

PREFACE

Rise of a city in early times was a rare event. Since then urbanization has become a continuous process, affecting the society as a whole. As such, urbanization and its various facets have drawn the attention of thinkers and observers of life. Systematic studies of the phenomenon, however, have started only recently.

The studies of urbanization have been undertaken in the different parts of the globe by researchers belonging to varied disciplines — the historians, geographers, demographers, sociologists, anthropologists, economists, political scientists, urban planners, and so on. As such, the process of urbanization, like the proverbial elephant, has been viewed differently by the researchers from different perspectives. To the urban sociologists and anthropologists 'urbanism' appears to be an important concern in the study of the process of urbanization. It connotes a way of life, distinct from that of the villages. It effects the social relations and social interactions, bringing about a dynamism in the urban society. This in its turn, creates relationships of dominance and dependence between centres of human settlement. But the dynamism, under changing socio-political and technological conditions, moulds and unmoulds the dominance-dependence relationships, and, as a result, the cities rise and fall — primatization and deprimatization take place. It is in this context that this research is of relevance.

My interest in the subject developed quite gradually as a concomitant to my various assignments in the fields of urban planning and teaching of urban sociology. This study, therefore, is an outcome of prolonged pondering. Finally, when the specific area of query was settled upon, I started collecting data from both primary and secondary sources. Thus, the nature of data vary quite a bit in the cases of individual towns studied.

Other than consulting the documented sources, my first probe in the field was at Jalpaiguri town. The help received from the Deputy Commissioner, Shri G. Balagopal and the Chairman of the Municipality, Shri Asit Kumar Sen, must be thankfully acknowledged in this context. The field-work at Jalpaiguri helped me to visualize and organize the research design. Later on I have received help from many others at other urban centres of North Bengal, all of whom cannot possibly be named individually, but I do remember them with nostalgia and gratitude.

There are others, to whom I owe great debt, and which must be acknowledged in this context. Professor Bela Datta Gupta advised and encouraged me in this research from 1984 to date and whose influence on my work can never be overstated. I am forever indebted to her, not only for the patient guidance, but also for her quiet manner of teaching, some of which, I hope, I have been able to imbibe.

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I also take this opportunity to extend my thanks to Shri Manoj Chakraborty, who has typed the thesis in a rush.

Finally, I shall go amiss, if I do not mention my children, who suffered my negligence smilingly and constantly urged me to finish my work. Special thanks are due to them.