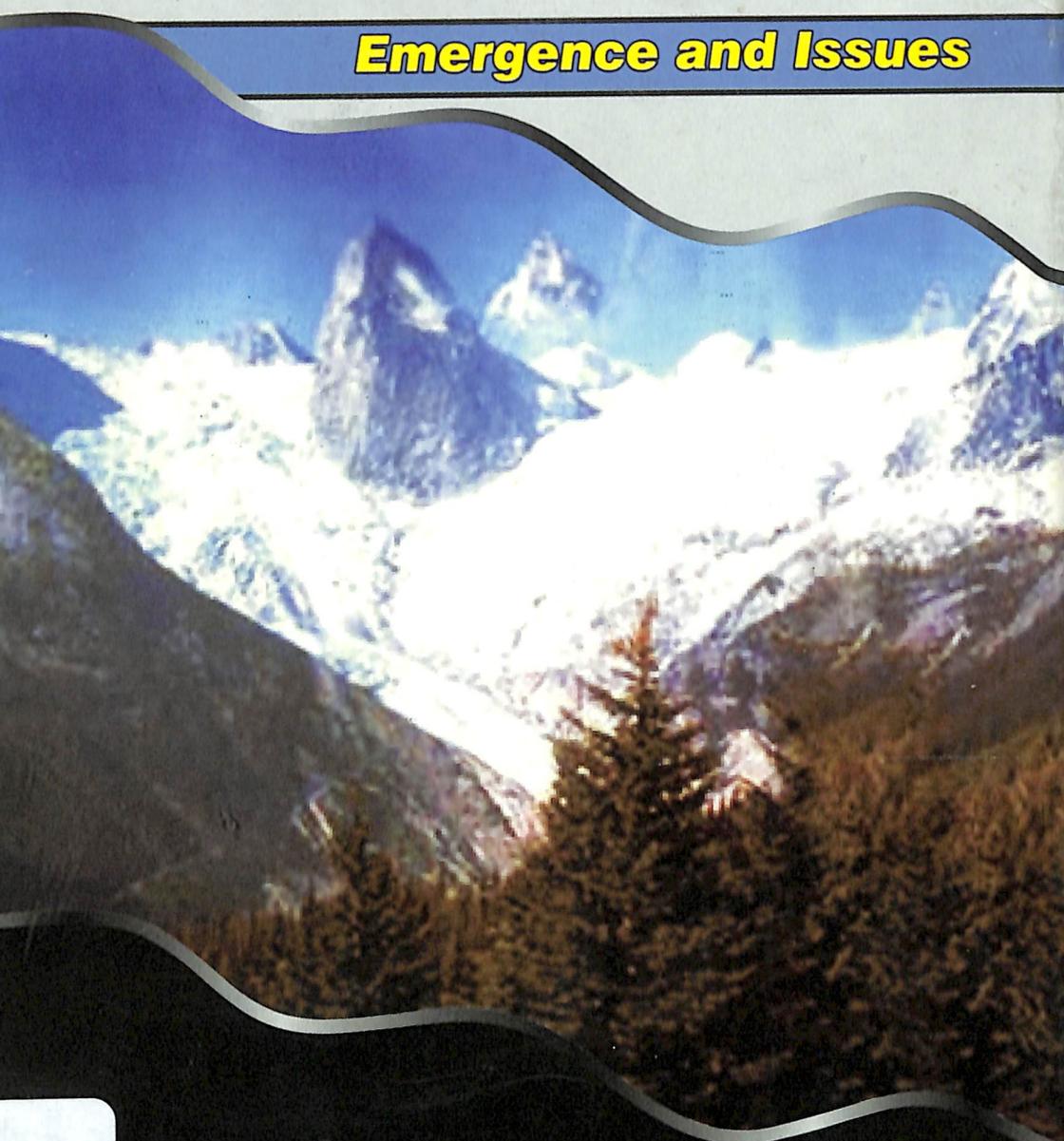


URBANISATION IN THE EASTERN HIMALAYAS

Emergence and Issues



Karubaki Datta

Serials

URBANISATION IN THE EASTERN HIMALAYAS:

Emergence and Issues

AUTHOR COPY

Edited by
Karubaki Datta



SERIALS PUBLICATIONS
NEW DELHI

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Acknowledgements

This present volume is the outcome of a National Seminar organised by the Centre for Himalayan Studies in November 2002. I acknowledge my thanks to the University Grants Commission for the financial support for organising the seminar.

Some of the scholars could not be present at the seminar but they responded to my request and sent their papers for this publication. I am particularly grateful to Dr. Aditi Chatterjee, Dr. Enakshi Majumdar, Dr. Gurudas Das and Vimal Khawas for this.

I express my gratitude to Prof. P.K. Saha, the Vice Chancellor of North Bengal University for his constant encouragement and interest in the academic programmes of the Centre for Himalayan Studies. I am equally grateful to Dr. T.K.Chatterjee, Registrar, Prof. P.K. Sen Gupta, Dean, Faculty of Arts, Commerce and Law and other officials of the University for their support and co operation at every stage of organising the seminar and publication of this volume.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to my colleagues Prof. S.R.Mondal, Prof. R. Sahu and Dr. M. Choudhury who have always stood by me with help and advice. Harinath Poddar, Sr. Technical Superintendent and Dr. D.P.Boot, Cartographer, Centre for Himalayan Studies not only helped me in organising the seminar but at various stages of preparation of the manuscript as well. The maps were prepared by Dr. Boot and some of the tables checked and finalised by Mr. Poddar. Our student Sri Anil Kumar Biswas, at present lecturer of Economics, P.D. Womens' College, Jalpaiguri, has checked and verified some references. I am particularly grateful to them.

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Introduction

Karubaki Datta

Urbanisation is a concept that refers to a demographic change involving an increase in the urban areas and the concentration of population in large urban settlements. Demographers, historians, economists and geographers—all have varied opinions regarding this process. The commonest and the most easily measurable definition is forwarded by demographers. For them the degree of urbanisation of a nation is generally defined as the proportion of the population resident in urban places. It involves two elements:

1. The multiplication of points of concentration and
2. The increase in the size of individual concentrations.

As a result of both, the proportion of population living in urban places increases. Especially in statistical studies, urban and urbanisation are usually considered in this demographic sense. Size of the population, its density, livelihood and such other criteria are used to define urban places.

The demographic conception of urbanisation is transcended by many other uses of the term. Sociologists, economists, historians and geographers have their own approaches to the concept. The geographers and physical planners deal with the less measurable aspects of urbanisation their concern being in the area and boundary of the urban places. A geographer's primary interest is in the study of the interrelationships between people and their habitats. In an urban setting, the habitat comprises not merely the territory of the city or the town and its hinterland but also the spatial

linkages between the urban and the rural settlements within the region. In addition, the geographers also focus on the environment of the habitat which includes the climate, landform features, surface and groundwater sources, drainage, soils, and vegetation. The environmental setting is important as it plays an important role in the desirability of an urban place as a residential area and to a large extent conditions its future growth.

To a sociologist urbanisation means the spread of urbanism. The latter is seen as a process that brings about great transformation in man's way of life such as change in values, attitudes, and behavioural patterns. This can also be adopted by people residing outside a city or in rural areas. This is a societal and psychological state of the people of a city. Urbanisation is also regarded as a necessary component of industrialisation and capitalism, when cities grow into centres of production, distribution and exchange process thereby bringing in a structural change in society.

The emergence and development of urban centres which is so intricately related to urbanisation is necessarily a function of four factors.

1. Size of the total population
2. Control of natural environment
3. Technological development
4. Development of social organisation.

Population size is necessarily a factor in urban development because to permit any agglomeration of human beings there must be some minimum number to sustain group life and to achieve large urban agglomerations relatively large total populations are required. This agglomerations of population requires efficient technology, particularly that of agriculture to a point where a surplus is possible i.e. a food supply in excess of requirements of the cultivators themselves. This is made possible by the emergence of crafts and their proliferation that permit some persons to engage at least part time in activities other than agriculture with improved technology including the wheel, the rod, irrigation, cultivation, stock breeding and improvements in fishing. The surplus

becomes large enough to support a sizeable number of persons freed from the production of food. In addition, such an agglomeration also requires more complex social organisation including improved communications and social and political mechanism. This is necessary for some forms of exchange among the emergent agricultural and non agricultural specialists.

Historically it is difficult to identify the origin of urban agglomeration as a form of human settlement. In all probability it was in the Neolithic period that man began to lead a relatively settled existence made possible by the technological innovations and domestication of animals. In reality these Neolithic villages were limited to a few hundred persons and was permanent only in a relative sense. By reason of limited agricultural techniques these villages had to be shifted every twenty years or so in order to achieve even minimal returns from the land. It took at least 1500 years, i.e. from 5000 B.C. to 3500 B.C. for the city to develop from the Neolithic peasant village—the first of which appeared in Mesopotamia and Egypt in about the middle of the 4th millennium B.C. Cities as large as of 100,000 or more probably did not exist prior to the Greek or Roman period . Although it is possible that a city of a million was achieved in ancient China and 18th century Japan, cities of a million or more were largely the product of 18th and 19th century developments. Both the level of technological development and social organisation achieved by mankind permitted the relatively widespread appearance of very large cities.

II

India has a long tradition of urban growth. The emergence of early urban life is associated with the evolution of Indus valley civilization about 2500 B.C. The major cities of this civilization are discovered and partially excavated in Kalibangan and Harappa in Punjab and Mohenjodaro in the lower Punjab. The cities were remarkable not only for their widespread aerial distribution and number but for their planning. In fact these were the world's first planned cities and they included a piped water supply and drains for nearly every house, something

which was not attained elsewhere in cities until the 19th century in the west and still not widely available in most cities in the rest of today's world. The continuity of India's urban history was broken shortly after 2000 B.C. when the Indus sites were largely abandoned and the centre of settlement migrated eastward to the Ganges valley in the course of Aryan immigration. We have little or no urban evidence from the intervening centuries till the early 4th century B.C. when the Mauryas established their capital in Pataliputra in the central Ganges valley near modern Patna. The town had been described as the largest and the most splendid city of the world of that time in the contemporary Greek accounts. As to the other parts of India, the capitals under the various dynasties had developed as urban centres and the temple towns in the south and the ports along the coasts had also developed into urban centres.

Some spatial and temporal urban growth and spread notwithstanding the urbanisation process diffused to other parts of the country under the impact of various forces operating during the ancient (upto 1206 A.D), medieval (1206–1757) and modern (1757 till date) periods of Indian history. For that reason India's urban pattern is a mosaic of segments belonging to the precolonial and post colonial period. The Portuguese were the first to come and set up urban centres along the coast of India—Goa being the most important of these. They were followed by the Dutch, the French and the English. These European presence as traders in a large number of ports, coastal towns and even inland cities continued throughout the Mughal period but failed to leave any marked impact on the level of urbanisation in India. They were basically confined to the coastal strips. It was in the 19th century that the British established a firm territorial control in India and India came under the rule of the Crown in 1858. From then onwards to 1947 they exercised unquestioned sway over the whole of India and the course of urbanisation was determined by their economic interests and policies. Around 1800 India had 16 cities with a population of one lakh or more and about 1500 towns spread all over the country. However, one feature of the early 19th century was the decline of the pre British cities

and towns. The factors that contributed to this negative feature of urbanisation was the British attitude towards the traditional Indian industries, particularly cotton and textile as also the introduction of railway network starting from 1853. The trade routes were diverted into different channels. New stations became points of export of raw materials and old trade centres lost their importance. At the same time railways contributed to the growth of new cities and major inland towns by introducing modern industry. The 19th century also saw the emergence of new towns in the hill areas of the Himalayas as well as in the south. After a trend of declining urbanisation there was a slow upward growth from the 1870s onwards followed by a period of slow growth till about 1930s after which urbanisation began to show signs of rapid growth.

By 1901 India's level of urbanisation remained around 11% with 25 cities with population of one lakh or more, 69 cities with a population of 50,000 or over and 1997 towns in all. In 1941, which was the last census before Independence, there were 49 one lakh towns in India and in all around 2500 towns. Thus, there was an enormous increase in the total urban population of the country in the course of this period. The urban population increased 2½ times from 15 million to 62 million in 1951.

Urbanisation entered a new and more important phase in the post Independence period. During the latter half of the 20th century the level of urbanisation in India increased from 17.29 to 27.8%. The total increase in urban population is about 4½ times i.e. from 62 millions to 285 millions during 1951–2001. The following table illustrates the point.

The table shows that the trend in the growth of urban population has not been uniform throughout the decades in the 20th century. It increased steadily upto 1951, declined in 1961 and increased again in 1971. Again, when compared to the decade of 1971-81, the decennial growth rate shows a declining trend in the decade of 1981-1991 when it declined by 10 points. In the decade 1991–2001, the growth of urban population is 31-40 which is lower by 5 points than the earlier decade. The reason for this slowing down of growth rate is the slowness in economic development. The overall economic

development during 1981- 91 did not commensurate with the changing upward trend in population growth.

Table 1
India's Urbanisation Trends in course of the 20th century

<i>Census Year</i>	<i>Total population (in millions)</i>	<i>Urban population (in millions)</i>	<i>Decennial growth rate of urban population (per cent)</i>	<i>Percentage of the urbans to total population</i>	<i>Annual Exponential growth rate</i>
1901	238.10	25.85		10.8	
1911	252.09	25.94	0.35	10.3	0.03
1921	252.32	28.09	8.27	11.2	0.79
1931	278.98	33.46	19.12	12.0	1.75
1941	318.66	44.15	31.97	13.9	2.77
1951	361.09	62.44	41.42	17.6	3.47
1961	439.24	78.74	26.41	18.0	2.34
1971	548.16	109.09	38.23	19.9	3.21
1981	685.18	159.73	46.14	23.3	3.83
1991	844.33	217.18	36.19	25.7	3.09
2001	1027.02	285.3	31.40	27.78	2.71

Source: Census 2001 & Human Development in India, (ed.) Prof. G. Ramachandrudu, Dr. M. Prasada Rao, Serials Publications, New Delhi, 2004, p. 15.

At present, India has the second largest urban population among the countries of the world. Most of these growths arose from the enlargement of existing towns at every level rather than from additions of new towns. This implies that the majority of settlements, now classified as towns and especially the larger cities have exhibited urban characteristics for a very long time. A large number of villages are at the borderline but only a small number of them graduated to town status. The majority of regions in India have had settled cultivation for long. The spatial distribution and number of settlements reflect this long history. The principal function of most of these small towns is that of serving the rural surroundings as markets and service centres. Thus their number and spatial distribution reflect the magnitude of demand for their services from the hinterland. However, in areas where the distribution of existing towns is sparse, large number of new towns can be expected

to appear as and when economic and population growth take place, particularly when enhancement of agricultural prosperity occurs.

However, the definition of urban in Indian census has undergone modifications over time and some of the changes in the pattern of urbanisation is related to the definition of 'urban' itself. According to the Indian census a settlement is defined as urban when its population is over 5000, its density over 400 per hectare and 75% of its male labour force is engaged in non agricultural pursuits. In addition, a settlement can also be defined as urban by government notification and the census authorities also have discretion to classify as urban some places 'having distinct urban characteristics even if such places do not satisfy all the criteria mentioned above.'

III

The pattern of urbanisation in heartland of India is not applicable to the hill areas of India. For the Indians the hills, particularly the Himalayas, have always been places of mythological significance and of occasional pilgrimage. The notion changed under the British. Coming from a cool temperature, the British sought respite from the inhospitable heat of the plains in the hills. From 1815 onwards they started building hill stations and by 1870 there were over 80 stations in different parts of the country serving the four major metropolitan cities of the country. These were Simla, Mussoorie-Nainital near Delhi, Darjeeling, Shillong near Calcutta, Mahabaleswar in the Western Ghats near Bombay and Nilgiri, Kodaikanal area near Madras in Tamil Nadu. Originally meant for the Europeans and the British, these stations changed their nature in course of time. The Indian princely families followed the British to the hill stations and built their summer palaces and they were followed by the native population. Gradually these places developed as recreational tourist centres. Some towns were also developed for administrative purposes.

As in the other parts of the hills, urbanisation is comparatively a recent phenomenon in the Eastern

Himalayas as well. the term Eastern Himalayas denotes the region stretching from Sikkim to Arunachal Pradesh and includes regions falling outside the geographical boundary of India. In it are included Sikkim, Bhutan, Arunachal Pradesh, the hills of Darjeeling and of course Tibet-the Autonomous Region of China. The latter has been kept out of the scope of this book.

The political status of the states of this region are different from each other. Politically Bhutan is an independent state under the rule of the Royal Government of Bhutan. Like Bhutan, Sikkim too used to be an independent kingdom under monarchy. In 1975 it merged with India as a result of which monarchy ceased to exist and it became the 22nd state of India. Arunachal Pradesh too has passed through administrative reorganisations. Very much a part of India, it used to be the North Eastern Frontier Province of India during the British period administered by the Governor of Assam as an agent of the President of India. It became a Union Territory in 1972 and was finally given statehood in 1984. The district of Darjeeling is a part of the state of West Bengal of India. The Northern part of the district is hilly consisting of the three hill subdivisions of Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Kurseong.

The entire stretch is a land of high mountain ranges, snow peaks, dense forests and rivers. It is the traditional homeland of several tribes each with its own language, culture, primitive agricultural practices and very low level of technology. Tibet used to a Buddhist country with very unique form of government and society. The states of Bhutan and Sikkim practiced the Mahayana Buddhism of Tibet with little variation. The cultural traits of all the states were more or less similar. Buddhism being the state religion in all the three states, Buddhist monasteries used to enjoy a special religious as well as economic status. In Bhutan they served the purpose of fortified military stations as well. All the Himalayan states (including Nepal) maintained relations not always friendly among themselves. They had some relations with India as well.

Arunachal Pradesh was the land of many tribes. Most of them thrived on the economy of hunting and collecting. Barring some tribes who practiced Buddhism, most of them used to

be animists. The Buddhism as practised by them was introduced either through their proximity to Bhutan in the West or through the neighbouring Buddhist states in the South East.

The natural landscape, the difficult terrain and the economy of the region were not conducive to the development of urban centres until very recently. Settlement used to be scattered with no considerable industry and even the tradition of crafts that was there was not meant for commercial transaction. The craftsmen and labour were not able to make full exploitation of the local resources. The surplus was little and was not an enough incentive to attract migration from across the mountains. Road and communication network was not developed and even number of wheeled vehicles was limited. As a result of all this, there was no urban centres in the region till as late as the 20th century. The earliest one was Darjeeling which was developed by the British. Thus the emergence of urban centres in the region was not so much a natural development as much a result of external intervention. A short description of the state of urbanisation in the region is given below.

Bhutan

There were no urban centres in Bhutan in the 18th and 19th centuries. The state maintained traditional trade relations with the neighbours and as a result of this the south eastern corners of the state had grown to be more populated and developed than the rest of the country because it was nearer to the trading centres of Darjeeling, Sikkim and Chumbi Valley of Tibet. But even the settlements in this part of the country were small with few houses and monasteries.

The actual process of urbanisation started in the late 1960s. It was the direct result of the king's policy to end the political isolation of the country in favour of a regular administration and planned economic development. With these objectives in view the country opened its windows to the southern countries, India being the only one for the time being. With Indian help, metal roads were constructed and wheeled transport introduced. Schools, hospitals and

dispensaries were also opened. All this resulted in a demographic change in the country. Urban centres began to emerge from this period onwards. A conscious decision was taken to establish a permanent capital at Thimpu. Town planners from IIT Kharagpur, India were invited to make a plan of the same. A provisional capital began to function from Paro Dzong. Some other settlements that developed into urban centres were Samchi, Penden, Phuntsholing, Geyelphu, Samdrujonkar etc. At present, Bhutan has about 30 urban centres. Some of these are very small in size. Only Thimpu, Punakha and Phuntsholing have a considerable population of 57.9, 21.0 and 56.3 respectively. The three together account for about 73% of the urban population of Bhutan. The average annual growth rate is about 4.5%. In fact, there is no such clear definition of urban in Bhutan. As per its 8th FYP document, settlements with populations ranging from 500 to 30,000 were recognised as urban.

Since 1970, Bhutan has begun to maintain a separate department of town planning at the national level which plans for locations of administrative complexes, markets, communication structure etc.

As to the characteristics of the urban centres, most of the centres are located on the southern borders of the country in Duars which links the country with India through roadways. This southern region is economically important as all the cash crops like orange, ginger, rice, cardamom, etc are produced in this area. Industrial estates like hydro-electricity and mineral extracting locations are also in the South. This is the region inhabited by the Lhotsampas i.e. the Nepalis. Because of its proximity to India, this region had also become the hub of the Indian insurgent groups. Towns in the interior of Bhutan are mostly district administrative centres without much of urban infrastructure and amenities.

Sikkim

The original inhabitants of Sikkim are the Lepchas and the Limbus. The Bhutia tribe that emerged as the ruling tribe immigrated in phases in course of the 15th and 16th centuries. The Nepalis who constitute the majority of the population now

started settling in the state from the late 19th century onwards. The early human settlements of Sikkim were mainly situated along the mild mountain slopes particularly facing the East and the South-East directions and along the river valleys. The ideal site was half way up in an airy spur and the main considerations were availability of agricultural land, drinking water and nearby forest for fuel and fodder. The original capital of Sikkim was at Yaksam from where it was shifted to Rabdantse in 1670. Again after Nepali incursion in late 18th century it was shifted to Tumlong and finally to Gangtok in 1880. In spite of having so many capitals, Sikkim did not have any township of considerable size and the places sank into obscurity as soon as the capital was shifted.

The situation began to change from the beginning of the 20th century onwards. The first authentic information regarding Sikkim's population composition is available in the census of 1891. According to this, Sikkim's total population was 30,458 of which 5,762 were Bhutias, 3,356 Limbus, and 15,458 Nepalis. The total population increased to 80,000 in 1911, 1,09,808 in 1931, 13,7,725 in 1951, 16,21,89 in 1961, 203,000 in 1971, 31,63,84 in 1981, 40,64,57 in 1991 and 540,493 in 2001. In spite of this rapid population growth the percentage of urban population is low. The state was completely rural before 1951. At present the percentage of urban population is about 22 and the number of towns 9. There are four districts in Sikkim, North, South, East and West. As per 2001 census there is only one town in the North, four in the East, two in the South and two in the West districts. Even the district headquarters have small populations.

Gangtok, the state capital was given the status of a town in 1951. It remained the only town till 1961. The number of towns increased to seven in 1971 census, eight in 1981 and finally to 9 in 2001.

Darjeeling Hills

Originally Darjeeling was a part of the state of Sikkim. It was first identified as an excellent location for a sanatorium way back in 1828 by Captain Lloyd. After long negotiations with the king of Sikkim the British managed to secure it as a gift

from him in 1835. Following annexation with India it went through several boundary reorganisations before it got its present shape. The territory between Darjeeling and Terai was seized by the British in 1849 while the Kalimpong part of it was secured much later. The treaty between Sikkim and the British in 1861 confirmed this territorial seizure. From this period onwards Darjeeling was developed by the British on the European model and turned into a hill resort. It also developed as a centre of missionary activities, educational institutes and trade centre. Very soon it attracted migrants from Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan and before long developed into a considerable urban centre. The growth of Tea and Cinchona plantations added to its economic importance. Kurseong, on the way to Darjeeling was economically important for tea plantations and developed as a satellite town of Darjeeling.

The Kalimpong part of Darjeeling district followed a different course of development. Initially it too belonged to Sikkim from which it was taken over by Bhutan and later handed over to the British after the Anglo Bhutan war of 1865. Kalimpong was economically important for the region due to its proximity to the Jelep-la and Nathu-la—the two passes through which passed the frontier trade of Tibet. Nathu-la was in Sikkim no doubt but the road from both the passes converged at a point not far from Kalimpong and in course of time the route through Jelep-la emerged as the more widely used one for trade with Tibet. The trade continued till 1962 and Kalimpong remained the premier trading mart of the region. The trade came to an end after the Indo China war of 1962. Like Darjeeling, Kalimpong too was earmarked by the British for development as a hill town though at a later period of early 20th century. As in Darjeeling, in Kalimpong too schools and hospitals were established by the missionaries. While Darjeeling was labeled as a district town, Kalimpong and Kurseong developed as sub divisional towns.

Darjeeling along with Kalimpong and Kurseong remained as the three urban centres in the hilly part of the district till 1971. Two more settlements—Cart Road and Mirik emerged as towns in the census as late as in 2001.

Arunachal Pradesh

As already mentioned, Arunachal Pradesh has passed through various administrative reforms. In fact, it was these reforms from the 1960s onwards that initiated the process of urbanisation.

Even after independence the tribal society of Arunachal remained economically backward and without any economic infrastructure. The development activity started only when the state became an administrative unit in the fifties. The actual development activities however, started only in the sixties. The period of 1961 to 1971 saw the establishment and creation of circles, community development blocks etc. The process was further accelerated after 1972 when it emerged as Union Territory. The capital complex was shifted from Shillong to Itanagar. Arunachal shares border with China and is strategically very important. It became the centre of activities in course of the border clash with China in 1962. This had its impact on the development process. It led to the construction of infrastructure, particularly all weather roads for movement of army vehicles.

As per the census of 1961 the state was absolutely rural with no urban centre. However, since the districts and the sub-divisional head quarters of the state were found to be possessing distinct characteristics and occupational patterns it was decided that the district and the sub divisional head quarters that recorded a population of 2,500 during the census of 1961 should be treated as towns for the purpose of 1971 census. Accordingly, Bomdila, Along, Pasighat and Tezu were declared as census towns in 1971.

Two more towns of Neharlagun and Itanagar were added to the list in 1981 thereby raising the number to six. Four more were added to the list in 1991. Even then four districts out of eleven remained without any urban centre at all. In 2001 census seven more areas have been added taking the total number to 17. The district of Upper Siang remained without an urban centre.

Apparently it seems that there is a spurt of urbanisation in the state. This is reflected in the growth, number and size of

the towns as well as in the fast decadal growth rate of urban population. The decadal population growth between 1971 and 2002 for the state of Arunachal has been very high-139.63 in 1981, 167.04 in 1991. There was a slight fall in 2001, the rate being 101.29. The percentage of urban population however is not very high. It was only 4-3.7 in 1971, 6-6.56 in 1981, 10-12.21 in 1991 and 17-20.47 in 2001. This is reflected in the sizes of the towns.

None of these seventeen towns has a population of 50,000 or above. Therefore no town belongs to the class I or II category. Three towns including that of the capital town of Itanagar fall in the category of class III with population in range of 20,000-49,000. Seven towns fall in the category IV their population ranging between 10,000-19,000, five towns are categorised as class V and two in the category VI with less than 5000 people living in these.

The main reason of urbanisation in the state is administrative reorganisation. All the buildings belong to the government and even those civic institutions like schools, parks, hospitals, electricity, library, playground etc came up at the government initiative. The development of Itanagar- the capital, has been mainly due to migration of people from Shillong. In fact, the percentage of interstate migrants is quite high in the state. This is due to the fact that the majority of interstate migrants are tertiary workers engaged in urban areas. This fact was brought out by 1971 census. The state was deficient in trained local manpower in many fields and the availability of job opportunities and scope of trade led to migration from other states.

Even now, many of these towns do not satisfy the criterion of 75% population gainfully employed in the non primary sector of production. Many of these towns also lack infra structural amenities required for a healthy urban living.

In spite of this trend of rising population and rise in the number of urban centres, the towns of this stretch of the Himalayas are different from the cities in the industrial societies. The region as a whole is still economically underdeveloped with low level of industrial growth. In spite of the recent trend of urbanisation and emergence of urban

centres being a distinct demographic and economic trend in the region, the towns—small in size and developed as administrative or trading centres, still look like small islands or urban communities in the sea of vast rural areas.

IV

As mentioned above, the field of urban studies has been subjected to multidisciplinary research involving disciplines like Economics, History, Geography, Political Science, Social Anthropology and of course Sociology. But this tradition is not very old. Initially it started among the social scientists of Bombay University in 1915 and was taken up by geographers and sociologists to some extent in the 1920s. In the post Independence period it received more attention from scholars of all the social science disciplines including Social Anthropology, Sociology, Political Science, Geography and Town Planning and Economics, though urban economics is yet a comparatively unexplored field in India. The historians too have worked on the theme though their primary focus has been on the Indus Valley civilization and the archaeological sources.

However, there is a dearth of literature on the Himalayas in general and Eastern Himalayas in particular. This because urbanisation itself is such a recent phenomenon in this stretch of the Himalayas that it has not received due attention from the scholars as yet. The objective of this book is to make up this deficiency to some extent. Due to the lack of information and limited scope of research Tibet has been kept out of the purview of the book. The 17 papers included in this focus on the various aspects of urban phenomenon in Bhutan, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh and Darjeeling while a couple of them focus on the Himalayas as a whole—both Eastern and Western as well as the North Eastern states of India. The authors represent different branches of social science and therefore approached the problem within broad frameworks or paradigms of their different disciplines.

The first article 'Urbanisation in the Eastern Himalayas' by S.K. Munsri introduces the theme of the book. After

describing the stages and characteristics of urbanisation in general he points out that in the third world urbanisation attains different forms depending on the levels of development in different regions within a single country. In India, the region known as the Eastern Himalayas had remained cut off from and insulated from the people of the plains, each component of the region following its own pattern of urban growth. The pattern of urbanisation is therefore different in this region. He points out that most of the studies reflect a lack of awareness of the dynamics of society at large in this region. The level and depth of urbanisation can hardly be understood without a proper understanding of the structure and functioning of the tribal life.

Pabitra Giri in his article 'Urbanisation in the Eastern Himalayas: The Question of Sustainability' discusses the issue of urbanisation in the hills from the point of an economist. With reference to multidimensional concept of sustainability he discusses the policy issues related to urbanisation and development. The development of urbanisation process in the hills is characteristically different from that of the plains and is not conducive to the growth of large scale urbanisation. First he looks at the natural resources of the hills. Both land and non renewable resources are limited and ecologically the region is fragile and hazard prone. Socially also, the people are not yet equipped to take the opportunity of urbanisation and development process that has been planted from outside. In some cases, as in Darjeeling, the fragile nature of social sustainability may lead to ethnic conflicts and tensions. There is a limit even to urbanisation based on tourism. He concludes that while increase in the level of urbanisation is inevitable, it has to be done through population management strategies as well as through increase in the carrying capacity of the hills. Only a judicious use of renewable resources like water, biodiversity, forests and plantations can make it economically sustainable.

A.C. Sinha first outlines the pattern of urbanisation in the hills in the historical context and then goes on to highlight the salient features of contemporary urban scenario. Most of the

towns with probable exception of the Bhutanese ones have a predominance of non-local population. There is sex imbalance in the towns which results in the siphoning off of the bulk of earnings by the residents to their families elsewhere which in its turn lead to lack of funds for the improvements of urban amenities in the towns. The towns have very limited resources of their own and they have to depend on the occasional allotment of funds from the administration. This affects the quality of life as a whole. The states have their priority for the rural areas as bulk of their population live in rural areas. The prospect of the parasitical urban administrative centres therefore do not seem to be very promising.

Mahalaya Chatterjee's article is 'Size and Functional Characteristics of the Himalayan Towns: A Comparison of the Eastern and Western Himalayas'. As indicated by the title, she deals with all the towns in the Himalayas-Eastern and Western alike and compares the urban scenario in the two. With help of census data, she points out the changes in the size distribution of the towns in course of the last four decades along with some demographic indicators like gender ratio, growth rate of towns, and the interactions among these indicators. She also makes a functional classification of the towns since 1961. The states in the Western Himalayas are bigger, and has longer history of urbanisation. However, the census data do not indicate any noticeable difference between the two parts of the Himalayas. Most of the urban areas are service towns, dependant on the activities of the state and central governments. A few trading towns are coming up but manufacturing towns are very few. Without proper exploitation of the local resources and skills, urbanisation is bound to remain imposed from outside without much linkage effects with the surroundings.

The two papers on Bhutan are 'Urbanisation and Development in Bhutan: Convergences and Divergences' by Anup Kumar Datta and 'Urban Scenario in Bhutan: Some Observations' by R. Sahu. R. Sahu traces the context of the emergence of urban centres in the 1960s and points out how the deficiencies of those plans have begun to be evident in the

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present context of rising population and trends of migration. The problems are particularly acute in the towns of Thimpu and Phuntsholing. The Government, however, is taking initiative to overcome those and taking foreign aids for the purpose.

Anup Kumar Datta places the problem of urbanisation in the broader context of transformation of Bhutan's economy that include industrial development and monetisation of economy, urban bound migration from rural areas, Bhutan's new liberalisation policy etc. and links it to the broad context of Bhutan's policy and Plan priorities. The inauguration of planned development and modernisation in the 1960s called forth enormous challenges of economic restructuring, a socially balanced environment and ecological sustainability. The subsequent changes in paradigms of both central oriented planning and structural reforms in trade, investment and finance have been unique. It is essentially the idea of globalisation, he points out, that has restored the importance of local governance and led to the emergence of new townships. He concludes by demonstrating that urbanisation process in Bhutan is faced with enormous difficulties because of its rugged physical terrain and lack of skilled human resources.

There are four articles on Sikkim. 'Urbanisation in Sikkim: Emergence and Issues'-the first of these is by Mamata Desai. The author gives an outline of the historical development and spatial distribution of human settlement in Sikkim and then relates population growth to the pattern of land use. Soil erosion is one physical problem in Sikkim. The state has become subject to human interference resulting from excessive vehicular movement, construction works and blockade of drainage channels by solid waste. Landslides often result from these. One landslide prone area is National Highway 31A. Given the physical constraints that limit the maximum development without further damage, the need of the hour is a scientific and realistic approach towards the issues of construction, conservation and development.

M.M. Jana's article is 'Functional Characteristics of the Towns of Sikkim'. Like Mamata Desai he too points out the

lack as well as the need of planning in the process of urbanisation in Sikkim. He reviews all the aspects of status, distribution, population trends and economic activities in the towns, and finds these to be infrastructurally underdeveloped and lacking in sufficient urban qualities. Even the growth rates of population during the last few decades had been low due to lack of urban planning and human resource development.

The overall imbalance in Sikkim's regional development process has been highlighted by Manas Das Gupta in his article 'Sikkim's Development and Inequality of Income: The Urban Rural Divide'. With help of data showing the trend of regional development, he points out that Sikkim is growing but this growth is also leading to inequality of income distribution both in terms of per capita income and HDI. This inequality is reinforced by regional disparity. The area around the capital town is developed while the rest is backward and unattended.

The last paper on Sikkim—'Child Labour in Sikkim in Socio Economic Perspective' is by Gita Payal. Child labour is not a problem in Sikkim alone. In fact, a widespread problem of the poor and developing countries, it exists in both rural and urban sectors. It is particularly common in the unorganised manufacturing sectors and in marginal occupations in the streets, slums and shanties. Sikkim is no exception in this respect. The paper gives some ideas about the extent of the problem in the towns of Sikkim and its socio-economic ramifications.

Of the three papers on the districts of Darjeeling, two deal with the town of Darjeeling itself while one probes into the origin of the town of Kalimpong.

'Emergence of Kalimpong as a Hill Urban Centre' by Enakshi Majumdar is the account of the initial days of Kalimpong written from a historian's point of view. Kalimpong, though locationally close to Darjeeling was different in character. Neither did it have any strategic or administrative importance nor did its locational or climatic condition induced the British to start a sanatorium there. Trade was one important lifeline but urbanisation as a natural offshoot of thriving trade did not happen to Kalimpong

Though the township started as a planned one it had a character of its own, different from that of Darjeeling, the seasonal retreats with their colonial social life, gaiety and style. The author has tried to trace its growth and identify its uniqueness.

Aditi Chatterjee's paper is 'The Impact of Urbanisation on Darjeeling: A Study of Colonial and Post Colonial Urban Development.' The author discusses the concept of urbanisation as a process and analyses its impact on human settlements in the hill towns in general and Darjeeling in particular. Darjeeling, like many other hill towns, had emerged as a result of British initiative and initially resembled an English village juxtaposed above an Indian one. She studies both the physical and social characteristics of the town during the British period. In the concluding section she identifies the changes that set in all the aspects of physical and social systems in the post colonial period and points out the several problems that developed as a result of rapid urbanisation.

The third article on Darjeeling is by Swatahsiddha Sarkar. Its title is 'Formation of a British Hinterland: Darjeeling in Colonial Days, while Aditi Chatterjee's article is a holistic one covering all the aspects of urbanisation in both the colonial and post colonial periods, the scope of this paper is indicated by the title itself. The paper is a detailed account of the story of how the town was initially developed by the British for their seasonal trips to the hills and also of the British policy of secluding the Darjeeling hills from the plains. It developed as a resort which could replicate the idea of a European countryside that the colonial masters could visit for recuperating from the dust and dirt of the plains and also as a social space based upon the idea of difference between the hills and the plains. Restrictions were imposed on the plainsmen from settling there except in the forms of few labourers, businessmen and managerial staff.

The last section consists of four articles on the North Eastern part of India. Of the seven states of India's North East (Sikkim is brought under the North-East Hill Council as the eighth state only recently) only Arunachal Pradesh is a part of

the Eastern Himalayas. Nevertheless, since the state with its predominantly tribal population shares some of the ecological and social problems with the other neighbouring states a comparison between Arunachal and other states of the North-East gives a comprehensive idea about the level of development in the former. This has been done by Vimal Khawas in his paper 'Trends and Patterns in the Levels of Urbanisation in the North-Eastern Hill States of India and Related Environmental Issues'. Some significant conclusions emerge out of his study. Compared to the national average, the region is relatively behind in terms of the levels of urbanisation and even in the North East, the level of urbanisation is not uniform in all the states. Small towns comprise about 74% of the total urban centres in the region. These towns along with the large cities have not experienced much change while the medium towns have seen increasing trend in the last two decades. In contrast to the population in the cities and the medium towns, there has been a decline in the population the small- particularly class V and VI towns.

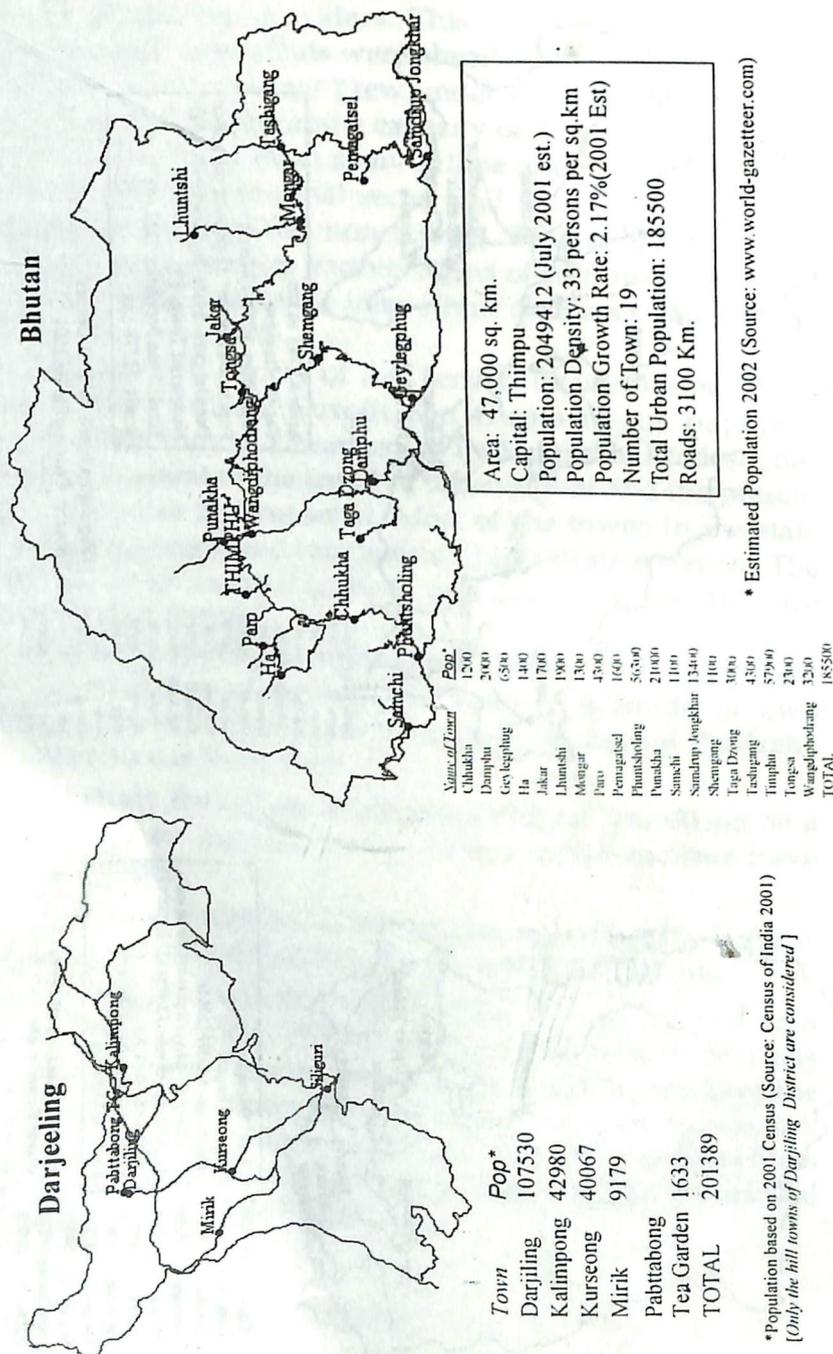
Gurudas Das also focuses on the whole of the North-East in his article 'Migration, Competition and Conflict Situation : Informal Sector in Urban Spaces of North-East India'. The idea of the paper, as the author himself explains, is to make preliminary attempts, primarily based on impressions, to understand how the emerging competition in the informal sector of economy of the North-Eastern states is giving rise to conflict situations. The term informal sector is often used to mean the small scale units engaged in the production and distribution of goods and services and the author has used it to indicate all the multifarious economic activities outside the realms of formal or organised sector. Excepting Assam the North-Eastern states do not have any large scale industry in general. Whatever meagre number of medium scale industrial units are there are mostly public sector units. Apart from the manufacturing activities, the informal sector is dominated by trading and service providing activities. Beyond governmental services self employment in small scale enterprises and service providing activities are the only alternative avenues in these

economies. The sector is characterised by competition among the locals and the outsiders. This is because initially the educated local non tribals were absorbed in the public sector while the informal sector grew under the migrant non tribal initiatives. But the absorbing capacity of the public sector was exhausted within a short span of time and the locals started entering into the informal sector and there has set in their attempt to replace the non tribals. This competition for resources often leads to various forms of culture conflict with the potential to invoke the inter ethnic cleavages and identity issues.

The last two papers of this section focus specifically on Arunachal Pradesh. Surojit Sen Gupta in his paper 'A Sociological Study of Urbanisation in Arunachal Pradesh' has given an account of the trend of urbanisation and the present urban scenario in Arunachal. Most of the towns in the state are of recent origin and function as administrative centres. The state lacks an industrial base and the urban centres are parasitical in nature.

The last paper by Samhita Das is 'Impact of Urbanisation on the Nishings of Arunachal Pradesh: A Study of Two Villages under Papum Pare District of Arunachal Pradesh'. The objective is three fold:

1. To study the nature of influence that are impinging on a village in the tribal area where urban centres have developed
2. To examine whether in this process the village has become economically dependent on the urban centres and
3. To find out whether urbanisation can be viewed as a process of social change in the tribal society. She has studied some economic and socio political trends of the villages and shows how the process of urbanisation has integrated the villages with the surrounding urban centres and brought in some significant social changes in the tribal society of Arunachal Pradesh.



Introduction to the Eastern Himalayas

K. Murty

PART - I **The Eastern Himalayas**

The first part of this book is devoted to the study of the geographical features of the Eastern Himalayas. It covers the topography, climate, and natural resources of the region. The second part discusses the socio-economic conditions and the development of the region. It includes a study of the population, agriculture, and industry. The third part deals with the environmental issues and the conservation of the natural resources. The book is intended for students and researchers in the field of geography and regional studies.

The second part of the book is devoted to the study of the socio-economic conditions of the Eastern Himalayas. It includes a study of the population, agriculture, and industry. The third part deals with the environmental issues and the conservation of the natural resources. The book is intended for students and researchers in the field of geography and regional studies.

Urbanisation in the Eastern Himalayas

S.K. Munshi

In the Dictionary of Human Geography R.J. Johnston refers to a three-part model of urbanisation, now accepted by the social scientists as an explanation of the process of urbanisation in any region or area.

The first part of this model is the demographic process involving increase in the proportion of population living in urban areas and their concentration in larger urban settlements in which migration is the main contributor of urban growth.

The second part is the structural change in society as a result of the development of capitalism in which cities grow in centres of production, distribution and exchange processes. Here urbanisation is a necessary component of industrialisation.

The third part of the model deals with behavioural urbanisation bringing out social change such as change in values, attitudes and behavioural patterns, which can be termed as urbanism.

In the three-part model of urbanisation, demographic change are the dependent variable driven by structural imperatives. But it is pointed out that such a model particularly suits the analysis of modern capitalism, as substantial urban growth and urbanisation have taken place in the Third World

long before industrialisation where the growth of towns and cities were not associated with industrial societies. Other forms of pre-industrial economic integration have also seen urban growth mainly on the basis of migration, some degree of commercialisation and development of the service sector in the form of administration, transport development and so on.

Therefore, the study of the process of urbanisation anywhere has to take note of the specific context of time and place.

We have talked about pre-industrial economic integration that, according to substantivist anthropologists and sociologists, could be achieved through reciprocity, redistribution and market exchange and in which anyone could be the dominant form.

It is now known that Third World urbanisation does attain various forms depending on the levels of development in different regions within a single country as big and with so much variety as India.

Therefore, any model on the emergence of urbanisation in a vast Third World country like India has particularly to take note of the variety of socio-economic conditions ranging from extreme pre-capitalist formations to fully developed capitalism.

Keeping this generalised problematic in mind one may approach the question of urbanisation in the Eastern Himalayas. By Eastern Himalayas we go by the traditional identification as the territories of the hills of the Darjeeling District of West Bengal, Sikkim, Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh outside the realm of the Brahmaputra valley.

Society in the major parts of the Eastern Himalayas remained cut off from the rest of India due to the particular history of colonial rule in this part of North-Eastern borderland of the Indian subcontinent. The tribal societies in this difficult terrain were kept isolated and insulated from free and open contact with the people of the plains. Some were kept as Excluded Areas and some Partially Excluded Areas. The Inner Line Regulations were promulgated forbidding the entry of non-tribals into specified tribal areas and without the Inner

Line Pass. The isolation hampered even the process of peasantisation in place of traditional shifting cultivation. As a result it contains a large number of tribal households that are still engaged in *jhum* cultivation practices.

The Eastern Himalayas have very sparse population, though at present with a fairly high growth rate. As per the Census of 2001, there are 17 towns in Arunachal Pradesh, 9 in Sikkim and 5 in Darjeeling District of West Bengal. According to an estimate the number of towns in Bhutan is 20. These are small centres and in some cases with less than one thousand inhabitants. That the process of urbanisation has been very slow is indicated by the fact that with just about 1.1 million people in 2001 the urban population in Arunachal Pradesh was 20.41 per cent of the total population. In case of Sikkim it was much lower being only 11.1 per cent.

It may be appropriate here to add a few words on Arunachal Pradesh. It is spread over half the Eastern Himalayas. Its population in 2001 was 1,091,117 and the density was about 13 per square km. the lowest for an Indian State. Three of its large districts like Upper Siang, Tawang and Upper Subansiri are among the most sparsely populated tracts in India. Over 80 per cent of the people living in Arunachal are tribals.

In 1982 Dr. Saradindu Bose noted, "The estimated figure of the total area under shifting cultivation in Arunachal Pradesh is 703 sq.km. It is also estimated that about 2,70,000 persons are involved in shifting cultivation" (Bose, S.:1982). Bose said that after 1963 in particular, construction and development of many roads led to a notable change especially along the communication lines where physical conditions were suitable for permanent cultivation. Professor Nirmal Kumar Bose had also noted that the seclusion of Arunachal Pradesh was only broken up by the construction of roads. (Bose, N.K.:1972).

In fact the Sino-Indian conflict in the early sixties stands out as a landmark in the process of social change in Arunachal Pradesh. The sealing of the Tibetan border across which there had been considerable trade and contact in the past and the rapid development of communication lines connecting the

plains with the hills, broke the age-old isolation imposed by the British and forced the pace of social change.

But the 2001 Census also shows that in spite of social change being hastened ; the pace is yet to gain any significant momentum.

Continuing the reference to Arunachal Pradesh one has to note that this state had 14 districts in 2001, the average size of each being 2,72 sq.km. with average population size of 83,932. The overall growth rate of urban population in the State between 1991 and 2001 had gone up from 12.80 per cent in the earlier decade to 20.41 per cent. This can naturally be considered as high but one has to remember that the base was so low here that any slight rise appears to be magnified. It is no wonder, therefore, that current textbooks on India show Arunachal Pradesh as having the highest growth rate of urban population in India.

The state has a road density of about 0.047 km. sq. km., which is indicative of the tremendous isolation inspite of the growing linkages with the plains.

Among its very sparsely distributed settlements (3,649) there was only one town with over ten thousand people and over 90 per cent were settlements with less than one thousand inhabitants. Jhumia households manned most of these settlements. One may note here the comments of Dr. Malabika Dasgupta who says that population growth amongst jhumia households in the North-East is normally identified as one of the factors of change that bring about a transformation in the traditional way of doing *jhum* cultivation by bringing about an increase in the requirements for *jhum* products—to be used over and above local changes. (Das Gupta, M.: 2001).

Sikkim had stronger links with the plains but it is still characterised by 'underdevelopment, industrially backward, land-locked agriculture-based with near subsistence economy', writes Amal Dutta (A. Datta, 2001) 'Much of Sikkim, particularly in the North, is inaccessible where people practise pastoral nomadism and the region has hardly any reflection of urbanisation. Between 1981 and 1991 Sikkim was the only State in India, which recorded a decline of urban population.

But this happened mainly because of the reorganisation of territories of five major towns of Sikkim: Gangtak, Jorthang, Gyalshing, Singtam and Namchi.

Bhutan has been a feudal kingdom almost totally closed to the outside world till the sixties of the last century. Life here is as feudal as it looks, wrote O.H.K. Spate in his book on India, Pakistan and Ceylon. (Spate, O.H.K.:1972) The construction of a new road system was started here only in the 1960's. After about 40 years, today the network of motorable roads is still limited to only 300 km. or so. Phuntsholling on the Indo-Bhutanese border is the only major link town.

Livestock raising, shifting cultivation and small-scale local trade dominate Bhutanese economy. The small-scattered urban centres are mostly located at sites of important forts and seats of chieftains.

According to Dr. Saradindu Bose, though Bhutan has tremendous potentiality in the development of tourism, the government appears to be very cautious in opening up the country. It has therefore, decided to restrict tourism and to monitor it closely. With these restrictions Bhutan was opened to tourists only in 1974. Nearly twenty years later the total number of foreign visitors hardly exceeded three thousand people annually (Bose, S. Unpublished paper).

It is obvious that urbanisation under such conditions is bound to take a backseat.

Eastern Himalayas in the Darjeeling District of West Bengal had a different history. With the creation of Darjeeling as a hill station and the development of one of the best tea plantation areas in the world, Darjeeling hills in the Eastern Himalayas got closely linked with the colonial urban processes since early in the 19th century. This is naturally the most urbanised tract in the Eastern Himalayas.

Describing the 'link' character of the foothill region of Darjeeling Himalayas a Government of West Bengal publication wrote that "the area has always been bridge-buffer between North Bihar and Assam with its present road and rail transport nodes around a newly enlarged old rail head facing the Himalayas of Siliguri. This staging point between Jalpaiguri

and Darjeeling after 1947 Bengal partition, became a case of urban capture. Its broad gauge rail terminal named New Jalpaiguri in deference to the much older town close by to the south was aligned to take the sweep of the North Bihar-Assam rail link built in the late 1940's: its proximity to the roads up the Teesta to Kalimpong and Tibet and to Sikkim, as well as to the Duars and Terai (and thence to the Morang tract of Nepal) led to the alignment of the National Highway from Bihar to Assam and improvement of roads into Darjeeling hills. At present Siliguri is the major urban centre of the region and the centre of the Terai, Duars tea industry with satellite military encampments across the neck from the Nepal to Bhutan border to the North" (Govt. of West Bengal. 1994).

The hill area of Darjeeling district was the most urbanised tract of the Eastern Himalayas with four towns well linked with the plains, a plantation industry of world repute and a thriving tourist traffic.

Therefore, when talking about urbanisation in the Eastern Himalayas one should not lump together the whole region and not deal with it as one aggregated object of observation, but should identify the micro units with their characteristic features and history of evolution. Even a casual observation would possibly show up three distinct tracts comprising of:

- (a) Arunachal Pradesh.
- (b) Bhutan.
- (c) Sikkim and the hill areas of Darjeeling District.

Society and economy of these three tracts are at different levels of development with distinctly different evolutionary history. The process of urbanisation in the Darjeeling hills was initiated since the beginning of the 19th century and grew in pace with development of tea industry, tourism and transportation network.

Till 1975 when Sikkim joined India Union, it was a closed feudal kingdom. The last twenty-five years have seen close linkages of Sikkim with the outside world, faster integration of the territory with the urbanisation processes in the neighbouring Darjeeling hills.

These two units together may possibly be identified as a near homogenous area in terms of urbanisation.

The second area is where the process can be said to be only nascent. It is Arunachal Pradesh, which is now opened up with growingly closer linkages with the North Brahmaputra plains, and through it the rest of India.

The third area belongs to the Kingdom of Bhutan, still largely closed and secluded.

Such a division is only tentative. This is mentioned only to indicate that the process of urbanisation is far from homogenous in the Eastern Himalayas with component territories having different history, economy and society.

Lastly, with due deference to anthropologists and other social scientists who have made considerable contributions to our knowledge about the life and living of people in the Eastern Himalayas, I must regretfully say that in all the studies that I have come across there is a lack of attention to the dynamics of the society at large in this region. There is ample material on tribal life, its structure and functioning though little material on the changing economy and consequently on the changing society. Without this the process of urbanisation, its levels and depth can hardly be understood. Caution must be exercised in understanding the differentials in the rate of development for different sectors of the economy and of the society. The complexities of indigenous social and economic organisation need to be closely observed before drawing conclusions. Finally, superimposing standards borrowed from elsewhere should never be allowed to overshadow our assessment.

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