

Emergence and Spatial Dynamics of Census Towns in Ranchi District: A Study of Peri-urban Transformation

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Abstract

Demography plays a very crucial role in the emergence of census towns. The key factors that influence the classification of an area as Census towns (CT) are the population size, composition and distribution. Urbanization and migration continue to shape the communities and demography provides insights into the dynamics of these areas. Demography is intricately linked to the emergence of census towns, shaping their identity, growth and development. Therefore, the behavior of human population to certain socio-economic factors needs to be studied in detail.

This paper attempts to critically examine the role of the population in the emergence of Census towns in Ranchi district which further contributes in the development of the region. The CT's play a major role in the process of Urbanization. Additionally, this paper also attempts to explain the reason that leads to the development of Census towns in Ranchi district.

Keywords: Census towns (CT's), Demography, Urbanization, Spatial dynamics.

Introduction

Small towns and cities are always considered the nucleus of human civilization. They owe their existence, origin and growth to the surrounding areas which lack in functionality. There are three determinants that helps in the revival of any place i.e., behavioural, structural and the demographic determinant. The role of large towns and cities have been always noticed in the process of urbanization. But the origin of new towns or say rural urbanization is a very simple but important aspect of urbanization in any area. Rural urbanization is a process by which the number of new town increases by the natural growth of small villages. The large towns and big cities keep developing and emerge into metropolitan area, by the time in the intermediate urbanization small towns transform into medium size towns and cities. Census towns are one such towns that emerge as a result of rural urbanization. There are several factors that lead to the emergence of these towns. But the main determinant that because of which the census of India classifies it as urban is its demography. In simple words, large villages that meets the census standards of an urban area is termed as Census towns.

These provide an accurate and comprehensive demographic data that is essential for various socio-economic planning and development initiatives (Kubiczek & Hadansik, 2022). By accurately counting and categorizing the population in these towns, policy makers can make informed decisions regarding resource allocation, infrastructure development, public service provisioning and urban governance. Apart from this, census towns also help in identifying areas that may require special attention in terms of social welfare programs, healthcare facilities, education, resources and other socio-economic interventions. The inclusion of census towns ensures that the diverse cultural and socio-economic dimensions of the areas are considered, allowing for more inclusive and equitable approach to development.

Definition of Census towns- In India, Census towns refer to a place which is not statutorily notified. These are the areas that are outside the statutory towns having distinct urban characteristics. The Census of India classifies them as urban because of the following characteristics:

- a) A minimum population of 5000 persons.
- b) It should attain a density of 400 persons per sq. km.

- c) At least 75% of the male main- working population should be engaged in non-agricultural pursuits.

The census of 2011, highlighted a phenomenal increase of census towns in India. This increase has brought about a subsequent change in the existing urban hierarchies as they exist somewhere between the urban and the rural. The development of these census towns prove that the society is experiencing sectoral variation. These urban centers are somewhat like the transition town that needs special attention of the state for its proper development.

THE STUDY AREA

This paper attempts to analyze the pattern of development and expansion of ‘census towns’ in Ranchi district, Jharkhand. The state, after its formation is still undergoing several demographical as well as socio-economic changes. Ranchi, as a district holds prime importance because it is the most populous district of Jharkhand is ranked 3rd in terms of area among the other 23 districts.

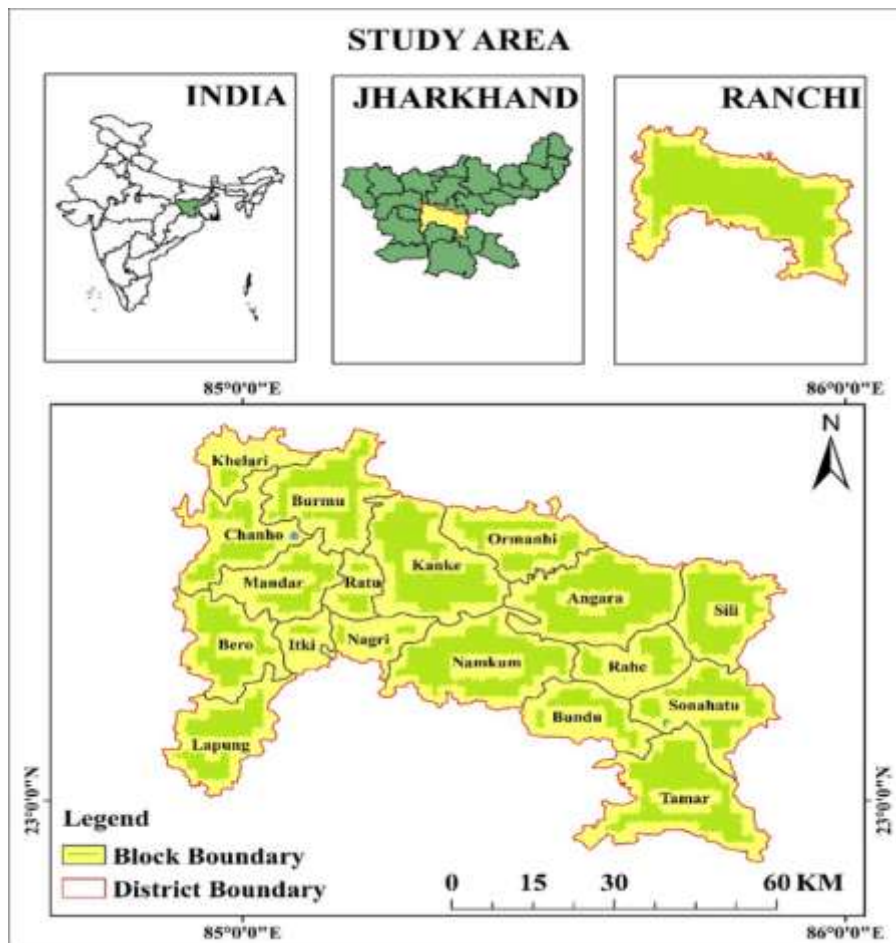


fig 1.1: Map showing the study area, Ranchi district

The district consists of 18 blocks and 15 towns, among which two are statutory and 13 are census towns. The census towns of Ranchi district are as follows:

Table 1.1 The census towns in different blocks of Ranchi district

CENSUS TOWNS	C.D BLOCK
Bishrampur, Churi, Ray, Khelari	Khelari
Kanke, Arsande	Kanke
Irba	Ormanjhi

Muri	Silli
Tati, Ara, Bargarwa	Namkum
Ratu	Ratu
Tundul	Nagri

Objectives

This paper attempts to analyze the recent trends and spatial pattern of the census towns of Ranchi district. The research objectives are stated below:

- 1) To analyze the spatial distribution of census towns in Ranchi district.
- 2) To highlight the factors leading to the emergence of the census towns in the study area.

Research Methodology

This study is primarily based on the analysis of the secondary data. The Census publication is the principal source of secondary data in the demographical studies which identifies the growth and distribution patterns of population leading to the growth of towns and cities. Meanwhile, other scholarly sources are also used. The necessary data has been retrieved from the official website of *Office of Registrar General of India (ORGI)* and the *District Census Handbook of Ranchi district (DCHB- Part A)* in order to understand the minutes of the emerging CT's.

Result & Discussion

Population Distribution and Density

There is a very basic concept which says that urbanization is a process of *population concentration*. The growth of an area is always correlated with its demographical characteristics which is a major factor that determines it as urban or rural. The urban centers shape the Indian economy. the upward trend in urbanization brings with it a huge crowd of people which means an urgent requirement of proper management of resources. The population distribution among the census towns depicts its increasing importance and also needs attention of the state. The Census towns in Ranchi district is observing a positive growth of population with the passing years.

Table 1.2 shows the growth of these Census towns in terms of population. Khelari CT Muri CT and Kanke CT have seen their emergence phase in the early decades of 1961-1971 and are growing since then. Whereas, most of the Ct's in Ranchi district have been notified after the establishment of Jharkhand as a separate state.

Table 1.2 Status and growth history of census towns in Ranchi district.

	CT / Year	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
1	Bishrampur	...	...	...	...	4346	4487
2	Churi	...	...	...	...	25222	24876
3	Ray	...	...	...	...	6419	6977
4	Khelari	5779	8104	13269	14180	18783	20010
5	Kanke	...	10994	13145	15489	16402	17560
6	Arsande	...	...	...	4504	6451	9582
7	Irba	...	...	...	...	4151	5210
8	Muri	4654	6712	9312	10342	12009	12744
9	Tati	...	...	...	...	10511	12878
10	Ara	...	...	...	...	4476	6346
11	Bargarwa	...	...	...	...	6232	8615
12	Ratu	...	...	...	...	16058	22379
13	Tundul	...	...	...	...	9080	11190

Churi CT is the only one which has seen a decline in its population in 2011 most probably due to the migration of people to other urban centers. Whereas, the other towns are seen growing in terms of number. It is an indicator of the transformation of rural social structure. The main city in the center, creates a large demand for the commodities such as vegetables, dairy, poultry products etc. which forms the main stimulus of change in the surrounding areas. The census towns are the result of this stimulus.

Census Towns and their Spatial distribution in Ranchi district

As stated by Mukhopadhyay, census towns are morphing places and this is not only the case for these CT's located at the peripheries of metropolitan cities but also applies to stand alone CT's or CT's located in not very urbanized districts. Accordingly, the sharp increase in the number of census towns between 2001 and 2011 did not only translate into expansion or consolidation of metropolitan areas but has also and led to spatial transformation of rural areas. Jharkhand, as a state with lower urbanization saw an absolute increase in the CT's. Ranchi district saw an increase in their number since 1961. The CT'S here are mainly located at the peri-urban areas around the capital city or areas that have proper connectivity networks with the city. Based on the census data and methodology devised by Pradhan (op.cit), Jharkhand and Bihar have a configuration similar to the national average i.e., around one-third of the new CT'S are close to a large city specified as class 1 town with an appropriate population more than 1,00,000.

In Ranchi district there are total 13 CT's that can be classified into 3 categories:

- Located around Ranchi city,
- Away from the urban area but located along a main road,
- Present in cluster.

(a) *CT's located around Ranchi city:*

The mushrooming of the census town around a large city is a common phenomenon seen in the urban India. Many small towns have been seen growing at the expense of older and larger cities. The same condition can also be seen in terms of the capital city of Jharkhand. There are total seven census towns around Ranchi city that comes under this category. They are Kanke, Ratu, Tundul, Bargarwa, Ara, Tati and Arsandsde. These Census towns are present at a proximity of 20 Km's from the capital city. They can also be regarded as the commuter's zone. Among these, Kanke, Tundul, Ratu, Bargarwa and Arsande are purely residential towns which do not consist of any big industries or factories. The Ranchi urban area provides a common market to them. Whereas, Tati serves as an industrial town which has some minor and major industrial plants such as Usha Martin plant, the Waxpol Industries etc. Ara is another census town which is located approximately 6 km away from Tati. It can be said that these two towns complement each other's growth and expansion.

(a) *CT's away from the urban area but located on a main road:*

The means of transport and communication plays a vital role in the development of any area. The regional mobility effects the growth of such areas has a two-way effect. Primarily, the transport and communication network create urban concentration and then it also helps in commuting activities.

This category bears only two CTs among the thirteen i.e., Irba and Muri. A national highway (NH-33) is seen connecting Irba with the Ranchi urban center on the other side the highway ensures its connectivity with the other district (Ramgarh). It is roughly 20 kms away from Ranchi city and 26 kms from the Ramgarh cantonment area. The expansion of this Census town is seen mainly due to the factor of accessibility. On the other hand, Muri CT stands at the extreme east of the district and shares border with the Purulia district of West Bengal. A state highway (SH-1) passes from the town that connects Muri-Tati-Ranchi. The Muri Hindalco plant, India's first Alumina refinery commissioned in the year 1948 serves as a boon to the economy of this town. This plant employs the workers and boosts the economy by creating local jobs. Change in the occupation is also considered as one of the most important indices for development of a rural area.

c) Group of CT's present in clusters around each other:

The last category of CT has 4 towns- Khelari, Bishrampur, Churi and Ray. They are present in clusters around each other. These group of towns are located at the extreme north-western corner of Ranchi district where it shares the boundaries with Latehar, Chatra and Hazaribagh district.

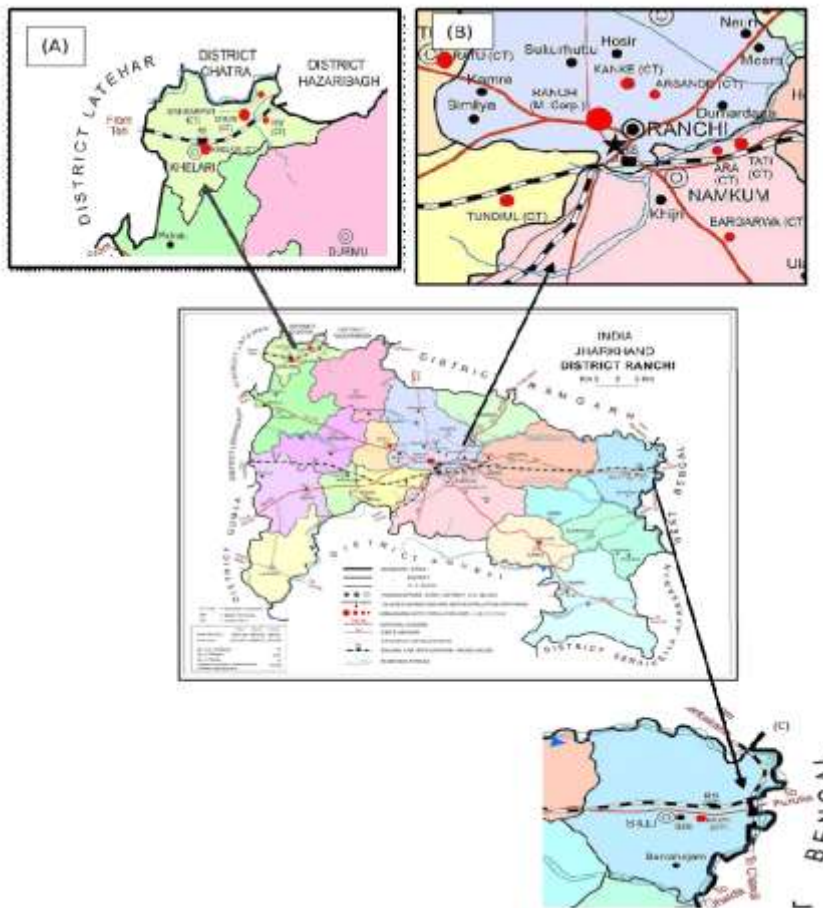


Fig 1.2: Clusters of Census towns; (A) CT's in Khelari block, (B) CT's in Kanke and adjoining blocks, (C) CT in Silli Block of Ranchi district

The major reason for the growth of these CT's is particularly the presence of a railroad which ensures its connection with other developed areas. It is far away from the central urban region but still it emerged in clusters because these towns lie in the proximity to the Khelari railway station. Hence, regional mobility plays an important role in development of any area.

The economy

An urban economy has several benefits on a rural economy. People tend to move towards places having better living conditions and facilities that has led to the growth of census towns. The emergence of these towns is closely associated with a shift from farm economy to a non-farm economy. Out of the total population, the workers can be classified into cultivators, agricultural laborers, Household industry workers and other workers.

The non statutory towns are the most profound destination of the rural people due to affordability in buying lands and getting services better than in the villages. One can enjoy the proximity to larger city with all the other beneficiaries. Such towns that lie around a larger urban area benefits its dwellers to easily commute daily for better education, occupation and other needs.

Proximity to the urban core of Ranchi city

The city serves as the administrative and economic hub of Jharkhand. As the city expands, rural areas in its vicinity are increasingly influenced by urban processes such as housing expansion, commercialization, and daily commuting. This spatial expansion has led to the gradual urbanization of villages that, while not officially classified as statutory towns, meet the demographic and occupational criteria outlined by the Census of India.

Infrastructural Development

The improvement of road networks like NH-33 and other regional connectors, has played a catalytic role in this transformation. Enhanced transportation linkages have not only improved access to Ranchi city but have also encouraged the establishment of small-scale industries, retail businesses, and service-based occupations in the surrounding areas. This infrastructural growth enables rural populations to integrate with urban labour markets while remaining geographically outside the formal urban boundary. Consequently, this has resulted in a shift in the occupational structure of these settlements. A significant proportion of the male workforce has transitioned from agricultural employment to non-agricultural sectors, including construction, transportation, education, and retail, aligning with the census criteria for classification as a town.

In-migration from tribal and rural hinterlands

In-migration from tribal and rural hinterlands has contributed to rapid population growth in these emerging urban clusters. Migrants are often drawn by better employment opportunities, educational institutions, and access to services unavailable in more remote villages. This demographic growth not only increases population density but also contributes to the socio-economic diversification of the settlements, which begin to exhibit distinctly urban characteristics in terms of consumption patterns, lifestyle choices, and housing infrastructure. Alongside these changes, there is a growing wave of urban aspirations among youth and local populations, driven by increased exposure to urban media, education, and digital connectivity. This aspiration manifests in the demand for urban-style amenities such as concrete housing, private schooling, digital banking, and recreational facilities, further blurring the rural-urban divide.

Observations

The study of census towns in Ranchi district reveals several critical observations that reflect ongoing peri-urban transformation:

- a) **Urbanization Driven by Proximity:** A majority of census towns are situated in close proximity to Ranchi city or along key transportation corridors such as highways and railways, suggesting that nearness to urban centres and connectivity are pivotal factors in this transformation.
- b) **Population Growth and Migration:** Rapid population increases in these towns are partly fuelled by in-migration from nearby rural and tribal areas, where people seek better economic and educational opportunities.
- c) **Urban Characteristics without Urban Governance:** Despite exhibiting urban features—such as higher population density, infrastructure development, and commercial activity—these settlements continue to be governed by rural administrative structures, resulting in service delivery and planning mismatches.

- d) **Aspiration-Led Development:** Rising aspirations among local populations, particularly youth, are pushing demand for urban amenities like quality education, digital services, and better housing, thereby intensifying the pace of informal urbanization.
- e) **Spatial Clustering:** The towns tend to cluster in peri-urban belts rather than being evenly distributed, which highlights uneven development and the need for spatial planning.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the rapidly evolving urban landscape of Ranchi through the lens of census towns—settlements that exhibit urban characteristics without formal urban status. The results indicate that the expansion of census towns within the district is not arbitrary or independent; instead, it is influenced by a multifaceted relationship with the spatial closeness to Ranchi city, infrastructural development, occupational shifts, and increasing rural-to-urban migration. The spatial distribution of these towns demonstrates a strong tendency toward clustering along major transportation corridors and in peri-urban areas adjoining the Ranchi urban agglomeration. This suggests that accessibility and connectivity play a crucial role in shaping urban expansion. Simultaneously, the emergence of these towns is being driven by demographic pressure, shifting economic activities from agriculture to services and informal industry, and the aspirations of a youthful population seeking better employment, education, and living conditions.

However, despite their urban growth, these towns remain administratively rural, leading to governance and infrastructure gaps. The lack of municipal recognition hinders the proper delivery of basic services and restricts access to urban development schemes. This governance lag poses a significant challenge to achieving balanced and sustainable urbanization in the district. The rise of census towns in Ranchi district reflects a broader pattern of peri-urban transformation occurring across many parts of India. These settlements act as critical transition zones between rural and urban spheres. Therefore, policy frameworks must recognize their growing importance and respond with integrated planning, infrastructural support, and appropriate governance reforms to ensure that these emerging urban centres develop sustainably and inclusively.

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