Trans. Inst. Indian Geographers
Vol. 2, No. 2, July 1980

# DECLINING TOWNS OF INDIA, 1971

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ABSTRACT : In spite of the rapid urbanization and increasing urban population, 129 Indian towns have experienced an absolute decline in population in the decade 1961–71. The spatial pattern in the distribution of these towns, their functional categories and the general processes responsible for the decline of these urban settlement are analysed. It was observed that the distribution pattern of the declining towns is very uneven. In all the towns male population had declined and in majority of them, the female population also showed a decreasing trend. The declining towns also exhibit an absolute decrease in working population thereby suggesting a decrease in employment opportunities.

## Introduction

India, along with other developing countries is experiencing a rapid urban growth. Its urban population increased from 78.9 million in 1961 to 108.8 million in 1971 i. e. a percentage increase of 37.83. The number of towns also increased in this decade, from 2461 in 1961 to 2921 in 1971. Inspite of these characteristics of urbanisation, 129 towns experienced an absolute decline in population. The decline was substantial in some towns. Contrary to expectations, some of these towns are large towns, and in many cases, are located on major transport routes. It was felt that an indepth study of these declining towns would throw light on the processes responsible for decline of urban settlements.

Northam (1963), in his study of the declining urban centres in the United States found that the declining centres were generally small urban centres. He identified the second important variable in the decline of urban centres as a spatial variable i. e. the the distance of the town from a city of 50,000 and more population. The small urban centres retained their viability only if they were located within the normal commuting range of the large cities.

Suri (1972), in a comparative study of a sample of rapidly growing and declining towns in India found that there were more " artisan towns " (household industry towns) in the set of declining towns than in the set of rapidly growing towns. Khan ( 1976 ) identified four causes of stagnation or decline of small and medium sized towns i. e. a high proportion of population dependant on agriculture, preponderance of household industry, low level of development of the hinterland, and inferior location of the town.

## Objectives

This study is confined to the 129 urban settlements which experienced an absolute decline in population during the decade 1961–71, based on data of the census of India, 1971. The main objectives of the study were

( 1 ) to explore the spatial pattern, if any, in the distribution of the towns;

( 2 ) to find out which group of towns showed decline;

(3) to understand the functional categories to which the declining towns belonged;

(4) in the light of the above-mentioned objectives, to identify the general processes which lead to decline of urban settlements.

**Methodology**

To understand the distribution, the towns were located on a map and differentiated according to their size in 1971 and the rate of decline in 1961-1971. Data regarding the occupational structure of the towns was compiled to throw light on the main functions of the towns. Since one of the causes of decline could be a decrease in area, such of the declining towns which had experienced a decrease in area were identified. Based on the occupational structure and decrease in area, it was possible to isolate some towns where the processes responsible for decline coud be easily comprehended. For the remaining towns, the change in occupational structure between 1961 and 1971 was studied to see if it would give a clue to causes for decline.

**Table I : Classification of declining towns according to size and rate of decline - 1971**

| Rate of decline (%) / Population | 100,000 + | 50,000 - 100,000 | 20,000 - 50,000 | 10,000 - 20,000 | 5000 10,000 | <5000 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 0-10 | 2 | 1 | 7 | 21 | 16 | 7 | 54 |
| 10-20 | - | - | 4 | 5 | 7 | 8 | 24 |
| 20-40 | - | - | 5 | 5 | 12 | 6 | 28 |
| 40-60 | - | 1 | - | 2 | 6 | 8 | 17 |
| 60-80 | - | - | - | 1 | 1 | 3 | 5 |
| > 80 | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 1 |
| Total | 2 | 2 | 16 | 34 | 42 | 33 | 129 |

**Results Distribution**

The distribution pattern of the declining towns (Fig. 1) is very uneven. There are certain areas where there is a high degree of concentration This is particularly noticeable in Himachal Pradesh and adjoining parts of Punjab; in the neighbourhood of Calcutta and along the Kerala coast. In contrast, there is an absence of declining towns in areas like Jammu and Kashmir, Rajasthan, Saurashtra and Kutch, Central Indian highlands and Assam. In some cases such as Assam, this feature may be due to the smaller number of urban settlements.

To analyse whether the distributional pattern of declining towns was the same in 1961, they were identified and located (Fig. 2). This map reveals two areas of very heavy concentration of declining towns i.e. Punjab, and parts of Tamil Nadu, especially in and around Ramanathapuram. Thus the pattern in 1961 is different from that in 1971, suggesting that the processes responsible for decline of towns were different in the two decades.

The classification of the declining towns on the basis of population (1971) and percentage decline 1961-1971 (Table I) brings out that 80% of the towns were small towns i. e. having a population of <20,000. However it is surprising that the remaining 20% are medium and large towns such as Ahmednagar, Panji and Kharagpur. In fact it is surprising that as many as 40% of the declining towns are parts of urban

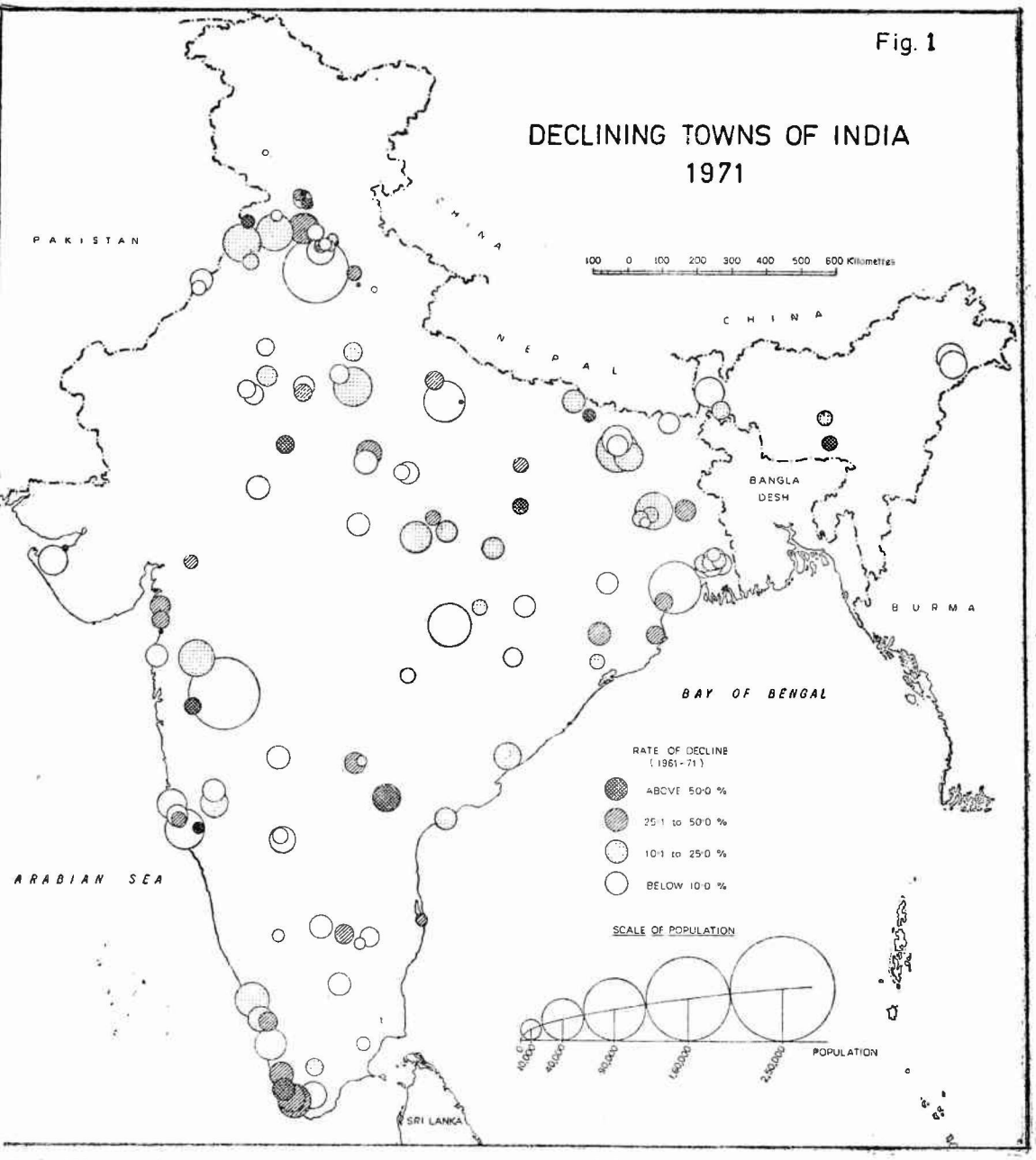
Fig. 1
DECLINING TOWNS OF INDIA
1971
PAKISTAN
CHINA
NEPAL
CHINA
BANGLA DESH
BURMA
BAY OF BENGAL
ARABIAN SEA
SRI LANKA
100 0 100 200 300 400 500 600 Kilometres
RATE OF DECLINE (1961-71)
ABOVE 50·0 %
25·1 to 50·0 %
10·1 to 25·0 %
BELOW 10·0 %
SCALE OF POPULATION
10,000
40,000
90,000
1,60,000
2,50,000
POPULATION

**Table II : Classification of declining towns according to size and rate of decline - 1961**

| Rate of Population decline ( % ) | > 100,000 | 50.000 - 100,000 | 20,000 - 50,000 | 10.000 - 20,000 | 5000 - 10,000 | <5000 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 0-10 | 2 | 1 | 16 | 29 | 40 | 13 | 101 |
| 10-20 | - | - | 4 | 6 | 3 | 5 | 18 |
| 20-40 | - | 1 | - | 5 | 11 | 7 | 24 |
| 40-60 | - | - | 1 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 8 |
| 60-80 | - | - | - | - | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| > 80 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Total | 2 | 2 | 21 | 43 | 58 | 28 | 154 |

agglomerations. In 60% of the cases, the rate of decline was small i.e. <20%. However, in 20% of the cases, decline was rapid i. e. > 40% eg. Dehu, Samastipur, Palampur etc.

A similar exercise for 1961 ( Table II ) reveals that the overall pattern is the same, but concentration of declining towns is more in the size range of 5000 to 20,000. This is probably because of the greater probability of declassification in towns of less than 5000 population.

**Change in Area**

In trying to understand the causes for decline, it may be noted that 25% of the towns had suffered a decrease in area; hence the decline in these cases may be partly the result of the change in the area of the enumeration unit and hence is partially statistical. The feature of decrease in area for even a large urban settlement like Ahmednagar is in itself surprising.

**Other Features**

17 of the declining towns are cantonments and another 4 are associated with defence activities; eg. Ambala, Agra, Lucknow etc. Many of these cantonment towns are medium and large towns and have in some cases experienced a substantial decline eg. Amritsar Cantt ( 59.7% ); Shillong ( 58.3% ) Jhansi ( 29.5% ). The decline of these towns is probably the result of policy decisions. However, it may be noted that in terms of occupational structure, there is a heavy bias to services, and not much of diversification eg. Mathura Cantt has > 90% of workers engaged in services.

Some of the towns i. e. 12% are mining centres such as Kolar Gold Fields, Dumarkonda, Noamundi, where the decline is due to decrease in mining activities. A similar effect is present in project centres in which the decline is attributable to decrease in construction activities eg. Nangal Township, Pipri.

Some of the towns like Jwalapur Mahavidyalaya ( 239 population ), Valsad O. G. ( population of 230 ), are merely extensions of towns and not indepndent urban centres, as is evident from their small size.

A few are old ports like Malwan and Vengurla which have lost their original functions due to increase in competition from other ports. In some of the towns there is an overwhelming preponderance of agricultural activities in the occupational structure eg. Teghra ( 65% ),Dahanu ( 80% ), Sadalga ( 80% ); such towns have therefore obviously not acquired urban functions.

All such 87 cases where the decline could be explained were not further analysed.

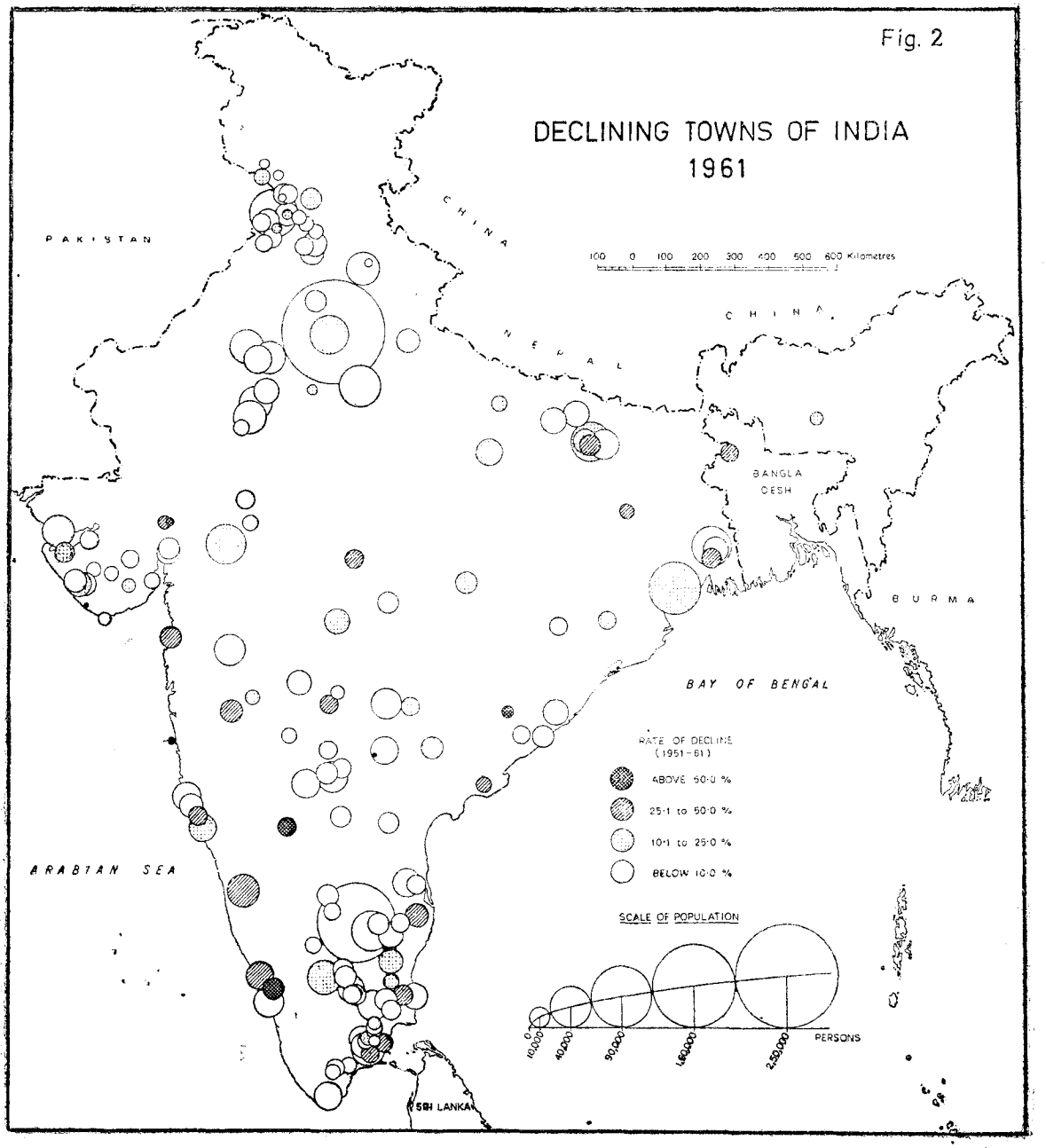
Fig. 2
DECLINING TOWNS OF INDIA
1961
PAKISTAN
CHINA
NEPAL
CHINA
BANGLA DESH
BURMA
BAY OF BENGAL
ARABIAN SEA
SRI LANKA
100 0 100 200 300 400 500 600 Kilometres
RATE OF DECLINE (1951-61)
ABOVE 50·0 %
25·1 to 50·0 %
10·1 to 25·0 %
BELOW 10·0 %
SCALE OF POPULATION
0
10,000
40,000
90,000
160,000
250,000
PERSONS

The remaining 42 towns were studied in greater depth particularly with reference to changes in the occupational structure. The results of this analysis may be summarized as follows :

( 1 ) In all the towns male population had declined and in 40% of the cases the decline was significant eg. in Angul, the number of males decreased from 9094 in 1961 to 5670 in 1971.

( 2 ) The female population declined in only 70% of the towns, and the decline was significant only in 12% of the towns. In some towns such as Sankrail, even though the decrease in male population was significant ( from 6936 to 6136 ) female population increased ( from 4908 to 5164 ).

( 3 ) In 95% of the towns, there was an absolute decrease in working population and in 70% of the cases, the decline was high. This indicated that in the declining towns there has been a decrease in employment opportunities.

( 4 ) In 93% of the towns, there was an absolute decrease in the number of workers employed in 'Other Services' and in 50% the decrease was significant.

(5) In 80% of the towns, there was a decrease in the number employed in household industry.

(6) In 50% there was a decrease in number of workers in factory industry. Thus in half the cases there was an increase in employment in this sector and yet the town declined in population for eg. Chettiarpatti ( T. N. ) experienced an increase from 798 to 1482 in factory industry, while population decreased from 8718 to 7378.

(7) In only 40% of the towns there was a decrease in the number of workers in Trade and Commerce and in only 38% in Transport. Thus in the majority of the towns, the number employed in Trade, Commerce and Transport increased in spite of the decline in population. This may be partly due to definitional changes but it also raises the question as to whether the employment in these sectors is real or disguised.

(8) As many as 40% of these towns i. e. 16 belong to urban agglomerations. Of these 16 towns 7 showed a decrease in workers in Factory Industry and 11 in Household Industry.

(9) 1/3 of the towns lie on railway lines and 1/4 on highways.

**Conclusions**

On the basis of the foregoing analysis it is clear that one of the causes of decline is probably outmigration as suggested by a more consistent decrease in male population and workers than of female population. The analysis also suggests that this outmigration is due to decrease in employment nopportunities. The outmigration appears to be due to economic factors – whether these are in the form of pull from outside or push from within can be established only after further investigation.

The decrease in importance of household industry is understandable, but the decline in the number of factory workers in some towns may be either due to shifting of industrial units or closure of units ( eg. Jute mills ) or the shift of residential areas of workers. This is all the more probable since in many cases, such towns are parts of larger urban agglomerations.

Since about 50% of the total number of declining towns are located either on railway lines or highways, it is clear that accessibility alone has not contributed to urban growth. Several factors are responsible for the decline of urban settlements. An analysis on these lines is being carried out for 1961 also to identify whether the factors responsible for decline are the same.

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