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Urban Local Government in India: Decentralization of the Political Power

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India is the biggest & largest democracy of the world. According to the 2011 Census, India has the population of 1210193422. Its Rural population is 833087662 & Urban population is 377105760.¹ There is no doubt that the Rural population is far more than the Urban Population, but it is the fact that its Urban population has been increasing rapidly.

<u>Year</u>	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
<u>Urban</u>	11	10.40	11.2	12	13.9	17.3	18	19.9	23.33	25.72	27.8	31.16
<u>Rural</u>	89	89.60	88.8	88	86.1	82.7	82	80.1	76.27	74.28	74.28	68.84

Decadal Growth of Urban Population (in percentage)

Urbanization in India by no mean an entirely new occurrence. The trend towards Urbanization has been evident for fairly long time which is clear from Table enumerating the Urban & Rural Population of the Country since 1901.²

Urbanization in India has shown its phenomenal growth during the post independence years because of the pressure of fast growing population, rapid industrialization, rural to Urban Migration and the growing tempo of modernization. As a result new towns are coming up, already existing commercial and industrial towns are expanding to accomodate the continuing influx of the rural population. Thus the census figure of 11 % of India Urban population in 1901 had shown marked increase to 31.16% in 2011.

To designate a place urban the following characteristics are normally necessary in India:

1. A total population of at least 5000.
2. A density of not less than 1000 person per square miles.
3. More than 75% of the working male population should be engaged in Non Agricultural Occupation.³

¹ MA, B.Ed, M-Phil, UGC-NET

The numbers of 'Urban Local Government' has been increasing in India as a result of an enormous increase in Urban & Suburban population.

The term "**Local Govt**" as defines by W.E. Jackson indicates that the management of Local affairs and services by popularly elected counciler even within the area administered by a Council.⁴

Local Govt. is that part of the state government in federal countries, dealing mainly with the local affairs administered by authorities, subordinates to the state govt. Local Government are important means of achieving decentralization of political power and promoting democratic values.

Bryce describes local bodies as the "**Best School of democracy.**"⁵

Local government has got several dimensions such as social, economic, geographical, legal and political. It believes in decentralization and democratization of power. It promotes popular participation which generates a sense of belongingness as opposed to alienation, apathy and indifference towards the political system.

Abraham Lincoln has described democracy as the govt. of the people, by the people, for the people. But to reach the masses at the grass root level, it is necessary to involve people in the management of local affairs with adequate degree of freedom. This can be achieved through the establishment of local govt.⁶

The Urban local self government in India own their genesis to Lord Rippon's resolution of May 18, 1882 when for the first time an organised system to Urban local bodies was constituted. And after the Independence keeping in view the growing importance of Urban Local bodies, the Union Government passed the "74th Constitutional Amendment Act". The 74th CAA prescribes for a Uniform system of Urban Local Government in the Country. It facilitates the democratic decentralization at the grass root level and provide stability through the mandatory election within the stipulated period of 5 years. All section of the society including women are guaranteed due representation in the city govt.

Until this amendment Urban local government in India were organised on the basis of the 'Ultra vires' principle (beyond the power & authority granted by Law) and the state government were free to extend or control the functional sphere through

executive decisions without an amendment to the legislative provisions. The constitution's 74th CAA is an enabling legislation for municipalities to be able to discharge their duties extensively.

The 74th CAA provides to constitute three kinds of Urban local bodies – 1. “**Nagar panchayat**” for a transitional area 2. “**Municipal Council**” for a smaller Urban area & 3. “**Municipal Corporation**” for a large urban area. This classification of the areas would be specified by the Governor of the state on the basis of the population, density, the revenue generated, the percentage of employment in non-agricultural activities, the economic importance or such other factors as deemed fit.

Empowerment of Municipalities through functional devolution is an important objective the 74th CAA the 12th schedule of the 74th CAA consist of a list of 18 function.

Part IX-A Twelfth Schedule Art 243W Powers of Urban Local Bodies

- Urban Planning including town planning.
- Regulation of land use and construction of building.
- Planning for economic and social development.
- Roads and bridges
- Water supply of domestic, industrial and commercial purposes.
- Public health, sanitation conservancy and solid waste management.
- Fire Services.
- Urban Forestry, protection of environment and promotion of ecological aspects.
- Safeguarding the interest of weaker sections of society.
- Slum improvement and up gradation.
- Urban poverty alleviation.
- Provisions of Urban amenities and facilities such as parks, gardens, playgrounds etc.
- Promotion of cultural, education and aesthetic aspects.
- Burials and Burial grounds ; cremations, cremation grounds and electric crematoriums.
- Cattle pounds : prevention of cruelty of animals.

- Vital statistics including registration of births and deaths.
- Public Amentities including street lighting, parking lots, Bus stops and public conveniences.
- Regulation of slaughter houses and tanneries.

While there are mandotyr, more functions may be notified.

(Source :- Indian Constitution)

There are some Hurdles in the way of Urban Local Self Govt. in India which are Low participation in Urban local bodies, state Govt. patronage on financial matters caste and religion interests, low salaries paid to Municipal Employees in general, Lack of financial accountability etc. but here are some solution for these problems:

- Decentralization of finances.
- Improved mechanism of overesigh including audoti and inspections.
- Improving the capacity building and training role of state and central government.
- Increasing local government participation in state and central schemes.
- Empowering the civil society by placing a substantial part of decision making with it.
- Use of periodic client satisfaction survey.
- Increased role for the ward committees and other Municipal Committees.
- Greater Transparency
- Methods of reducing corruption
- Privatisation of certain services, which likey to inhanche performance.
- Use of IT in computers to improve citizen's access to information and reduce drudgery for employees.⁷

These Urban Local Govt. Bodies are the institutions which decentrized the power and established the Gandhian Philosophy of Partcipatory democracy.

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