

## ON ASSESSING TRENDS IN URBANISATION BETWEEN 1961 AND 1971\*

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THE tests for urban status for a habitation were broadly the same in the 1961 and 1971 Censuses of India. One may, therefore, feel that there are no substantive or methodological problems involved in the comparison between these Censuses on this score. Indeed, the problems are not as serious as with the 1951 and pre-1951 Censuses *vis-a-vis* the 1961 and 1971 Censuses. However, there is one very serious methodological point and it concerns the test relating to 75 per cent of male working population engaged in non-agricultural occupations. The purpose of this article is to examine this point and to see whether assessing trends in urbanization over the decade since 1961 on the basis of the data of the 1961 and 1971 Censuses in the form in which they are available is validly justified.

Indian Censuses are known for massive data. They are also known for non-comparability of these data over time. Consequently, demographers, social scientists and other data-users are put to severe constraints while pronouncing judgements concerning trends over time in respect of crucial social variables. Nothing is more true than in the case of the urban trends.

In 1961, a new definition of town was adopted. This rendered the 1951 and pre-1951 Census data on towns wholly non-comparable with the 1961 data. For the purpose of assessing trends between 1951 and 1961, therefore, it is highly essential that the two sets of data are properly adjusted for the definitional change. If this is not done, an error is involved and it is found that this error is not of a marginal nature. It is found that the urban population of India increased by 26 per cent between 1951 and 1961 if the data are not adjusted, while the corresponding percentage is found to be about 35 per cent when the 1951 data are adjusted according to the 1961 definition.<sup>1</sup>

Fortunately, there was no change in the definition of the town in the 1971 Census. However, this could not ensure cent per cent comparability between the 1961 and 1971 Census data. For, non-comparability arises not merely from a definitional change; it can arise

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<sup>1</sup> Vasant P. Pethe and Sanjeevani Mulay : Urbanisation Trends in Maharashtra : 1951-71, Demography India, December 1975, p. 380.