With one-seventh of the world's population to its credit, India had the potential for emerging a strong political and economic power to reckon with. However, the typical distributional pattern of its population, continued explosive growth rate of its population, slow pace of its literacy transition, slow pace of its socio-economic transformation and continued overwhelming dominance of agricultural occupations, low degree of urbanisation, continued vertical inequalities in various segments of its society, continued imbalance in its sex composition and discrimination against females in matters of education, mobility and employment, and its poor score card on the socio-political and demographic fronts were some of the features of Indian demographic processes that may have been responsible for the country's continued socio-economic backwardness. Although it may not be possible to establish one-to-one cause and effect relationship, yet the country's prevailing socio-economic-political milieu has to be taken into account for comprehending the processes of its demographic change.

The distribution of country's three-fourths population in over half a million villages of varying size; extremely skewed distribution of country's urban population — about 200 class I towns claiming over 60 per cent of the
country's total urban population and leaving less than 40 per cent for the remaining 3000 towns; concentration of Christian tribal population in the north-eastern states; concentration of non-Christian tribal population in the traditional tribal belt of central India; concentration of religious minorities in the sensitive peripheral land border locations; and an uneven pattern of population concentration in general — crowded Indo-Gangetic plain and coastal areas contrasting with the vast interior, were some of the typical features of the country's distributional pattern of population that have continued as such for centuries. The decade 1971-81 too could not effect any significant change in this demographic scenario of the country.

However, such post-Independence developments as reclamation of wastelands, development of irrigation, rural electrification, road construction, installation of basic industries in backward areas etc. did introduce an element of change in the supporting capacity of some of the areas in the country. Consequently, some redistributational tendencies, though not on an impressive scale, in the pattern of population concentration were observed by the present study.

However, since agriculture continued to be the mainstay of India's economy and the urban-industrial development continued to be confined to a few selected regions, the dominance of factors that promoted good agriculture in determining the pattern of change in density remained...
undisputed. No wonder, the areas with low increase in density were those which suffered from serious physiographic handicaps such as difficult terrain, severe climate, limited availability of good agricultural land, backward socio-economic background etc.

One of the major areas of concern on the country's demographic front was the continued explosive rate of growth of its population. The decade 1971-81 turned out to be most notorious with highest rate of population growth ever since the beginning of the present century. Although the process of demographic transformation in the country began in the early decades of the present century, yet the country was far from having attained the final stage of demographic transition. While the mortality in India started declining in early twenties, the initiation of fertility decline came as late as early seventies. A long time span, indeed, between mortality and fertility declines. An accelerated rate of fertility decline holds the key to India's demographic transformation.

Broadly speaking, there was a negative correlation between density of population and the rate of population growth during 1971-81. Generally, the areas of rapid growth of population were those which experienced large scale in-migration, associated with reclamation of wastelands, extension of irrigation, intensification and commercialisation of agriculture, acceleration in mining and
trade and commerce activities, development of industries etc. By comparison, slow growth of population was recorded by the areas experiencing out-migration due to severe population pressure and paucity of local resources. The role of declining trend in the rate of natural increase was confined to limited areas only.

The spatial mobility patterns in the country do not seem to have undergone any significant modification in terms of both direction and magnitude. The areas of chronic population pressure continue to experience out-migration, while in-migration was typical of the areas which had registered a spurt in the demand for agricultural labour as a consequence of Green Revolution, or where new agricultural lands had been reclaimed or mining activity had been accelerated. The large scale out-migration notwithstanding, the pockets of chronic population pressure did not witness any significant improvement in their population-resource nexus. Thus, the continuing out-migration from these backward areas failed to provide any relief to them. It signifies that out-migration was no solution. Instead, a substantial restructuring of the society and economy holds the key to mitigating the imbalances in population and resource distributions.

Migrations to urban destinations, in India, had comparatively greater element of economic motivation than the migration to rural destinations which were dominated by
socially-rooted marriage migration. Both the rural 'push' and the urban 'pull' in case of the former provided the economic motivation. Considered in this context, rural to urban migration formed an important segment of migrations in India. How far rural to urban migration was the manifestation of rural population explosion or a sad reflection of the backwardness of our rural economy was difficult to assert. The metropolitan cities were the chief recipients of the migrants to urban destinations. These migrants originated from both rural and urban areas alike. The unprecedented growth of urban slums and deterioration in the quality of urban life indicated the incapability of our metropolitan cities to provide full employment to these migrants. How far is it advisable to permit the continuation of such metropolitan based urbanisation may be a difficult question to answer. Diffusion of industries to district headquarters perhaps can effect the desired change in the direction and magnitude of migration in India.

One of the characteristic features of Indian demography referred to above was that of mass illiteracy. It was to be understood in the context of prevailing socio-economic milieu consisting of general poverty, primarily agricultural economy, high cost of education, limited facilities for getting education, deep-rooted caste structure, feudalistic attitude and little development of...
secondary sector of economy. Thus, accelerated diversification of economy, shedding away of our caste and sex prejudices and attitudinal change together hold the key to our social progress.

The Indian illiteracy scene was also characterised by sharp vertical inequalities where the females lag far behind the males and so do the scheduled castes and the rural population in comparison to their counterparts. Though the socio-economic background may explain, to a large extent, such vertical inequalities, yet the attitudinal factors have the over-riding effect.

In spatial terms, peninsular India was more literate than north India. Within peninsular India, Western coast was more literate than the eastern coast and within north India, Punjab plains in the northwest and the north-eastern states in the northeast constituted the two nodes of high literacy which contrasted with the rest of north India displaying low literacy. The areas of high literacy were those which had: (i) a long history of exposure to the outside world; (ii) a long history of Christian missionary activities; (iii) a tradition for service in the armed forces; (iv) a relatively high degree of urban industrial concentration; (v) a high degree of commercialisation of agriculture; (vi) a high proportion of Christian population; and (vii) a high budget allocation for education.

The decade 1971-81 could not claim much progress in
terms of literacy because the number of illiterates in the country increased by over 50 million during the decade. This was despite the fact that the decade added a large number of schools both in the rural and urban areas. Much of the gains on this front were, in fact, neutralised by very high rate of natural increase. Thanks to the explosive population growth in the country.

Broadly speaking, coastal areas, particularly along the western coast, and Christian dominated areas in the northeast recorded relatively high increase in literacy rates, while the Hindi-speaking belt in the north continued to present the most depressing picture vis-a-vis literacy transition. It may be of specific interest to note that the female literacy remained almost stagnant at an extremely low level in north India during the decade. It was an area of major concern for our policymakers.

In a country with a demographic scenario of explosive population growth, large proportion of population below the age of 15, mass illiteracy and prejudices against females' mobility, education, employment etc., high dependency ratio was inevitable. No wonder, only one out of every three persons in India was working.

Not only that, the industrial structure of the country still continued to be overwhelmingly dominated by agricultural occupations. Two out of every three workers were
still engaged in agricultural pursuits. Spatially also, cultivation or agricultural labour was the most prominent occupation in a vast majority of districts of the country. While on the one hand, it establishes the continuing primacy of agriculture in the country, on the other hand, it exposes the incapability of our industrial base, to create enough employment opportunities and to initiate a process of industrial diversification on a large scale.

The country displayed only a low increase of change in its industrial structure during 1971-81. It further corroborated the lack of infrastructure required for a breakthrough in the diversification process. How far the disproportionate growth of tertiary sector in comparison to the secondary sector was responsible for such a situation, was difficult to comment. It offers an area of future research. During the decade, high index of change was, however, experienced by the areas with high degree of urbanisation, abundant variety of resources and sensitive border location. By comparison, low index of change was recorded by the areas of backward, stagnant, agricultural economy; low degree of industrial development; and agriculture-related developments.

As pointed out earlier, India still continued to be one of the poorly urbanised countries of the world, unprecedented growth of urban population during 1971-81 notwithstanding. The rate of urban growth which reached its
peak during the decade under review had, in fact, started picking up since 1931, partly due to the increasing rate of natural increase and partly due to the increasing magnitude of rural to urban migration. Although the rural 'push' had always existed in India, yet the urban 'pull' started emerging since 1931. That is why, the year 1931 has been designated as a significant demographic divide vis-a-vis urbanisation.

Some of the typical features of urbanisation process in the country during 1971-81 were: (i) unprecedented rate of urban growth; (ii) high growth rate of medium-sized towns, such as district headquarters; and (iii) narrowing down of regional inequalities in the degree of urbanisation.

Spatially, the high urban growth was typical of backward areas with rich resource potential, Green Revolution areas, centrally administered union territories and areas located in the proximity of metropolitan cities. By comparison, slow urban growth was confined to the areas where the poor local resource base had been the chief impediment in the region's socio-economic development.

Finally, a word about the demographic situation in India as revealed by the latest census of 1991. The Indian demographic scene seems to be getting ready for a significant breakthrough. Although, the country continued to be in the explosive stage of demographic growth, yet the
trends in fertility and mortality for the country as a whole, as also for its large parts, indicate that the country had attained the take-off stage. A faster decline in its fertility in comparison to that in its mortality; a significant improvement in the life expectancy at birth of the females in comparison to that of the males; a significant improvement in the literacy rates of males and females, rural areas and urban areas alike; and a conspicuous fall in the growth rate of urban population during 1981-91, all point to the direction in which the demographic situation in the country was moving. It may not be risky to suggest that the country had reached the threshold where a little more effort could promise rich dividends. It would be in the fitness of things to recommend that the Eighth Five Year Plan, being prepared these days, must grant the population control programmes the first priority with a view to providing the desired stimulus at the threshold stage.