

NEW TOWNS IN WEST BENGAL—A DEMOGRAPHIC AND ECONOMIC APPRAISAL

D. N. BASU

THE present paper seeks to analyse the role of new towns in the over-all process of urbanisation in West Bengal. New towns, in the present analysis, mean the towns which are for the first time declared as 'Towns' in different censuses of India. In other words new towns are those places which are elevated to urban category by census from their previous rural status. The terms of reference are primarily 1951 and 1961 census. The use of data prior to 1951 census has been generally avoided as this will involve definitional anomalies and moreover comparable details on the items of analysis are hardly available. Actually, 1961 list of new towns provides the starting point for a firm series of the growth of towns for comparison in the future. Prior to 1961 census, uniform eligibility tests for a 'Town' for the country as a whole could not be evolved and naturally inter-state or inter-census comparison of growth of urban population has not been strictly possible. The 1961 census listed the following eligibility tests for declaring a place a 'Town' besides those places already covered by municipal law or other parallel administrative categories: (a) A density of not less than 1000 per square mile, (b) a population of at least 5,000, (c) three-fourths of the occupation of the working population should be outside of agriculture and (d) the place should have according to the superintendent of the census operations for the state, few pronounced urban characteristics, the definition of which, however, leaves room for vagueness. In the light of this introductory remark, the role of new towns in the process of urbanization in West Bengal vis-a-vis India has been presented below.

The growth of urban population for any place over a specific time-period (a census-decade for our purpose) may be seen as the resultant effect of the following factors: (a) Population added through new towns (elevation to 'Urban' category from rural status) as adopted in the present census; (b) Population subtracted due to