Chapter Two
Urbanization and Urban Fringe
Chapter Two

URBANIZATION AND URBAN FRINGE

2.1 Urbanization

Urbanization is a historical incident depending on the socio-economic status of the society – the level and rates of development. Urbanization is not uniform in all countries. It is a complex, relentless process which occurs under the most diverse conditions throughout the world. One might suspect that its roots lie in something as basic as an instinctive human gregariousness. Whatever the cause, people increasingly seem to want to live in company with a larger and varied collection of other people in a way which cannot happen in a rural environment.

Urbanization has increased in an accelerated rate over the past century that today it encompasses hundreds of millions of people throughout the entire world. Urban settlements being the ‘engines of economic growth’ and centres of economic activity, the subsistence level of rural living compels people to flock to towns and cities in search of better economic prospects. The migrants’ basic needs for economic well-being overshadow and concern about the worsening environment in urban settlements (Malakar, 1985). Urban life has thus produced what some people have called the mass society. It has greatly increased social differentiation, the clash of norms and social roles, and the breakdown in interpersonal relations (Hauser & Schnore, 1965). Life of the large cities of several hundred years ago, both in Western and the Orient, was quite different from life in the same cities today.
The increasing urban population unfolds a series of challenges and problems regarding additional employment, opportunities, augmenting of housing stock and shelter, civic services, transportation, social welfare services and developing new congenial neighbourhoods to accommodate the diverse socio-cultural and religious groups. In fact, growing mass and complexity of cities and the growing capacity of people and technology to create functional conflicts and degrade the human environment until it is unacceptable for life make comprehensive planning imperative if contemporary development is to proceed without running into disasters of increasing frequency and severity.

Urbanization served as an index of modernization. Urbanization in the poor countries is much more from uncontrolled population growth and declining opportunities in over-populated rural areas. The continuous and swelling flow of people from villages to city in the poor countries like India is creating a serious social crisis which affects the quality of life, of the inhabitants. Urban pull has been replaced by rural push. Rapid urbanization in developing countries like India has thus brought enormous problems of housing shortage and even deteriorating quality of housing characterized with highly densed condition also. Hence, such countries have a special stake in the issue of crowding especially on the psychic and behavioural consequences of continued living in overcrowded settlements. It is only a common sense observation that people live under such high-density areas and mostly in low-quality environments not by personal choice but out of economic necessity. Over-crowding and environmental stress is mostly the price people pay for survival and for the satisfaction of basic needs like food and clothing. Therefore, there is an existence of situational force exercised on the people living in such conditions. The psychological and social
impacts of such a “force” have captured the attention of social scientists, only recently.

The important question whether “living in high-density housing or living in overcrowded condition is harmful” is now being asked by social scientists in various fields including environmental psychology. If highly densely or overcrowded environments are inflicting irreparable psychic damage to a large portion of existing group of human beings then there is sufficient reasons for the social scientists to be deeply concerned with the problem.

Urbanization brings about pronounced changes in the way of life of a country. It connotes all kinds of change, in patterns of population distribution and their work habits, housing pursuits, transaction with widening circles of people and myriad opportunities for crime; it also means a greater complexity of life, impersonal relationships, sub-cultures and less immediate controls of behaviour. It implies more opportunities for crime with less risk of detection (Social Defence Policies, 1970).

The city in developing countries is always in flux. Now imperceptibly, it is in flux: every morning a few more squatters are found on the nearby roads of urban settlements, railway stations, industries and power centres. Of late, violently, it is in flux, reluctantly service as a receptacle for the sudden appearance of a million refugees due to the partitioning of an adjacent country. But whatever the changes, it has a seemingly endless power to attract more and more people to the urban maw. Hence, the migration is an inevitable event. Again, over a sufficient length of time the migration process is an important instrument in altering the spatial pattern of physical and social structures of urban area and under
certain conditions it leads to dramatic changes in the pattern of the incidence of crime and crime-inviting conditions (Sivamurthy, 1982).

It may be relevant to mention in this context that there are certain significant reasons that distinguish the problems due to urbanization in developing countries—some of these features are as follows:

(i) Continuous and high rate of migration from rural areas to the prime city or other metropolitan areas. It is estimated that 35 to 60 percent of population increase in cities of developing nations are attributable to migration (Carstairs, 1984).

(ii) High level of unemployment and underemployment in the cities of developing countries.

(iii) Low level of housing supply in the urban areas (Absher & Lee, 1981).

(iv) The percentage of people living in a single room and two-room dwelling units increasing and the percentage of people living in more spacious room is decreasing (Lin, 1983).

(v) Land value constitutes a major portion of house building cost in most cities of the third world.

(vi) Occupancy rate (number of people living per dwelling unit) has been increasing rapidly.

(vii) While need for housing in the cities has been increasing considerably, effective demand for housing does not rise proportionately due to poor
purchasing power of people in developing countries including India (Report on Low Cost Housing, Government of India, 2001).

The above facts indicate how problems have developed due to over population as a consequence of urbanization process. Such problems do exist not only in urban centres but also in urban fringe.

2.2 Urban Fringe

It is again an undeniable fact that in spite of rapid urbanization process atleast three-fourth part of India remained unurbanised till the end of the sixth decade of current century. Following India’s political independence in 1947, Indian administrators became seriously interested for the country’s industrialization and urbanization. Since 1960s urban-rural links start increasing, as greater numbers of rural dwellers have sought city-fringe to live in the newly growing set-up of mass-society as sophisticated good citizens and as other urban activities in relation to trade, commerce, industry and administration have over-spilled from the cities, suburban towns into the countryside. It created maximum urban-rural interaction around 1970s when India became interested in the community development projects, at the expense of rural land, throughout the country – more particularly in the border districts between India and Pakistan – to accommodate migrated refugees. Immediately beyond the edges of the continuously built-up areas city fringes grew up. “Here lies the undeveloped space into which a town or city expands by circumferential or radical growth. It is a zone of mixed land-use elements and characteristics in which rural activities and modes of life are in rapid retreat, and into which not only residential, but also commercial, educational, recreational, public service and other largely extensive uses of land are intruding. In a land-use, and
often in an administrative sense too, the area is only partially assimilated into the growing urban complex. This is the area which has been termed the 'urban fringe', or sometimes the 'rural-urban fringe' (Johnson, 1974) — which no social scientist attended seriously as subject-matter for study until recently.

According to a few social scientists, rural-urban fringe may be subdivided into "rural fringe" and "urban fringe" on the basis of its land-use composition. The urban fringe exhibits a density of occupied dwellings higher than the medium density of the total rural-urban fringe — a high proportion of residential, commercial, industrial and vacant land, as distinct from farmland — and a higher rate of increase in population density, land-use conversion and commuting. By contrast, the rural fringe exhibits a density of occupied dwellings below the median of the total rural-urban fringe — a high proportion of farm as distinct from non-farm and vacant land — and a lower rate of increase in population density, land-use conversion and commuting" (Pryor, 1968). But it may be difficult, particularly in West Bengal districts, to identify fringes exactly fitting to the said description of Pryor (1968). They are, at present, better understood as interlocking parts of a dispersed city.

Pahl (1965) has recognized the following four characteristics to differentiate between rural and semi-rural areas, viz., (i) a tendency towards social and spatial segregation being stemmed from differences in the capabilities of the immigrants; (ii) a tendency towards selective immigration into the urban fringe with reference to previous socio-economic and cultural backgrounds of the immigrants; (iii) the changing commuting character of the urban fringe due to the influx of urban-oriented population in the fringe. "Finally the tendency towards the collapse of geographical and social
hierarchies" (Pahl, 1965). According to Golledge (1960), the urban fringe is a physical entity with a particular land-use mix brought about by the spread of the city, its functions and populations into rural areas; while to Pahl (1965), it is a social entity brought about “by the influx of socially-segregated, economically filtered, urban-oriented, mobile, middle class families, intermixed with a more staid, socially diverse, static, indigenous rural population”.

In spite of differences in emphasis and approach by different scholars to define urban fringe there is virtual unanimity in regarding the said fringe as a problem area with reference to the given inequalities:

(i) Unplanned distribution of residential and commercial areas being dominated by traditional social and administrative controls.

(ii) Non-conforming land uses – industrial, residential, agricultural, fishery, animal husbandry, poultry, highway and rural linkways and a few others. In the fringes, on the grounds of economical viability lands remain reserved for local or indigenous livelihood and cottage-industry, while seldom the dwellers care to spare any land permanently for games, sports and recreation.

(iii) High costs of services to scattered settlements in comparison to nearby urban mass. High costs are due to heavy capital charges for completely new installation of services like water-supply, gas supply, power supply, public transport from periphery to central place, etc. The common consequence of which is lower level of service position.
(iv) Differences and conflicts between heterogeneous groups, some with urban-based and others with rural-based attitudes and ways of life.

Although there are no dearth of efforts to control the problematic situations but there are number of ongoing difficulties. "The mechanisms at work within the urban fringe are so intricate that it is perhaps unrealistic, with the planning tools at present available", in India, "to expect more than a modest readjustment of the considerable forces of urban expansion" (Johnson, 1974).

In the perspective about discussions it may be relevant to discuss how environmental quality, whether it is urban, urban fringe or rural settlements, affects the 'quality of life' of the concerned inhabitants.