



Socio-Economic Character Of An Industrial Town: A Case Study Of Haora (Mc)

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Abstract

The present pattern of urbanization in West Bengal is highly concentrated and it is based on industrialization. A large number of urban populations of the state is concentrated in the industrial towns. Industrial towns play dominant role in the urban West Bengal. In the course of urbanization, industrial towns tend to exhibit a set of socio-economic characters by which these towns can be distinguished from the non-industrial towns in the state. The present research attempts to study the socio-economic characters of Haora town.

Key Words: Socio-Economic Characters, Industrial town, Haora

Introduction:

The present pattern of urbanisation in West Bengal is highly centralised and it is based on industrialisation. A large number of urban populations of this state is concentrated in the industrial towns. Industrial towns play a dominant role in urban West Bengal. In the course of urbanisation industrial towns tend to exhibit a set of socio-economic characteristics by which these towns can be distinguished from the non-industrial towns in the state.

The absolute number of population in the industrial towns shows a rising trend over a long period of time.² However, the rate of growth of population of these towns is fluctuating. In the initial stage of growth population grows at high speed and the population growth rate slows down drastically as the economy moves towards a more advanced stage of growth. However, this is not always general rules in the case of Indian towns.

The growth of population has a strong influence on the sex-ratio and the dependency ratio of a town. Both of these two ratios are very low when population grows rapidly. More interesting is that these two ratios have been rising continuously with the demographic growth of the industrial towns.

The work participation rate is low in the industrial towns. This implies high burden of

² See Table 1 and Table 2.

unproductive consumers in these towns.³ The occupation structure of the industrial towns is highly male dominated. The distribution of labour force among the main economic activities is unequal. What is more interesting is that the occupational imbalance has been falling. Besides this, industrial towns show a tendency towards tertiarisation of the occupation structure.⁴

Industrial towns are the core urban units in which most of the district urban population concentrates. However, such urban concentration gradually falls with the expansion of the peripheral urban area. As a result, the surrounding urban region, especially the suburban fringe grows at a higher rate than the town itself.⁵

Another noticeable social character of industrial town is that the literacy rate is high compared to other non-industrial towns.

The present paper attempts to test the validity of these socio-economic characteristics in the case of Haora town. The methodology of this paper is mainly the simple analysis of the relevant data collected from the Census Report of India., though in some situations very simple statistical techniques have been used.

Socio-economic characters of Haora

Population growth:

In Haora town, the size of population is very high and the absolute number of population has been continuously rising since 1941. The decadal growth rate of population has been fluctuating and gradually declining. The decadal growth rate of population was abnormally high at 68.67% in 1941 and fell to 0.89% in 1981. This demographic trend supports our said hypothesis that the growth rate of population has been slowing down as the town moves from less advanced to more advanced stage of growth.

One could find a rigorous explanation of such demographic trends in the size of economic activity of the Haora town. In the initial stage of growth economic activity was expanding rapidly in this town and thus attracted a large number of migrants in this town. The high speed of migration raised the growth rate of population in Haora. On the other hand, as the town reached the mature stage of growth the economic activity was not expanding at the rate required to absorb the rising population of the town. The saturation of the employment generating sector reduced the inflow of migrants and thus reduced the growth rate of population drastically.

In the early stage of urbanisation in the state the number of towns particularly industrial towns was very small. In this period the choice of the migrants was restricted to these few towns. Thus, the movement of the people concentrated in these towns and the town population increased at a very high rate. As time passes many new towns emerged in Haora District. The new towns attracted a large number of migrants due to their expanding economic activities. Thus, the rate of immigration to this town declined and this reduced the population growth rate in Haora town.

In the early stage natural growth rate was very high due to illiteracy, poverty, superstition etc. At the more advanced stage, natural growth rate fell due to various govt. programmes like Family Planning Programme, Poverty Alleviation Programme, and Illiteracy Eradication Programme etc. Thus, the fluctuation in the natural rate of growth is also responsible for the decadal variation in the growth rate of population in Haora town.

³ See Table 3.

⁴ See Table 4.

⁵ See Table 5.

Sex-Ratio:

Table 4 shows that In 1941, the sex ratio in Haora (M.C.) was very low at 536 and it rose to 766 in 1981. So, the sex ratio has been rising over time in Haora town. Initially, a large number of town people was male migrants who came alone in this town for getting jobs. Hence, the number of males was much higher than females. However, the original male migrants in the latter period married or brought their families at the destination when they became established financially in this town. As a result, the number of female rose and caused the sex ratio to rise.

Moreover, in the initial period the tertiary sector was very small. Thus, the scope of female employment was much lower in this town and hence the sex ratio was very low. In the mature stage tertiary sector has been expanding rapidly and this opened up the scope of female employment. As a result many female came to this town from other areas in order to get jobs at the destination. The inflow of female jobseekers raised the sex ratio in Haora town in the latter stage. The rising sex-ratio in Haora town implies that the number of dependants has been rising.

Work Participation Rate:

In 1981, less than one-third of the total population of Haora town was workers. The work participation rate was 30.63%. Though this figure was good when compared to the non-industrial towns, still this was worse from the stand point of the level of employment in this town. The reasons for this low work participation rate may be due to the following reasons: firstly, industries did not grow at the rate required to absorb the expanding population of this town. Thus, potential workers became unemployed and caused the work participation rate to fall; secondly, sex-ratio has been rising, indicating the increasing number of females in this town, but the scope of employment of these females was very restricted due to the urban character of the occupation structure and the high participation of female in the house work which were not taken into account in the Census definition of productive work. The high value of unemployed females was responsible for low work participation rate in Haora town. Finally, many people usually came to work in this town from the nearer villages due to the improved rail-road linkages. Thus, the job created within the town was shared by the people living outside the town. This was also partly responsible for the low work participation rate in Haora town.

Occupation:

In 1981, of total labour force in Haora town 95.86% were male and only 4.14% were female. This implies highly male dominated occupation structure in this town. Since agriculture is not an activity within a town we can disregard agricultural sector from our discussion. To show the distribution of non-agricultural labour force among the manufacturing, trade and transport, Service sector Sherry and Dutta's study regarding the functional shifts of towns in India has been used. Their study reveals that in 1981 of total non-agricultural workers in Haora town 51% was in manufacturing sector, 30% in Trade and Transport Sector and 19% in Service Sector. In 1971, the corresponding figures were 49%, 39% and 13% respectively.

It is now clear that the occupation-wise distribution of non-agricultural labour force in Haora town was highly unbalanced.

To find out the degree of occupational diversity we have calculated the coefficient of variation of the three variables: percentage of non-agricultural workers in manufacturing sector, Trade and Transport sector and in Service sector. The C.V. was 39.81% in 1961, 45.18% in 1971. Thus, the occupational diversity has been rising rather than falling in Haora town over the period. The main reason is that Trade and Transport

sector was expanding while Service sector was contracting.

Table -8 shows that the percentage of non-agricultural workers in tertiary sector rose from 49 in 1961 to 51 in 1971. This implies that the tertiarisation process has been started in Haora town. This was due to the saturation of manufacturing sector and the improvement of the transport system which encouraged trade to a large extent.

However, the growth of the tertiary sector in Haora town does not imply the improvement of the structure of the economy. There has not occurred a growth of the secondary sector commensurate with the growth of the tertiary sector. One can find a rather disproportionate growth of the tertiary sector. Again, tertiary activities in this town involves various types of informal jobs where payment to labour is low and labour utilisation is also low.

Growth and Change in the Concentration of the District Urban Population in Haora:

In 1961 the percentage of district urban population in Haora town was 62.13 and fell to 55.60 in 1981. Thus, the town itself has been losing much of its importance in the district urban population distribution. At the same time the population of the urban area of Haora district has been growing continuously. Further, from 1951 urban population in Haora district has been growing at higher rate than the population of Haora town.

The reason of the above tendency is not far to seek. Firstly, Haora town did not attract a large number of migrants due to lack of concomitant growth of the main economic activity. This is quite clear from the falling work participation rate in the town. Secondly, , the number of town has been growing continuously in Haora district. Table-7 shows that the number of town in this district was 2 in 1941, 4 in 1951, 23 in 1961, 27 in 1971 and 35 in 1981. These new towns raised the peripheral urban population and thus reduced the pressure of population in the old town by inducing a large number of people to migrate to these new towns for getting jobs.

Literacy Rate:

The literacy rate for the urban West Bengal as a whole was 62.66% in 1981. This rate was 65.07% for Haora town which is higher than the state average. One could find an explanation behind this is that 80% of the males in Haora town was literate and 57% of total population was male. The female literacy rate was 57.45% in 1981. Our society has not yet developed so much that the social status of the females are treated equally to that of the males by the common people. In this male dominated society more males are likely to be literate than females.

The number of educated persons is large in the industrial town. These educated people influence even the non-educated people and illiterate parents to make their children literate. Thus, the demonstration effect is also responsible for present high literacy rate in Haora town. Moreover, the tight competition in the urban job market has changed the mental set up of the illiterate parents so that they afford to make their children literate first and then educate in the hope that their children would get jobs in future by which the present financial problems can be solved. The rising number of educational institutes and the rising propensity to literacy raised the literacy rate in Haora town above the state average.

Concluding Remarks:

From the above discussion it is clear that one of the most important problems facing Haora town is the high volume of unemployment. This has occurred due to non-commensurate growth of the industrial sector. The deceleration of Jute industry is highly responsible for such sluggish industrial growth in this town. Stagnation of Jute industry is mainly due to the demand constraint and poor technology. For this major

emphasis should be put on the technological development which would improve product quality and reduce cost of production.

Small and medium industries can provide ample scope of employment for female workers which raises work participation rate and reduce the burden of unproductive consumers. Hence, commensurate growth of small and medium industries is highly needed in Haora town.

It is perhaps very difficult to lower the number of dependents because of child and retired persons grow naturally. What is necessary is to improve the productivity of labour by which dependents can be sustained. Various training programmes and better working condition can be a panacea for this problem.

To reduce the overcrowding in the labour market one can advocate for the growth of the rural economy of the Haora district. Rural growth can widen the size of economic activity which can absorb rural people. Rural growth can also enhance industrial growth by providing raw materials and by creating market for industrial products. To encourage urban people to move into the rural sector and also to reduce the rate of migration the betterment of rural life is a good strategy for urban growth. Development and growth strategy should be directed towards the rural growth centres.

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Table—1:Growth of Population in Haora Town

Year	Population	% Variation
1941	379292	68.67
1951	433630	14.33
1961	542598	18.21
1971	737877	Bally was included in HMC
1981	744429	0.89

Source: Census of India1981.

Table ---2: Urban Population in Haora District

Year	Population	% Variation
1941	429689	68.36
1951	522320	21.56
1961	825092	57.97
1971	1013533	22.84
1981	1338793	32.09

Source: Same as Table 1

Table---3: % of Urban District Population in Haora Town

Year	%
1941	88.27
1951	83.02
1961	62.15
1971	72.80
1981	55.60

Source: Computed from Census of India, 1981

Table---4: Sex Ratio in Haora MC

Year	Sex Ratio
1941	536
1951	616
1961	630
1971	679
1981	766

Source: Census of India, 1981

Table---5: Number of Towns in Haora District

Year	Number of Towns
1941	2
1951	4
1961	23
1971	27
1981	35

Source: Census of India, 1981

Table---6: Occupational Distribution of Non-agricultural Workers (%) ,1961-1971

Year	Manufacturing Sector	Trade and Transport Sector	Service Sector
1961	51	30	19
1971	49	38	13

Source: Mitra, Sherry and Patel: Shift in the Functions of the Cities and Towns in India,1961-1971

Table---7: Coefficient of Variation of the % Distribution of Non-agricultural labourers

Year	C.V	
1961	39.81	
1971	45.18	

Source: Commuted from Table--6

