

Understanding India's Urban Frontier

What Is behind the Emergence of Census Towns in India?

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Abstract

This paper presents the results of an investigation of selected census towns in northern India. Census towns are settlements that India's census classifies as urban although they continue to be governed as rural settlements. The 2011 census featured a remarkable increase in the number of census towns, which nearly tripled between 2001 and 2011, from 1,362 to 3,894. This increase contributed to nearly a third (29.5 percent) of the total increase in the urban population during this period. Only part of this evolution can be attributed to the gradual urbanization of settlements in the vicinity or larger towns. Instead, the majority of census towns appear as small "market towns," providing trade and other local services to a growing rural market. The case

studies of representative census towns in Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, and West Bengal show the role of increased connectivity and growing rural incomes in driving the demand for the small-scale and non-tradable services, which are the main sources of nonfarm employment in these settlements. The case studies also reveal that the trade-offs between urban and rural administrative statuses are actively debated in many of these settlements. Although statistical comparisons do not show a significant impact of urban or rural administrative status on access to basic services, urban status is often favored by the social groups involved in the growing commercial and services sectors, and resisted by the residents still involved in the traditional farming sectors.

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I. Introduction

India's urbanization and the emergence of Census Towns

India is still in the early stages of its urbanization process. According to the latest Census of 2011, the urbanization level in India has increased from 27.8% in 2001 to 31.2% in 2011, and for the first time, the absolute increase in urban population exceeded the increase in rural population. However, the statistical method used to measure urbanization in India can be interpreted as contributing to understating the share of India's population living in urban areas. The definition of urbanization in India is rather restrictive. It is the only country to use population, density and economic character together as criteria. The agglomeration index (AI) - originally developed for World Development Report 2009: Reshaping Economic Geography provides a consistent basis for comparing urbanization across countries. By this measure, it was estimated that 52% of India's population lived within an hour's distance of large cities, compared to 36% in China, based on the census of 2001 and 2000 respectively.¹

In addition to India's "hidden" urbanization, the 2011 census highlighted a new feature in its urban transformation. A total of 3,894 settlements were identified as Census Towns while there were only 1,362 such settlements in the 2001 census. Census Towns are part of India's "visible" urbanization, since they satisfy the three criteria set by the Registrar General of India for defining an urban area: population of at least 5,000, density of at least 400 persons per square kilometer and workforce of at least 75% of male main workers in the non-farm sector. The remarkable increase in their number between 2001 and 2011 means that a large number of settlements were reclassified from rural to urban, because of the change in their demographic and workforce characteristics.

It is important to note that there are two dimensions to the distinction between urban and rural spaces in India: a statistical one, and an administrative one. The statistical dimension is measured through the criteria mentioned above and used by the census. The administrative dimension distinguishes between: (i) Statutory Towns, which are administered by different types of Urban Local Bodies (ULBs); and (ii) Villages, which are administered by village councils (Gram Panchayats). The two categories of local governments function under different principles outlined in the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts which were enacted in 1992 to introduce local governments as the third constitutional tier of government. Therefore, among settlements, CT is a specific subgroup defined as urban by the Census of India but under rural governance.

Importantly, of the total urban growth of approximately 90 million people, about 44% is due to natural population growth in urban areas that existed in 2001, 21% is due to migration from urban to rural areas and the remaining, i.e., more than a third is because of re-classification of rural settlements as urban areas due to the change in the character of settlements, i.e., mostly new CTs - with a small proportion due to villages being reclassified as urban local bodies (Pradhan, 2013). As such, the 'morphing' of places is more important in urban growth in India than the 'movement' of people. A recent World Bank report on "Leveraging Urbanization in South Asia" (Ellis and

¹ Large cities are defined as settlements of more than 50,000 persons, similar to the Metropolitan Statistical Area in the United States (Uchida and Nelson, 2010).

Roberts, 2016) notes that this evolution reflects a more general process of *in situ* urbanization across much of the region.

Two characteristics of this feature bear emphasis. First, this morphing of places is not a phenomenon that is happening on the periphery of existing large urban areas. Only about a third of the new CTs are close to existing class I towns (urban areas of 100,000 or more), the rest being either isolated or part of a group of smaller rural settlements. Second, understanding this phenomenon is important not only for understanding urbanization, but also for rural poverty alleviation. A critical element of economic growth is the rise in non-farm employment and incomes. Himanshu et. al. (2011) find that rural non-farm diversification is more rapid when neighboring urban centers grow and this association is stronger if the urban center is a small town as compared to a large city.

In order to do this, it is not sufficient to study the small statutory towns. While the share of small towns (i.e., towns with a population of less than 100,000) in total urban population has actually increased marginally over 2001-11, the share of CTs has almost doubled from 7.4% to over 14%, and within small towns, it rose from 19% to 36%.

The aim of this paper is to contribute to a better understanding of the dynamics at play behind the sharp increase in the number of CTs observed in the 2011 census, and its potential implications in terms of policies aimed at supporting economic development and poverty alleviation in these small urban centers and their surrounding areas. The paper also tries to understand whether these settlements are connected to the broader urban economic expansion of the region or whether they do develop as independent nodes of localized urbanization process. The process of governance of these centers and their economic and spatial impacts are also addressed in this paper.

The paper is organized into six sections. Following this introduction, section II provides a reading of the existing literature on small towns related to governance, employment and spatial change. Section III details the rationale for the choice of sites and expands on the methodology chosen. Sections IV to VII presents the results along four main axes: section IV is concerned with the shift towards non-farm employment and the analysis of the new types of jobs existing in the towns; section V is concerned with the existing debates and practices around governance of CTs especially with the idea that some CTs should become statutory towns; section VI looks at the various urban services and attempts to assess which variations (rural/urban; state) explain differences in services. Section VII concludes with key findings.

II. Existing Literature on Census Towns

The emergence of a large number of CTs during the 2001-2011 decade and their role in the urban growth has generated some interest as to what these settlements represent (Pradhan, 2013) and the reason for their emergence (Kundu, 2011; Bhagat, 2011). In spite of this particular status, there has been limited research on Census Towns so far. On the one hand, research on small towns has been centered either on small urban local bodies, comparing cities of different sizes but without a specific focus on Census Towns per se. On the other hand, rural studies, both quantitative and qualitative, have not highlighted the specific status of CTs.

The main question raised by the limited research on CTs with regards to governance and its relationship with urbanization is what we refer as to the “politics of classification” (Denis et al., 2012). This term encapsulates the idea that in most states urban local bodies are more restricted in their autonomy as compared to rural ones. In addition to the objective situation, a set of other factors could play a role when states decide to classify a settlement as rural or urban. Bhagat (2005) presents different elements of this cost-benefit analysis in favor of rural settlements, such as lower levels of taxation, cheaper electricity and the absence of urban bylaws and especially access to public schemes, in particular Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), which is supposed to provide guaranteed unskilled employment of 100 days to each rural household, and Indira Awas Yojana (IAY), which provides subsidies for house construction to targeted poor households. As Sivaramakrishnan (2011) summarizes, “these places “in between” will be better off as panchayats since government funding and various other concessions available to panchayats are more in number and much larger”. On the other hand, once a settlement reaches a certain level of population and density, the need for networked urban services can only be financed through resources allocated to urban local bodies and there might be a certain need for planning. In other words, there is a form of cost-benefit analysis at work that can differ from one settlement to another and that can mobilize different types of actors and interests. This leads to the question of whether a process of municipalization is required to enhance governance.

Field research that has explored these dynamics in specific states or locations reinforces these hypotheses and opens up new insights. First of all, studying the case of Maharashtra, where a number of settlements that fulfill the criteria to become urban remain rural, the authors of a Tata Institute of Social Sciences study argue that the urban is a “contested terrain” (Bhide and Waingankar, 2011:43). They consider that the importance of agriculture and primary sector and the local and economic stakes also shape decisions to become urban. Guin and Das (2015a) in their state level study on census towns in West Bengal claim that the agrarian distress drives the increase of the rural non-farm sector and is the main reason for the enormous increase of census towns in the state. They also claim that the recent growth of new census towns in the state i.e. in 2011, does not follow any significant pattern (Guin and Das, 2015b). Some of them are scattered while others are located near small and medium cities unlike the earlier development close to the big city agglomeration.

Denis, Mukhopadhyay and Zérah (2012) refer to a number of field examples where political factors play a role in the governance boundary between the urban and the rural. They cite the case of Tamil Nadu, where in June 2004, 566 town panchayats (small urban local bodies) were reclassified as rural panchayats due to the resistance to urban taxation. These two examples point to the variations between states. For instance, declassification from urban to rural is possible in Kerala and in Tamil Nadu but not in all other states. In West Bengal and in Kerala, the two states with the highest number of new Census Towns, the provision available in the 74th amendment to have town panchayat or nagar panchayat for transitional urban areas does not exist, which might explain the slow process of municipalization (Samanta, 2014). Indeed, since the definition of urban varies from one state to the other, it requires probing the politics of classification in diverse sites. Finally, other examples provided in the Denis et al. (op. cit.) paper based on exploratory field work also show that social stakes can also influence the rural vs. urban classification.

III. Methodology and case

Case studies were conducted in seven sites located in the states of Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, and West Bengal. These states were chosen to better understand the type of urbanization transition in poorer states with a low rate of urbanization and in West Bengal, which ranks second in 2011 for the increase in the number of CTs. As one can see in Table 1, census towns are an extensive contributor to the extent of urbanization in all the states, except Bihar. In the three other states, the contribution of new CTs to the urban population is significantly higher than the Indian average. In the case of West Bengal, the increase is as high as 66% (second only to Kerala). Even in the case of Bihar where the contribution of new CTs to the urban population growth is lower than in the other states, 52 new CTs have been added in 2011.

Table 1. Census Town (CT) and Extent of Urbanization 2011

	Census level of Urbanization (% of state population)	Population of New CTs as share of growth in state's urban population (%)	Number of New CTs in 2011	Number of Total CTs in 2011
Bihar	11.3	13.9	52	60
Jharkhand	24.1	44.7	107	188
Odisha	16.7	38.3	86	116
West Bengal	31.9	66.0	526	780
All India	31.2	29.5	2553	3892

Source: Authors' analysis

At least one Census Town was identified in each state (in Jharkhand, a pair of adjoining Census Towns were studied), and a methodology was applied to identify candidate settlements which would be as representative as possible. In Bihar, three settlements including a Census Town, a large village, and a Statutory Town - all located in the same district – were selected as case studies. The list of settlements selected is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Case studies

State	Settlement	Status	Population (census 2011)
Bihar	Satghara	Census Town	8,060
Bihar	Jhanjharpur	Statutory Town	30,590
Bihar	Simri	Village	10,846
Jharkhand	Cherra	Census Town	5,279
Jharkhand	Bishnugar	Census Town	4,847
Odisha	Erein	Census Town	7,890
West Bengal	Gopalpur	Census Town	7,016

In order to ensure that the selected Census Towns were as representative as possible of the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of Census Towns in their respective states, all settlements were situated with respect to other settlements, using their population, as well as a composite development index of 17 variables and population of the settlement. These 17 variables are male and female literacy, non-farm workforce, child gender ratio, possession of at least one asset, household size, share of households with phones, electricity, television, two-wheelers, access to banking, households using LPG for cooking, houses with burnt brick walls, concrete roofs, flush latrines and tap water within the house.

The site selection for Bihar was done more systematically given the state's specific characteristics, including a low official level of urbanization, and a high proportion of people living in large villages. A first selection was done at the district level using the following measures of development:

- a. The composite development index developed based on census data for 17 variables, as in other states.
- b. A second, additional separate index, utilizing 71 variables in six different groups – Economic, Governance, Infrastructure, Social, Finance, Primary — was built using data from the Bihar Economic Survey. This involved building weighted (generated using principal components analysis) sub-indices for each of the groups and then building a weighted index of the sub-indices.
- c. Third, a rank based on the district domestic product
- d. Fourth, the rural poverty headcount ratio for the district

On each of the above four measures, districts were divided into three groups. The intent was to focus on districts which were in the middle third, across multiple measures.

In addition, given our strategy, the district also had to have a large village, a Class III statutory town (between 20,000 and 50,000) and a census town. Applying the criteria above, three districts, Madhubani, Samastipur, and Paschim Champaran, emerged as likely candidates.

In Samastipur, all the four CTs were in the agglomeration of Samastipur municipality while in Paschim Champaran; all three Census Towns were in the agglomeration of Bettiah. In Madhubani, there are two CTs; of which Madhubani (CT) is part of the Madhubani municipality built-up agglomeration. The other is Satghara. All the three statutory towns, Jhanjharpur, Jainagar and Ghoghardiha, are part of a mixed SA – a collection of settlements whose built up areas are connected and which has both rural and urban settlements. In the last two towns, the town is smaller than the largest village in the agglomeration. Given this, the field sites chosen were Satghara (CT) and the statutory town of Jhanjharpur (Nagar Panchayat). A large village, Simri (pop: 10,846) was the third site.

As in the case of Bihar mentioned above, proximity to a large town was another criterion considered in the selection of the study sites. One of the common perceptions about CTs is that they are in the peri-urban areas of larger towns. However, this is not supported by data. As shown in Table 3, based on the Census data and the methodology devised by Pradhan (2013), Jharkhand and Bihar have a configuration similar to the national average, i.e., around one-third of the new census towns are close to a large city, defined as a class I town in India with a population of more

than 100,000. West Bengal departs from the norm with a higher proportion of CTs, which are located close to a larger city, especially Kolkata. However, a closer look at the location of the new CTs and the analysis that has already been conducted in West Bengal indicate a shift in the spatial distribution of urban settlements in the state (Chatterjee, 2014). We also classify CTs by contiguity of built-up area, which we call settlement agglomerations (SA) (Denis and Marius-Gnanou, 2011). The results, as shown in Table 3, differ slightly between the two approaches.

Table 3: Census Towns close to Large Urban Areas by Number and Population					
	Bihar	Jharkhand	Odisha	West Bengal	All India
Proximity measured by distance buffer					
Number	38.3	34.6	11.2	48.7	41.0
Population	37.6	44.6	13.8	52.5	49.0
Proximity measured by contiguity of built up area					
Number	31.7	13.3	3.4	38.1	37.3
Population	29.6	32.7	6.2	42.0	51.4

Note: Large Urban Areas are those with more than 100,000 in population

Source: Authors' analysis

As indicated in the discussion below on specific case studies, the study includes CTs that are part of an agglomeration, close to larger towns, as well as CTs that are stand-alone and those that are part of agglomerations with other CTs or villages.

In addition to proximity to large urban areas, the size of the settlement was a criterion for selection. Figures 1 to 3 present the distribution of settlement size separately for CTs and statutory towns (STs) for the selected states. As can be seen, their median sizes vary considerably, given that STs are much older and the larger settlements are more likely to acquire statutory status. While the distribution of CTs is relatively similar across the four states, there is visible difference across states with respect to STs. West Bengal has a distinctive distribution, skewed towards larger towns. Given that the criterion for becoming a statutory town is more stringent in West Bengal; this is to be expected.

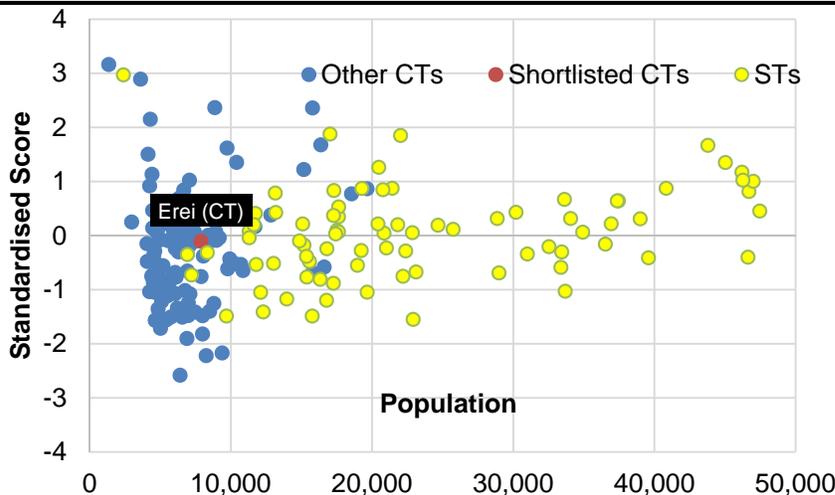
Selected Settlements

In the case of Odisha, Erein (pop: 7,890), which is about 65km away from Baleshwar Municipality (pop: 144,373) and 6km away from Bhadrak Municipality (pop: 121,338) was selected. Erein is very close to Bhadrak railway station and is part of a panchayat with a number of other villages. It is also on NH-5, part of the four-lane national highway Golden Quadrilateral. The new rail line that connects Dhamra port to Bhadrak passes through lands of Erein and substantial land acquisition has taken place, which is a possible source of capital. According to the port's website, a 125 meter wide corridor from Dhamra to Bhadrak has been acquired to accommodate two rail tracks and a four lane road. In Phase-I, the 62 km rail connectivity from Dhamra to Bhadrak has

been constructed while Phase-II will construct a four lane freight road along the corridor to service its upcoming container and general cargo terminal.

While urban features like paved roads and street lighting are not present, there is considerable activity in residential construction, with relatively elaborate buildings becoming increasingly common. A number of people from outside the settlement are taking up residence in Erein and there is evidence of land development and renting. The area has a number of rice mills, which are located outside the municipal boundary. There is also an FCI procurement godown nearby. These mills provide casual employment for unskilled labor. In addition, there is also a transport industry, including vehicle repairing, etc. In Figure 1, Erein is plotted with respect to the composite index of development and population size. As can be seen, Erein is quite ‘average’ for Orissa.

Figure 1. Erein in relation to other urban settlements in Odisha

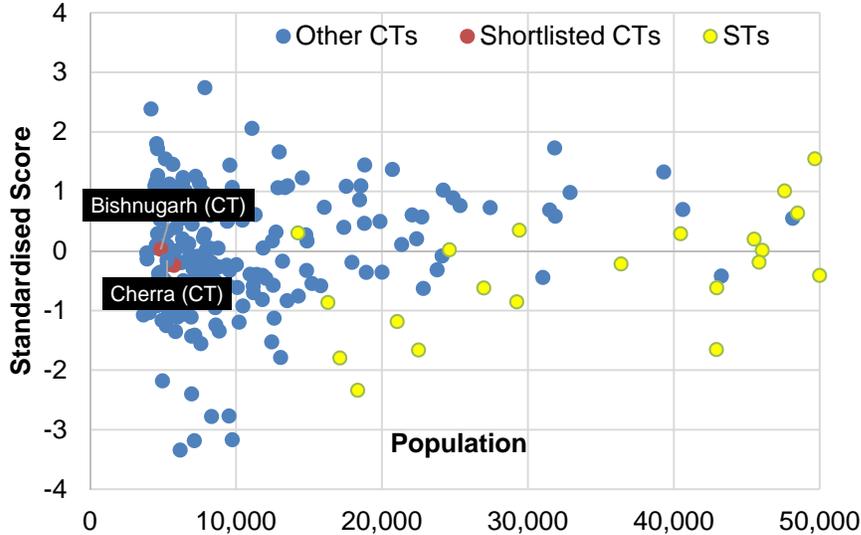


In Jharkhand, the Census Towns of Cherra (pop: 5,279) and Bishnugarh (pop: 4,847), which form a settlement agglomeration, were selected. Not only are they both at the boundary of classification as an urban area (Bishnugarh actually does not meet the three-fold test of urbanization, even though it has been declared as a census town²), which will permit investigation into the nature of classification, their proximity to each other permits a closer look at the regulatory issues relating to rural administration. While both Bishnugarh and Cherra belong to Bishnugarh Panchayat Samiti, they are in different Gram panchayats – Bishnugarh is in Bishnugarh Gram panchayat with two other villages, while Cherra is in Cherra Gram Panchayat, with one other village. We plot these two CTs in a manner similar to Erein. As seen in Figure 2, both Bishnugarh and Cherra are ‘average’ in terms of their development index. It should also be noted that Jharkhand has a number

² This is because there is a predictive component to the classification of rural and urban areas. Since CTs are identified prior to the census operation, information from the last census is used for such identification. For CTs in 2011, all villages having a population of 4,000 or more at the 2001 census are taken up for examination with the assumption that such settlements are expected to cross 5,000 population by the time of the 2011 census. For such units the density and the male main workforce composition of the population are examined to see whether these qualify to be categorized as CT.

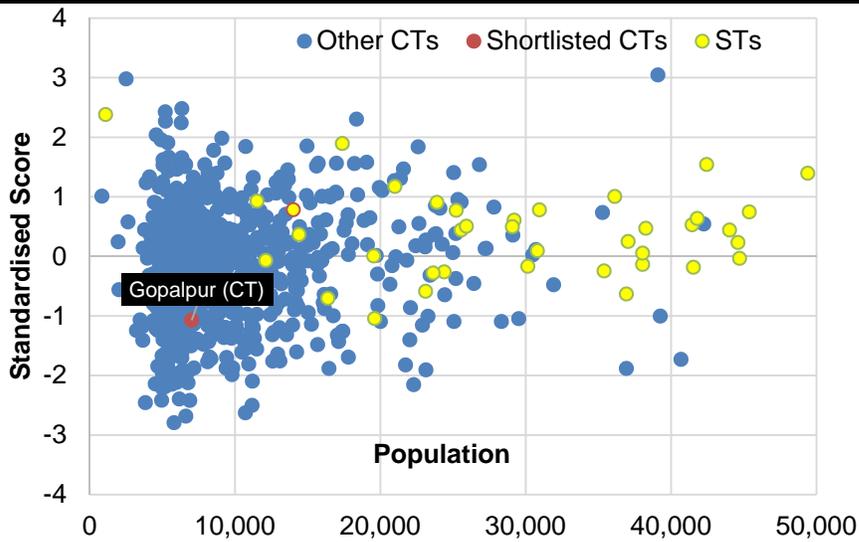
of large CTs, such as Saunda (81,915), Gumia (48,141) and Kopali (43,256). Most of these are factory towns built around mines and power stations.

Figure 2. Bishnugarh and Cherra vis-à-vis other urban settlements in Jharkhand



In West Bengal, the selected site was Gopalpur (pop: 7,016) in Dakshin (south) Dinajpur district, about 40km from Balurghat (pop: 153,279), a statutory town; and 5 km from the smaller town of Gangarampur (pop: 56,175). There is a ferry crossing the Purnabaha river near Gopalpur. The Institutional Strengthening of Gram Panchayats (ISGP) program, supported by the World Bank, is being implemented in the panchayat. Like other states, here too, Gopalpur is plotted against other urban settlements. As seen in Figure 3, Gopalpur's development index is relatively poor, about one standard deviation below the state mean.

Figure 3 Gopalpur vis-à-vis other urban settlements in West Bengal



IV. The shift towards nonfarm employment

As stated earlier, the literature on CTs is sparse and within that the economy of CTs is sparser still. Most news reports, such as some published in the Mint referred to later, indicate a diversified broad based service dominated economy, but at relatively low scale. In some places like Barjora investigated by Samanta (2017), the mainstay is mining and small sponge-iron plants, and in others, the basis is farm processing. However, in other studies of census towns, there is more of a variety of small scale service activities. In CTs that are close to larger towns, there is also spillover of economic activity. Punia and others (2017) find that the periphery of Yamunanagar has cement and packaging industries, numerous small-scale enterprises in timber business as well as thermal power plants and educational institutions. In Manakpur, an industrial enterprise cluster of metal and alloys has developed). In the district of Karnal, many CTs are growing due to real estate. The possible drivers of change in the north along the national highway are real estate builders, demand from agro processing industries like rice and wheat flourmills and government cooperatives for housing projects. This is what a recent research project on ordinary towns of India refers to as the importance of ordinary activities based on markets, construction, in a form of in-situ urbanization that is critical in a context of limited employment opportunities (Denis and Zérah, 2017).

This paper also demonstrates that as one moves up the scale, some interesting trends become visible in small towns. Raman's work (2017) on Tiruchengode shows a home-grown well drilling industry, along with manufacture and export of equipment. Kundu and Bhatia (2001) find a flourishing mini-steel industry in Gobindgarh, and De Bercegol and Gowda (2017) document an established furniture industry in Kartarpur.

Such ‘anchor industries’ are not usually seen in the limited literature on CTs, except Samanta’s (op. cit.) on Barjora. This is not unexpected unless the CT is the consequence of a large public or private investment, since its relatively small size would not initially attract such large industries.

Following our field investigation, the nature of economic transformation of the CTs can be grouped into three categories: (i) the everyday economy, (ii) town-specific activities (which may not exist in all towns) and (iii) new activities, all of which, with the possible exception of transport, are largely financed through non-formal sources. The everyday economy, which is organically rooted in servicing the demand from surrounding settlements, is facilitated by improved connectivity and transport options. This everyday economy is organized around the local market, i.e., the bazaar economy, but is insufficient to generate surplus capital, though it is an important and resilient source of employment and of interactions with the surrounding villages. This is similar to the findings on other states (see Denis and Zérah, 2017). In some settlements, there are also additional external drivers. However, in the state of Bihar, there is a visible absence of such drivers, of industry and a lack of public investment beyond roads. Five new activities are common to all sites, the major two being para-transit and construction. In addition to these two, three other common activities are private education, private health care and services around cellphones, their sales, servicing and value-added services.

Old economic activity

As noted in the earlier section, CTs may not be characterized by ‘anchor industries’. The study also finds that the nature of economic activity in these settlements is fragmented and dispersed, relying largely on a number of services. However, this does not mean that there is no manufacturing. In Jhanjharpur, there was an attempt to establish an industrial base. An old complex of mills that included sugar and paper mills is located within the Jhanjharpur NP area, but has been defunct since within a year of its inception. The factories have been vandalized and the machines have been stolen. There is a Jhanjharpur NP Trade Corporation Rice Mill, Machen Processing and Trading Center and a Food Grain Godown in one compound located immediately north of the highway junction. This is a part of the Notified Area, but is not included within the NP. These units have been constructed around five years ago, but have been defunct after a year of functioning. There is a small rice mill in Jhanjharpur NP industrial area that employs 50 persons, but only in the period after the monsoon paddy crop. Most respondents cite lack of electricity and other infrastructure as a hindrance to the growth of industry. Other reasons include lack of financing from banks, lack of labor and lack of security.

By contrast, in Bishnugarh, there is a large employment base provided by the manufacture of foundry industry for brassware, which is retailed in the region. It has also a thriving jewelry industry. In Satghara, as in other settlements in Bihar, there is the manufacture of storage units, like metal trunks and cupboards, which are visible in the marketplace. Jewelry is present in the Bihar settlements also, and indeed, even in Simri village, there are jewelry workers who work on a ‘putting-out’ basis for shops in nearby markets like Rahika and Madhubani.

Another group of economic activity is agro-based. While both the Makhana factory and the rice mill in Jhanjharpur (where a large proportion of the workforce is still in farming) are defunct, a number of private rice mills are very vibrant in Erein. Bishnupur is engaged in the production of

local alcohol and Gopalpur has a thriving household industry manufacturing curd, which is supplied to the region. By contrast, defunct sugar mills dot the landscape in Madhubani district, a testament to the significant nexus with government policy and possibly the associated lack of reliable electricity.

In addition to this, there is the more banal, everyday form of non-farm economic activity in terms of both small manufacturing like the drums and trunks that are omnipresent in Bihar's bazaars or grocery stores, hairdressers (beauty salons for women, a sub-set of this category, are also more visible and often home-based), tailors, jewelers, etc. However, since there is better communication to a given location, thus increasing the size of the 'hinterland' and more consumption per household, there is a higher level of such activity that can be supported at a given location, thus making it more possible that a specific location would cross the 75% threshold of male main workers in non-farm occupations.

New Economic Activity

While each site has specific features associated with its transformation, it would not be totally out of place to note that there are some common new elements across these sites. A few of them are highlighted, as points of departure from older forms of non-farm work.

First, there has been a relatively rapid increase in construction. This is not just of public works projects associated with MGNREGS, Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY), the rural roads scheme, Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA), which constructs school rooms and other such schemes, but also importantly in the everyday improvement in housing and building quality, as more of them acquire brick walls and concrete roofs. Indeed, in one of our interactions in the district of Madhubani, we were told that it was much easier now to find the skills for 'modern construction', in part seeded by return migrants who worked as construction workers in the cities, than it was to find skills for more traditional construction using mud and straw, which may be more environment-friendly and cost-effective. Associated with the increase in construction is the activity of brick-kilns to supply these areas and not just the cities. These brick-kilns provide another avenue of employment for manual laborers who were previously engaged as farm workers.

A second visible activity is based around transport, especially low-capacity vehicles (a formal capacity of four to seven, but which seat many times more) like three-wheelers, or in some cases, depending on route capacity, buses and SUVs of various forms. It would be natural to speculate that much of this is supported both by transport demand from rising incomes and by improvements in road quality at all levels, major district roads, rural roads, etc. The availability of formal banking finance for vehicle purchase (as compared to the difficulty of finding finance for other types of activities) and the relatively low entry costs and sunk costs for this activity make the growth of this activity even easier.

A third sector is the growth of private education at all levels and price points. These are schools staffed by local persons with school education, managed by similar people with college degrees. Many of the larger schools often provide transport services to pick up and drop children (thus generating a transport demand of their own). There is also demand for add-on education services like coaching even for children in public schools.

Fourth, there is the economic activity generated by cellphones and the ecosystem that surrounds them. Not only is there indirect activity, there is also direct activity in terms of sales of phones,

repair, recharge of talk-time, downloads of music and videos, etc. This is a relatively low-cost entry business and success would depend on location of the shop.

Finally, there is health service, with the growth of private health care, some of it based on tele-medicine as in the Sky health centers in Bihar as well as non-certified health care providers of varying hues. There are also supportive activities, such as chemist shops, diagnostic centers, and pathology sample collection centers, supported by the relatively large share of private out of pocket health expenditures.

Financing

Since the financial scale of most of these activities is small, financing is usually provided by friends and family or from personal savings, which may depend on remittances and savings as a result of migration. Formal bank finance is available for transport. Funds are also generated by the sale of agricultural land. In Erein, it was found that compensation received for land acquisition was invested in small economic activities. In Gopalpur (and Erein too), there were also co-operative financial institutions who extended finance.

Box 1. Women and labor participation

In all the settlements studies, there are women involved in the local governance structure thanks to the quota provided in the 73rd and 74th, but their role appeared to be limited.

In terms of employment, their participation is also limited. Women are involved in agriculture in Satghara and in South Behar (Jhanjarpur). In Satghara, the rising involvement of women in agriculture seem to be triggered by the departure of men for migration while in Gopalpur women engaged in agriculture mostly belong to lower caste group.

Women's job in services is limited though one finds teachers in Gopalpur and in Jhanjarpur, where women are also employees of the urban local body.

The only location where women seem to be involved at a large scale is the bidi industry in Gopalpur. An estimated 500 to 600 bidi makers are working in Gopalpur, a number that is increasing every year. Women, particularly, are joining the industry as they can complete their household chores and make bidis during the remaining time. On an average, each woman makes 4,000 to 5,000 bidi per week. Of late, they are getting paid Rs. 78 for 1,000 bidi as their labor charge.

There is some informal work, at times prompted by the Self-Help Groups that exist in Simri and Gopalpur. In Gopalpur, women make puffed rice but in Simri, the Self-Help Group does not work very well. Other casual activities are selling fruits and vegetables in the markets or involvement in traditional caste-based activities. This is the case in Bishnugarh Cherra where women are involved in the local wine making industry and in Satghara where 250 to 300 women are engaged in bangle making. In Jhanjarpur, around 50 women are employed in a rice mill located outside the town boundaries and Gopalpur where some women are involved in rice mills and ice cream factories.

Finally, in Simri, there is mention of the difficulty to open bank accounts that is a hurdle for women since they depend on remittances and for widows who are beneficiaries of government schemes. This problem is not mentioned in other settlements but would be worth exploring since it does affect women's livelihoods.

V. The many stakes of Governance

This section examines the manner in which the existing rural/urban dichotomy is debated by local actors and shaped by the state legislation's definition on urban settlements. In these five settlements, the results show that the form of governance of these CTs (rural vs. urban) is discussed locally and their status is contested. Four common factors shape these debates: (i) the comparative level of service provision, (ii) the role of taxes and public schemes, (iii) the nature of their non-farm activity and the related land use changes, and (iv) local socio-political formations. However, the aspirations for urban status are not uniform and these perceptions about economic trade-offs are influenced by regional configurations, social settings and local power structures. This section also underlines that, with the relative exception of West Bengal, the administrative capacity is weak and impacts the potential for local governance.

Cost-Benefit Analysis of Urban Status Seen from Below

The existing literature has highlighted a number of factors that could either be drivers or factors of resistance to becoming urban. Many of these aspects are indeed raised by the persons interviewed during the field work, in particular the sarpanch and ward members.

A first argument against urban status is the higher level of taxes. This is evident in all the cases studied. In Erein, the resistance to taxes was unanimous ranging from residents, shop owners and rice mill owners who feared that a potential merger with Bhadrak Municipal Corporation would entail higher taxes. The only CT where the discussion on taxes differs is Gopalpur, where members of the panchayat believe that people are ready to pay for better urban services for which there is a demand. In Gopalpur users have experienced better service provision, e.g., improved water supply and there may be a belief in government's ability to deliver and a stronger administrative capacity (see Table 4) that is likely to increase confidence in service delivery. A question that remains is the extent to which the resistance to higher taxes is driven by the belief that taxes will not lead to improvement in services.

Table 4: Administrative capacity

	Jhanjharpur						
Jhanjharpur	RS	Satghara	Simri	Bishnugarh	Cherra	Gopalpur	Erein
1 Executive Officer	1 Panchayat secretary	1 panchayat secretary	n.a.	1 Panchayat Secretary	1 Panchayat Secretary	1 Executive officer	1 Panchayat secretary
2 clerical staff	No staff	1 temporary assistant (for MGNREGS)	n.a.	No staff	No staff	5 government employees + 2 contractual posts	n.a.
16 sweepers awarded contracts for SWM	No sweeper	No sweeper	No sweeper	No sweeper	No sweeper	No sweeper	n.a.

Second, the bigger existing package of schemes for rural areas is not as important a factor as could have been expected in favor of rural governance. It is mentioned in Erein, Odisha and in the CTs in Bihar but the perception of trade-off depends on the social composition of the wards. In Erein, the loss of MGNREGS and IAY is seen as having a potential negative impact of becoming urban in the poor wards but this is not the case in wealthier wards. In Bihar, the inefficiency of MGNREGS, which has been stopped in the last six months according to our interviews, neutralizes the weight of public schemes. Rural schemes do not seem to make much of a difference, at least for the local elite.

A third difference, and an important one, between urban and rural governance is the bringing of urban bylaws and planning devices. In our case studies, except in Erein that is located in close proximity to a municipal corporation where urban planning and urban regulation apply, there is no direct reference to the trade-off related to urban norms. Conversely, in the statutory town of Jhanjharpur, the spatial expansion is partly driven by the absence of authorization for construction and cheaper land values in the surrounding villages.

Fourthly, access to better urban services, water, sanitation, solid waste management and drainage can be a major benefit of urban status since additional funds are provided for these. However, the analysis of census data on the growth of services (Table 6) does not necessarily corroborate that argument. The question of basic amenities is the main discussed topic in the governance debate. In Bishnugarh and Cherra, both the sarpanch believe that urban governance would automatically lead to better services and job opportunities, almost as a manifestation of faith that some external driver would change the settlement. This is shared by the residents and the elected members in Gopalpur whose preference is in favor of additional funds for urban services rather than rural public schemes. The Bihar case provides a more conflicting view and brings to the fore a facet of the debate that is not visible in the existing literature. The very low level of services, in Jhanjharpur, according to the fieldwork interviews, acts as a justification for many sarpanch and ward members to reject the idea of becoming urban. If the only advantage of becoming urban is the prospect of better urban amenities that are nowhere to be seen in the district – then this is not an attractive proposition. As the president of the North Behat Panchayat states, “we do not want to join Jhanjharpur Nagar Panchayat because development is better in Gram Panchayat than nagar panchayat”. In other words, the trade-offs between remaining rural or becoming urban are not seen by the actors in a vacuum but are embedded with their understanding of what urban signifies in their regional context.

Finally, the field work conducted in the various sites unveils other issues that are only touched upon very sparsely in the literature. One of these issues is the necessity in many cases of realignment of jurisdictions. Another is the connection of the debate on urban status with its social outcomes and related to social conflicts as well as its impact on local politics and the local power structure.

In Erein the urbanization process has been marked by displacement due to large public sector schemes and increased social disparities between the new “middle class” inhabitants (public sector employees working in the district headquarters of Bhadrak) and its poorest inhabitants concentrated in tribal, Dalit and Muslim neighborhoods. Dalit and Muslims’ wards are deprived of electricity which they access illegally and in these wards the fear of having to pay taxes is combined with a sense of exclusion that would be furthered with urban status. In the tribal wards,

a similar sense prevails that is accompanied by a genuine feeling that becoming urban would entail a loss of the rural identity of Erein as compared to the Bhadrak Municipal Corporation.

Table 5 Arguments in favour or against becoming an urban settlement					
Lines of argument	Jhanjharpur	Satghara	Bishnugarh Cherra	Gopalpur	Erein
Taxes higher in urban governance	People not in favor to pay taxes	People not in favor to pay taxes		People willing to pay taxes	People not willing to pay taxes (consensus from ward members, shop and rice mill owners)
Services	Yes, but not in favor of being urban since comparison with Jhanjharpur not positive. In favor, if Jhanjharpur becomes a district	Conflicting views: Yes, potentially Yes, but not in favor of becoming urban since services not of good quality in towns like Madhubani	Yes	Yes, including social infrastructure Yes, additional funding will be coming	Yes, but not in favor. No improvement in services compared to villages incorporated in Bhadrak (gram panchayat can do better). Some people may not be able to pay for urban services. Yes, the poor would lose access to public schemes
Access to public schemes		Conflicting views In one GP, no, does not play a role because MNREGS not efficient. In another, yes these schemes important for some groups			
Regulations	Land registration cheaper in Jhanjharpur RS and no land regulation which pleads for remaining rural				People not in favor to have to need building permit
Change in political constituency		Yes, fear of losing political power to people of Satghara			In some ways, idea that urban would be detrimental for poor and tribal and be a loss of identity + The cost of elections would increase
Realignment of jurisdictions	Mentioned as requirement	Mentioned as requirement			
Social groups		Yes articulation of differences of interests according to the caste hierarchy			Yes, strong articulation of differences among social groups. Tribals, Dalits and Muslims not in favor of urban status.

Source: Interviews conducted in the field (for more details, see individual case studies)

In Bihar, the socio-political dimension is central and this is seen in the case studies and also in other sites that were not included in the final selection of settlements.

A first apparent outcome of becoming urban is the manner in which it can modify the local power structure by favoring some political leaders above others. This reconfiguration of local political leadership was mentioned in Pandaul (see box 2 below) and in one of the neighboring villages of Satghara where people fear that the Chairman of a newly constituted NP would be from Satghara itself to the detriment of the local village leaders. In Erein, the mention of the increased cost of elections in urban local bodies, that local leaders could not afford, is mentioned to justify this fear.

Another concern is the disruption of local village politics. There is a prevailing sense that a GP takes care of the interests of a wider group of people and is linked to a specific form of patronage around allocation of public schemes benefits. The availability of urban funds for improved infrastructure, in particular small roads, leads to another network of actors that involve small public works contractors. Beyond this reshaping of political incentive, the urban/rural discussion reveals the division of opinions along class and caste lines.

In Benipatti, another large village, local politicians better connected to higher levels of government and local businessmen are in favor of urban status. The rural/urban question is framed in a local elite/non-local elite framework.

Box 2. The socio-political debate around urban governance: Narratives from Bihar

Shift to urban governance and reshaping of political configurations

Village of Pandaul, a local inhabitant:

“The reason many do not want the GP to turn into a town is because the āzadi (freedom) will be taken away from the multiple representatives. If 10 mukhiyas are going to be replaced by 1 chairman, who wants to relinquish power?”

Shift of urban governance and its embeddedness in social structures

Satghara, a retired teacher from Karahiya East GP:

“Creation of nagar panchayat will help only Suri, Sonar and Marwari castes. Leaders who live in Bazaar are demanding for it as they do not get anything from GP. It is the poor people who benefit from GP like MGNREGS, IAY and other schemes. We have CM funds for Mahadalits who just live on the outskirts of our village, who will get deprived and majority of them are poor and landless. They do not get anything in NP. Let the proposal come up, we will oppose it and why should we pay taxes as we live in a village?”

Benipatti, the sarpanch:

“It is simple: the satisfied rich people are the ones who want an NP because the commercial, landed class will most benefit from this. They are the same ones who run the NPs... In the NP there is no government, only money.”

Source: Field work interviews (transcriptions)

Despite the richness of the various conversations around urban aspirations they also have to be understood within the legal definition that the state refers to for urban status, which requires us to turn our attention to the actual practices observed on the ground related to the governance debate.

Articulation of urban aspirations or resistance

A minimum population of 20,000 is required to become a transitional urban area in Jharkhand; in West Bengal, the smallest urban settlement has to have a population of 30,000 since there is no specific transitional urban area status. Consequently, the new CTs are not close to this threshold (around 7,000 people in Gopalpur and around 10,000 in total for Bishnugarh and Cherra together). Beyond discussion, no concrete action has been taken in those sites to push for or resist a shift towards an urban status.

In Odisha, the threshold to become a transitional urban area is 10,000 above the actual population of Erein (around 7,800 people) but its proximity to Bhadrak implies that it could be incorporated in the corporation. According to interviews, some villages have been incorporated already³ and there is a master plan in preparation⁴ with Erein situated just at the limits. Consequently, some fear its potential engulfing with Bhadrak and some rice mill owners had requested a stay order against incorporation.

In Bihar, the question of procedures and practices is interesting since the threshold to become a transitional urban area is not very high, around 12,000 a threshold that Jhanjharpur has crossed (around 30,000 people) and so has Ghoghardiha, the other NP in the district. Despite this high population as compared to Simri or Satghara, nevertheless, both these NPs do not have a very high share of male employed in non-farm employment. The grounds on which the claim can be made to become urban or to change one's administrative status seem to be embedded in regional politics. In our case studies, there is no debate in Simri about urban status. However, we will discuss the cases of Jhanjharpur, even though it already does have an urban status, Satghara and Benipatti.

In Jhanjharpur, during interviews with the Nagar Panchayat Chairman and local political leaders, there were multiple references made to a new expansion plan for Jhanjharpur but no details were provided. A plan to expand and improve the Jhanjharpur NP area was mentioned repeatedly by citizens and political leaders, with constant references to the Master Plan that would include the Railway Station Market as well as villages north of the NH junction. It was reported by the NP authorities that an engineering firm from Delhi had conducted a survey and it would submit a report to the NP based on which further decisions would be taken; however, interviews with the firm and the district administration confirmed that there is no official master plan sanctioned by NP or the district administration but that the MLA of Jhanjharpur, also a Minister, had personally asked for the company to make a visit to Jhanjharpur. However, there is also a long-standing rumor that Jhanjharpur will be the headquarters of a new district that will be carved out from Madhubani. Some respondents in the RS market suggest that it will be better to be included in a town (colloquially called township) after Jhanjharpur is declared as the district HQ. The reasoning behind this is that the state administration will be forced to improve infrastructure in a new district HQ. Becoming a district headquarters is therefore much more attractive than becoming a Nagar

³ On 20th May 2013, the Odisha Gazette notified the inclusion of four villages in the corporation (see <http://odisha.gov.in/govtpress/pdf/2013/1028.pdf>).

⁴ <http://www.dailypioneer.com/state-editions/bhubaneswar/stakeholders-meet-for-bhadrak-master-plan-held.html>

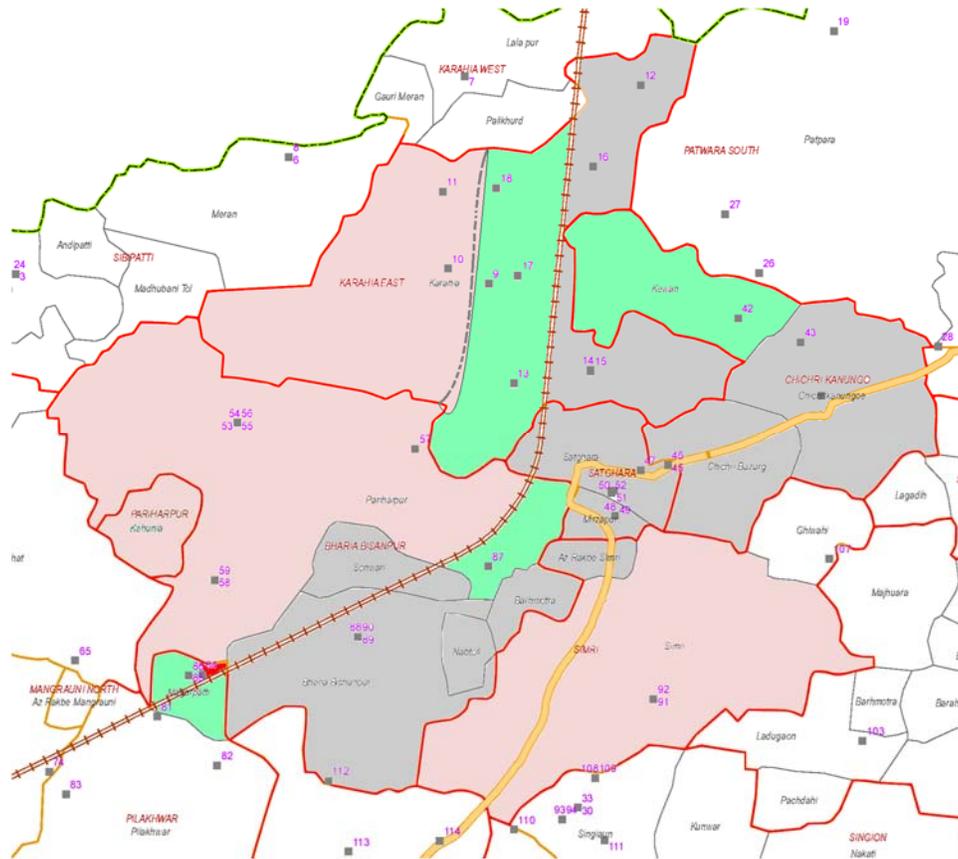
Panchayat since it would necessarily involve public investments. The district administration however denies the existence of any such plan.

Satghara is another example of the necessary connection between local and regional politics to further jurisdictional changes. During the year 1979-80, the Satghara Gram Panchayat passed a resolution requesting the state government to declare Satghara as a Notified area. This plan was accompanied by a bottom-up mapping but since then, restructuring of Satghara and other GP villages was done without public consultation. It is an exercise done by the district administration prior to the gram panchayat elections based upon increase in population and administrative criteria and over time, many parts of neighboring GPs were added or removed.

In this new configuration, the villages or parts of villages that local leaders have suggested for inclusion in a future Satghara Nagar Panchayat to the government is shown in Map 1. It is a recommendation to government based on geographical proximity to Satghara but this is not binding on the government agencies. The district administration is the final authority in delimitation of GP or NPs. However political influence does matter in inclusion and exclusion. Recently, in the year 2005, the Gram Panchayat again passed a resolution which was sent to Panchayat Samiti and from there to Zilla Parishad samiti, however it is a proposal passed by Satghara GP but not by the other neighboring GPs which are proposed to be part of it. Based on this, the district magistrate decides to carry a feasibility study at to whether the town is eligible for Nagar Panchayat or not. Despite the central administrative role played by the district in this process, such a demand has to be accepted politically. The former MLA from Rajnagar –Satghara says it was his political friends at the block level who requested him to raise the issue of Nagar panchayat in the state assembly. He raised the issue verbally in the assembly in 2008 but nothing has happened. According to him without a No Objection Certificate (NOC) from the concerned Gram Panchayats and the Panchayat Samiti, it cannot be declared Nagar Panchayat unless the Assembly declares otherwise. There is no consensus by all the neighboring panchayat in fear of losing political clout, among others. The experience of Satghara tells us that there has to be a multi-level process of political acceptance for becoming urban but this can be overruled by fiat either from the assembly or a jurisdictional realignment by the district administration.

Finally, the case of the large village of Benipatti (where preliminary field work was done) provides another example. A sub-divisional headquarters (since 1990) and a census town, which lies in the northwest of Madhubani, it has a thriving market that contains many automotive showrooms, private and government banks, mechanical sales and services, and clothing stores, and that also benefits from its location on the state highway that connects it to Darbhanga, Madhubani and Sitamarhi district. For its local elite, the high level of non-farm employment makes it worthy of being a township and there is a proposal submitted to the District Magistrate to convert the Behata-Benipatti-Kataiyya agglomeration into an NP. This proposal has been placed by the MLA but it seems that the three GPs have vetoed the proposal, a fact contradicted by others who state that an official declaration will be made before state elections. Concretely, in the three locations there is no clear identification of leadership of who wants an NP, except that the MLA is pushing for this and is trying to include a number of local supporters.

Map 1: Proposed Satghara Agglomerate



Notes: This represents the Satghara agglomeration that could be part of a Nagar Panchayat (see text). The parts in *Gray* are to be included in the NP. This is suggested by various interviews. The parts in *Green* are contiguous in built-up but no one has mentioned them yet (Except Karahiya East next to railway station). The parts in *Pink* are partially affected GP. The *Red* boundaries are Gram Panchayat boundaries while the *thin black* lines are the village boundaries. The dots with the numbers are the Wards.

The future Satghara Nagar Panchayat would include Satghara revenue village (pop: 8,060) Mirzapur village (pop: 2,287), part of Tola Narkatiya, (about 2,500 people) of Bheria Bishnupur (pop: 4,857), part (Kasiyona , about 3,500 people) which is included in Karahiya (pop: 17,649) and part (Chichri Buzurg of Chichir Kanungoe (Ganj-tola, 3000).

The three cases in Bihar, Jhanjharpur, Satghara and Benipatti reveal that the debate on urban status is not held in a vacuum. On the ground, actions are taken, procedures are initiated to change the status of settlements and to realign jurisdictions. These processes are intricately connected with the political power structure and the formation of solid political alliances. It might even be that the push for urban status is related to shifting political constituencies. Thus, the term of “political classification” is entirely apt to describe the stakes that surround the rural/urban debate. Nevertheless, beyond a political dimension, a central theme that runs through these debates is the level of basic ‘urban’ amenities, to which we turn next.

VI. Census Towns and Access to Basic Services

As mentioned above, one potential advantage of being an urban settlement concerns the funding available with urban local bodies for the development of urban services. The available literature is again limited on the level of urban services in Census Towns and on the capacity to design, operate and maintain networked services. There are a number of papers comparing variations in services from metro-cities to small towns that show a systematic decrease in the level of basic services as one moves down in the size of towns (Dubey and Gangopadhyay, 1999; Raghupathi, 2005), with marked inequalities in some specific states, two of them (Bihar and Odisha) of interest to this research (Kundu et al., 1999). Small towns are therefore described as deprived of funds and as suffering from a weak governance capacity⁵. Nevertheless, these papers do not differentiate between CTs and STs. The only available paper that addresses the question that the administrative status plays in service provision in a comparative manner is Mukhopadhyay (2017). He uses a unique constructed data set of matched settlements from two census periods and defines indicators related to access to piped water supply, and improved sanitation and finds limited differences between STs and CTs both in the levels of service and in their growth over 2001-11 (Table 6). But, CTs close to larger towns have better improvements in levels of service.

Table 6: Comparison of Census Towns and Statutory Towns for Select Services

Amenity	Level of amenities in 2001				Change in Level of amenities 2001-11			
	Tap Water	In-house Tap Water	In-house Latrine	Water Closet	Tap Water	In-house Tap Water	In-house Latrine	Water Closet
Mean value in Statutory Towns	57.9%	35.9%	59.0%	28.2%	5.7%	5.4%	8.0%	28.4%
Mean value in Proximate Census Towns	47.87%	27.96%	66.34%	32.46%	8.15%	7.77%	11.96%	29.38%
Mean value in Other Census Towns	49.20%	32.64%	64.69%	37.72%	4.85%	4.34%	8.84%	23.18%

Source: Mukhopadhyay (2017). Proximate CTs refer to CTs that are close to larger towns.

There is an emerging, but still very limited, literature that focuses on some selected CTs, and it comes either from field research or from journalistic coverage.⁶ These works provide insights into the low level of services, even in CTs located in the periphery of large metropolitan cities and into some of the governance issues that impact service delivery. The cases of Molachur (50 km from Chennai) and Chakan (30 km from Pune)⁷ that benefit from the shift of manufacturing into rural areas highlight the problems raised in rapidly transforming places of the absence of physical and

⁵ See for instance the study of the financial capacities of 29 small towns in 8 states in Shastri (2011). Or of four small towns in Uttar Pradesh by de Bercegol (2012).

⁶ The Mint newspaper carried a series of articles on Census Towns (see below) and a few articles have appeared in other newspapers after the publication of the Census results that showed the large number of new CTs in 2011.

⁷ <http://www.livemint.com/Politics/51FuOuvRXWXhxmwrRTBMXbN/New-paths-to-urbanization-from-farms-to-factories.html>

social infrastructure. However, this is not the case in other types of Census Towns where growth seems to be more related to real estate growth, such as Neral in Maharashtra⁸. This article acknowledged the difficulty that Panchayats face in providing services to a population that almost doubled in ten years.

The research work of Samanta (2017) in the state of West Bengal highlights the existing service gaps in CTs. In Barjora, water supply is provided only partly through the panchayat but people have to rely on their own arrangements because supply is insufficient. Most households have their own well in their courtyard, which raises some quality issues with the increased pollution of the ground water due to polluting industries. The panchayat tries to find solutions to its insufficient supply by relying on tankers. There are no covered drains and no solid waste management services due to paucity of funds. She finds very similar results in Singur (Samanta, 2014). What she also highlights in her work is the difference between the village of Barjora and the other villages in the agglomeration, hinting at the possibility of discrepancies within villages that are located in the periphery of CTs, as is also the case in Singur. She also places this situation within the specific situation of West Bengal where the criteria to become urban is strict (a minimum of 30,000 people and density and employment criteria). This work underlines the difficulty of panchayat to handle service provision for settlements that have urban features and density levels that would require networked services. In a recent op-ed, Debroy (2014) also points to the question of fragmentation of authorities⁹, in particular in CTs located in Delhi, raising the question of the place of CTs in larger metropolitan cities.

Based on this limited literature on the intersection of CTs and urban services, research questions that explore the relationship between governance and access to basic amenities are multifold. Put simply, with the rise in population and spatial expansion, there is a change of scale in terms of service provision. In particular, for water and sanitation services, it might be necessary to develop networks and to shift from on-site sanitation or community or individual water systems. For roads and solid waste management, expansion of services and better organization might be required. One of our questions is as to whether there is a difference between census towns, villages and statutory towns both in terms of the level of services and the manner in which people make demands (or not) on urban services. This will require understanding how services are provided in different types of settlements as well as the level of differentiation in different parts of the town studied, or even beyond its boundaries.

Services

The profiles for each settlement based on census data (Table 2) as well as the qualitative interviews carried out in each settlements reveal significant variance in provision and expectation of basic infrastructure, such as water supply. From Table 2, it is clear that among the three settlements in Madhubani, Satghara (CT) is most comparable to the sites in the other states. Jhanjharpur (NP) despite being a statutory town lags behind in most service indicators as compared to the CTs in other states. Indeed, it is similar and often worse than Simri, a village in the same district. In Bihar, therefore, there does not seem to be a major benefit from ST status. Erein's position as being on

⁸<http://www.livemint.com/Politics/364m2CaVtj2HoR88spSpNM/Zero-amenities-yet-census-towns-hit-the-property-jackpot.html>

⁹ <http://blogs.economictimes.indiatimes.com/policy/puzzles/an-urban-chaos-issue/>

the periphery of a large town appears clear from indicators like the use of LPG, the ownership of two-wheelers and cars, and most importantly, rented houses.

Water Supply Service

Water supply is the most varied across the settlements studied. All the three settlements in Bihar, even the large village, Simri, have an overhead tank system, but none of them were functional. Since these areas have a high water table and hand pumps were accessible for most households, this has not proved to be a major problem in terms of water access, which brings into question the rationale for the original scheme in the first place. While expectations from the state appear to be relatively low here, the situation is quite different in Gopalpur, where there is similar prevalence of hand pumps and a high water table, but the water supply scheme is quite functional and there is a plan to extend it to more households (see Box 3).

In Bishnugarh-Cherra, the situation is in-between. The Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) constructed a surface water supply project on the Jamuniya River to provide pipeline water to the three villages of Cherra, Bishnugarh and Ramua in 1984. However, supply is unreliable because of lack of proper maintenance. Those who get water from this household connection have to pay Rs. 62/month. There were two community taps under this project, which are now completely defunct. To address this situation, another water project is going to be constructed by the Public Health and Engineering Department on the Jamuniya River.

Water supply in Bishnugarh-Cherra is therefore largely through dug-wells and hand pumps. Presently there are 17 dug wells and 41 hand pumps in Cherra and about 25 to 30 panchayat hand pumps and 12 dug wells in Bishnugarh. The location of public hand pumps and panchayat dug wells is shown in Box 4. In addition, people use tullu pumps (low horsepower pumps) both for irrigation and drinking purposes. In the neighborhood with concentration of scheduled caste population, most people have to rely on the use of these pumps.

Box 3: Public Water Supply System in Gopalpur		
	Water Supply Hours in Gopalpur	
	Project I	Project II
	5 am – 6 am	6 am – 7am
	11 am – 12 noon	12 noon – 1 pm
	4.30 pm – 5.15 pm	5.15 pm – 6.00 pm
<p>In Gopalpur, the Panchayat and the Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) of the state government supplies piped water and community taps through the Swajaldhara Project, using ground water. Before commencement of Swajaldhara Project, this area was totally dependent on PHED's hand pumps. Besides piped</p>		

water supply, the panchayat also provides hand pumps and deeper Mark-II tube wells for the community's use. As the panchayat's supply coverage is not adequate, many households have dug their own wells and tub wells. The use of hand pump or motor pumps depends on the financial condition of the households.

There are two projects under Swajaldhara; one provides water to 350 households and another serves 250 households. The households having water connections pay Rs. 60/month. There are also 30 roadside community taps under Swajaldhara. These two projects supply water thrice a day to a third of the total households at the times indicated above.

There is a Beneficiary Committee, which consists of 10 members, and the head of the panchayat is the president of the committee. This committee collects water taxes from the residents and they maintain the total water supply system. Recently, in the last 4 -5 years, they have constructed many mark-IIs (average depth of 250 to 300ft), which supply water round the year efficiently. There are 19 hand pumps in the Gopalpur mouza, which are mainly concentrated in Gopalpur Madhyapara, Schoolpara and Dakshinpara.

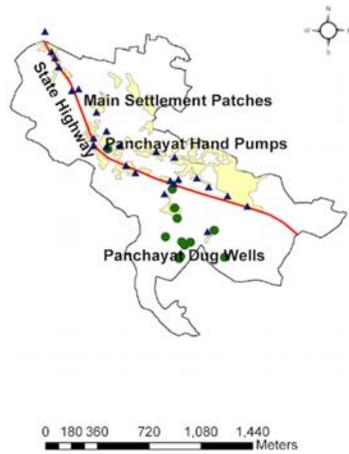
Though water access was very poor in the past during the dry season, they have overcome this problem to some extent through installation of mark-II, which is the deepest tube well in the area. The problem of water becomes acute during November to June (in part due to withdrawal of huge amount of ground water for Boro rice cultivation) because of very low pressure in water from both the sources - household tap and hand pump (which become defunct because of falling ground water levels). However, since the water pressure is poor except in the households located near the pump houses, the Panchayat is not giving permission to any households for further connections. The state government has plans to supply treated surface water through PHED from the river Punarvaba to all households. This project is expected to considerably improve water supply in Gopalpur.

Source: Project field work by Malay Ganguly

In Erein, water supply is from a number of public tube wells (the reported number is 146) that are available in the panchayat. Since the ground water level is quite high, it is not very expensive to sink collective or individual hand pumps. Recently, about a year ago, a piped water supply project under the Swajaldhara Scheme has been started and 60 percent of the village expects to get water from the panchayat after implementation of the project.

In Satghara, too, a water tank was built and water pipeline laid up to the market but water is rarely supplied. However, some part of Karahaiya East GP gets water supply with some 4-5 public taps in the area. Some people have taken household connections (Rs.10 for month is the nominal tax prescribed by the PHED but hardly collected). There is no maintenance by the PHED or the Gram Panchayat. Individual householders have to connect on their own as there is no staff to do so.

Box 4: Location of Public Hand pumps and Panchayat Dug Wells in Cherra



The map shows public hand pumps and dug wells in Cherra. Dug wells are used for both domestic and agricultural purposes. During the rainy season, bleaching powder is used for the dug wells to keep the water clean. Many households have their own dug wells and many others have hand pumps. Most of the public hand pumps are concentrated near schools and offices (see map) while in residential areas, people rely on their own private hand pumps. The location of panchayat dug wells has a relationship with political power, as seen in the concentrated location on the map.

Source: Project field work by Malay Ganguly

In Simri, the situation is worse. A water tank to supply drinking water was built by the Public Health Department (PHED) but the pipelines broke down soon after installation and have not been repaired since. The tank is now defunct. A commonly held view, reflected by a shop is that it was built solely to spend money. In any event, residents obtain water through public and private hand pumps and funds for construction of hand pumps are available for the gram panchayat from MLA, MP, Chief Minister's fund and also the PHED. Residents of the village feel that the iron content is high from groundwater sources, but as of now there is no proposal to repair the existing tank or build a new one.

Oddly, in Jhanjharpur NP, the ST, the situation is no better. A water tank was constructed about four years ago, but no pipeline was laid and therefore no water has been supplied. Officials claim that lack of manpower and miscommunication between departments is to blame. The area around Jhanjharpur railway station (RS) is dependent on public and private hand-pumps as is the NP area, though the number of public pumps is lesser in the agrarian wards. Though the hand pumps are installed by the NP, GP or the PHED, these are not well maintained and respondents complain that if a hand pump breaks down then none of the authorities are willing to repair it. In some wards, local respondents say they collect money from the neighborhood in order to pay for the repairs. However, while the respondents complain about the defunct water tank and pipeline, they seem to be satisfied with the dependence on the hand-pump. There seems to be no collective movement to either repair the tank infrastructure or install new hand pumps either in the NP or the RS areas.

Sanitation, Sewerage

None of the settlements studied had a drainage system or any arrangements for septage management for the households with septic tank systems. Estimates by local politicians and informants about the extent of coverage of individual toilets vary from the census estimates – in both directions, overestimating coverage in Bihar and Jharkhand and underestimating coverage in West Bengal. Based on the census data, it does appear that CTs have higher number of households with in-house latrines and with septic tanks as compared to their district averages.

Jhanjharpur (NP) had built a few public toilets but these were non-functional at the time of the study. Both markets were prone to flooding during the monsoons due to overflow from the Kamala river; but since the construction of a barrage two years ago, this has substantially reduced. The NP authorities say that septic tank cleaning trucks are hired from Madhubani from time to time. North of the railway station, the government housing for the railway and for the Kosi project are the only places where the sanitation is in a better condition. In Satghara CT there is no functioning drainage network, even though it is always flooded during monsoon. In a few areas, especially in Satghara old bazaar, drains were built several years ago but are now choked by the garbage. According to the mukhiya, it is not a priority, because there is a need for better roads and better planning first.

Solid Waste Management

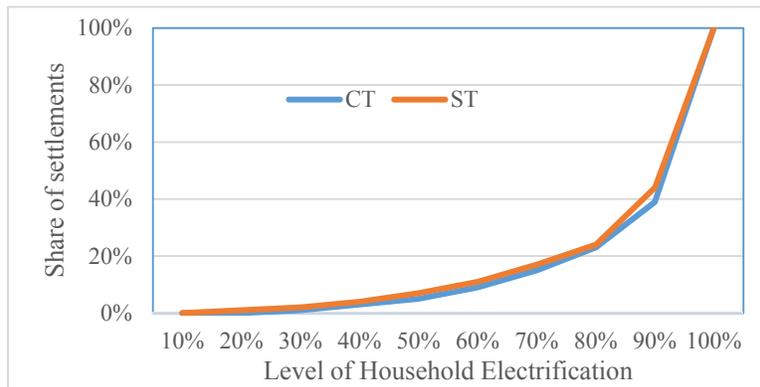
None of the settlements studied, except one, provide solid waste collection and treatment services. In these settlements, household garbage is usually dispersed or burnt. In some market places, the local merchants make arrangements to collect and dispose waste (typically through burning). Special one-off arrangements are also put in place by these merchants during festivals in order to handle the spike in solid waste volumes during these times. However, there is no arrangement, indeed, no conception, of safe disposal practices in these settlements.

The exception is the only urban local body in the study, i.e., Jhanjharpur (NP), where there are 16 employees (one for every ward) retained for the purpose of sweeping and collecting solid waste. However, even here, there is no arrangement for disposal. It is worth noting that Gopalpur panchayat is able to organize itself to provide regular water supply, which is a much more complex service to provide but does not provide solid waste management, while Jhanjharpur, which has relatively low governance effectiveness, still provides this service, presumably because it has been allocated this responsibility under the 74th amendment.

Electricity

Nationally, for services like electricity, there is no difference between census and statutory towns. Figure 4 below shows the distribution of CTs and STs by the coverage of household electrification. As can be seen, distributionally, there is little to choose between the two. This is unusual since it can be surmised that statutory towns would get preference in electricity networks, and since CTs are administratively villages, their electrification should be similar to rural areas. However, this does not appear to be true. Since, unlike other services discussed here, many urban areas appear to be well served by electricity, the question arises whether the causality may run the other way. More work would be needed to understand if electrified villages are more likely to become CTs and how electrification relates to the formation of CTs.

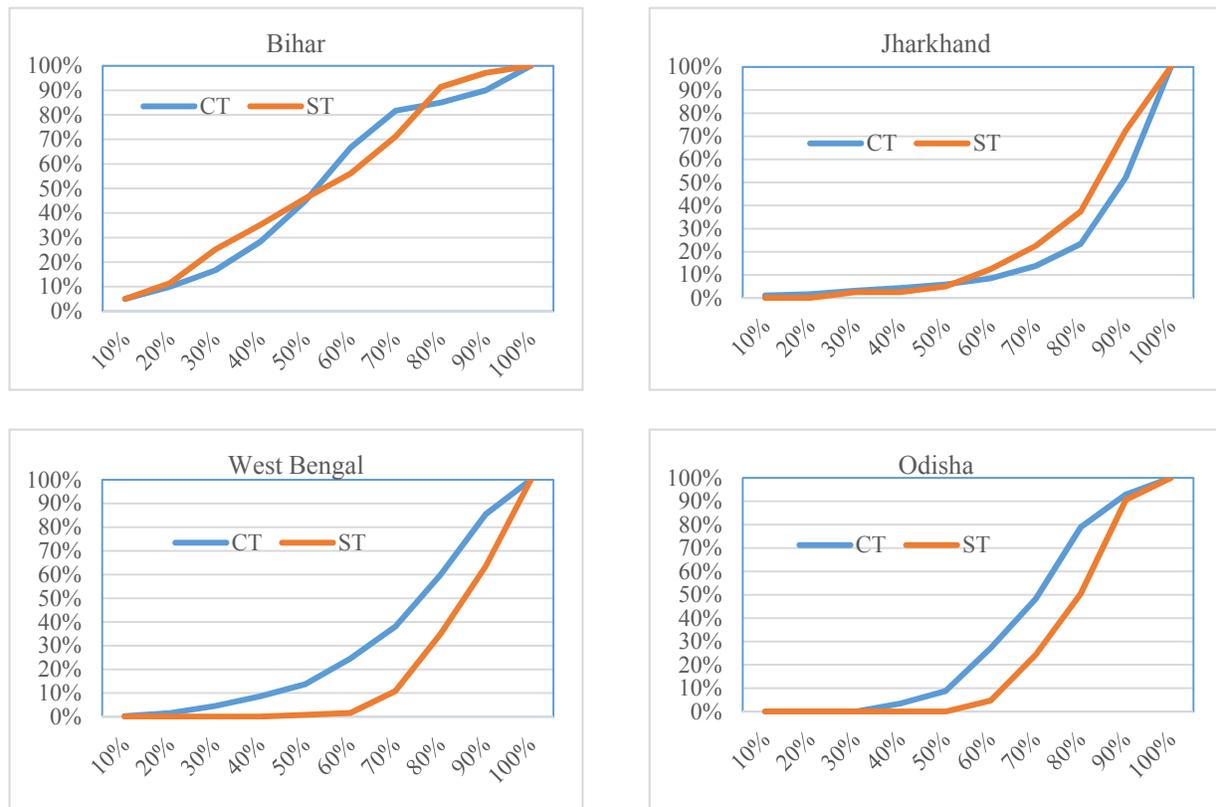
Figure 4: National Household Access to Electricity for Census and Statutory Towns



Source: Census 2011

However, in the four states being studied, the situation is not as clear. As seen in Figure 5, there is considerable variation between states regarding electricity supply in STs and CTs.

Figure 5: State Wise Household Access to Electricity for Census and Statutory Towns



Source: Census of India 2011

While in West Bengal and Odisha, STs are better than CTs (though in West Bengal, this could be due to the fact that STs tend to be larger towns), in Jharkhand, CTs do better than STs. Bihar is again an outlier, where there is no clear pattern. Indeed, among the three sites, the ST, Jhanjharpur NP has levels of household electricity access much lower than in Satghara CT.

Education and Health

As seen in the discussion on new economic activities, the state of health and education service delivery has led to the growth of a vibrant private provision economy even in these smaller settlements. This is aided by the rise of transport providers and better roads. However, there are public hospitals at two of our sites, viz. Jhanjharpur NP and Bishugarh-Cherra. This aspect was not investigated in detail during our fieldwork.

VII. Key Findings

Economic Transformation

This study is based on fieldwork at multiple locations in four states. These are Satghara, a census town, Simri, a large village, Jhanjharpur, a statutory town and block headquarters, all in the Madhubani district of Bihar; Erein, a census town near Bhadrak, a small class I district headquarters in Odisha; Bishnugarh and Cherra, a paired set of co-located census towns in Hazaribagh district of Jharkhand and Gopalpur, a census town in, Dakshin Dinajpur district of West Bengal. This spread allows us to ask how location-specific are the processes associated with urbanization and what commonalities, if any, one can notice in these sites.

A number of new activities are indeed common to many of these sites. These include activities connected to construction, transport – both passenger and freight, education, health and cellphones. In addition, better transport infrastructure, for instance, makes it possible for traditional activities like curd-making, which earlier were limited to the local market to now serve a much larger regional market, making it possible for more people to be employed in such activities. Large economic activities, like medium manufacturing appear not to thrive in these areas, in major part, due to the lack of reliable electricity supply, which would increase the cost considerably, by necessitating self-provision.

However, much of the economic activity of these census towns remains rather “ordinary” consisting mainly of non-tradable services and commerce. They are the sites that provide a wide variety of services to a growing rural market which is growing more able to afford them and access them, both physically in terms of infrastructure and socially, in terms of cultural mores. This banality of urbanization, its commonplace ubiquity and non-remarkable nature of transformation masks a very important character of this transformation, which is its resilience and permanence. Since it is not based on any major directed external agency (except perhaps Erein in our sites), the process is organic and can be expected to continue, with different degrees of vitality at different sites.

Spatial Transformation

The main observation regarding spatial transformation pertains to the pervasive nature of the transformation underlying the emergence of new Census Towns. Even in the cases of Census Towns located away from larger urban agglomerations, the increases in population densities and non-farm employment which are driving the emergence of new Census Towns are playing out not only within but also around the administrative limits of the Census Towns. And some of this transformation will remain invisible in terms of statistical measurement of urban areas and population. It is useful to reiterate that the size and area of villages in India vary enormously, even within a tehsil. However, the unit of determination as to whether a settlement is a census town or not is the village. So, a naturally small village will never become a census town even if its economic activities become completely non-farm because it will not meet the size criteria. Similarly, a group of villages may be sufficient to be a census town as a group, but not individually. In this manner, some forms of urbanization will remain invisible to the current system of measurement.

More relevant however, is the fact that as the non-farm activity in a village spreads, the actual site of the activity may be another village. In Gopalpur, one of our sites, for instance, the site of the main bazaar is near the ferry crossing, which is connected by road to a major district road to the other bazaar site. However, much of the first bazaar is in a different village, Bazrapukur, which is actually in a different panchayat. It is possible that much of the urban growth in Gopalpur census town will therefore be not measured within Gopalpur and that the growth in Bazrapukur may not be sufficient to reclassify this into a census town. This is one instance where the contiguous built-up methodology may be of use to identify such clusters. However, keeping such a measure updated and discovering new sites is an issue.

A similar issue is seen in Jhanjharpur, where the growth is outside the town boundaries, which contain a substantial farm population. A redefinition of Jhanjharpur town to exclude its farming areas and include its non-farm activity areas may lead to a cleaner urban rural separation. As it stands, the level of amenities in Jhanjharpur town, which is a block headquarters, is much below that of a census town like Satghara.

Provision of Services

At the start of this study, it was hypothesized that there would be a choice for people between urban status, associated with a variety of public services like water and sanitation, street lights, etc. and rural status, which offered a variety of schemes like IAY, MGNREGS, etc. However, as the study progressed, it became clear that this was not an accurate characterization of the choices involved. In most of the case studies, there were groups of citizens who were interested in urban status and others who were not and in some places, like Satghara and Jhanjharpur or Benipatti (not a site but a village in Madhubani district near our sites), there were extensive efforts that included the generation of maps, etc. to bring about a change in status. This was associated with occupation, but also caste.

The choice was complicated by the finding that urban status was not strongly associated with better services in identifiable dimensions. This is true not just in our sites, but also appears to be true for

census towns and statutory towns more generally. More curiously, it may also be so for villages close to census and statutory towns. It would appear that for smaller statutory towns, the level of public investment in service provision is not high (see Khan 2014 for an example) and investment in private infrastructure such as septic tanks may well be higher in census towns, due to higher incomes and no expectation of public investment. In such a situation, the demand for statutory status often is associated with a demand for the town to become administrative headquarters, e.g., a block headquarters or, in the case of Jhanjharpur, a district headquarters.

From the earlier discussion on urban status, it is not clear whether the level of services in statutory towns is distinctly and visibly better than census towns. This is also a finding that is seen in these sites, though with significant variance. Functions that are entrusted to ULBs like solid waste management are at least staffed to be carried out, though actual delivery may vary. Most of these settlements, with the exception of West Bengal, are not staffed to provide services. In Bihar, one observed defunct water supply schemes in all three sites, where expenditure on infrastructure is rendered infructuous.

Some of these results from the qualitative fieldwork may be specific to poorer states, and in more developed states, the monetization of land may, inter alia, play a more central role and can trigger a potential for capital surplus later invested in more productive activities.

Is Bihar different? Pair-wise comparison

The lack of association between status and service provision may be specific to Bihar, as illustrated by comparison of Simri and Satghara as well as Satghara and Jhanjharpur. The purpose of this comparison was to illustrate the position of a large village, a census town and a statutory town with regards to their governance and their economic structure. Our results show that these three types of settlement cannot be seen as being on a linear continuous process from rural to urban. First, in terms of its employment structure, Jhanjharpur's percentage of male employed in non-farm activities is closer to Simri, at below 50 percent as compared to 81% in Satghara. In this sense it is among the few STs that do not meet the census criteria. Jhanjharpur is worse than Simri and much worse than Satghara in terms of electricity access. This is surprising since electricity is publicly provided as compared to septic tanks, which are based on private individual investments. In terms of overall service provision, the statutory town, Jhanjharpur is closer to Simri than Satghara, which is far better serviced. If services define a form of urbanity (or urban quality of life), then the census town is much ahead of the statutory town in this instance. In other words, the reason for Jhanjharpur becoming a NP either is linked to its higher population (pop: 30,590 people) or to other governance processes, e.g., the presence of the block headquarters (which is not the case with Benipatti, for example).

In Simri, people clearly see themselves as part of a rural settlement and the most dominating caste still owns large tracts of land. In addition, its connectivity is very limited as compared to Satghara and Jhanjharpur, which constrains its expansion as a node for non-farm activities. It is worth speculating as to whether the intense demand for urban status by parts of the Satghara population is related to this situation of non-farm work and better services, while Simri, being of similar administrative status and population size, has no such demand. The caste dynamics of Bihar is also evident in the divide between the bazaar (market) and basti (settlement). The demand for urban

status comes from the bazaar and the castes who are in the majority in the CT, while the surrounding rural areas have a different caste composition, and are not as much in favor of urban status.

Initial Policy Implications

The study results open up a number of questions for policy implications in terms of governance, service provision and support for economic growth.

A major policy implication in terms of governance, not just for the four states, but more generally, is the need to plan at a more aggregated level, like the tehsil or the district, and not at the level of the settlement. The existing separation between rural and urban that structures all public interventions and governance structure is not in sync with the spatial and economic reality of these settlements that are perceived as a territorial unit by most of the residents. Various options can be envisaged that would require more or less interventions ranging from evolving solutions to activate efficient district planning committees as exists in today's administrative organization to more radical solutions such as ending the binary rural/urban status created by the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments on decentralization.

In terms of service provision, the study shows that the level of basic amenities remains very low. Since these CTs are sites where increasing numbers of people live and work, even in states like Bihar with high levels of outmigration, public investment to ensure higher levels of service provision such as water and sanitation needs to be called for. In addition to increasing population densities, and even in the absence of radical economic transformations, Census Towns appear as emerging centralities in their respective territories. This is illustrated in these towns by the expansion of markets and increased regional commute and brings demands for improvement in the provision of services such as solid waste management and street lighting, which are mostly non-existent in Census Towns.

In terms of economic activities, another important implication relates to the need for spatially blind policies aimed at improving access to services such as formal finance and electricity, with the objective of enhancing the level of access of basic amenities but also the economic potential of CTs.

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