Chapter One
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The current upsurge of interest in the human environment is remarkable. More books treating man and his environment from a holistic and ecological point of view have appeared within the past few years than appeared during prior five decades (Moos, 1996). Within the broader society, this interest is largely due to technological advances whose "side effects" raise critical issues about the delicate ecological balance existing on "Spaceship Earth". Major human problems such as environmental deterioration, water and air pollution, increasing population and population density, and resource depletion have aroused grave concern.

New developments in the social and behavioural sciences reflect these concerns. Architects and city planners focus on the optimum construction and physical organization of urban centres and new towns. Human ecologists and geographers are concerned with the ways in which all the communities adapt and grow in their unique surrounding. Psychologists and sociologists attempt to focus on the designing environments that will maximize effective functioning and personal competence. Psychiatrists and social workers, believing that disorders of human functioning are partially rooted in dysfunctional social systems, want to identify the ways in which social environments can facilitate the constructive handling of life crises.

An integrated perspective regarding the human environment is essential for the central task of the social, behavioural and biological sciences. This task may be broadly conceived as furthering man's struggle to create an optimum environment. The arrangement of environments is
probably the most powerful technique we have for influencing behaviour. From one point of view, every institution in our society sets up conditions that it hopes will maximize certain types of behaviour and certain direction of personal growth. Families, hospitals, prisons, business organizations, schools, universities, communities, groups, and, for that matter, all the societies are engaged in arranging environmental conditions to maximize certain intended effects. There is, of course, serious disagreement about which effects should be maximized and which environmental conditions should maximize them.

In this context an important question may arise: What are the criteria by which an environment can be judged as favourable? Lewis Mumford (1968) viewed an ideal environment as “Seeking continuity, variety, orderly and purposeful growth” as opposed to an environment that “magnifies authoritarian powers and minimizes or destroys human initiative, self-direction and self-government”. Others have conceived of optimum environments as highly structured and controlling, since they must provide the organization necessary for a plentiful existence. There are no clearly defined criteria for an ideal environment that can meet everyone’s requirements. But we are much more likely to achieve an optimum environment when critical decision about constructing and changing the environment are in the hands of the people who live and function in it. These decisions are currently in our hands, and to make them wisely we urgently need more reliable information about human environments and their impacts on human beings.

In this context a relevant and serious question may arise: What are the principal ways in which environments and their impacts have been conceptualized? In this context we may mention seven major trends that
underlie the recent upsurge of interest in man's surroundings. Thereby, we can identify certain recurrent issues, with the goal of synthesizing different approaches to man-environment relations into a social-ecological perspective.

The seven trends may be mentioned as follows: First is a broad historical and geographical perspective that attempts to explain the rise and fall of entire civilizations. One major example is Arnold Toynbee's (1962) notion that men need "stimulus and challenge" from the environment to develop advanced societies. The second trend is the development of ecology and the associated outgrowth of human ecology and cultural ecology. These developments are linked to concepts of the environment as currently used in anthropology, sociology and epidemiology. The third trend, the notion that environmental factors influence health and disease, has an old tradition beginning with the ancient Greeks. The study of organizations, the fourth trend, emerged from the Industrial Revolution and the rise of the bureaucratic society. This trend, was historically represented by Karl Marx and Max Weber. The fifth trend is mainly due to experimental psychology and personality theory. Personality theorists and mental health practitioners have found that personality traits do not explain as much about individual behaviour as these investigators had originally thought. This has led to important shifts in emphasis in these fields and to the development of community oriented and environmental perspectives. The sixth trend stems from the architectural and building design profession. Architects conceive of buildings as actively shaping the behaviour that occurs in them. Buildings and the spaces in them encourage some behaviours and inhibit others. The seventh trend is represented by recent interest in conservation and the "quality of life". Hence, the above seven trends provide a broad introduction
to the major ways in which human environments may be conceptualized. Whatever may be the trend in conceptualizing human environment it refers, by and large, to a physical individuality, inhabited by a population who were attracted by certain ecological features to live there, form social organization and express their characteristic culture. It may be described also as a locality or settlement for a dwellers’ community which bears a history of volitional adaptation of a group – by choosing locations and patterns of living and life-style or quality of life, with reference to consistent spatially referred values. The said values find symbolic expressions in a place and help maintaining a particular land use. Such place is an outcome of the way the dwellers think about and the utility value the space they have assigned with. Even a group of migrators may prefer to utilize a particular place for certain facilities which may not be equally facilitative to others. History reveals that to Moghuls, who came from North-Western Frontier Provinces, Delhi was found suitable for developing a settlement and finally capital of their kingdom while East India Company selected Calcutta for developing a settlement and finally capital of their kingdom – later shifted to Delhi again by the British administrators.

Man decides how he wants to live within the stipulated area set by nature and the environment offers him resources which meet his needs, viz., food, minerals, communication and safety or may present before him a couple of constraints like unhygienic condition, lack of security, inclement weather and climate etc. The interaction between man and his environment gradually develops a process by which man adapts with a particular geographical area and forms a community and society. Accordingly, society may be considered here as a super-structure – above the more basic competitive level of community life in a specified space.
Society housed in such space is the subject-matter of social geography. It serves the specific interest of study centering around planning, history, demography and economics. Pahl (1965) has defined it as the study of the patterns and processes in conceptualizing socially defined population in a spatial setting. It specially refers to area pattern and functional relations of social groups in the context of their social environment, reflecting the influence of their convert Cognitive fields (Krech et al., 1962).

Hence, the relevant researchers put emphasis on the socio-spatial outcomes of the scarcity and inequitable distribution of essential commodities and their availability in the living environment of an interested group. They are interested in human social life in relations to the physical properties of living environment while some other investigators are mainly interested in the ‘work of man’ only under a particular ecology. The former group of researchers look upon squalids and slum, poverty and deprivation as the spatial components of social life – in the urban area, rural area, industrial towns and urban fringes – like “ethnicity, class, interest-group activity, language, religion, etc., which encourages alienation and group differentiation for survival and other pursuits of life and help to evolve a process of social life (Jones & John, 1977).

Thus, in brief, physical and socio-cultural aspects of the environment are linked with people and various psychological processes such as mental and behavioural activities. Again mental activities include things that occur in the minds of people – what they see, hear and their interpretation about the physical environment as well as beliefs, attitudes – positive or negative. All person receive the same information in a given real-life environmental display and they process it as an invariant fashion. Thus personal disposition is the tendency to act in a certain ways. In this context the significant
aspects are: (a) Spatial cognition, (b) Perception of natural hazards and (c) scenic quality analysis. Spatial cognition consists of processes whereby individuals acquire code, store, recall and decode information concerning environmental attributes and their location. The product of these processes is a mental representation of the spatial configuration of the geophysical environment, which can be considered to be the cognitive analogue of the cartographic map. In fact the production of cartographic maps and cognitive representations of the spatial environment require similar transformations of information (Downs & Stea, 1973). From a utilitarian perspective the function of spatial cognition is quite clear: it is central to orientation or simply, way-finding. Although there are circumstances in today's world where misdirection can be life-threatening (e.g., being lost in the wilderness or inadvertently wondering into the crime-laden area of a region), satisfaction, convenience and frustration with the experience of going places and finding desirable locations while avoiding undesirable ones are the primary consequences of spatial knowledge. Studies on rural to urban transition experiences may tell us a great deal about the manner in which ruralites adjust to the urban physical environment cognitively, but they reveal little about the effects on spatial cognition of long term experiences and living in rural environment.

In this context studying some aspects of urbanization process and urban fringe seem to be quite relevant.