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GROWTH TRAJECTORIES OF CENSUS TOWNS : A CASE OF MURSHIDABAD DISTRICT, WEST BENGAL

□ Kiran Kumar Roy*

ABSTRACT

The role of census towns in India's current urbanisation has become a subject of intense debate since the publication of the census data of 2011. The growth of census towns during the decade preceding the 2011 census was enormous in most of the states of India especially in West Bengal. The existing debates on the issue of census towns are mostly on the grounds of methods of counting and of their geographical location within or beyond the urban agglomeration. However, the existing literature on census towns is highly oriented towards the data available from secondary sources. This article, based on secondary data analysis, tries to understand the nature of growth and the process of territorial transformation of the settlements in the Murshidabad district, West Bengal.

Keywords : Urbanisation, Census Towns, Transformation

1.0 Introduction

In India, maximum settlements are re-classified from rural to urban areas. It is also seen that some settlements are re-classified from urban to rural areas. Urban classification is dynamic since one can be re-classified from rural to urban but from urban to rural as well (Bhagat, 2011). According to the RGI, there are three criteria that have been discussed earlier, for being an urban centre. One of the most important criteria is that 5000 inhabitants are needed for a place to be an urban centre. In India, some settlements already have crossed 5000 inhabitants but have not been declared as an urban centre by the RGI. This cut off point of 5,000 inhabitants has not precluded the classification of some settlements below 5,000 people as Urban (Denis and Marius-Gnanou, 2010). The 2011 census has mentioned a marginally higher increase in the urban population, but it also stated an extra ordinary increase of 2774 new census towns which is greater than the range of such new towns recognized throughout the twentieth century. According to Kundu (2011), it is nothing but a census hyper activism. Pradhan (2012) estimated that among the new

census towns which have emerged in the last decade, 28% census towns are not full-fill the criteria for being census towns in India. However, Samanta (2014) from her empirical studies stated that census towns of India have emerged due to the development of different types of non-farm activities. Guin and Das (2015) also agreed that it is not over estimation. The census towns of West Bengal have emerged due to agricultural crisis which helps to create non-farm activities within the settlement. Roy and Samanta (2018) also stated that census towns in India are developed due development of non-farm activities.

According to the 2011 census, the development of settlement units varies widely from state to state. Among all the states of India, West Bengal holds the highest position in the increase of census towns followed by Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Interestingly, a majority of these census towns have emerged in areas beyond the influence of Kolkata Metropolitan Area. Murshidabad District, which is located far away from Kolkata Metropolis, has experienced a high growth of census towns in the last decade (Samanta 2014). Out of 65 census towns, 43 have emerged in the last decade the research will try to

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