truly by any enumerating agencies including the Census which could help assess analyse the census result in the back drop of prevailing socio-demographic realities.

As it has been clear by the definition of migration the foot loose (the desperate search for work that drives poorer people in multiple directions with no clear final destination) and short-term, step-by-step intra state movements are not recorded and almost always elude the true picture from the enumerators. It seems the migrants are guided by hunger and contractor greed, staying at one place for very small period and then further migrating to another place in hunt of jobs (menial) which are not there, thus being exploited further by contractors and the middlemen.

It would be further interesting to note that the position is more or less similar across the states. It becomes further disturbing and strange when considered in reference to EAG (Empowered Action Group) States. EAG states are innovation of Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) keeping in mind certain socio-demographic realities, incorporated in ambitious National Rural health Mission.

The ultimate objective of the EAG concept is not overall health care but demographic stabilisation. The understanding is that issues of reproductive health and child care have to be addressed not because they are rights but because they will lead to demographic stabilisation. The EAG states include Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Uttaranchal, Chattisgarh, Orissa, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.

The EAG states are core Hindi belt states with large population and that too in rural areas. The following table elucidates the current socio-demographic realities in EAG and Non EAG states.

Table No. 3

Growth Rate of Population in Per Cent			
STATES	1991-2001	2001-2011	Difference
EAG States	25.0	20.9	-4.1
Rural	23.5	18.7	-4.8
Urban	31.6	29.9	1.7
Non EAG States	18.9	15.0	-3.9
Rural	13.2	5.7	-7.5
Urban	31.5	32.7	Plus 1.2

Source: Derived from Census of India, 2011, Provisional Population tables.

Though the population growth rate in rural areas of EAG (Empowered Action Group) states is nearly three times in rural areas of Non-EAG states, it is for the first time that the significant fall of growth rate is seen in the rural areas of the EAG states. Declining trend in net addition of rural population in lesser developed largely agrarian states speak volumes.

These states are negatively affected both ways as there is a flight of talent able bodied workforce and also as a resultant the primary or agriculture kept on spiraling down due to lack of proper and efficient work force thus rendering the farm sector even more non-viable. It would be important to note that a large number of marginal farmers and landless people abandoning farming looking for better prospect somewhere else, are not absorbed anywhere save the informal and unorganized sector. It could be emphasized by the fact (table no.3) that the loss in rural areas in terms of total number is not made up by the urban areas in EAG states.

The Non EAG states have also registered a sharp decline in rural population growth it is in tune with the general declining population growth rate.

It is also noted in the census 2011 report that the increase in urban population is also reflected in emergence of new census as well as statutory townships during the last ten years.

Census towns are those urban dwelling which satisfies the criteria laid down by the census of India, which includes, no less than 5000 of population, 400 and above population density and more importantly more than 75 per cent of the total male workforce should be engaged in non- primary activities. On the other hand 'Statutory Towns' are those places with a municipality, corporation, cantonment board or notified town area committee, etc.

Table No. 4

Urban Units (Statutory and Census Townships)			
	1991-2001	2001-2011	Difference
Towns (Total)	5161	7935	2774
Statutory Towns	3799	4041	242
Census Towns	1362	3894	2532

Source: Derived from Census of India, 2011, Provisional Population tables

The above table points towards a very pertinent trend. There has been very significant and substantial rise in total number of towns, however, it assumes special significance in the light huge almost 185 per cent increase in number of census towns since the last census. Whereas, increase in statutory towns is nominal considering a period of ten years.

It is not hard to believe and conjure that the growth of census towns is on the cost of adjoining rural areas more technically known as rural urban fringe having mixed land use as major characteristics. The declining agricultural sector and exodus from farming has created a situation where even less than 25 per cent people are engaged in agricultural activities in the erstwhile complete village set up. It could have been also because of delimitation of few towns and expansion of existing townships. Till the complete census statistics are released it cannot be said with great surety.

It is now a well established fact that the smaller towns are nothing to provide for the prospective immigrants, they fail to act as bulwark between the spillover or surplus workforce from the farming sector and burgeoning large and metropolitan cities.

The informal sector is one potential area which is absorbing huge inflow of unskilled work force coming to the cities. It practically requires no skill and education is hardly a criterion for vast unorganized sector. Getting into an unorganized sector like becoming a hawker, domestic help, working in some menial jobs, becoming a construction worker is never a difficult thing. Class three and successive lower category towns provide ample opportunities to the prospective immigrants in informal sector of the economy.

Conclusion

Though in a very nascent stage, the trickling in reports and results of census 2011, are indicative of few significant trends in Indian-rural urban demographic composition. Any society transforming itself from rural to urban is taken to be good and positive indication for overall socio-economic development, however, if it is not sustainable or not in congruence with the

logical step by step development or if it is a result of interplay of factors like compelled /forced migration, abandoning of farming sector at large scale resulting in massive exodus of rural populace, it is not desirable at all. In Indian context the later stands some water and hence require proper analysis of the situation.

It is established now without any doubt that the considerable increase in net population in urban areas exceeding that of rural India, is due to urban oriented migration. This paper has tried to emphasize that the character of this migrating trend aptly termed as an exodus is perhaps the result of despair and gloom prevailing in agricultural sector. The decline is severe and so entrenched in rural life that it is compelling people to abandon agriculture all together and move out for better prospect towards the cities. This exodus does not have clear destination and the innocent rural migrants fell easy prey to middle men, contractors and hence are vulnerable to all sorts of exploitation. This foot loose migration guided by hunger, sinister design of contractors and the middlemen is distress out migration a kind of chase of a mirage, the job, better opportunities, uplift in lifestyle etc, which is never there to be reached, but in the process a migrant loses whatever little he had at his native place, the middle men and the contractors are the only ones who get extremely benefitted.

Pace and tempo of Indian economic development is not very sustainable and is primarily driven by Information and Computer Technology (ICT) and Service sector. Agriculture which still sustains the largest number of Indian is shattering and tottering like anything, while the engine of the economy is sectors which employ miniscule percentage of Indian population. IT the fastest growing sector supports less than three percent of total population.

Such is the scenario where largest segment of people are not benefiting by globalization and other economic reforms the country is undergoing, on the contrary they are bearing the brunt of being the most disadvantaged and unprivileged segment of the society, are in shambles. There has been a general mood of despair, gloom and helplessness resulting in widespread distress migration. The informal and unorganized sector is hugely accommodative for unskilled labour force pouring in the cities. It would be interesting to learn when all the reports pertaining to census 2011 are released, whether the migrating trend is still heavily oriented towards the big and metropolitan cities. However, the future of small and middle category towns is not very bright they would have to muster their strength and emerge as important destination for prospective migrants so as to be bulwark between the large burgeoning cities on one hand and the declining rural areas on the other.

Legalizing and providing status at par with registered units, the informal/unorganized units like NDME (Non-Directory Manufacturing Establishments) DME (Directory Manufacturing Establishments) OAME (Own Account Manufacturing Establishments) and others should be encouraged. A sector employing more than 90 Per cent of total workforce should no longer be ignored. Although, definitely not the panacea of all the ills emanating from changing socio-demographic reality, informal economy with legal protection to the workforce and in turn bringing the unorganized sector in the tax net, government can effectively meet the challenge.

The need of the hour is to confront the situation with humane face; distress migration and economic status are intrinsically related. A comprehensive and holistic perspective needs to be developed.

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