

**DECONSTRUCTING THE PROCESS OF URBANISATION IN
WEST BENGAL: THE POST INDEPEDENCE PERIOD**

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INTRODUCTION

About 10 years ago, this author had defined Kolkata as an 'Ecologically subsidised city'. For, the city has a river to draw water from (the Hooghly) and another down east, to dispose the wastewater (the Kulti), copious groundwater and adjacent wetlands that treat the city's wastewater and recover the nutrients to give back with a continuous supply of fresh fish and vegetables. Today, the river Hooghly carries untreated water much more than before, the groundwater table has gone down and the wetlands are happy playfield for the realtors. Nevertheless the author's interest to know more about Kolkata remained dormant and persisted in collecting bits and pieces that have been brought together here. For compulsions of brevity, the paper has not dwelt on the pre-Independence period. The subsequent decades up to the nineties have been reasonably elaborated on as they have laid the foundations of the urbanisation process. The nineties, as well as the current decade, present an assortment of pulls and pushes in the urbanisation process, out of which the paper has had to be somewhat selective. The observations here are not that of a historian or a social scientist, but that of a planner and may have some limitations to that end. If however, some of the linkages and connectivities observed are of some interest to the indulging reader, the author will be happy.

The author's engagement with space is limited to a discourse of urbanisation as an indicator of socio-economic and political strategies. Rather than looking at the contemporary situations and its complex linking together of ideas and concepts, the observations here aim to deconstruct both ideas and ideals that have historically contributed to this particular kind of urbanisation. Now deconstruction as an analytical tool to assess and evaluate urbanisation may pose certain challenges precisely because it departs from the study of people's lives and moves us back into the history of ideas (Gullickson, 1989). The very terminology brings in a retinue of specialised vocabulary contained within strict boundaries of textual studies which may seem totally alien to the readers. Thus to be coherent and comprehensible any specialised vocabulary of deconstruction had been avoided. Instead,

deconstruction has been used simply -- as postulated by Jacques Derrida in his *Of Grammatology* -- a method of reading (and reading into) the arrangements, the plots and plans of urbanisation.

THE 50s DECADE

For the architects of a newly independent country, the most serious challenge was to choose a development model. The options were clearly two. Either it had to be all American or capitalist model or it had to be a Soviet or Socialist model. This could not have been an easy task. It will not be out of place to discuss the global political scenario which was prevailing at that historical point of time and must have been extensively debated for long eight years before the Avadi session of the Indian National Congress which adopted a socialistic pattern for India. Discussing global political scenarios, however, has remained crucial for all times to come and most of the development efforts had been linked with the external economic forces of interest. Urbanisation, as a part of the development process, remained a development variable of the pressures and pulls which the country had to undergo and is still undergoing on account of external political and financial interest.

Before the emergence of the Soviet Union, the World had only one political and development model. With the birth of USSR and its allies a second option began to emerge. In fact, under this broad sub-division various sub-types were developing. The capitalism was not of similar nature in America, Japan or Sweden. Similarly, the Socialist Block had various types of developmental models. A completely new set of conflicts were looming larger and larger. Such conflicts were either between the two super powers or between the countries belonging to separate power blocks or most interestingly, within the same power block. It became increasingly difficult to find an order in global political events. Or, for that matter, it was easier to locate the state of complete disorder all around.

A number of things were getting increasingly prominent. The Third World resources were being increasingly depleted by the rich countries. Previously, the global trade was mostly in the items like spices, textiles, perfumes and porcelain. After World War II these trades were largely in non-renewable goods like minerals and oils, flowing from the poorer to richer

countries. The pauperisation of the poorer countries had unavoidable precipitate on the global political canvas in the subsequent decades.

Another important event of the 50s decade was the end of Indo-China War, which erupted again in the 60s. For West Bengal, Vietnam was a major emotional issue. Corridors of learning used to find students chanting slogans '*Amar nam, tomar nam, Vietnam, Vietnam*', announcing total identity with Vietnam in their anti-imperialist movement. Interestingly, this emotional attachment gradually waned towards the end of that decade. This may have been because of the significant difference in the Socialist Block on the matters of post independent Vietnam and also substantial change in the political climate of the state itself.

On July 21, 1954, in Geneva an agreement was reached, bringing peace in this volatile space. The basic provision of the agreement was to divide Vietnam along the 17th Parallel, with the northern portion to be controlled by the Communists whereas the southern portion was to be controlled by Emperor Bao Dai with French support. A Republican senator in the US, commenting on this agreement, said the Geneva agreement will be looked as the victory of the Communists in the Far East.

On 1st March 1953, the US exploded their second hydrogen bomb at Bikini Atoll and this was claimed as 600 times more powerful than the bomb that destroyed Hiroshima (12 million tons of TNT equivalent).

In the same year, in the month of July, the three years of bloody fighting in Korea was over. The agreement was signed at Panmunjon. However, the Korean War did not have much effect on India, in a way it had on China. On the other hand, in 1955, Israeli forces broke the armistice by conducting a lightning raid on the Egypt-held Gaza strip. Arab-Israeli conflicts could not be solved thereafter and it continues to impact the global peace process even today. Indian politicians in the past played their cards carefully, without seriously taking side of any of the confronting parties.

Within this overall scenario of chaos and disorder, the Indian political leaders chose to distance themselves from either of the power blocks and declared the policy of 'non-

alignment'. However, as a matter of economic principles it chose a socialistic pattern of development strategy.

During 50s, India had two five year plans. Both these plans, understandably, were more concerned about the problem of agricultural and industrial development. Urbanisation did not particularly attract the minds of initial experts. Not that there was any dearth of intelligent mind at the disposal of the Planning Commission, which was busy in translating the Mahalanobis concept. But urbanisation as a challenge did not strike the experts during the initial years. Not surprisingly, there was no mention of a need for an urban policy in the First Plan period. What however earned attention was the housing problem. There was comprehensive recognition of the problem of acute shortage of dwelling units. A large number of houses were constructed – a share of which went to rehabilitate the refugees.

It is about the end of the First Plan when a new Ministry of Works and Housing was conceived and thereafter established. The same ministry was subsequently renamed as the Ministry of Urban Affairs. A number of premier institutions were also established during this period. Apart from the School of Planning and Architecture in New Delhi and a town and regional planning department in the Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur, the Town and Country Planning Organisation was set up in 1957 for preparing the Delhi Master Plan.

In course of the Second Plan period the need for planned development of cities were increasingly felt. More importantly the concept of an integrated approach to rural and urban planning was also gaining currency. In spite of such conceptual framework nothing tangible could emerge as a national urbanisation policy. It was also in this time that the Delhi Development Authority was established to implement the Delhi Master Plan. This was a milestone in introducing city planning and plan implementation in India. After several years similar development authorities were set up for all major cities in India.

Having said this much about the context of urbanisation in West Bengal during 50s it is imperative to discuss the state of agriculture during that period because agricultural surplus is considered to be one of the prime movers of urbanisation.

Irrigation remained a low priority in the British days. More than 90% of the agricultural land of West Bengal was rain-fed and depended on gravity flow irrigation. Not much arrangement of lift irrigation would be recorded during that period either. Not surprisingly, large tracts of agricultural land remained single cropped (subsistence paddy cultivation).

The quality of information about irrigational facility itself was not entirely reliable. The gross irrigated area of West Bengal amounted to about 1.9 million hectare. Out of these 0.74 million hectares was covered by private canals and tanks (real command area of such tanks and canals are not clearly known). Not also known is the impact of climatic variations (flood and drought) on the agriculture. Not more than 3% of the total gross area under cultivation could be said to be under perennial water supply system (using lift irrigation) to support pre-kharif and post-kharif crops. The source of irrigation was almost entirely used up for the kharif crop and opportunities for multiple cropping were precious little (Munsi 1975).

A very sorry state of things was prevailing in the field of agriculture in West Bengal at the beginning of the 50s. If agriculture was the retarding force for industrial and urban growth it could be similarly argued that the nature of industries inherited from the immediate past was no great force for the villages to come up (Munsi 1975).

THE DECADE OF 60s

The global and national political events left the most lasting imprint on the development process of West Bengal in general and urbanisation in particular. West Bengal saw one of the most volatile and violent mass protests and identified itself with the global political movements. It was a decade of tremendous students upsurge all over the world and West Bengal was one of the cradles of such movements.

This decade saw the formal breakdown of the Communist Block into two and that must be marked as the beginning of the decline and fall of Communist movement within the next few decades.

In 1960, during the 22nd Soviet Party Congress, Khrushchev and Chou En Lai clashed openly and after that Russia withdrew all technical and military support from China. The cause of this schism was partly ideological and partly relating to frontier demarcation. China also stimulated a different vision of Socialist development. This was based as more egalitarian ideals and they started implementing the idea of 'organisation without bureaucracy', 'serve the people' etc. Russians regarded these as utopia. The Chinese themselves, after Mao's death, launched 'modernisation drives' of the Soviet nature and have allowed things to take an entirely different turn.

This decade saw a dramatic escape from a nuclear showdown. In 1962, Americans and Soviets were just at the brink of a showdown in Cuba when better sense prevailed and both the sides withdrew their nuclear arsenal and agreed for a peace course. At the other end of the globe, Americans intensified their attack on North Vietnam and another protected war started with considerable political implications all over the world. Interestingly, Nikita Khrushchev was deposed by Leonid Breznev, while the former was enjoying a holiday in his villa by the Black Sea.

In Paris in 1968, the most violent student movement was witnessed. The students were carrying out anti-American rallies which snowballed into a pitched battle involving 30,000 students and were also joined by the workers and intellectuals, bringing the country to a halt.

In England during the same time students were taking over one institution after another. In China, hundreds of thousands of students were leading the 'Cultural Revolution'. Schools were being shut and teachers and intellectuals were heckled. They were the 'Red Guards' and were also the vanguards of what was termed as 'Great Protelarian Cultural Revolution'.

The wave of this world wide discontent among the students definitely reached the shores of West Bengal and this state also saw one of the most violent student movements of its history which had a definite effect on the developmental process and urban growth of the state.

The decade of the 60s saw the death of Nehru. This was followed by a brief stint by Lal Bahadur Shastri, who died in Tashkent. The year 1966 marked the beginning of Indira Gandhi's stewardship. This also signalled the beginning of a new generation of political leadership who did not participate in the freedom movement of the country. But the decade of the 60s was much more important for two wars, one with China in 1962 and the other with Pakistan in 1965. This was the time when qualitative changes were brought into India's defence preparedness and a considerable portion of the national exchequer began to get absorbed in this head of expense.

From 1966 onwards, West Bengal saw the bloodiest student and youth movement since independence. This was because of the prevailing economic situation in the country – acute food shortage, lack of political freedom – aided by the burning situations in many parts of the world where students were at the forefront. All such other things taken together, the whole state, specially the urban centres, spearheaded by Calcutta, was turned into a battlefield. This movement did not last very many days beyond the 60s. Political goals of the Left extremists were largely utopian and would not be realised. However it brought tremors in the hearts of the powers-that-be at the cost of the lives of a few thousand brilliant and idealistic band of students. Such events of non-conformism leave lasting impact on history. What however is of particular interest to us is the way such acts of violence and corresponding concern in the seats of power attracted the most prolific financial support towards the development of Calcutta. After all, the students rebellion sprouted mostly from the cities and this phenomenon had to be taken care of. These we may discuss further in the portion for the next decade.

The 60s decade definitely found some serious thinking on the part of national planning experts. In 1961 cities with population of 100,000 and more rose from 75 in 1951 to 115 in 1961 and supported 43% of the total urban population. This trend of big cities attracting more city dwellers continues even today and has not shown any signs of change.

The broad objective during Third Plan period was to secure a balanced development between large, medium sized and small industries, and between rural and urban areas. Main ingredients of this development policy were the following:

- i) As far as possible new industries should be established away from the large and congested cities.
- ii) In the planning of large industries, the concept of region should be adopted. In each case, planning should extend beyond the immediate environment to a larger area for whose development the new industry would serve as a major focal point.
- iii) In community development projects or other areas within a district the rural and urban components of development should be knit into a composite plan, based in each case on schemes for strengthening economic inter-dependence between town and the surrounding rural areas.
- iv) Within each rural area, the effort should be to secure a diversified occupational pattern in place of the present extreme dependence on agriculture. If the above objectives are read carefully it will then be possible to identify in them the beginning of ecological thinking in urban planning.

It was also the Third Plan document that marked the concern for the high costs of urban development as one of the major causes of deteriorating living conditions. Speculation was seen as a major factor in raising land prices. The Plan recommended that without exception and in all towns, according to the nature of the situation, the need for adequate measures for taxation of urban land and property. It is now well known, however, especially for the metropolitan cities, that neither the forces of speculation nor the rise in land prices have been brought under any semblance of regulatory control.

The Third Plan introduced the concept of preparing master plans for securing orderly development of the cities. In fact, the document went further by identifying the task of preparing interim general plans as the first step towards the preparation of master plans. Necessarily, metropolitan cities were considered to be priority places for having such master plans. As a result, during the Third Plan period urban development plans were undertaken for 72 city regions. Within 1969 such reports for 40 cities were completed.

Towards the end of Fourth Plan Housing and Urban Development Corporation (HUDCO) was formed to provide the funds for metropolitan authorities, state housing boards and other urban institutions for financing house building in urban areas.

Another area of urbanisation which was accorded importance in the Fourth Plan was the task of improving the administrative structure in cities and towns. The state government was told to create planning and development authorities for big cities. Necessity of making available more funds to the municipal authorities was also impressed upon the state governments. These provisions were told to be supplemented by raising resources at the local level by the state government and the local authorities. Ideas like new or enhanced taxes, borrowing programmes by the local authorities, making up unearned increment on the land value, tax on vacant lands, payment for services provided by the local authorities and such other tools were promoted. These were particularly applicable to metropolitan cities.

This discussion will remain incomplete if mention is not made about a remarkable study made by Prof. Nirmal Kumar Bose, a renowned anthropologist. In 1964, Dr Bose carried out a ward by ward study of Calcutta to understand the nature of a mix that describes the city. It was a mix of various groups belonging to different religious faith, place of origin, caste, language and occupational specialisation. It was interesting to know how Calcutta could be the city absorbing such a conflict situation without ever at all becoming a melting pot because of such a curious amalgam. Dr Bose observed that such different social identities, which ought to have dissolved if employment opportunities had been constantly on the increase, became reaffirmed. This was basically not the fault of the Indian social system, but the fault of native capitalisation which tried to thrive under the shadow of a colonial economy. It drove men into retaining even in the city some of the features of their small scale rural culture. Dr Bose defined the city as a premature metropolis. Interestingly, even today Calcutta can not be prided for having a demanding citizenry.

Finally, and most importantly, the 60s decade produced the first comprehensive planning document for metropolitan Calcutta. In 1960, the development and planning department of the Government of West Bengal, through Calcutta Metropolitan Planning Organisation (CMPO) published the Basic Development Plan (BDP) for the Calcutta Metropolitan district.

The BDP identified two strategic centres for urban renewal activities. These were the Metropolitan Centre and the Kalyani Bansberia Centre. The three essential tasks marked

out were (a) the arrest of deterioration (b) a better use of existing industrial capacity and (c) provision for extensive new growth. To accomplish these tasks four kinds of programmes were recommended – a programme for economic growth, strengthening of the governmental and administrative system, major improvement in the physical environment, and the provision of key community services and facilities. BDP also recommended the formation of West Bengal Industrial Development Corporation (WBIDC). Also important in this period was the establishment of Calcutta Metropolitan Water and Sanitation Authority (CMWSA). A combination of all these marked the beginning of an organized and planned initiative for the development of urban facilities in West Bengal.

DECADE OF THE 70s

The decade of the 70s saw the one of the fiercest battles since World War II in the Sinai desert when Egypt and Syria invaded Israel. This was popularly known as Yom Kippur war (Yom Kippur is the holiest day in the Jewish calendar). On 17th October, 1973 Arab oil states decided to increase the oil prices by 70 per cent and marked the beginning of the unilateral authority to hike petrol prices by the oil owning countries of West Asia. Oil price rise had effects all over the world, the more so on the developing countries, of which India could not be an exception. That also marked the beginning of a search for non-conventional energy. Since then, significant changes have been introduced in the energy utilization pattern in cities.

With the fall of Saigon in April 1975, the war in Vietnam was over. This was the end of America's 15-year involvement in a war that was denounced by many countries all over the world and most importantly by a large number of American citizens. It is interesting that today that World Bank provides assistance to Vietnam in her renewal and redevelopment efforts.

Also crucial was the India Bangladesh war (erstwhile East Pakistan) in 1971. India forced complete surrender of the Pakistan army. Bangladesh became an independent country and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman took over as its first Prime Minister on 12th January 1972. It will be difficult to come up with an accurate figure of the refugee population which came to

West Bengal since then but this phenomenon itself has by some degree, unsettled a planned development of a number cities, suburbs and most importantly, Calcutta.

There was an agreement on water sharing between India and Bangladesh in _____, which took into account a handsome water award for the latter. The Bangladesh government thinks that the distribution or release of water from the Farakka Barrage has to take account of their interest.. However the problem remains unsolved. This dispute along with the tendency of the river taking a northern turn and completely avoiding the Farakka by taking a new course straight to Mahananda and then to Padma, will be the most serious challenge to sustain the Calcutta Port.

The year 1972 staged the Stockholm Conference on global environmental concern. This also marks the beginning of a new consideration in designing human survival. It took a few decades before every major city in the world were perforce to incorporate environmental concern in planning and development.

In May 1974, India joined the nuclear club by testing her first nuclear device in Rajasthan desert. India became the sixth nation to have an atom bomb. The Prime Minister said that the explosion was for peaceful purposes. However, it has been argued if this was the least cost approach to attaining such goals and whether the opportunity cost of such a huge amount of public money being spent could ever be calculated. West Bengal has said no to a proposed nuclear reactor in the Sunderbans – one of the richest reserves of mangrove biodiversity in the world. Interestingly, Mrs. Indira Gandhi lost the elections in 1977 and for the first time since independence a non-Congress government took over the reigns.

The 1970s was reasonably eventful in the Planning Commission. As the first time, 'Urbanisation' was allowed separate chapters in both the Fifth and Sixth plan documents. It is true that the document recognised the problems of urban poor but 'as in the past, the laudable objectives stated in the plans were not matched with action programmes' (Ramachandran 2001). Five basic objectives laid down in the Fifth Plan were (a) to augment civic service in urban centers (b) to tackle the problems of metropolitan cities on a regional basis (c) to promote the development of small towns and new urban centers (d) to assist inter-state projects on metropolitan projects and (e) to support industrial townships

under government undertakings. It may be interesting to note that there has hardly been any effect on the burgeoning of the big cities because of the Integrated Development of Small and Medium Towns (IDSMT) initiatives.

This was the time whereafter the emptiness of the country's plans and planning processes became increasingly clear. The excellent planning goals and devastating real life achievements co-existed in a country where tolerance is the most preferred option to negotiate deprivation, deceit and depravity. A strange mindset of not-so-demanding, not-so-responsible, call it a 'laid back syndrome', continued to add sluggishness in the behavior of the masses.

The 70s have been eventful with respect to the process of urbanisation in West Bengal. It saw Calcutta Metropolitan Planning Organisation (CMPO) which was set up with considerable fanfare, falling from grace. The most talked about document in city planning, the Basic Development Plan (BDP) had to be revised for its lack of implementability. It has been a fact that quite a number of international experts contributed in creating BDP. It may not be out of place to refer to what was known as the origin of CMPO or BC Roy, the famous chief minister of West Bengal, who was well known as a visionary, in 1961, went to President Kennedy and said "I want some help; Calcutta is going to the Communists". (This news appeared in the New York Times). In a hurried move, the Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority (CMDA) was formed, essentially to begin a number of projects to spend money. Subsequently, CMDA created its own planning wing and in 1976 wrote the Development Perspective Plan. CMDA produced Land Use and Development Control Plans (LUDCP) for most part of Calcutta Metropolitan Area (CMA) and these are considered as basic planning guidelines for urban and regional development.

As of has been stated earlier, for the first time since independence, Calcutta could attract huge amount of development funds. Two major engines were steamed up. The CMDA and the Metro Rail. Roads were being repaired, drainage lines were laid, slums were improved, most of the city roads were excavated for reason or other. Hundreds of new construction contractors and their suppliers were born in this decade. They were earning money.

The CMDA's best work has been the Bustee Improvement Programme. It was the first project where the Bustee people themselves participated in the entire process of changes. The health programme in the Bustee was also remarkably successful. It is unfortunate that the continuity of this good work could not be maintained and even the good lessons were not properly recorded.

On the whole 70s decade presented one of the most complex intellectual challenges to understand the dynamics of urbanisation. The beginning of the decade saw some intense and almost uncontrolled urban violence. Para-military forces were combing one lane after another in search of the fugitives. There had been wanton killing. The life of the common man was affected. Sometimes gainfully, sometime adversely (doctor's fees was drastically reduced by a small political note).

Thereafter started the taming of the urban violence. Violence, to start with, had to be met with violence. That part was cleverly done. The crucial need thereafter was taming the youth rather than systematic urban improvement. The former held sway in deciding the nature of spending in construction projects. But then, everything had to look formal and proper, therefore the urban authorities and institutions. We have in addition a large number of young men, driving their two-wheelers, a gold chain around their neck, strong and confident, emerging as the icon of the present generation youth who do not reach any of the university campuses for studying. *Status quo was preserved. Planned urbanisation could wait.* No wonder Hiten Bhaya, a member of the Planning Commission, commented that the spending of the first seven or eight years by the urban development authority were largely cosmetic (Bhaya 1990).

THE DECADE OF 80s:

At the global level, the decade of the 80s will at least be important for two major issues. Firstly, the fall of Communist block and secondly, the emergence of environmental concern in mainstream thinking.

Although it was early 1991 when the Communist regime in Russia fell, indication towards that were only too prominent during the second half of the 80s. The year 1989 saw the

killing of Ceausescu and the fall of Communist power in Romania. Ceausescu was responsible for brutal torture and genocide in his country. Communist regimes in Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria were just at the point of total collapse. The 28 km Berlin Wall was opened and the two German countries were reunited. Nothing went well for the Communist regimes any where in the world.

China saw one of the worst massacres of students and of youth in modern history. While Gorbachev was shaking hands with Deng Xiaoping – ending 30 years of conflict – a few hundred yards away, half a million students were demanding more democracy. On the 9th of June 1989, the Chinese army in cold blood killed several hundred and wounded several thousand students. This is the historic barbarism happening at Tiananmen Square. China continues to be a ‘Communist country’ but it has opened up the gates wide to allow fluent entry of the consumer culture of the West along with their business interest.

West Bengal is one state where the Marxist led government has been entrenched in power since 1977. With the virtual collapse of any international model (Moscow or Beijing) the ideological debate on international guidelines, so prominent in the previous decade lost its significance. It was left to the local think-tanks to evolve and innovate strategy and tactics to retain the political power in the state.

The second important event of international significance in the decade of 80s was the gradual emergence of environmental concern all over the world.

In 1984, Britain’s lakes and rivers were being contaminated by acid rain. Scotland and Lake districts were most seriously threatened. Acid rain is caused by the oxides of nitrogen and sulphur, which are the result of fuel burning, getting dissolved in rain water while in the sky. In the same year, in Bhopal, the Union Carbide’s chemical factory leaked and killed at least 2000 people immediately, in one of the worst industrial disasters of modern times. This will be discussed in more detail. In 1986, a Russian nuclear reactor at Chernobyl caught fire and turned out to be one of worst nuclear station disasters.

Starting from 1981, scientists started talking about greenhouse effect and global warming. Scientists at the University of East Anglia found that 1981 and 1983 were the hottest years.

Greenhouse effect is mostly caused by the burning of fossil fuel which releases carbon dioxide. Carbon dioxide if not sequestered by the plant kingdom acts like the glass of a greenhouse. Today, global warming is the most widely discussed issue in global environmental matters.

In addition to the above major international issue of our concern in the context of urbanisation, a number of events occurring in the same decade deserve a mention. In 1984, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was shot dead and her son Rajiv Gandhi took over the reigns.

The Sixth Plan brought into focus the role of the small towns for their facilitating role in triggering rural development. Integrated development for small and medium towns was conceptualized and initiated for 200 towns. Water supply and sewerage projects were also proposed for a small number of cities. Nevertheless, the condition of water supply and sewerage of the smaller towns all over the country remains far from satisfactory.

The Seventh Plan continued the thrust on developing the small and medium size cities. It had, in addition, emphasised the need for stronger municipal administration and municipal tax laws, which was admirably done in West Bengal. The National Urban Infrastructure Development Finance Corporation was created to provide capital for the development of small and medium towns. It can be seen that five year plans were losing their context to what was happening in the country or for that matter in West Bengal, with respect to the urbanisation process.

More important effect was visible because of the Bhopal Disaster. This single event resulted a number of crucial environmental rules being proclaimed to ensure industrial safety.

- 1) Hazardous waste (Management and Handling) Rules, 1989
- 2) Manufacture, Storage and Import of Hazardous Chemical Rules, 1989
- 3) Manufacture, Use, Import, Export and Storage of Hazardous Microorganisms and Genetically Engineered Organisms or Cell Rules, 1989

In West Bengal the effect of these rules, specially the first two rules has been positive. All major industries have been brought under the preview of these rules. Off-site emergency

plan preparation has been obligatory. An interesting conflict has also emerged. It is a requirement of these rules that hazard prone industries be relocated to safer places. However, a number of urban patches along the river Hooghly are essentially dependent on such industries. Relocation of such industries will cause collapse of the livelihood support for most of these areas.

It has been mentioned that the decade of the 60s marked the beginning of comprehensive urban planning effort for the development of the city when the Calcutta Metropolitan Planning Organisation (CMPO) was established. It may be appropriate to set the major events since then in a chronological order:

1960 : Establishment of CMPO

1966 : Publication of the Basic Development Plan (BDP)

1968 : Establishment of the CMWSA

1970 : Establishment of the CMDA

1970 : Beginning of the Calcutta Urban Developing Project (CUDP-I)

1974 : Taking over of the CMWSA by the CMDA

1979 : Town and Country (Planning and Development) Act was passed.

1980 : The Calcutta Municipal Corporation Act and the
Howrah Municipal Corporation Act was passed.

1980 : The Bengal Municipal Act of 1932 was amended

1981: The Thika Tenancy (Acquisition and Regulation) Act was promulgated. (For bringing the tenorial status of the city slum areas under control)

In 1981, the central Air and Water Acts were also in place. It can be seen from the above chronological arrangement of events that the beginning of 80s brought a very significant change in regulatory mechanism in urbanisation and urban development management in West Bengal. Considering 1981 as the benchmark it will be useful to mark the history of urban development in West Bengal in the subsequent decades. (It will take time before perceptible changes can take place).

The 80s decade also marks the beginning of one of the most outstanding studies in urban wetlands. The East Calcutta Wetlands came into prominence as the world's largest ensemble of wastewater fish ponds, serving as the city's sewage treatment plant and also

providing the city with a copious amount of fish supply. This research, which started at the behest of West Bengal Science and Technology Committee in the State Planning Board of the government of West Bengal and subsequently supported by the Fisheries department, has left a lasting print in the history of Calcutta's urban growth and development of technology option of wastewater treatment and disposal.

THE DECADE OF 90s:

The 90s was different and crucial in the first place for identifying the concern for environment (the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit of 1992) and secondly, the beginning of trade liberalisation (GATT and WTO). Both of these were new phenomena in modern history which are already having and will have in future most serious impact on the developmental models in general and urban development in particular. In fact the new highway for developmental leap forward which will honour the thresholds has a new name, it is termed as 'sustainable development'.

Development initiatives are designed for two basic objectives. First one is for the welfare of the masses. The common people should have access to the basic minimum condition of living so that they can survive and work to serve.

Ideally, in the capitalist economic order, there should not be any pauperisation of the masses or the poorer countries, because the phenomenon is self defeating for making profit. However, as greed is one human faculty on which controls are difficult to attain, the process of pauperisation creeps into the mainstream. In such historical times, a crisis in capitalism occurs essentially because of the lack of purchasing power of the people and a large number of death and disability rendering the basic workforce less effective. At such instances, messiahs like J K Galbriath step in and talk about welfare society. More recently, Raghuram Rajan and Luigi Zingales in the same way talk about saving capitalism from the capitalists.

The second, and the most crucial objective of development is to procreate profit. Without the component of profit from development investments there is no capital formation. Without capital accumulation at an increasing pace the present economic order tends to

collapse. Development as an agent for procreation of profit has never stopped servicing the capitalist economic order and for that matter it was 'sustainable' from the day one. We also know about 'development' expenses made for taming violence and social turbulence which erupt due to acute stresses and disorders in the distribution of wealth.

The new coinage of 'sustainable development' (which gained currency at the Earth Summit) in essence, means a new strategy which respects the thresholds of nature. Population is going up, so also the waste that modern civilisation is producing, whereas, resources have become scarce and random disposal of waste has brought the gates of inferno closer to mankind. We are also saying that we are overdrawing from nature, which leaves our children and their children empty handed. This amounts to borrowing from our future without their consent.

Another September 11, this time in 2003. Right in front of the hotel complex in Cancun, where the Fifth Ministerial of WTO was in progress, Lee Kyung Hae, a South Korean farmer leader, committed suicide after 'seeing' how the WTO was killing peasants round the world. The message of such an act is not necessarily forgettable. This is not the place to elaborate upon the impacts of liberalisation. Only, one observation needs to be made. In the 1990s, there has been a rise in the percentage of the workers engaged in the unorganised sector. This is a signal of further marginalisation of the working class.

Ethics have been the foremost casualty in international trade. Hunger and pauperisation is never a point to ponder in trade negotiations. Intense homework in place of humanitarian arguments should be the basic strength of negotiators from the poorer countries. Failing this the country as a whole, urban development included will see a kind of polarisation of wealth which may not augur well for the future history of India and similar other countries.

The recent efforts to understand the urban environmental problems better have brought the significance of urban poverty to the forefront, as an agreed necessity. Discussion on urban environmental management in the poorer parts of the world without a reference to the poverty of the people is incomplete and futile. It is also in this part of the world that urban growth will be the most in future and therefore, cities in these areas will become the prime

attention as urban 'hot spots' where there is a need for comprehensive reduction of environmental threats.

In the near future, two important changes are going to significantly affect the future ecological balance of the city. Firstly, an analysis of the growth of the urban population in West Bengal indicates that a large part of them will settle in the Calcutta Metropolitan Area for which the city region will have to be kept in readiness. Secondly, a number of major development decisions are now being taken for which the industrial mosaic of the region will be significantly altered. As a result, new urbanisation will take place and land use changes in the city's fringes will be unavoidable.

With the introduction of environmental concern, the most significant change has been brought into the process of understanding in place of traditional sectoral or narrow vision approach. Holistic approach, also known as ecological approach, lays emphasis on the inter-relationship of various events and activities and views them from the whole to part. Incorporating ecological observation and environmental concern in urban and regional development will ensure longer sustainability and reduce the risk in the prevailing modes of living.

Urban managers and planners are reorienting themselves somewhat to incorporate environmental concern within their ambit, with urban environment gaining attention at the highest decision-making places. The changing priorities have already opened the gate for liberal funding in the field of urban environmental improvement. Research is also gaining momentum. Understandably, the major emphasis is laid in improving the 'hot spots' – the mega cities in India. In many ways the present environmental qualities of these mega cities are frightening.

Leaving aside the efforts like awareness building and institutional support, four basic actions for the purpose of improving urban peoples environment will be (a) population control and hazard avoidance (b) waste disposal and recycling (c) conservation of nature and the wise use of natural resources, and (d) focused attention towards the population at risk.

In June 1992, government of India released the national conservation strategy and policy statement on environment and development. The document recognises the emergence of the big cities and consequent problems of poverty and expansion of slums. The substantial urban growth in the last four decades has been cited as the reason for urban congestion and squatter settlement, with millions of people having no access to the basic needs of civic amenities. The green covers are being destroyed, beautiful gardens converted into concrete jungles. Although there is no direct mention of any guidelines for urban development, the document addresses a number of issues from where a workable set of guidelines for urban development can be generated.

For West Bengal, in the 90s decade, we saw the incorporation of a set of serious environmental concern in urban development planning. It has also seen disproportionately overpaid consultants (in many cases ill informed about the problem they come to solve) and one set of strategies and agenda after another. The citizens who finally pay for all these intellectual artefacts are never told about what they are paying for.

Founded on the ordered assimilation of available information as a part of their in-house initiatives, Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authorities produced the present status report on the urban people's environment. This was considered as the basis for developing the strategy for urban environmental improvement and restoration and also safeguarding the city from future ecological imbalance (Sustaining Calcutta, 1994). Subsequently DFID funded the production of Calcutta Metropolitan Environmental Strategy and Action Plan. This was written in the customised format meant for such reports for any other big city and necessarily missed the hidden ethos of this complex city with unusually rich cultural moorings.

CONCLUSION

The new millennium is just a decade old and the task of discussing the context of urbanisation in the ensuing period will require looking back to anticipate the way forward. At least it will require to touch upon the highlights and form a perceptual construct for the thinkers of urbanisation.

India started with what is known as 'Nehruvian' model of socialistic pattern of development. After about forty years of it was understood that these ideals of self-sufficiency have failed to work. In 1980, after her return to power, Mrs Gandhi took a large loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and abandoned her father's 'holy' strategy. This has been a crucial change in the way of doing things in the highest places.

Lord Meghnad Desai, a well known economist has said that the infantilisation of Indian industry is a very deep process. The situation was further aggravated by the permit-license economy and the country was almost nearing bankruptcy during the beginning of 90s. A completely new mindset of 'rent-seeking' pervades the country almost at every level of regulatory check-point. Although the era of permit-license economy has been left behind, the 'rent-seeking' tendency is leading to the growth of a parallel economy which invariably eats up the vitals of governance.

The reason of marking one single event of Indian economy out of its 50 years history is simple. The country is now open to almost unlimited flow of foreign fund, culture and temptations for the decision makers. It brings a fundamental shift in the setting of the priorities of development in general and urbanisation in particular. The year 2000, therefore has not just been a change of millennium, it has signalled the beginning of changing over to the capitalist mode of production and accepting the global pressures and pulls in the field of trade, commerce and technology transfer almost uncontested.

What is likely to happen in West Bengal, how much resources will be available for urbanisation at the disposal of the government, how much external assistance will be advisable, can the promoters be stopped from filing up on one pond after another and keep the real estate development as the most happening event of the state? All these are necessary questions upon which the futuristic imaginations will have find their plank.

Let us take a look at the resources available at the disposal of the state government. As the easiest way to reliably probe this matter we can take up the annual publication of the government before the budget session in the Assembly.

One can observe that for about a decade the expenses to be met for debt repayment and staff salary cannot be met by the state's own earning. This will itself require borrowing an amount nearing Rs 10,000 crores. Again almost the entire amount of borrowing during each financial year is being spent in repaying the earlier debt. We are therefore forced to go for fresh borrowing to repay the earlier debt. The most interesting situation is that the entire expenses depend upon the availability of debt (Dr Ajit Narayan Bose, erstwhile Member, State Planning Board of the Government of West Bengal had examined the situation brilliantly).

Beyond the ambit of the above state expenses, a fair number of externally aided projects have reached the shores of urban development agencies. International consultants, making ritual reference to community participation, are preparing the blue prints of urban growth and sustenance. It is difficult to be optimistic about the future impact of debt driven growth on our cities and the relevance of the priorities set by the external investors (fly-overs for example). There is a serious possibility of losing our indigenous knowledge in urban management (constructing conventional sewage treatment plants in place of the wastewater fish ponds in the East Calcutta Wetlands which well known over the world for its outstanding ecological significance for the city of Calcutta). The challenge of sustainable urbanisation in West Bengal will be as much political as it will be technical. And, inspite of the political will and constitutional provisions, without the emergence of a demanding citizenry, it will be impossible to come out of the difficult corner in which this challenge is now situated.

I tend to conclude with hope in mind in the following lines:

CITIES OF JOY

*From those arrogant young men,
Let us learn again,
The language of the Bengalees, or the filth it carries.
No they are not the radarless Naxalites,
But the ones who run those auto rickshaws,
And run amok.
Let us visit every water body,
Lest we not see it again.*

*Let us cross the road quickly,
Lest we die before crossing it again.
Let us drive our children mad,
How else will they survive the rat race.
Let us see only our own interest,
Let the collective die.
But the Sun will perhaps rise in-spite,
Such is the habit of history.*

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