

CHAPTER II

THE PRESENT STUDY

After delimiting the major theoretical concerns in the field of urban studies, attention may now be directed to the present study. Most of the Third World urbanization studies, in the past, had been focussed on the metropolitan centres. It is only recently that attention has been given to the study of small and intermediate cities¹. In earlier studies, urban primacy had been very much reflected in the neglect of other urban centres and intra-urban strategies. The correction of this imbalance could be had if only a whole series of measures is adopted in a well-coordinated manner, creating a network of linkages between different urban centres, private

1 H.D. Kramler and P.J. Swan (eds.), Equity with Growth? Planning Perspectives for Small Towns in Developing Countries, Bangkok, 1984; G.P. Mathur (ed.), Small Cities and National Development, Nagoya (Japan), 1982; Pranabranjan Ray, "Urbanisation in Colonial Situation: Serampore — A Study in method" in Trends of Socio-economic Change in India 1871-1961, ed. Chaudhuri, M.R., Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Simla, 1969, pp. 250-274; Chittapriya Mukhopadhyay, "Growth Pattern of a Rural Town (1851-1961). A Case Study" in Ibid., pp. 222-235; H.G. Hanumappa, Urbanisation Trends in India, Ashish Publishing House, New Delhi, 1981; etc.

and other, and the rural hinterland. It is, precisely, with this object in view that the present study has been planned and tried to be executed.

This is an exploratory study in a region, where urbanization is gaining momentum in recent decades only. The study has been undertaken with the expectations that it might be possible to understand the dynamic aspects of some of the parameters of urbanization in this set up.

The study is confined to the spatial area conventionally known as 'North Bengal'. This is the northern part of the state of West Bengal in eastern India. The study explores social, economic and demographic aspects of urbanization. This has been done by looking into the past and the present situation with the help of documented evidences and interviewing some key-informants. For certain aspects, such as participation in urban associations or face to face interaction of townsmen, the researcher relied upon first-hand observations alone. As such, retrospection forms an essential component of the research.

Although, the time-span of the study is stated to be the post-Independence period, yet, in order to reconstruct the floor of the study — the state of affairs in 1947 — the researcher has often gone back much beyond that time while tracing the history of urban development in the area. For the purpose of this study urbanization in North Bengal has been presented into three temporal categories — pre-British, British

and post-Independence periods. In the pre-British period urbanization, so to speak, was not really heralded in the region, although there are instances of primordial urban centres, of which Malda is the only existing town of today. The British laid the foundation of urbanization by creating new urban centres and bringing in drastic changes in the economy of the region. The changes were brought about by establishing administrative headquarters, sanatorium towns, factories for collecting and processing raw materials such as cotton and silk, and introducing plantation economy and improved roads and bridges.

In this set up, in the post-British or post-Independence period, several new towns emerged and some of the older towns showed considerable growth. Large scale population movements and changed importance of communicational routes can be seen as the two major factors of such a growth. These are not the only factors of urban growth, but, change in political, economic and social relations have together contributed towards urbanization in North Bengal. In this study, in order to look into the dynamism of the process of urbanization, some aspects of these factors have been examined.

Objectives of the Study

The objective of this research, therefore, is to study the trend of urbanization in North Bengal with special reference

to the dynamic manifestations of some of the parameters of the process. The problems and prospects of the urban North Bengal have also been considered in this context.

As the objective is stated above in rather general terms, the break-down of it is spelt out in more specific terms as follows:-

1. In order to study the trend of urbanization in North Bengal the tasks were —
 - a) to compare and contrast the ratio of urban population to total population in the five districts of North Bengal in the context of West Bengal,
 - b) to study the growth of the individual towns of North Bengal and classify those by size and function,
 - c) to look into the nature and extent of migration, as far as possible.

2. To understand the dynamic aspects of urbanization the tasks were —
 - a) to see the degree of relationship between migration and social change — by studying the places of origin of the urban migrants; significant increase in the number of migrants from any particular place of origin; new urban forms, such as associations, cooperatives, libraries, creating new situations of interaction,

- b) to identify the urban occupations providing opportunities of social and economic mobility to the urbanites,
 - c) to study some aspects of social disorganization, such as, change in family and kinship relations, vices and crimes.
3. To consider the prospect of the urban North Bengal the following tasks were felt necessary —
- a) to study the extent of urbanization — whether by development of rural centres into new towns or due to development of urban outgrowths and urban agglomeration in the vicinity of important urban centres,
 - b) to collect information on the status of urban amenities,
 - c) to take a look into the planners' view points regarding the future of the important towns of the region — what is proposed, what is being done and suggestions, if any.

Methodology

For data collection of this diachronic study the researcher has depended largely upon the secondary sources. For demographic aspects census data is the mainstay of this study.

Old documents, such as the district gazetteers and travelogues have provided some other information. There are also a few current works on North Bengal, both published and unpublished, which have proved to be very useful. These have been supplemented, wherever possible, by first-hand information obtained from the older inhabitants of some of the towns.

Census data has also thrown some light on the economic and occupational situation. These have been studied, moreover, by selecting six towns² of varying sizes and collecting information from different sources there. These sources comprised of both the official and non-official persons and documents. Of these towns, Siliguri and Balurghat, the two Class I urban centres, have been studied with special care. These two cities, being the largests in the region and having registered very rapid population growth, were expected to throw some light on

2 The six towns selected are —

- i) Siliguri, a Class I urban place with 1,54,378 population (1981), which is dominating the economic and communicational scene in North Bengal. It is also more cosmopolitan than the other towns of North Bengal.
- ii) Balurghat, the other Class I urban centre with a population of 1,04,646 (1981), is less heterogenous than Siliguri and relatively more isolated.
- iii) Jalpaiguri, a Class II town with 61,743 population (1981), which is loosing its economic and communicational importance. But it has a Bengali middle-class cultural heritage.

the underlying factors of urban growth. In these two places the researcher has tried to understand the urban dynamism by looking into some aspects of urban occupations, associations and social disorganization. This has been achieved to some extent through interviews and observations. Interviewing ^{of} key-persons in commerce and industries, and small traders as well, has been undertaken. Similarly interview with some unskilled workers and trade union leader was also done to search the changing pattern of urban occupations. Some official statistics were obtained from the Bureau of Applied Economics and Statistics, District Industries Centre, North Bengal Chamber of Commerce, Municipal Offices, etc. History of formation of the urban associations, their activities and nature of participation have been collected through interviewing the members, and on a few occasions, it has been possible to observe the functioning of the associations. Some literature handed out by the associations and little magazines were also found useful.

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- iv) Rajani, a Class II town with a population of 60,343 (1981), which is well connected by roads and rail, and is growing rapidly.
 - v) Gangarampur, a Class III town with 22,767 population (1981), which is well connected by roads.
 - vi) Mainaguri, a Class IV town with 19,568 population (1981), which too is well connected by roads.

To study social disorganization is rather difficult. Looking for disruption in familial relations has been done in an indirect manner through interviews. The information about vices and crimes have been obtained from two parallel sources — the police and the local people. In some cases, such as incidences of crime or housing problems like slums, official statistics have been made available to us.

That 'urbanism' is not dependent only upon the size of the urban centre is made amply clear by the differences in the nature of social interactions and economic relations observed in the two cities — Siliguri and Dalurghat. This could be discerned only through first-hand observations made during the field trips there.

The formulation and the data collection part of the research started in the first half of 1983. The field trips were taken, off and on, during the years 1983 to 1987. Even during 1988, short field-visits became necessary to fill in some data gaps.

Relevance of the Study

This is a descriptive study covering the whole of North Bengal in a broad sweep. It is an initial survey of the urban situation in North Bengal with some amount of historical

perspective, to be followed up at a later date by more in-depth studies of the towns of North Bengal. At present it is confined to collating information from existing documents and official sources with some amount of emphasis on primary data collected from the selected towns.

Urban and industrial development in North Bengal is not an altogether neglected area of study. Some tentative steps have been taken by several researchers of different disciplines to analyse the state of affairs in this region. However, the interests differ and the focus varies.

Thus, some geographers, economists and urban planners have already studied some aspects of urbanization in the region. The studies undertaken by the geographers is concerned about the settlement pattern, hierarchy of the settlements and the land-use pattern. The economists have looked into some changing economic activities and effects thereof. The planners, who are part of the governmental planning machinery, have been concerned about identifying the existing problems — mainly physical, and future needs and providing some blue-prints for short-term and long-term developments in some of the bigger towns and surrounding areas in the region. A list of these studies are given in the Appendix 'C'.

The focus of the present study is more sociological than demographic or economic or physical. The physical, demographic and economic aspects of urbanization provide the

base, on which the researcher has tried to build up the changing social relations and other manifestations of urban dynamism. By fulfilling the objectives, this study may have filled up some of the gaps in the comprehensive knowledge of urbanization in North Bengal on the one hand and added to the body of on-going urban researches in India on the other, and while so doing some insight in the process of urbanization may have emerged to enable us to formulate some hypotheses. This is the relevance of this study, although this endeavour has been taken up with quite a humble expectation.

Limitations

Probably no study can fulfil all the requirements that are expected of it. This study, too, has many limitations. The canvass of the study is rather vast for a single researcher, and as such, there remain many lacunae.

Lack of man-power and resources were the two main hurdles faced to make the study a comprehensive one. It has not been possible to study urban dynamism extensively. It is confined to a comparison of the two towns of Siliguri and Balurghat mainly.

The researcher has largely depended upon secondary data, but comparable secondary data about the towns is not available. Census data even is not always comparable from one

census year to another. For example, non-availability of rural/urban migration data in 1951 and any migration data in 1981 has put serious constraints ^{on the researcher} in analysing migration in relation to urbanization. Also, due to dependence on birth-place data, ~~fine~~ in the analysis is lost.

Finally, the study is theoretically constrained. Other than asserting (a) the inapplicability of some theories — e.g. melting-pot theory or the 'culture of poverty' theory and (b) applicability of some hypotheses such as Bogue's hypotheses about migration, it has been possible only to suggest a model for adaptation of the urban migrants and a comprehensive yet analytical definition of urbanization. It should also be confessed that the stress has been given to study the changes in cultural ideology and social relations more than to the study of economic aspects³.

3 This confession is relevant to the remark of Manuel Castells, "whoever wishes to study a city (or series of cities) must also study capital, production, distribution, politics, ideology, etc." (The Urban Question, London, 1977). He considers "collective consumption" and "organization of the collective means of reproduction of labour power" as central to the urban problematic.

Structure of the Study

After outlining the objectives and the major theoretical concerns and limitations of the research it may be useful to mention the contents of each of the chapters and how these have been organized in this dissertation.

The study has been organized into eight chapters.

Chapter I, Introduction, starts with a study of urbanization in historical perspectives and enters into a theoretical discussion with emphasis on urbanization in the developing countries. Different approaches to the study of urbanization and the urban studies in India have also been mentioned in this chapter.

Chapter II, The Present Study, acquaints the reader with the study.

Chapter III, North Bengal : The Area of Investigation, describes the setting and the history of urban development in North Bengal. The urbanization in the region has been presented under three temporal categories — pre-British, British and post-Independence periods.

✓ Chapter IV, North Bengal : Development of Urbanization Since 1947, examines the urbanization in North Bengal in the context of West Bengal and India. The focus gradually narrows down upon the five districts and then on the individual towns

of North Bengal. Classification of these towns by size and functions have also been taken up in this chapter.

Chapter V, Migration and Urbanization, deals with the causal aspects of migration and nature of migration from various places of origin to North Bengal. The migrants have been categorized into two groups — internal and international migrants. The aim of this chapter is to relate the types of population movement with urbanization of North Bengal. In the light of this discussion, some emerging focal points of urbanization have been identified.

Chapter VI, Dynamism of Urbanization, presents some aspects of the social processes and social interactions in the towns of North Bengal. The discussion is confined to the focal points of urbanization in North Bengal. The thrust of the chapter is on the changing aspects of urban occupations, associations and social disorganization in order to understand the abstract happening that the dynamism of urbanization is.

Chapter VII, An Analysis of Urban Growth : Siliguri and Balurghat — Case Studies, describes the growth of the two cities from small villages. Both the cities have grown rapidly due to immigration. Attempts have been made to analyse the factors of growth and the nature of adaptation of the migrants. Social and economic life in the towns have been examined and

some interesting differences in the pattern of adaptation in the two towns have been found. This analysis, moreover, points towards a surer-urban future for Siliguri.

Chapter VIII, Summing Up, attempts to summarize the major findings of the research and to offer some conclusions regarding the trend of urbanisation in North Bengal. Of the various aspects treated, special notes have been taken of urban dynamism and how this is not kept confined to the urban centres only.

Appendices provide further information about the area of study and some other details.