

SOCIAL IMPLICATION OF URBANIZATION

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It may appear implausible but it is true that urban areas cry for recognition, for acknowledgement. That such a lifeless and generally speaking, sprawling entity should seek to assert itself must cause surprise. But a city or a town—and that is how an urban area is often defined—is like an organism and palpitates. It is not really inert and lifeless. Too often we make the mistake of depriving a concentration of human beings in a socio-economic sphere of its personality. And it is such a notion that creates all the difficulties in approach and treatment and brings in its wake all the indifference and apathy towards urban problems.

Thanks mainly to western warnings, we appear suddenly to have become aware of what is now popularly called the “urban explosion”. Yet, I have myself never been able to appreciate this morbid fear of urbanization. Indeed, in another context which is not, and should not really be, altogether divorced from the current meaning of the word, we welcome urbanism—its tolerance and catholicity, its polish and gentle sophistication, its physical shape and being and, above all, its cultural and intellectual heritage. Who would not like entire mankind to become urban in that sense? The persistent contradistinction between the urban and the non-urban has helped accumulate stratified attitudes and psychological barriers between human beings. The intellectual snobbery is responsible for much of the misunderstanding and consequently of the dismal failure to deal with the matter sympathetically. Above all, helpless dependence on western diagnosis and medication keeps us further away from real solutions to our problems. The nature of the urban problem in India is vastly different from that of the West though there is a fair common denominator. No one can deny that there is a large migration of people from the rural to the urban areas: I do not propose to burden this paper with an array of statistics on the subject. The reasons are obvious—the possibility of employment for vast masses of people who are currently either unemployed or under-employed in the agricultural sector. What is, however, significant is that this flow is not a regulated or organised movement—it is not preceded by any rational analysis of the principal economic factors which normally determine such human movements. To that extent the shift of population is blind. Neither those who crowd into towns nor those who receive them have any idea, in any scientifically measurable sense, of the nature and extent of the employment opportunity

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in a given situation. Cities and towns are as unaware of their physical and economic potential as the migrants. The resultant confusion causes difficulty for everyone, creates serious economic problems and gives rise to complex social tensions and rapid degeneration of the physical environment. And each of these, in its turn, reacts on the other creating a whole lot of administrative problems.

Assuming that the human being is a gregarious animal, we would be justified in postulating that, by and large, in any group of human beings, who are spatially juxtaposed, there would be some sort of social adjustment and cohesion. In fact, the cohesion will manifest itself along numerous lines and produce the kind of inter-dependence which is the special characteristic of human societies. In rural communities the inter-dependence is less because the social and economic factors operating in those areas are fewer. In urban communities, these factors are more numerous and complex. The result is an extremely complicated pattern of interactions, some visible and assessable, others invisible and not easily distinguishable. The larger the urban community, the greater the play of these diverse forces and consequent tensions and mal-adjustment. To this is added the initial mal-adjustment of the new migrant to the city, which is always present, anyway. In the Indian situation, the social and economic disparity between the real urbanite and the new comer is very great, indeed, whether one likes it or not. Besides, this disparity tends to get perpetuated on account of the presence of a large number recent and old migrants who continue to retain their rural identity. The quick and smooth assimilation of new migrants in this group may appear to be a happy feature but it certainly delays and hampers total integration. Thus, the urban population in our cities consists of easily identifiable groups with little or no communication on the emotional plane among them. The meeting is at the functional level only. This continuing separateness is altogether an undesirable feature and efforts will have to be directed towards the achievement of a greater measure of homogeneity in the urban community. Let it also be stated that economic factors will only partially help fusion and such fusion is often only superficial. Greater mobility on the social plane alone will generate cementing forces of a lasting kind. In this context, urban community development work acquires special meaning but specialised efforts, however well-intentioned, will fail to produce results if similar attention is not bestowed upon the rural areas that feed the town with men and women. Which brings me to the essence of the matter: the quality of our approach to the urban and rural human elements must be roughly similar, even though quantitatively different on account of various limitations. I concede it is a provocative thesis but the logic of the circumstance prevents its rejection and the sooner recognition is given to it and efforts directed towards developing a planning and administrative system which would gradually eliminate discriminatory attitudes, the better for everybody.

If urbanization means only progressive accretion of population and nothing else then it is a meaningless phenomenon. Yet, that is what we are witnessing today. And there appears to be a certain amount of helplessness about it. There is undoubtedly now a growing awareness of the implications of such a menacing development—menacing at once in a physical and psychological sense but the awareness is rather that of the spectator than of the participant. Plans and programmes to avert the avalanche or to organise the change so as to give it a meaning and a purpose appear to be woefully absent. Maybe, this indifference is due to an unawareness of the total situation with all its social significance. The impact registers itself in an erratic manner and action programmes are undertaken in a disjointed way. Some of it is undoubtedly due to administrative shortcomings but the main difficulty springs from an inadequate insight into the human aspect of the great change that is contemporaneously taking place. Once the social aspect of the problem is fully understood, the application of measures to meet the challenge would become more intelligent and determined. Today, spasmodic and half-hearted attempts to meet the housing shortage or the provision of more potable water or more schools seems to satisfy both Governments and local bodies. Each specialist or administrator thinks only of that facet of the situation with which he is familiar or concerned to the exclusion of the other facets, as, indeed, happens so often in a rigidly compartmentalised and bureaucratic system of policy formulation and implementation. There is no over-all policy yet ; no urban ideology has emerged. On the other hand, we are constantly being reminded of the urban explosion. Fragmentary action may hearten the government and the administration but it cannot sustain the social structure that is in the making. What is urgently needed is a complete understanding of the entire nature of the development, the evolution of a progressive and enlightened policy embracing all aspects of it and action along all the lines that unfold themselves. Naturally, many disciplines will be involved and inter-disciplinary understanding will have to permeate the task if integrated action is sought. I can do no better than quote from a report prepared by so sagacious an administrator as the late V.T. Krishnamachari :

“It is obvious that plans of development of rural and urban areas cannot be prepared in isolation from one another. Plans of social and economic development of rural areas have to be linked up closely with those of adjoining urban areas. Such coordination has to be continuous. For example, production programmes in villages which are in proximity to towns have to be framed so as to meet the needs of the towns. Suitable markets and marketing centres linking up such areas have also to be planned after careful surveys, with connected roads and other facilities. Similarly, programmes of education, medical relief, water supply, extension of house-sites etc. for both areas have to be viewed as a whole in order to

avoid overlapping and waste of effort.”¹ No wiser advice could have been given.

This leads us on to the major question of the institutional arrangements, with the necessary legal sanction, to undertake the task. The initial need of a philosophy and a policy has already been stressed. But in the absence of a proper managerial organisation, the objectives will not be achieved. What emerges from the foregoing analysis is the need of an administrative arrangement rather different from what we have today because the challenge of urbanization is proposed to be met not from the outside, as it were, but from within. That is to say, urbanization considered not in its narrow and somewhat artificial sense as an “urban” phenomenon but as a social phenomenon. The scale of action has thus to be not merely spatial or functional but basically human. The administrative change recently brought about for the sustenance of Panchayati Raj institutions was in the nature of a fundamental change but it was, in a sense, only a partial effort.

In the absence of links or institutions to produce cohesion between these new institutions and the existing urban local bodies, gaps in the administrative system have continued to exist resulting in disharmony in the field of implementation and inconclusiveness in regard to the over-all policy. Coordination is an easy enough word to use as much as the over-worked idea of mutual representation. Unfortunately, however, those who have been involved with administration can probably, in all honesty, claim more experience of the lack of coordination than of its employment, and mutual representation often results in the creation of hostile camps. In any case, these devices seldom succeed in creating cohesion or in arousing a sense of common purpose. As much as administrative systems are meant to be the efficient instruments for the speedy achievement of social objectives they must also symbolise the social spirit. It is no wonder, therefore, that some progressive countries prefer to call the organism the “Social Community” and do not use expressions like the “urban community” or the “rural community”. While this is not exactly the occasion for a detailed examination of the administrative set-up needed to usher in the new social structure and to nurture it so as to help develop it in all its magnitude and grandeur, it would perhaps not be altogether inopportune to suggest that the present system of administration and the various institutions functioning therein are not entirely conducive to the achievement of the new purpose in view or even to tackle competently the new problems that are arising. The present system is good enough so far as it goes but it is basically still negative in character and, at best, helps tide over difficulties rather than respond adequately and enthusiastically to the dynamism

1. V. T. Krishnamachari, *Report on Indian and State Administrative Services and Problems of District Administration*, p. 54.

of the social change. It rather prevents break-downs than helps construct, certainly an excellent maintenance unit but not very much more. What new institutions would be needed must await clearer analysis and I have no doubt the Administrative Reforms Commission would give thought to the matter. I can on this occasion only refer to the new and challenging idea of "area management" which has acceptable and practicable attributes but would need to be carefully modified to suit our conditions and then tested out before being extended. The constitutional, legal and political aspects of the proposed change would also need to be carefully examined before any fundamental deviations are undertaken. It will be foolish to dogmatise that this or that system of administration or chain of institutions would best subserve the purpose in view but it can certainly be asserted that colonial institutions have failed to deliver the goods and build democratic traditions in administration. And mere tinkering at it will only further confound basic issues. The aim should be clear—a welfare society needs the emergence of a social community, and institutions for its sustenance and governance must draw their authority and inspiration from the people—at all levels—and make active participation possible. The Central and State Governments have undoubtedly a very vital role in this drama: they must make the over-all policy, ensure the implementation of these liberal policies through provision of funds and such guidance as may be possible but the local areas where the first and continuing impact of urbanization is most felt must be ready to cope with the problem. Urban local bodies thus have a major role to play and on their enlightened functioning would depend the quality and character of urbanization: whether it becomes an unmitigated evil leading to the disruption of the social organism or a lasting blessing to human society.

Urban local government as it is understood in modern societies did not grow from below in our country but was foisted upon the people from above. But the motivation was basically sound even though it was coloured to some extent by financial considerations, that is to say, it was felt that it would be easier to raise fiscal resources for education, health, roads and the like at the local level if the people of the areas were associated with local administration, and to that extent the then Imperial Government would be saved the burden. However, for a long time local government was wholly under government control. As a result, popular response was not only not awakened, a feeling of hostility towards the local administration was generated. It is unfortunate that the nightmare of the past still persists and creates tensions within the municipality even today. They have thus had a bad start and continue to arouse doubt as to their usefulness, in varying degrees, even today among otherwise politically conscious and democratically minded people. These psychological hurdles hamper the full-flowering of a popular institution which is at the base of democratic decentralisation. For instance, one hears of the interminable argument about the roles of the deliberative and executive wings of an urban

local government but seldom comes across a similar controversy at the state or federal levels. And yet, it is through local self-governing bodies that the challenge of urban problems can be met. It may be necessary to modify their structure, functions and jurisdiction. A measure of adjustment with Panchayati Raj institutions may be found necessary. A new purpose and dimension may have to be given to both or perhaps to a wholly new institution which would combine the functions and characteristics of both. The tendency on the part of state governments to take over many of the functions of local bodies either for direct administration or by creating somewhat unnatural special purpose agencies is entirely undesirable and severe stresses and strains at the human level are bound to manifest themselves sooner or later affecting the entire body-politic, helping erode the foundations of democracy. Besides, the process is not even logical in the frame-work of a socialistic pattern of democratic society. Once the spiral of such a force is let loose, it will end up in consuming all people's institutions even at the highest levels. No wonder the Rural-Urban Relationship Committee of the Government of India urged that "the remedy lies not in depriving the local bodies of their functions but in improving and strengthening their organisational and administrative set-up, allocating to them adequate resources and giving expert and technical help, in the discharge of their functions."² The report goes on to say: "there has to be greater state control, supervision and guidance in regard to functions which have either regional, state or national implications" but it adds "nevertheless, there are community activities and functions which are best performed only by local authorities" and that "it is evident that the urban local body should generally be entrusted with the execution of programmes which relate exclusively to its jurisdiction." The vast and complex situation created by urbanization necessitates a great deal of new thinking on the subject so that the phenomenon which is essentially socio-economic in character is utilised to the best advantage of mankind. The Rural-Urban Relations Committee, to which a reference has been made earlier, gave careful thought to the matter and recommended that it had in mind "an administrative system which may be called, for want of a better expression, area management. That is to say, a whole area should be treated as one unit for administrative purposes, and rural and urban areas falling within it should be treated as integral parts of the area for purposes of over-all planning and implementation of development projects. This will promote political and emotional integration and remove the hiatus which exists between the urban and the rural dwellers and pave the way for the evolution of an organic community. It is true that the emphasis will vary from locality to locality but the approach will be similar. The existing devices to secure a modicum of integration are basically of a mechanical nature

2. Government of India, Ministry of Health and Family Planning, *Report of the Rural-Urban Relationship Committee*, pp. 16-17 (1966).

which often tend to accentuate differences by focussing attention of features of contra-distinction. It is obvious that a more human and organic system of administration alone can help build integrated units.”³ I cannot help but quote further from the Report not merely because I happened to be a member of the Committee, but because I feel convinced that the recommendations of the Committee provide the outline of a new philosophy which contains in it at least some of the answers to the social implications of urbanization. The concluding observations of the Committee are pertinent: “The transition from the agricultural to the industrial economy and the consequent spread of urbanization are symptomatic of the tendency of homogenisation of the various sectors of society. The gap between the rural and the urban tends to be narrowed down as the standard of living improves and social change takes place. The attainment of human welfare depends upon sociability and community of interest among the different sections of the society. The maintenance of distinctions like the caste or the class and the antimony between the rural and urban create disharmonies, conflicts and maladjustments and thus act as barriers to social cohesion and the development of an integrated human personality.”⁴ I consider it an advantage that we have become aware of the phenomenon of urbanization because it gives us an opportunity to deal with it not as an unwelcome development but as a sociological development which has the potentiality of enriching the spirit of human society. Rather than that people continued to stay in a state of somnolence in detached compartments it is better that we are face to face with an upsurge that may result in the humanisation of society. That then should, even if it is not looked upon as such contemporaneously, be the social implication of urbanization. Yet, by way of a ghastly contrast, towns and cities are labelled as A, B and C class on the basis of the population they hold and given recognition by the state. Population has become a status symbol, alas, inspite of abominable degradation of living conditions. Is it not time for a re-valuation of values, for giving a higher recognition to those urban areas which provide better facilities for a good life to their citizens?

Almost all theories of State, whatever their logic or hypotheses, postulate a stable and unchanging social situation. The constitutions and the laws, whether unwritten or codified, custom-based or otherwise, tend to provide protection to the State and the individual through institutions which are tradition-oriented and somehow seem to take it for granted that the social organism is a static thing, that it conforms to a fixed pattern of inter-relationship and behaviour. Unfortunately, however, these expectations are constantly being belied. Maybe, a new theory of State will emerge, which will be basically empirical and have enough flexibility to

3. Government of India, Ministry of Health and Family Planning, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 4 .

accommodate new relationships. In the meantime, the laws, as they are, must be interpreted and understood in the context of the perpetual conflict between the State and the citizen, the community being thrown in as a buffer.

Mahatma Gandhi's abhorrence of the growing omnipotence of the State was born out of his desire to conserve the individuality of the human being and yet he was neither an anarchist nor a nihilist. The concentration of a large number of people, not wholly integrated, into an area compels the introduction of complex administrative measures of an extremely impersonal kind and all manner of laws to sustain the administration. Such laws are ostensibly for the protection of the individual. But protection against whom? And why should such protection be necessary? The answers to these questions are not difficult to seek but they all lead towards the inexorable process of thinking that man is his worst enemy. The result is more laws and an enlarged bureaucracy for keeping urban concentrations in some shape, and the gradual diminution of the stature of the individual. In our impatience and temporary exasperation, we are prone to ask for more and more laws, hoping that these would ensure protection against lawless elements. It is seldom realised that each such statute results ultimately in the attenuation of one's personality and becomes an encroachment on one's freedom. The more complicated the fabric of society and the greater the heterogeneity in its composition, the greater is the dependence on laws to regulate human conduct. If, on the other hand, through evolutionary and animated processes human beings could be better integrated on the socio-economic plane, it is not unlikely that conduct and behaviour would not require so much of external regulation. It is not intended to insinuate that all laws are futile and unnecessary. The concept of law as a desire to regulate relationships cannot but be accepted but it would be a mistake to assume that law can create relationships. Laws should liberate rather than incarcerate; should define the privileges of the people rather than the powers of the State.

The pressure of urbanization of an entirely haphazard kind, without proper preparation, has necessitated the enactment of a large variety of laws. In fact, a senior judge once confided in me that he was unable to keep pace with the increasing volume and variety of laws. If the treatment of human beings could be scientifically organised, maybe some of the laws now considered unavoidable would not have been necessary. For instance, we constantly talk of the laws regarding land acquisition. The Constitution is quoted from both sides and urban development is linked up with the law on the subject. But has any attempt been made to arrive at a theoretical basis? The Government of India has had the whole question examined several times during the last decade and the matter is at the moment under fresh investigation by a committee headed by a distinguished retired judge. One can only hope some decisions will

be taken not so much to simplify procedures for land acquisition but to elucidate the policy of Government about land itself—not land as an urban commodity only. Further, has thought been given to the problem of disposal of acquired land? Should it continue to belong to the community having been acquired in its name or should it be transferred as property to individuals? These are basic questions which do not appear to get answered. I am making a passing reference to these matters only to emphasize the point made earlier that a new social order is emerging—whatever the reason—and a new approach to the problems of the situation has to be evolved. Mere tinkering at the laws will not help as the amended laws will still reflect obsolete or dying values. If there is confusion about objectives, there is bound to be worse confusion as regards the methods for the fulfilment of these objectives. And law and procedure for the dispensation of justice are only tools of a system of social philosophy. Take for example the question of zoning regulations, the reasonable restrictions imposed by town planning and the like. Current attitudes will suffer a sea-change if the attitude of society towards land itself undergoes a change. It is to this sphere of absolute values that much more thought should be given. Whereas the physical and financial aspects of urbanization are important and must be tackled boldly, it should be remembered that the social and psychological aspects of it are of greater significance and should not get out of focus. The laws we make and administer should help smoothen relationships rather than perpetuate conflicts.