Beyond Metropolitan Shadow: Growth and Governance of Small Towns in Eastern India

Gopa Samanta

The 2011 census has observed a tremendous rearrangement of the traditional pattern of metro-based urbanisation in India. Unlike earlier decades, this new urban growth is occurring in areas outside the metropolitan shadow. The existing small cities are growing at a much faster rate than the metropolises and big cities. The new pattern of urbanisation is also taking place in the form of huge growth of Census Towns (towns without statutory status) in India, most of which are again emerging in areas far away from existing urban agglomerations of more than one hundred thousand population. In contrast, the infrastructural development and the provision of basic services under the government grant are still biased towards big cities, especially under the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), the nodal programme for urban India. The nature of municipal funding is skewed, neglecting the development of small cities. The census towns are growing without access to urban status and proper urban governance mechanism. This article, based on the secondary data covering three states (West Bengal, Bihar and Jharkhand) of eastern India, analyses how and to what extent this new urbanisation is challenging the urban core, i.e., the metropolis and its shadow. With the help of empirical research carried out in small towns of West Bengal, the article also explores how urban policies, complex governance structures and the politics of access to urban status are playing major roles in transforming the new urban territories in India.

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INTRODUCTION

The pattern of urbanisation in eastern India has started to take a new shape since the turn of this century. Globalisation-led development of mining and industry, and rapid infrastructural development, especially in transport and communication have been the key players driving this emerging pattern. This new form of urbanisation, which is sometimes defined as census activism (Kundu 2011), has observed a tremendous rearrangement of the traditional pattern of metro-based urbanisation in India. Unlike earlier decades, this new urban growth is occurring in areas outside the metropolitan shadow. The existing small towns are growing at a much faster rate than metropolises and big cities. This new urbanisation is also taking place in the form of huge growth of Census Towns\(^2\) (CTs) in India, most of which are again emerging in areas far away from existing urban agglomerations of more than one hundred thousand population.

In spite of this tremendous growth of both the urban population and urban areas outside metropolises and their shadows, urban policies and planning in India is still biased towards big and metropolitan cities. In the era of globalisation, these metropolitan cities are competing for a ‘world-class’ image, global standards of infrastructure facilities, motorised modern transport system, leisure facilities and communication network which would help them become economically functional and sufficient to emerge as destinations for both national and international investments. Thus, the current discourse of urban development concentrates more on economic potential, ignoring the common people who inhabit these urban spaces (Gavasker 2013) and this is often done with financial support from central government schemes. The nature of municipal funding is skewed, neglecting the development of small cities, as a consequence of which both the regional and sectoral inequalities are increasing throughout all states in India, irrespective of their highly varying growth performances. At present, the nodal urban programme in India called the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) is highly biased towards big cities and infrastructure, thus neglecting small cities and basic urban service provisions.

In this backdrop, this article tries to understand the levels of reorientation in the existing urban pattern (from big city to small towns) in three Eastern Indian states—West Bengal, Bihar and Jharkhand. Further,

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\(^2\) Towns without statutory urban status.
it analyses the patterns of growth and complexities of governance in India’s small towns, with special reference to the politics of urban classification and municipal financing. Here, the small towns include both categories of statutory and non-statutory CTs with a population size less than 1,00,000.

The article is based on both primary and secondary data. Using secondary data from the 2011 census covering the three states this article analyses how and to what extent the pattern of urbanisation is changing in eastern India, especially in the areas beyond metropolises and their shadow areas. The macro observations based on secondary data have been supplemented with field-level empirical data collected from four small statutory towns (Memari, Katwa, Bolpur and Raniganj) and two CTs (Singur and Barjora) of West Bengal province to better understand the local level governance, and social and political processes that shape the small towns territories in India. The empirical research uses both quantitative and qualitative methods to understand the issues related to governance and government finances in these small towns. The quantitative survey was done through questionnaire surveys, whereas the qualitative methods employed in this research were unshrouded interviews, conversation and focus group discussions. Qualitative methods have been employed to explore how urban policies, complex governance structures and the politics of access to urban status are playing major roles in transforming the new urban territories in India.

**PATTERN OF URBANISATION IN EASTERN INDIA AND ITS RECENT CHANGES: WEST BENGAL, BIHAR AND JHARKHAND**

The pattern of urbanisation in eastern India is not much different from the all-India situation. The levels of urbanisation in West Bengal are higher than that of the Indian average since 2001, whereas the levels of urbanisation in Bihar and Jharkhand are much below the all-Indian average in the last two decades (Table 1). Although Jharkhand’s situation has increased in the last two decades, there has not been any change in Bihar. In general, the urban growth rate has increased in all the states in the last decade in comparison to their state level growth rate in earlier decades (Table 1). However, the rate of growth in 2001–11 in West Bengal State is below the average urban growth rate of India, while for Bihar and Jharkhand, it is higher than the Indian average (Table 1). Thus, the rate of urbanisation appears to decline with increasing level of exiting urbanisation in these states.
Similar to the development in other Indian states, there is a remarkable growth of CTs in all the three states under study in the last decade (2001–11). West Bengal has contributed the highest number of CTs among these three states, as well as 20% of total CTs in the whole of India (Table 2). In Bihar and Jharkhand the growth of CTs is also remarkable, where the number of these settlements has grown from 5 to 60 and 108 to 188 respectively, between 2001 and 2011. Although the number of CTs has increased significantly, the number of statutory towns has not increased as much. In fact for Jharkhand, it has decreased. The increase in number of statutory towns at West Bengal and Bihar, is only 6 and 14, respectively. The slow process of municipalisation has been significant during the last decade in all these three states. As a consequence of this, the number of urban settlements without proper governance structure has increased along with the levels of urban poverty. The current levels of urban poverty in these three states are higher than the Indian average (Table 2).

Table 2 : Growth in the Number of Statutory and CTs (2001–2011): West Bengal, Bihar and Jharkhand

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>States</th>
<th>No of Statutory Towns</th>
<th>No of CTs</th>
<th>Levels of Urban Poverty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>West Bengal</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bihar</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jharkhand</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>3799</td>
<td>4041</td>
<td>1362</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Kundu D 2013

SPATIAL PATTERNS

If we look at the spatial pattern of urbanisation in Eastern India, it is still significantly high in the Kolkata metropolitan area, but there are a
number of districts in these three states where the level of urbanisation is between 40 to 60% (Fig. 1). These districts are: Patna in Bihar; Ranchi, Ramgarh, Dhanbad and Purba Singbhum in Jharkhand; and North 24 Paraganas in West Bengal. These districts are also located nearer to the metropolises and in areas of early urbanisation in these states. Another nine districts have relatively higher level of urbanisation, i.e., in between 20 to 40%, among which seven are located in West Bengal and two are located in Bihar and Jharkhand.

**Figure 1. Level of Urbanisation in 2011: West Bengal, Jharkhand and Bihar**

**RECENT CHANGES IN THE PATTERN**

The rate of urban growth in the last decade has experienced immense change in its pattern as compared to the earlier decade. The districts with higher levels of urbanisation have a lower growth rate (Figure 2). For example, the growth rate is less than 50% in Patna, Ranchi,
Ramgarh, Dhanbad, Howra and North 24 Parganas districts. In fact, Kolkata metropolitan district experienced a negative growth rate. In contrast, the districts with relatively lower levels of urbanisation in the earlier decades have experienced high growth rates between 2001-2011. The highest growing districts of Bihar were Begumsarai, Purba Champaran, Purnia and Jehanabad, which are not only less urbanised but also are located far away from Patna agglomeration. Similarly the districts with the highest rate of growth in Jharkhand are Palamau, Latehar, Koderma, Giridih, Deoghar, Sahebganj and Pakur, all of which are located in the northwestern, northern and northeastern parts of the state. These are also located far away from the Ranchi agglomeration. In West Bengal, the growth rate is again high in low urbanisation districts such as Jalpaiguri, Malda, Murshidabad and Nadia (Figure 2). In this state too, there is a clear trend of high growth in areas away from the Kolkata Metropolitan area. Thus, the new urban growth in these states

Figure 2. District Level Urban Growth Rate, 2001–2011: West Bengal, Jharkhand and Bihar
is taking place in areas beyond the metropolitan shadow and is more or less indigenous in nature, as these places are not controlled by the metropolitan economy.

In West Bengal, the proportion of the state’s urban population in the Kolkata Metropolitan Area has sharply declined from 58.88% in 2001 to 48.44% in 2011, which supports the view of decreasing metropolitan dominance in the pattern of urbanisation in West Bengal. The growth of small and medium size towns became more pronounced and the percentage of urban population in class I towns decreased from 81.7% in 1991 to 75% in 2001. Chakraborty and Dasgupta (2011) predicted the same trend by analysing the regional level data in urban situations between 1981 and 2001 in their study on regional variations in the urban growth pattern of West Bengal. The new urban growth in these districts may be attributed to the agricultural surplus and consequent movement of investment from the farm sector to the commerce-based tertiary sector in the small town category. Some studies (Banerjee 2012; Roy 2012) have proved this connection in their research on the growth of small and medium size towns in West Bengal. According to Chaudhuri et al. (2012), although there was a downfall in the primary and secondary sector growth of West Bengal in the last decade, its tertiary sector grew at a very fast rate of 9 to 11%, which may have led to this higher level of new urbanisation in the form of small market and service centres, and consequent growth of non-recognised urban territories in West Bengal.

**CITY SIZE DISTRIBUTION**

The city distribution in Eastern India as represented by the Census of 2011 shows a clear picture where besides the million cities, there are two other categories of cities which dominate the urban situation in this region (Table 3; Figure 3). These two categories of city sizes are a) those with population of 1,00,000 to 3,00,00 and b) the CTs. The other small categories of towns such as towns having a population between 20,000 to 50,000 and 50,000 to 1,00,000 also contribute a big share of urban population, which is unprecedented. The urban growth in metropolitan areas has also declined significantly. For example, the proportion of West Bengal’s urban population in the Kolkata Metropolitan Areas has sharply declined from 58.88% in 2001 to 48.44% in 2011, which proves the decreasing metropolitan dominance in the pattern of urbanisation in the state (Samanta 2012).

In response to this declining metropolitan dominance, the growth of small and medium towns including CTs has become more
pronounced by the end of the last century in each of the three states in eastern India. This kind of urban growth trend has been defined as ‘subaltern urbanisation’ (Denis, Mukhopadhyay and Zerah (2012: 52) which is characterized by an “autonomous growth of settlement

Table 3: Percentage Share of Population in Different Size Categories of Towns (2011): West Bengal, Bihar and Jharkhand

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>States</th>
<th>West Bengal</th>
<th>Bihar</th>
<th>Jharkhand</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of Urban Population in the Million Cities</td>
<td>18.62</td>
<td>13.71</td>
<td>28.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of urban population in the cities of more than 5,00,000</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>8.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of urban population in the cities 3,00,00 to 5,00,000</td>
<td>11.44</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of urban population in the cities 1,00,000 to 3,00,000</td>
<td>28.63</td>
<td>35.09</td>
<td>12.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of urban population in the cities 50,000 to 1,00,000</td>
<td>7.15</td>
<td>15.41</td>
<td>8.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of urban population in the cities 20,000 to 50,000</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>20.39</td>
<td>8.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of urban population in the cities of less than 20,000</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of urban population in CTs</td>
<td>26.76</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>32.55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India Reports, 2011

Figure 3. Percentage Share of Population in Different Size Categories of Towns (2011): West Bengal, Bihar and Jharkhand
agglomerations. Such agglomerations may not always denoted as urban by the census of India. The subaltern urbanisation is generated by market and historical forces and which are not on the following three factors namely, ‘dependent’ on large traditionally important settlements, planned cities or industrial townships”. The contribution of CTs in the total urban population of the individual states has turned out to be the highest in Jharkhand, followed by West Bengal. Bihar is still dominated by big city growth, especially by the size category of 1,00,00 to 3,00,000 population (Figure 3).

GROWTH AND GOVERNANCE OF CENSUS TOWNS (CTS)

The remarkable increase in the number of census towns in India from 1,362 in 2001 to 3,894 in 2011 with an addition of 2,532 in a single decade, which is more than the total number of new CTs in the preceding ten decades (Samanta, 2014), and is being attributed to census activism due to pressure to review the methodology for collecting data on urban centres (Kundu 2011). According to others, the inclusion of these new CTs is an acknowledgement of an often unrecognised urbanisation process. Recent work by Pradhan (2012) demonstrates that almost 70% of the CTs declared in 2011 already fit the characteristics of an urban settlement in the preceding census which contradicts the idea of census activism. The 2011 census also reports 90 new urban agglomerations comprising continuous urban spread (Samanta 2012). These new agglomerations include a large majority of CTs, especially in West Bengal, Kerala and Tamil Nadu (Kundu A 2013).

The growth of CTs in Eastern India is significantly high and the spatial pattern of growth has taken a new shape in the last decade. Earlier these settlements were mostly located in the periphery of big and metropolitan cities. The new census (2011) observes that the new CTs are more often located along either national or state highways (Figure 3). Out of all the CTs in Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal, only 8%, 18% and 48% respectively are located within the 50 km range of metropolitan cities of Patna, Ranchi and Kolkata (Figure 4). In West Bengal, out of 780 CTs, only 195 (25%) are located in the urban agglomeration of the size of more than one lakh and above. Around 75% of new CTs have come up in districts with a dominant agricultural economy and far away from urban–industrial regions. Thus, the spatial pattern of new towns also supports the view of lessening metropolitan dominance in the overall pattern of urbanisation in eastern India.
Although there is a big debate around the measurement criteria of towns by Census Authority, our field-based investigation shows that these settlements are not very small in size if we consider their actual built up areas, which often spread over more than one rural mouza, against which the census counts the population of a settlement (Samanta 2012, 2014). The reported urban population living in both census and statutory towns do not represent the actual urban dimensions. The problem lies in the population counting of CTs, which does not take into account the settlement agglomeration beyond the revenue area. In reality, the actual built up areas of most of the CTs have expanded much beyond their revenue limits and have taken the shape of

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3 The lowest level unit of census counting in rural area; although officially it represents one village, very often it covers more than one village boundary
settlement agglomerations having urban character. According to Denis and Marius-Gnanou (2011), such settlement agglomerations with a population of more than 10,000 in each unit can be considered as an urban area in India following the universal urban model of the Geopolis definition. They have also mentioned that the actual urban dimensions in India are much higher than reported, and this underreporting is due to the neglect of settlement agglomerations while calculating the urban population. Field-level observations at selected CTs such as Barjora (Bankura District) and Singur (Hugli district) show that there is a significant gap between the actual urban expansion (agglomeration) and reported urbanisation in these places (Samanta 2013a).

In spite of having uniform criteria for identifying CTs, the governance of such towns vary in different states of India. In many states, such settlements are defined as town/nagar panchayats, thus recognising their status as small towns. These town panchayats are not governed by rural local bodies (panchayats) and develop as urban authorities having a status below a municipality (responsible for areas with statutory urban status as Town). These urban centres start to develop more urban amenities and services and are eligible to charge different kinds of taxes to make provisions for basic services. In eastern India, although Jharkhand and Bihar have provision for small town status, i.e., town/nagar panchayats with the respective population size of 10,000 to 12,000, West Bengal does not. Here the CTs do not receive any kind of urban services as long as they do not qualify as proper urban local bodies (ULBs) or municipalities. The qualifying population criterion (30,000) is again quite high in comparison to other states, which limits the potentiality of a CT to receive statutory urban status. These settlements continue to grow as urban centres, while governed by rural local bodies, with limited capacity to provide basic urban services such as water supply, street lighting and sanitation. However, even without much support from the governments, these CTs are growing in most cases on the basis of indigenous capital generated from the farm sectors of surrounding rural areas, which is invested in commerce and business activities (Samanta 2014).

**POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES FOR SMALL TOWNS IN INDIA**

Since the beginning of the third plan period, the major focus of urban development and planning in India was on large and metropolitan cities. It was only during the sixth plan period that the small and medium size
towns received importance through Integrated Development of Small and Medium Towns (IDSMT) (Kennedy and Zerah 2008). The National Commission on Urbanization Report, 1988, emphasised the need for turning the focus of urban planning from large cities to small towns, to ensure more equitable and balanced urbanisation in the country, but even after that IDSMT was the only programme available for hundreds of small and medium towns in India. Now this programme does not exist anymore, as JNNURM has become the umbrella programme for all cities in India. If we look at the JNNURM fund allocation, it is very clear that it focuses mainly on big cities, called mission cities. The 65 cities (covering 1.7% of total statutory towns and 42% of urban population) under the UIG (Urban Infrastructure and Governance) and BSUP (Basic Services to Urban Poor) account for 79% of the total allocation, whereas only 21% allocations are attributed to the remaining cities that account for 98.3% of total towns and 57% of urban population in India (Khan 2013). This indicates how infrastructure requirements of big cities are being supported by the central government programme, leaving hundreds of smaller towns to depend on the resource-constrained state exchequer.

As mentioned, earlier IDSMT was the dedicated programme for small and medium towns in India. It was later converted into Urban Infrastructure Development of Small and Medium Towns (UIDSSMT), a component of JNNURM. Thus the development programme for small and medium size towns at present is at the mercy of left over grants of UIDSSMT under JNNURM after a big share is spent on big cities. Moreover, UIDSSMT is a programme for large physical infrastructure only, and does not cater to the provision of basic health or education services in small towns. Khan (2013) observes that even within the JNNURM fund for smaller towns, the bigger ones among them receive most of the funds. CTs are not eligible for funds under any scheme of JNNURM because they are under the jurisdiction of rural panchayats (Samanta 2013a). The number of such towns in the three states of eastern India is very high and the population in these towns have more than doubled in the last decade. Thus, a large share of the small town population is not being covered by financial assistance from the central government’s urban programme.

Although there is a debate about whether the levels of current urbanisation as observed by the Census of India shows over-representation (Kundu A 2013) or under-representation (Mukhopadhyay 2013; Denis and Marius-Gnanou 2011), there is wide consensus among scholars that India’s urban future lies in its numerous small towns. Findings of
the Census 2011 show a decline in the demographic growth in large cities, especially mega cities. On the contrary, small statutory towns and Census Towns (CTs) are growing at a faster rate. According to Mukhopadhyay (2013), these settlements are important because they embody a vibrant people-driven, market-centred process and many of them will grow into large cities quite soon. Therefore, ignoring them is not a good idea for urban policies. Kundu D (2013) also believes that urban policies in India need to be more focussed on smaller urban centres because of their weak economic base, high incidence of poverty and lack of access to basic amenities. She thinks that smaller towns must have a separate scheme similar to JNNURM to strengthen their infrastructure and services and to promote them as centres of distributed and inclusive growth.

GOVERNANCE CRISIS OF SMALL TOWNS

The problems of governing small towns are varied in nature, depending on the status of the towns. For Statutory Towns, the problem is more of financial support, as these towns are entirely dependent on government grants for all kinds of service provision and infrastructure in the cities. For nagar/town panchayats, the problem is with the sharing of income and expenditure between the state and the local government. Finally, in CTs, the problem is un-governability of these settlements.

MUNICIPAL FINANCES OF STATUTORY SMALL TOWNS

In India, municipal financing and municipal functions of ULBs are entirely dependent on their respective state government’s jurisdiction. Entry 5 of the State list in the Constitution empowers the state governments to lay down the functions, powers and responsibilities of municipal governments. The revenue base for municipalities are also dependent on the state governments as the Constitution of India does not specify this, leaving the responsibility to the State Government (Mathur 2006: 83). Therefore, state governments specify the taxes that the municipalities can levy and collect. The main sources of such revenue are taxes on land and buildings, taxes on advertisements, taxes on animals, boats, tolls, taxes on professions, trades, callings and employment, and taxes on entertainment. In addition to these, municipalities can also charge fees and fines to enhance their non-tax base.

Municipal finances hold an important key to the production and delivery of basic infrastructure and services (Nallathiga 2009). During
the period of open market of the globalised economy, the reduction of subsidized funds from state governments and semi-public financial institutions has limited the flow of funds to ULBs for infrastructure projects and compelled them to explore alternate sources and methods of finance. One such source—direct access to domestic capital markets is now an accepted option for larger, financially viable ULBs (Mathur 2006: 97). Many big cities are prospering as a result. However, small and medium-sized ULBs do not have the capacity to directly access domestic capital markets. Therefore, the reduction in subsidies and government grants to the municipalities are severely affecting the level of basic services provided to the citizens of the small cities.

A thorough analysis of the budget of all towns (excluding cities with a population of one million or more) in West Bengal gives an idea of the pattern of municipal financing across size classes of cities in the state. Among the two major sources of income of cities—government grant and own fund—own fund dominates the situation for big cities (Figure 5). Along with the decrease in the size of the cities, the proportion of government grant steadily increases in their income sources, which indicates that small cities are heavily dependent on the government grant as their income generating options are very limited. Similar

Figure 5. Revenue Structure (Govt. Fund and Own Fund) of the Towns in West Bengal across Size Classes, 2005–06

Source: Municipal Affairs Dept. Government of West Bengal (The data excludes million cities)
observations have also been made for other small cities in other states
(Sharma 2013). CTs are not covered by municipal finance as these are not
counted as towns, unless they are recognised by the state as Statutory
towns. These towns are therefore, dependent on the rural panchayats,
who do not have any provision for municipal services at all. Due to
the lack of funds for their development, they are fast becoming crisis
territories for future urbanisation in India.

PROVISION OF BASIC INFRASTRUCTURE, HEALTH
AND EDUCATION SERVICES

In globalising India, the urban sections are much more influenced by this
globalisation process than any other individual sector in India (Sridharan
2008). However, Harris (2007) opines that besides globalisation, there
are other processes refashioning cities simultaneously. A few among
these are: cities’ continual change and incremental adjustment to
external markets, long term process of deindustrialisation, impact of
increased world competition, and so on. One of the most significant
impacts of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) was sharp
cutbacks in public expenditure which included big cuts in the health
care, education, subsidies to farmers and the poor, and privatisation
of services. As a consequence, in many countries of the world, poverty,
child malnutrition and ill health are advancing again after decades of
steady retreat. The credit for this goes to globalisation (Sengupta 2003).
In India, the withdrawal of subsidies on public welfare services such
as health and education, and consequent privatisation of basic services
have directly and selectively started to affect the already disadvantaged
groups, i.e., the urban poor, the majority of whom again live in small
and medium size towns.

Lack of basic infrastructure services due to poor financial capacity
is not the only problem in small and medium size towns. The poor
delivery of health and education services is another major problem.
Iyengar and Surianarain (2008) think that the poor delivery mechanism
is related to the principal-agent problem, caused by the gap between
government and citizen, school and parent/children, policymakers and
implementers. These problems of basic services are cropping up in small
towns more prominently because of the large scale migration to these
urban centres, driven by a decaying rural economy and exclusionary
policies of big, metropolitan cities (Kundu A 2013). In addition, a
new urban middle class has emerged in Indian cities, which prefers
a better quality of service even at a higher price. According to the 47th
Constitutional Amendment Act of India, the provision of basic services is the direct responsibility of ULBs. The condition of small towns is critical as they have finance gaps in income and expenditure because of the lack of capacity of the ULBs to raise revenue, inadequate transfer of funds from the State or Central government, and the inability to attract investors (Sharma 2013). These factors together have given rise to the insufficient and ineffective delivery of urban basic services in Indian small towns.

The National Commission on Urbanization report in 1988 raised the critical issue of funding basic services in cities (Kennedy and Zerah 2008). It is only a few large cities with strong economic bases that have been able to secure a high credit rating and raise resources through bonds and other instruments of credit (Kundu 2007). The conditions of small towns are the worst, as they neither have the capacity to raise their own revenue nor can they attract private capital for investments in infrastructure and services due to lack of proper mechanism of cost recovery in terms of user charges.

A study (Citizens’ Report Card) by Bangalore based Public Affairs Foundation examined the status of forty ULBs of Kolkata Metropolitan Area in West Bengal. It shows that among common services, outpatient health services, collection of property tax and to some extent water supply reflect good scores. However, most pro-poor services like drainage, garbage collection, sanitation and approach roads in slums have returned low satisfaction scores. Direct user feedback on service attributes and derived analysis point out that regularity, predictability and quality of services are factors that rank high in the priority of users, and the present basic services in cities are poor in these attributes. These observations lead to the premise that mere spread of infrastructure and deployment of staff need not translate into improvement in services. Moreover, the improvement of service delivery in small towns does not ensure that it would not discriminate between the poor and the non-poor, slum and the non-slum areas. However, an in-depth study (Firdos 2013) on the provisions of municipal services to the urban poor living in slums under the Kolkata Municipal Corporation have shown that the basic municipal services in slum areas of Kolkata Municipal Corporation area are much below the desired levels. It suggests that the municipal authorities are far from paying attention in extending services in slums and squatter settlements despite the severe deficiency. The delivery of services are much better in wards inhabited by influential and socio-economically and / politically connected middle class.
An empirical study done in four small towns of West Bengal shows that the condition of service provision of health, education and sanitation are in a bad state because of scarcity of funds (Samanta 2010, 2013b, 2013c). Public Health services from ULBs are non-existent in small towns which force citizens to depend on the private health services. Public education, although supported by state institutions, is slowly being replaced by private education services to meet the demand of the emerging urban middle class. For sanitation, especially for solid waste disposal, people have to depend on municipal services which are very poor in nature as the ULBs are neither financially nor physically (in terms of manpower and land required for dumping and managing solid waste) equipped to handle the situation.

**CONCLUSION**

This article highlights the patterns of small city urbanisation in India with special reference to three states of eastern India, along with the governance crisis of small towns in India. The broad pattern indicates that in the overall urbanisation of India, the contribution of big and metropolitan cities is declining as more urbanisation is taking place outside metropolises and their shadow areas. However, the urban planning strategies still continue to focus on big cities, spending a major share of the municipal finance on these big cities in order to make them global cities of the future. The new urban territories are facing two kinds of problems. CTs are facing the crisis of denied urbanisation, which means that these territories in spite of becoming urban are not being covered by urban services and infrastructure due to the politics of classification. These small towns cannot any longer be denied statutory status by the government, as these are the territories where new urbanisation will take place. The small Statutory Towns are facing the crisis of meager financial support from the government.

Central government grants are nearly non-existent for small towns and small towns are not capable of generating their own funds for sustenance because of their poorly managed finance (Sharma 2013). These towns are therefore, heavily dependent on the meager government grants from their respective state governments. As a consequence, the urban poverty level is increasing and the service provision, especially in the water and sanitation sectors are deteriorating in these cities. To check all these and to improve the situation of future urbanisation in India, rigorous restructuring is necessary in municipal financing and urban planning strategies because small and medium towns are the
only affordable destinations of future rural urban migrants in India. The government must design a scheme for better governance of small towns to strengthen their infrastructural bases and to develop their basic service provisions. These strategies can make them more capable of absorbing the future urbanisation in India.

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