A careful and systematic study of the process of urbanization and related factors is very essential in underdeveloped and developing countries. Urbanization can be defined as “a process which reveals itself through temporal, social, spatial and sectoral changes in the demographic, social, economic, technological and environmental aspects of life in a given society. Urbanization as a progressive concentration of population in urban unit (Kingsley Devis-1965).

Urbanization is a process of agglomeration of people and concentration of economic activities in geographical space. The process of urbanization takes place when the proportion of urban population is increasing. The rural to urban migration is the chief component of the urbanization and the essential mechanism by which the urban trends are accomplished [N.B. K. Reddy, 1970].

The simplest and the most accepted definition of urbanization refers to the proportion of total population living in the urban settlements or else to a rise in proportion. In Geographer’s view, urbanization as a process of concentration of population in human settlements either through multification of the points of concentration or through increase in size of existing points of concentration.

Urbanization is not only accompanies to industrialization but also interlinked with modernization and these three sometimes work in conjunction. To study the role of urbanization in national as well as regional economy the study of cities or towns is very important. The increase in number of towns is the indicator of urbanization. Cities can deliver a higher quality of life to the surrounding area.

Now a days, process of urbanization is global phenomena. Global proportion of urban population is rising rapidly. It was 13% in 1900, 29% in 1950, 49% in 2005 and it is estimated that in 2030, which will be 60%. It is also estimated that 93% of urban growth. In 2008 half of the world’s population (51.2%) live in urban places. In year 2050 64% population of the developing countries and 85.9% population of developed countries will live in urban places. It shows rapid growth in urban growth. U.S.A. and U.K. have the highest level of urbanization.
India is one of the leading urbanizing Nation in Asia and in developing countries in the world. According to 2011 census, urban population of India is 377.10 million with growth rate of 2.76% per annum. The urban population of India in 1901 was 11.4%, in 2001 it was 28.53% and in 2011 it is 31.16%. It is estimated that in 2030, it will be 40.76%, means there is a growing percentage of urban population. The number of towns is also increasing. In 2001 the total no. of towns is 5161, while in 2011 it is 7742, means increase of 2581 towns is there. The no. of class I cities in 2001 is 394 while in 2011 it increased up to 468. It indicates that the trend of urbanization in India is increasing.

Maharashtra ranks second in urbanization in the country. It has both highly industrially developed area and extremely poor regions with agrarian base. The proportion of urban population in our country has changed from 10.85% to 31.16% in last 60 years while in Maharashtra, it has changed from 16.59% to 45.23%. When we look into the locational and spatial pattern of Maharashtra, then we find that the number of towns has increased from 226 in 1961 to 535 in 2011. The increase in number is only 309 in last 50 years. It means, the growth of urbanization in Maharashtra is not only due to increase in number of towns, but with increase in urban population. The rate of growth of urbanization in Maharashtra has been accelerated after independence, through development of industries, agriculture, transport and communication, and technology in various fields.

Urbanization is a component of regional economic development because urban centres provides inter alia a variety of centralized services for the surrounding zone of influence which are necessary for regional development.

Cities have an important role to play in the life of people living in that area and are the indicators of urban growth, so the change in number of towns and changing sizes of cities are very important in the study of urbanization. The census of India recognized the settlements as an urban places when they fulfill the following criteria.

a) All places with a municipalities, corporation, cantonment board or modified area committee etc.

b) All other places which satisfied the following criteria

i) a minimum population of 5,000
ii) At least 75 percent of male population engaged in non-agricultural

iii) A density of population of at least 400 persons per sq.kms. (1000 persons per sq.miles).

The census authorities have changed the definition of towns in 1961 and introduced six fold size classification of towns. According to declassification all the categories of towns having population below 20,000 are defined as small towns and medium towns are those having population in between 20,000 to 99,000 are considered for the study. In the year 1961 there were 266 total urban centres out of that 62 were small but we observe the accelerated growth in no. of towns in Maharashtra and no. of have been reached upto 378 as urban centres in 2001. Accordingly the remarkable growth in no. of medium towns in Maharashtra is observed and it has been reached to 178 along with the 220 small towns in the state. It clearly indicates that the no. of medium size class towns are increasing rapidly and the role of medium and small size towns in the process of urbanization in Maharashtra is very important specifically in post-independence.

The origin and development of any urban centre is entirely depends on the functional base of town specifically in Maharashtra the spatial distribution of small and medium towns is uneven. The concentration of towns is observed in western Maharashtra which having mainly industrial base o the contrary in Vidarbha region, the resource base is observed in development of towns and in Maharashtra region whatever town development is found it has agrarian or administrative base. Considering all these factors the study will be focus on functional and functional classification of small and medium towns in Maharashtra.

Study Area

The state of Maharashtra is located in the north center of peninsular India, is the third largest state in area and second most populous state of India. It lies between 15°.4’ North latitude to22°.1’ North latitude and 72°.6’ East to80°.9’ East longitudes with an area of3,07,690 sq.kms and 720 km. coast line. According to 2011 census the total population of Maharashtra is 11.23 crores with 5.83 crore male and 5.40 crore female population. The urban population of Maharashtra is 50.8 million comprising 13.5% share of country’s total population. The density of population is 365 persons per sq.km. Administratively the entire region is divided into six
divisions as Konkan, Pune, Nasik, Aurangabad, Amaravati and Nagpur comprising 35 districts. Bombay or Mumbai is the state capital. There are 357 tahsils in Maharashtra.

Maharashtra has a remarkable physical homogeneity. Physically Maharashtra is divided in coastal plain, plateau, Sahyadri, Satpuda at north and Bhamaragad and chiroli ranges on east. The climate of Maharashtra is of tropical monsoon type with hot summer, mild winter and seasonal rains. The monsoon have varied influence over different regions causing heavy rains at some places e.g, 400cms at Sahyadri’s west part and 70 cms at other parts (plateau).

Maharashtra have forests comprising 21% of area of the state. Evergreen deciduous type of forest dominates the landscape varies evergreen to scrub jungle. Residual soil derived from basalt is main soil type.

Maharashtra is rich state in minerals and other natural resources. Agriculture is the mainstay of economy of Maharashtra. Barely 17.8 % of net sown area is irrigated. Mineral zones lie in eastern vidhabh, southern Kolhapur and Sindhudurga. Coal, Manganese, iron ore and limestone are major minerals. It also a leading industrial state of the union contributing 25% of country’s industrial output. It has well developed network of transport and communication having 5983 kms railroads and 73 km per 100 sq. kms of roads.

**Significance of the study**

Since Independence of the country, planning for social and economic development has been the main instrument for progress. So the study about the planning and related factors such as process of urbanization, study of cities and towns has a great importance in urban as well as regional development planning. As urbanization is an inevitable part of economic development and urbanization is an important factor in economic transformation, the study of urbanization is very important in various fields.

Maharashtra is a leading state of India with highest urbanization and remarkable development in various fields. Small and medium towns play an important role in development process through urbanization and also help in minimizing the pressure of population on the big or mega cities of the state. To identify the economic, social and cultural, demographic and political issues the study of process of urbanization is very essential.
Statement of the problem

The small and medium towns play a vital role in the urban growth of Maharashtra since independence period and they are concentrated in the urbanized districts of Maharashtra causes imbalanced urban growth in the state.