In our school texts, a description of Indian economy would invariably begin with explicit statements of its rural, agricultural nature. Yet, all around us we could sense changes in that rural economy, and the variable transformation of social and economic space through the impact of unseen forces. The traditional distinction between rural and urban no longer remains valid. The millenia-old subsistence economy of India is now changing to give rise to more and more, larger and larger villages, which stood somewhere in the middle of the rural-urban continuum.

This may have been due to the fact that we belong to the post-green revolution Burdwan where the full impact of the high yielding variety of seeds and the Damodar Valley Corporation (DVC) canals was felt on the rural scenario. Therefore, identifying our study region while remaining faithful to the empirical tradition of Geography was easy enough for us.

Burdwan, the headquarter of the district of the same name, is a flourishing town of about 2.5 lakh population (as per 1991 census: rough 2001 projection as 3.25 lakhs). In recent decades it has experienced rapid growth mainly through the expansion of its commercial base though its various agro-processing industries to serve the surrounding countryside. We took up for our study eleven rural development blocks, two among which are called Burdwan-I and Burdwan-II and nine have common boundaries with Burdwan Police Station (P.S.).

Burdwan town, located in the midst of an agriculturally prosperous, near isomorphic region, has developed a close relationship with the smaller settlements around it. These centres located within a radius of 40 kilometres from Burdwan, encircle the town and are also very well connected to this central urban focus. Together, they form a complete economic region characterized by significant amount of functional coherence.

The work taken up here could best be defined, in a nutshell, as an 'urban study of a specific region'. Our present enquiry into the spatial relationships of a medium-sized urban centre and its even smaller satellites would hopefully provide a major foundation stone in developing a greater understanding into the nature of rural-urban interaction in the context of the third world, and would help to reveal that the myth of rural-urban disjunction is not valid in its classical form any longer.
The dissertation has been presented in 10 chapters.

The first chapter provides answers for the fundamental questions that can arise in the mind of a reader. The selection of urban geography has been justified, the region of study defined, objectives identified and the methodology has been described. The second chapter clarifies the conceptual basis for the research work, putting it in the longer context of third world urbanization. This discussion is particularly relevant as in many urban studies there is still a tendency to compare the Indian experience with the models of urbanization developed in western countries. Furthermore, we have added a thorough review of literature on urban geography in India and rural-urban interaction to this chapter.

The third chapter tries to put the ‘forces’ working behind the changing rural scenario in West Bengal especially in Burdwan district. It describes the changes in Mughal and British periods, especially the land tenure system developed in late eighteenth century, and the post colonial changes in agriculture particularly the Intensive Agricultural Development Programme (IADP) and more recently the Operation Barga.

The fourth chapter analyses the regional socio-economic characteristics at the panchayat level using the latest available census data (1991).

Chapter five deals with intra-regional patterns of rural development using multivariate analysis technique. We used 29 variables and the data was adopted both from primary sources such as field surveys and official statistics from panchayat offices, and the secondary sources like census reports.

In the next, sixth chapter, we have studied the large villages and rural market centres of the region. These intermediate places are often neglected in conventional urban literature but in India they are now beginning to play significant roles at the local levels. However, in this chapter we have focussed on their growth, spatial pattern of location, growth potential and population characteristics besides their roles in the integration of rural and urban economies of the region.

In seventh chapter we have described in detail the town of Burdwan as the regional urban focus, and the two other census-identified ‘towns’ – Guskara and Memari. It brings out the roles they play in integrating the regional economy and how these roles have shaped the nature and characteristics of the towns themselves.

In eighth chapter, we have looked into the informal sector of the urban economy of Burdwan town as a possible mirror reflecting the ties between the rural and urban sectors. We studied the rickshaw-pullers – the most probable unskilled service that a poor rural
migrant would be absorbed in an urban context – to examine if they have originated from surrounding rural areas or not.

The ninth chapter deals with the various linkages between the two sectors – physical, social, economic, technological, service, population movement and political – and the roles they have played in integrating the region. These linkages have been crucial in helping the rural areas shed their shroud of isolation and connecting them to the urban centres.

The last chapter concludes the study. It identifies the gaps still existing between the rural and urban in Burdwan region, and suggests ways and means that could be explored by decision-makers for planning of either or both.