

THE STRUCTURE OF URBAN INCOMES IN INDIA

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IN 1954 the Research Programmes Committee of the Planning Commission initiated and financed a series of socio-economic surveys of towns and cities in India with a view to study the progress of urbanization which had been particularly rapid during the preceding decade. In all 21 such surveys were carried out during the next 2-3 years and up-to-date 11 reports on these have been published. Four are available in typescript while the others are either incomplete or not available for one reason or another. Besides these surveys similar surveys of four towns and cities had been carried out in other contexts at about this time and the information for these was available and usable. My endeavour here is to utilize the information so available regarding the incomes of individuals and families in these urban areas and to try to sketch broadly the structure of urban incomes in India.

Eighteen cities and towns are dealt with here. They are listed in the appendix and a note on each of them is also to be found there. These towns and cities cannot be said to constitute a representative sample of cities in India. Firstly, North India is more heavily represented in the sample than the South. Secondly, the bigger cities are dominant in the sample. There is no way of overcoming these drawbacks. It would have been possible, however, to deal with a more homogeneous group by dropping the Southern cities and by dropping towns below 500,000 in the North to make a sample fairly representative of northern cities of 500,000 and more. In view, however, of the overall paucity of the information about urban incomes in India it was thought undesirable to do so. We thought that it would be better to utilize all the information that was available and to make the fullest use of it.

Though the data furnished by the several urban surveys are formidable each survey has its own individuality in methods, presentation, concepts used, etc. The degree of comparability between them is strictly limited. The definitions adopted, say for earners, etc. are different. In some monthly income data are given, in others yearly data are presented. The breakdown of earners by earnings and industry and occupation are not available in all surveys. The classification of industry and occupation are not in all cases uniform. In the incomes of households some surveys include the incomes of domestic