

THE NATURE OF URBANIZATION IN INDIA

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In the case of a society which has had long traditions, it is very difficult to generalize about the nature of urbanization. In India, urbanization can be described to have been of various types: (1) urbanization which has developed out of trade and commerce; (2) urbanization which had developed as centres of pilgrimage and religious activity (Great Tradition); (3) administrative centres; (4) centres of industrial activity and commercial activity; and (5) centres which primarily developed as a result of western impact.

It is not necessary to go into the history of urbanization in India, nor is it necessary to dwell on these different types of urbanization present in India. The only purpose which is intended to be served by listing the types of urbanization is to pin-point attention to the fact that urbanization in India is not something which hinges on westernization alone. More often than not, students of urbanization have proceeded on the assumption that urbanization is equal to westernization.

This equation, however, implicit it may be, has certain implications: for instance, it is felt that with the wake of urbanization, the traditional pillars of the Indian social system *viz.* the joint family, the kin-group, the caste and religion will have crumbled or become ineffective. The traditional social structure is said to rest on these pillars, while in the wake of urbanization (westernization) these pillars must necessarily give way in favour of more universalistic attitudes and practices coupled with rationality and scientific spirit, not to mention the utilitarian approach towards life and reality.

To use pattern variables, one could say that according to this view, life in urban areas would mean a slant on affective neutrality, collectivity, universalistic orientation, achievement and diffuseness as contrasted with affectivity, self, particularism, ascription and specificity.

As mentioned earlier, this is a tacit assumption and not a proven fact. This assumption, however, has made scholars on urbanization to look for data which would be favourable to their pet assumption. Consequently efforts have been made to collect such material which would go to prove the break down of the family as a system, or caste as a determinant of social relations and distance, break down of religiosity and increase in rationality, increase in cosmopolitanism etc. Besides, no proper sociological study worth the name has yet been attempted on urban areas in India. Most of the studies pertain to so-called socio-economic

surveys of urban areas where the slant has been on the economic changes brought about by industrialization and urbanization and migration etc. Attention was concentrated on overcrowding in cities, the falling standards of health and vitality etc. So also, deviant behaviour has been traced to point out the slackening of social control in urban areas. One of the types of studies which has been conducted in urban areas can be described as attitude studies. These attitude studies have been woefully deficient in the sense that the investigators have been content with merely listing the attitudes of the people and refused to bother themselves about the actual interaction and relationships of the people of different groups. In these days of so-called modernization, it is quite fashionable to pay lip service to cosmopolitanism, broad mindedness and other things. Even if one goes to a village, one would come across this sort of assertion by the people. This does not mean that the people live upto these assertions.

As mentioned earlier, the material pertaining to the process of urbanization is very deficient. However, whatever little material has been gathered pertaining to this pivotal feature of Indian social structure can give us a clue to the process and nature of urbanization in India. The various types of urbanization mentioned earlier which are of historical importance also offer us a clue about the nature of urbanization in India, *viz.* that urbanization can never be equated in a simple and naive manner with westernization, but has to be treated as a complex of various dimensions mentioned above.

Of late, various studies have been conducted of family system in India in certain urban areas like Bombay, Dehli, Bangalore, etc. These studies go to point out the resilience of the family as a system. These studies do not prove by any chance the break-down of the joint family as such, but go to point out as to what people feel about the joint family as a system. It is pointed out that given modifications, the joint family as a system is acceptable to the people and is found to be functional by many people. It is true that the structural aspect of the joint family is undergoing change due to migration, housing difficulties, increasing spirit of individuation etc., Nevertheless, the sociological core of the joint family as a system, *viz.*, the spirit and theory of obligations which one owes to the members of one's family, one's own father and others continues to exist even now. Likewise, it can be said that kin as a group is quite effective even in the so-called urban areas where even to-day a great deal of dependence on the kin group seems to exist.

In regard to caste, there is no doubt that there has been a great deal of reduction in caste taboos regarding commensality, the type of food one eats, the social intercourse etc. Yet it would be hazardous to state that caste as a system of inter-relationship has broken down in urban areas. In a city like Bombay, which is said to be the citadel of cosmopolitanism, even today there are certain buildings and localities which are

specific to certain castes. Dr. Ghurye and others have mentioned as to how there has been a proliferation of caste activities in cities like Bombay, particularly since independence. As regards marriage and such intimate relationship, there is no doubt that even today caste comes into its own. It is true that there is a slackening as far as caste prejudices and social distances are concerned, which is exemplified by people of various castes dining together or spending leisure time together in cinema houses and other recreation centres. However, what is usually ignored is the essential characteristic of caste as a system whereby one can meet others at tangent. Caste provides a mechanism for meeting people and also withdrawing oneself into one's shell. In so far as caste can offer these possibilities of having the cake and eating it too, to say that the caste system has broken down because of this slackening of prejudice and social distance is not really warranted.

Then again, it is felt that in urban areas religion as a force would cease to exist. The function of religion is to establish relationship between human beings and supreme order which is normally beyond the control of human beings. Particularly since independence there has been a resurgence of religious activity and patronizing of such activity by people as a whole in urban areas. Even the elite today have taken interest in patronizing such religious activities and performances in urban areas.¹ Moreover, the great patronage given to various saints and religious personages in cities like Bombay, Poona, etc., is a clear example of the firm hold which religion has on people even today. Even highly educated people seem to be competing with each other in patronizing and giving allegiance to some of the saints and religious personages. Whatever might be the factors to which one can ascribe this increase in religiosity, there is no doubt that such an increase has been there. It is normally assumed that religiosity is antithetical to rationality. Personally, I think there is no reason to warrant such an assumption. However, if one were to accept such an assumption, it is obvious that to the extent that there is a great deal of increase in religiosity, it detracts rationality of the people.

Another assumption is that people become achievement-oriented in urban areas. No specific studies have been made on this dimension. Yet whatever indirect evidences exist, go to point out that people are not completely achievement-oriented even in urban areas, so far as they depend on non-achievement categories, such as loyalty to one's kith and kin, loyalty to linguistic region etc. Very often it is mentioned that people are averse to migration in India due to this intergroup loyalty. This goes to prove that people are not adequately achievement oriented.

Then again it is felt by various students of urbanization that urbanization would spell secularism. As mentioned earlier however, we find that secularism is more in the nature of assertion rather than in the

¹ See my study, *Harikatha, A Study in Communication*.

nature of practice. One just has to make a list of the various rituals and ceremonies performed for the opening of various industrial units and factories and offices and concerns by the various ministers in India to disengage oneself of the pet assumption that secularism in India is on the increase.

I have briefly described that the pivotal features of the Indian social structure, *viz.*, the joint family, the kin group, the caste, the religion etc., have not been sufficiently affected by urbanization so as to equate urbanization with westernization. There is no doubt that certain cities have been under the impact of westernization, but even westernization in the urban set-up of India assumes a peculiar form in so far as it has to compromise with the traditional features of the social structure. There are several centres in India which have been urbanized, no doubt, but on a different basis altogether. It is necessary to bear this in mind when one makes any assertion about the nature of urbanization in India.

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