Chapter-II

The History of Urbanization in Colonial India

I

The colonial phase of urbanization in India started, ironically in the period during which Mughal supremacy was at its height. The process of urbanization in all parts of India during this phase was primarily determined by British colonial economic policies and social attitudes. Among the European countries, the Portuguese were the first who entered into the commercial relation with India. They established new port towns in India such as Panaji in Goa in 1510 and Bombay in 1532.[1] The Dutch were followed by them and established a factory at Petapuli in north Coromandel Coast as early as 1606 followed by another in neighboring Masulipatnam in the same year. South Coromadal was reached with the establishment of a factory at Tirupapaliyur in 1608. Yet another factory was established at Pulicat in the same region in 1610. At any rate, it is clear that due to the establishment of factories and growing economic activities centering factories, urbanization started its manifestation. As a result Masuliptnam became an important urban center of this region. In 1658 another urban center was established by Portuguese called Nagapttanam.[2] France was another European maritime power of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, who enter into the commercial communication with India at a later date and established Pondicherry in 1674 and Chandannagore in 1676.[3] The British establish themselves in Madras in 1639 and Calcutta in 1690.[4] The European powers came and settled here to reap the benefit of Indian merchandise. But finally, the English earned unquestioned supremacy over all the foreign competitors in the trade of Indian merchandise.[5] As a result; flickers of urbanization process were extinguished within a few decades of the end of 18th and 19th century. The gradual increasing influence of the English gave a sharp jolt to the commercial and industrial progress of the area. Because these new rulers aimed at a maximum commercial profit to themselves, they systematically disregarded the interest of the domestic commerce, but more so of the industries. Consequently the urban resources began to dry up; the town could not flourish after the removal of their sustaining commerce and manufacture. Therefore, the period witnessed the beginning of the process of the de-urbanization, the desertion of the town, or any rate

thinning out of the town inhabitants,[6] and thereby, trends in urbanization took a new turn.[7]

II

England, in Marx's view, had "a double mission in India: one destructive, the other regenerative"- this statement is equally important to the colonial urbanization in India.[8] In the initial stage, the policies of the British proved rather harmful to the process of urbanization. The transformation of India's economy into a colonial one-a market for the manufacturers and source for the supply of raw materials to her industries- hit hard the industrial and commercial base of a number of towns.[9] In 1813, when the monopoly of East India Company in trade with India was ended and the new stage of industrial capitalist exploitation was started[10] many traditional industrial and trade towns declined; due to the erosion of the Indian industrial base by the growing commercial interests of the British.[11] On the basis of the technical superiority and also with the help of one-way free trade the predominance of British manufactures was built up in the India market and the Indian manufacturing industries were destroyed. The most remarkable consequence of the establishment of British manufactures over India was a dislocation of the traditional pattern of trade of the country.[12] The effect of this wholesale destruction of the Indian manufacturing industries ultimately led to the ruin of the millions of artisans and craftsman. As a result, the old populous manufacturing towns such as Dacca, Murshidabad, Surat, Lucknow and the like, in a few years lost their previous importance. During the period ranging from 1757 to 1840, the population of Dacca had fallen from 150,000 to 30,000 or 40,000 and the jungle and malaria fast encroaching upon the town. This decadence had occurred not in Dacca only but in other district also.[13] Thus towns and cities long famed for their specialized products faced a continually shrinking market; the entire industrial structure crashed down under stiff competition from imported goods resulting in the slackening of the activities in the commercial centers. For example, Dhaka, judged from the 'magnificence of its ruins such as bridges, brick causeways, mosques, caravan serai, palaces, and gardens, now overgrown with jungle'[14] and the transfer of capital from Dhaka to Murshidabad in 1704 spelt its doom. Likewise Murshidabad lost its glamour and importance when the Nawab was defeated by the English in 1757.[15] An analysis of the growth and decay of Lucknow clearly show that so long it enjoyed the position of being the center of trading and

commercial activities, its growth continued. But as soon as British government came and began to impose curbs and obstacles on trade and commerce, the decay of the city was assured. Mutiny also precipitated the crisis which led to the restriction upon the settlement of the people. But more important than these restrictions were gradual cessation of domestic demand for local products, even coming of the railways could not stop the process of decay.[16]

The decline of a large number of urban places in India during the 19th century was also due to the negative attitude of the British towards the traditional industries of India, particularly the cotton textile industry. This attitude was largely a result of the industrial revolution in England and the growth of the textile industry in Manchester.[17] The traditional industrial base of Indian cities which had been made up by the indigenous handicraft production was destroyed by the influx of cheap manufactured goods from Europe.[18] As a result, Indian industries were discouraged under the new regime. The market gradually shrank and the trade slowly passed hands from the local people to the English free traders. The result was disastrous. The cities were degraded; the specter of economic threat slowly depopulated them which could be clearly assumed from the shrinking size of the many of these cities.[19] This naturally leads to the conclusion that the cities, remaining in decayed condition at the beginning of the 19th century, were in better shape and position in the immediate past or distant past that is before the installation of British power in India. The most convincing example is that of Agra-once an imperial city, at the first quarter of the 19th century was surrounded by extensive ruins all around. Vijaynagar a great metropolis of the 16th century was mostly in ruins, Cambay, the sea port and one most important metropolitan of India represented a collection of uninhabited streets, ruined mosque, and moldering places.[20] This is by no means a complete list of cities which declined during this period. During the colonial period certain distortion were also introduced in the spatial structure of the economy.[21] Centripetal pulls were replaced by centrifugal pulls and trade and internal commodity flows were diverted to the colonial ports. As a result, indigenous ports like Khambayat and Broch were destroyed. The symbiotic relationship that had existed between the indigenous urban centers and their hinterlands of primary production was disrupted. These urban centers either died out, like Murshidabad, or become satellites of the colonial ports.[22]

The triumph at Plassey, in 1757, gave an opportunity to the East India Company to consolidate their political authority in Bengal and gradually they succeeded in extending their sphere of influence not only in Bengal but also in India which had a negative effect on the process of urbanization in the sub-continent. The new politico-administrative framework and economic exploitation of the Company contributed to the decline of the urban centers of the pre-British period. The town and cities hitherto acting as centers of political and economic activities of independent kingdoms lost their freedom of action. Their function being restricted in many fields, the very purpose for which the cities existed becomes largely superfluous. The entire economy of the country was going through a devastating change necessary to serve the needs of the ruling power. The town and cities had to fit into this changing pattern. Their obligation and responsibilities were not the same as before. Their economic and political role was replaced by a role in general administration for which most of the important towns and cities were converted into some time administrative headquarters of the British India. This meant a great curtailment of activities in a much wider field which quite naturally could not be conducive to their growth. Decadence slowly crept into the urban life making its toll on high or low depending on circumstances. This is very clear when we compare the list of 16 largest cities given by Hamilton in his book named 'Description of Hindoosthan', written in 1820,[23] and the 16 cities given in the first Census held in 1872.[24]

Another factor contributing to the decline of the urban centers of the pre-British period was the introduction of the network of railroads in India, starting from April 16, 1853.[25] By 1857 most of the big interior cities had been connected by railways with the ports of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras[26] and by 1900, the rail network had been fully developed and covered all parts of the country. Railways, by establishing these links, had an impact throughout the urbanization process of India. The introduction of the railways resulted in the diversion of trade routes in different channels and every railway station became a point of export of raw materials, thus depriving some of the earlier trade centers of their monopoly in trade. Many trading points on the Ganga River, which was an important trade channel, lost their importance. A good example is that of Mirzapur.[27] The railway line between Pathankot and Amirtsar that passed through Dinanagar, Gurdaspur, Dhariwal and

Batala isolated the remaining towns, diverted their trade, and in some cases, even crippled their manufacture. This happened in two ways-either by encouraging the manufacture of those places that happened to be on the railway line, like Batala and Dhariwal, or by bringing the manufactured goods from outside the region.[28]

With the establishment of the colonial rule over India was visited by a series of calamities, which also to some extent contributed to the decline of pre-colonial towns.[29] The process of commercialization of Indian agriculture under the aegis of British East India Company resulted in the substitution of commercial crops for food crops. The effect of this development on the overall food situation of the country was a tragic one. The famine of Orissa and Bengal during the second half of the 19th century bore testimony to this process of substitution of crops.[30] One of the major calamities was the famine of 1869-70 in Bengal, occurring five years after the British takeover of taxation rights in the province. Apart from the two years of erratic rainfall of preceding two years, it was due to the worsened by the ruthless efficiency of the new regime in collecting land taxes and by a smallpox epidemic. The legendary Guntur famine of 1832-33 followed crop failure as well as excessive and uncertain levels of taxation on peasants.[31] These calamities also contributed to a certain extent to the decline of some of urban centers. For instances, the district of Birbhum in Bengal was one of the worst affected by the Famine of 1770. It had not only lost 'many hundreds of villages' the decay of old towns and trade marts had also started.[32] This state of condition of the towns of the district of Birbhum may be comprehended from the correspondence of the then District Collectors. He states that 'Towns once populous are now deserted; the manufactures are decayed; and where commerce flourished only a few poor and wretched hovels are seen. These pernicious effects are visible along the whole course of Ajay (river), particularly in the decay of Ilambazar, and the almost complete desertion of the once trading town of Lakrakunda.'[33] The generation of surplus products is one of the prerequisite conditions to sustain people in non-agricultural activities.[34] Before the coming of the British, the Indian village was self-sufficient and could easily fulfil the food requirement of the urban inhabitants. But the British gave a modern turn to the village set up and led to the economic life in India more stagnant. Therefore, the volume of surplus production for urban population reduced day by day and thereby accelerates the process of decline of some of the towns.

III

After the somewhat dreary sketch of urban decay, stagnation or decimation by disease[35] a new trend of urbanization began in the later half of the nineteenth century as a result of the opening of Suez Canal (in 18690), introduction of steam navigation and construction of railways, canals, and harbours, which gave rise to further increase in the volume of trade, and growth of factory industries, coal mining, tea plantation, banking, shipping and insurance.[36] Apart from above mentioned developments, by the start of the 19th century, the British Empire gradually had consolidated itself and established an elaborate spatial structure of administration with an imperial capital, provincial capitals, and district headquarters as the control points. The new rulers brought new officials, new institutions, and new structure to these towns with a kachari, cantonment, police station, jail, treasury, public garden, post office, schools, dispensary and above all a municipal committee.[37] Thus, in course of time, administrative headquarters emerged as the most important towns and cities of the country.[38] For example, by the start of the 20th century, Calcutta, Bombay and Madras had become the leading administrative, commercial and industrial cities of India. The city's focal point was the central commercial area, with tall, European-style buildings, representing the banks and headquarters of commercial and industrial houses. Numerous streets and by-lanes specialized in various products- clothing, furniture, medical supplies, electrical and other gadgets, apart from areas devoted to entertainment. The chief commercial areas also the city's focal point of rail and road transportation. Suburban railways, tram cars and city buses gave the colonial cities a new status, unmatched by the traditional cities of the interior. The city's administrative nerve center was no less impressive. Dalhousie Square in Calcutta and Fort St. George in Madras were close to the central commercial area and had massive buildings which were British variants of Roman styles. To the native Indians, there administrative structures provided a glimpse into European culture, which for the Europeans; they were remainders of their home.[39]

One of the suitable examples of the urban place of British origin is New Delhi. A completely new city called New Delhi was built with the transfer of capital of British Indian Empire from Calcutta to Delhi in 1911. This new city was completed around 1935. It had a modern commercial area, with a magnificent administrative complex not far away. It was a sprawling city of bungalows with large

compounds and wide streets lined with trees, which on the whole provided a cultural landscape satisfying European taste. New Delhi stands in sharp contrast to the now overcrowded and rather dilapidated Shahjahanabad, the city of the Mughals.[40] Srinagar is another example of the British contribution of Indian urbanization. During the early part of the Dogra rule in Kashmir (1846-1890), Srinagar presented a very bad picture. There was an obvious deterioration in the physical appearance of the city. The streets were full of filth. The narrow streets were choked with the traffic of pack animals, horses, donkeys, cows and pedestrians. In the rainy seasons the streets were extremely muddy owing to the absence of any drainage system. Both the drainage and the water-supply had been neglected. The health and sanitation conditions in the city were unsatisfactory. Such was Srinagar before the establishment of Srinagar Municipality in 1886, by the first Municipal Act. Thus under the guidance of British Residents and British officers, measures were taken to improve the urban amenities. And with the improvements in communication and transport, the social and economic opportunities of Srinagar become more accessible to the outsiders and gradually Srinagar became an important urban center of colonial India.[41]

With the advent of the European traders in India, new coastal cities also began to grow up as ports-cum-trading centers. In the course of political and military advancement of primarily trading interests of these Europeans, their settlements were gradually acquiring the character of port-markets with fortresses. In about a century, these were assuming the added character of administrative centers. The finest example of that category is Serampore. In July 1755, the Danish East India Company secured a parwana from the Nawab of Bengal for the erection of a 'factor' on sixty bighas of land in Serampore. The more plausible reason for the establishment of Danish settlement at Serampore was its situation near the famous grains and handicrafts market of Sheorafuli Hat and also on the bank of Bhagirathi. Within a short span of time the settlement grew around the 'factory' and flourished under the predominance of European influence in Bengal. With the establishment of producing centers and emergence of an artisan class among the settlers, Serampore's character changed from a parasitic settlement to a generative center. On 11th October, 1845, the English took possession of the city. With the positing of a Sub-Divisional Magistrate and Collector in February 1846, Serampore become the administrative headquarters

of the sub-division of the same name. After the transference of Serampore to the British, its importance as a center of administration increased. The Christian missionaries of Serampore also had an active role behind the growth of the town.[42]

Rail-roadisation had a stimulating effect on the Indian urbanization during colonial period. The introduction of railways in India in the latter half of the 19th century contributed to the emergence of a national network of urban places, in which the metropolitan cities formed the primary foci, supported by the one-lakh cities which acted as satellite centers.[43] By the end of the 19th century, there were main lines between all the cities and connections between all middling towns and cities. A large number of small towns were also linked to the bigger urban units. With the help of rail links some new towns came in to existence while the existing units rose in the urban scale.[44] With the advent of railways obscure villages have grown into towns, several towns into big cities and some of the big cities have become so large as to compare favorably in population, area and modern amenities of life with some of the major metropolitan centers of the world.[45] The railways contributed in no small measure to the enlargement of trade and the introduction of modern industry and thus indirectly helped the process of urbanization. The most direct contribution to the growth of the existing cities was the railway station. The railway station, soon become a focal point of the city, rivaled only by the main market center. The city began to grow in the direction of the railway station and even the main market began to shift towards this area. The railways also introduced, in a number of towns, railway colonies to accommodate their administrative and engineering staff. As a result of this development, new railway towns emerged in various parts of the country, for example, Jamalpur in Bihar, Waltair in Andhra, Bareilly and Meerut in Uttar Pradesh, and Nagpur in Maharastra.[46] In Bengal also a number of new towns began to develop centering Rail-station. For instances, Bolpur, in the district of Birbhum, Alipurduar, in the district of Jalpaiguri and so on.

With the spread of commercialization, agricultural production began to get localized in different regions endowed with different geographical peculiarities.[47] For instances, Assam, Darjeeling hills, Doors region of north Bengal and Nilgiri mountain of south India had the ideal climate and topology for tea plantations. Efforts began to develop plantation in these region. The first Indian tea was produced in Assam on a government-owned experimental farm in 1838. Then gardens came up

in the Darjeeling hills and the Doors region of north Bengal. Nearly 75 percent of tea land in India was located in Assam. Between 1860 and 1900, tea plantation was started in south India. The tea plantation generated externalities in the form of urbanization and the creation of markets of rural produce, transportation, schools, hospitals, a local trade network that supplied material to the plantations, and so on. It also generated profits that flowed back to and enriched almost all the major towns in eastern India, such as Calcutta, Gauhati, Darjeeling and Dhubri.[48] Among other factors the growth of Jalpaiguri in north Bengal emerged as a very important town in the nineteenth century due to the growth of tea plantation.[49] The movement towards sub-regional cropping specialization; the opening and extension of market for low and medium value commodities; the distant outlet now provided for glut year produce; and the reduction in grain store levels, all contribute to a tremendous expansion in the volume of higher level and long distance commerce during the period after 1860. The expansion of trade gave some boost to urbanization and raised the importance of market towns as two-way distributive and supply channels between rural hinterlands, distant market and producer.[50]

In hill areas a new type of urban centers had developed during the colonial periods. It was all due to the British policy to develop those centers as sanitarians when the European invalids would recover from the heat and disease of the tropics. To respite from summer heat and to isolate themselves from the native Indians was the primary objective of the establishment of such station. This trend was followed in all over India. The creation of hill station or sanitarians was the significant contribution made by the colonial masters to the Indian urbanization. This is the direct legacy of the Europeans. It is a permanent feature today, though it has been thoroughly Indianized during the post-independence period.[51] Regarding the number of hill stations constructed by the British and their functional classification different views are being held. Nora Mitchell has identified nearly about eighty hill stations that existed at the time of the British rule. Kennedy had, of course a modest estimate, he did not think there could be more than sixty five.[52] The first hill stations were established as early as 1815, and by 1870 there were over 80 hill stations in four different areas in India, serving the four metropolitan cities of Calcutta, Delhi, Bombay and Madras. These areas were: (a) Simla-Mussoorie-Nainital near Delhi,(b)Darjeeling-Shilong near Calcutta, (c) Mahabaleshwar in the Western Ghats

near Bombay, and (d) the Nilgiri-Kodaikanal area in Tami Nadu.[53] Regarding the classification of Hill stations done by Nora Mitchell consisted of- (i) Official multifunctional hill stations, like, Simla, Darjeeling, Nainital, (ii) Private multifunctional hill stations, like, Kodaikanal, Metheran, (iii) Single purpose hill stations, though had put them in a class apart, her identification was not free from doubts. However, Kalingpong can be held to be one such station as a transit trade hill station; (iv) Minor hill station like, Dharmkot for Presbyterian missionaries, Yercand for coffee planters, and Lonavala for Mumbai Railway employers, and (v) Satellite hill station like, Kurseong.[54]

IV

With the extension of British power over India by the first quarter of the nineteenth century brought about certain basic changes in the physical form of some towns. This meant the addition of 'western' extension to the already existing towns in the form of civil lines and cantonments and also the founding of new towns planned with geometrical regularity. When the British established their administrative centers in the Indian subcontinent they found the condition of the towns 'unhealthy, noisy and distasteful'. This prompted them to start independent colonies outside the towns. The officials and the professional people as well as the well-to-do businessman lived in the civil lines while the army built the cantonments.[55] The Civil Line settlement and cantonment stood in sharp contrast to the native towns and it was marked by its segrativeness.[56] The increasing segregation of the colonists from the indigenous inhabitants of the city went hand in hand with growing permanence among colonial settlers in India.[57] The area between the old town and the new settlements was divided by maintaining a green belt of gardens between the two.[58] The 'Civil Line' contained the administrative offices and courts as well as residential areas for the officers. The 'Civil Line' settlement and cantonment are characterized by law-density, horizontal, single-storey developments and broad, tree-lined roads which gave access to a system of large compounds, each containing a roughly centrally sited bungalow.[59] These bungalow set in their compounds essentially functioned as oases of cultural space.[60] The 'Civil Line' area stood apart from the native city, which was overcrowded and lacked basic amenities. On the contrary, the 'Civil Lines' had well-laid streets, widely spread building, introducing English architectural style into Indian cities and enough green and open

space breathing an air of ease. They had basic civic amenities, schools, churches and hospitals. Recreation areas in the form of gymkhanas, clubs, game courts and racecourses[61] were also added. The civil station covered a large area yet had a low density of population and much less density of built-up area than the old city. The residential areas in civil lines and cantonments were independent of business or administrative pockets. In the British settlements the residence and office zones were clearly demarcated.[62] The contrast between native towns and colonial towns could be understood from the following statement of a colonial resident:

"The Indian or native city is situated often at a considerable distances from the European civil lines and military cantonments, in one or other of which the European live. The Indian city is usually walled. The houses are closely packed together, the streets being very narrow, some of them not wide enough for a wheeled vehicle. Even the main streets, in which the chief business is transacted, will hardly allow of one cart passing another. The houses are high and most picturesque,. Though very dirty. The bazaar is a feast of colour. The sanitation is such that diseases when introduced spread with incredible rapidity. It is not without reason that the European residential quarter is built at considerable distance from the fascinating but dangerous native city."[63]

The social significance of this new element cannot be ignored. The 'Civil Lines' appearing as an appendage of the main city kept the European separate from the main life-style of the country.[64] This detachment had a deep impact on the urban life in general.[64]

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The most dramatic consequences of the establishment of British power over India so far as it affected urban society were its class composition. The colonial cities like Calcutta and Bombay, which came into existence as a result of the establishment of British dominion over India, represented a novel departure in the development of urban society in the subcontinent. The social structure of the colonial cities reflected the political and economic role played in British emporium over India. The dominant social class in these cities was made up of the senior officers of the Company (after 1858, the British Government of India), who administered the vast territory of India. These officers constituted the uppermost stratum of the British society in India.

Perched below the officers were the commercial classes sharing with the native landed aristocracy. The merchant and financiers of these cities were the next significant class. Perched immediately below the aristocracy of land and commerce was a social stratum which comprises a secular and religious intelligentsia. This stratum was made up of individuals drawn from very different social backgrounds. At the lower end of the social stratum were the petty shopkeepers and the artisans and craftsman, who constitute a considerable proportion of the urban population.[65]

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[63] This is quoted in King D. Anthony, "The Colonial Banglow-compound Complex in India: A Study in the Cultural use of Space", in *Urban Studies*, ed. Sujata Patel, Kushal Deb (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), 45-46

[64] K Ojha, *op.cit.* 12-13.

[65] Ibid. 217-218.