

EVOLUTION OF AN INDIAN CITY: FROM CALCUTTA TO KOLKATA

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ABSTRACT

Historically the transition of villages to cities was the final and most important stage of development in all largest cities around the world. In this context, the article attempts to understand the evolution of Kolkata not only from urban expansion but also from social and economic perspective of population composition. Since its foundation in 1690 by the side of the Hooghly River, Kolkata (the then Calcutta) was an important trade centre due to its excellent communication network. During the colonial period it was the capital of British India. The visible command of the city around its neighbouring regions influenced in-migration from the subcontinent and Europe. After the Indian independence, the region experienced an influx of refugees. This article also explores the integrated social relationship among communities in the city. By diversity of time, the last decade witnessed a negative population growth in Kolkata though the population was densely distributed.

Keywords: Urbanisation, Urban history, Kolkata, Social structure

1. Introduction

Urbanisation is a process of switch from spread out pattern of human settlements to urban centres (Davis, 1962: 3-26) and the consequent spatial and physical changes in the region. Urban growth refers to the increase in concentration of people living inside a town or a city which is often random and intensely variable between places (Kumar and Sangwan, 2013: 88-91). India is one of the fastest and largest growing economies in the world, but it is also one of the least urbanized. The total number of urban centres in India increased at an extremely slow pace (2500 in the last ten decades), however, it shot up to 2774 in just the last decade (Kundu, 2014: 541-566). These cities mostly evolved in a haphazard and unplanned manner. Recently, Indian cities underwent a phenomenal growth. Rapid urbanisation led to new issues of densification, congestion, traffic, and stress on infrastructure. This transition of cities was preceded by

important economic changes. Innumerable reasons like population growth, economic development, migration, and infrastructural innovations transformed villages to towns, towns to cities and cities into metro cities (Singh, 2012).

Historically, the transition from the village to city structure was found to be the final and most important development in the largest and important cities around the world (Rowe, 1900: 721-745). Different schools of thoughts have often debated to identify the possible nature of the forces that determined the development of city life. These were sometimes on the basis of a common religion (De Coulanges, 2012) or the concept of a fortified place that provided refuge to the neighbouring population at times of danger (Ihering, 1897). However, most of these concepts were more relevant for the Western cities and failed to effectively explain the growth and expansion of Indian cities. The cities in India gradually developed over a period of time. The ancient cities of Varanasi, Kanchipuram, Bhubaneshwar, Madurai etc. are diverse and basically built as a settlement with physical layouts influenced by Hindu Vedic principles and the concept of cosmos (Kumari, 2020). The cities of Hyderabad, Lucknow, old Delhi etc. developed during the Muslim rule in India. Another form of settlement like that found in Jaisalmer, Bikaner, Jodhpur etc. were built and encircled with the walls of forts. However, the cities formed during the colonial rule, like Puducherry, Bombay, Kolkata etc. are relatively young and their social and physical structure show the amalgamation of Indian culture and colonial functions. The most recent cities were formed after the independence of India and were specifically function-oriented like the industrial townships and a few planned cities (ibid).

One common character of most Indian cities was the importance of market that strengthened its territorial ties with the surrounding regions. The components of urban growth in India revealed that the less urbanised states grew mostly through natural increase whereas that for the more urbanised states was by the process of migration (Bhagat and Mohanty, 2009: 5-20). With increasing population, the urban economy encouraged division of labour. This was particularly important as it created more occupational opportunities other than the sole dependence on agriculture, eventually attracting more population into the urban areas. With time, it also developed the agricultural sector and established interdependence among the inhabitants, leading to the growth of a strong urban centre. This encouraged the possibility of specialization in trade and industry as well as developed the service and counter-service bonds, increasing the complexities of territorial ties (Rowe, 1900: 721-745). As a result, the economic transformation led the way to stronger and complex social setups. Urban development created industrial modernity, in turn framing the transition from agrarian to industrial society (Fields, 1999: 102-128). Most of the Indian cities took shape with the influence of rulers of the time who tried to establish a strong foothold in the region. Later these cities developed as individual urban entities,

solely by the influence of the social manners, customs, and economic relations among the inhabitants.

Indian settlements are largely segregated geographically by religion, social and communal characters of its citizens. Generally, communities, whether they are in big cities or villages in India, are always immensely complicated agglomerations of primary and secondary groups and networks, as well as an array of economic, political, religious, cultural, and many other institutions and structures, most of them organized hierarchically (Gans, 2009: 211-219). With the expansion of the city a process of population distribution occurs which sifts, sorts, and relocates individuals and groups by residence and occupation (Burgess, 1925: 47-62). Urban restructuring of population creates an urban mosaic which always undergoes a complicated and constant change (Van Kempen, 2007: 13-31). The urban society is heavily influenced by the past and present population who altered to certain social and economic customs and specific occupational structure (Dutt, 1989: 151-162). It is extremely common to find different residential zones especially in Indian cities according to the function and population structure. Though they expand and create a diversified and culturally assimilated citizenship, the practice of segregation, separates the people because of upper / middle and lower social and economic class distinction (Mehra, 2011: 39-42). These dimensions of segregation i.e., social, and economic are strongly connected with one another. Income differences and social inequalities often overlap and create an aggregate urban pattern in Indian cities.

This study attempted to understand the evolution of the city of Kolkata. This Indian city was established initially from a cluster of villages and transitioned to a metropolis with industrial development. Prior to the urban form, not much can be deciphered on its rural nature. This article tried to understand the growth not only in terms of urban expansion but also by the social and economic composition of the population. Information on the municipal history of the city was also collected. Multiple literature on Kolkata from various time periods which recorded the society and city structure aided the completion of this article. Information was also gathered from official District Census Handbooks from different time periods. In conclusion, the population structure and space delineation in Kolkata based on Census of India over the last 50 years is also presented. The main aim of this paper was to explore the transition of Calcutta to Kolkata, focussing on its population and associated spatial structure and dynamics over the years.

2. History of establishment:

Kolkata (the then Calcutta) was founded in 1690 on a small natural levee, by the side of the Hooghly River, on the edge of a deltaic swamp. Three small villages namely, Sutanuti, Gobindapur and Kolikatta nucleated to form the present metropolis of Kolkata. Written records

suggest that the settlements were arranged as hamlets, with a higher caste composition in the oldest portions (Sinha, 1978). On 24th August 1690 Job Charnock established a factory in Sutanati and settled in the place. Officially, this date is considered as the foundation of the Calcutta city (District Census Handbook, 1991). The company received permission from the Nawab to build a fort (Munsi, 1975) on the eastern banks of the Hooghly River. The place was sparsely populated at that time, but was situated in an ideal location for trade and communication. The East India Company arrived here after almost fifty years since Job Charnock established his factory. Though the ground beside the riverside was swampy and inadequate for settlement; yet the English selected the highest level of ground and the basic design of was like urban European transplants on the maritime regions of Asia. These were generally built on limited space and focussed on the advantages and disadvantages solely from the perspective of the merchant (Sinha, 1978). There was once an old fort called Fort William, built in 1692, during the reign of William the Third. This extended from the middle of Clive Street to the northern edge of the Tank Square and served much like the feudal castles of England. It was brought down in 1819 to make way for the Custom House (Long, 1974). In a survey conducted by the East India Company in 1707, it was found that a great Bazar was located almost at half a mile from this fort (Sinha, 1978). This was the most densely populated built-up area in the city. This early city provided an excellent communication network that gave it an ideal location as a seaport, situated on a navigable river and connected by rivers, navigable canals, and roads especially beneficial for trade. From 1700 onwards, the area came to be known as **Calcutta** to the English (Figure 1). In 1707, the Company declared Calcutta to be a separate Presidency, accountable only to the Directors in London. Gradually, the East India Company took a lease of 38 more villages in and around Calcutta in 1717. The settlement by this time had already become a commercial, administrative, residential, and military complex; located within an area of two hundred and fifty acres of land (ibid). By 1757, it was developed to be the largest city and commercial centre of the sub-continent. From 1774 to 1912 Calcutta was the capital of British India and the second most important city after London. The opportunities for trade and employment developed and encouraged more people to settle. From the initial export of silk and cotton to England, to the enormous increase in the trade of jute; by the middle of the 19th century Calcutta was a flourishing centre of business. Since 1750, almost half of India's sea-borne trade was passed through Calcutta (Murphey, 1964: 241-256). Production of oil seeds and tea vastly increased and Calcutta became the node of the trade route of Assam, Bengal, and the whole of the Ganga valley (Sinha, 1978). Calcutta was such flourishing and rapidly growing city at the time that H. James Rainey (1876) denoted the city as "Metropolis of the East --- Capital of British India, The seat of the Supreme Government, of the Metropolitan, and a University, Emporium of Bengal and without a doubt the most important city in all Asia" in his book: A Historical and Topographical Sketch of Calcutta (Rainey, 1876).

The history of the municipal administration in Calcutta dates to 1727 by a royal charter. In 1774 Warren Hastings proposed boundaries for Calcutta from Khari Juri, (village) in the south, Palta (village) in the north, Bidyadhari river in the east and river Ganges in the west (Nair, 1989). In 1779, the southern boundary was extended to the Kidderpore Nullah. In 1794, Lord Cornwallis demarcated the boundaries of Calcutta from Maratha Ditch in the north, Circular Road in the east, the Ganges in the west and from Lower Circular Road to Kidderpore Bridge and Tolly's Nullah to the river including the Fort and Cooly Bazaar (Hastings) in the south (Constable, 1916). The municipal boundaries expanded further and Fort William, Hastings and Maidan were excluded in the Act XVI of 1847. The area of Hastings was re-included in Act V of 1868. Between 1850 to 1881, the total municipal area was divided into 18 wards. In 1888, the Municipal boundaries were extended by the inclusion of suburbs lying east and south of Lower Circular Road. Seven wards were brought within the fold and additions were made to three other wards in the north of the town, summing up to 25 wards. After 1923, the adjacent municipalities of Cossipore, Manicktola, Chitpore and Garden Reach were amalgamated with Kolkata and the total number of wards of the city increased to 32. Garden Reach was later separated. The city limits under the municipal corporation decreased in 1941 and later increased in 1951 (Census of India, 1951).

3. Demographics of Calcutta in the pre-independence era:

Early documents recorded that, by middle of the 18th century, Calcutta looked like a 'fenced city' with Europeans residing within the 'white town' on the northern fringe and the Maratha Ditch surrounding the 'native quarters' (Sinha, 1978). In 1821, Hindus (118,203), Muslims (48,162), Christians (13,138) and Chinese (414) along with the European and Eurasian were the major population groups in Calcutta (Bhattacharya & Bhattacharya, 1963, pp. 71). About 10,000 people daily commuted to the city in this duration (Long, 1974). The population of Calcutta began to grow steadily but not rapidly in the last quarter of the 18th Century (Ghose, 1960). In 1837, an estimate by the then Police Superintendent of Calcutta on house taxes showed that between 1821 and 1837, population in the city increased by 50,000 persons. Calcutta was a thriving city of the period. In-migration was inevitable to this place. No official migration estimates were available however, the skewed sex-ratio of more adult males in the city partially confirmed this. The town had a heterogenous population of more Bengali Hindus than Bengali Muslims. The growth rate of the Muslim population was estimated to be more than the Hindu population between 1798 and 1837. According to Finch (1850), the lack of protein in diet and bathing ritual in the Ganges increased the mortality among the latter group, in turn affecting the population growth. The upper and middle ranks in social and economic stratification of the city were dominated by the Hindus. A handful of Muslims, mostly rich merchants occupied ranks in the administrative units. With British administrative reforms, most of the population were

employed as clerks or as junior administrators in the Revenue and Judicial departments. More Hindus were employed in these positions than the Muslims as the level of education was low among the later. A Hindu middle-income group was formed in this period. Long (1974) estimated the average population of Calcutta in 1850 as Europeans (7,534), Eurasians (4,660), Americans (892), Chinese (847), Hindus (2,74,506), Muslims (1,11,170) and other Asiatics (15,454) along with 100,000 Hindus who commuted daily. During 1860s and 1870s Calcutta experienced tremendous influx of migrants in the city. Soon the small settlement grew up into a prosperous commercial city of the east. High population density was always a concern of overcrowding and space scarcity. Uneven distribution and density of city population created shortage of civic amenities in low and medium densely populated areas. Long (1974), mentioned that the infrastructure like the drainage system etc. worsened during this period to such extents that, the Europeans migrated from Tank square and found new abodes in the Chowringhee which was in the outskirts of the town. High mortality rates prevailed among the Europeans (ibid).

Bose (1965) described Calcutta to have a cosmopolitan environment, comprising of multiple communities like the Sikh workers from Punjab, businessmen from Rajasthan and Gujarat, professionals from Kerala and Madras and Hindi speaking bearers and labourers from the neighbouring states alongwith native Bengali speaking Muslims and Hindus. Later after the partition of the country in 1947, the population count increased exponentially with the huge influx of refugees especially from East Pakistan (present day Bangladesh).

4. Social structure of Calcutta in the pre-independence era:

Sociologists like Nirmal Kumar Bose (1965) considered Kolkata to be a 'premature metropolis' where familial and communal ties existed in a modern commercial and administrative centre. Social mobility in Bengal occurred since the 18th century. Occupation was not framed rigidly based on caste but all professions were open for all (Mukherjee, 1977). Breaking of the caste boundaries for occupation was noticeable. The probable reason for this fluidity might have been an outcome of the job scarcity which dissolved boundaries for work (Bose, 1965). Caste however remained important in topics of marriage and inheritance. In the 19th century, the British controlled the political destiny of Bengal. Public concerns for the Indians were English education, *Sati* (a practice in which a widow sacrifices herself on her husband's pyre), the right of Indians to sit as Jurors, the defence of private property and the demand for better positions of Indians in the British administration. Mukherjee (1977) noticed that another area of collective involvement especially for the Calcutta elites were matters related to caste which were settled in *castecutcherries* (social assemblies). This system was later replaced by '*dals*' (social groups) lead by '*dalapatis*' (group leaders) in the 19th century. Slowly, this evolved into a competition between the elites of the city to gain control over the population (ibid).

A pilot survey conducted in Calcutta in 1806 gathered statistics on land use and land ownership prior to the Census reports. The survey was based on the House Assessment Books of the Kolkata Corporation. These HABs were specifically constructed for the purpose of taxation by the municipal government and were irregular which covered only a part of the city. Mukherjee (1977) tried to associate a few of these HABs to prepare a study on the social morphology of Calcutta that gave a picture of the societal structure of that time. His views on the Machooa Bazar Road (now in central Kolkata) presented an interesting sociological pattern of co-existence of people from different religious, social and occupational background. Mukherjee recorded,

‘The richest man (in terms of ownership of property) in this neighbourhood was a Muslim maulavi whose neighbours were two Muslims, a brahmin, one kansari, one sadgop, three or four kayasthas, one well-known Babu, one subarnavanik and a prostitute. The plots were not equal in size or value. The brahmin and the Babu has very large plots containing many residential quarters, gardens, tanks, but the maulavi’s Bazar and his shops were more valuable than the former’s property. The sadgop had the cheapest and smallest plot in the neighbourhood; he owned 4 straw huts whose rent value was only Rs. 3. The prostitute owned a small lower roomed house and a mosque. She was richer than many others in the neighbourhood.’

These historic data were useful in construction of ideas on the social change in the city over a time: change in the size of plots, premises, ownership of property and change in the value of land, the number of streets and gave an idea on the social morphology of Kolkata and the type of neighbourhoods. However, there were serious problems of the surveyed data like lack of standardized spellings and numbers of the streets and the areas by the collectors of the data or standardizing the names of the owners and few could not even be identified. Identifying and associating the names of individuals as a basic working unit was impossible for this survey. To overcome such difficulties, the property owners were grouped broadly into 9 categories: Europeans, Muslim, non-Bengali Hindus, Bengali Hindus, Parsee, Chinese, Voluntary Society, Government, and unclassified (some low castes and others). The Bengalis were further subdivided into 33 caste groups. Female owners were segregated under each criterion. Property owned by prostitutes were also recorded. Identifying the caste was difficult from Bengali Hindu surnames thus, as a reference, already printed texts like works of Risley (1891-92), Bhattacharya (1968), Banerjee (1356 Bengali era) and Ghosh (1964-66) were used. A general assumption was made that people from same castes lived in the same neighbourhoods. Artisan castes lived together, kinsfolk lived in the same neighbourhood, lower castes, Muslims, non-Bengalis were often distributed in the same areas. Residential segregation was evident for Calcutta in the 19th century. During this period, the central and south-eastern part of the town was residential. Europeans and seven Bengali Hindu caste groups constituted the upper and middle groups of the society whereas, the non-Bengalis and the Muslims comprised the lower strata of the order, who

mostly lived in straw and tiled huts and were engaged in the transport service. The poorest section were the untouchables and the poor artisan castes like the *Muchis*. The richest group were the Europeans. There was a Muslim concentration in the central and south-eastern portions of the town where they owned properties here. The non-Bengalis closely followed. Calcutta emerged as a commercial town, with prime occupation as involvement in primary activities but with not fully established urban development.

Calcutta in the 19th century was peaceful, devoid of periodic riots, mob-violence and political murders, quite in contrast with the situation that disrupted the social order in the 20th century. The English created opportunities in trade, commerce and ownership and management of land since the beginning. Opulent merchants, small traders, junior administrators, land holders and bankers formed the aristocrat class especially families with surnames as Deb, Tagore, Dey, Ghosh, Mallick etc. were the first urbanized social groups of the 19th century (Mukherjee, 1977) in the city. Predominantly this aristocrat group followed Hinduism. Rich Muslim merchants such as Shaikh Abdullah and Shaikh GhulamHosein, also were the elite class of the city (ibid). Eurasian youths were mostly engaged in clerical professions. However, there was an evident wage difference between them and Bengali clerks in commercial houses (Sinha, 1978). English education gained prominence to balance out these issues and many Indo-Bengali schools came up and educationalists like H. L. V. Derozio was one of the greatest contributors. This period of early 19th century was the start of the Bengal Renaissance. Education was however provided in multiple regional languages and Bengali language was not made compulsory in educational institutions.

5. Population distribution, space and access to amenities and infrastructure in the pre-independence era:

The English planned Calcutta in typical colonial pattern. The first official settlement of the East India company was established around the Dalhousie Square or Lal Dighi area. This was predominantly the white town. The buildings were *pucca*(permanent), surfaced roads, sanitary services existed, water supply, gas and electric light were the first signs of infrastructural development of the area in comparison to the adjacent areas. Street watering commenced in 1818, streets were lighted with gas in 1857, supply of filtered water began in 1874, electricity in mansions started in 1899, Sir Stuart Hogg market opened in 1874 and expanded in 1909 etc. (Munsi, 1975). In the 18th century, the Tank Square was the heart of the white town or the European quarters and the centre of the European business agencies. Big merchant houses and firms of the time like Alexander & Co., Mackintosh & Co., Cruttenden& Co., Messers, Stuart & Co. Fergusson & Co. etc. ran successfully in the place. They traded in spices, clothes, liquor, wine, indigo, opium alongwith manufacturing businesses like carpentry, glass work, gun making, distillery etc. focussing on the European population of the city.

The adjacent black town in the north, was the residential area of the Indians of the city and their economic and social stimuli depended on the 'bazar' in the area. This is the present-day Shobha Bazar area. The white town later extended to Chowringhee towards the south, pushing the native town more towards the north and east. Incidences like exclusive use of swimming clubs for the whites or monopoly of the whites to use palanquins to avoid the city transport system existed (Munsi, 1975). Racial segregation transformed to class and cultural segregation. The prominent native families were however provided alternative lands by the Company. Spatial hierarchy was markedly observed in access to services. Chattopadhyay (2007), mentioned that the Indian population complained about the installation of gaslights in the city was unreliable in the north compared to a few places in the south where European population lived. This area saw introduction of electricity supply and was equipped with free electric lights for three months as a part of 'experimental demonstration' (Report of Municipal Administration of Calcutta, 1912-13). The nucleus of the native town were the affluent Hindu-Bengali merchant and elite class of Calcutta (except for one north-Indian Khatri family), the Debs in Sobha Bazar, the Thakurs in Pathuriaghata and Jorasanko, The Fhosals in Khidderpore and other parts of Northern Calcutta (Sinha, 1978). They basically were *zamindars* (land-owners) of the region who owned small areas or villages towards the north of the city. Ethnic group clustering was evident (Bose, 1965). The population were differentiated not only by their language or culture but by their occupation (ibid). There existed overlapping of space in many portions of the city. The buildings were in contrast to the white town with kutcha houses, unsurfaced roads, open drains with no lighting services, infested with dirt and poverty. Infrastructural development was low to almost nil in the native town. This was till the middle of the 19th century. The residents were generally the migrants who had moved to the city in search of employment. Sometimes there existed a 'palace' amidst the shanty buildings of the locals of some ruler in the black town. It showed a strong indication of class and race discrimination of the time. Civic infrastructure to deal with escalating pandemics like plague dengue, malaria, smallpox, diphtheria, cholera, tuberculosis and respiratory diseases were inadequate however, the administration took proper care to classify and dispose of dead bodies by performing the last rights according to religion (Chattopadhyay, 2007). The present-day Lenin Sarani or the Dharmatala Street was the divide between white town and the native area. The market or the bazaars in the north established tenanted land or *bustees* (slums) in the adjoining areas which became the most prized possessions for the landlords. These were generally lent out to the poorer classes who were engaged in various informal works. There was a high concentration of Muslim occupational groups like table servants, tailors and lawyers starting from the south-western part of the intermediate town (Sinha, 1978). The physical infrastructure in these areas were in contrast to the northern native areas of the city but could be differentiated with the European settlement. Muslim landownership was a noticeable feature of the intermediate zone and the immediate suburbs of the city.

Chattopadhyay (2007) described Khidderpore area at the west as one of the poorest wards with 'abysmal' living standards. This area was even mentioned as one of the unhealthiest places to live in the city in the Calcutta Corporation administrative report of 1912-13. The area recorded the highest mortality due to the influenza pandemic in 1918. The wards here housed labourers and witnessed many labour protests during 1920-21. Sinha (1978) added that the upper and middle classes of the Muslim community lacked a spatial cohesion but were concentrated in the north-west and the south-east parts of this area as well as the outlying parts of the Indian towns. To the north-western sector of the intermediate town was a cosmopolitan community of Persian, Arab, Parsi, Armenian, Jewish, Greek and Gujrati. Portuguese and Armenian churches can still be located in the city. These intermediate towns were connected by intricate bazaars and were the main stimulus for urban expansion. The largest and grand mosque of Calcutta called the Nakhoda Masjid is in close proximity to this area. Though, territorially there was not much expansion in Calcutta at the period but, the settlement showed urban characteristics of expansion like increased built up structures, clearing off the forest area and marshy lands for settlement, increasing the population density. Today, all of these establishments are situated within limits of the extended core area of Kolkata.

However, the racial discrimination not only existed between the Europeans and the natives but also within the Eurasian community based on skin colour. Sinha (1978) cited a term *Callah Feringhee* which was mentioned in the notes of Mr. Justice Hyde, a Supreme Court judge in the late 18th century. They generally belonged to the Portuguese community; children descended from European fathers and native mothers; later termed as 'Anglo-Indian.' The children mostly had European names though their mothers retained their association with their own caste or community till death. The Anglo-Indian community indicated a degree of exclusiveness in the upper strata of the community. Though residential segregation existed among the European community, the lower strata of people lived in close proximity to the higher and middle quintile of people of the European descent. This was the Bowbazar area of Calcutta in the early 19th century. The presence of a China town here, further complicated the ethnic composition of the area. This area still holds the famous Tiretta Bazar on Chitpur Road. The eastern fringes belonged to the neighbouring Indian town. Many areas in this portion of the city had European Street names in the mid-18th century which later changed to Bengali names in the next century. The Burrabazar formed as the main central wholesale market and till today continue being one of the busiest the business hub. North-Indian Khattris, Agarwals, Seths and Marwari Oswalsalongwith Bengali gold merchants operated in this area. Written records describe the area distinguished by the Marwari community (Long, 1860). During the closing year of First World War (1918), acute scarcity created a price-rise for essential commodities like daily food items and cloth, making life difficult for the middle and lower economic households and flaring a violent environment (Chattopadhyay, 2007: 212-239). A 'cloth-riot' begun for the unemployed or

semi-employed Urdu-speaking, Muslim poor and directed against a section of the rich non-Bengali cloth merchants reflecting an ethno-linguistic, class and religious division in the city (ibid).

The establishment of industries like jute mills (first in Rishra in 1859), development of the first railway line (Howrah and Rianiganj), first steamer constructed (Kidderpore in 1823) and the first vessel entered the Kidderpore dock (1882), Calcutta became the most important commercial and administrative unit of the British in India. With the abundance of cheap labour, segregation due to poverty was evident in Calcutta in this time period. This led to an increase of slums in the city. There was almost nil to very little change in the distribution of slums (bustees) or their conditions over the decades. Munsii (1975) recorded that almost half of the slums were located along the eastern periphery of the city in areas of Narkeldanga, Ultadanga, Maniktala, Beliaghata and Chingrighata. Housing crisis was a rising issue. According to Bose (1965), more than three-fourths of the population in Calcutta lived in overcrowded tenements or the bustees (slums), two-thirds of the households lived in kutchha houses and more than 57 percent of the multi-member families lived in one-room dwellings. The weak sewerage system was so evident that open surface drains and garbage was dumped everywhere within the city.

6. Calcutta in the post-independence era:

Calcutta ceased to be the capital of India on 12th December, 1912. The next big event was Indian independence, followed by the partition of the country. After the partition, Calcutta continued to be the administrative capital of the state of West Bengal (to present day) and the population of the city grew in leaps and bound due the huge migration from East Pakistan (1947-1950). The authorities were not equipped to cope with the sudden addition to the city population and urban development suffered a setback. In the first complete Census of 1876, Calcutta had a population of just over 6 lakhs. In 1971, it was the largest urban agglomeration in India, followed by Greater Bombay and Delhi, Madras, Hyderabad and Ahmedabad agglomerations (Munsii, 1975). However, the growth rate in this region remained fairly slow (22.11 percent) compared to 43.75 percent of Bombay and 42.86 percent of Madras in 1961-71. The core of Calcutta extended and covered Park Street, Chandni Chowk, Burra Bazaar from BBD Bagh, Esplanade, Free School Street, Dalhousie Square and Sudder Street. The demographic profile sharply changed in this period. The Calcutta Municipal Corporation added southern wards and neighbouring municipalities like Tollyganj by 1953. The trend of land occupancy for the first two decades after the independence left its effect on the area between Tolly's Nala and Raja Subodh Mullick Road and the Sealdah-Garia Railway line. Cross-border refugees settled mainly in these portions and soon came to be known as colonies. These were considered to be enclaves with separate ethnic, religious and political identity. The population lived in camps organised by the Government of India. The total number of displaced populations enumerated in Census 1951 for the district was

527, 262. A considerable population from the group were transferred to other districts and states of India. The numbers were so huge that there was acute shortage of housing. Delay in acquiring land by the government resulted in trespassing of private lands. These camps grew up in a very short period of time in Dumdum and Rajarhat (35), Baranagar (7), Belgharia (1), Khardah (11), Bijpur (6), Alipur (2), Behala (5), Noapara(4), Kolkata(1), Tollygunge (54), Jagaddal (4), Naihati (1), Noapara(4), Cossipur (1) and Titagarh (2). Today, many of these areas come under the administration of Kolkata Municipal Corporation and all of them come under the Kolkata Metropolitan Urban Agglomeration area (2011). Five camps were maintained by the Rehabilitation Department at Tangra, Chandipur, Helencha, Kumarkhola and Santoshpur. The population profile since 1951-71 concentrated on the land reclamation and new settlements of Jadavpur, Garfa, Santoshpur, Baishnabghata, New Alipore etc. The Bangladesh Liberation war of 1971 led to a massive influx of thousands of refugees (District Census Handbook, 2011). This affected the land use pattern and the political turmoil in 1971. The infrastructure in these lands were not developed systematically and there was absence of general civic amenities.

With change of political administration in the early 1980s, the colonies developed fast and were structured in terms of schemes and facilities. Kolkata Municipal Corporation took over these areas by 1985. With better provision of infrastructure in civic amenities, the middle-class population grew in South Calcutta. With development of financial status; posh residential areas adjoining these colonies started coming up in the 1971-81 decade. A detailed population dynamics (Table 2) and population composition (Table 3) of Kolkata over the period of 1971 to 2011 calculated from Census of India, has been provided here. Today, improved civic amenities and infrastructural arrangements are prominent here and the real estate market in this area is one of the costliest and most preferred locations within the city. Remodelling of old houses into high rises are common. The Calcutta Municipal Corporation Act of 1980 (effective from January 1984) marked a bold departure from the old formalities, instead shaped a corporation that was autonomous and directly responsible to the electorate. This was the first example of decentralization of administrative power within the urban local bodies. With the amalgamation of erstwhile Municipalities of Jadavpur, South Suburban, Garden Reach and Joka, the strength of the elected wards was fixed at 144 (Kolkata Municipal Corporation website). However according to Census of India 2011 presently, there are 141 wards in Kolkata.

Bose (1965) described that the infrastructure and civic facilities provided a better picture in the relatively newer residential areas of Alipore, Ballygunge and Tollygunge in the southern part of the city and in the Esplanade area. At the eastern side of Maidan, the buildings carried the imperial touch even after the Indian independence. However, the growth of the city stagnated compared to other metropolitan cities of the country like Mumbai. The alignment of caste-based localities initially gave way to an urban framework which changed with time and diversity of the

population who migrated to Kolkata. This was overall a very slow process and structured around the occupational framework, visible in the mid-19th century. Industrial development was not profound in Calcutta unlike the pace in the rest of the country. Several traditional industries like the jute and tea shut down and no “new” industries ultimately were allowed to flourish (Bhattacharjee, 1990: 1012-1013) for a long time. Till the early 20th century, the effect of the urban development schemes was not profoundly observed. Migrants in the city created their own suburbs and Kolkata expanded. By 1960, the development in the city was insufficient to support the needs of all of its residents. Overcrowding, insufficient water supply, inadequate sanitation services, resulted in health hazards, inadequate transport services, silting of the Hooghly River; all resulted in the deterioration of the economic growth of the then most rapidly expanding industrial region (Bose, 1965). The Calcutta Metropolitan Planning Organization (CMPO) was created in 1961 by the government of West Bengal for coordinating development in the entire region. This organisation took the interim action of providing clean water supply and disposal of wastes to execute endemic cholera that was almost an annual occurrence in the city. Other actions initiated were the Slum Improvement efforts.

During 1980s, Mumbai (erstwhile Bombay) overtook Calcutta as India’s most populous city. The name of Calcutta changed to Kolkata in 2001. Presently, the Kolkata Urban Agglomeration area consists of 3 Municipal Corporations (Kolkata, Haora and Chandannagar), 37 Municipalities, 75 CTs (Census town), 1 CB (Cantonment Board), 1 ITS (Industrial township) and 6 OGS (outgrowths) (Census of India, 2011). According to the last Census, the total population of Kolkata Municipal Area was 4,496,694 persons while that of the city and suburbs together estimated 14,112,536 persons. It ranked 5th among all the metropolitan areas of India. KMDA report (2010-2011) stated the total area is 1886.67 km², making the population density 7,480 persons per km², which made Kolkata the highest densely populated metropolitan area in India. The municipal region, itself has an area of 185 km², making the population density, as high as 24,306 persons per sq. km. (District Census Handbook, 2011). The city comprises of 141 wards (Census of India, 2011) divided in 16 boroughs (Table 1). It was the only district in West Bengal which experienced a negative decadal growth rate of -1.7 per cent from 2001 to 2011. It was the one and only district of the state having hundred percent urban population and consisting of three-fifth of the total urban population of the state. The annual population growth rate of the city was about 4.1 percent and decennial growth rate was -1.88 percent in 2001-11 decade, recording the lowest among the million plus cities of India. Sex ratio in the city was 899 females per 1000 males, lower than the national average which showed a tendency of male in-migration in the city. Bengalis comprised most of Kolkata’s population (55 percent). Major languages spoken in the city other than Bengali in 2011 were Hindi, Urdu, English, Oriya and Bhojpuri. Hindus comprised of majority of the city population (76.5 percent) followed by Muslims (20.6 percent) and others (Table 3).

Calcutta (Kolkata) has a history of very few communal and political riots over the years. Das (2000) accounted the first major Hindu-Muslim riot in 1918. Subsequently, others followed in 1926 and then in 1946-47, however, the pre-independence ones were unorganized, autonomous of organized politics and basically expressions of class discontent. The 1946 Calcutta killings were communal, organized and symbols of class and colonial oppression. Post-Independence a riot broke out in 1964. Later in 1992, with the demolition of the Babri Masjid the city again saw a pattern of communal violence.

7. Discussion:

The prime question to study the evolution of a city remains as what transforms the agricultural regime of the village into the active institutions of city? The answer to this might be the active factors of cooperation, combination and communion among the population groups living in the city that create a pattern of activities and opportunities which in turn make the area a primary social emergent and form its complex social purpose. With increase in population numbers and diversification, there arises chances of physical and social disruption with disorder, disintegration, extensions of slums, deterioration of civic amenities and conflicts in the cities. Effective city design and planning is essential to ultimately rebuild the civilization. It is important to preserve the mechanisms of the past, provide solutions for the problems of the present and effectively create a liveable city for all in the future.

Presently, the principal visual impression of Kolkata is of uneven spatial population structure, overcrowding, unplanned land use, heavy traffic, busy markets, and distinguishable architecture from the colonial period, mostly located in the older portions of the city. The city was always an amalgamation of old traditions and institutions of India like the caste, communal and ethnic diversity of heritage on one hand and the pressures and values arising from the process of urbanization and industrial revolution on the other (Bose, 1965). Spatial chaos is expected in this case as Kolkata has been an extremely important city since the colonial period. Like any other metropolitan city in the country, urban sprawl is evident (Figure 2). Though Kolkata observed negative population growth in the last decade, yet the population density is tremendously high, putting a constant pressure on the urban housing situation. Unequal price of properties in the city core forced migration from the core towards the city periphery. Many residential buildings in the oldest parts were converted for business or commercial purposes due to the decreasing population growth in these areas. A huge population commute to the city every day. Official estimates (Kolkata Municipal Corporation website) suggest that, presently about 6 million floating population exist in the city. Kolkata never underwent any formal planning structure, thus tackling the huge population is difficult. With haphazard evolution, the city structure often remained similar since their formation. The colonial city was segregated between the European and native quarters. It always served as the urban centre that absorbed the huge flow of in-

migrants from the vast hinterland but with the adequate availability and growth of civic amenities to cope up with this influx(Bhattacharjee, 1990: 1012-1013). Unplanned population growth and urban sprawl increased the appearance of slums and squatters over the years, since their first appearance during the colonial period. Overcrowding in old cities like Kolkata, brings out the concerns of uneven distribution of resources. In the long run, if unregulated urban expansion and associated environmental destruction are not addressed might lead to disruption of urban morphology.

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