

Human Settlements: Definition and Classification

A **human settlement** is defined as a cluster of dwellings of any type or size where human beings live. For this purpose, people erect houses and other structures and command a specific territory as their economic support base.

The process of settlement inherently involves the grouping of people and the apportioning of territory as their resource base.

Settlements range in scale from small **hamlets** to massive **metropolitan cities**. As the size of a settlement increases, its economic character, social structure, ecology, and technology also change.

Broadly, settlements are divided into **rural** and **urban**, which differ significantly in several ways:

- **Economic Base:** Rural settlements derive their life support from **land-based primary activities** (agriculture, fishing, mining), while urban settlements depend on **manufacturing** (processing raw materials) and a variety of **services**.
- **Functional Relationship:** Cities act as nodes of economic growth, providing goods and services to rural hinterlands in exchange for food and raw materials. This relationship is facilitated through **transport and communication networks**.
- **Social Structure:** Rural social relations are intimate and less mobile. In contrast, urban life is complex and fast, with formal and impersonal social relations.

I. Rural Settlements: Types and Distribution

The type of rural settlement is determined by the extent of the built-up area and the distance between houses. In India, several factors influence these patterns, including **physical features** (terrain, climate, water), **cultural factors** (caste, religion), and **security factors** (protection against theft).

1. Clustered, Agglomerated, or Nucleated Settlements

These are **compact or closely built-up** areas of houses. The living area is distinct and separated from the surrounding farms, barns, and pastures.

- **Patterns:** Streets and houses often form recognisable geometric shapes, such as **rectangular, radial, or linear**.
- **Distribution:** They are widely found in **fertile alluvial plains** and the **northeastern states**.
- **Specific Drivers:** In the **Bundelkhand** region of central India and in **Nagaland**, people live in compact villages for **security and defence**. In **Rajasthan**, water scarcity necessitates compact settlements to maximize the use of limited water resources.

2. Semi-Clustered or Fragmented Settlements

These result from the tendency of clustering in a restricted area of a dispersed settlement or the **fragmentation of a large compact village**.

- **Social Segregation:** Often, one or more sections of society are forced to live away from the main cluster. Typically, the **land-owning dominant community** occupies the central part of the village, while people of lower social strata or menial workers settle on the **outer flanks**.
- **Distribution:** These are widespread in the **Gujarat plain** and parts of **Rajasthan**.

3. Hamleted Settlements

Sometimes a settlement is fragmented into several units that are physically separated but bear a **common name**.

- **Local Names:** These units are locally known as **panna, para, palli, nagla, or dhani**.
- **Drivers:** This segmentation is frequently motivated by **social and ethnic factors**.
- **Distribution:** These are common in the **middle and lower Ganga plain**,

Chhattisgarh, and the lower valleys of the Himalayas.

4. A population density of at least **400 persons per square kilometre**.



4. Dispersed or Isolated Settlements

This pattern appears as **isolated huts or tiny hamlets** in remote jungles or on small hills with farms or pastures on the slopes.

- **Drivers:** Extreme dispersion is caused by the **extremely fragmented nature of the terrain** and the land resource base.
- **Distribution:** Found in parts of **Meghalaya, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, and Kerala**.

II. Urban Settlements: Definition and Evolution

1. Defining Urban Settlements in India

The **Census of India (1991)** defines an urban area based on the following criteria:

1. Places with a **municipality, corporation, cantonment board**, or notified town area committee.
2. A minimum population of **5,000 persons**.
3. At least **75 per cent of male workers** engaged in **non-agricultural pursuits**.

2. Evolution of Towns in India

Towns have existed in India since prehistoric times (e.g., Harappa and Mohenjodaro). They are classified based on their period of evolution:

- **Ancient Towns:** These have a history of over 2,000 years and mostly developed as **religious and cultural centres**. Examples include **Varanasi** (most important), **Prayag (Allahabad)**, **Pataliputra (Patna)**, and **Madurai**.
- **Medieval Towns:** About 100 existing towns have roots in the medieval period, often serving as **headquarters of kingdoms**. These are frequently **fort towns** built on ancient ruins, such as **Delhi, Hyderabad, Jaipur, Lucknow, Agra, and Nagpur**.
- **Modern Towns:** Developed by the British and other Europeans.
 - They started as **trading ports** like **Surat, Daman, Goa, and Pondicherry**.
 - Later, nodes like **Mumbai, Chennai, and Kolkata** were consolidated in British style.
 - They also established **administrative centres, hill-towns** as summer resorts, and **military cantonments**.
 - Post-1850, towns based on **modern industries** evolved, such as **Jamshedpur**.
 - After Independence, planned **administrative headquarters (Chandigarh, Bhubaneswar, Gandhinagar)** and **industrial centres (Bhilai, Durgapur)** were developed.

III. Urbanisation and Distribution in India

Urbanisation is measured as the percentage of urban population to total population. In 2011, India's level of urbanisation was **31.16 per cent**, which is low compared to developed nations but has grown eleven-fold during the 20th century.

- **High Urbanisation States:** Goa and Mizoram have high proportions, with Goa having more than half its population in cities.
- **Low Urbanisation States:** Himachal Pradesh and Bihar have very low proportions of urban population.
- **Regional Trends:** Urban growth is most conspicuous along main road and rail links in the **North Indian Plains** and around industrial hubs like **Kolkata, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Ahmedabad, and Delhi**. Conversely, degree of urbanisation remains low in agriculturally stagnant areas, remote hilly regions, and flood-prone parts of Peninsular India.

IV. Functional Classification of Towns

Towns are often known for a specific activity or service, though most cities are **multifunctional**, with functions becoming more intertwined as they grow into metropolises. Indian cities are classified based on their dominant function:

1. **Administrative Towns:** Support higher-order administrative headquarters (e.g., **New Delhi, Chandigarh, Bhopal, Jaipur, Chennai, Srinagar, Gandhinagar**).
2. **Industrial Towns:** Industries are the primary motive force (e.g., **Mumbai, Jamshedpur, Bhilai, Salem, Coimbatore, Modinagar, Hugli**).
3. **Transport Cities:**
 - **Ports:** Primarily engaged in export/import (e.g., **Kandla, Kochi, Vishakhapatnam, Kozhikode**).
 - **Inland Hubs:** Hubs of rail or road transport (e.g., **Agra, Mughalsarai, Itarsi, Katni**).
4. **Commercial Towns:** Specialise in trade and commerce (e.g., **Kolkata, Saharanpur, Satna**).
5. **Mining Towns:** Developed in mineral-rich areas (e.g., **Raniganj, Jharia, Digboi, Ankaleshwar, Singrauli**).
6. **Garrison Cantonment Towns:** Established for military purposes (e.g., **Ambala, Jalandhar, Mhow, Babina, Udhampur**).

7. **Educational Towns:** Centres of education or major campus towns (e.g., **Roorkee, Varanasi, Aligarh, Pilani, Allahabad**).
8. **Religious and Cultural Towns:** Gained prominence due to religious significance (e.g., **Varanasi, Mathura, Amritsar, Madurai, Puri, Ajmer, Tirupati, Haridwar**).
9. **Tourist Towns:** Major destinations for tourism (e.g., **Nainital, Mussoorie, Shimla, Pachmarhi, Jodhpur, Ooty, Mount Abu**).




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V. Modern Urban Challenges and Perspectives

1. Rural-Urban Migration and Slums

The flow of population from rural to urban areas is driven by the demand for labour in cities and a lack of job opportunities in villages. This often leads to the growth of **slums**, which are residential areas of "least choice" marked by **dilapidated houses, poor hygiene, and overcrowding**.

- **Dharavi:** Located in central Mumbai, it is **Asia's largest slum**. Despite its poor living conditions (uncollected garbage, foul water), it is a hub of economic activity, producing ceramics, embroidery, leather goods, and high-fashion garments.

2. Urban Waste Disposal

Urban areas generate enormous quantities of **solid waste** (metals, glass, plastic, ash) from domestic and

industrial sources. In major metropolises like Mumbai and Delhi, about 90% of waste is collected, but disposal remains a massive challenge. Untreated sewage and industrial waste dumped into rivers lead to severe water pollution downstream.

3. Smart Cities Mission

To address urban challenges, the Indian government launched the **Smart Cities Mission**. Its objective is to provide **core infrastructure**, a clean environment, and a decent quality of life through "smart solutions". This includes making areas less vulnerable to disasters and using fewer resources to provide cheaper services.

Summary Table for CUET Revision

Feature	Rural Settlements	Urban Settlements
Primary Activity	Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing	Manufacturing, Services, Trade
Social Relations	Intimate, less mobile	Formal, complex, fast-paced
Settlement Types	Clustered, Semi-clustered, Hamleted, Dispersed	Administrative, Industrial, Commercial, etc.
Distribution Factors	Terrain, water availability, security	Industrialisation, transport, admin status
Indian Census	68.8% of population (2011)	31.16% of population (2011)