



UPSC & STATE PCS CURRENT AFFAIRS · UJIYARI.COM

EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

Neither Village Nor City: The Peri-Urban Blind Spot in India's Planning

 DOWN TO EARTH

12 July 2026

SOCIAL ISSUES

GS1

GS2

CURATED & WRITTEN BY

**Bharat Choudhary**

UPSC Educator & Content Creator

 [linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)

ALSO FROM THE CREATOR

BharatNotesFree UPSC notes, MCQs, PYQ analysis. **100% Free.**bharatnotes.com → **ADVERTISE****Advertise with Ujiyari**

Reach thousands of UPSC aspirants daily.

 epicbharat@gmail.com



Neither Village Nor City: The Peri-Urban Blind Spot in India's Planning

Down to Earth

12 July 2026

GS1

GS2

Source: ujjyari.com — researched, fact-checked & UPSC-mapped

✓ Every fact web-verified against primary sources (<https://ujjyari.com/how-we-verify/>)

THE LIFT LINE

India's fastest-growing settlements are governed by a rulebook written for the place they used to be.

WHY THIS EDITORIAL MATTERS FOR YOUR EXAM

Around every large Indian city lies a belt of settlements that the state cannot classify. They have urban densities, non-agricultural workforces, apartment blocks, factories and traffic, but they are still legally panchayats. They are therefore administered by rural institutions with rural budgets and rural technical staff, while the urban programmes that could actually serve them, municipal water supply, sewerage, solid waste management, stormwater drainage, stop at the municipal boundary. The result is a WASH, that is water, sanitation and hygiene, blind spot of enormous scale: households buy tanker water at multiples of the municipal tariff, sink private borewells into collapsing aquifers, and discharge septage into open drains that were never designed to carry it.

GS Paper 1: urbanisation, its problems and remedies; the distribution of population and settlement patterns; the social consequences of unplanned growth.

GS Paper 2: [devolution](https://ujjyari.com/terms/devolution/) of powers and finances to local levels and the challenges therein; government policies and interventions for development and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

For **Prelims**, hold the census distinction precisely. A **statutory** [town](https://ujjyari.com/vocab/statutory/) has an urban local body: a municipal corporation, municipality or notified area committee, created by state statute. A **census town** has no urban local body at all; it is still governed by a gram panchayat but satisfies three Census criteria: a minimum population of 5,000; a density of at least 400 persons per square kilometre; and at least 75 per cent of the male main working population engaged in non-agricultural pursuits. Census towns have been the single largest driver of India's recent urban growth. Also hold: the 73rd Amendment,

1992, with the Eleventh Schedule and its 29 subjects for panchayats; the 74th Amendment, 1992, with the Twelfth Schedule and its 18 subjects for municipalities, including urban planning, water supply and sanitation; the Metropolitan Planning Committee under Article 243ZE and the District Planning Committee under Article 243ZD; the Jal Jeevan Mission for rural piped water; AMRUT and [Swachh Bharat Mission](https://ujiyari.com/schemes/sbm/) (http://ujiyari.com/schemes/sbm/)-Urban for towns and cities; and the Atal Bhujal Yojana for participatory groundwater management.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The Indian Constitution, through the twin amendments of 1992, drew a clean line between the rural and the urban and gave each its own institution, its own schedule of functions and its own planning machinery. That line has not moved in step with the settlements themselves. India urbanises substantially through in-situ transformation: a village on a highway acquires a factory, then workers, then builders, then density, and becomes urban in every respect except the one that matters administratively, its notification. Reclassification from census town to statutory town is a state government decision, and states routinely delay it, because notification raises expenditure obligations, brings municipal taxes and building bye-laws, and disturbs local political arrangements.

The consequences are concrete. The Jal Jeevan Mission designs for a rural service level, a functional household tap connection at a modest per capita norm, which is simply inadequate for a settlement with urban densities and industrial demand. AMRUT and the urban Swachh Bharat Mission, which fund sewerage networks, sewage treatment plants and faecal sludge management, are keyed to urban local bodies, so a census town cannot access them. A gram panchayat has neither the staff, the technical capacity, nor the own-revenue base to build and run a sewerage system, and no master plan governs where construction may occur. So growth happens anyway, unplanned, on floodplains and over recharge zones, and the [aquifer](https://ujiyari.com/terms/aquifer/) (https://ujiyari.com/terms/aquifer/) beneath it is drawn down by thousands of private borewells that nobody licenses.

THE CORE ARGUMENT / ISSUE

The gap is constitutional in origin, not merely administrative

The 73rd and 74th Amendments created a binary in a country that grows on a gradient. Nothing in the constitutional design contemplates a settlement that is legally rural and functionally urban, so no institution owns it. This is not a paperwork problem that a circular can solve; it is a category error at the level of the basic scheme of local government, and it must be corrected by giving the intermediate settlement a legal existence of its own.

Perverse incentives keep settlements unclassified

States gain in the short run by not notifying. The settlement's residents pay for that in the long run, and so does the exchequer, because retrofitting sewerage and drainage into a settlement that has already built out is several times more expensive than laying it before construction. Delayed notification is a fiscal choice that

transfers a small saving today into a large liability tomorrow.

Ujjayari Current Affairs · ujjayari.com · Free Daily Current Affairs for UPSC & State PCS

FEATURE	RURAL REGIME (73RD AMENDMENT)	PERI-URBAN / CENSUS TOWN	URBAN REGIME (74TH AMENDMENT)
Institution	Gram panchayat	Gram panchayat, urban reality	Municipal corporation / municipality
Water programme	Jal Jeevan Mission, rural service norm	JJM norm inadequate; AMRUT inaccessible	AMRUT, 24x7 supply ambition
Sanitation	SBM-Grameen, ODF and soak pits	Septage into open drains; no FSTP	SBM-Urban, sewerage, STPs, FSSM
Planning instrument	None; no master plan	None; growth is unregulated	Master plan, building bye-laws, DPC/MPC
Revenue base	Weak own-source revenue	Weak, though land values are urban	Property tax, user charges, municipal bonds
Groundwater	Largely unregulated	Unregulated plus urban-scale demand	Regulated abstraction, mandated recharge

Groundwater is where the bill comes due

Because piped supply is absent or inadequate, peri-urban India runs on private borewells, and because nobody regulates abstraction outside the municipal limit, the drawdown is unmeasured. The classic sequence follows: falling water tables, drying shallow wells that the poorest depend on, the entry of tanker mafias, and eventually contamination as untreated septage percolates into the same aquifer the settlement is drinking from. The WASH failure and the groundwater failure are one failure with two names.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (ANALYTICAL FRAME)

Frame this as a problem of institutional mismatch, the gap between the functional geography of a settlement and the administrative geography imposed on it. Wherever the two diverge, services fail in the space between them, and the failure is invisible in official data precisely because each institution can truthfully report that the area lies outside its **mandate** (<https://ujjayari.com/vocab/mandate/>). The transferable rule: whenever governance is organised as a binary but reality is a continuum, the middle of the continuum is systematically underserved, and the fix is either to create an institution for the middle or to make transition automatic rather than discretionary. Apply this frame equally to the urban informal worker, the forest-fringe village and the interstate river basin.

THE DIAGRAM IN WORDS

Ujjayi Current Affairs - ujjayi.com · Free Daily Current Affairs for UPSC & State PCS

Village on a city fringe -> highway, factory, migrants, builders -> urban density and non-agricultural workforce, but still a gram panchayat -> state delays statutory-town notification to avoid expenditure and municipal taxes -> settlement is excluded from AMRUT and SBM-Urban (needs a ULB) and under-served by Jal Jeevan Mission (rural norm too low) -> no master plan, no building bye-laws, no sewerage -> private borewells + septage into open drains -> aquifer drawn down and simultaneously contaminated -> tanker dependence and public-health burden -> fix: automatic reclassification on Census criteria + a statutory peri-urban planning category + City-Region plans through the MPC + a WASH programme window that funds settlements, not institutional categories

WAY FORWARD

- ❶ **Make reclassification automatic, not discretionary.** Provide by state law that a settlement meeting the census-town criteria for two consecutive Census cycles is notified as a statutory town, with a defined fiscal transition package so that notification is not financially **punitive** (<https://ujjayi.com/vocab/punitive/>).
- ❷ **Create a statutory peri-urban planning category.** Recognise the urban fringe in town and country planning law, extend building bye-laws and layout approvals to it, and prohibit construction on floodplains and recharge zones before the settlement builds out.
- ❸ **Make the Metropolitan Planning Committee work.** Operationalise Articles 243ZD and 243ZE so that the city-region, and not merely the municipal core, is the planning unit for water, sanitation, drainage and land use.
- ❹ **Fund settlements, not categories.** Open a peri-urban window under AMRUT and the Swachh Bharat Mission that a gram panchayat may access, and permit Jal Jeevan Mission designs to be built to urban service norms where density warrants it.
- ❺ **Regulate groundwater at the fringe.** Extend **Atal Bhujal Yojana** (<https://ujjayi.com/terms/atal-bhujal-yojana/>)-style participatory management and abstraction registration to peri-urban aquifers, and mandate recharge and faecal sludge treatment before contamination becomes irreversible.
- ❻ **Build panchayat capacity in the interim.** Second engineering and planning staff to fringe panchayats and pool them at the block level, because a settlement cannot wait for its notification to need a drain.

PYQ LINKAGE AND PRACTICE

Ujjayari Current Affairs - ujjayari.com · Free Daily Current Affairs for UPSC & State PCS

UPSC has repeatedly asked about the problems of unplanned urbanisation, the effectiveness of the 73rd and 74th Amendments, urban service delivery, and groundwater depletion. This editorial connects those to the settlement type that India is actually growing into.

Practice question: “India’s peri-urban settlements fall in the gap between the 73rd and the 74th Constitutional Amendments, and consequently between rural and urban service delivery programmes.” Examine the causes and consequences of this governance gap, with particular reference to water and sanitation. (250 words, 15 marks)

Sources: Down To Earth (<https://www.downtoearth.org.in/>)

Source: Neither Village Nor City: The Peri-Urban Blind Spot in India's Planning — Ujjayari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Editorial Analysis

RELATED DAILY ARTICLES

11 Jul **World Population Day 2026 and India's Demographic Shift**

8 Jul **UDISE+ 2025-26: Teacher Count Crosses One Crore**

7 Jul **Chita Andolan: Tribal Protest Against the Ken-Betwa...**

5 Jul **Maharashtra Recognises Women as Independent Farmers**

Ujiyari Current Affairs · ujiyari.com · ~~Free Daily~~ Current Affairs for UPSC & State PCS



CURATED & WRITTEN BY

Bharat Choudhary

UPSC Educator & Content Creator

 linkedin.com/in/epicbharat

 [Read Full Article on Ujiyari](#) →

<https://ujiyari.com/editorials/2026/07/dte-peri-urban-wash-planning-gap-2026/>

ALSO FROM THE CREATOR

BharatNotes

Free UPSC study platform — subject-wise notes across all 4 GS papers, Prelims MCQs, Mains answer frameworks, PYQ analysis & progress tracking. **100% Free • No Login Required.**

[Start Preparing](#) → bharatnotes.com

OPPORTUNITY

Advertise with Ujiyari

Reach **thousands of serious UPSC & State PCS aspirants** daily through our PDFs, website, and social channels.

Ideal for: Coaching institutes • EdTech platforms • Book publishers • Exam prep apps

 epicbharat@gmail.com

Write to us for rates & media kit

Free UPSC & State PCS Current Affairs · ujiyari.com · bharatnotes.com