

The Size of Settlement and Urbanisation in Sindh

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About This Report

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Rural to urban migration is one route to urbanization. Another one is the increase in size and change in complexity of smaller rural settlements, as they acquire urban characteristics. This has been ably documented by Raza Ali in the Pakistani context particularly with respect to Punjab. This note will show that the size and pattern of settlements in rural Sindh is considerably different, with relatively small settlements accounting for a large proportion of settlements and the population. The tendency towards 'fragmented' settlements, therefore, needs to be juxtaposed alongside the more conventional trend towards consolidation. There are distinct historical and sociological explanations for this settlement pattern, as well as clear implications for the trajectories of urbanization in Sindh. The note will illustrate this issue as well as the challenges for reliable documentation, data collection, and programming, using case studies of individual revenue villages in Sindh. Implications for research as well as policy-making will be spelled out.

What do we know about rural settlements in Pakistan? And what do we know about them in Sindh? The most common way of knowing about settlements is the population census. The census enumerates the population using territorial divisions which are based on administrative boundaries. One important division is between urban and rural areas. Urban areas are usually identified as those territories which fall under municipal governance of various types. For rural areas the census relies on the territorial demarcation of the land revenue department, which, historically, formed the basis for civil administration over much of the country.

In Sindh the *deh* is the basic administrative and revenue unit, and is the lowest territorial unit for which the population census publishes data. In other provinces this basic rural unit is called the *mouza*. The *deh* or *mouza* is used to identify the lowest population agglomeration for virtually every social policy and research purpose. Moreover, the *deh* or *mouza* sometimes end up being used as synonyms for rural settlements. This works, to some extent, in many parts of Punjab and some regions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where the rural settlement often bears the name of the *mouza*, and much of the population of the *mouza* resides in a geographically compact agglomeration.

But this is not the case in Sindh. There is little correspondence here between the identity of the *deh* and that of the *goth* which is how communities refer to their villages or settlements. A *deh* can have over a dozen *goths* of various sizes spread over its territory. The *goth* is usually made up of smaller segments known as *paro* (plural *para*) which are generally inhabited by close kin. Some of the smaller *goths* are just single *paro* settlements, while the bigger ones can have several *para*. In any case, the *deh* does not tell us much about the actual rural settlement. The Sindh government has conducted *goth* surveys from time to time. One such survey conducted in 1990 found that there were 3,643 *goths* in the 452 *dehs* of Dadu district, 1,765 *goths* in the 281 *dehs* of what was then Nawabshah (now Shaheed Benazirabad), and 2,863 *goths* in Hyderabad's 374 *dehs*. As we show later, *goths* enumerated in the survey are those which were thought to be eligible for government recognition – numerous smaller *goths* are not included in the list.

In a study of rural settlements in different regions of Pakistan we carried out settlement-wise population censuses in seven administrative villages (*deh* in Sindh and *mouza* elsewhere) in 2005 (Table 1). There was great variation between these administrative villages in the geographic spread of the population within their boundaries. In the fieldwork site in Toba Tek Singh district in central Punjab which had a population of over 2,500, the entire population resided in one consolidated settlement. In Thatta in southern Sindh, however, our fieldwork *deh* of 1,829 persons consisted of 22 distinct settlements of

which 16 had fewer than 100 people. The settlement pattern was found to be similarly fragmented in Muzaffargarh in southern Punjab and in Upper Dir in northern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Table 1: Settlement patterns in 7 administrative villages across Pakistan

District of administrative village where fieldwork conducted	Population	No of settlements	Average per settlement	No of settlements with > 400 people	No of settlements with < 100 people
Chakwal	491	2	246	1	1
Toba Tek Singh	2,638	1	2,638	1	0
Muzaffargarh	1,878	11	171	1	5
Upper Dir	1,171	13	90	0	9
Mardan	1,164	3	388	2	1
Sanghar	2,999	12	250	1	4
Thatta	1,829	22	83	0	16

Source: Gazdar, Haris (2006), 'Rural Economy and Livelihoods', Asian Development Bank, Islamabad.

Turning back to Sindh, the *goth* is not only distinct from the *deh* which is the land revenue system's administrative unit. It is also a very different type of settlement from the traditional *raj* which was a relatively large composite settlement made of multiple classes, kinship groups and occupations. The Sindhi *raj*, in fact, was similar to the historical pattern of the village republic found in Punjab and other parts of South Asia. The *raj* combined an economic system with a closely linked governance structure - with landlords and farmers at the top, the *raj* had artisans, craftsmen, and other non-agricultural occupations, all woven together into one whole. Many of the older *raj* settlements have already grown into small towns and lost their rural character. But unlike Punjab, Sindh has also seen a pattern of settlement fragmentation towards *goths*.

The question arises how do we know what the rural settlement in Sindh looks like. How many are there, and what are their sizes in terms of population? There are at least four distinct ways in which the government system attempts to know these rural settlements. First, at the local level there is the land revenue cadaster known as the Mukhtiarkar map. Settlements are marked on this as areas which are formally designated as inhabited zones from the land revenue point of view. This does not necessarily mean that all actual settlements are covered, or that all areas formally marked as inhabited zones actually have settlements on them. Second, there is the Sindh Goth Abad Authority's village directory which is based on a survey carried out in 1990 for the implementation of the Sindh Goth Abad act.ⁱ This list only includes settlements thought to have at least 50 households. Third is a Rural Settlements Survey carried out by the Sindh Bureau of Statistics – sporadically in particularly districts – which includes on those settlements that are thought to have more than 200 households. Finally there is the Sindh Education Management Information System or SEMIS which maintains a record of all government schools in the province. The school record includes information on the UC and *deh* where the school is located.

Table 2: Settlements in Deh Bhaji, District Sanghar

	Settlement	Collective census		SGAS	SBS
		Population	Households	Estimated population	Estimated households
1	Bhaji	1,080	145	300	300
2	M A Bagrani	393	55	200	80
3	W Bagrani	349	41	250	
4	M Rind	234	31	150	
5	G Bagrani	202	28	200	30
6	Jaityo Bheel	189	27		
7	B Wassan	148	19	150	
8	S Kerio	144	16	300	
9	D Bheel	108	11		
10	Khaskheli	82	10	200	
11	Sanjrani	70	8	150	300
12	Maachhi	0	0		
	Total	2,999	391	1,900	710

Source: Collective fieldwork 2005; Sindh Goth Abad Survey; Sindh Bureau of Statistics

For one *deh* in the Sanghar district of central Sindh we were able to compare the settlement record from all of these sources. In addition, here we were able to carry out a complete house-to-house population census ourselves and identify each distinct settlement. A comparison between our own census, the SGAS list and the SBS findings is presented in Table 2. While we had found 11 distinct settlements and one abandoned settlement (Maachhi) the SGAS directory had missed two: both belonging the non-Muslim and socially marginalized Bheel community. The SGAS had also missed the Maachhi settlement although it had been inhabited in 1990 and was abandoned only in 1997. The SBS list was even more restricted. It had only 4 settlements. The omissions in both these lists were not necessarily driven by their own cut-off rules. The Sanjrani settlement was in the SBS list although it had only 8 households. One of the largest landlords of the *deh* happens to reside in this village. Similarly the SGAS list omitted the two Bheel villages while in included some villages that were even smaller than these villages. There were also other discrepancies. The SGAS list included another five *goths* with an additional population of 900 persons which were not traceable on the ground. There were also discrepancies between the SEMIS list and our own census, as well as other sources. SEMIS lists a school in the Sanjrani village while none exists on the ground. It also lists a school in Sultan Bhanoojo which happens to be in a neighbouring *deh* as belonging to Deh Bhaji.

The fragmented settlement phenomenon in rural Sindh has implications not only for accurate measurement. Important social policy issues are at stake. For a population of 10 million children aged 5-16 Sindh had over 42,000 government schools, compared with Punjab which served 23 million children through 57,000 schools. The difference is almost entirely due to the smaller settlement size in rural Sindh compared with rural Punjab. The Sindh schools had an average of 3.5 teachers compared with 5.8 in Punjab.ⁱⁱ

There are implications of Sindh's distinctive pattern of rural settlement for the process of urbanization. Part of the historical trend of village consolidation into towns which is observed in Punjab (e.g. in Raza Ali's work) is visible in Sindh with respect the conversion of the old *raj* villages into towns. There is also,

however, a strong countercurrent in the shape of fragmentation of settlements along kinship group lines into smaller *goths* and *para*. This countercurrent is driven by the desire and ability of kinship groups to acquire relative autonomy from their more powerful neighbours. This can be observed even among historically marginalized groups who, by establishing their villages, acquire a stronger sense of identity and political power. There is an active contest for the recognition of a settlement and for the acquisition of public infrastructure such as schools and electricity. These public goods are valued not only in themselves, but also as a way of creating greater stability and security of tenure for the settlement. This trajectory is remarkably similar to the process of regularization of unplanned urban settlements in urban Sindh.ⁱⁱⁱ

An understanding of the rural settlement is important for making sense of urbanization in Sindh. The fragmented settlement not only poses identification, measurement and social policy challenges, it also influences the pace of urbanization by slowing down the agglomeration of rural settlements into towns. At the same time, however, there appear to be many points of similarity in the political economy of rural settlement fragmentation on the one hand and the consolidation of urban unplanned settlements on the other. Going forward, there is an urgent need for the more precise identification and documentation of rural settlements, using both ethnographic methods but also modern techniques in spatial mapping. While we have provided observations based on limited primary fieldwork and comparison with government records and lists, Sindh needs to undertake a far more extensive exercise in the accurate mapping of settlements and their populations. This is crucial not only for social policy and service delivery, but for a more grounded analysis of urbanization in Sindh.

ⁱ For details about the Sindh Goth Abad scheme and its implementation see Gazdar, Haris and Hussain Bux Mallah, "Residential Security as Social Protection", in IDS Bulletin, July 2010.

ⁱⁱ These figures are based on authors' calculations from the Pakistan Standard of Living Measurement Survey.

ⁱⁱⁱ We have argued this elsewhere, see for example, Gazdar, Haris and Hussain Bux Mallah, "The Making of a 'Colony' in Karachi and the Politics of Regularisation", South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal, Thematic Issue No. 5, Rethinking Urban Democracy, February 2012.



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