

Analysing Delhi's Prosperity: A Brief Commentary

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Abstract

Delhi is a historical hub for regional, national and international commerce and a place for the socio-political elites. The city is widely considered to be prosperous. This study is an attempt at understanding Delhi's affluence using both existing literature and data from Aspirational India, Consumer Pyramids Household Survey, 2024, Economic Survey of Delhi, 2023–2024 and Multiple Indicator Survey, 2020–2021. The city of Delhi faces significant challenges in terms of housing quality, access to clean drinking water, electricity connections and asset ownership among different socio-economic groups. It is essential to work towards making these facilities and assets more equitable and accessible to all its residents. Furthermore, enhancing coordination among various levels of government is crucial to ensure a better quality of life for all individuals living in the city. Addressing the pressing issue of limited prosperity in Delhi requires urgent attention and action, given the financial struggles faced by its residents on a daily basis.

Keywords

Aspirational India, Consumer Pyramids Household Survey, Delhi, Economic Survey of Delhi, 2023–2024, Multiple Indicator Survey, 2020–2021, prosperity

Introduction

Delhi, since times immemorial, has been a city par excellence in terms of its rich history, culture, traditions and overall socio-economic significance. Many times,

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this city was plundered and razed to the ground due to its strategic location. Yet, it almost always managed to rise from the ashes and reinvent itself. This is a testament to its sprightly and eternal spirit.

The study seeks to evolve an informed opinion on the state of Delhi's affluence. The same employs the latest data from January to April 2024 on *Aspirational India: Consumer Pyramids Household Survey* of the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy for the purpose.

This article is divided into the following sections. The first introduces the theme of this study. The second reviews pertinent literature on the topic. The third discusses its methodology. The next segment seeks to explain the results and the last concludes this study also elicits its future policy implications.

Accordingly, the subsequent section reviews available literature on this theme.

Review of Literature

This segment evaluates relevant studies in light of this topic. The first theme gives a background to Delhi's importance to India. The second discusses its socio-economic features and the third deliberates on its prosperity. Key research gaps are identified on the basis of this analysis. The same helps with the formulation of research questions for this study.

Delhi's Importance for India

The National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi holds special significance for India due to its cultural, historical and political underpinnings. As the capital of India, Delhi serves as an administrative and political centre, where vital decisions are made and the government is headquartered. The supreme law-making body of the country, the Parliament, is also located in the city. Laws formulated in Parliament have profound implications for the citizens of the country, ranging from their social to economic impact. As a result, Delhi occupies a pre-eminent place on India's governance map. In addition, the city serves as a cultural hub with various festivals, art galleries and museums playing a crucial role in the preservation and promotion of Indian culture. Citizens from all across the country flock to this city so as to have better access to education, health and employment. Over the period, the city transformed itself into a megacity. This according to the United Nations is usually a metropolitan area with a population of 10 million or more (Statista, 2024). As per population projections by United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), the city is likely to house 36 million residents by 2030. Thus, Delhi would become the second most populous city in the world after Tokyo, Japan (UN DESA, 2016).

Given such information about the current and anticipated future of the city, it is reasonable to argue for its centrality within India's structural framework. To put it somewhat modestly, Delhi acts as a 'hub' attracting scores of people towards it, thanks to its vibrant social and commercial imprint on the country, strengthened by the city's deep cultural and historical roots, dating back several centuries.

Socio-Economic Features of Delhi

Delhi comprises a population of well-educated, youthful and healthy individuals. The following sections discuss the educational, health and demographic profile of the city residents.

Education in Delhi

As of 2023–2024, the state stands at the number two spot after Kerala in terms of literacy rate. As per the 75th NSS report, Delhi's literacy rate is 88.7%, with male literacy rate at 93.7% and female literacy rate at 82.4%. These figures are higher than the All India statistics for these categories. Literacy in Delhi has been continuously improving and the literacy gap is also decreasing between males and females. However, there is still a gendered differential of 11% between males and females in terms of literacy outcomes. For 2023–2024 (BE), expenditure on education as a percentage of aggregate expenditure is 21%. The same is higher than the All India average figure of 13.3% for the given period. As a percentage of the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP), the state's expenditure on education is 1.50% (Economic Survey of Delhi, 2023–2024).

In Delhi, there are around 46.29 lakh pupils enrolled in 5,488 recognised schools. There are 1,240 government and government-aided schools operated by the Delhi Government, accounting for 22.59% of all schools in the city. In 2022–2023, the percentage of students enrolled in government and government-aided schools exceeded 41.61% of all students enrolled in Delhi Government schools. The Directorate of Education (DoE) under the aegis of the Government of NCT of Delhi aims to impart inclusive, qualitative and continuous education to the residents of this Union Territory. The primary objective of the DoE is to augment the overall learning atmosphere in the state. To achieve the said target, several initiatives are being taken by the DoE by focusing on improving infrastructure, ambience of state-run government schools, upgrading pedagogies, continuously involving parents/guardians with the academic progress of pupils, intensive and ongoing teacher training, focusing on students with learning deficits/difficulties through targeted teaching methods, redesigning learning materials and assessment tools. All in all, the main objective of the DoE is to evolve a holistic teaching-learning atmosphere in line with the spirit of India's New Education Policy (Economic Survey of Delhi, 2023–2024).

Owing to its unique characteristics, the education model of Delhi is growing in popularity, not just in India but also across the world. Known for an innovative teaching style, emphasis on '*learning by doing*' rather than rote; Delhi has emerged as an epitome of didactic excellence, especially when it comes to school education. A mention worthy feature of the same is the emphasis on developing critical life skills of the likes of empathy, problem-solving, communication and collaboration. The *Happiness Curriculum* in state-run schools is intended to inculcate these very values right during the formative years of schoolgoers so as to encourage them to lead peaceful and fulfilling lives during their adulthood (Economic Survey of Delhi, 2023–2024).

When it comes to higher education, Delhi yet again performs well. When measured using the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) and Net Enrolment Ratio, Delhi stands out as an achiever. As per the UDISE+ Reports and the AISHE Surveys, during 2021–2022, the GER at all levels of education in Delhi is higher as compared to All India levels. Also, there are a total of 232 higher educational institutions in Delhi in the year 2022–2023, including Universities, Deemed Universities, Institutions of National Importance, Colleges for General Education and Colleges for Professional Education. Additionally, the state government has allocated ₹819.29 crore towards the higher education sector in 2023–2024. Furthermore, the gender parity index for higher education in Delhi puts the state in good stead for future gender equality in higher education as evident from Post Graduate, Diploma and Certificate levels and the fact that it significantly outshines the All India figures for these categories (Economic Survey of Delhi, 2023–2024).

In line with the Government of India's thrust on skilling the country's youth, Government of NCT of Delhi is focusing on promoting entrepreneurial spirits among its young through the State Incubation Policy which is aimed at making the city residents job providers and not job seekers (Economic Survey of Delhi, 2023–2024).

Health in Delhi

Health is a basic human right. Regardless of their income, social group, locality or social class, all citizens are entitled to lead a healthy life. Delhi is making progress in providing affordable and quality healthcare to all. For this purpose, it is building reliable health infrastructure at various levels—involving both the public and the private sectors. The motto behind this is 'prevention is better than cure'. Good health seeks to improve the quality of life through timely prevention and treatment of diseases. Delhi, just like any other part of the world, must focus on its education and health sectors so as to ensure a productive workforce for itself. It is a virtuous cycle. Healthy and educated individuals make better workers and contribute towards the GSDP. For Delhi to ensure itself lasting prosperity, it is vital to strengthen the laser-sharp focus on education and health—the twin pillars of socio-economic development (Economic Survey of Delhi, 2023–2024).

As of 31 March 2023, Delhi has a total of 3423 medical institutions. The primary reason for the slow expansion of new health facilities is the lack of available land. Additionally, the multiplicity of agencies and shortage of experienced manpower are contributing factors to the slow extension of health facilities. Furthermore, major hospitals in Delhi are experiencing heavy patient workload. Despite these seemingly remarkable statistics, there are areas of major concern for Delhi in the health domain. First, the bed-to-population ratio is 2.70 as of 2023–2024. This is unimpressive given the WHO-mandated ratio of five beds per 1000 persons. Second, the health infrastructure of this state is often found wanting when it comes to the migrant population from contiguous and far-flung districts of other states. Third, existing laws and regulations often lead to overlapping actions by multiple agencies regarding dimensions of public health, namely, the State Government, Urban Local Bodies and the Central Government

(Economic Survey of Delhi, 2023–2024). Fourth, it is evident from the aforementioned statement that the spending on Health & Family Welfare within the Schemes/Programmes/Projects of the Delhi Government has more than doubled over the past seven years, rising from ₹1,999.63 crore in 2015–2016 to ₹4,158.11 crore in 2022–2023. This amount represents approximately 13% of the total expenditure on all schemes/programmes and projects, with the exception of the year 2019–2020. Moreover, during the COVID-19 period of 2020–2021 and 2021–2022, this figure stood at around 16% of the total expenditure. However, this outlay is insufficient given the vast population of the NCT of Delhi and persistent in-migration from other parts of the country in search of better educational and employment prospects (Economic Survey of Delhi, 2023–2024).

The health expenditure in relation to GSDP has seen a significant rise, reaching 1.03% in 2021–2022 from 0.86% in 2020–2021. There is a declining trend in Under 5 Mortality Rate (U5MR), surpassing the national trend. Similarly, Fertility Rates are also declining. The goal is to eliminate preventable deaths for infants and children under the age of 5 by 2030. In Delhi, both infant mortality rate and U5MR have been steadily falling and are currently around 12 and 14, respectively, according to Sample Registration System data. Furthermore, the share of institutional deliveries and the percentage of births attended by skilled health personnel are continuously increasing in Delhi, reaching 94.02% and 94.83%, respectively, in 2022 (Economic Survey of Delhi, 2023–2024).

There is a need to further strengthen Delhi's healthcare system and extend this to reach all marginalised communities in the capital city. Health facilities must be consistently upgraded to address new and existing challenges. The progress achieved in healthcare must be reinforced and maintained. Recognising the significance of a strong healthcare sector and improved health results for the capital city in the future. The government will persist in combating major diseases and allocating resources to healthcare infrastructure, services and personnel to guarantee top-notch healthcare for all residents (Economic Survey of Delhi, 2023–2024).

Employment Situation in Delhi

In 1981, the workforce participation rate in Delhi stood at 32.19%, which then dropped to 31.63% in 1991, experienced a slight increase to 32.82% in 2001 and finally reached 33.28% in 2011. The growth of workers in Delhi from 1981 to 2011 was calculated at 5.96% per annum, while non-workers grew at a rate of 5.51% per annum. This trend was also observed at the national level, where the growth of workers exceeded that of non-workers, with a difference of 1.05% per annum during the same period. These findings clearly indicate an increase in workforce participation rates both at the national and state levels. Given that Delhi is nearly fully urbanised within India, the growth of workers and non-workers surpassed that at the national level. Additionally, the percentage contribution of workers and non-workers in Delhi increased in tandem with the population growth during the same period. It could thus, be safely stated that one-third population supports two-thirds of the NCT of Delhi, indicating a high dependency ratio (Economic Survey of Delhi, 2023–2024).

The prevailing trend in urbanised regions is the low percentage of individuals involved in the primary sector, namely, agriculture and allied activities. This pattern is evident in Delhi as well, where a significant portion of the workforce is employed in the services and industrial sectors. During 2011, female workers comprised a smaller portion of the workforce in Delhi, making up around 15% of the total workers. The majority of workers in Delhi fell into the category of other workers, which included industrial and tertiary sector activities, constituting 95% of the workforce. Data from the Periodic Labour Force Surveys indicate that the Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) for all age groups in Delhi was 34.8% in 2021–2022, increasing to 35.7% in 2022–2023. At the national level, the LFPR stood at 41.3% and 42.4% for the respective years. The Worker Population Ratio (WPR) for all age groups in Delhi saw an increase from 33.0% in 2021–2022 to 35.0% in 2022–2023. On a broader scale, at the national level, the WPR was 39.6% and 41.1% for the same respective years. In the year 2021–2022, the unemployment rate for all age groups in Delhi was recorded at 5.3%, which decreased to 1.9% in 2022–2023. On the other hand, unemployment rate at the national level was 4.1% and 3.2% for the corresponding years (Economic Survey of Delhi, 2023–2024).

Demographics in Delhi

More than 97% of Delhi's population resides in urban areas as per the Census of 2011. This is in sharp contrast to the statistics for 1901; a meagre 53%. The same points toward a trend of declining rural population as a share of total population, or rising urbanisation in Delhi over the century. Based on the 2011 Census data, the sex ratio of Delhi was recorded at 868. Over the course of the last decade, there has been a rise in the sex ratio in Delhi from 821 in 2001 to 868 in 2011. According to birth registrations through the Civil Registration System, the sex ratio has improved, rising from 809 in 2001 to 929 in 2022 for Delhi. This is owing to persistent pro-women measures taken both by the Central and State governments. According to the 2011 Census, Delhi had a population density of 11,320 persons per square kilometre, which was significantly higher than the national average of 382 persons per square kilometre. In 2011, Delhi had the highest population density among all states and union territories. As per the 2011 Census, there were 3,340,538 households in Delhi. The average size of a household in Delhi was found to be 5.02. In 2011, almost one-third of Delhi's total population consisted of children aged 0–14 years. Only about 7% of the state's population was aged 60 years or more. This clearly indicates a relatively low dependency ratio, implying that Delhi is an economically active state, with the share of working-age residents surpassing that of the dependents. The percentage of Delhi's population under 15 years old is projected to decrease from 27.22% to 18.46%. Meanwhile, the proportion of the middle age group (15–59 years) and the older ages (60 years and above) are expected to increase significantly. The working-age group (15–59 years) is anticipated to rise from 65.85% in 2011 to 67.33% in 2036. In terms of numbers, the natural population increase in 2022 was 1.72 lakh, while migration has been estimated at 2.21 lakh (Economic Survey of Delhi, 2023–2024).

Socio-Economic Infrastructure in Delhi

The housing quality in Delhi has seen a significant improvement in recent decades, as the percentage of 'good' houses has risen from 58% in 2001 to 66% in 2011. Approximately one-third of the houses require minor repairs, while only 3% are in a dilapidated state and in need of major repair. To achieve the goal of providing housing for all by 2022, a total of 4.8 million houses will need to be constructed or upgraded, with 54% of the total allocated for the Economically Weaker Sections (Economic Survey of Delhi, 2023–2024).

In addition, as per the Census of 2011, 89.2% of the households have an electricity connection along with toilet facilities and 81.3% have a piped water supply. Delhi has already achieved the status of an Open Defecation Free city and is implementing Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban) 2.0. SBM (U) 2.0 will concentrate on upholding the sanitation and solid waste management achievements from the previous phase and further drive the progress made during that time (Economic Survey of Delhi, 2023–2024).

The next section explains the methodology adopted for this article.

Methodology

This study employs an existing review of literature on Delhi and its socio-economic characteristics (majorly, the Economic Survey of Delhi, 2023–2024 is referred to for this article), in addition to its use of the latest data from *Aspirational India*, Consumer Pyramids Household Survey (CPHS), 2024 (January to April 2024 cycle) to assess asset ownership patterns for Delhi's residents. *Aspirational India*, Consumer Pyramids Household Survey provides valuable insights into the asset preferences of households. These preferences may indicate a keenness for ownership, a yearning to possess, or simply a contemplation of acquiring assets. The study encompasses 12 different types of assets, including residential properties, household amenities like refrigerators, ACs, coolers and washing machines, electronic devices such as TVs and computers, modes of transportation like cars and motorcycles, as well as, additional items like generators, tractors and livestock. Using data from *Aspirational India*, a simple table is developed for depicting summation across 18 occupational categories. Summation for each of these categories is done for the following. Number of Persons in an Occupation Group, Sum of Houses Owned, Sum of Refrigerators Owned, Sum of ACs Owned, Sum of Coolers Owned, Sum of Washing Machines Owned, Sum of TVs Owned, Sum of Computers Owned and Sum of Cars Owned. This is corroborated with reviewed literature on the topic and helps to form an informed opinion on the same. Total number of persons under all occupation groups is 1,088. The main objective of following this methodology is to link the socio-economic characteristics of Delhi with data-backed evidence on asset ownership from the CPHS. The same aids in bridging the gap between theory and evidence.

The ensuing segment explains the results of this study.

Results and Discussion

As evident from the table, of all the occupational groups; agricultural labourers, home-based workers, non-industrial technical employees, small traders and hawkers, small and marginal farmers, support staff, wage labourers and white-collar clerical employees are worst off in terms of ownership of physical assets like houses, refrigerators, ACs, coolers, washing machines, TVs, computers and cars. There is higher ownership of these assets among other occupational groups of business and salaried employees, entrepreneurs, managers/supervisors and white-collar professional employees, indicating better prosperity among the latter than the former. Thus, there is a need to make affluence in Delhi more broad-based and equitable. Currently, that does not seem to be the case, as suggested both by data and literature.

See Table 1 for detailed results.

Conclusion and Future Policy Implications

Delhi is still found wanting on parameters such as housing quality, access to drinking water, electricity connections and ownership of assets among all its residents. For instance, only 80.2% of city households had access to an exclusive source of drinking water; 72.4% of city households had exclusive access to improved source of drinking water located in the household premises which was sufficiently available throughout the year; 99.4% of households had access to toilet facilities; 94.6% used LPG as their primary energy source for cooking; 82.9% of households used clean sources of energy for cooking, lighting and heating (Multiple Indicator Survey, 2023). In addition, 87% of its residents used mobile phone(s) with an active SIM card at least once over the last three months; only 62.8% of households had access to broadband connectivity, 93.1% had access to mass media; 88.6% of the city residents had an account individually or jointly at any of the banks/ other financial institutions/ mobile money service providers (Multiple Indicator Survey, 2023). Only 31.9% of Delhi's households reported to be the owners of air conditioners; 87.2% of households in the city purchased/ constructed a new house/flat for residential purposes after 31.03.2014, purchased for the first time and owned that house/flat as on the date of the Multiple Indicator Survey; the average floor area of newly purchased residential property is only 50.6 m² in Delhi (Multiple Indicator Survey, 2023). There is thus, a need to make the facilities and ownership of assets more equitable in reach and scope (Dupont, 2004; Economic Survey of Delhi, 2023–2024).

There is also a need to promote better coordination among different levels of the Government so as to ensure a decent quality of life for all city residents. All in all, the pressing issue of limited prosperity in Delhi demands immediate attention and action. Despite its designation as the capital of India, many individuals in Delhi face financial hardships on a day-to-day basis. The city's economic struggles are further exacerbated by high pollution levels, inadequate infrastructure and a scarcity of employment opportunities. It is crucial for the government and local

Table 1. Asset Ownership Among Delhi's Occupational Categories, 2024.

Occupation Categories/Groups	Number of Persons in Occupation Group	Sum of Houses Owned	Sum of Refrigerators Owned	Sum of ACs Owned	Sum of Coolers Owned	Sum of Washing Machines Owned	Sum of TVs Owned	Sum of Computers Owned	Sum of Cars Owned
Agricultural Labourers	9	10	9	2	12	9	10	2	0
Business and Salaried Employees	36	36	35	34	36	35	38	25	20
Entrepreneurs	53	54	54	58	56	53	56	52	48
Home-based Workers	3	3	2	0	1	1	1	0	0
Industrial Workers	34	33	32	12	30	27	33	12	1
Managers/ Supervisors	38	39	39	31	44	38	42	29	17
Miscellaneous Non-industrial Technical Employees	6	7	5	4	5	5	5	3	2
Organised Farmers	13	13	12	8	11	11	13	10	1
Qualified Self-employed Professionals	17	19	18	14	21	18	18	11	10
Retired/Aged	15	15	15	19	16	15	15	16	14
	150	154	153	145	177	150	163	113	87

(Table 1 continued)

(Table 1 continued)

Occupation Categories/Groups	Number of Persons in Occupation Group	Sum of Houses Owned	Sum of Refrigerators Owned	Sum of ACs Owned	Sum of Coolers Owned	Sum of Washing Machines Owned	Sum of TVs Owned	Sum of Computers Owned	Sum of Cars Owned
Self-employed	216	220	215	123	240	214	219	99	51
Entrepreneurs									
Small Traders/Hawkers	24	24	24	9	25	23	24	5	1
Small/Marginal Farmers	11	11	11	10	14	11	11	8	4
Support Staff	89	88	84	45	94	79	86	28	11
Wage Labourers	100	101	92	14	101	85	95	17	3
White-collar Clerical Employees	72	72	72	52	81	69	73	51	35
White-collar Professional Employees	202	209	205	206	225	200	213	201	152
Grand Total	1,088	1,108	1,077	786	1,189	1,043	1,115	682	457

Source: Aspirational India, Consumer Pyramids Household Survey, 2024.

Note: As evident from Table 1, some of the asset ownership numbers are greater than the number of persons in Occupation Group(s). This is due to greater asset ownership among certain occupation categories/groups, pointing towards their relative affluence vis.-à-vis. other occupations and hence, concentration of assets in the hands of a few, pointing towards socio-economic inequities in Delhi.

authorities to collaborate effectively in order to implement sustainable solutions that enhance the overall quality of life for all residents in Delhi. Through strategic investments in education, healthcare and sustainable development, Delhi can chart a course towards a brighter and more prosperous future for all its dwellers.

To ensure an equitable future prosperity for its residents, Delhi must take some urgent steps. First, due to the continuous increase in urban population (both naturally and due to persisting migration), there is a deficit of housing and this requires maintaining a balance between housing demand and supply (Sharma, 2017; Sharma & Abhay, 2022). Second, women, especially young girls, in India and other developing countries are faced with a heavy load of unpaid household responsibilities, which hinders their educational and career opportunities when compared to men. This disparity increases the risk of poverty and economic hardship for women and girls, impeding progress towards gender equality. Addressing the unequal distribution of household tasks is crucial for advancing gender equity and fostering economic growth in a nation with a billion-plus population (Islam & Sharma, 2021; Sharma, 2020, 2021). Finally, it is imperative for the government to exhibit a stronger political resolve in upgrading infrastructure. A comprehensive investment strategy aimed at refurbishing existing buildings, strategically constructing new ones and significantly enhancing the living standards of the city residents by ensuring timely availability of electricity connections, piped water supply, potable water, good educational and health facilities.

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