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Urban Governance in the Context of Urbanisation

A study on urban politics and governance has to take into account the actual urbanisation process and the nature of the urban settlements that exist as objective realities. Urbanisation is generally considered as a matter of physical residence and hence, it is defined as the progressive concentration of people in urban areas. The study of urbanisation thus usually concerns the level and tempo of change in the distribution of population between urban and non-urban areas, the size structure of urban population distribution and the processes that give rise to a typical pattern of urbanisation.1 However, the process of urbanisation also has its socio-anthropological dimensions whereby it is described as a 'way of life'. Accordingly, urban places are distinguished by the life styles of their inhabitants. Affected by the qualities of population size, density and heterogeneity, which typify urban settlements, an urban life-style is characterised by relative anonymity and a lack of face to face interactions than among the ruralites. Residing in cities, in and of itself, tends to alter people’s minds and social lives. The differences that exist between ways of life in the city and the countryside also result from different types of people coming to live in each place, and from different economic circumstances in the communities.2 Cities embody the diversity and energy of human pursuits. They are in many ways remarkable engines of economic and social progress. Cities offer employment opportunities, entertainment and other

amenities and potential efficiencies not found elsewhere, as well as advantages in the delivery of education, health and other social services. On average, urban dwellers have higher incomes and live healthier, easier lives than their rural counterparts, although these advantages are often not shared by all urban inhabitants. But cities are also characterised by over population, lack of civic amenities, crimes, violence and drug abuse, health hazards and poverty. Cities play a central role in degrading the physical environment and in shaping the social environments in which most of the world’s people will soon live. Improving the urban environment thus becomes the immediate priority. Beyond this immediate priority lies the need to strengthen local governments and to implement new approaches to alleviating poverty and supporting communities. Virtually all of the policies needed to improve the living conditions in cities require more effective urban governance.

Defining the ‘Urban’

It should be noted at the outset that there is a lack of uniform definition of ‘urban in different countries of the world. By the year 2010, well over 3.7 billion people will be classified as urban dwellers — more people than inhabited the world just four decades earlier. While some of these urban dwellers will be living in such megacities as Shanghai and Sao Paulo, the majority will live in a kaleidoscope of settlements: from large industrial cities to small mercantile towns and villages. While the term ‘urban area’ is typically used as a synonym for ‘city’, the two are not the same. All cities are urban areas, but not all urban areas are cities. ‘Urban’ is a statistical concept defined by a country’s government. A city, on the other hand, is more than just large numbers of people living in close proximity to one another, it is a complex political, economic and social entity. Cities are centres of economic production, religion, learning and culture.

Because each country sets its own definition of ‘urban, there is a

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bewildering array of definitions, around the world. Governments of small or relatively rural countries may simply declare one or more settlements urban, regardless of size or function. Many countries use minimum population size as one of the important criteria to define a place as urban though this size differs substantially across countries – from 200 in Sweden to 30,000 in Japan. Other governments base their definition on a combination of criteria, such as population density, political function or predominant activity of the region. The definitional differences can skew international comparisons. If the Indian government adopted, for example, Peru’s definition of urban (the threshold number being a few hundreds), India would suddenly become one of Asia’s more urbanised nations. This, in turn, would change the regional urbanisation levels for South Asia. However, in practice, as per the Census of India (1961) yardstick, in India, a place to be designated as ‘urban’ must inter alia possess the following characteristics:

a) a density of not less than 1000 persons per square mile.

b) a total population of at least 5000.

c) more than 75% of the working male population should be engaged in non-agricultural occupations, and

d) the area should have some pronounced urban characteristics.

In addition to the above, the Census of India recognises all those settlements as urban which have statutory status like municipality/municipal corporation / notified area authority / cantonment board etc. The definition of an ‘urban’ area has remained more or less the same from the 1961 Census to the present (1991 Census). There are, then, two distinct types of urban units in India, such as, a) places which have come into existence by virtue of statutory notifications and b) places which are defined as urban because they satisfy the above criteria mentioned in the Census of India and are referred to as census towns or non-municipal towns. With a continuous increase in the number of urban

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5 Gugler (ed.), The Urban Transformation, p.5.
dwellers, India, at the end of this century, is expected to have an urban population of about 330 to 340 million. This urban growth is in tune with the overall trends in the world urbanisation process in recent times, particularly in the Third World.

The Urban Transformation

The world is in the midst of a massive urban transition unlike that of any other time in history. As the year 2000 approaches, urbanisation has become a powerful force throughout most of the world. In fact, the urban transformation of the globe may come to be seen as the lasting legacy of the 20th century. Within the next decade, more than half of the world's population, an estimated 3.3 billion, will be living in urban areas. As recently as 1975, just over one third of the world's people lived in urban areas. By 2025, the proportion will have risen to almost two-thirds. Now the last phase of this profound urban transformation is unfolding in the less developed/developing countries of Asia, Oceania, Africa and Latin America and Caribbean - commonly known as the 'Third World'. At present, nearly two-thirds of the world's urban population - more than 1.5 billion people - live in the Third World cities. As per the United Nations estimates, within little more than a generation their number will triple. Since 1950, world urbanisation has been extremely rapid. The number of urban areas containing at least 100,000 inhabitants grew from 946 in 1950 to 1,773 in 1975. By the year 2000, the number of such places will probably double again, and about 400 of them will have at least one million inhabitants. By 1995, more than 70 per cent of the population in both Europe and North America was living in urban areas. Urban growth in the developed world continues, although at a much slower rate on average than in previous decades. Much of the population shift now under way involves movement away from concentrated urban centres to vast, sprawling metropolitan regions or to small and intermediate-size cities. Between 1990 and 2025, the number of people who live in urban areas is expected to double to more

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6 ibid.
than 5 billion people. Almost all of this growth – a staggering 90 per cent – will occur in the countries of the developing world.\textsuperscript{9}

\textbf{The Third World Perspective}

It is true that the developing countries are urbanising rapidly, but its various regions differ markedly in the level of urbanisation they have attained at this time. There has been a tendency to generalise about urbanisation in the Third World. But the countries thus commonly lumped together are spread over three continents and are home to more than three-quarters of humanity. Therefore, it is quite natural that there are important differences in the urban transformation across the South. At one extreme nearly three-quarters of the population of Latin America and the Caribbean live in urban areas. At the other, two-thirds or more of the population remain rural in China, India, Indonesia and Africa south of the Sahara. The Arab states fall in between.\textsuperscript{10} The differences in level of urbanisation among the regions correspond roughly to the differences in per capita income. The variations in the rate of urban growth among the different Third World countries have become quite striking over the last three decades. China, India and Latin America and the Caribbean had less than 4 per cent annual growth in their urban populations: Indonesia and the Arab states 4.7 and 4.5 per cent respectively and Africa south of the Sahara 5 per cent. Natural population increase has been a major element in urban growth, but rural-urban migration makes an even larger contribution in many of the developing countries. Urban concentration is generally measured in terms of the proportion of a country’s population living in its largest city. China and India show a pattern typical of very large countries where several large urban centres dominate different regions. The Arab states, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean present a sharp contrast. In each region, a quarter or more of the average country’s population lives in its largest city.

In some respects, the patterns of urban growth in developing countries today are not much different from what occurred a century ago in Europe and North America. Many of the forces driving urbanisation today are the same —

\textsuperscript{9} United Nations, \textit{World Urbanisation}, p.27.
\textsuperscript{10} Gugler (ed.), \textit{The Urban Transformation}, p.5.
chief among them being the shift of jobs from agriculture to industry and services and the concentration of economic opportunities in urban areas. And although cities of the developing world are growing at least twice as fast as in the developed world, these rates are not unprecedented. A number of European and U.S. cities sustained very rapid growth in the early 20th century, as fast as that now under way in the developing countries. What is unprecedented now, however, is the absolute scale of the change in terms of the number of countries undergoing rapid urbanization, the number of cities worldwide that are growing rapidly and the sheer number of people involved. Roughly 150,000 people are added to the urban population of developing countries everyday. Because of the huge population base in developing countries, even a relatively slow rate of urban growth can mean an enormous increase in absolute numbers. Given the huge size of the world's population, even at these somewhat reduced rates of growth, the urban population will continue to increase dramatically. Although rates of growth vary dramatically from region to region and city to city, growth is generally most pronounced in two contexts: in the poorest regions and in those regions that are undergoing rapid economic growth. In the developing countries, urban growth rates are among the highest in the world, at nearly 5 per cent per year. An accelerating pace of urbanisation, specially in the countries of the Third World, resulting in a mismatch in the space economy at various levels and in several forms, has been a matter of growing concern to planners, decision-makers and the development analysts. Rapid population growth, unbalanced urbanisation and the deteriorating human environment form the trilogy of problems which the Third World is facing today. These together seem to negate all national planning and development efforts aiming at improving the quality of human life. Local governments in these countries are often strapped for cash and do not have the

resources to provide even the most basic civic services for their residents. In 1994, for example, some 30 per cent of African urban residents were not served by municipal water services in any form. The rapid growth rates of many cities in the developing countries, combined with their huge population bases, are pushing cities to unprecedented sizes. In contrast to earlier in the century, most of the world's giant urban agglomerations are now and will continue to be in the developing world. It is true that the rapidly growing cities offer several advantages over rural villages, having both more numerous job opportunities and superior infrastructure and living conditions. Even so, infrastructure facilities, such as road networks and wastewater treatment, lag far behind what is needed. The result is congested city streets, mounting air and water pollution and other citywide problems. In addition, although many urban dwellers in these wealthier cities live in comfortable dwellings with piped water and weekly garbage pickups, vast numbers of poor people still live in illegal settlements with conditions nearly as dismal as those in the poorest cities.

Notwithstanding the differences among themselves regarding the trends and patterns of urbanisation, the countries of the Third World share some common characteristics in this context. They are poor compared to most of the rest of the world and they all have a colonial past. The process and pattern of urbanisation in the Third World countries have been characterised by certain typical features usually unknown throughout the history of urbanisation in the developed industrialised world. Though Latin America, Africa and more particularly Asia have witnessed long history of urban development, and some of their old towns and cities have presently developed into large urban centres and metropolises, nevertheless, the broad outline of their existing spatial system was laid out during the period of European colonisation with a particular design to serve the colonial powers. While urban centres sprang from industrial revolution in the West, they emerged out of the needs of colonial commerce in most parts of the Third World. The colonial system was exploitative rather than developmental in nature, facilitating the collection and exportation of primary products from and the
importation and distribution of manufactured goods within the region. European expansion created a dependency relationship of the periphery upon the centre in the Third World countries. The dominant social formations and productive systems in this region emerged in response to colonial and capitalist development and the urban forms were 'conditioned' by a similar process. Manuel Castells has invented the term 'dependent urbanisation' to describe this phenomenon. A 'core-periphery' relationship evolved where the core profoundly modified the internal structures and patterns of the periphery. This relationship that evolved at the national level during the colonial period, has become more entrenched in the process of development because of the urban bias in national investment policies. This phenomenon is well reflected in the degree of primacy of the largest city/metropolitan centre in the developing countries. Primate city distribution characterises the urban system in most of the countries of the Third World. The national space is dominated by a single megacity containing a disproportionately large segment of the urban population with increasing degree of primacy, which is getting more entrenched in the process of development in most of the countries of the Third World. Characteristically, one city, usually the seat of government, becomes very large relative to other urban places in that nation. The Third World today contains some of the largest and the fastest growing metropolitan cities in the world, which invariably function as the prime cities in their national economy.

Cities are growing because they provide, on average, greater economic and social benefits than do rural areas. Cities provide a natural locus for economic growth. Urban growth is inextricably linked with economic growth. Cities optimise the use of human and mechanical energy, allow for fast, cheap transportation and provide flexible, highly productive labour markets. The efficiency inherent in urban areas translates into major gains in productivity. In developing countries, urban areas produce as much as 60 per cent of total Gross

16 Singh, 'Process of Urbanisation', p.56.
National product (GNP) with just one-third of the population. In addition to economic activity, major demographic forces such as natural population increase and migration underline urban growth. In the developing world today, the natural increase of the urban population is as important as migration. The high rate of natural increase in these cities, however, does tend to follow migration, because most migrants are of reproductive age. Figures on rural to urban migration are notoriously difficult to pin down, but it is believed to account for between 40 and 60 per cent of annual urban population growth in the developing world. And migration is expected to be a major factor in the coming years in regions with large rural population, especially those where rural poverty is rampant, as in Africa and parts of Asia. Whether in developing or industrial countries, urban growth appears to be irreversible. Should the current trend continue, the French sociologist Henri Lefebare anticipates that in the 21st century, the surface of the earth might be covered by concrete deserts, interrupted by islands of agricultural production. As for the present, the Third World countries, as noted earlier, are urbanising rapidly and India is no exception in this process. India is often described as a land of villages; nevertheless, in reality, it is equally a land of cities and towns. The metropolis and the town today play a major role in the emergence of an industrial and urban India.

The Indian Urban Scene

The imperatives of imperial rule in India necessitated the insular growth of colonial cities like Calcutta and Bombay. These cities did not grow naturally out of a healthy symbiotic relationship between the city and countryside. On the contrary, these were artificial entrepots located as seaports to siphon off the wealth of India to serve the imperial purpose. While urban centres sprang from industrial revolution in the West, they emerged out of the needs of colonial commerce in modern India. The requirements of colonial rule thwarted economic development in India. The horizontal movement of people from rural to urban areas was not in response to vertical mobility within the work force. It was rather,

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to a large extent, the outmigration of ‘refugees’ from an indigent hinterland. Multitudes of the rural poor were pushed out from the agricultural sector and came to the large conurbation, which did not have the capacity to assimilate them. This struck at the very roots of the urban-rural continuum. ‘Primate Cities’ emerged, which became effective instruments for operationalising the centrifugality of the colonial economy. These were the foci of the exploitative mechanism. The primate cities were satellitic in character. Generally a sea-port like Bombay, Calcutta and so on, these satellitic primates grew very fast and in terms of population sizes dwarfed the indigenous nodes of the colony or of their hinterlands. There was a high degree of in-migration from the indigent hinterland of primary production to these cities. Their economic base was characterised by a weak secondary sector with a strong bias towards ancillary and processing industries and also by a marked development of the tertiary sector, having a high incidence of non-productive elements.

Post-independence urbanisation in India has tended to follow the pattern set during the colonial regime. The dominance of the primate cities and the relative neglect of the hinterland have continued. The partition of India in 1947 and the mass migration of the refugees had their impact on urban growth and the decade 1941-51 recorded the highest ever rate of urbanisation. According to the 1951 Census of India, 54 per cent of the total refugees who came to India settled in urban areas. This implies that though only 17 per cent of India’s total population were urban, a disproportionate number of refugees moved to the urban areas. Throughout most of the post-independence period, the rate of growth of urban population in India has accelerated continuously. The 1951-61 decade was the first decade of planned economic development in India and a period of rapid industrialisation. During this period there was a marked shift in the distribution of towns by size class. There was a significant increase in the number of towns with 10,000 population and over and a considerable decrease in the number of towns

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with less than 10,000 people. Similarly, the distribution of population by size class changed considerably during this decade with a shift in the direction of large towns. The urban population as a proportion of the total population increased from about 18 percent in 1961 to about 20 per cent in 1971. Though in terms of increase in percentage points the rate of urbanisation during this decade cannot be regarded as high, in terms of absolute numbers, the urban population increased from 78.9 million in 1961 to 109.1 million in 1971. The shift in the distribution of the urban population from smaller to larger towns and cities (a pattern of the previous decade) continued in this period. This decade (1961-71) experienced an increase in the number of class I cities (100,000 people and over) from 113 to 148, and the population residing in these cities went up from 38 million to 61 million. All other size categories experienced declines in their relative share of the total urban population. The urban population of India as recorded in the 1981 Census (excluding Assam and Jammu and Kashmir, where census was not conducted) was 156 million amounting to a decadal increase (1971 - 81) of 46 per cent. This was the highest ever decadal urban growth. According to 1991 Census (excluding Assam and Jammu and Kashmir) the urban population of India reached 217 million. The absolute increase in the urban population during the 1981-91 decade has been of the order of 58 million – a decadal growth of 36 per cent (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1 Trends of Urbanisation in India 1941 - 91.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census Year</th>
<th>Total Population (in million)</th>
<th>Urban Population (in million)</th>
<th>Per cent (Urban)</th>
<th>Decennial growth rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>318.7</td>
<td>44.2</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>361.1</td>
<td>62.4</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>41.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>439.2</td>
<td>78.9</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>26.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>548.2</td>
<td>109.1</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>38.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>683.3</td>
<td>159.5</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>46.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>844.3</td>
<td>217.2</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>36.19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

India shares most of the characteristic features of urbanisation in the developing countries. However, during most of the post-independence period, the rate of urbanisation in India has remained comparatively lower than in several other countries of the Third World. Even in 1991, the urban population of India was just over a quarter of the total population. But in absolute terms, the total urban population was very high (217 million). Thus, in spite of the low level of urbanisation in India, the Indian urban population is almost the same as the total population of the U.S.A.\(^{20}\)

The size of the country’s urban population has increased from around 26 million in 1901 to around 217 million in 1991. Excluding Jammu and Kashmir and Assam, there were 3,696 towns/urban agglomerations in India at the time of the 1991 Census. Of these 3,696 urban centres, there were 300 class I cities (population size 100,000 and above). These 300 cities together possessed nearly 65 per cent of the country’s total urban population. In the case of 23 of these cities, the population size was even above 1,000,000. The urbanisation process in India has largely been towards the primate and the million plus cities. In the last decade (1981-91) alone, 11 such cities have come into existence. The 23 metropolitan cities comprise around 31 per cent of the country’s total urban population. These metropolitan cities continue to grow in terms of population and today we have some of these cities rechristened as megacities. Any city which has a population of over four million as per 1991 Census, has been classified as a megacity and we have in India, at present, six such cities – Greater Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi, Madras, Hyderabad and Bangalore. Over the years there has been a continuous increase in the concentration of urban population in class I and million plus cities. On the contrary, the concentration of urban population in medium and small towns has either fluctuated or declined. The graduation of a number of urban centres from lower population size class categories to class I cities, as well as a higher rate of population growth in large cities, have given rise to a top heavy structure of urban population in India. It is true that in some of the million plus cities the growth rates of population have come down in recent times.

\(^{20}\) ibid. pp.111-112.
But we cannot draw solace from this fact as, it does not really indicate that urban problems are less pressing today. More often than not, the slowing down of the urban growth rate shows lack of economic dynamism, inability to attract enough investment and generate employment, strained urban infrastructure, sky-rocketing land prices, extreme shortage of water and energy and a general worsening of urban environment.  

Notwithstanding some of its common features in the all India context, the pattern of urbanisation in India reveals considerable inter-state variations on different aspects. This, however, is not unexpected in a country like India with a subcontinental disposition. As regards the distribution of urban-rural population, only eight states – Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal have a larger share of the urban than rural population (1991 Census). These states accounted for 61 per cent of the urban population and over 43 per cent of the towns and urban agglomerates in India in 1991. The degree of urbanisation varied from a low of 8.7 per cent in Himachal Pradesh to a high of 38.7 per cent in Maharashtra in 1991. According to 1991 Census, the states having an urban population above the all India average of 25.7 per cent were Andhra Pradesh (26.84), Goa (41.02), Gujarat (34.40), Karnataka (30.91), Kerala (26.44), Maharashtra (38.73), Manipur (27.69), Mizoram (46.20), Punjab (29.72), Tamil Nadu (34.20) and West Bengal (27.319). Southern India is relatively more urbanised than its northern counterpart. The former is coastal, characterised by a higher degree of commercial agriculture in cotton, oil seeds, sugarcane and plantation crops and is comparatively more industrialised. Urbanisation level of different states is significantly related to their per capita income, share of income generated in the secondary sector and the proportion of city population in total urban population. In 1991, a little less than a fifth of the

21 ibid., p.16.
country's population (16.4 per cent) was living in class I cities. It has increased from a level of 11.2 per cent in 1971 to 16.4 per cent in 1991. Here also, large inter-state variations can be observed. For example, in 1991, 30.1 per cent of Maharashtra's population was living in class I cities, while the corresponding percentage was as low as 2 per cent in Himachal Pradesh. In Orissa it is slightly up to 6 per cent, whereas in Gujarat, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal it is over 20 per cent.\(^\text{24}\)

In India as a whole, and within regions and states, urban development has been markedly lopsided. This has prevented our cities from becoming vibrant centres of growth and radiating the effects of growth through their hinterlands to the entire society. In fact, urban-industrial development should not be looked upon in isolation of the agricultural and/or total societal context. Urbanisation, whether in the sense of demographic concentration or techno-industrial occupation or a 'way of life', depends on the broader socio-economic context in which it takes place. Rather than looking at urbanisation as an independent variable, its interactive relations with the total societal context should be taken into account. It is a bit ironical that though India, after 1947, embarked on an ambitious programme of economic development, which was articulated through the five-year Plans, one does not come across a national urbanisation strategy. Thus, planning in India has been limited to economic planning at the national level and physical planning at the urban settlement level. The pattern of urbanisation has been characterised by a continued polarisation of population and activities in the metropolitan cities. However, the Indian State has attempted some policy interventions at different times. The thinking of the national government can be best gleaned from the plan documents.

The First Five-Year Plan (1951-56) simply expressed its concern over the rapid and haphazard urban growth. The problem of urbanisation was seen as proliferation of 'labour camps' as a consequence of rural to urban migration. In the year immediately after independence, the major urban policy issue was speedy rehabilitation of refugees through the creation of new refugee townships as well as

of refugee colonies in existing cities.\textsuperscript{25} The Second Plan (1956-61) suggested strict enforcement of municipal laws, emphasised slum clearance and sought land acquisition and development for housing programmes. In the Third Plan (1961-66), there was a wider perspective and the broad objective was of balanced development of large, medium and small towns as well as of rural and urban areas. Regional and urban development were accorded particular attention. The main ingredients of urban development included dispersal of industry away from large cities, slum relocation/improvement and rural development to check urbanward influx.\textsuperscript{26} The Fourth Plan (1969-74) stressed the need for a regional approach to issues of urban development, decongestion of cities, dispersal of urban population, adoption of the community development programme for cities as well and the environmental improvement of slums. The Fifth one (1974-79) continued with the ‘Environmental Improvement of Urban Slums’ programmes and also drew attention to the need for the promotion of smaller towns and of new urban centres to ease the pressure of increasing urbanisation. The Sixth Plan (1980-85) stated that the thrust of the urbanisation policy in the next decade would be to give greater importance to the provision of adequate infrastructure and other facilities in the small, medium and intermediate towns. It continued with the ‘Environmental Improvement of Urban slums’ and ‘Integrated Development of Small and Medium Towns’ programmes as conceived in the previous plan. The next plan period (1985-90) opted for a further thrust to programmes adopted in the Sixth Plan. At the same time, it introduced two new schemes of urban development – Urban Basic Services for the Poor and Nehru Rozgar Yojana. The strategies for the Eighth Plan (1992-97) included formulation of integrated regional spatio-economic schemes at state/regional/district levels to strengthen the urban-rural relation, and to stimulate private initiatives and investments in urban development.


\textsuperscript{26} Bose, ‘Urbanisation in India’, p.119.
It seems there was awareness regarding the need for balanced regional development; consequently, the need for dispersal of industries and decongestion of cities were reiterated in plan documents. However, most of the policies remained in the realm of wishful thinking with very little implementation. The National Commission on Urbanisation (NCU), which was constituted in 1985 and submitted its report in 1988, was hence of the view that a programme of explicit state intervention is necessary to direct and modify the course of urbanisation in India in future. The NCU report argued that one should take a positive view of urbanisation in India and the cities should be regarded as engines of economic growth and generators of income and wealth. In fact, the NCU coined the acronym – ‘GEM’ and ‘SPUR’ to denote ‘Generators of Economic Momentum’ and ‘Spatial Priority Urbanisation Regions’. The objective spelt out by NCU was to make GEMs of as many cities as possible and in their first preliminary exercise they identified 329 such GEMs spread over 49 SPURS. It was felt that if sufficient investment was made in them, the urban settlement pattern in India would be substantially changed and the imbalances in the present urban system greatly reduced. The NCU examined a number of projections of urban population and came to the conclusion that as things were, India was heading towards an urban population of 350 million which would constitute 35 per cent of the total projected population of over 1000 million in 2001. The report of the NCU also discussed statewide variation in growth rates of rural, urban and total population and concluded that, as in India we have a variety of demographic situations, there can be no worthwhile urbanisation strategy of a blanket nature. A number of strategies are called for in the light of the sharply differing demographic scenes in the country. All said and done, the basic issues relating to Indian urbanisation have not been adequately addressed to. Urbanisation in India continues to be an expanding phenomenon and increasing concentration of people in cities (mainly the larger ones) and towns goes on. This has led to growing demands for basic civic amenities and services. And this underscores the crucial role of urban management in improving the conditions of city life.
The Challenge of Urban Governance

As the cities grow, the management of them becomes difficult, especially on the infrastructure front. A city or a town can be best governed by a government of its own — which is "local" and nearby — not a distant one like the state or national government. An urban government institution with a truly representative character and adequate autonomy of jurisdictions and powers is essential to carry out the task of governing cities and towns. In modern democracies, such urban local self-government is constituted primarily to face the challenge of urban governance. And it is of more and more significance in the wake of growing urban population throughout the world and particularly in the developing countries including India. The size of urban population as also its rate of growth has serious implications for the municipal authorities that are required to provide basic civic services and urban infrastructure. These institutions have to cover multifarious local problems such as health, housing, education, water supply, drainage and sewerage, transport and so on. Every person coming to urban areas puts a direct demand for civic services and infrastructure, thereby putting additional pressure on an already overstretched supply situation. As the number of people living in the cities and towns grows, environmental concerns such as adequate housing and sanitation, clean air to breathe and access to potable water become increasingly important. As population growth will be virtually synonymous with urban growth in the coming decade, the focus of efforts to develop sustainable human settlements must be on cities. This then is the urban challenge. Policy makers should be more receptive to the need for new institutional responses to this challenge and to urban management initiative at the local level. As policy initiatives directly affect people and interests, policies become an eminently political affair. Conflicts must be resolved and consensus found among competing interests and parties. Urban governance and politics is to be viewed; then, in this larger context of urban management. And urban management essentially involves the urban local self-government institutions, which should be revitalised and made capable enough to deal effectively with this task.
City government emerges as the practical manifestation of the concept of 'democratic decentralisation', representing first and foremost, a spread of political power. The municipal authority in a city/town on the one end and the urban dwellers on the other constitute two of the most important actors in the arena of urban governance and politics. As the issue of urban governance in India becomes increasingly significant and challenging in the context of her rapid urban population growth, the present work attempts to probe into the process of urban management in a particular town of India as a case study. The town of Medinipur – our location of study – is the headquarters of Medinipur district in the state of West Bengal. The largest district in West Bengal – Medinipur – covers an area of 14,081 sq.km. with a total population of 8,349,890 persons (1991 Census). Before we take up a more detailed description of our locale – the Medinipur town in the district of Medinipur – let us have a brief review of the process and pattern of urbanisation in West Bengal.

**West Bengal: The Urban Scenario**

In conformity with the all-India pattern, the process of urbanisation in West Bengal has generally shown an upward trend. The percentage of urban population in the state increased to 27.5 of the total population in 1991 from 26.5 in 1981, which is above the national figure of 25.71 per cent. According to 1991 Census, the urban geography of West Bengal covers almost a population of 19 million (18,708,000 persons). The rate of density of the urban population in the state is 5,462 persons per sq.km., which ranks third in the national scale after Delhi (9,745) and Chandigarh (6,188). A striking feature of the process of urbanisation in West Bengal has been an upward trend in the proportional growth rate of population of the towns situated at the outskirts of greater Calcutta than that of its inland population. About 70 per cent of the urban municipal population of the state reside in Calcutta Metropolitan Area (CMA) alone, which accounts for only 38 per cent of the municipal geographical area. In contrast, urban population in the rest of the state is small and thinly spread over a large area. Once the districts partly or fully covered by the CMA (Calcutta, Howrah, Hugh, Nadia and 24-Parganas) and Burdwan are excluded, the proportion of urban population in the
rest of the state accounts for only 12.4 per cent. The dominance of metropolitan Calcutta over the economy of the state has led to a particular pattern of distribution of urban population, which consists of a super city (Calcutta), a giant city (Howrah), some medium towns and a large number of small towns. The dominance of Calcutta as the primate city and its urbanised suburbs has undergone little substantial change since independence. The wide gap between the former and the other cities/towns in the region in terms of population size, economic activities and cultural influence, and the predominantly rural character of the other areas in the region continue. This pattern is distinct from the one of decentralised urbanisation as found in Punjab, Haryana, Kerala, Maharashtra and in some other states in India. In Maharashtra, for example. Bombay has Pune and Nagpur as major alternative urban centres. In neighbouring Gujarat, Ahmedabad has been a fast growing metropolis. Ludhiana, the biggest city in Punjab is followed by Amritsar, Jalandhar and Patiala close behind. In Tamil Nadu, Coimbatore and Madurai compete with the city of Madras as alternative urban centres. The urban population in these states is more evenly spread over the state than is the case with West Bengal. Taking the ratio of the population in primate city with the aggregate population in the next three cities as a measure of Primacy, in Calcutta’s case it is very high (10.11) while it is as low as 0.50 in case of Ludhiana. The primacy ratios for Bombay and Madras are 2.26 and 1.76 respectively – much lower than that of Calcutta. This contrasting pattern of urbanisation has a great deal to do with the differing land tenure systems in pre-independence period and the course followed in terms of economic development in these two types of areas since independence. The present pattern of lopsided urbanisation in West Bengal evolved over two hundred years as a consequence of colonial economic and administrative policies. It was externally imposed in order to meet the needs of the colonial economy and was therefore mainly based on the export trade, and was delinked from the developments in the rural areas. There was no harmonious hierarchical distribution of towns by size categories from very large to very small.

each playing its part in the system of distribution of goods and services and having an areal jurisdiction of its own as could have emerged, had the urban development been autonomous and closely linked with the local economy.\textsuperscript{28}

As the dominance of Calcutta and its urbanised suburbs has continued, urban development in West Bengal has traditionally been conceived in terms of tackling the problems of Calcutta and its environs. Consequently, efforts for urban development got bogged down only in Calcutta with no satisfactory solution in sight. However, during the last two decades, a conscious attempt has been noticeable on the part of the government to spell out the state's urbanisation and urban development policy as an integral part of the state's overall development perspective. The West Bengal Urban Development Strategy Committee (WBUDSC) set up in 1979 emphasised on clear terms the need of a balanced urban growth in the state. It was suggested that improvement of Calcutta alone would be self-defeating. In fact, the pressure on Calcutta will never be eased unless other towns are sufficiently developed to hold the population back. Other towns in the state must be provided with minimum urban facilities. The overall picture is that unless other population growth centres are adequately developed the problem of lopsided urbanisation and the dominance of the primate city will not be satisfactorily dealt with. Hopefully, since the last two decades, it has been the policy of the state government to direct urban growth toward alternative centres in space. The WBUDSC laid down a clear policy guideline favouring balanced urban development, use of low cost technology, attention to the condition of the urban poor, and decentralisation and grassroots participation in development. Accordingly, development authorities have been set up in three regional nodes: Siliguri-Jalpaiguri, Asansol-Durgapur, and Haldia. Planned development of Siliguri-Jalpaiguri is expected to radiate development impulses in North Bengal. The development of Asansol-Durgapur industrial complex is likely to create a powerful anti-magnet to Calcutta. The new port of Haldia in the district of Medinipur is similarly being planned to grow as a port-based and petrochemical-based industrial complex, which is expected to create employment opportunities

\textsuperscript{28} ibid.
in the surrounding southern region. Due to the policy of decentralisation in planning and development spearheaded by the state government in West Bengal for the last two decades, the process of urbanisation has taken place in many rural units. In a bid to check uncontrolled migration of population to the metropolitan cities in the country from the small and medium towns in their respective hinterlands, the Government of India in the beginning of the Sixth Plan (1980) introduced the programme of Integrated Development of Small and Medium Towns (IDSMT) throughout the country. The principal objective of the programme was to develop small and medium towns as nodal centres of their respective hinterlands by providing appropriate inputs for development. In West Bengal, under the Sixth Five-Year Plan (1980-85), 20 such towns from different districts including the town of Medinipur, were selected under the programme. The number of such towns covered by the IDSMT project has gradually increased in the subsequent plan periods. In realisation of the need for developing alternative growth centres other than Calcutta, the state government in 1993 took up a project to develop 27 cities and towns within a 100 km radius of Calcutta. It plans to make those urban areas self-sufficient within a span of thirty years. Five towns within a 100 Km. distance from Calcutta have been selected to include them within the Calcutta Metropolitan Area (CMA). Medinipur is one of those, the other four being Kharagpur, Krishnanagar, Nabawip and Barddhaman. In view of the mounting pressures on most of the large metropolises of our country due to rapid but unplanned urbanisation, a planned and holistic development of urban agglomerations and medium and small towns has become the crucial need of the hour. During the past few years, urban planners and policy-makers have also been emphasising the need for the creation of alternative urban growth centres as a measure to check metropolitan decay in India. Sustainable development of medium and small towns is essentially an issue of urban management and governance. And this naturally calls for an inquiry into the nature of the political processes in these urban areas. Studies on the politics of such towns can help indicate the potentialities of these areas as alternative growth centres.
The town of Medinipur - a medium sized town - has been selected as the locale of the present study in the light of the above considerations. Being the headquarters of the district of Medinipur, Medinipur town stands as an important administrative-cum-trading centre. Lying at a distance of only 135 km. from the Calcutta metropolis, it is quite likely to possess the potentials of emerging as one of the alternative urban centres. Though urban growth in the district of Medinipur has generally been at a slow pace, in terms of absolute number, the urban population in its major urban centres was ever increasing. The town of Medinipur has been no exception. A steady increase of urban population in the town over the years has led to ever-growing demands for basic civic services and amenities. This puts pressures on the city government and makes the task of urban management a challenging one. Effective governance can alone lead to the integrated growth and development of the town. An inquiry into the political process in the town of Medinipur can reveal how it is being governed. And that is why in the present study we make an attempt to look into the nature of urban politics in Medinipur. Before that, let us, in the next chapter, introduce in more detail the town and district of Medinipur.