



Measuring Urbanity in Census Towns: A Probe through Selected States of India

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Abstract

Census towns are those which are urban in respect to the total population, population density and occupational engagement as laid down by Census of India in one hand but rural by nature in respect to administrative identity on the other. An important aspect to be mentioned is that the number of census towns (CTs) in India has grown from 1,362 in 2001 to 3,894 in 2011. Kerala, West Bengal, and Madhya Pradesh contribute 11.83, 20.03 and 2.87 percent to total CTs respectively in 2011. A study shows that the new CTs account for almost 30 percent of the urban growth in the last decade. It also shows that the largest increase in the number of CTs was in the state of West Bengal and Kerala. In the case of West Bengal, the increase is 528 CTs and in the case of Kerala, it's 362. Hence, it will be very significant to analyze the level of fulfillment of civic amenities which should be substantially available to an urban resident. In the present analysis, West Bengal and Kerala have been taken in to account along with Madhya Pradesh. The present paper attempts to examine the comparative status of civic amenities provided by government local bodies in the CTs of these states. Thus the study will focus on the status of the civic amenities and services cutting across different levels of development in the country like Kerala, West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh exhibit a relatively high, medium and poor level of development respectively.

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Introduction

Critical observations followed after the figures related to the state of Indian urbanization were published for public dissemination by the Census Organization of India in 2011. For the first time, the absolute population growth in urban population not only surpassed that of rural counterpart but was even slightly higher than the expected one (Kundu and Bhagat, 2011). Strikingly, a number of Census Towns (CTs) almost trebled between 2001 (1362) and 2011 (1,362). Also, the number of Statutory Towns (STs) increased from 3,799 in 2001 to 4,041 in 2011, i.e. almost by 6.4%. Such an unprecedented growth of CTs has contributed nearly 30% of the overall urban growth in India (Pradhan, 2013). Experts opine that this excessive growth is mainly due to two broad reasons- firstly, a more dispersed pattern of in situ urbanization in India and secondly, the reluctance of the policymakers to recognize new statutory towns. In fact, there are many CTs where the population is much higher than the consideration slab, although

they are rural by their administrative identity. Thus, it requires further investigation and in the present study, it is analyzed for three Indian states namely, West Bengal (1st in number of CTs and a developing state), Kerala (2nd in number of CTs and a developed state), and Madhya Pradesh (one of the poorly developed Indian states).

Pradhan (2013) found that CTs contributed nearly a third of the overall population growth in India and a growing share of the urban population is now living in these CTs that are governed by rural administration. Guin and Das (2015) opined that the spatial pattern of the new CTs follows the pattern of the existing urban centers. As a result, the force of urban concentration has been further accentuated. Quite expectedly the field of urban concentration around Kolkata Urban Agglomeration has been extended outward, which indicates the perpetuating centripetal force of the declining metropolis. The study concludes that to make this emerging organization of space significant, it is necessary to have effective urban governance and planning in



the newly emerged (as well as existing) census towns. Mukhopadhyay et.al (2016) suggested that only part of this evolution can be attributed to the gradual urbanization of settlements in the vicinity of larger towns. Instead, the majority of CTs appear as small 'market towns', providing trade and other local services to a growing rural market. Roy and Pradhan (2018) found that the importance of CTs will be maintained in the urban structure, and a significant share of the urban population will continue to grow beyond municipal limits. The influence of large towns on the growth of CTs will be persistent in the future, but a more localized form of urbanization is also evident where the effect of agglomeration is less. Such a pattern may be stable because these places are relatively more prosperous than their rural counterparts. Guin (2018) further emphasizes that little has been talked about the process of transformation of the concerned settlements from 'rural' to 'urban' using field information. Urban growth and urbanization are not the same. Urban growth is the addition to the existing urban population whereas urbanization is a process of transformation from rural habitation into an urban through the adoption of urbanism (Anwaruzzaman, 2019).

Objectives

The main objectives of this study are as follows

- To analyze the size class-wise number of Census Towns (CTs) and trace the decadal growth of the CTs in the states under study.
- To assess the comparative status of the three Indian states namely, Kerala, West Bengal, and Madhya Pradesh with respect to Cts.
- To examine the level of services provided to the dwellers.
- To propose some recommendations on the basis of the findings of the study.

Database and Methodology

For the present study, data have been collected from the District Census Handbook (DCHB) of West Bengal, Kerala and Madhya Pradesh for 2001 and 2011. These contained the required information on town amenities in MS-Excel format. The location map of the study area has been prepared using QGIS 2.14 software. MS-Excel has been used for further manipulation, analysis and graphical representations.

The Study Area

For the current study, three states of India have been taken into account i.e. Kerala, West Bengal, and Madhya Pradesh as they exhibit high, moderate and low growth of Census Towns during the decade 2001-2011. Besides, Kerala, West Bengal, and Madhya Pradesh are highly, moderately and poorly developed Indian states respectively with respect to their overall development.

Conceptualizing Census Towns and Statutory Towns

Broadly speaking there are two categories of urban centers in India, namely, Statutory Town and Census Town. According to *Census of India* (2011), "Places that satisfy the following criteria are termed as Census Towns (CTs):

- A minimum population of 5000,
- At least 75 percent of the male main working population

engaged in nonagricultural pursuits,

- A density of population of at least 400 per sq.km."

The basic ground of difference between a statutory town (ST) and a census town (CT) lies in their administrative status (Fig.2). The basic difference lies in administrative and the up-gradation of a Census Town to a Statutory Town is largely dependent upon the fulfillment of this criterion which can only be done by the policy-making government agencies. Actually, the fulfillment of the remaining three criteria lies totally on the size of population along with occupation and in a populous country like India; this fulfillment can be done easily.

The interesting observation is that the share of Statutory Towns and Census Towns in the states is not balanced (Fig.3). The share of CTs is very large in case of Kerala and West Bengal compared to Madhya Pradesh. But this low share in CTs in Madhya Pradesh does not mean that the number of Statutory Towns is high. A number of urban centers have been recognized other than 112 CTs such as 16 Nagar Nigams, 100 Nagar Palikas and 249 Nagar Panchayats which ultimately reduced the number of CTs in Madhya Pradesh. Whatsoever, the number of Statutory Towns are very less compared to the total number of urban units in these states. Most of them are CTs in case of Kerala and West Bengal. In case of Madhya Pradesh, the Non-statutory towns are also categorized under Nagar Nigams, Nagar Palikas and Nagar Panchayats along with Census Towns. Thus the count of CTs is less in Madhya Pradesh and Nagar Panchayat is highest there.

Decadal Growth of CTs in India

During 2001-2011, there is a massive increase in the number of CTs in India as well as in the three selected states taken in to account (fig.4). The extent of increase is nearly 2.5 times compared to the previous census year i.e. 2001. The contributions of Kerala, West Bengal, and Madhya Pradesh are 11.83, 20.03 and 2.87% respectively which is significant in the Indian context. State-specific number of CTs is the highest in West Bengal followed by Kerala. This is basically due to a widespread reclassification of rural areas into urban areas due to a huge number of immigration of people into the nearest nodal village as those areas are relatively favorable for habitation and commutation offering a good range of services. Another reason may be the occupational shift from the primary sector to non-primary one for a better standard of living. But the administrative status of those places is still rural by nature and that is why they are not statutory towns.

Size-class Distribution of Cts

The most interesting feature is that there are two CTs in the study area which fall even in the class-I category of towns (Fig. 5). They are Dabgram (in Jalpaiguri district) and Bally (in Haora district) and both are located in West Bengal. The reason behind the formation of these class-I CTs is firstly due to recent growth of these places in terms of in-migration of aspiring people and secondly due to its close proximity and well connectivity with large towns. Whatsoever, most of the CTs of West Bengal are in class-V and in case of Kerala and Madhya Pradesh, they are mostly in class-III. Thus, CTs of Kerala and Madhya Pradesh belong to smaller size class (population-wise) compared to that of West Bengal.



Selection of Civic Amenities

For the analysis, some essential civic amenities and services which are provided by the government local bodies are selected to represent the urbanity of a settlement and they are categorized under 6 (six) broadheads (Fig.6).

Transportation Services

Nearly 44% and 36% CTs of West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh respectively are located within 5 km radius of the nearest rail stations (Fig.7). In Kerala, this figure is nearly 33%. In the case of West Bengal, there are some CTs whose data are lacking and categorized as NA. The density of metalled roads in CTs is shown. The availability of metalled road is the highest in the CTs of Kerala (3.04 km/ sq km) followed by West Bengal (2.11 km/ sq km) and Madhya Pradesh (1.18 km/ sq km). The degree of data deficiency in West Bengal is about 35% and in Madhya Pradesh, 20%.

Electricity Supply

On the basis of domestic electric connection per thousand households in the CTs, Kerala stands first among the three states and West Bengal third (Fig.9). The same picture has been reflected when the analysis has been done considering the street lighting (Fig.10).

Fire Services

Going by the provisions of fire services, the fire stations are hardly present in the CTs of the selected states. A very small number of CTs have their own fire station. Kerala is the highest among the three states in this regard (Fig. 11). Absence may be due to the reason that there are other fire stations in close proximity to them. But it is important to mention that fire incidents may occur very quickly. So it is necessary to establish the fire safety network in such a way that the availability of fire services should be close to each of the Cts.

Medical Services

The overall condition of government hospitals is strikingly poor in Kerala in spite of it being the most developed state in India and scores the highest HDI (Fig.12). It proves that there is a sharp contrast with the state picture of Kerala. Madhya Pradesh stands at the best position in this regard, although not quite impressive. The condition of West Bengal is moderate in this regard. But the availability of hospital beds is also poor in all the three states whereas the poorest condition has been seen in Kerala followed by West Bengal. It may be due to the nearness of the statutory towns in Kerala having better health services not necessitating many hospitals in CTs. The most striking fact is that in Kerala, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal, there are 93%, 97% and 85% CTs that do not have any hospital. The condition of dispensaries in the three selected states shows that Kerala is slightly better; it is poor in Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal (Fig.13). A huge number of CTs are found without any dispensary in these states.

Education Services

To examine the educational facility, the availability of schools per 1000 population has been calculated from the Census data by dividing simply the number of schools by the total population of

all the CTs of each state. It shows that Madhya Pradesh has the highest availability followed by West Bengal and Kerala (Fig.14).

Occupational Structure

It represents the unequal geographical distribution of desirable jobs among the communities and is classified according to skill level, economic function or social status. It is shaped by factors such as the structure of the economy, technology bureaucratic approach, the labour market segmentation, labour market, status, and prestige. All three states show a male dominance in the categorization (Fig.15). Although the female percentage is the highest in West Bengal (26.12%) and the lowest in Madhya Pradesh (21.33%). Among the three states, West Bengal shows the highest percentage of marginal workers in the CTs whereas Madhya Pradesh shows the least one (Fig.16). Kerala has the highest share of non-workers in the CTs. The highest percentage of workers is found in West Bengal (Fig.17).

Financial Services

In the case of financial services, the availability of nationalized banks has been taken into account. It is found that in most of the CTs of West Bengal, there is not even a single nationalized bank (61.7%). The situation is marginally better in Kerala and Madhya Pradesh. Most of the CTs of Kerala (58.6%) and Madhya Pradesh (57.5%) have 1-3 banks located in each of them. This is probably one of the basic reasons for the large scale influence of moneylenders in West Bengal.

Major Findings

Among the three states, the largest decadal growth in the number of CTs has been observed in West Bengal followed by Kerala and Madhya Pradesh. *Dabgram* and *Bally (West Bengal)* are two CTs in the study area, that are Class-I cities. Most of the CTs of West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh are Class-V urban center, while in Kerala, most are Class-III towns. In most of the CTs of West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh, length of the metalled road is less than 10 km, while in Kerala, it ranges between 10-30 km. In the study area, CTs are located within 10 km from the nearest of rail stations. The status of electric connections, both for domestic use and street lighting is the best in Kerala and the worst in West Bengal due to the fact that Kerala is much advanced in electricity services and in case of West Bengal the dominance of unauthorized connections may be one of the reasons. The fire fighting services are rarely present in the CTs of the said three states; of these Kerala has the highest percent (3%) and the remaining two states have 2% of their CTs equipped with fire service stations. Availability of hospitals and hospital beds are poor in the CTs of all the three states. Most of them do not have any hospital. In the case of dispensaries, the scenario is to some extent satisfactory. Kerala has the highest number of CTs having dispensaries followed by West Bengal. The highest availability of schools /'000 population has been found in Madhya Pradesh followed by West Bengal. Kerala shows a contrasting picture in respect of the traditional concept of education of Kerala and achieving universal literacy. Male literacy is comparatively more one, although female literacy is the highest in West Bengal (26.1%) and the lowest in Madhya Pradesh (21.3%). Although West Bengal maintains the highest



share of workers including marginal workers in the study area. However, it does not reflect a good occupational structure. In Madhya Pradesh, the availability of schools is the highest; thus, the quality of education is not up to the mark. The availability of nationalized banking services is good in Kerala, followed by Madhya Pradesh. West Bengal has the highest number of CTs having no nationalized banks.

Conclusion

As the CTs are the smallest administrative units in an urban context, it is expected that the government civic facilities will not be up to the mark of a big city. But it is equally true, while any area is coming under the consideration of an urban unit, it should be equipped with adequate civic amenities than a rural unit. Besides, while considering an area as CT, qualitative and quantitative parameters other than population and its related attributes should be introduced. The following recommendations have been proposed for the Cts in general:

- Class-I CT's administration should be upgraded to a municipality for better governance.
- Roads may be upgraded with financial support from PMGSY and NABARD etc.
- Electricity connection should be increased in West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh by giving subsidized but authorized connections.
- The vulnerability of the CTs should be reduced by establishing new fire service stations within 10 km.
- Hospitals and bed count should be increased keeping in mind the quality of services.
- There should be such arrangement and programs to create job opportunities in the CTs. Vocational education and hands-on-training courses can be of great help in this regard.
- Schools must be increased in number in the Cts with adequate student-teacher ratio and a system of surveillance to ensure better education in order to produce skilled human resource.
- Nationalized banks may be increased in number to serve people with institutional financing so that they get out of the clutches of the private money lenders (Mahajans).

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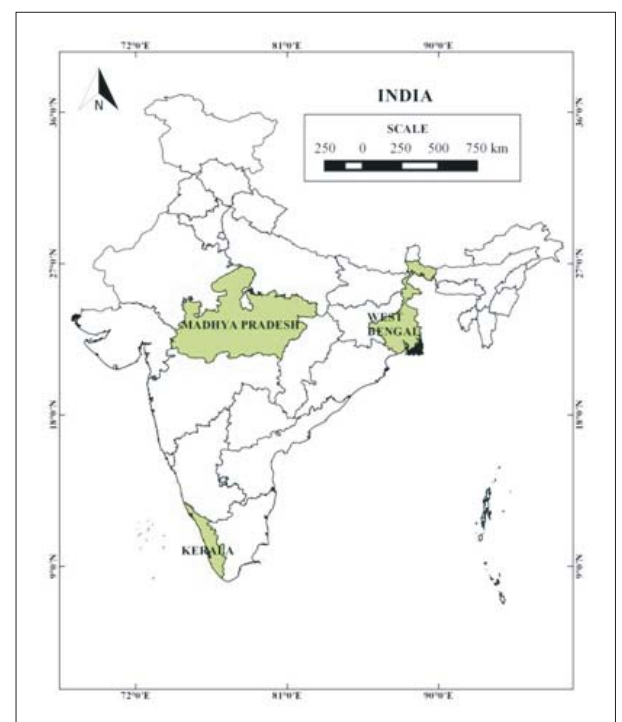


Fig.1: Location of the Study Area

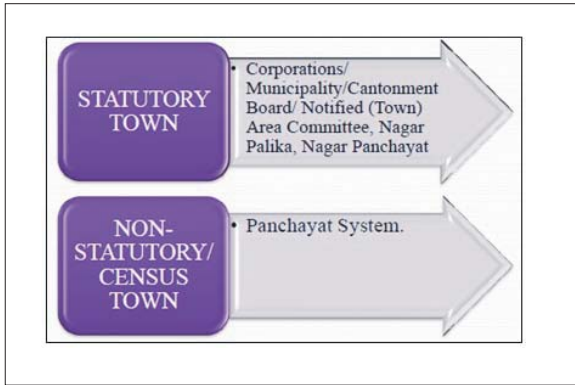


Fig. 2: Basic difference between CTs and Sts

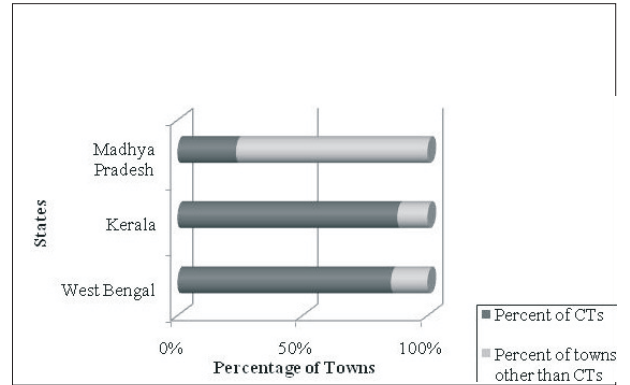


Fig.3:Share of CTs and others in the study area

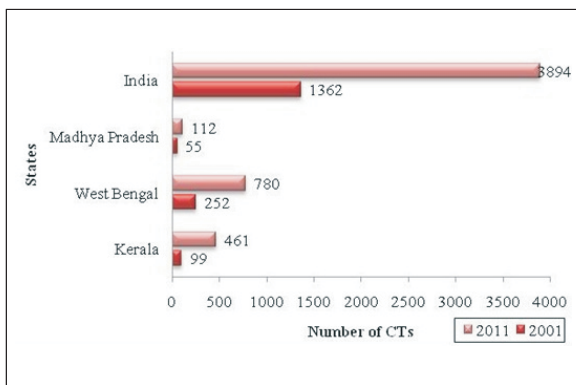


Fig. 4: Decadal Growth of CTs in the study area

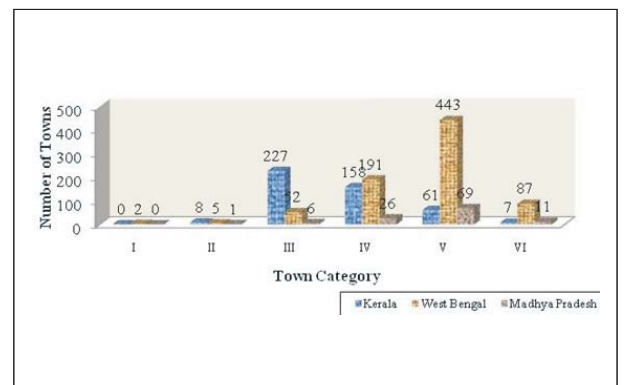


Fig. 5: Class-wise distribution of Census Towns

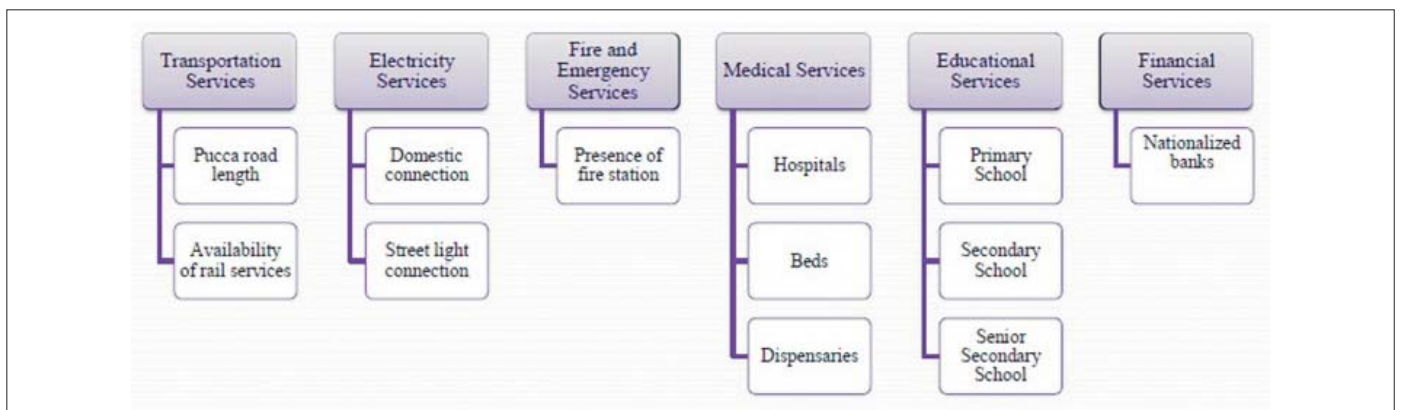


Fig. 6: Chart showing the selection of Civic Amenities for analysis

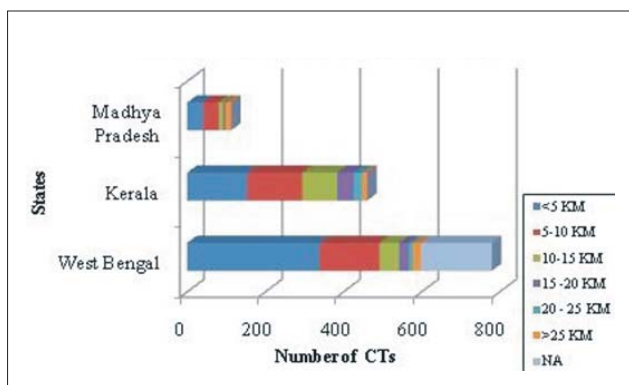


Fig. 7: Distance of the nearest Rail Stations from CT s

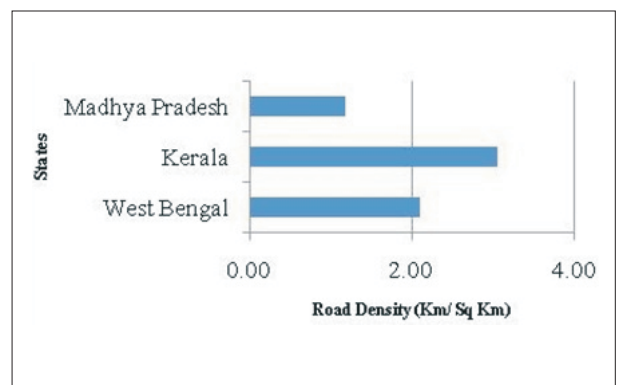


Fig.8: Metalled road Density in CT s

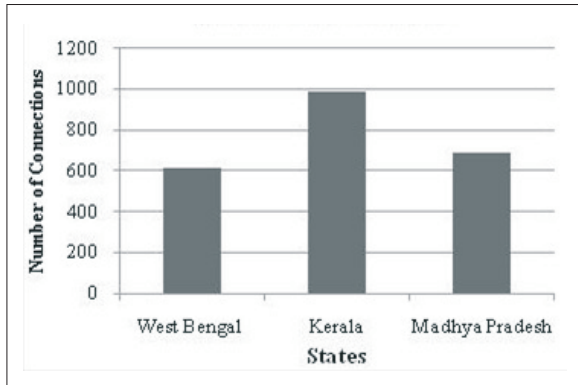


Fig. 9: Status of Domestic Electric Connection

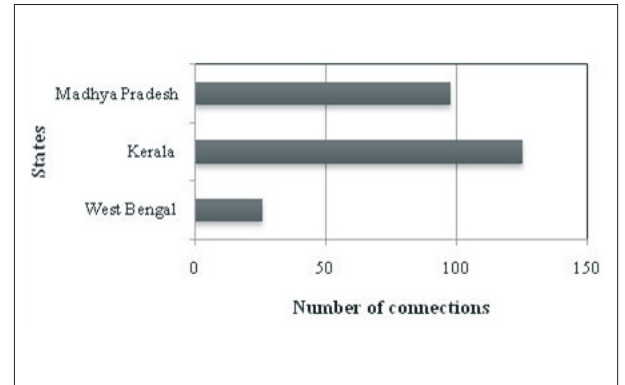


Fig. 10: Status of Street Light Connection

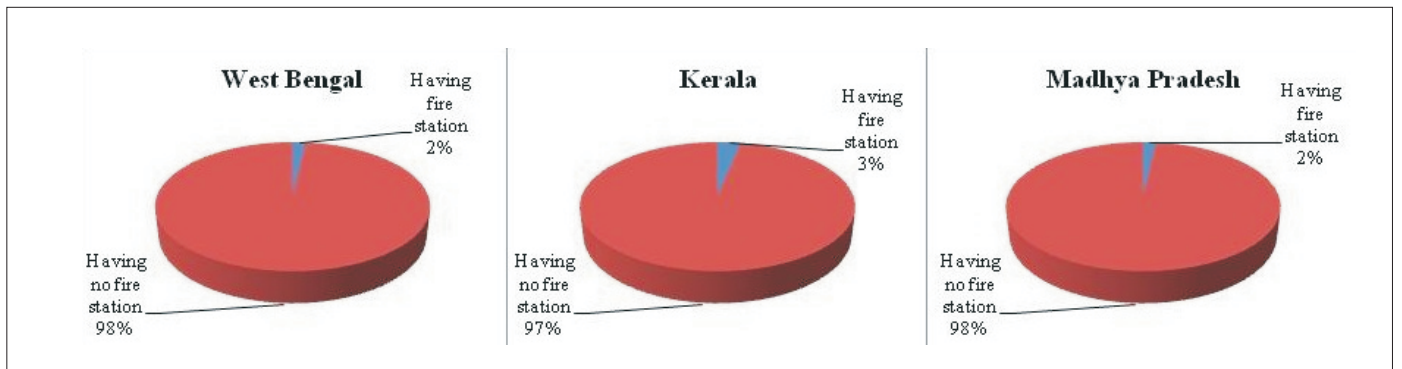


Fig. 11: Presence of Fire Stations in the CTs in the Study Area

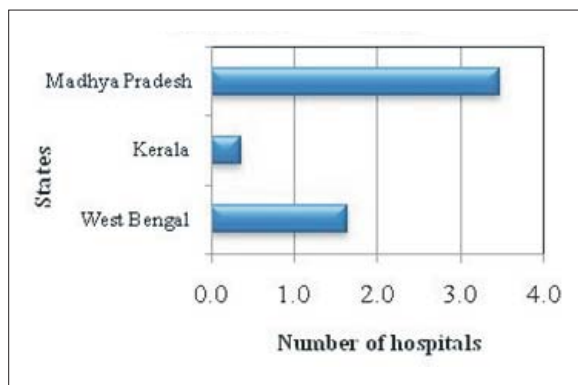


Fig. 12: Condition of Govt Hospitals

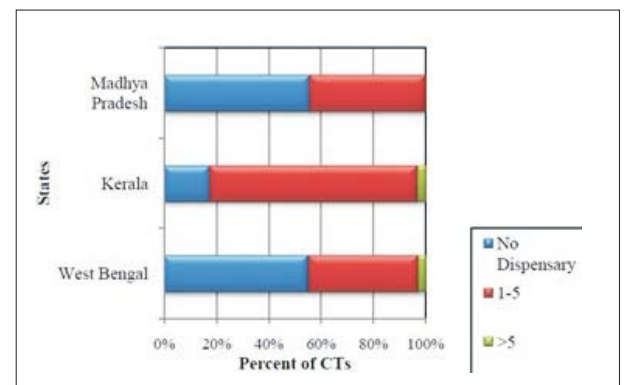


Fig.13: Availability of Dispensaries

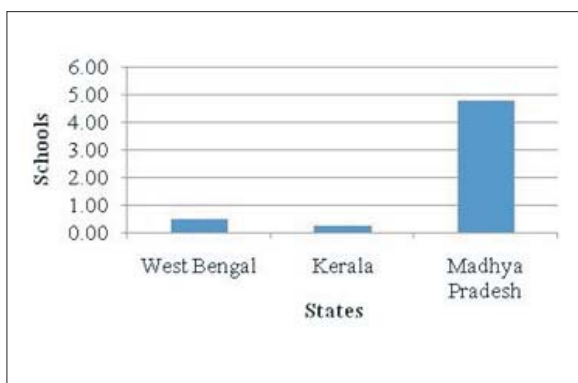


Fig. 14: Availability of Schools /'000 Population

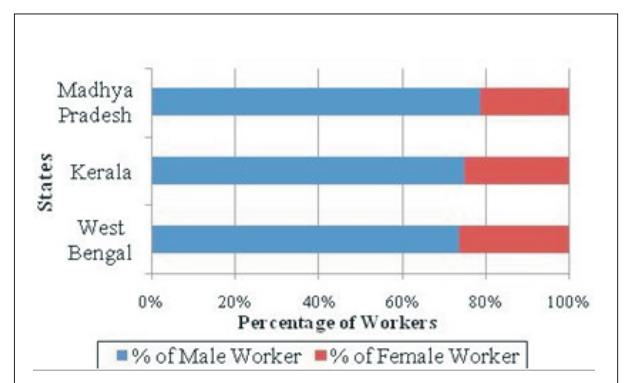


Fig.15: Sex Composition of Workers

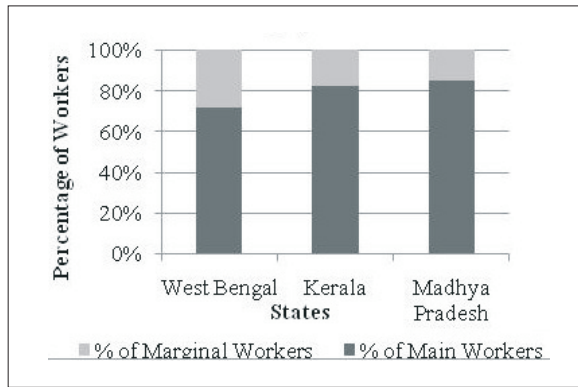


Fig.16: Category of Workers

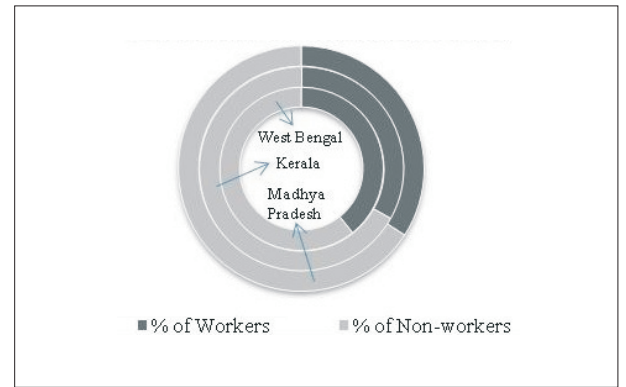


Fig.17: Working and Non-working Population

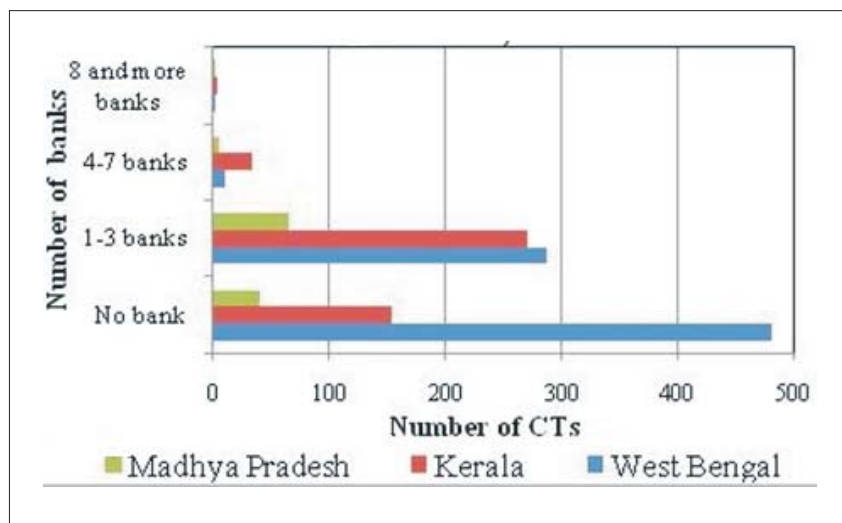


Fig.18: Number of Nationalized Banks



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