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## Political Economy of Urbanization in Himachal Pradesh – Aspirational politics

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### Abstract -

India is one of the most rapidly urbanizing countries in the world and this urbanization is mostly haphazard and has no holistic approach in terms of having a blueprint for its future. Hill states have their own unique problems despite the fact that urbanization has also flourished in these states. Urbanization in Himachal Pradesh has flourished due to various historical reasons .Shimla as the largest urban city has its start from colonial rule. It flourished after it became the Summer Capital of India. Dharamshala too has its Colonial past and establishment of Tibetan Exile Government. There are much older cities which were founded under the Rajput Dynasties like Mandi, Nahan , Chamba, Kullu, Bilaspur and Hamirpur. There are more ancient towns like Trigtha . Industrialization has also spurred urbanization in lower Himachal regions towns like BBN, Ponta, Kala Amb ,mehatpur has spurred up. Latest growth of urbanization is led by creation of district headquarters, tehsils and sub- tehsils or other way round designating smaller towns as the administrative units. There are presently 75tehsil and 34 sub-tehsils in Himachal Pradesh. These towns' especially the district headquarters and small administrative towns, represent great challenges and opportunities to transform the lives of their present and future residents. Main hypothesis of the authors is that there is a strong aspiration among the small town residents to transform their town into better urban centres of growth and this is being reflected in the politics of development. There is a possibility that investment in these smaller towns in terms of better facilities ( better bus stands, auditoriums , public toilets ,better connectivity with other towns , playgrounds ,decentralized sewerage facilities , supply of water and electricity) can transform millions of people's lives and lift them out of poverty. These towns are providing livelihood opportunities to both men and women crossing the caste and community barriers.

### Introduction-

India is one of the most rapidly urbanizing countries in the world and this urbanization is mostly haphazard and has no holistic approach in terms of having a blueprint for its future. Hill states have their own unique problems despite the fact that urbanization has also flourished in these states. Urbanization in Himachal Pradesh has flourished due to various historical reasons .Shimla as the largest urban city has its start from colonial rule. It flourished after it became the Summer Capital of India. Dharamshala too has its Colonial past and establishment of Tibetan Exile Government. There are much older cities which were founded under the

Rajput Dynasties like Mandi, Nahan , Chamba, Kullu, Bilaspur and Hamirpur. There are more ancient towns like Trigtha . Industrialization has also spurred urbanization in lower Himachal regions towns like BBN, Ponta, Kala Amb ,mehatpur has spurred up. Latest growth of urbanization is led by creation of district headquarters, tehsils and sub- tehsils or other way round designating smaller towns as the administrative units. There are presently 172tehsil and sub-tehsils in Himachal Pradesh. These towns' especially the district headquarters and small administrative towns, represent great challenges and opportunities to transform the lives of their present and future residents. Main hypothesis of the authors is that there is a strong aspiration among the small town residents to transform their town into better urban centers of growth and this is being reflected in the politics of development. There is a possibility that investment in these smaller towns in terms of better facilities ( better bus stands, auditoriums , public toilets ,better connectivity with other towns , playgrounds ,decentralized sewerage facilities , supply of water and electricity) can transform millions of people's lives and lift them out of poverty. These towns are providing livelihood opportunities to both men and women crossing the caste and community barriers.

### **Flaws in the Policy making and implementation on Urbanization-**

Presently half of the urbanization in India is coming from small and medium cities and towns but academically and from the level of policy formulation this fact is not properly recognized. Over the years the idea of urbanization has been fixed around the metropolitan areas and cities in India. But small towns and Medium cities are also contributing a lot in the process of urbanization and they have benefited millions of people in terms of livelihood promotion. They have emerged as convergence zones where villages and metropolitan culture meet to exchange products. There is the need to create awareness regarding this less focused aspect of urbanization. The Urban India Research Facility is working to study and analyze the impact of such urbanization in India. Urban India Research Facility (UIRF) has been working with the mandate to promote interdisciplinary research on the issues of small and medium towns in India. They have reached the conclusion that predominantly India's vision of urbanization is reduced to metropolization and competition between global cities. They aim to challenge the usual approach that tends to consider the urban world only through the large cities rather than small towns.

The Census of India defines a place as urban if a ) it has been according the official status of an urban area and thus has an elected urban local body ( Statutory towns) ,or b) if it as an area having a population of more than 5000 population , where more than 75 per of male main workers are engaged in non-agricultural activities , and density is greater than 400 persons per sq.km ( Census Towns). Based on the size of population urban areas are either classified as cities (100,000 or more) , medium towns ( 20,000 to 99,000) and small towns ( from 5,000 to 1999) smaller settlements with the designation of 2,532 new Census towns ( based on 2001 active population results).<sup>1</sup>

This article also tried to touch on the same point that the question of urbanization in the Himachal politics and policy planning has been focusing primarily on the bigger towns only. Smaller towns and census towns have not been included in the formal policy of urban infrastructure promotion and grant.

<sup>1</sup> Urban India Research Facility (UIRF) & Subaltern Urbanization in India (SUBURBAN) Retrieved in 30-2-2020.I

## Politics of development - District Headquarters and sub-divisions in Himachal -

Over the years Himachal Pradesh has witnessed the growth of 3 divisions , 12 headquarters , 73 sub-divisions, 78 blocks and 172 Tehsil and Up-Tehsil which has brought with them urbanization because administrative headquarters and divisions come with certain institutions.<sup>2</sup> These centers of administration provide relatively better opportunities of health, education and non-agricultural livelihoods. Inter- district and intra- district migration of people to these towns has also boosted the urbanization process. Many of these headquarters have gained prominence over the years due to the creation of many private schools and hospitals too. Subdivisions like Joginder-nagar, Bajnath , Rohru , Rampur , Manali , Theog and Ponta-Sahib and many more are buzzing with new aspiration for developing more and more urban amenities for the residents. These towns are facing the common problems of parking, tariff congestion and better civic amenities. There are towns like Banjar, Nerwa, Tissa , Karsog ,Bassa , Sangah , Nirmand, Jubbal, Rajgarh,Pangi and Chirgaon that are facing lack of proper double lane connectivity with the bigger towns which really hampers their growth . In the third rung are those semi-urban areas which have grown within a Panchayat and have not gained the status of Nagar Panchayat with this official recognition. These village towns like Padhar, Manikaran , Sainj , Barot, Luhri , Nagwai , Balichoki, Tissa, Haripudhar and many more has not yet got the status of Nagar Panchayats because of two factors one is the opposition of the villages because of the expansive charges of water and electricity within the Nagar Panchayat and threat of losing the MGNREGA. On the other hand many of these small towns don't fulfil the necessary population requirement to become Nagar Panchayat. These two constraints have really hampered the urbanization of these towns but this does not mean that people living in towns do not understand the importance of these towns. Subsequent Center governments and State governments have not been able to realize the importance of helping these small towns in the urbanization process. First national programme for urbanization of India JNNURM had only chosen Shimla city under this mission while AMURT had taken Shimla and Kullu towns. Since none of the cities in Himachal qualify under AMRUT scheme where a minimum of 50000 population is mandatory therefore clusters of Shimla and Kullu were devised. State government of that time had sought inclusion of Una, Solan , Hamirpur and Chamba under AMRUT mission for strengthening the urban infrastructure. They had suggested to cluster of Solan(Solan- Nahan-Paonta ), Una ( Una- Mehatpur –Gagret –Daulatpur), Hamirpur ( Naduan-Bhota) and Chamba ( Chamba- Dalhousie –Chuari) <sup>3</sup> Dharamshala was chosen as the first Smart city in 2019 of Himachal Pradesh. This has provided a big push for the planned development of Dharamshala but the project is stuck after the state government has failed in providing its share of funding.<sup>4</sup> This clearly shows that a state government like Himachal which is fiscally constrained cannot fund such huge projects and if the center demands huge contributions from them then such projects will suffer. Centre should devise much more accommodative terms of funding if they really wish to promote sustainable urbanization.

<sup>2</sup> "Himachal Pradesh - Wikipedia." [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Himachal\\_Pradesh](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Himachal_Pradesh). Accessed 26 Dec. 2021.

<sup>3</sup> "HP seeks four clusters under AMRUT scheme - Tribune India." 18 Apr. 2017, <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/archive/features/hp-seeks-four-clusters-under-amrut-scheme-393450>. Accessed 26 Dec. 2021.

<sup>4</sup> "Centre yet to fully fund Dharamshala smart city project - Construction ...." 6 Aug. 2021, <https://www.constructionworld.in/urban-infrastructure/smart-cities-projects/centre-yet-to-fully-fund-dharamshala-smart-city-project-/28982>. Accessed 26 Dec. 2021.

## Need to Promote Urbanization in the Census towns and lowest administrative centres-

There is the need to implement town and country planning in these towns so that urban settlements are developed in a proper manner. Towns like Nerwa, Banjar, Padhar, Chelchok, Sangrah, Rajgarh, Tissa and Haripudhar many more. If these towns are motivated to follow the urban norms of planning besides offering them funding to establish urban infrastructures and facilities then policy makers can help in lifting many people out of poverty by providing alternative livelihood opportunities. Presently there has been a very haphazard growth of urban centers which are centers of economic, commercial and town life. Houses are constructed in a very haphazard manner and there is no space between two continuous houses. House construction should be allowed to conform urban norms besides checking its resistance to the seismic danger. These towns lack the sewerage plants and facilities. There is usually a lack of proper public toilet facilities in these towns and these towns lack the facility of a good bus stand. There is a lack of playground and sports facilities in these small towns which should be essential for any healthy community. Parking and pedestrian paths are another major problem of such small towns. There is also a lack of open or closed amphitheaters to organize public festivals and cultural events in these towns. This kind of facility is a must for the community life of a town and without it residents are forced to rely on the makeshift facilities. Himachal being a hill area has many small towns on the bank of a river or brook and due to this these towns face congestion and usually there is the need to develop bypass facilities which could provide expansion and decongestion facilities to these towns and rejuvenate their urban lives. These are another factor which is health in which these towns find them self-constrained. There is a need to upgrade all the towns which are having Primary Health Centre to Community Health Centre so that they have better health facilities. Public-Private partnership can also be used to motivate Private Players to establish hospitals in these towns and where the private sector doesn't show interest then it will be the duty of the state to perform this job. There is the need to devise future planning for these budding towns, their future expansion a kind of blue-print for future plans. Water supply for these towns should be protected and nourished in a very earnest manner. The waste disposal facility of these towns should be upgraded and more toxic wastes should be taken to proper facilities. Proper policing facilities should be provided to these towns and use of street lights and cams should be used. Political class being sensitive towards this emerging sentiment among the people has tried to act in this direction. Congress government under Virbhadr Singh has created record 2013 to 2017 in opening colleges in small-towns like Panasra, Kotli, Thachi, Sainj, Nirmand, Ronhat, Telka and Kafota. This has created opportunities for girl students and students of socio-economically weaker sections for proper education. Himachal Pradesh CM Jai Ram has announced opening of the SDM office in Jubbal, Kotkhai, Nirmand and Kupvi<sup>5</sup> which clearly depicts the acceptance of the local sentiments of these constituencies to see these towns grow as administrative centres. Upgradation of CHC Rewalsar to Civil Hospital<sup>6</sup>, CHC Anni to Civil Hospital, CHC Bagsaid to Civil Hospital and CHC Baldwara to Civil Hospital many more are being upgraded. Subsequent governments have kept on increasing many new up-tehsils in the state which is usually one of the earliest steps for the growth of small towns on the administrative side.

<sup>5</sup> "DEVELOPMENTAL ACTIVITIES BEING PERFORMED IN PRADESH ...." <http://www.indianewscalling.com/tourism-lifestyle/news/111085-developmental-activities-being-performed-in-pradesh-under-the-dynamic-leadership-of-cm-jai-ram-tha.aspx>. Accessed 26 Dec. 2021.

<sup>6</sup> "CHC Rewalsar's Upgradation to Civil Hospital Announced." <https://himachaltonite.com/himachal/chc-rewalsars-upgradation-to-civil-hospital-announced/>. Accessed 26 Dec. 2021.

## Politics of Regional aspiration and Urbanization in Himachal Politics

After the merger of new himachal ( Punjab Himachal including present Kangra , Hamirpur, Una, Lahaul & Spiti and Kullu ) with old Himachal ( Shimla, Kinnaur, Mandi, Chamba, Sirmour and Bilaspur) Jan Sangh a party of the new Himachal mobilized people on the issue of discrimination with new Himachal by Congress party. Kangra being the biggest district became the centre of his mobilization and Shanta Kumar emerged as the leader of this movement. Congress Party also started accommodating the issues from the new Himachal region and tried to neutralize this issue.<sup>7</sup> Political leadership of New Himachal and even the Congress party could not bring about radical transformation in the agricultural sector, they rather chose the path of establishing institutions which would develop urban growth in the sector besides giving employment opportunities in the lower Himachal Region. The congress government created two more states out of Kangra Hamirpur and Una which further increased the growth of urbanization by creating two new district headquarters beside cutting the political power of Kangra to a smaller size .

In Palampur, Shanta Kumar in his first term was successful in establishing Agricultural University in 1978. Subsequently, the Council of Science and Research established its Institute of Himalayan Bioresource Technology (CSIR-IHBT) under Congress rule. Himachal Pradesh Board of School Education was shifted to Dharamshala by the Congress government to challenge the sentiment of rising sub-regionalism in Kangra region. Creation of the Himachal Pradesh National Institute of Technology (NIT) shifting of Himachal Pradesh Subordinate Staff Selection Commission under Prem Kumar Dhumal from Shimla has helped in giving further push to the urbanization of Hamirpur town. Subsequently, formation of Neri Horticultural College and shifting of Himachal Pradesh Technical University to Hamirpur in 2011 during Dhumal government. Creation of IIT Mandi in the backward region of Kamand has totally transformed the economy of this small town and functioning of these institutions. This has a direct impact upon the nature of politics and aspiration of the people residing in this town. New hotels, homestays and shops are flourishing in this town and connectivity with Mandi and Kullu town has also been improved. The entire Uttarshala valley is looking at this town as their center of economic, educational and administrative hub. This is the reason for conflict and delay in the finalization of the proposed site for the establishment of Central University of Himachal Pradesh (CUHP). Prem Kumar Dhumal and Aurang Thakur have a natural inclination to establish this in Dehar being part of Hamirpur parliamentary seat which he represents. While the lobby of Kangra Parliamentary seats of both Congress and BJP wants to construct this CHUP in Dharmasthala, an already developed city.<sup>8</sup> Shahpur is the place where the provisional CHUP campus was based and locality of this region has fought to keep this facility within Shahpur. This triangular struggle for the establishment of CHUP campus is the clear example of the recognition of economic and developmental impact upon the area on which such a huge institution is being constructed. Recent construction of AIIMS and Hydrological College in Bilaspur district due to the influence of BJP leader Nanda who was the Union Health minister in the Union Cabinet. This is going to have a major impact on the economic growth of the Bilaspur district and urbanization of this area.

<sup>7</sup> "SUB- REGIONALISM IN HIMACHAL - Prep4HAS." 9 Dec. 2020, <https://prep4has.blogspot.com/2020/10/sub-regionalism-sub-region-refers-to.html>. Accessed 27 Dec. 2021.

<sup>8</sup> "Anurag Thakur drags CU campus row to parliament - The News ...." 4 May. 2016, <https://thenewshimachal.com/2016/05/anurag-thakur-drags-cu-campus-row-parliament/>. Accessed 27 Dec. 2021.



Dharamshala also witnessed spurt in its urbanization process with the creation of Himachal Pradesh University Regional Centre in 1992 when Shanta Kumar was the Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh. Its own campus came up in Khanyara in the outskirts of Dharmshala town giving further push for urbanization. Chief Minister Virbhdhar announced the creation of a second Legislative building at Chinmaya Tapovan as winter vidhan sabha to counter the tide of regionalism in Himachal politics. Dharmshala Stadium was constructed during the time of Prem Kumar Dhumal as Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh and role of Anurag as the member of BICCI. A TB sanatorium gifted by a philanthropist Rai Bahadur Jodhamal Kuthiala was upgraded by the Virbhardra government in 1996 to a hospital. In 1997 it was subsequently declared as a medical college. Today it is known as Dr. Rajendra Prasad Government Medical College. Virbhardra was the first Chief Minister of the old Himachal region who could establish his image as a mass leader even in Kangra and entire new Himachal Pradesh due to his many steps like this. In his last term he announced to make Dharamshala as the second capital of Himachal this was one of his master strokes to counter the tide of anti-incumbency although it did not prove its worth in elections. His government also chose Dharamshala over Shimla for the Smart City Project in Himachal.

During these times another demographically very powerful region called Mandi was waiting in the wings to assert its political might and cash in the politics of development. Mandi Parliamentary seat also includes the district of Kullu with four seats of the MLAs with other demographically smaller units Lahaul & Spiti, Kinnour and Pangi Bharmour. Historically Thakur Karm Singh of Thung was the de-facto leader of the Regional Territorial Council from 1956 to 1963 till the reformation of legislative assembly. Y.S Parmar due his better link at the centre and seniority within the party was able to capture the Chief Minister post while giving Karam Singh a cabinet berth. Rise of Sukh Ram as an iconic figure of Mandi clashed with Vir Bhardr for the prime post but he had to withdraw from the party. He was the true rebel in the sense he created a new party Himachal Vikas Congress and was able to win 5 mla seats within the Mandi Parliamentary zone in 1998 election and supported Prem Kumar Dhumal government of Bjp. This was a reassertion of regional leaders against the might of the Chief Minister with success. He was subsequently ditched by his MLA who now joined Bjp. Virbhadra as Chief minister got another shock from this zone when his wife Pratibha was defeated by a new unknown BJP candidate Ram Swarup due to Modi Wave 2014 and internal politics of congress leaders of Mandi parliamentary region which was upset with Virbhadra. Kaul Singh Thakur of Mandi grew into official number two after becoming chief minister within the state government. Subsequently the anti-Virbhadra lobby within congress made him their unofficial challenger. The Virbhadra Singh government, in which he was health minister legislated to establish Lal Bahadur Shastri medical college at Ner Chowk in Mandi and also establish Himachal Pradesh University of Health Sciences in the same district. The Virbhadra government also decided to open the Cluster University of HPU at Mandi. Rise of Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur from Mandi-Parliamentary region was result of the clean sweep of total 10 assembly constituencies in the Mandi district in 2017 which allowed the transfer of leadership from Dhumal (Hamirpur) to the leader of Mandi. Jai Ram Government has given stress in establishing an International Airport in Balh Valley and focused on developing tourism potential of Mandi district and his own constituency in particular Siraj. In 2021 the government decided to open the second state university in Mandi rather than creating a cluster university. He has upgraded the status of different roads connecting his constituency from other constituencies and districts which have direct impact on the economy and society of these areas. Jai Ram belongs to one of the most mountainous regions of Mandi which due to horticulture has improved but overall this constituency lags behind in education, health and urbanization aspects. His becoming Chief Ministership has given the entire Seraj region a sense of pride which even includes parts of two constituencies of kullu

district like Banjar and Anni. Karsog and Gohar legislative constituencies of mandi are also geographically contiguous to Seraj Constituency and face similar challenges and potentialities. Mahender Singh of Dharmpur mandi, Govind Thakur of Manali and Ram Lal Markande of Lahaul and Spiti along with the Chief Minister have got a very strong representation among the government. Atal Tunnel and four Lanning of Chandigarh – Manali due to the strategic reasons has also provided a boost to this region. Recent defeat of a BJP candidate in the by-polls of 2021 of Mandi parliamentary seats clearly depicts the limitation of the pull of this new power center. Kullu as a smaller sub-region of mandi parliamentary region is feeling neglected on many fronts. Failure of the government in rebuilding the Bunter Valley Bridge and Bhootnath Bridge and the fact that Kullu Zonal Hospital could not be upgraded to the status of Medical College despite providing facilities to adjoining Mandi, Lahaul and Pangi regions. Bhubu Jot Tunnel Project to connect Kullu to Jogindernagar has remained on paper which would have boosted the connectivity of the valley to Kangra and Jalori tunnel project to connect Anni constituency with the main Kullu have also remained on the paper. Kullu as a region could not get any institution of education, sports and health within its geographical territory which would have boosted its economy.

### Conclusion-

Politics of Himachal Pradesh since the formation of large Himachal in 1966 has found its impetus with the waves of regionalism. First phase of it came with Kangra as a region which is being deprived by the Congress upper-Himachal horticulturist elites. Gradually Kangra lost its status of Centre of power in the lower Himachal to the rise of Hamirpur with the rise of Prem Kumar Dhumal. Now Mandi has emerged as a new power-Centre while Shimla has recently lost the biggest leader ever lived in Himachal Pradesh Shri. Virbhra Singh. Time will tell which new political power centers will emerge in Himachal Pradesh politics fueled by the growth aspirations of different regions.