

Preface

The evolution of human civilisation has witnessed a journey from rural world to urban world, signifying a shift from agrarian to non-agrarian society, that is to say, from a less advanced to a more advanced state. This phase of transition has also been accompanied by a mass movement of rural population towards urban centres to avail of better facilities for living since these two types of human habitation-urban and rural-are dichotomous in character. Thus the inherent dichotomy between urban and rural settlements has an implicit causal effect on the process of urbanisation; (since people from rural areas crowd the cities or towns to avail of better facilities for living). Again, the very nature of the functional dichotomy in these two habitats makes them functionally interdependent to such an extent that their sustainability becomes questionable without their reciprocity.

At times, this interdependence becomes unidirectional, as the rural people, being pushed by their utter poverty, become centrifugal from their soil and move towards the urban centres in search of better alternatives. Such movement has its pros and cons: the urban centres grow at the expense of their rural counterparts and the rural areas tend to be depopulated, ultimately overburdening the urban resources while the rural resources remain untapped. And, it is precisely here that the process of urbanisation becomes a problem in itself. The less developed and developing countries, in particular, are experiencing this problem-ridden urbanisation. Since the days of Industrial Revolution, this tendency has been intensifying because of more and more concentration of services, activities and benefits in the urban centres when, in contrast, rural areas remain neglected. To abate this problem, an ideal urban-rural harmony is required that may involve reciprocal development of both urban and rural areas.

Different countries have tried to solve this problem in conformity with their resources, markets, history, traditions, culture, etc.

In the present thesis, this world-wide problem has been studied with relevance to some parts of West Bengal, India, in the light of the interpretation of urban-rural interaction in relation to the question of rural development. The study is basically

exploratory in nature and apart from the observation at macro level of the districts of West Bengal, it is entirely based on extensive and intensive field survey, conducted in selected urban centres and their hinterlands in the districts of Koch Bihar and Jalpaiguri of West Bengal.

Suggestions towards the solution of the problem have been made here taking into consideration the local situations comprising available resources, transport, market and the overall socio-eco-cultural environment. The policy recommendations have been made in view of the idea that the reciprocity between urban and rural sectors is necessary for sustainable regional development.