In recent times, the third world countries are known to be experiencing the major thrust of urban growth. It is seen that the urbanisation process experienced by these developing nations, often with very low levels of economic development, is distinct from the process experienced earlier by the countries of the developed world. Thus contemporary third world urbanisation has become a major issue of research among urban geographers and much work has been done to investigate urbanisation in India, one of the foremost members of the developing world. Again, West Bengal as one of the earliest among the Indian states to undergo rapid urbanisation during the present century has frequently received attention from workers in this field.

Studies of urbanisation in West Bengal have shown a consistently lopsided and unbalanced pattern since the beginning of the twentieth century. It is this peculiarly distinctive characteristic of urban West Bengal that has particularly drawn the attention of this researcher. It has been felt that an investigation into this and other aspects of the urban scene of West Bengal could provide useful information regarding existing patterns and future trends of urbanisation in the state and also open up avenues of further research.

Numerous studies have been conducted to analyse urban patterns of West Bengal, but many of them, while making valuable contributions to the field of urban research, are descriptive in nature and make little use of quantitative techniques of analysis. Recent works making use of such techniques tend to focus attention either to one particular aspect of urbanisation or to one particular area of the state. Thus, there are fewer attempts to analyse different aspects of urbanisation in West Bengal as a whole and its temporal variations upto the present day. The present work tries to fill this gap and provide an up-to-date account of the spatio-temporal variations of the different facets of urbanisation in West Bengal during the twentieth century. A quantitative approach has been used wherever possible since it was felt that such an approach would lead to rational and bias-free conclusions.
The work primarily consists of statistical analysis and mapping of census data for various decennial counts since the beginning of the twentieth century. It makes use of a wide variety of research methods including techniques of correlation and regression analysis, principal component analysis and concept of entropy function to name a few. Empirical studies of urban systems like identification of urban hierarchy by the rank-size rule and spacing of urban settlements by nearest neighbour analysis have also been included.

Generally, the work has been conducted at district as well as urban centre level. However, case studies have been included in the analysis wherever it appeared that a micro level study was called for. Certain aspects of analysis, especially functional zoning of urban areas required extensive field observations and such studies could not be conducted for all urban centres of the state within the given time. Therefore, analysis of this aspect of the urban landscape of West Bengal was made on the basis of case studies and detailed field observations were conducted to supplement the relevant data obtained from respective authorities.

Finally, it may be noted that in fulfilling the objectives laid out in the first chapter, the researcher has consulted several books, reports, papers and other published materials. The libraries, institutions and organisations from which such materials have been collected may be listed below:

1. Library of the Department of Geography, University of Calcutta.
2. Library of the Department of Statistics, University of Calcutta.
7. Library of the Department of Geography, Presidency College, Calcutta.
10. Chandannagar Corporation, Chandannagar.