
Issues and Impacts of Urbanization on the Village of South 24 Parganas, West Bengal: An Ethnographic Study

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Abstract: *Urban anthropology deals with the social and cultural processes in urban areas as well as cities. Contemporary issues of urban anthropology include rural-urban migration, demography, effects of urbanization among cultural pluralism and practical urban problems. The present paper depicts the issues and impacts of urbanization on the concentration of rural areas, which has altered human life styles in dramatic and significant ways in a district of West Bengal the preliminary ethnographic account deals with the consequences as well as impact of global urbanization on the rural areas under study in general along with the changing aspects of the socio-cultural milieu. The present study finally depicts the gradual spread of global urbanism in the traditional life in the main stream and surrounding areas of the villages through a micro-ethnographic approach.*

Keywords: *Urban Anthropology, Rural, Urbanization, Urbanism, Communication, Migration.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Urban Anthropology is an area of study in social cultural anthropology, in which anthropologists focus on social cultural processes in urban as well as cities (Kottak, 2000). A topical specialty in socio cultural anthropology was born as urban anthropology or the anthropological study of urban dwellers. One of the significant environmental factors that have important effects on socio-cultural milieu of rural areas is urbanization.

Today, especially after 1980s, urban anthropologists expanded their interest to any aspect of urban life. Along with the theoretical interest in an conceptualization of urban space and urbanism, contemporary issues of urban anthropology include rural urban migration, demography, adaptation and adjustment of humans in density populated environments, the effect of urban settings among cultural pluralism and social stratification, social network, the function of kinship, employment, the growth of cities, architecture, crime, and practical urban problem such as housing, transport, use of space, water management, and infrastructure (Kottak,2000; Eller, 2009; Scupin & De Corse, 2009). Urbanization- the concentration of populations into large urban context has altered human lifestyles in dramatic and significant ways (Scupin & De Corse, 2009)

According to Anderson (1953), urbanization is not a one way process but it is a two way process. It involves not only movement from villages to cities and change from agricultural occupation to business trade, service and profession, but it is also involves change in the migrants' attitude, beliefs, values, and behavior patterns (Ahuja, 2007). Urbanization rates vary in countries and in and in states.

Basically the movement of people from rural to urban areas is called urbanization. Rural people come to cities seeking jobs, and the material and social cultural advantages, they believe, are available in urban areas as well as in cities. This influences the process of urbanization. The people are forced out of the countryside by the high population levels, inability to acquire land, environmental degradation, and sometimes violence, when new migrants arrive in urban areas; they often find dismal living conditions. Therefore, the world is becoming

increasingly urban. Living in urban spots new cities forces people or community to develop indirect and complex means of obtaining food and satisfying other needs.

We will say relatively little about adaptation on which modern urbanization rests- large scale, mechanized agriculture (agribusiness) combined with individual production. Since, World War-II, anthropologists have turned their attention to cities, focusing their ethnographic research on population such as villagers, large hamlets, etc. and developing the new specialty called urban anthropology. Among its practitioners in the present century, urbanization as well as urban migration and poverty, are attracting considerable anthropological contribution.

As industrialization and urbanization spread globally, anthropologists increasingly study these processes, their impact as well as the social problem they create. Urban anthropology, which has theoretical (basic research) and applied dimension, is the cross-cultural and ethnographic study of global urbanization and life in cities. Recognizing that a city is a social context that is very different from a tribal or peasant village, the anthropologist Robert Redfield (1941) focused on contrasts between rural and urban life. He contributed rural communities; Redfield proposed that urbanization be studied along a rural urban continuum. He described differences in values and social relations in four sites that spanned such a continuum.

In any nation, urban and rural represent different social systems. However, cultural differentiation occurs as people, products, subsistence strategies, education, and religion and mass media move from one to the other. Migrants, being at the core unit of the present study, bring rural practices and beliefs to town and take urban patterns back home. The experiences and social forms of the rural area affect adaptation to city life as Redfield depicted this in the theoretical issues as present study shows and analyzes. With urbanization comes, the development of great variety of social groups based on voluntary membership. Therefore any solution to the consequences and problems caused by urbanization must focus on both rural and urban areas which deserve ethnographic researches holistically from anthropological perspective.

2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE PRESENT STUDY

The basic aims and objectives of the present study are-

- To give an preliminary ethnographic account on the consequences as well as impact of urbanization on the rural areas of south 24 Parganas, West Bengal in general
- To throw light on the changing aspects of socio-economic milieu of the villagers under study due to the impact of global urbanization and developed system of communication along with the significance of migration, and finally
- To depict the gradual spread of global urbanism in the traditional sociocultural life in the main stream and surrounding rural areas under study and in larger West Bengal through the present micro-ethnographic approach (Bryman, 2008)

3. BACKGROUND OF THE PRESENT STUDY

The present was based on the intensive fieldwork in four villages namely, *kalagachia*, *Nabason*, *Highland* and *Nainan* of the district of south 24 Parganas, West Bengal. The administrative settings of all these villages under study are given below in a tabular chart.

3.1 Brief Profile of the Administrative Settings of the Studied Village:

Table-1: Administrative Settings

Village	Klagachia	Nabason	Highland	Nainan
Mouza No./Name	107	110	Gopalpur	Nainan
Gram Panchayet	Sarisha Gram Panchayet	Sarisha Gram Panchayet	Kalatalahat Gram Panchayet	Kalatalahat Gram Panchayet
Block	Diamond Harour	Diamond Harour	Diamond Harour (II)	Diamond Harour (II)
Post Office	Sarisha	Sarisha	Nainan	Nainan
District	South 24 Parganas,	South 24 Parganas,	South 24 Parganas,	South 24 Parganas,

The geographical setting is one of the vital criteria for urbanization of an area, because physical and cultural communication is very important factor for introducing of urbanism as a pertinent way of life. The geographical settings of all these four villages are as follows-

- *Main Road*- National Highway 117 (previously D.H. Road)
- *Nearest Railway Station*- Diamond Harbour
- *Nearest River & Ferrighat*- Hoogly (45 km away from Kolkata port). The only ferrighat located in Nainan village (located at riverside in Hoogly river). The ferry service is available in short distance (Nurpur) as well as Long route (Shivpur Ghat in Howrah District).
- *Bus Route*- SD 9/1 (upto Esplanade taking 2 hours and 30 minutes)
SD 14 (upto Taratala taking 2 hours and 30 minutes)

The selecting criteria for such village are for their regular contact with the Metropolitan city, Kolkata as well as the location of Falta Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in that area.

4. METHODOLOGY OF THE PRESENT STUDY

In order to collect the primary data, participant Observation, Intensive Interview and Case studies, have been utilized for the present study. In case of data collection, the researchers mainly converse with the villagers in the form of a scientific interview from different members of the panchayet. Finally they were taking relevant case studies from the villagers, mainly on those who are involved case based economy rather than traditional subsistence based rural economy. The secondary data have also been utilized from the books, journals, internet, etc. All the villagers were co-operative and familiar to us during investigation as well as.

5. OBSERVATIONS, DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATIONS

The impact of urbanization can be seen in every aspect of people's life both in positive and negative way. The aspects of economic, political, social, cultural and environmental are changing day to day urbanization of the village under study. The consequence as observed during investigation among these four villages two are Hindu caste (Bengali) dominating. The villages namely Kalagachia and Nabashan and other two are Muslim dominated villages namely Highland and Nainan. The total populations of these four villages are 2500, 1812, 4925 & 6000 respectively.

As slowly enters into the industrial phase of capitalist development several new cultural challenges are bound to be encountered and most of these merit formulation of far-sighted policies the slow and gradual entry of mass media, the universalization of communication through radio, television, mobile phone, the technological availability of global information system through satellites like Dish-TV and computer etc. The development in information and communication technology together with increase in means of transport contribute to globalization of culture is not the same in all those four villages and the intensity varies according the economic conditions of the villagers. Presence of a cinema hall at the entrance of *Kalagachia* village is also an indication of advanced way of cultural communication.

In the sector of economic activity, there is also a radical change is also evidence but in these aspects, the scenario is different villages as mentioned earlier. The main reason is the availability of cultivable land that mainly people to switch over the change.

The villages Nabashan and Kalagachia are mainly influenced by the urban way of life especially in the spheres of availability and variety of jobs. They mainly migrated to nearby urban center like Diamond Harbor as well as Kolkata for the seeking and engaging in like business, industrial labor, and service in privet sector. Whether temporary or permanent, urban migration is both a direct have and indirect sources of change in traditional societies. It has also noticed that not only the urban migrants themselves have changed in the process of adopting of urban life but the communities of origin are also changed. Most modern influences enter the country side through urban centers, either by cultural communications, as radios and cine culture which have become available in villages or through the links between urban migrants and those who remain at home their land. Not only modern

consumer goods but also new ideas, knowledge, and values are passed on to village through urban migrants. These modern influences permeate the village only slowly, however material culture is affected first and then social organization and ideology. In summing up the trends as the result of such migration is as follows- i) an increasing modernization of material culture. ii) an increase in the number of villagers earning a living from modern industrial and commercial jobs instead of traditional craft and farming. iii) less-dependence of landless laborers on land owners.

In case of these of two villages, apart from those temporary migrants rests, of the adult folk are engaged agriculture. One of the most important changes resulting from the expansion of western society is the increasingly worldwide dependence on commercial exchange. The borrowed customs of buying and selling at first is supplementary to traditional means of distributing goods in a society.

The advent of commercialization can come about the introduction of commercial agriculture. In commercial agriculture, all the cultivated commodities are produced for sale rather than the personal consumption. Along with these change, the system of agriculture may be industrialized. Though most of the villagers are involved in traditional crop (mainly paddy) cultivation, but some of them gradually cultivated different types of crops like sunflower, and mushroom only for commercial value as well as benefit.

Another way of commercialization occurs, when people are cultivating the soil produce a surplus above their subsistence requirements, which is then sold for cash. Under these circumstances, commercialization may be said to be associated with the formation of a peasantry. Peasants are rural people who produce food for their own subsistence, but they must also contribute or sell their surpluses to other like, in towns or cities that do not produce their own food. But these happens only those families who occupy their own cultivable land but the number is gradually decreasing. In other words, some of the production processes, such as ploughing, weeding, irrigation, and harvesting are done by machine. Land is worked for the maximum return it will yield and labor is hired.

Similarly, commercial attitude regarding the wage consumption among some members of a community move to a place that offers the possibility for working of wages. The migrants want to earn money because they get aspiration to raise their standard of living. In case of other two villages, namely, Highland and Nainan, the scenario is quite different than the earlier two villages as discussed above. Here the life of the villagers is influence by the existence of the Falta SEZ (Special Economic Zone). Under this project, the habitation as well as cultivable land has been taken away from the villagers in return of very minimum remuneration. As result dependence upon SEZ has been must for them.

Moreover, regarding the characteristics futures of the Falta SEZ as well as its impact upon the local inhabitants can also be observed among the local inhabitants Falta SEZ (locally known as 'Fi-ted zone'). It might have been derived from "Free Trade Zone" which has recently been converted to the present official name after enactment of the SEZ act, 2005. It is about 60 km away from Kolkata, Located by the side of the river Hoogly. the principal connecting road is Diamond Harbour Road which is presently a National Highway NH127 and this is about 45 Km away from the Kolkata port. It was entirely a part of the Sundarban. The main livelihood of people of the area prior to setting up to this SEZ was cultivation and fishing. The fishing community was connected with water transport, mainly in the river Hooghly even in the pre-sest day specially the inhabitant of Nainan village. The other two village is located nearby with Nainan were Akalmegh and Simulberia (at present 'Highland') at about 1968, the Kolkata Port Trust dredged the Hooghly river to make it navigable for ships. The process caused eviction of several hundreds of families residing in the then Nainan, Akalmegh and Simulberia village. But the bastees of Akalmegh and Simulberia had been affected most terrible than Nainan. They resulted in new area which was named by the locals as 'Highland'. This Falta SEZ is divided into four sectors namely the sector 1, 2, 3 and 4. The latter two is designated as Industrial Development Center.

In case of SEZ workers, a majority of whom are normally hired on a purely temporary basis as casual workers. Labor security can also be affected by work security (hours of work, ESI benefits, PF etc.), which generally are either absent or scarce. The wages are usually given on daily basis i.e. no work no play policy is followed here. Almost

2/3rd of the population (irrespective of sex) is involved as industrial labor in Falta SEZ. The attraction of cash money as well as their suffering is responsible for the huge gathering of them in those factories. The introduction of money into the economy of the villagers not only altered the economic system but also affected other areas of life as it involves the female workers on huge scale.

The advent of commercialization has also been felt in various ways. People can begin to sell and buy because they begin to work near home or away for wages, or because they begin to sell, surplus food or cash crops. One type of commercialization does not exclude another, all types can occur in any society.

It has also been observed that in some of the villages, mainly in the caste group like Rajbanshi are still engaged in fishing. Fishing is practiced both inland and outland (Bay of Bengal) area. For inland they use small boat but for outland they use large fishing trawlers. The economic condition of the owners of such trawlers is quite good but the share traders generally suffering from poverty as compared to the labor they give in this profession.

In the arena of health some changes has also been observed by the present researcher. Again there is different situation in different villages. Acceptance of modern allopathic medicine is gradually increasing instead of *ayurvedic* medicines among the villagers of every village. Recently medical service for medication as well as pathological labs etc. as well as ambulance has been introduced in nearby sub-health center near about 1 k.m. from Kalagachia and Nabashan village.

Now, we shall pass on to the important factors of development i.e. levels of education in the villages. It has been noticed that about 50% adult male population has achieved at least secondary (upto Madhyamik) education in all villages. Apart from general education, the picture somewhat different in two Muslim dominated villages. Here, most of the adult male population instead of getting formal education are involved themselves in non-formal educational center in Mosque, called 'Moktab' where their religious head 'Moulabi' used to taught Arabic language. Very recently a college is situated in Harindanga, Falta; named Sadhan chandra Roy Mahavidyalaya Which help the willing students of their four villages to continue their higher studies. But after completing the education, most of them remain unemployed and as consequence crime is increasing. But this situation in earlier years, now they are gradually attracted to Madrasa located at Nurpur. Beside due to demand of various jobs they also attracted to technical education in ITI especially in Tollygange and George Telegraph training institute located at nearby Bishnupur area and this training also fulfill the demand of skilled labor in Falta SEZ.

Again the effect of urbanization is reflected in the cultural identities of local communities inhabited in those villages. Cultural identities whether local or regional, are activated not entirely because of the cultural self consciousness endogenous to peculiar configuration of cultural style or historical achievements of the concerned communities. Many exogenous factors have assumed a great deal of relevance in making communities and ethnic groups acutely aware of their cultural identity.

In our evaluation of this issue we have so far used parameters of economy and social ecology (rural-urban process) and now we paid attention to the role of community. The social effects of urbanization may be analyzed in relationship to marriage, family, caste, social status, women and village life.

Community like kin group and family are the basic institution of human society. Both institutions have suffered seriously on slaughts for their existence from the forces released by new ideologies and techno-industrial advancement. Yet, this institution has survived though not in the original form. Urbanization affects not only the family structure but also intra and inter-family relations as well as functions the family performs. The rural joint family is being gradually replaced by nuclear family is shrinking and kinship relationship is confined to two or three generation only. The relation with one distant kin is breaking or weakling. Though the structure of family is changing, still the spirit of individualism is not growing in the families.

Caste identity tends to diminish with urbanization, education and the development of an orientation towards individual achievement and the modern status symbols and as a consequence concept as well as formation of social class is gradually starting among them. The relation between traditional castes and occupations are also disappearing rapidly.

Empowerment of women conceptually forms a distinct category by itself. It implies processes by which women's power of self-organization is promoted and reinforced, they developed the capacity for self reliance out-crossing the relationship of subordination on account of gender social and economic status, the role in the family and society and the arenas of politics.

During investigation, it has been found that irrespective of sex the level of education has been improved. As a consequence, the age of marriage is also increased. The concept of family planning is also increasing day by day. In this respect, the role of two NGOs is noteworthy, namely, AGP (Asurary Gramonnoyan Parisad), a branch of American NGO like SAHAY and CINI (Child In Need Institute). But it has not brought about any radical change in traditional pattern of arrange marriage without dowry. At the same time divorce is new phenomena we found among some of the villagers. In the arena of economy also the participation of women is improving specially for the location of Falta SEZ where many women in the nearby villages get involved in return of daily wages. The opportunity has improved their position in the family level at least in case of decision making to some extent. Politically also the rural women are more active today. The number of women contesting election has increased specially at the local level but lastly it can be said that women want new opportunities but demand old securities as well. They enjoy their newly found freedom but at the same time wish to carry on with old values.

So the effect of urbanization can be seen in every sphere of life but not only in positive way but also in negative way which can be discussed later very briefly-

Wastes are a major problem in the above mention villages especially the village in the village Nainan where wastes plastics is creating a worse problem for the villagers. As mention earlier that, the factory in Falta SEZ imports the plastic wastes from the US and European countries. They are then washed, cleaned, dried and shorted out by the workers. After shorting, the unusual plastics are thrown away outside the factory area in huge quantity. This huge amount of waste plastics gradually soil infertility as well as water pollution of the area. As a result, much cultivated lands slowly converting to abandoned land.

Another negative effect of urbanization can be noticed regarding the health hazards of women labor working in the Falta SEZ. The cleaning process of those wastes plastic is very unhygienic in nature. At first the used plastics wastes dipped into large vats after mixing it with detergent but is often complained that no detergent is provided at all. The women stand inside the vats and rub and clean the plastic with their feet. On many occasions, the waste material is plastered with rotten food residues from hotels, mud, san, animal excreta and even blood, so skin, ailments are common as working continuous in water for long eight hours sift takes its toll. Besides, they have to take their food with their dirty hand because there is no such fresh water facility for washing. So the liver problem is also common. Exposure to chemicals increases the risk of spontaneous abortion and there is sufficient evidence of association between exposure to chemicals and reproductive disorders.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Lastly, it can be conclude that, the globalization process is slowly and gradually entering in the arena of village life. Long distance communication is easier, faster, and cheaper than ever and extends to remote areas. Emigrants transmit information and resources transitional as they maintain their ties with home. Economic development agents and the media promote the idea that work should be for cash rather than mainly for subsistence. Indigenous people and traditional cultures have devised various strategies to deal with threats to their autonomy, identity and livelihood. It is fact that the world is becoming urbanized day by day. In almost every country in the world, the tendency is rapidly increasing to move from village to big cities or urban area. In our country, even though it is developing country, the urban population has been increased from twenty percentages of fifty percentages within ten years. This trend echoes with our preference for living and working in urban area rather than village area. Our view based basically in three perspectives: educational facilities, career opportunities and availability of the basic and essential services. New forms of political mobilization and cultural expression including rights movement are emerging from the interplay of local, regional, national and international cultural forces.

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