

CITIES: Demystifying & Tracing Urban Governance in India

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Abstract

Cities in India have been posited in the civil administration of multiple agencies since independence, making the city jurisdiction endowed with paltry inter-institutional synchronisation and sporadically, confrontationist attitudes. Against this backdrop, the paper seeks to unravel and expound the complicated nuances of modern urban governance in India, while drawing on the enriching repository of urban planning flowing from ancient and medieval India namely, the Harappan Civilisation, the Kautilyan wisdom and the standard of architecture in Mughal India as a pedagogic paradigm. It highlights the intricacies of “the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act (CAA)” and brings forth the degeneration set in Urban Local Bodies in the twentieth century. This paper then delves into the granular aspects of urban local governance in Uttar Pradesh, the largest state, in terms of population, in India and throws light on the entanglement of multiple parastatal agencies in the discharge of civic services in UP at the expense of strategic and organisational interests of Urban Local Bodies (ULBs). Following this, the paper delineates bottlenecks in urban governance in India along with recommendations while reinforcing the prescriptions with corroboratory illustrations or citations. Finally, the paper submits a comprehensive audit report, presenting key analytical findings that shore up the argument of vitalising Urban Local Bodies and closes with a forward-looking conclusion.

Keywords: 74th CAA, ULBs, multiple agencies, Municipal Corporations, Urban governance, Urbanisation, decentralisation

1. Introduction

Urbanisation has become one of the key drivers of economic growth amidst the overhaul in the global fiscal arena. Statutory municipal bodies are the cornerstone of urban centres in India as these bodies currently constitute the third tier of governance. Urban local government, à la mode traces its institutional provenance to British rule, during which the maiden Municipal Corporation came up in Madras in 1688, followed by the inception of similar Corporations in Bombay (presently, Mumbai) and Calcutta (presently, Kolkata) in 1762.

2. Tradition of Urban Governance

2.1 Harrappan Civilisation: an Indigenous Guiding Light

The conception of Urban governance, both in theory and praxis, is historically affiliated to the Indian subcontinent. Excavated remnants of Indus Valley Civilisation augur the presence of a mature system of urban governance. What distinguished Harappan cities from other civilisations was their meticulous drainage system. The roads and streets in Mohenjodaro were laid out along an approximate “grid” pattern, intersecting at right angles. It seems that streets with drains were laid out first and then houses built along them, indicating the precedence of town planning over construction in those days. Ernest John Henry Mackay, a famed British archaeologist from Bristol, noted “It is certainly the most complete ancient system as yet discovered” in the context of the extensive drainage system of Harappan cities. Bricks used for the construction of Harappan cities also manifested signs of planning as “the bricks were of a standardised ratio where the length and breadth were four times and twice the height respectively”. In addition to this, the “spaces were specified for the elite class and masses” (Danino, 2008).

2.2 Kautilyan Wisdom on Urbanisation

Kautilya in his magnum opus, Arthashastra expounded the role of Nagar Adhyaksh or Nagrik, the officer entrusted with the maintenance of municipal law and order in the city. He envisioned local bodies to be free from regal interference. Kautilya’s intellectual products shed light on urban planning principles for early Indian cities. He writes about a hierarchy of urban centres and administrative decisions. These classifications were mainly contingent on the size of the population and were influenced by resources available in the region and the opportunities for economic development.

Kautilya in his profound sagacity, exhorted migration to the countryside to avert overcrowding in cities (Deshkar 2010) . This policy might have been intended to ensure the panoramic development of all the regions of the country. As regards land use, Kautilya exalted the paramountcy of land to olympic altitude. Depending upon the productivity of the soil, he mentioned apropos applications for such lands. However, to tap into the kinetic and potential value of the land, Kautilya ennobles human effort over the qualitative aptitude of land. ‘The value of land is what man makes out of it’ (ibid.). He also advocated the “formation of densely populated places either on new sites or on old ruins thus building up human capital and shoring up wealth generation through trade”. He floated “measures to induce foreigners to immigrate to the kingdom” for cultivating human assets (ibid.)

2.3 State of Urban Governance in Mughal India

Town planning also pervaded the mercurial Mughal India. Shahjahan, was an ardent advocate of urban planning, as Muhammad Salih Kamboh, a contemporary historian avers that, in the course of his regular court ceremonies, “nobles and princes placed their plans for building complexes and lawns” before Emperor Shahjahan, and in the evening he used to take stock of the designs of “buildings which were under construction” (Salih, G. Yazdani) .Shahjahan founded the city of Shahjahanabad in Delhi. Its city style emulated the aristocratic retinue of the ruling elite. Chandni Chowk of Delhi epitomises the architectural grandeur of Medieval India. “Long before Paris set the fashion (1670 AD) of having the principal streets of the city flanked with avenues, and boulevards became the attractive features of the modern towns in modern Europe, Shahjahan had planned in 1638 a beautiful boulevard in the Chandni Chowk of Delhi” (ibid.). Bazaars were the face of Mughal cities, brimming with trade and commerce. These bazaars were replete with commercial as well as social connotations. Symmetric architecture and dedicated space for specific genres of trade and commerce enhanced the ordered influx and outflux of the crowd. These places served as places of social reunion where people hailing from diverse social roots interacted and exchanged ideas, adding to the fiscal aspect of these marketplaces. For instance, in Delhi, the ingenious layout of the market facilitated its expansion to cater to the demands of the rising population (Muraqqa-e-Dilli). The office of Kotwal in the Mughal era was compendiously accredited with the rights and duties of the modern offices of Municipal Commissioner and City Magistrate (Aggarwal, 2023).

2.4 British Brainchild of Statutory Local Bodies

Samuel Laing, a member of the Hon'ble Viceroy's Council advanced the idea of "self-efficient local government in the Budget Speech of 1861-62". "In 1870, Lord Mayo, in his resolution advocated for the idea of decentralised administration" (Banerjee, 2021) . In the light of same, various municipal acts were enacted.

In 1882, Lord Ripon, the father of municipal self-governance in India, unveiled his resolution where he advocated for an extensive web of "local self-government institutions, reduction of the official element to not more than a third of the total membership, a large measure of financial decentralisation, adoption of election as a means of constituting local bodies, etc." (ibid.) .Ripon's resolution was hailed as the Magna Carta of Local Self Government. This resolution enunciated "adequate resources which are local in nature and are suited for local control, should be provided to local bodies". "Consequent to the resolution, the Bombay City Municipal Corporation Act came into being, enabling the Bombay City Council to be constituted mostly by elected and nominated personnel" (ibid.)

2.5 Picture of Urban Governance in Independent India

Since then, the structural functional anatomy of urban bodies maintained the *status quo* notwithstanding the proliferation of urban centres and further complications of urban problems. India's Independence in 1947 and the enforcement of the Constitution of India in 1950 enlisted "urban affairs" into the "state list". The rich prowess of urban governance bequeathed to us began to degenerate in the 20th century on account of the shifting sands in the country's political landscape. ULBs, deriving funds from state governments, became toothless and dysfunctional in sharp contrast to Gandhi's idea of local self-governance. The growing urbanisation starkly juxtaposed with debilitating urban local governance impelled the union government to enact the 74th constitutional amendment in 1992 which administered the remedy of constitutional status to frail and feeble ULBs, plagued by gross negligence and weak institutional structure.

The 74th CAA mandated the transfer of 18 functions listed in the 12th schedule of the Constitution to ULBs by the states besides, prescribing some institutional reforms to be undertaken by state governments to provide a fillip to urban local governance. However, various states did not abide by the directive of the 74th CAA. "By the year 2013, only 11 out of 31 states/UTs transferred all 18 functions to ULBs" (Banerjee, 2021).

Surprisingly, “the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, and Meghalaya did not transfer a single function to ULBs” (ibid.) This ensued in a generation of disparities in urban local governance across the Indian territory. “The primary objective of the 74th CAA was to invigorate democratic ideals at the grassroots level through urban local governments, and the secondary aim was to raise the level of participation of elected representatives of urban citizens in the governance of the cities” (ibid.). The 74th Constitutional Amendment advanced the following reforms to aggrandize municipal governance and public participation in urban local governance:

- “Constitution of municipal bodies for five years through universal adult franchise for each statutory urban body of the country. If a municipal body was dissolved before the completion of its term then a new municipal election has to be conducted within a span of 6 months from the date of dissolution(Article 243 U)” (ibid.).
- “There must be a State Election Commission (SEC) in each state to ensure the regular elections for ULBs in the respective state (Article 243 K)” (ibid.).
- “No less than one-third of seats in the municipal bodies will be reserved for women candidates. Whereas for SC and ST candidates seats will be reserved in a proportion of their population in the respective urban body (Article 243 T)”(ibid.).
- “Based on the population size, revenue structure and economic status, statutory urban bodies of the country can be placed under three different categories, such as Municipal Corporation, Municipal Council and Nagar Panchayat or Town Area Committees (Article 243 Q)” (ibid.).
- “The Governor of every State has been given the responsibility to constitute a State Finance Commission for a tenure of 5 years (Article 243Y) to review the financial condition of ULBs”(ibid.).
- “For every district and metropolitan region, a District Planning Committee (Article 243 ZD) and a Metropolitan Planning Committee (Article 243 ZE) have to be constituted, with the rationale of preparing developmental plans for their respective area of interest”(ibid.).
- “Article 243W of the Constitution requires the state laws to equip the municipal bodies with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as the institutions of self-government. The 12th Schedule has been attached to the Constitution that provides recommendations to the states regarding the transfer of 18 mandatory functions to ULBs, in order to increase the capacity of municipal bodies to function as self-efficient governance units”(ibid.).

3. Case Study: A Ringside view of Functional Fitness of ULBs in Uttar Pradesh

Given the context, it becomes seminal to meticulously examine the various facets of urban governance in Uttar Pradesh (“the largest state in terms of population”) to understand how the state machinery deals with the day-to-day affairs of the largest population in the country. Municipal Corporations are the primary civic service provision agencies in cities that have a population greater than 3 lakhs followed by Municipal Councils for cities having a population ranging from approx. 50 thousand – 3 lakhs and then come the Town Area Committees/Nagar Panchayats for serving a population of approx. 10 thousand – 50 thousand. An overview of the functional health of ULBs vis-à-vis mandatory transfer of 18 functions, as mentioned in the 12th schedule paints a disgruntling picture of civic bodies in UP.

“Urban and town planning (1st function) and Regulation of land use and construction of buildings (2nd function)” rest with the Department of Housing and Town Planning in UP in lieu of ULBs. “Planning for social and economic development (3) and Roads and Bridges (4)” entails multiple stakeholders including various departments of the state government. “Water supply for domestic, industrial and commercial purposes (5)” is carried out by ULBs.

“Public health, sanitation conservancy and solid waste management function (6) involves both ULBs and state health department, with sanitation conservancy and solid waste management pertaining to the functional domain of ULBs”.

“Fire services (7)” in UP fall under the jurisdiction of the Department of Home Affairs.” Urban forestry, protection of the environment and promotion of ecological aspects (8)” are collaboratively looked after by the forest department and ULBs. “The function of safeguarding the interests of weaker sections of society, including the handicapped and mentally retarded (9)” is performed by multiple departments of state governments which may sporadically include ULBs. “Slum improvement and upgradation (10) and Urban poverty alleviation (11)” are assigned to District Urban Development Authorities (DUDA) which report to District Collectors in accord with ULBs. “The functions of the Provision of urban amenities and facilities such as parks, gardens, and playgrounds (12)” and “the Promotion of cultural, educational and aesthetic aspects (13)” are discharged by the Department of Housing and Town Planning and ULBs in concert with each other. “ULBs minister to Burials and burial grounds; cremations, cremation grounds and electric crematoriums” (14). “State police are responsible for the prevention of cruelty to animals (15) while ULBs are concerned with the management of cattle pounds (15). Functions from 16 to 18 rest with ULBs”.

Owing to the interplay of various parastatal agencies in the discharge of functions, people often deem ULBs as adjunct bodies to district administrations Municipal Corporations in UP are governed by the **UTTAR PRADESH MUNICIPAL CORPORATION ACT, 1959**.

Municipal Corporations in Uttar Pradesh are vital statutory local bodies in large cities, which are meant to dispense a range of civic services to common citizens. At present, there are 17 Municipal Corporations in Uttar Pradesh. All executive powers are cardinally vested in the position of Commissioner of Municipal Corporation while Mayor serves as the constitutional chief of civic bodies.

Municipal Councils and Town Area Committees/ Nagar Panchayats function in compliance with the **UTTAR PRADESH NAGAR PALIKA ADHINYAM, 1916**. Chairman (elected) and Executive Officers sourced from allied state civil services jointly exercise financial and administrative control over both Municipal Councils and Town Area Committees/ Nagar Panchayats. As per the data furnished by the State Urban Development Department, there are 200 Municipalities and 545 Town Area Sources of finances in ULBs.

ULBs receive funds mainly from the “Government of India and the Government of Uttar Pradesh”. ULBs are provided funds by the central government through 15th Finance Commission grants, SBM, AMRUT, Smart City Mission, PMAY, NULM and different central schemes like Namami Gange etc. State government dispenses funds to ULBs through State Finance Commission grants, State Smart City Mission, CM-NSY, CM-GRIDS, CM-VNY, Kanha Goshala, Antyeshti Sthal Vikas Yojna, urban drainage schemes etc. and state shares in different central schemes. In addition to deriving funds from the Government of UP and the Government of India, ULBs generate their revenue through taxation, user charges and fees on different services like advertising, parking, mutation fees, fees on different kind of licenses, door-to-door waste collection charges, rental incomes etc.

Santosh Sharma (IAS), Commissioner of Ayodhya Municipal Corporation notes, “Now, Municipal Corporations are evolving to respond to changing needs of urban populace. Missions like AMRUT, PMAY, CENTRAL SMART CITY MISSION and SWACHH BHARAT MISSION are changing the face of Municipal Corporations. In state of UP, various initiatives are being taken by state government to enhance the ease of living of urban citizenry through multiple schemes such as State Smart City Mission (for those corporations who are not registered in Central Smart City Mission), CMNSY (for new areas acceded to the territorial jurisdiction of Corporations), CMGRID (incentive-based scheme for providing positive reinforcement to Corporations), CMVNY (an incentive-driven scheme for strengthening the ULBs), and UPVAN (for enhancing greeneries and fulfilling oxygen demand of cities)etc. The state government is proactively introducing IT in Urban Governance. We are moving towards paperless offices.”

Sharma is a distinguished IAS officer in UP, who has been associated with urban governance for the last 9 years and is currently one of the senior Commissioners of Municipal Corporations in the state. He is currently also the inaugural CEO of Shri Ayodhya Ji Teerth Vikas Parishad, a key state body chaired by CM Yogi Adityanath, which has been established to facilitate the holistic progress of the Ayodhya Region.

4. Roadblocks in Urban Governance & Recommendations

State governments bankroll dependent ULBs as the sun endows the non-luminous moon with its resplendence. The dismal performance of many ULBs can be attributed to the recalcitrance of state governments to empower ULBs. State governments have tacitly devised ways to subvert the stature of ULBs by allotting functions of ULBs to other agencies. For example, “The Tirupati Urban Development Authority was founded by the Government of erstwhile Andhra Pradesh in 1982 to solve twin problems of housing and water supply in Tirupati city and its adjacent counterparts. Thus, the state government gradually eroded the powers of the Tirupati Municipal Corporation by establishing a parallel body, i.e. Tirupati Urban Development Authority” (Banerjee, 2021). Therefore, First and foremost, every state and union territory must ensure that all functions written in the 12th schedule are devolved to ULBs so as to maintain parity in urban governance across the country. This step will ramp up the dexterity of services extended to the citizenry by centralising all functions of a civic nature in one authority. Excessive decentralisation, as critics of scholar Max Weber suggest, leads to displacement of the ultimate goal as subunits begin to take over tasks in silos.

ILLUSTRATIVE CORROBORATION: The managerial prowess of Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation was lauded by the Honourable Supreme Court in the wake of COVID-19 management. Connoisseurs argue that the better performance of Mumbai as opposed to Delhi, in COVID management, was on account of a centralised chain of command with BMC at the apex, whereas in Delhi, multiple agencies were entrusted with the same task, which virtually gave effect to constitutional wither and mismanagement. BMC is governed by an act of the colonial era,(THE MUMBAI MUNICIPAL CORPORATION ACT,1888) that bestows humungous powers on the Commissioner of BMC and consequently ensures closer and robust inter-organisational synergy., unlike other Municipal Corporations of Maharashtra which abide by MAHARASHTRA MUNICIPAL CORPORATIONS ACT,1949. As a matter of fact, Iqbal S. Chahal, IAS, Additional Chief Secretary to the Government of Maharashtra once stated, “BMC Commissioner is virtually the CEO of Mumbai city.” Chahal is a dynamic IAS officer in Maharashtra and has been widely extolled for his role as BMC Commissioner in COVID management of Mumbai”.

The discretionary capacity to ordain “municipal revenue base, i.e. tax authority, tax base, tax rate settings, local tax autonomy, or even the grants-in-aid and other forms of financial transfers rest with the state governments” ((Banerjee, 2021). “As an obvious consequence, ULBs suffer from circumscribed financial autonomy and the absence of any well-ordered and structured method to transfer the financial resources to municipal authorities makes them subject to the whims of state government” (ibid.). In a nutshell, state governments must bestow financial powers on ULBs to make them more relevant locally. These bodies should determine tax rates etc. based on their domestic assessment of their areas.

SUPPLEMENTING EVIDENCE: According to Compendium Performance Audits on the implementation of “the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act (CAA) 1992”, released by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India in November 2024 only 32% of the total revenue of ULBs flows from their own sources, while the rest is replenished by the Union and state governments by way of funds. State governments sometimes, severely delimit the capacity of ULBs to exact taxes from citizens, jeopardising their financial strength for electoral dividends.

ULBs should wield power to frame their customised schemes and policies pursuant to policy directions of centres and states for ensuring inclusive development of different urban settlements as the top-down approach is not as effective as the bottom-up approach.

REASON: Local citizens often feel alienated from the lowest tier of governance given the frequent and fervent interference of the second tier of governance. Most of the policy constructs are foisted upon ULBs by the State governments, in disregard of the local purview of the concerned ULBs. Local citizens, owing to the over-the-top intercession of the state governments, view ULBs as auxiliary arms of the mighty state.

Additionally, the delivery of some civic services in big cities is impaired as it counts on the support of police or local law enforcement agencies which are beyond the directorial purview of Municipal Corporations. Municipal corporations are duty bound to enforce municipal regulations such as launching anti-encroachment drives, no parking zone norms, Solid waste management clauses, pre-empting illegal hoardings and local bye-laws, within their jurisdiction, in the course of which, these public institutions require complementary gestures from local law enforcement agencies, that may not be available on every occasion. For this purpose, state governments should postulate an internal bureaucratic arrangement that streamlines the deputation of state police personnel in Municipal Corporations, which will embellish the regulatory capacity of Municipal Corporations.

SUBSTANTIATING CITATION: As respect stepping up the regulatory capacity of Municipal Corporations, Santosh Sharma, IAS, remarks, “Municipal Corporations are confronted with a range of issues, such as ensuring execution of non-vending zones, which necessitate police intervention for smooth implementation. We need police for different kinds of enforcement activities like anti-encroachment drives, regulation of parking and no parking zones, vending and no vending zones, control on stray animals, seizures of restricted polythene, and other restricted items. rescue measures in different kinds of calamities etc. Equipping ULBs, especially Municipal Corporations as they take care of large cities, with a cadre of police personnel would lead to better civic regulation and management of the cities.”

State Election Commissions must solely conduct delimitation exercises in place of state governments despite the constitutional obligation that the municipalities will be constituted for five years only and the State Election Commission is constitutionally obliged to conduct municipal elections as per requirements,

in many states, the State Election Commissions are incapacitated to do so because the authority for delimitation of municipal wards is with the state governments and they seldom undertake this electoral task within stipulated time period.

ILLUSTRATION: The Telangana State Election Commission placed its plea before the High Court for timely conduct of municipal elections, accusing the state government of intentionally withholding the preparatory processes.

The civic provision agencies of cantonments, that is, cantonment boards must mandatorily espouse representatives from local municipal bodies for seamless interoperability between agencies entrusted with civic functions. The Cantonment boards, presently, incorporate delegates/ nominees of the district administration, sometimes to the exclusion of the interests of municipal bodies which in turn, obfuscates intra-executive organisations and yields fractured delivery of civic functions, especially in areas of cantonment boards contiguous to the territorial demarcation of local municipal bodies. The ULBs ought to model their legal configuration after that of the cantonment boards as powers appertaining to civic administration in the framework of cantonments are concentrated in Cantonment boards, resulting in an ameliorated service delivery in the territorial jurisdiction of the latter.

CORROBORATIVE CITATION: In this regard, Mrs Jigyasa Raj, IDES, Chief Executive Officer, Cantonment Board of Ayodhya opines “Cantonment Boards closely deal with Urban Local bodies to streamline the delivery of civic services. Therefore, it should be legally mandatory to enlist representatives from urban local bodies. In fact, the Centre’s policy direction of facilitating the accession of some stretches of the territory of Cantonment boards to the territorial ambit of relevant urban local bodies entails robust coordination with urban local bodies. As urbanisation matures, primacy must be given to urban local bodies in civic matters.” Mrs Raj is an illustrious IDES officer and has previously served as CEO of Kasauli, Dagshai and Shahjahanpur Cantonment Board before being roped in to spearhead the Cantonment Board of Ayodhya.

The potential of ULBs must be exploited to meet the Sustainable Development Goals set by the United Nations. Citizens are the fulcrum of Sustainable development goals, as they are at the helm in the third tier of governance, so, ULBs are aptly positioned in the plane of governance to eventuate Sustainable Development Goals. For instance, Sustainable Development Goal 11 *viz.*, *Sustainable Cities and Communities* directly echo the larger mandate with which ULBs have been charged. All the tiers of government must synergise their resources and coordinate effectively to accomplish the comprehensive aim of sustainability.

5. Comprehensive Audits and Findings

Most of the municipal bodies in India are paradoxically inundated with legal obligations while being divested of their bonafide rights. Local municipal authorities in many regions of India are not even in concert with the benchmarks laid by the Honourable “Supreme Court of India” for local authorities in “the Mohammad Yasin vs. Town Area Committee, 1950” case. “Pursuant to the adjudication of the Honourable Supreme Court in the said case, a local authority must meet the following benchmarks:-

1. Have a separate legal existence as a corporate body
2. Not be a mere government agency but must be legally an independent entity
3. Function in a defined area
4. Be wholly or partly, directly or indirectly, elected by the inhabitants of the area
5. Enjoy a certain degree of autonomy (complete or partial)
6. Be entrusted by statute with such governmental functions and duties as are usually entrusted to locally (like health, education, water, town planning, markets, transportation, etc.)
7. Have the power to raise funds for the furtherance of its activities and fulfilment of its objectives by levying taxes, rates, charges or fees.”

It has come to light by practitioners of urban governance that developing regions in India often exude a propensity to attach undue paramountcy to the institution of Collector/ Commissioner of Police/ Superintendent of Police attributable to the direct interface of these institutions with the citizenry in regulatory matters. Such authorities primarily exercise supervisory jurisdiction and prioritise enforcement contingencies over advancement in the civic realm. Such functional vestiges of colonial dispensation in underdeveloped regions repudiate the theoretical plinth of facilitative authorities adopted by the Indian state. Local municipal bodies are facilitative arms of the elective domain of the state, and are hence, prescient for augmenting and streamlining development. The predilection of policymakers towards regulatory regimes, as manifest in overpowering regulatory institutions lays bare the need for civilisational maturation that the populace needs to undergo as the Political System Theory of David Easton avers that the demand for any change must emanate from the general population. The subversion of the third tier of government by wresting powers constitutionally vested in them and delegating them to other parastatal agencies is legislative *ultra vires*, in the light of the 74th CAA and impedes integrated development. Logically, the realisation of facilitative “Directive Principles of State Policy” which confer on the citizens the rights of positive orientation, is contingent on the operational and transformational competence of the ULBs, for example,

“Article 47 - The State shall opt for measures to improve public health and prohibit consumption of intoxicating drinks and drugs that are injurious to health.”

“Article 48 – The state shall restrict the slaughter of cows, calves, and other milch and draught cattle and improve their breeds.”

The ULBs in developed countries outclass those in India, especially in the Northern heartland, in terms of legal accreditation, which can be empirically inferred as one of the reasons for their ascendancy in urban development. Urbanisation in India casts upon policymakers the additional obligation of generating employment as urbanisation has not been a corollary of the Industrial Revolution, unlike the West. Such a predicament appended to the demographic surplus bound with the Indian setting warrants a punctilious focus on strengthening facilitative organs viz., ULBs of the state.

“According to Compendium Performance Audits on the implementation of the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act (CAA) 1992, released by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India” in November 2024, only 4 functions have been decentralised to ULBs and on average, grants etc. The Comptroller and Auditor General of India in its report, has prescribed increased involvement of ULBs in essential areas like planning to enhance their functionality and decision-making capacity. Such reports call for urgent capacity building of ULBs and demand political will from state governments to effect legal benefaction of certain functions to the ULBs.

6. Conclusion

“This framework is neither democratic nor autocratic; it is a cross between the two, and has the disadvantages of both.” - Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru

This is what Nehru observed while expressing dismay at the state of municipal administration in British India in his autobiography. However, his view on British municipal governance has transcended temporal as well as political frontiers for today, it can be fathomed as the quintessential critique of the precarious affairs of urban local bodies even after seven decades of Independence, indicating the perpetuation of unjust institutional practices propounded by Britishers to serve English interests. Now the focus of policy makers globally is gravitating towards urban local governance. The adage stating that India lives in villages is losing its pertinence, with maturing globalisation. Urban settlements are emerging as new economic engines of the country due to unprecedented breakthroughs in the tertiary sector. A robust and smart civic infrastructure is indispensable to fuel India’s ascent in international theatre. Governments must leverage the changing tapestry of increasing urban settlements by making urban affairs the bright spot of policy-making while keeping rural interests intact. India’s stride against fleeting time should be evenly propelled by burgeoning cities and the inherited repertoire of *tranquille* rural heartland.

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