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**Urbanization Trends and Urban
Planning in West Bengal, India**

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Urbanization Trends and Urban Planning in West Bengal, India

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Abstract

Urbanization implies a shift of the population from the rural to urban areas and the proportion of population living in urban areas indicates the level of urbanization of the country. According to the latest national Census of population, about one-third of the people of India live in urban areas. The absolute number is very high considering the huge population of the country. West Bengal, a constituent state in the eastern part of the country was one of the foremost states of the country in terms of level of urbanization in 1947 (at the time of Independence of the country from 200 years of colonial rule). Gradually, the state slide down as the rate of urbanization slowed down. Even the presence of Kolkata (erstwhile Calcutta) metropolis could not resist it over the last five decades. This was mainly due to unbalanced economic growth, spatial concentration of non-primary activities and inter-district disparity in development. The primacy of Kolkata, the settlement pattern (in favour of large densely-packed cities) and the rural-urban relationship is unique for this state. Not miss the result of government level policies as until recent past, the state was governed by a Left-oriented Coalition government for the last three decades and a half. Somehow, all the trends got reversed, as revealed in the preliminary results of the last population Census (2011)

Urban planning and local self-government was ushered in by the colonial government in the last part of the 19th century to satisfy their governmental needs. Modern urban planning with foreign experts was initiated in the sixties of the last century. Apart from building the necessary infrastructure, the planners also had to work for other aspects of urban living like the development of transport and betterment of the weaker section of the society. And all these were done without the Constitutional recognition of the third tier of the government. This recognition came in 1993 with the 74th Amendment of the Constitution.

This paper looks into the urbanization trends and process in the state, the settlement pattern and the urban development and planning experience for the last six decades in the state of West Bengal and often compared it with the all-India trend.

Keywords: Urbanisation, Urban Planning, Urban Primacy, Spatial imbalance, Inter-district Disparity, Trend and Process of Urbanisation

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Introduction

Urbanisation is a process by which the resident population of a country shifts to the urban areas. The definition of 'urban area' differs among countries. In India, the urban areas are identified by the Registrar-general of the country at the time of the decennial Census of the country, when his responsibility doubles as the Census Commissioner. In India, the urban areas are identified by either of the two criteria given below.

At first, we have the statutory definition. Any area with a local body (e.g. Municipal Corporation, municipality, cantonment, notified area) is urban by definition. This is the statutory criterion. On the other hand, the objective criterion for the identification of urban area is as follows:

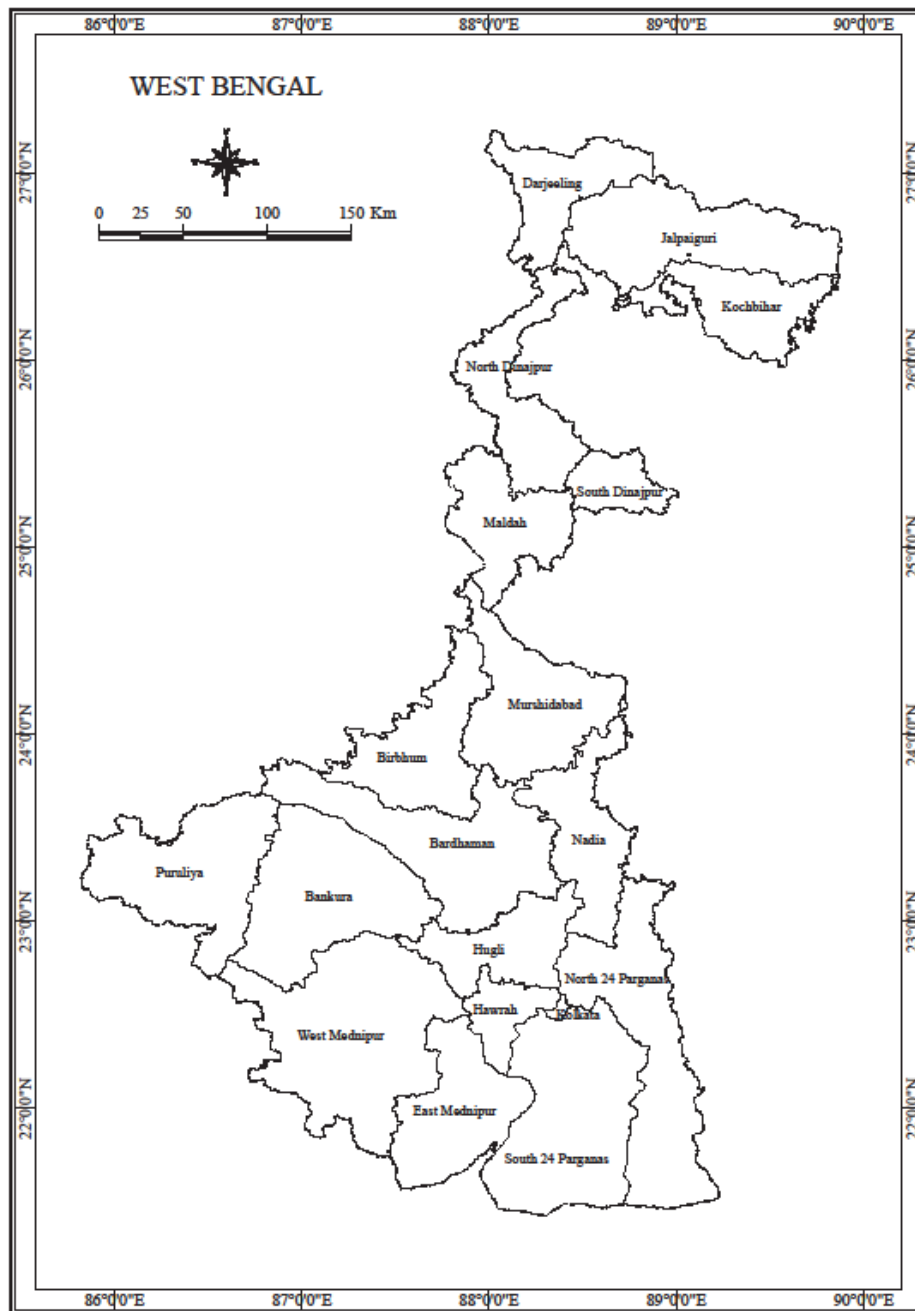
- i. The population will be at least 5000,
- ii. The density of population will be 500 persons per square kilometer;
- iii. At least 75% of the male working population will be engaged in non-agricultural occupation;

Till 1991, there was third criterion. The Census Commissioner could designate any area as urban if it possessed distinctly urban characteristics other than demographic.

In a populous country like India, the average level of urbanization is quite low. By the findings of the latest Census (2011), only 33 % of the people live in urban areas. And the more important part is the level of urbanization varies sharply in this large country. In some smaller city-states (like Delhi, Goa and Pondicherry), it is as high as 90%, whereas in some states, it is below 10%. In most of the advanced industrialized states, it is around 50%.

In this paper, we will concentrate on the urbanization trends of West Bengal, a state in the eastern part of the country (Fig. 1). The eastern and north-eastern part of the country lags behind in economic development and consequently urbanization level. West Bengal was one of the most urbanized states of the country at the time of the independence of the country in 1947. After that, it could not keep the level due to various reasons. The second part of this paper is devoted to the discussion of the trend of urbanization in the state for the last six decades (1951-2011). The third section deals with urban planning in the state – the process, the organizational set up and the legal framework. The concluding section discusses the policy options.

Figure 1. *Map of West Bengal with Districts*



Urbanisation Trends in West Bengal (1951-2011)

In 1947, West Bengal was one of the most urbanised states of the country. But it was a result of colonial legacy of various types. Though the level of urbanisation was one of the highest in the country and quite ahead of India as a whole, it was concentrated around the primate city of Kolkata and extremely

unbalanced as far as the urbanisation level of the other districts of the state, was concerned.

In the pre-Partition Bengal, the urban scenario was scattered with cities and towns of different origins. While Dhaka and Murshidabad (with Baharampur) could boast of a pre-colonial origin, the colonial towns owe their existence due to a variety of reasons. The city of Kolkata was the seat of colonial power and its port was the centre of different types of inward and outward movement, not only of raw materials and finished products, but also human beings. Kolkata was the main centre of labour movement to different parts of the British Empire. So, streams of migration from other parts of India converged to the city. Industrial growth, initially dependent on jute industry, started in the existing small towns and settlements along the river Hooghly, first based on the riverine transportation network and subsequently on railways.

The agriculturally prosperous region was mainly in the Gangetic alluvial plain spread in eastern and western part of the undivided state and the *Barind* in north Bengal. Urbanisation in this region was mainly came out of the river-based market towns (*ganja*), which were connected to not only Kolkata, but also other parts of the country through natural and man-made waterways. Cultivation of tea in the slopes of the Himalayas and Terai region led to the emergence of plantation and tourism-based urban centres, whereas the extraction of coal gave birth to mining towns in the Raniganj coalbelt. The spread of railways and administrative hierarchy gave birth to railway towns and administrative towns like district headquarters. Sometimes, these functions overlapped in a single town or city. Also, there were cantonment towns, sometimes contiguous to an existing town. Last, but an important category was the seats of governance of the princely states and big *zamindars*, an outcome of the Permanent Settlement of 1793. These towns (though small in size) like Kochbihar, were pioneers of today's planned townships.

Even with this spatial spread of all these types of urban centres, as we have already said that the overall level of urbanisation was quite low. After the Partition, the level of urbanisation in the districts around Kolkata became more lopsided, as the huge influx of refugees from the eastern part of the state mainly settled down in these districts.

The Main Features of Urbanisation in West Bengal

The information about urbanisation available from each of the decennial Census in the post-independence period shows that the level of urbanisation in West Bengal is higher than the all-India level, though the gap is decreasing successively (Table 1). In 1951, West Bengal ranked fourth after Maharashtra, Gujarat and Tamilnadu. But in 1991, it was down to the sixth position with Punjab and Karanataka moving ahead. In 2001, Haryana also went up, demoting West Bengal to the seventh position. Of course, this ranking is for major states, leaving out the city states (Delhi and Chandigarh) and smaller states (e.g. Goa, Mizoram etc.), which have a much higher level of urbanisation. It should also be noted that the rate of urbanisation in all the decades is quite slow in West Bengal, remarkably slower than the all-India

rate. However, in 2011, the gap has increased slightly and for the first time in the post-independence period, the growth rate of urbanisation in the state is higher than that of the country.

Table 1. Urbanisation in West Bengal and India 1951-2001

Year	Urbanisation Level			Rate of Urbanisation	
	West Bengal	India	Gap	West Bengal	India
1951	23.88	17.29	6.59	-	-
1961	24.45	17.97	6.58	2.38	3.93
1971	24.75	20.22	4.53	1.23	12.52
1981	26.47	23.34	3.13	6.95	15.43
1991	27.39	25.72	1.67	3.48	10.20
2001	28.03	27.78	0.28	2.34	6.07
2011	31.89	31.16	0.79	14.02	12.05

Source: Calculated from Census of various years

One of the explanations of this lower growth rate is due to the demographic characteristic of the state. The urban growth rate in the state is lower than the national growth rate of urban population and it is decreasing throughout the period of our study (Table 2). On the other hand, excepting the eighties, it is showing an increasing trend in the country as a whole. The rural growth rate in West Bengal is higher than the national average for all the decades, rendering the rural-urban growth differential below the national average. The level of rural-urban migration within the state is low and decreasing over time. At the same time, the most powerful stream of migration in the colonial period, to the industrial regions of West Bengal from the north Indian states also slowed down in the post-independence period. The refugee influx, another source of growth of urban population in the initial decades after independence also slowed down eventually.

Table 2. Rate of Urban and Rural Population Growth Rate in West Bengal and India 1951-2001 (Annual Exponential Growth Rate)

	West Bengal			India		
	Urban	Rural	U-R	Urban	Rural	U-R
1951-61	3.07	2.76	0.31	2.33	1.88	0.45
1961-71	2.50	2.34	0.16	3.21	1.96	1.25
1971-81	2.76	1.85	0.91	3.83	1.78	2.05
1981-91	2.54	2.07	0.47	3.09	1.80	1.29
1991-2001	2.02	1.80	0.22	3.11	1.79	1.21

Source: Calculated from Census of various years

Another important characteristic of urbanisation in West Bengal is its uneven rate (Table 1). It was more than 2% in the sixties, and then came down in the seventies, mainly due to the industrial slowdown and the political unrest in the state. It shot up in the seventies (6.95%), only to be halved in the next decade and then decreasing even more during the nineties. As we still do not

have the comparable data for 2011, we are not in a position to comment about the increasing rate of urbanisation during 2001-2011.

One of the disturbing features of urbanisation in West Bengal is its spatial concentration, with the dominance of Kolkata. Not only the city itself, but also the Kolkata Urban Agglomeration (KUA), spread over five contiguous districts (North 24 Parganas, South 24 Parganas, Howrah, Hooghly and Nadia) spread along the river Hooghly. In 1951, the KUA accounted for more than three-fourth of total urban population of the state. In five decades, this share came down to about fifty per cent. This is due to the rising share of the Asansol-Durgapur area in the sixties, followed by the growth of Siliguri in the north and the emergence of port-cum-industrial complex of Haldia in the south. The rapid growth of agriculture and consequent growth of smaller towns in the eighties, added to correct the spatial imbalance to some extent. But given the uneven development of infrastructure and other facilities within the state, the law of cumulative causation worked on and in the decade of liberalisation, the other forces, in fact weakened, the spatial concentration did not change much.

The third prominent feature is the preference of the urban population to reside in the big cities and towns (Table 3). In 1951 about two-third of the urban population lived in Class I cities. With minor ups and downs, this has almost remained constant in the following five decades. Though the other 25% still live in the rest five size classes, the increasing preference for big towns is reflected in the increase in the share of Class II towns from 5% in 1951 to almost 9% in 2001. The combined share of the other four size classes has decreased from about 20% to 17%., the most noticeable decrease being in size class III.

Table 3. *Size Distribution of Urban Population in West Bengal 1951-2001*

Size Class	Population Range	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001
I	100,000+	75.12	72.14	74.02	77.04	81.71	74.10
II	50,000-99,999	5.29	7.91	10.40	10.74	6.58	8.81
III	20,000-49,999	9.38	11.12	9.02	7.45	7.66	7.71
IV	10,000-19,999	7.44	5.52	4.13	3.57	2.59	4.79
V	5,000-9,999	2.18	3.08	1.76	1.04	1.35	4.02
VI	<5000	0.59	0.23	0.07	0.16	0.11	0.56
Total		100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Calculated from Census of various years

However, it should be noted that the smaller towns grew at a faster rate than the bigger cities and towns from the sixties (Table 4), which became most prominent in the eighties, due to the high growth rate of agriculture and the decentralisation measures taken by the Left Front Government, when the districts received an increased share of the public expenditure in different

sectors. But during the nineties, this trend reversed as the stronger exogenous forces started acting. In the last decade, the fastest growth rate was for Class II **towns**. The most remarkable phenomenon of the eighties, i.e. the growth of isolated towns in the smallest class (Class VI), totally thwarted in the following decade. The share of the bigger cities in total urban population increased mainly due to the promotion of towns to higher size classes, solely due to increase in population.

Table 4. *Growth Rate of Towns in Different Size Classes of West Bengal 1951-2001*

Size class	Decadal Population Growth Rate				
	1951-61	1961-71	1971-81	1981-91	1991-2001
I	24.56	40.65	30.03	28.82	<u>21.12</u>
II	19.31	26.88	26.16	22.75	<u>43.37</u>
III	15.09	37.27	33.43	40.03	<u>31.10</u>
IV	12.98	40.95	51.03	41.92	<u>23.07</u>
V	18.53	24.70	47.70	38.58	<u>18.10</u>
VI	23.56	26.15	18.21	128.50	<u>11.32</u>

Source: Calculated from Census of various years.

The spatial concentration of urban population is also reflected in the uneven level of urbanisation in the districts. In 2001, barring Kolkata (which is 100% urbanised, by definition), urbanisation level varied from 50% in Howrah to 7% in Maldah (Table 5). The table also reveals that in some districts the level of urbanisation has remained constant or increased very slowly over the five decades.

Table 5. *Urbanisation Levels in West Bengal Districts (1951-2001)*

Sl.	District	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
1.	Kolkata	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
2.	N 24 Pargana	42.92	45.59	49.49	51.02	51.23	54.30	57.59
3.	Howrah	32.41	40.48	41.93	45.12	49.58	50.39	63.30
4.	Hooghly	24.60	25.96	26.47	29.53	31.19	33.48	38.62
5.	Nadia	18.21	18.41	18.74	21.59	22.63	21.27	27.81
6.	S 24 Pargana	4.58	6.94	8.45	11.99	13.30	15.77	25.61
7.	Burdwan	14.78	18.20	22.78	29.39	35.09	37.18	39.87
8.	Midnapur	7.53	7.70	7.63	8.49	9.85	10.49	13.10
9.	Darjeeling	20.56	23.16	23.05	27.55	30.47	32.44	38.99
10.	Jalpaiguri	7.22	9.11	9.60	14.05	16.36	17.70	27.00
11.	Coochbehar	7.50	7.01	6.83	6.90	7.81	9.10	10.25
12.	U. Dinajpur	2.93	7.40	7.88	8.99	13.34	12.06	12.07
13.	D. Dinajpur	5.90	7.58	11.39	14.30	13.35	13.09	14.13
14.	Maldah	3.75	4.16	4.22	4.78	7.07	7.32	13.80
15.	Murshidabad	7.86	8.54	8.45	9.36	10.43	12.49	19.78
16.	Purulia	6.71	6.80	8.26	9.00	9.44	10.07	12.75
17.	Birbhum	6.47	6.97	7.03	8.28	8.98	8.58	12.80
18.	Bankura	7.17	7.34	7.47	7.63	8.29	7.37	8.36

	West Bengal	23.88	24.45	24.75	26.47	27.48	28.03	31.89
(with Kolkata)	Mean	17.84	19.52	20.54	22.67	24.36	25.17	29.81
	Standard Deviation	23.25	23.43	23.57	23.54	23.52	23.76	23.31
	C.V	1.30	1.20	1.15	1.04	0.97	0.94	0.78
(without Kolkata)	Mean	13.01	14.79	15.86	18.12	19.91	20.77	25.91
	Standard Deviation	11.29	12.43	13.12	13.89	14.46	15.15	16.41
	C.V	0.87	0.84	0.83	0.77	0.73	0.73	0.63

Source: Calculated from Census of various years

This table also gives an idea about the urban scenario in West Bengal with and without Kolkata. The average level urbanisation in the state including Kolkata is 25.17%, whereas it comes down to about 20%, if Kolkata is excluded. The almost constant standard deviation leads to a falling coefficient of variation, showing slight decline in the primacy of Kolkata. But if Kolkata is excluded, the standard deviation increases over time. Even the marginally falling coefficient of variation could not hide the disparities in the intra-district level of urbanisation.

Urban Planning in West Bengal: Institutions and Organisational Structure

This rapid growth of population in the metropolitan areas and the big urban complexes in the state has caught the urban planners, policy-makers and others associated with urban management unprepared to meet the situation. This is because this rapid growth has not been accompanied by an equally quick expansion of urban infrastructure. Regarding physical infrastructural services the issue is not only of provision of new ones but the renovation and maintenance of existing ones. One of the main constraints of the urban local bodies (ULBs) is scarcity of resources, both financial and technical. The problems have assumed large proportions technologically as well as from the point of view of management.

In the context of the urban crisis that West Bengal was facing in the '70s there was an urgent need to evolve a suitable strategy for the comprehensive management of the urban sector in consonance with the economic situation in the state and the available resources and expertise.

The urban development strategy of the Left Front government (LFG) in West Bengal was based on four cardinal objectives –

- ◆ decentralized and balanced development,
- ◆ people's participation in planning and execution of development works,
- ◆ transparency, responsibility and accountability in municipal administration and

- ◆ democratic decentralization in decision-making authority.

The West Bengal government had in fact developed a new approach to urban development and management in the country. Many of the basic ideas and prescriptions detailed in the 7th Amendment Act of the Constitution, 1992 were developed and practiced in West Bengal before the Act came into being. Formulated on the basis of the recommendation of the National Commission on Urbanization (1988), it is a landmark act seeking to devolve more powers and functions to the municipalities in respect of preparation of plans for economic development and social justice.

Changes in the institutional structure

The system of urban administration in West Bengal before the rule of the LFG was heavily dependent on the state machinery as the ULBs had very little powers and functions and remained superseded most of the time. There were only some parallel state institutions to help the ULB's in the management process. The LFG since the late 1970s has brought about major reforms in the institutional structure of urban governance in West Bengal. The basic purpose of the reforms has been institutional strengthening of the ULBs so as to increase functional efficiency of the municipalities, to ensure people's participation and hence bring about transparency in urban governance and democratic decentralization of powers.

These institutional innovations and changes in the general structure of urban governance in West Bengal have taken place at different levels of the urban hierarchy.

A. The State level

At the state level, two departments are directly involved in urban management:

a) *Municipal Affairs Department (MAD)*: The municipal corporations, municipalities and Notified Area Authorities (NAA's) are looked after by the MAD. It is also the nodal agency for all central and state sponsored municipal development schemes, besides being the administrative department for allocation of plan fund to the ULB's outside the KMA.

b) *Urban Development Department (UDD)*: It has under its administrative control all urban development and planning agencies and also the Town and Country Planning Branch which formerly was under the administrative control of the Development and Planning Department (DPD).

The Directorate of Local Bodies (DLB): It was set up in 1978 with the mandate to oversee the performance of municipal bodies, coordinate their activities, analyze their budgets, assess their fund requirements, evaluate the progress of schemes from time to time and do general counseling whenever needed. It has now a revised role on the suggestion of the West Bengal Municipal Finance Commission (1987). All resource transfers from the state government to the ULBs are now routed through the DLB.

The Municipal Engineering Directorate (MED): The need for having a wing to provide engineering services required for municipal development and

administration was felt in 1978. After the formation of DLB in 1980 it was decided that MED would function as the engineering cell of the DLB for planning of drinking water supply, drainage, sewerage and other engineering works in urban areas. The cell took the shape of a directorate in March 1981 and came to be known as the MED.

The Institute of Local Government and Urban Studies (ILGUS): This was set up in 1982 under the overall control of the DLB. It became a separate directorate in 1985. It was established primarily to undertake research, training and consultancy in Municipal affairs and to collect, collate and disseminate information in municipal statistics and urban data. In course of time its functional domain has expanded to include matters like project formulation, implementation and monitoring. It also advises the government on major policy matters.

The idea of centralized assessment and valuation of properties for tax purposes in West Bengal was proposed by the World Bank during the first phase of the Bank assisted CUDP-I in 1975. The matter was taken up by the LFG and the *Central Valuation Board (CVB)* was formed in 1979 for the purpose of valuation and assessment of properties in the ULBs. Its responsibility was to obtain uniformity in valuation, objectivity in assessment and securing higher level of municipal revenue throughout the state. Out of 122 municipal bodies in the state, the state government has authorized the CVB to make the valuation and assessment of municipal taxes of 120 municipal bodies at an interval of 6 years.

State Urban Development Agency (SUDA) – Was set up in 1991 to implement anti-poverty schemes and projects in the municipal areas through project planning, implementation and monitoring. It was also supposed to implement well-designed training programs in close collaboration with urban local bodies (outside the CMA) in the state.

The state government set up the *West Bengal Municipal Finance Commission (WBMFC)* in 1979 to review the fiscal performance of ULBs and to recommend for its improvement and also to suggest a revenue transfer (from the state to the municipal bodies) policy. It submitted its first report in 1984 and the second report in 1993.

The 74th Amendment made the constitution of Finance Commission by the state government once in every five years mandatory. The *State Finance Commission (SFC)* is to make recommendations regarding principles to govern sharing of the state taxes, duties, tolls and the fees between the state government and the municipalities and also its distribution among the municipalities. It also has the power to suggest ways and means of improving the financial position of the municipal authorities. This is one of the most important aspects of the 74th Constitution Amendment, particularly in the financial sphere. The SFC has published its report twice, once in 1995 and recently in 2002.

Before the advent of the LFG, elections to the municipalities were not held on time and the ULB's remained superseded most of the time. It was in 1981 that the Electoral boards were constituted and General Elections to the ULB's

began to be held at regular intervals. Also there were provisions in the State legislature for constitution of new boards by fresh election after dissolution of any local body by the State government after exhausting natural justice. In accordance with the stipulation of the 74th CAA, the *State Election Commission* (SEC) was constituted under the West Bengal SEC Act, 1994. Preparation of electoral rolls and conduct of elections in respect of all 125 ULB's of the State were undertaken under the direction and control of the SEC.

B. The Metropolitan level

The first body created for development planning for a metropolitan area in the state was the *Calcutta Metropolitan Planning Organization* (CMPO). Set up in 1961, it was to undertake a comprehensive long range planning exercise and evolve a program for development of infrastructure in different sectors of urban services.

The *Calcutta Metropolitan Water and Sanitation Authority* (CMWSA) was set up in 1966 for providing specialized municipal services in the field of water supply and sanitation.

In 1970, came the *Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority* (CMDA, presently KMDA), a statutory body of the State government, as a nodal agency for plan implementation. It was entrusted with the task of formulation of multi-sectoral development plans for metropolitan development. This led CMDA to embark upon a Rs. 150 crores investment program involving development of infrastructure in different sectors of urban services within CMA. In 1970 the state government also enacted the CMDA Act to provide legislative support to CMDAs activities. The Act provided CMDA with certain statutory receipts like octroi and allowed it to resort to market borrowing through floating of CMDA bonds every year. The advent of the CMDA marked the beginning of centralization of local functions in respect of development of the CMA.

However, the CMDA looks after the KMA only. The non-KMA region lacks an autonomous body like the CMDA. Thus for the non-KMA areas in West Bengal, nine area development authorities have been set up under the Town and Country (Planning and Development) Act, 1979. They are as follows:

- 1) Siliguri Jalpaiguri Development Authority (SJDA)
- 2) Asansol Durgapur Development Authority (ADDA)
- 3) Haldia Development Authority (HDA)
- 4) Sriniketan Santiniketan Development Authority (SSDA)
- 5) Medinipur Kharagpur Development Authority (MKDA)
- 6) Burdwan Development Authority (BDA)
- 7) Digha Sankarpur Development Authority (DSDA)
- 8) Jaigaon Development Authority (JDA)
- 9) Bhangar Rajarhat Development Authority (BRADA)

The 74th Amendment of the Constitution, 1992 has also made a provision for the setting up of a *Metropolitan Planning Committee* (MPC). The function of the MPC is to prepare the draft development plan for the metropolitan area

as a whole. The Government of West Bengal have accepted the principle of a MPC although the detailed functions, terms of reference, powers and duties are yet to be defined (CEMSAP, 1996, p.26).

C. The District level

At the district level there is the *District Urban Development Agencies* (DUDAs) each of which is a registered society. The major objectives of these agencies are to promote and assist the local bodies in the implementation of anti-poverty and human development programs and to arrange and cause to be arranged by local bodies and other agencies skill training programs for the urban poor labour force.

The 74th Amendment of the Constitution provides for the constitution of *District Planning Committees* (DPC) at the district level for consideration of plans prepared by the panchayats and municipalities in the district and preparation of the draft development plan for the district as a whole. Thus each municipality is required to prepare its development plan which will get integrated in the district development plan. The West Bengal District Planning Committee Bill was passed in 1994.

There is a *district planning and coordination sub-committee* with wide ranging functions. It is entrusted with the preparation of the development plan of the district, mobilization of resources, and deciding priorities to be assigned to works in the draft development plan etc.

At the district level, there is also a *District Planning and Coordination Council* (DPCC) in each district. The council has representation from the municipalities in the district and urban development sub-committee. The DPC is required to consult the DPCC in preparing the draft development plan.

However, 'the planning structures as described above are still to work. It is hoped that the planning structures will start working shortly. Incidentally, there is a feeling that the municipalities are not properly represented on the planning bodies' (Datta, 2001, p.29).

The Municipal/ Local level

Both the Calcutta Corporation Act, 1951 and the Bengal Municipal Act, 1932 were reviewed. The new *Calcutta Municipal Corporation Act, 1980*, which was enforced in 1984, installed the mayor-in-council system vested with the responsibility of civic management in the city. This was the first municipal cabinet system of government in India. A similar form of government was also installed in Howrah by the virtue of the *Howrah Municipal Corporation Act, 1980*. In both cases further decentralization of civic management has been brought about in the form of *borough committees*. These committees discharge such functions as the municipality may require them to discharge.

The municipalities were gradually involved in planning and development of their areas. It was realized that sustainability of urban infrastructure and services can be better ensured if the ULBs are involved in the planning and development process. For municipal level development, none other than the

elected representatives in the ULBs can better understand the local level needs and priorities.

E. The Sub-local level

Administration at the community level got constitutional recognition only through the 74th Amendment Act.

Ward Committees (WCs) – The 74th Amendment of the constitution sought to institutionalize people’s participation in municipalities with three lakhs or more population. West Bengal has taken a step further by making the formation of WCs mandatory for all municipalities irrespective of the size of population. The local councilor is to be the chairman of the committee, which should have not more than 14 members drawn from the residents of the ward. There are two categories of members, those nominated by the municipality chairman and those nominated by the councilor. The committee is required to meet at least once a month and organize annual general meetings.

According to the *Ward Committee Rules, 2001*, the main functions of Ward Committees in West Bengal are identification and prioritization of the problems of the ward, overseeing the proper execution of various municipal works in the ward, motivating the people to pay municipal dues on time etc..

They are also responsible for planning and execution of various obligatory and discretionary functions in the Municipal Act and detection of statutory violation such as unlawful construction, encroachments on municipal and public properties, public nuisance, evasion of taxes, unlicensed activities and the like.

The following table illustrates the different levels of the urban management structure and the various organizations associated with each level.

Table 6. *Different Levels of the Existing Urban Management Structure its Changes over the Periods*

Periods Levels	Before 1977	1977-1992 Reforms and changes initiated before 74 th CA Act	After 74 th CA Act, of 1992
<i>a) State level</i>	Local government and urban development department	Dept. of municipal affairs and urban development DLB (1978) CVB (1979) MED (1981) ILGUS (1982) <i>MFC(1982 & 1993)</i> SUDA (1991)	SFC (1995 & 2002) SEC (1994)
<i>b) Metropolitan level</i>	<i>CMPO(1961)</i> CMWSA (1966) CMDA(1970)	Town and Country (Planning and Development) Branch, 1979.	MPC (1994)

<i>c) District level</i>		DPC DUDAs	DPC (1994)
<i>d) Local level</i>	CIT (1911) HIT (1951)	Elected Boards (1981) Mayor-in Council system and Chairman in Council system	To obtain powers and functions on 18 items in the 12th schedule (obligatory and discretionary)
<i>e) Sub-local Level</i>		Borough Committees (in Municipal corporations)	Ward Committees

Source: Chakraborty (unpublished)

Note: Items in italics do not exist anymore.

Conclusion

The urban scenario in West Bengal has been dominated by the primate city of Kolkata, mainly because of colonial legacy. The process of urbanization is mainly the offshoot of manufacturing industry followed by tertiarisation. After 1977, there has been a conscious attempt by the Left-led coalition government to usher in a change in the spatial concentration in urbanization with emphasis on agricultural growth and strengthening of small and medium towns. There was corresponding changes in policies and institutions. Some effects of these changes were visible during the eighties and nineties of the last century with only to be swept away by the stronger forces of globalization Secondly, all the institutions and organizations did not function properly due to encroaching jurisdictions, conflicting policies and sometimes due to financial stringency. The preliminary results of 2011 Census shows a major change in the spatial distribution and nature of urbanization in the state. The lessons learnt from the earlier decades should be the guiding force for a planned settlement system of West Bengal.

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