CHAPTER - IV

PATTERN OF THE SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION OF URBANISM IN NORTH EAST INDIA

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NORTH-EAST INDIA

Urbanism, like any other geographical feature,
is unevenly distributed over the earth’s surface; this
is true in case of the North - Eastern India too. The
geographer’s view point is essentially a spatial one
and Hartshrone\(^1\) had made it explicit in his concept of
'areal differentiation'. Hence, the study of spatial
variation of urbanism in a region is relevant in the
field of urban geography.\(^2\) Several studies on the
spatial distribution of urbanism and urbanization are
available.

Urbanism and urbanization are so intimately
related to each other that the difference between the
two becomes hazy, and it is difficult to draw a line
between them. Urbanization from a demographic point of
view is essentially a process of population concentration

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   survey of current thought in the
   light of the past. Lancaster;
   Association of American Geographer,
   1939.

   (1971).
and it proceeds in two ways: 1) the multiplication of the points of concentration and the increase in the size of the individual concentration. Since the process of urbanization is intimately associated with the economic development, especially industrial development, the distribution of urbanism faces an inevitable spatial variation and warrants and understanding of the spatial distribution of it.

The analysis of distributional aspects of urbanism, as it refers to the spatial dimension of the process of urbanization, forms the foundation of all regional studies concerned with the understanding of the process of urbanization. An endeavour is made here, to study


the distributional aspects of urbanism in the North-Eastern region of India. The distribution of urban features like the urban settlements, urban population and its density, urban-rural ratios etc., are analysed. The distributional disparities of these urban features are also examined in the light of locational, physical, cultural and historical factors.

THE STUDY AREA:

The North-Eastern region of India with an area of about 255,050 sq. km. covers 7.8% of the total area of the country. According to 1991 census, it has a population of 31,386,911 which is about 3.75% of the population of the Indian Union. In size, the region is larger than the whole of the United Kingdom. This hilly region with a little plain area in Brahmaputra, Imphal valley and some parts of Tripura is situated in the eastern sector of the Himalayan Orogenic Belt, the youngest mountain chain on earth - a system that is still in the process of rising and stabilisation. Out of a total population of 31,386,911, 27,030,172 persons are in the rural area and 43,82,005 in the urban. (\textit{tbl.2.1}) The following table will explain the position:
### Source: Census Volumes of India: 1991

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total</th>
<th>29,55,050</th>
<th>32,12,621</th>
<th>31,02,611</th>
<th>27,57,205</th>
<th>27,72,046</th>
<th>19,51,380</th>
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<th>22,74,790</th>
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<td>7. Total</td>
<td>29,55,050</td>
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<td>31,02,611</td>
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<td>1,10,662</td>
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</tbody>
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**Note:**

- The table above represents the distribution of population in the NEU Region of India as per the 1991 Census.
From the above table it is evident that the major portion of the population is in Assam which accounts about 71% of the total population of the region.

However, from the point of view of urbanism, Assam is less urbanised than its sister states of North Eastern India. The following table presents a broad picture of the urbanization trends in the north-eastern region of India with literacy percentage of unit states. (Dig. 4.1/4.2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>No. of Towns</th>
<th>% of urban population to total population</th>
<th>Literacy Percentage</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
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<tr>
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<td>12.80</td>
<td>41.22</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Assam</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>11.08</td>
<td>53.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Manipur</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>27.52</td>
<td>60.96</td>
</tr>
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<td>4. Meghalaya</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18.60</td>
<td>48.26</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Mizoram</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>46.10</td>
<td>81.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Nagaland</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17.21</td>
<td>61.30</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Tripura</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15.30</td>
<td>60.39</td>
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<td>NE India</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>21.23%</td>
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<tr>
<td>INDIA</td>
<td>4689</td>
<td>26.13%</td>
<td>52.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NORTH EASTERN INDIA LITERACY PERCENTAGE 1991

DIG NO.

Percentage

TRIPURA
NAGALAND
MIZORAM
MEGHALAYA
MANIPUR
ASSAM
ARUNACHAL PRADESH

FEMALES

Males

Percentage

100 90 80 70 60 50 40 30 20 10 0
An analysis of the relationships between the natural conditions and the spatial distribution of urban centres will be revealing. The term 'geographical factor' which is often used in the geographic literature, seen as a factor controlling the distributional patterns, not only includes the physical factors but also, the economic and social. The settlements in general and the urban settlements in particular are the most significant expression of human occupancy of the earth's surface.

In urban studies, the researcher has to encounter several difficulties. Still, there is no uniform or commonly agreed definition of "urban" which has universal applicability. At present there are as many definitions as there are countries and they vary both spatially and temporally. An urbanism exhibits a great diversity in different countries, it is not an easy task to formulate a common definition of 'urban' which could be applied to all the countries. Because the terms "urban" and "rural" are relative, they have to be viewed from the perspective of "rural-urban continuum".

In India itself the definition for "urban" was changed frequently. In 1961 census, the term "urban" was radically redefined. The definition did not change in 1971 census but its application in recognising the urban areas was more rigorous. As per 1971 census all places with a Municipality, Corporation or Cantonment or Notified area are treated automatically as towns. All other places which satisfied the following criteria are considered also as towns:

i) a minimum population of 5000 persons;

ii) at least 75% of the male working population should be non-agricultural;

iii) a density of population of at least 400 per square Kilometer (or 1,000 persons per square mile).

A few places which did not satisfy the above mentioned criteria were also treated as towns in view of their predominant urban characteristics and urban facilities. However, recognition of such towns is done by the census organisation in consultation with the State Government.

Though it appears to be ambiguous, still it is significant to note that for the first time in 1961, and then in 1971, uniform and somewhat rigid criteria were applied throughout India to identify the urban centres.

The criteria for determining a town in 1981 were generally the same as adopted in 1971 census. The Director of Census of each State/U.T. is however given some discretion in respect of some marginal cases in consultation with the state government to include some places that had other distinct urban characteristics and to exclude underserving cases. The concepts of an urban area adopted at the 1991 census are as follows:

(a) All places with a municipality, corporation, cantonment, board or notified town area committee;

(b) All places which satisfy the following criteria:

1) a minimum population of 5,000;

2) at least 75 percent of male working population engaged in non-agricultural pursuits; and
iii) a density of population of at least 400 persons per square Kilometer (1000 per sq. mile).

Further, the Director of Census Operations in consultation with the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India and the State Government was given some discretion to classify some places having distinct urban characteristics as urban centres even if such places did not strictly satisfy all criteria mentioned under category (b) above. But there is no precise definition for the rural area at the Indian census. The urban areas were defined at each census and all the remaining residuary areas are treated as rural areas.

As per 1991 census, the North East India has 183 urban centres of which 87 are in Assam and the remaining 96 are in Arunachal Pradesh (10), Manipur (30), Meghalaya (7), Mizoram (22), Nagaland (9) and Tripura (18). (Tbl.3.2) Of these 183 urban centres 8 are class-I cities (Guwahati, Shillong, Imphal, Agartala, Dibrugarh, Silchar, Jorhat and Aizawl) (Vide Appendix-II).
For the first time in 1971 census, the concept of "urban agglomeration" is introduced. Of the 8 Class I cities mentioned above all 8 are identified as urban agglomerations. For the first time in 1991 census, Imphal has been treated as an 'urban Agglomeration' in Manipur. It is relevant to note here that Assam has 4 (four) urban agglomerations (Guwahati, Dibrugarh, Silcher and Jorhat) and the remaining 6 states although collectively bigger in area, have only 2(two) urban agglomerations (Shillong, Imphal). None of the other states like Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura and Mizoram have urban agglomerations.

The concept of 'Town Group' used in 1961 is replaced with the concept of 'urban agglomeration' in 1971 and continued at both the 1981 and 1991 censuses of India. "An urban agglomeration is made up of a core town with contiguous areas of urban spread"9. The following conditions are employed to identify a city as an urban agglomeration:

i) a city with continuous outgrowth (the outgrowth being out of the statutory limits but following within the boundaries of the adjoining village or villages);

ii) one town with similar outgrowth or two or more adjoining towns with their outgrowth all of which form a continuous spread. Contiguity in urban spatial growth is taken as the most important factor.

Imphal is the solitary urban agglomeration in the entire Manipur State. It is interesting to note that a town which was declassified in 1951 as class VI town and only a class II town in 1961 could grow into an urban agglomeration in 1991.

**Pattern of Distribution of Urban Centres in the Region**

Most of the urban centres of the region are located along the course of a river and on the sides of roads. This trend is more pronounced in the Assam Valley. A detailed study in depth of pattern of urban distribution is made subsequently.
THE ASSAM VALLEY OR THE
BRAHMAPUTRA VALLEY:

The Assam valley or the Brahmaputra Valley
(25°94'-27°55'N and 89°41'-96°02'E), though it is the
eastern continuation of the great plains of India, is
a well-demarcated physical unit within the girdle formed
by the Eastern Himalaya, Patkai and Naga Hills and the
Garo-Khasi-Jaintia and the Mikir Hills. Extending from
the easternmost tip of upper Assam near the syntaxial
bend of the Eastern Himalaya to the west of Dhubri on
the border of Bangladesh, the valley (about 720km x 80km)
covers an area of about 56,274 sq.kms. The valley
includes the administrative districts of Lakhimpur,
Sibsagar, Nowgong, Darrang, Kamrup and Goelpara of the
state of Assam. The Brahmaputra and its tributaries,
the Surma, the Barak and the Imphal river by virtue
of the exceptional utility for agriculture and trade and
commerce are known to be very important rivers of North
East India. For the same reasons a large number of
towns have clung to their banks since time immemorial.
As a matter of fact, the whole Brahmaputra valley is
the mirror of the Assamese civilization in which almost
all events of Assamese history are reflected through the activities of its towns where the cultural essence of the region is crystalised.

All the urban settlements in the valley are invariably concentrated in close proximity to the river Brahmaputra which has long been acting as the carrier of commerce and culture of Assam. Guwahati, Dibrugarh, Dhubri, Jorhat, and Sibasagar are the old established historical towns of the Brahmaputra valley. All these are the reverine towns standing either on the Brahmaputra or its tributaries. Guwahati is the biggest urban centre of the entire N.E. India. It is rightly called the nerve centre of Assam and the six neighbouring states.

This regional centre is supposed to serve larger areas than any other urban centres of this region. Its present growth rate is tremendous owing to its strategic position and urban potentialities, especially after the shifting of the capital from Shillong to Dispur. Greater Guwahati which includes Guwahati, Pandu, Kamakhya, Noonmati, North Gauhati, Khanapara and Jalukbari has a population of 5,84,342 in 1991. Another significant distributional aspect of the urban centres of the region
is that most of them which are located in the central part of the valley are larger in size compared to the urban centres at the periphery. Of them each of the towns of Dibrugarh (1,25,667), Jorhat (1,12,030), Tinsukia (73,760), Dhubri (65,861), Tezpur (54,999) and Nowgong (93,324) has a population over 50,000 persons. It is due to (1) favourable terrain conditions (2) better resources potential and (3) transportation network. The distributional pattern of settlements in general and urban settlements in particular clearly indicate that there are now 72 towns in the Brahmaputra valley out of 87 total urban centres of the whole Assam. In fact, they have clung to the river, growing either on the bank itself or at some distance away by the side of railways, State or National Highways (all of these practically running parallel to each other from the western to the eastern end), showing thereby a linear pattern.

In the Barak plain, towns like Silchar and Karimganj have grown along the Barak river. In this plain, Silchar (1,15,483) is the most important city from the administrative, commercial and educational
points of view. It is connected by rail and air with Guwahati and other important cities like Imphal and Dimapur. Other centres of commercial importance are Lakshipur (3,748), Karimganj (43,623), Badarpur (16,490), Hailakandi (25,475) and Lala (8,631).

In the Hill Districts of Assam, except Diphu, most of the towns such as Haflong, Maibong, Mahur, Bokajan, Doukamokom, Donkoka etc. are small and they are important only from the administrative point of view.

Thus, the concentration of urban centres in the Brahmaputra valley is a significant feature in the distribution pattern of urban centres of the region. It is due to the favourable physical and economic conditions that are found in the Brahmaputra valley area. In addition, the number of urban centres coming up primarily either due to the development of railways (e.g., Jogighopa, Rangiya, Chaparmukh, Furkating, Simalguri) or the greater exploitation of mineral resources (e.g., Dhulijan, Namrup, Moran, Margherita) or the growth of tea industry (i.e. Rangapara) or due to the combined effect of all these factors, have boosted up the process of urbanization in the region.
All these urban centres along with the existing towns are thus tending to form two distinct chains of urban settlements on both the banks of the Brahmaputra. There is, however, a break in the southern chain due to the presence of the Mikir hills. A closer study of their locations further shows that there are two major concentrations of urban settlements, one around Guwahati and the other around Dibrugarh, leading to a sort of polarization at the two ends of the valley. (Fig.1.9). The other towns in the region are located either uniformly or unevenly around the major district centres. They have grown around the administrative and commercial nuclei of Jorhat, Nowgong, Tejpur, Dhubri and Barpeta. In addition, the development of Bongaigaon, Rangiya, Lumding and Mariani as railway towns is notable.

MEGHALAYA REGION:

The region is sparsely populated due to its rugged terrain and inhospitable environs. It has a population of 17,74,778 of which 14,44,731 are rural and 3,30,047 are urban. The overwhelming rural character (81.40%) of the Region is mainly due to its hilly terrain and inaccessibility, which have so far kept the area considerably isolated from the neighbouring plains. The urban population comprises 18.69% of the
total population. Though the percentage of urban population is higher in this region than in the neighbouring states of Assam (11.08%), Nagaland (17.21) and Arunachal Pradesh (12.80), it may be noted here that the crowding of urban population in the Shillong town-group is solely responsible for this, which otherwise would have been very insignificant, because the urban population in the entire region excluding Shillong is only 1,06,806 which is distributed in 5 other urban centres of the region. The capital of Meghalaya is Shillong (25°34'N, 91°5' E). It is situated at a height of 4,908 feet (1,496 metre) above mean sea level in a rolling upland of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. Surrounded by cliffs and ravines, brooks and revulets, lakes and waterfalls mixed with abundant pines, Shillong is one of the premier hills stations with scenic beauty in the N.E. India. It is well connected with Guwahati by a broad and metalled road, which is 101 Km. (63 miles) in length. According to the 1991 census, it has a population of 2,23,366 including the town groups of Shillong, Shillong Cantonment, Nongthymmai out of the total urban population of 3,29,079. It is developing owing, mainly to its being the administrative base.
The other urban centres in the region are small in size and they are Tura (45,677) in West Garo Hills District, Jowai (20,713) in Jaintia Hills, Nongstoin (14,378) in West Khasi hills and Williamnagar (11,985) in East Garo Hills District of the region. They have essentially grown up for carrying out administrative functions. In addition to these, a number of market centres with considerable urban amenities are growing by the side of the main roads. Notable among such centres are: Cherrapunji, Mawphong, Shella, Dawki, Nongbualang, Nongpoh and Barnihat in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills and Phulbari, Dalu, Baghmara, Siju, Dianadubi, Gatharubandha, Singrimari and Rechu-Belpara in the Garo Hills. It is worth mentioning that Cherrapunji had its urban development even earlier than Shillong, when it was the capital of Assam. Barapani and Barnihat have their urban potentiality mainly due to the establishment of hydro-electric projects nearby. Sonapahar in the Khasi Hills is growing as a mining town owing to the exploitation of silli-manite deposits.
III-NAGALAND REGION:

There are, in all, 9 urban centres in Nagaland, which are distributed in the seven districts of the State.

The percentage of urban population (17.21%) in the State is slightly higher than that of Tripura (15.30), though it has a very limited number of urban centres such as Dimapur (56,918), Kohima (53,122), Chumukedima (8,734) in Kohima District, Mokokchung (24,636) in Mokokchung District, Tuensang (20,971) in Tuensang District, Zunheboto (12,079) in Zunheboto District, Mokha (14,066), Mon (11,137) and Phek (8,432); of these Dimapur and Kohima are Class II towns of Nagaland. Kohima recorded in 1901 a meagre population (3,093); its population is more than 17 times (53,122) by 1991. The town is quite well planned with concentration of the residences of officers over separate hill tops constructed according to their status. There are also good number of military camps and quarters occupying considerable areas of the town. It is also an important nodal point and N.H. 39 connecting Dimapur to Imphal passes through it.
IV. ARUNACHAL PRADESH:

It is one of the sparsely populated regions of the country with a density of 10 persons per square kilometre. Out of the 11 districts, 4 districts do not have any urban population. At present there are 10 towns and most of them are class IV and V towns. They are Itanagar (17,320), Pasighat (14,320), Naharlagun (13,656), Tezu (12,686) and Along (11,098) in Class IV town groups. The remaining 5 towns are Zairo (8,419), Namasi (7,881), Roing (7,271), Khonsa (6,350) and Bomdila (5,570). Thus, the region has 12.80% of its population in urban settlements of varying sizes ranging from 5,570 persons in Bomdila to 17,320 in Itanagar.

V. MANIPUR VALLEY:

Out of 30 urban centres of the region all, except Churachandpur and Moreh, are located in the valley. The most interesting aspect of the present distributional pattern of urban centres in the region is the recent growth of a large number of market towns which have essentially come up for discharging commercial functions including collection and distribution in addition to
some industrial activities on a small-scale basis and socio-cultural functions. Out of the total population of 18,37,149 persons in 1991, 5,05,645 persons (27.52% of the total) were enumerated as urban areas living in 30 towns scattered over 3 (three) districts of the State. These urban centres are very unevenly distributed in the region. The degree of urbanization increases from the central portion of the State (Imphal District) to the West (Bishnupur District) and the south east (Thoubal District) in general and the existence of a few well-marked belt of urban concentration is noteworthy.

12 towns accounting for more than half of the State's urban population are concentrated in the Imphal District which is the most urbanized part of the region. It is obvious that the higher the rank of the town the greater is the proportion of urban population contained therein. Imphal (Class - I town) accounts for more than 39.56% of the total urban population of the State.

Most of the towns and cities of the region are multi-functional and small in size. Out of 8 towns having populations over 15,000 as many as 5 (Imphal, Thoubal, Churachandpur, Kakching and Moirang) have the
largest number of workers in services. Imphal (2,02,839 in 1991), the regional as well as political capital of Manipur, lies on the river Imphal, amidst a vast alluvial plain. The city which occupies a considerable area at present, has grown through several phases.

There is only one town with a population exceeding 1,00,000 (Imphal). The comparatively small populations in the other important towns are due to the fact that these centres have very little industrial development, though now they are becoming important in trade and commerce. Most of the larger urban centres like Thoubal, Churachandpur, Kakching, Moirang, Bishnupur etc. have developed as administrative headquarters, commercial centres and transport foci in the region. Other towns such as Nambol, Lilong, Wangoi, Mayang-Imphal, Yairipok, Wangjing, Sikhong-Sekmai, Sugnou, Heirok, Ningthoukhong, Kumbi, Oinam, Kwakta, Moreh, Kakching-Khunou, Samurou, Thongkhong Laxmi Bazar, Lamjao Tongba, Andro, Lamsang, Sekmai and Lamlai are market towns at the junctions of transport routes that serve the surrounding villages of the respective towns.
VI. TRIPURA REGION:

Unlike the other sub-regions of N.E. India, Tripura region comprises 18 (eighteen) urban centres, five of them, namely Agartala (1,57,358), Teliamura (27,663), Badarghat (35,082), Jogendra-Nagar (26,961) and Dharmanagar (25,898), having population of over 25,000 each. This has not only raised the proportion of urban population in the area but has also added substantially to the general density of the region.

The urban settlements in Tripura are distributed far apart from one another in the midst of rural settlements and they act as nerve centres for the variety of essential functions of the surrounding region.

There is only one city, Agartala (1,57,636) in the region, of over 1,00,000 population which accounts for about 37.63% of the total urban population of the whole State. There are only 4 (four) class III towns having over 20,000 population and they are Badarghat, Teliamura, Jogendranagar and Dharmanagar. 7 towns viz, Khowai (12,553), Barjala (14,583), Pratapgarh (13,881), Kailashahar (16,166), Kumarghat (14,640), Udaipur (18,222) and Belonia (13,288) are of class IV category having
over 10,000 population which constitute about 24.66% of the urban population of the region. The remaining 5 towns - Sonamura, Singerbil, Gandhigram, Kamalpur and Sobroom account for about 10.12% of the total urban population. Thus, the region has 15.30% of its population in urban settlements of varying sizes ranging from less than 5,000 persons to over 1,000,000 or more.

Because of better facilities, the west Tripura District is more urbanised than the North and South Districts. South Tripura with an urban population of 44,801 (distributed in four towns), is the least urbanised district of the State. This urban population pattern of the region is, however, the result of a growing tendency towards urbanization of population almost from the beginning of the century.

VII. MIZORAM:

As per 1991 Census, Mizoram is the most urbanised state (46.10%) among the seven States of the region. Due to the recent growth of economic developments, there has been in Aizwal District a series of towns like Aizwal, Champhai, Serchhip, Kolasib, Seiutal, Khawzawl, Vairengte,
North Kamnpuri, Thouzawl, Darlawn, Mamit, Sairang, Zawlnu North Vanlaiphi, Bairabi, Baite, Kwahai and Lengpui. Thus, 18 out of 22 towns of the region are concentrated in this district alone. Of the remaining 4,3 towns are in Lunglei District and 1 (one) is in Chhimtuipui District. Almost all the towns in this State grew up during the modern period. In between 1981-91 urban growth has been steady. The decades of 1961-71 and 1971-81 have recorded an increase in the number of towns, from 2 in 1971 to 6 in 1981 and again 22 in 1991. Rugged topography and lack of industrial development have prevented the growth of towns in some tahsils of this hill state. Other towns are located over the level peneplains at the convergence points of roads and function as administrative centres to which commercial and industrial functions have gradually been added. Aizawl, Lunglei and Saiha are the examples of district headquarters towns. In future, there is likelihood of most spectacular growth of towns in this hill state as is evident from recent trends. The highest percentage of increase in urban population during 1981-91 in the whole of the N.E. India has been recorded in this sector.
The study of inter-urban densities reveals the relative congestion of population in the urban centres. However, the study may have certain limitations because of the fact that in most of the cases the boundaries of the urban centres are not drawn on the basis of uniform criteria. The built-up area of the urban centres may not have any relation to the municipal boundary. Factors like gerrymandering, tradition bound attitudes, political manipulations play a considerable role in fixing the corporate boundary of the urban areas. Absence of scientific and rational basis in fixing the municipal limits unduly influence the size of the towns making them "over-bound" or "under-bound".  

A considerable difference is usually found between the boundaries of a geographic town and corporate town. Since the urban-density figures given in the census reports are for the corporate towns the variation of urban population densities amongst the taluks, does not

provide a meaningful criterion for the understanding of the distributional aspects of urbanism in a region. Figures pertaining to population for the urban centres of the region given in Appendix - II will make the above statement more explicit.
DISTRIBUTION OF STANDARD URBAN AREAS:

The concept of potentially 'urbanisable areas' is very useful in urban studies. It enables us to identify the areas that would soon get urbanized and profoundly influence the surrounding rural areas, and such a concept will be of immense use in regional planning. It is in this context that the Census Organisation of India had introduced the concept of 'Urban Agglomeration' in place of the earlier concept of 'Town group'. As an 'urban agglomeration' should record a contiguous growth, very few (compared to the total number of urban settlements) towns in India would be classified as urban agglomerations. As a logical consequence, for the first time in 1971, the concept of 'Standard Urban Areas' was introduced by the Indian census and the criteria selected for the purpose of locating such areas are as follows:

i) Predominant urban land use;

ii) Intensive interaction with the urban centres as reflected in commutation for the purpose of work and secondary education facilities;
extension of city bus service, sale of commodities like milk, dairy products, vegetables (other than those transported by rail or truck load) and purchase of food-grains, cloth and general provisions etc., by the consumers directly;

iii) Anticipated urban growth as a result of locational decisions relating to industry, market, transport, and communication, administrative and servicing functions;

iv) Existence of big villages with a large proportion of working force engaged in non-agricultural industrial categories.

The advantage of identifying the standard urban areas are many. However, the important feature is that the boundary of 'standard urban area' remains the same (since the census organisation has decided not to change the boundary at least for a period of three decades) though the boundaries of statutory towns are changed from time to time. The availability of
comparable data which is thus possible, will be of immense help in the studies related to urban spread, growth and planning. It is important to note that standard urban areas unlike urban agglomerations include both rural and urban components.

In all there are eight Standard Urban Areas in the region of which four are in Assam while the remaining four are scattered, one each in Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura. (Fig. 1.7)

In terms of population the largest Standard Urban Area in the region is Guwahati with a population of about 5,84,342 and the smallest is Jorhat with a population of about 1,12,030 only. It is interesting to note that all the standard Urban Areas of the region except Shillong and Aizwal are located in the valley areas.

**VARIATION IN THE DISTRIBUTIONAL ASPECTS OF URBANISM BETWEEN 1981-91:**

Urban geography deals with the spatial aspects of urban development. As already mentioned, it is not easy to distinguish between urbanism and urbanization, and in a broader context the meaning of the two terms becomes
rather hazy. The dynamics of urbanism is reflected in its spatial and temporal variations and studies concerned with such aspects are of paramount importance in the field of urban geography.

A note on the changing definition for the term 'urban' in India is already made. It is relevant to point out here that the definition for 'urban' in the 1981 and 1991 census have remained unchanged and hence the data given for the urban areas are comparable (Table 4.1). It is to be noted that between 1981 and 1991 it is not only the urban population which has grown of urban population in isolation is considered, a correct picture of change in urbanism may not be obtained. Hence, the degree of urbanism of different states for 1991 is also computed and the state wise changes during the period 1981-91 are brought to light. (Fig. 2.1 ) Similarly the changes of urban-rural population ratio during the same period are explained (Table 4.1).

It is interesting to note that most of the seven States of the region have improved their urban status. The States that have improved their urbanism to a considerable extent are Mizoram (46.10%), Manipur (27.52%), Meghalaya (18.60%) and Nagaland (17.21%).
These four States, had 68 towns in 1991 against 52 towns in 1981 and as such values pertaining the difference in Degree of Urbanism is relatively high. Among the remaining states which had improved their urbanism, Assam has the highest figure (87 towns in 1991 against 77 in 1981), followed by Tripura (18 towns in 1991 as against 10 towns in 1981).

CONCLUSION:

A study of the distributional pattern of urban centres in North-Eastern India has revealed that most of them are located along the sides of the main river or main road of the region. The large size cities and towns have emerged as administrative headquarters, commercial centres and transport focii in the region.

Several urban criteria employed in the present study have clearly brought out the salient distributional aspects of urbanism in the region. Since the region is heterogeneous in character, several inter-regional diversities in the distribution of urbanism are seen. The large urban centres do not find a concentrated distribution in the region. They are scattered and this has affected the distributional pattern or urbanism in
the region to a considerable extent. The distance of separation, between the class-I urban centres are considerable. The two nearest class I urban centres are Guwahati and Shillong (101 Km. or 65 miles).

In addition to the physical, economic and social factors, the historical factors also have influenced the distributional pattern of urbanism, though its influence does not seem to be profound.

The Brahmaputra valley is a region of plenty with its agricultural forests and hydro-power resources and cheap long route transportation but the recurrence of annual flood havoc because of the nature of the terrain pose serious threat to agricultural crops, settlements, transport and communication system. The vast and varied forest resources especially in the hill states like Manipur, Nagaland and Mizoram are not extensively explored and tapped though potentially most important for the emergence of growth centres. The region thus, awaits not only development of means of transportation, forest based-industrial development and afforestation
schemes but also measures for eradication of malaria and other diseases. The transportational isolation of physico-cultural diversities, lack of encouragement for any outside capital investment on industrial output are the hindrances in the development of urbanization of the region.