The preceding analysis, based primarily on the mapping and statistical treatment of data for all the decennial census counts from 1901 to 1971, exposed the various facets of Indian urbanisation. The spatial picture of urbanisation was found as a mosaic of patterns emerging under three historical settings - the pre-British, colonial and post-Independence. The history of urbanisation in the Indian subcontinent goes back to about 2500 B.C. when a number of urban communities were flourishing in the Indus valley. The Aryans, on their first arrival around 1400 B.C., are said to have destroyed many of the then existing towns and there was a little trace of city life in the early Vedic age. Soon the Aryans settled down in village communities many of which eventually grew into urban. Towns showed a concentration in the Sarasvati-Yamuna divide located to the east of the Indus valley. Urbanisation diffused further east with the movement of the Aryans in the same direction. Several urban places had emerged at least up to the Middle Ganga plain by the close of the Vedic age around sixth century B.C. South India was yet to experience urbanisation; it was a post-600 B.C. affair in all probability. Within south India, the deltas of Kaveri, Godavari-Krishna and Mahanadi were the first to witness urbanisation making the eastern coast of India more urbanised than its western counterpart.
Subsequently, periods of spurts in urbanisation alternated with those of stagnation depending upon conditions of political stability, agricultural prosperity, industrial production, trade and religion. The rise and spread of Buddhism was associated with the birth of many monastery towns and other religious places related to the life of Buddha. Towns multiplied rapidly during the reign of Maurayas (from 4th to 2nd century B.C.) and Guptas (4th and 5th centuries A.D.) when there was an all-round progress under stable political conditions. A phase of urban stagnation followed the fall of Gupta empire. The reactivation of urbanisation had to wait till about 1000 A.D. when several Rajput kingdoms took form, especially in western India.

The supremacy of Rajputs declined with coming of the Muslim Sultans in power at Delhi in 1206. The political consolidation of the country under the Muslims and later under the Mughals led to a considerable revival of the country's economic life. Many new towns appeared as administrative, defence and trade centres. The glory and grandeur of the imperial cities was unmatched. The Muslim and Mughal rule was distinctly urban biased which favoured urban growth. In spatial terms, northern India was more urbanised than other parts of the country. In the case of south India, frequency of towns was relatively high in the Vijayanagar and Bahmani empires with a long history of political peace and economic progress.
It was the western coast that was destined to experience quick urbanisation with arrival of the Europeans — the Portugese, the Dutch, the French and the British in that order, who came for trade but gradually established their colonies. The British ultimately succeeded in building a big empire. They were in firm control over most of India by the middle of nineteenth century. Territorial administration was reorganised on systematic lines. Industrialisation in the modern sense of the term came to India near this very time. The first railways were also laid in the early years of the second half of the nineteenth century. Agriculture got special attention in cotton, jute and wheat areas to increase the production of these export commodities. Tea plantations were also established. All this gave a new impetus to the growth of administrative, industrial, transport, trade and port towns. Such developments practically bypassed the erstwhile princely states as a result of which the level of urbanisation remained very low in most of them. The British also founded nearly a hundred hill stations in different parts of India — a transplantation of the British urban culture on the Indian ridges with an elevation of around two thousand metres. None the less, the new industrial and trade activity concentrated largely in the three port cities of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras in conformity with the colonial nature of urbanisation.
Despite a long history of urbanisation and in spite of some vital developments since the middle of the nineteenth century, India entered the twentieth century with a small base of urbanisation. Hardly one-tenth of its population was urban. Nine out of every ten towns were smaller than 20,000 in population. Calcutta was the only 'million' city. Towns showed contrasting distribution patterns that found their explanations in historical, economic and cultural factors operating in the framework of physical setting of different areas. Their concentration was relatively high in the northern plain, parts of western and southern India and the two coastal plains. They were few and far between in the Himalayas, northeastern peninsula and the Rajasthan desert where extensive tracts were rather without any urban settlement.

The first two decades of the present century were marked by a process of sluggish urbanisation. There was only a nominal increase in urban population. About a half of the towns suffered a decrease in their population. This was the result of frequent epidemics of plague, cholera, malaria, small pox and influenza that not only took a toll of millions of human lives but also disrupted the economic life of urban and rural areas alike. The decline in India's exports of cotton, leather, sugar and coffee in the face of growing international competition was also responsible for arresting the growth of many a market, manufacturing and port town. In some local areas, such as newly irrigated tracts in the Punjab
and Godavari-Krishna delta, mining pockets in central India, and industrial districts in West Bengal and Maharashtra, urban growth took place under favourable economic conditions. Nevertheless regional variations in urbanisation were determined largely by differences in mortality rates associated with varying intensity of epidemics. The vast canvas of India portrayed a picture of slow urban growth in general sprinkled by pockets of relatively fast urban growth. Growth rate of towns was independent of their size.

The period 1921-1941 made a distinct departure from the previous trend. A reversal to fast urban growth during this period was due partly to a continuous rise in the rate of natural increase and partly to the growing volume of rural-urban migration. The rise in natural increase rate was attributed to a substantial decline in death rate with gradual control over epidemics. Rural-urban migration was induced by availability of employment opportunities in the prominent industrial and administrative centres and was impelled by large scale unemployment in rural areas consequent upon economic depression of late twenties and early thirties. The depression was more hard on agriculture in the Indian context. The adoption of a protectionist policy toward native industry in 1923 and the beginning of World War II in 1939 were crucial in giving a spur to industrialisation. There was rather some dispersal of industrial activity favoured by extension of railway network in general and by advancements in agriculture and mining in local
areas. The pace of resultant urbanisation was particularly fast in the cotton producing areas of Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu where textiles industry made a headway, in the princely states of Hyderabad and Travancore where new developments in irrigation, railways and industries broke the stagnation of economy, and in parts of the Chota Nagpur plateau and central India where mining and mineral-based industries experienced a spurt. An overwhelming majority of towns recorded positive growth. The relationship between size and growth rate of towns was getting crystallised with class I towns growing the fastest, class II and class III towns recording moderate growth rates, and small towns showing the lowest rates of growth. Big industrial concentrations were distinguished by their explosive growth.

1941-1951 was an eventful decade in the recent history of urbanisation in India. The conditions prevailing during the World War II, at the time of the partition of the subcontinent in 1947, and immediately after it were favourable to rapid urbanisation. The enhanced rural-urban migration associated with rapid industrialization during the War and the influx of displaced persons from the erstwhile Pakistan at the time of partition were the major determinants of urban growth. The growth rate of urban population during 1941-1951 was the highest for any decade during the entire span of the present century. Most of the towns recorded positive growth and there was a distinct relationship between the size and growth rate of towns.
The urbanisation process was conspicuously faster in south India than in north India. Within south India, rapid urban growth was marked in the industrial regions, plantation areas, and newly reclaimed agricultural lands. Town growth in north India was mainly a function of the balance between the Muslim exodus and the non-Muslim influx. Thus, the role of economic factors was dominant in south Indian urbanisation while the political situation was the chief determinant of urbanisation in north India.

The post-Independence period displayed new trends in urbanisation. Despite an accelerating rate of natural increase, the process of urbanisation slackened during 1951-1961. This was intriguing, particularly in the context of vigorous efforts by the government for economic development of the country under the five year plans. Sizeable economic migration within rural areas at the cost of rural-urban migration explained this peculiar situation. New employment opportunities generated by several rural development schemes, such as reclamation of culturable wastelands, irrigation and road construction, diverted a part of the potential rural to urban migration. Rural-urban migration was moderated also by a growing tendency toward commuting and increasing supply of locally born labour in urban places. Among different parts of India, the northeastern zone comprising of the states of Assam, West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, and the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh recorded rapid urban growth, thanks to the various industrial, mining and river valley projects started with liberal financial assistance from the central government. Urban growth was rapid also in prominent industrial
regions, such as Bombay-Ahmadabad, Madras-Salem-Coimbatore, and Delhi along with its peripheral zone. The areas of agricultural colonisation were the scene of new urbanisation. One of the redeeming features of the 1951-1961 decade was a relatively fast growth of medium sized towns, in addition to that of cities, as a result of a gain in their industrial and service activity under the new public policy.

The process of urbanisation geared up during 1961-1971. An increase in the volume of rural to urban migration in conjunction with a continuing rise in the rate of natural increase explained this. Rapid urban growth was typical of resource rich northeastern peninsula with several new mineral-based industries, of newly reclaimed agricultural lands (such as terai of Uttar Pradesh, Dandakaranya in northeastern peninsula, Chambal basin in Rajasthan, Bhakra canals command areas in southern Punjab, northern Haryana and northwestern Rajasthan, Malnad in Karnataka and Wynad in Kerala) with increased market activity and agro-based industrialization, and of new mining areas in south Bihar, western Orissa and eastern Madhya Pradesh. Most of the metropolitan cities and their peripheral areas exhibited explosive growth. Sluggish urban growth persisted in economically stagnant parts of the Ganga plain, Rajasthan desert and the Himalayas in general. Interestingly, most of the areas with commercial agriculture recorded slow urban growth. It was the outcome of decentralization of urban functions to rural areas manifest in the emergence of numerous rural service centres that captured parts of the umlands of the existing towns. The previous
trend of fast growth of cities at the expense of small towns accentuated with increased volume of urban to urban migration. Small towns stagnated because of competition not only from cities but also from newly emerged rural service centres. The fast growth of medium sized towns was a continuation of a trend established during the previous decade.

It follows that the differences in the growth rate of towns belonging to different size categories were the minimum when the urban process was determined primarily by the rate of natural increase as during the first two decades. These differences gradually crystallized with the role of rural-urban migration becoming prominent as during 1921-1951. The contrast between the explosive growth of cities and stagnation of small towns persisted during the post-1951 period but the gap in the growth rates of large and medium sized towns narrowed considerably. Differences in growth rates of towns belonging to various size categories were the greatest in areas with subsistence agricultural economy, insignificant in newly developing areas, and moderate in relatively developed areas.

A statistical analysis of the 1961-1971 census data revealed that growth rate of towns was related positively to their size, administrative status, and rail as well as road accessibility. The size-growth rate curve was gently ascending and there was no sharp break in the town-size after which growth rate jumped abruptly. A positive relationship was found also with percentage of workers in manufacturing, construction,
mining and services, and a negative one with percentage of workers in agriculture, household industries and trade and commerce. Rather the role of services, transport and construction was found more critical than that of manufacturing in promoting urbanisation.

Contrary to general impression, agricultural productivity and urban growth were found as related negatively with each other. This was due firstly to considerable industrial - urban development in mineral rich but agriculturally poor areas, and secondly to sizeable out-migration (both urban and rural) from several agriculturally productive but densely populated regions with subsistence agricultural economy. A negative relationship between degree and rate of urbanisation confirmed the recent decentralisation of urbanisation.

The most striking difference in the pre- and post-Independence urbanisation was in terms of its spatial expression. The colonial urbanisation tended to concentrate in a few big cities or some local areas with commercial agriculture, plantations and mining. Cities of colonial setting were the principal port, industrial, and administrative centres that grew rapidly. The Indian experience after Independence was certainly one of diffusion of urbanisation. Initiation of developmental activities by the government, especially in backward areas, introduced modern urbanisation even in tribal regions. The autonomous economic forces continued favouring the explosive growth of big cities. Urban to urban migration became a more pronounced feature of Indian urbanisation after Independence.
India shared many of the attributes of urbanisation experience of other developing countries. The low proportion of urban population in the total (nearly one-fifth in 1971), the concentration of urban population in a small number of big urban places, contrast between explosion of cities and stagnation of small towns, increasing proportion of locally born urban population, dominance of tertiary sector in urban employment, and subsistence nature of urbanisation produced more by rural push than by urban pull were common to India as well. But unlike most of the other developing countries, India did not witness the emergence of a single primate city; rather its urban structure had a multi-metropolitan apex. The urban shadow effect of metropolitan cities was also not evident as towns in their proximity grew fast. The recent tendency toward decentralization of urbanisation highlighted the role of public policy and investment in remodeling the spatial structure of urbanisation.

Identification of urban systems in India is suggested as one of the prospective fields of research. This amounts to regionalisation of the country on the basis of functional links of the towns/urban agglomerations with each other. Under such a scheme, each region would have a dominant city with a hierarchy of lower order urban places in the zone of its influence. This task can be accomplished by approaching the problem from both macro- and micro-levels. Macro-urban systems at the national level may be discerned by application of quantitative techniques.
like population potential, rank-size rule and network analysis. Micro-urban systems at the local level may be discovered with the help of field work. The persistent stagnation of small towns is another field of fruitful investigation. A mere probe into the causes of their sluggish growth is not enough; measures for stimulating their functional vitality are to be explored as well. There is a case also for detailed studies relating to impact of the recent green revolution on urbanisation in the agriculturally progressive regions, of the international border on urban growth in the frontier areas, and of metropolitan cities on the expansion of towns in their peripheral zones. Spatial variations in these respects would be of special interest to geographers.