

INDIA'S TINY TOWNS: ECONOMIC STRUCTURE, LOCATION AND GROWTH*

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I — INTRODUCTORY

The study of urbanisation has a tendency to either completely ignore very small urban settlements or relegate them to the unimportant. Medium and small towns have recently assumed some importance due to the current emphasis on spatial aspects of population redistribution in the developing countries. The rapid growth of urban population in those countries in the recent decades has brought to fore questions about concentration or decentralisation of economic activities, which are associated with alternative patterns of urban settlements. These questions have by and large arisen out of concern for increasing concentration of population in large urban centres on the one hand and for decline or stagnation of small towns, on the other.¹ Despite this concern, little is known about the growth of small towns, particularly those in the lowest rung of population size hierarchy.

The Census of India considers as urban all places having a municipal nomenclature. Besides, it also recognizes other settlements as urban, provided they pass a set of eligibility tests. The tests of eligibility have been changing in their content, scope and application from census to census. As a result, there has been considerable fluctuation in the number of urban places included in the lower size categories. For this reason, the lowest size category comprising towns with less

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