UNDERSTANDING PLANNED URBANISATION IN PERI-URBAN AREAS OF KOLKATA - A CASE OF NEW TOWN

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DECLARATION

I, **Ms. Bidisha Ghosh**, declare that the dissertation titled "**Understanding Planned Urbanisation in Peri-Urban Areas of Kolkata - A Case of New Town**" submitted by me for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of the university or any other university.

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CERTIFICATE

We recommend this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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Contents

INTRODUCTION

One of the significant challenges facing most third world countries today is planning of the peri-urban areas. In older industrial or post-industrial countries, the peri-urban areas are a zone of spatial restructuring and social and economic change. However in the newer industrializing countries, which includes most of the developing world, the peri-urban areas are associated with chaotic urbanization that leads to a sprawl. Countries like China and India are responding to this development by attempting to build planned townships in the peri-urban areas.

In the Indian context, these planned townships are usually built on the periphery of a metropolitan agglomeration or an already existing urban settlement. The principal driving forces behind the urbanization in the peri-urban areas are quite similar - deconcentrating old central business districts (CBDs), relieving urban pressure and augmenting housing stock. In India, planned urbanization is mostly characterized by a state-led and state-driven approach which involves issues regarding land assembly, lack of participation by the locals, speculative land transactions which are often anti-poor, massive displacement and social and economic capture by the upper and middle classes accompanied by a high budgetary impact.

Why the planning of the city matters?

Unlike villages, the element of planning that is associated with city raises questions about the vision behind the plan. An inquiry into what kind of houses, streets, localities, transportation and living experience we want cannot be divorced from the kind of people we are, want to be and envision ourselves becoming. This is the very point that David Harvey raises in his work "The Right to the City" citing the words of Robert Park:

"man's most consistent and on the whole, his most successful attempt to remake the world he lives in more after his heart's desire. But, if the city is the world which man created, it is the world in which he is henceforth condemned to live. Thus, indirectly, and without any clear sense of the nature of his task, in making the city man has remade himself."[1]

Harvey interprets the words of Robert Park to be expressing the very basic and fundamental association of humans with the place they live in and it is this relationship that is invoked when one attempts to plan the city. Harvey understands this plan to entail the vision of who we want to be, the kind of relations with nature and society we seek, our aesthetic values, technological preferences and such fundamentals of everyday existence. It is the notion that in reimagining and recreating our world we attempt to change ourselves which is the dialectical relationship according to Harvey that guides human labour.[2]

Focusing on the times that we live in, there is a rapid growth in urbanisation. The UN report on World Urbanisation cites that 55% of the entire population of the world is currently living in urban areas, to which approximately 2.5 billion people will be added by 2050. As per the report, close to 90% of the increase in urbanisation will take place in Africa and Asia.[3] At a time when countries like India are increasingly getting involved in planning and building new cities and townships, it is interesting to note their aspirations behind the spaces they are designing. The vision upheld behind the models of city spaces being proposed is crucial in decoding and understanding the turns taken in the journey of mankind in its attempt to rebuild itself.[4]

Architects like Andrea Palladio believed that architecture has the purpose to help us be better people and build positive states of mind. Through his work, Palladio also attempted to give greater dignity to the aspects of life that have been treated as

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[1] Robert Park, "On Social Control and Collective Behavior", In the Right to the City by David Harvey, New Left Review, 53(Sep-Oct): 23-40

[2] David Harvey, "The Right to the City", New Left Review, 53 (Sep-Oct): 23-40.

[3] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). World Urbanization Prospects: The 2018 Revision (ST/ESA/SER.A/420). New York: United Nations.

[4] Samantha Mitchell-Dix, "David Harvey, The Right to the City", Rampages.us, December 6 2015.

unworthy.[5] Another popular architect Oscar Niemeyer who is famous for his work on the planned city of Brasilia became the first architect to practice a regional kind of modernism breaking away from orthodox modernists who opposed to any kind of regionalism in design, planning and envisioning of a city. While Niemeyer tasked himself with the job of including the local and regional attributes unique to a place in designing the structures that will stand on it, the man that he was influenced by had a totally different view. This man is one of the key figures of modern architecture and also the architect behind the planned city of Chandigarh, Le Corbusier.[6]

The Swiss architect, Le Corbusier from the very beginning of his career had attacked the architecture of the Victorian age. In his works, Le Corbusier argued for a kind of modern efficiency that would render any additional decoration superfluous and unnecessary.[7] He projected engineers as the builders of our times because they are the ones who will be able to provide the kind of functionality expected out of architecture. His ideas included what a basic house structure for a modern man should look like, notes on rebuilding the city centre and incorporation of taller towers which could house about 40,000 people.[8] The motivations behind making the buildings and structures look alike all over the world was the popularity of the modernist movement in architecture to which Le Corbusier himself subscribed. The understanding of aspirations of the architect can help us grasp the vision behind the planning of the city which in case of Chandigarh's model of grid-like blocks arranged following the makeup of the human body is well reflected as far as Le Corbusier's focus on modern efficiency is concerned.

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[5] The New Jersey Italian and Italian American Heritage Commission, "Republic Virtues in Architecture - Thomas Jefferson's Use of Palladio", New Jersey Italian and Italian American Heritage Commission U3-LP-001, 2010.

[6] John Hill, "Saving Corbusier and Niemeyer", Profiles of Selected Architects, 19th July 2016: https://www.world-architects.com/en/architecture-news/headlines/saving-corbusier-and-niemeyer

[7] Le Corbusier, *The Radiant City: Elements of A Doctrine Of Urbanism to be Used as the Basis of Our Machine-Age Civilisation* (New York: Orion Press, 1967).

[8] Le Corbusier, *The City of Tomorrow and Its Planning*, trans. Frederick Etchells (London: The Architectural Press, 1971).

However, in case of New Town, Kolkata the planned urbanisation undertaken by the government was not assigned to any particular architect but to public sector agencies. For New Town, it is the West Bengal Housing Infrastructure Development Corporation (WBHIDCO) that was entrusted with the duty of developing the plan for the project. The planning of New Town is significant because it was never envisaged to start off on a clean slate characterized by massive eviction and displacement where a completely new future can be built on the ashes of the past. In fact, it has been projected as 'urbanisation with the human face' because of its pro-poor stance and people's participation involved in the planning.[9]

What is the significance behind the planning of New Town in Kolkata?

The planning and aspirations behind the New Town Kolkata is significant as it has been projected as the Green Smart City under the programme of Smart Cities Mission of the Government of India. Designed and planned to be "a model of urban innovation in India"[10], it holds the key to understanding the conception of an ideal efficient city should be like. The goals of a smart city are to improve accessibility, transportation and social services, promote sustainability and include its citizens in its planning, projects and functions. These are exactly the criteria that New Town in Kolkata seems to have fulfilled.

The claim of "shaping power over the process of urbanization" as argued by David Harvey[11] has been utilized in the case of the planning of New Town in Kolkata if not in the exact way suggested by the thinker, but surely in spirit. This is because the planned satellite township that was recently developed, New Town, situated in the peri urban areas of Kolkata has been exemplary in including both the participation of the locals in the process of planning and also in accommodating the people ensuring minimal displacement and other measures taken by the government.

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[9] Sanjay Mitra, "Planned Urbanisation through Public Participation: Case of the New Town, Kolkata", 1048-1054. Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 37, No. 11 (Mar. 16-22, 2002).

[10] Emma Shaw, "Smart City Roadmap - New Town Kolkata", *Future Cities Catapult*, 2016.

[11] David Harvey, "The Right to the City", *New Left Review*, 53 (Sep-Oct): 23-40.

Usually projects of planned urbanisation are characterized by loss of traditional avocations, eviction from ancestral dwellings and forcible displacement. In order to minimize these effects the West Bengal government took the cafeteria approach adopting the best of different endeavours. Therefore, unlike regular boundaries of a planned township, the planning authorities had to work with a highly irregular project boundary building around certain areas which were units that was to be left untouched. This meant compromising on the aesthetics of a modern planned township as it is envisioned in structure and form but it was also definitive of a shift in the approach to urban planning that is marked by consideration of what a place has been in defining what it should be. This is where the planning of New Town resembles in spirit the model of city proposed by Jane Jacobs in her work "The Economy of Cities" (1969).

The New Town, Kolkata has been notable for its road to urban development, that is its strong pro-poor approach, the role of the state as a facilitator and enabler rather than a doer, involvement and participation of the local land losers, anti - speculative measures, low budgetary impact and specific subsidies for targeted groups.[12] The project had been described as 'urbanisation with a human face'. It has tried to consciously adopt a pro-poor stance, consistent with West Bengal government's pro-poor thrust. It sought to, assure the small holders of a remunerative price for their land, distinguish between project affected persons on the basis of their economic status, prevent unnecessary displacement, encourage non-farm employment through preferential participation in project activities and provide alternate accommodation. The government went even further. It provided earmarked land to the project affected persons, instituted a system of reservations for such persons in government housing for the weaker sections and created service villages. Even the physical planning process was modified to cater to the poor. For example, the entire transport planning of the New Town is based on public transport.[13]

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[12] Sanjay Mitra, "Planned Urbanisation through Public Participation: Case of the New Town, Kolkata", 1048-1054. Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 37, No. 11 (Mar. 16-22, 2002).

[13] Sanjay Mitra, "Planned Urbanisation through Public Participation: Case of the New Town, Kolkata", 1048-1054.

Research Problem

David Harvey explains his understanding of the right to the city as more than being just a right of providing access to the resources embodied in the city, but as "a right to change ourselves by changing the city more after our heart's desire". Harvey argues for democratic control over the process of urbanization which entails more than just a right to improve our housing, neighborhood, the city or its surroundings but the right to urban space - to access, occupy and use it.[14] Now as the model of a smart city seems to be built around the notion of giving a voice to its citizens, it will be interesting to note how far is a smart city democratic.

Secondly, New Town is a "planned" project of the West Bengal government which makes it interesting to explore the vision of a city ingrained in the process. The planning for the project has not been assigned to any architect to be modeled after an individual's vision. New Town is a project designed by the state for its citizens with the participation of the latter and in such a case, the aspiration behind the kind of city that has been envisioned especially with its unique endeavour of accommodating the old with the new merits a thorough consideration.

As Rajarhat New Town presents an interesting case with a slightly different story of planning politics in building this township and the role of state as an active agent of the planning process, I attempt to explore three broad research questions through my MPhil research work.
1. In studying the provisions made by the government for people's participation in the various processes of the functioning of a city, I want to understand how people own the space that is city.
2. I want to evaluate and interpret the Government of India's motivation and vision behind the Smart Cities Mission along with the various other Government reports on the measures taken to transform New Town into a smart city understand what is the relationship between the imagination of the city and the facilities and the culture associated with urban or city life.

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[14] David Harvey, "The Right to the City", 23-40.

3. I want to understand what kind of a city has been envisioned in planning New Town Kolkata as a Smart City modeled to lead urban innovation in India by comparing the interpretation of different Government reports with the suggestions and works of urbanists like Richard Sennett and Jane Jacobs to evaluate the 'nature' of the urban space in New Town and what it says about our aspirations.

Literature Review

Open and Closed Spaces

Richard Sennett in his work on 'The Open City' talks about cities as a physical place and the other a mental compilation of perceptions, behaviors and beliefs. He points out the basic element of the relationship between dwelling and building: an asymmetry, a conflict. Normally planning is thought of as something people want, that building should follow dwelling. But when people want something unjust then the planner has an obligation to resist the community in the name of justice. The planners are employed by global capitalism to basically act as poodles to design environments that can facilitate repressive investments. There is also a structural conflict between the two aspects of our lives - the way people are obliged to live and the way cities are built. Sennett makes a distinction between open and closed cities where an open city is a democratic one which sometimes has to be opened in undemocratic ways and yet closed cities can also be desirable to live in. Sennett points out the manner in which capitalism closes cities which often coincides with the desires of the inhabitants to get away from difficulties or from other people in the city - basically to flee difference.[15] An open system is concerned with wrong answers regarding why a particular system does not work. The incapacity to deal with difference feeds into a capitalist economy that can profit from making people want to do only what is comfortable and familiar to them. The question that is posed by

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[15] Richard Sennett, *Building and Dwelling: Ethics for the City* (United Kingdom: Penguin Books Limited, 2018).

Sennett is what kind of city does one want to build? Should a city be user-friendly or should it be a place where you learn to deal with a difficult situation?

Expectations from a Space

In 1970, legendary urbanist William Holly Whyte formed a small research group called The Street Life project and documented his observations in "The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces".[16] Whyte's team investigated different aspects from the sitting space on a plaza for its ideal percentage to the intricate interplay of nature's forces - the wind, trees, sunlight and water. Urban parks, according to Whyte, can be regarded as a crucial mechanism that could stimulate our interaction with the city but the reason why they are so valued is because of the impulse use that they can stimulate. Whyte explores the impact of urban experiences like steps, performance and public art. Whyte also considers the problem of "urban undesirables" which is a term used for drug dealers and drunks.[17] The conventional wisdom is here debunked with an invaluable, counter-intuitive insight i.e. rather than having places flooded with surveillance cameras and fencing them off, we should instead aim to make these spaces as welcoming as possible. In fact, Whyte's approach to developing an urban perspective can be beautifully summarized in one line: "The way people use a place mirrors expectations."[18]

Reclaiming Urban Diversity

Famous activist Jane Jacobs has had an extensive impact on urban planning with her works like *The Death and Life of Great American Cities, The Economy of Cities* and *Cities and The Wealth of Nations.* In the book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jacobs criticized the failings of cities and the approach to urban planning. Challenging the conventional theories and practices of planning, Jacobs argued that the modern cities that were built on the principles of ultimate efficiency were neither interesting, safe or even economically stable. Jacobs looked at cities like living beings

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[16] William H. Whyte, *The Social Life of Small Urban Space*s, (Washington, D.C.:Conservation Foundation, 1980).

[17] William H. Whyte*, The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces,* 45-47.

[18] William H. Whyte, *The Social Life of Small Urban Space*s, 25.

and approached them as ecosystems. She pointed out how people's interaction with the different elements in the city transforms it into a living organism. Jacobs primary contribution includes the "mixed-use" urban development which suggests the integration of both old and new, residential and commercial and buildings with different types and uses together. The diversity of life in an area at different hours of the day creates community vitality according to Jacobs.[19] Instead of creating clean marked spaces with demarcated barriers for use of definitive purposes, Jacobs saw cities as essentially being spontaneous, organic and untidy. This intermingling of different city users with the myriad uses of city space is also crucial to both urban and economic development. Jacobs has also discussed the merits of local expertise in guiding community development advocating bottom-up community planning. Jacobs also made a strong case for higher density of people in city spaces suggesting that a critical mass of people is crucial to supporting more vibrant communities. Jacobs also suggested a model of economic development taking into consideration the local economy of a place. This could be done by adding new kinds of work to the old without driving out the latter, supporting creative endeavours of urban entrepreneurs and promoting small businesses. The quote that sums up Jacobs views on the economic model suggested by her for urban spaces is: "Old ideas can sometimes use new buildings. New ideas must use old buildings."[20]

Decoding the Imagination of 'Urban'

In the book, "Beyond Kolkata: Rajarhat and the Dystopia of Urban Imagination", authors Ishita Dey, Ranabir Samaddar and Suhit K. Sen, examined the ecological and socio-economic repercussions of building a new township delving into the politics behind the creation of New Town, Jyoti Basu Nagar or Megacity in Rajarhat. The idea was conceived by the state government of West Bengal in the mid-1990s, pandering to the vision of developing a hi-tech town beyond the crowded and unruly city borders, feeding the greed and imagination of developers and realtors which in parts erected a ghost city at the cost of spoiling a fragile environment and wiping out self-sufficient

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[19] Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. (New York: Random House,1961). 22-28

[20] Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. 66

economies. The utopian new town for the opulent, reveals the mechanics of exploitative and primitive forms of capital accumulation lying at the heart of the neoliberal, post-colonial urban development.[21]

Problematising the concept of "Urban Planning" around the world

H. Evan (1972) in his book entitled 'New Town : The British Experience' attempted to study the prospects and problems of British New Town and particularly emphasised on the conformity of the concept of planned projects. Whittick and Osborn (1977) in their book entitled 'New Town - Their origin, Achievement and Progress' discussed the experience of New Town for the Americans, particularly emphasising on the progress of its development. Petar Daniel and Michel Hopkinson (1983) in their book named 'The Geography of settlement' have looked into the concept of New Town as per E.Howard and also elaborated on the problems of New Town. Eng Siew Teo (1986) in his book entitled 'New Town Planning and Development in Singapore' discussed in detail the Singapore New Towns and the development syndrome associated with it comparing all the new towns of Singapore.

Understanding India's Experience with Urban Planning

Ved Prakash (1969) in his book 'Nero Town in India' provided a detailed survey of Indian New Towns. S.H. Verma (1985) in his book 'Bombay, New Bombay and Metropolitan Region' has mapped out the process of evolution of Navi Mumbai. The book offers an analysis of both the advantages and the disadvantages of urban development. S. Sita (1988) in her article 'Mumbai: A global city in Making' and the book "Million cities of India" edited by Kamalesh Mishra and R. P. Mishra, compared and analysed both Navi Mumbai and Greater Mumbai. Other valuable contributions in this area has been Ardhendu Bhattacharya (1993) in the article titled 'CIDCO's performance in New Bombay: A Review' published in Urban Management by the Local Government and Urban development Department, Government of West Bengal and the book, 'The making of Navi Mumbai' by Annapurna Show (2004).

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[21] Ishita Dey, Ranabir Samaddar and Suhit K. Sen, *Beyond Kolkata, Rajarhat and the Dystopia of Urban Imagination*. (India: Routledge India, 2016). 15-18.

Urbanisation and Kolkata

A report was prepared by Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority (1982) on 'New Township - DumDum Rajarhat' to analyse the feasibility of planning a project of New Town to adjacent to the main city of Kolkata. Housing and Infrastructure Development Corporation (1999) had released a report on 'New Town -Kolkata' strictly from the perspect of planning. S, Mitra (2000) in the 'Planned Urbanization through public participation: Case of New Town Kolkata' analysed the process of land acquisition which was done through the enactment of Land Acquisition Act, 1894. It also highlighted the discontentment of the land owners which largely varied as per the nature and value of land. There was huge disparity in the compensation that were awarded to people across residents and also the price at which it was being transferred to developers. The article also talks about the demand of land through the process of application and pointed out that there were at least 30 applications being submitted for one plot of land. In the report, 'New Town Kolkata: Comprehensive Environmental Impact Assessment and Environmental Management Plan' by Housing and Infrastructure Development Corporation (2000), the reports and plans relating to the developmental projects in Rajarhat New Town, were highlighted which aimed at assessing the impact of socio-economic structure as well as the terrestrial ecology demographic. The report by Housing and Infrastructure Development Corporation (2003) titled 'New Town Kolkata Project Report of Action Area I' detailed out the programme of Action Area-I which gives us a glimpse into the kind of lived experience that is desired in the city. P. K. Biswas (2006) in the paper titled 'New Town Kolkata at a glance' has discussed the changes in land allocation caused by the emerging I.T. Sector.

Main Objectives of Research

- To understand the vision behind urban planning in India and the kind of life we plan or are condemned to live through the cities we are creating.
- To critically examine the discourses on urban planning and understand the New Town project in the larger context.

● To evaluate the kind of democratic control people exercise over the urban space in New Town by analysing the different kind of people participation allowed by the government.

Methodology

Keeping in view the objective and focus of the study, the research is qualitative in nature with the application of content analysis method. The methodology adopted in this study can be characterised as analytical, critical, descriptive and interpretative with both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary sources are documents released by the Government regarding the planning, execution and functioning of New Town. It includes documents released by both the Central and State governments like City Development Plan, its Appraisal, Annual Reports on New Town by WBHIDCO and various documents on New Town under the Smart Cities Mission project. The secondary sources focus on the existing literature and the research already done on the New Town project in Kolkata.

Dissertation Structure

As per the main structure of the dissertation, it consists of three chapters in addition to an introduction to the study and a concluding segment which contains the summary of the findings from the research.

Introduction: This section focuses on why urban planning matters with a brief overview of history of urban planning in India and architects, development models and aspirations behind it. Explaining why the case of New Town, Kolkata is unique and merits consideration. Thereafter, briefly mapping the journey of New Town as a proposed Government project to relieve urban pressure to becoming one of the model Smart Cities for urban innovation in India.

Chapter: New Town, Kolkata - A model for urban innovation in India

This section focuses on the concept of "New Town" in urban planning and starts with a discussion on the Indian situation with regards to New Town. It briefly discusses

New Towns in India and then provides a background of New Town, Kolkata. It elaborates on location of the study and history of the space before the project. It evaluates different Government documents released on New Town mapping the planning and actions taken to bring it into existence. Analysing the various steps taken by the government to involve the locals and encourage citizens participation in the development of New Town. A qualitative overview of different annual reports released by the WBHIDCO on New Town, the Smart City Roadmap of New Town Kolkata by Future Cities Catapult, Land use and Development Control Plan by WBHIDCO, Appraisal of City Development Plan by Town and Country Planning Organisation under Ministry of Urban Development and other documents released by different government agencies. The different measures taken for the realisation of various projects and aspirations in New Town have been delineated in the documents as recommendations, strategic priorities and innovation framework. A close look into these measures reveals the kind of urban space that was envisioned in creating New Town in Kolkata. This provides the basic framework designed by the Government to carry out the New Town project revealing its priorities and motivations leading us closer to the abstract vision of the urban space of New Town.

Chapter: Understanding New Town as an Urban Space

By pointing out the various provisions made by the government for people's participation, innovation projects undertaken for locals, economic models adopted and projects designed to facilitate transport, communication and business, it analyses the nature of urban life in New Town. A brief analysis of the Government of India's Smart Cities Mission to understand its aspirations also helps us understand what constitutes to be the ideals of a modern city in India. It briefly touches upon the aspects that are left outside the purview of a discussion on urban development but is very much the reality of a modern man living in a modern city. The infrastructure and necessary facilities made available to the people is crucial in creating livable cities. This exercise also suggests whose ideas or what ideas have likely been incorporated in planning and designing New Town.

Chapter: The Ideals of a Planned City

In consideration of the analysis already been done in the last two chapters, this chapter attempts to understand what are the aspirations behind designing an urban space in India. The language in which the projects in New Town are being advertised to attract people and businesses to New Town is crucial in determining what constitutes to be the goal of urban development in India. This helps us understand what kind of environment do we consider to be ideal for our existence. The provisions allowed to include citizens and people in the planning along with everyday facilities provided to the people reveals how far people are being able to access, control and own the urban spaces that they occupy. By comparing the developments in New Town with the ideas, suggestions and models of urban planning advocated by urbanists and architects like Jane Jacobs, Richard Sennett and William H. Whyte, this section attempts to evaluate the ideology behind the vision of New Town. The false sense of security that is constructed by gated communities can often be extremely isolating and how spaces like New Town are attempting to challenge, reinforce or overlook this modern dilemma has been discussed here.

Conclusion: This will briefly delineate the findings of the research along with a brief overview of the chapters.

CHAPTER - I

New Town, Kolkata - A model for urban innovation in India

The concept of New Town is a total departure from the existing models of large cities which are getting increasingly congested. New Towns are planned townships that are not supposed to be either too big or too small but possess certain characters like limited number of inhabitants in proportion to size, have landscaping all around and should be self-contained.[22] The pioneer work in this area was done by Sir Ebenezer Howard, a social philosopher and a British activist, who initiated the concept of New Town in his work, "Tomorrow: a Peaceful Path to Real Reform" in 1898 and revised in 1902. As per Howard, the high value and rent of land in cities encouraged high density buildings which were often overcrowded and congested. Whereas, land in rural areas, despite having advantages of spaciousness and clean air is deemed less valuable because of lacking in employment, housing and transport. New Town, as argued by Howard is the combination of both the environments and is envisioned in terms of a 'garden city'.[23]

The propositions forwarded by Sir Ebenezer Howard included quite a few criteria. Firstly, the town should be built on land acquired at a low cost, preferably, agricultural land. Secondly, the land should be held in trust. Thirdly, the town should ideally contain 30,000 people with proper facilities and employment opportunities. Fourthly, The estate should incorporate activities associated with agriculture. Fifthly, the process of growth will involve the establishment of another new town close to the original town directly connected to each other via rail or road links.[24]

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[22] Elisabeth Lichtenberger, "The Nature of European Urbanism". *Geoforum.*Volume 1, Issue 4, (1970):45-62.

[23] Ebenezer Howard, *To-morrow! A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*. (Cambridge University Press, 2010). 35-37.

[24] Ebenezer Howard, *To-morrow! A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*. 38

Definition of Urban

As per the Census of India, a habitation is considered to be urban if it has "minimum population of 5000 people" and has about 400 persons per sq. km. of population density with an engagement in non-agricultural pursuits by at least 75 percentage of the male population. This definition was framed by the Census Commissioner Asok Mitra. As per the 2011 Census, 31% of the total population in India was living in urban areas.[25]

A. Indian Situation with regards to New Town

The emergence of new towns in India has always been considered a major urban phenomenon. However, it was not carried out according to the rules and regulations followed by most developed countries around the world. The new towns of India are the result of a uniquely Indian experience. During the British regime, many industrial cities sprung up across the country. A key strategy pursued in the national plan was to identify new industrial sites away from major cities but close to power plants where essential amenities are readily available. This allows them to meet the multi-purpose needs of new cities while dispersing the growing population in larger cities.[26]

As India continues to grow economically, urbanization is progressing, and there is a need to develop townships on the outskirts of large cities. The influx of FDI has led to policy changes by the Government of India to create more satisfying space for private developers. The rapid increase in township development in India is a direct result of the growing urban population. Other important factors behind this trend are the liberalized FDI regime and the gradual improvement of structural reforms.

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[25] Ajai Sreevatsan, "How much of India is actually urban?", *Live Mint,* September 16, 2017. https://www.livemint.com/Politics/4UjtdRPRikhpo8vAE0V4hK/How-much-of-India-is-actually-urban.html

[26] Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, National Urban Policy Framework, Strategic Intent, October 2020.

Among the Indian states, West Bengal is predicted to experience an urban population of as high as 40 per cent by 2030[27]. Therefore, there has been a huge shift in focus in the state to develop residential space under the banner of "planned township" by both private developers and government agencies. In fact, the government of West Bengal jointly with private developers had planned the development of six "planned townships", which were supposed to be the peripheral extensions of big cities. There has been a focus on the pattern of development of large residential spaces within the context of metropolitan growth. The different streams of literature in this regard has given way to monocentric and polycentric models, spatial mismatch, population density and job or housing balance. There are both direct and indirect effects of city growth. Land prices are indirectly affected as potential sites development is restricted directly impacting the cost of development[28]. There are direct effects like increased lot preparation cost and shifting development cost to the projects from the public.

a) New Towns in India

The metropolitan cities that came up in different states in India including that of Edwin Lutyens in New Delhi are perhaps one of the oldest and continuous exercise in the building of New Towns. However, Akbar's Fatehpur Sikri and Maan Singh's Jaipur are often regarded as the historical example of the same. But it is the railway towns of British India that can be regarded as the beginning of the New Town era in India. They were mostly meant for railway employees only but many of them were developed into sizeable settlements with temples, schools, churches, playgrounds, clubs, cinema, markets and other peripherals. Some examples of this would be Asansol and Kharagpur in Eastern India, Bhusaval or Manmad in the West and Itarai or Tundla in the north Arkonam, which were created as railway towns.[29]

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[27] Shirish Sankhe, Ireena Vittal and Ajit Mohan, "Urban Giants: India and China, and Their Urbanization Paths", Environment and Urbanization Asia 2, No.1 (2011):1-12.

[28] D. Dowell, The Suburban Squeeze, (Berkley: University of California Press, 1984). 62.

[29] Nikhil Nadh VS, "New Towns in India", *Town and Country Planning* (blog), 2021. https://www.townandcountryplanninginfo.com/2021/01/new-towns-in-india.html

The form and method of sustenance of the different post-independent New Towns are similar to the railway towns that were built many years ago. The two steel towns founded in 1908 and 1921, Jamshedpur and Bhadravati respectively have been the exception in some ways. It was the influx of refugees after the partition of India that marked a new chapter in the formation of New Towns in India post independence.

When it comes to India, it is sometimes difficult to classify New Towns as they often change their functional perception from what they have been marked for in the initial stages of planning. For example, Faridabad was built for refugee settlement but is now considered an industrial area. The plan of building Chandigarh by Le Corbusier (1951-55) is the best example of a planned township, which at present has attraction for industry and higher education primarily. The towns of Durgapur and Rourkela were built for specific industries and are now going through significant occupational changes.[30] Hence, New Towns can be broadly categorized into two groups - one with economic self-containment and the other without economic self-containment.

The towns built by any company to use as their own economic base would be an example of the first kind. This category of towns may be further divided into other types, which are single product town, military base or resort base town and town based on natural resources or different projects. The second category of towns without the economic self-containment would be suburbs, metro towns and satellite towns. The examples would be the industrial complex of Jalhalli near Bangalore where Hindustan Machine has its own economic base. However, in order to avail various domestic or personal services and fulfill different medical and social needs, people rely on Bangalore Metropolitan Area. In West Bengal, Baisnabghata-Patuli, Ashoknagar, Kalyani and even Saltlake city are examples of satellite towns as residents of the towns are dependent on Kolkata for different services and benefits.[31]

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[30] Smriti Chand, "Statistics Regarding Trends of Urbanization in India", *Your Article Library*, https://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/urbanization/statistics-regarding-trends-of-urbanization-in-india/19879

[31] Ved Prakash, *New Town in India*, (U.S.A: Duke University,1969).

B. Background of New Town, Kolkata

The IT hub near Kolkata in West Bengal is called Rajarhat. As a hotspot for real estate development, it did not take long for the place to become a hotbed of investments from real estate giants from across the world. With the initial phase of DLF's IT project of Rs 2.80 billion operational since 2005 and another IT park already on its way, land prices are soaring. But Rajarhat is considered to be one of the main fertile areas of not only the state but perhaps the country. Keshtopur, Bagjola along with three adjacent canals irrigated the land and it used to produce 3-4 crops anually. The farmers working here would get adequate water supply from these canals and there was no need for any aid from the government irrigation canals. The land did not even need a lot of fertilizer and hence, it was relatively easy to grow crops here. The crops that were grown here were different kinds of Khariff and Ravi, Aush and Aman crops along with different kinds of seasonal crops, fruits, vegetables and flowers. The yield from the land was abundant enough to meet about 20 to 25 per cent of demands from the nearby town of Kolkata and its suburbs after satisfying the need of the local markets in the area. Moreover, during the monsoon season, the residents of the area could get supply of their fish from the local fishing embankments called bherries and from the overflowing canals in the area. This was especially beneficial for the poor because they could get fish in really cheap prices from the local bherries.[32] However, it is the same land that was reported to be a low yield agricultural land as per government reports,[33] which makes the manipulation that went into setting up of Rajarhat even more evident.

There was another valuable contribution of the farmers in meeting the demand for milk in Kolkata, which was fulfilled from their herds of buffaloes and cows. The animals were nourished on the green grass from the fields around the bherries and the banks of the canals. Hence, it was often possible to raise cattle in minimal cost as they

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[32] Santanu Sengupta, "A history of the brutal Rajarhat land acquisition, Bengal's new IT hub", *Sanhati* (August 29, 2008), accessed November 18, 2021. http://sanhati.com/excerpted/945/

[33] P.K. Biswas "New Town Kolkata at a Glance", West Bengal, Department of Information and Cultural Affairs, Kolkata. 2006.

could feast on nature's bounties. There was a population of Hindus, Muslims and Christians in the area with a history of peaceful coexistence. Communal unrest was not reported in this area, irrespective of any issues that may have arisen at the national or the state level.[34]

In an event, as reported in The Telegraph, Historian Haripada Bhowmick had visited New Town's Rabindra Tirtha and spoke to the audience about the history and etymology of the township. He explained that in Bengali, the word "Raja" means king and the word "haat" means marketplace. It was in 1649, as explained by Bhowmick, when Gourhari Ray Chaudhury had decided to set up a market in that area, that the place was named so. Only the area where the market was set up was called "Rajarhat" meaning the "king's market" but later it was used to signify the areas surrounding it as well. According to him, present day Rajarhat was inhabited even then but a new lease of life came into it when Ray Chaudhury attempted to develop it. However, Rajarhat was neglected for a few centuries after the demise of Ray Chaudhury as his son moved away in 1716. But the turning point for the place came in 1956 with a bridge built over the Bagjola Canal near Nagerbazar, between Dakhinpara and Baguiati. The bus service between Baguiati and Shyambazar started touching Rajarhat for the first time.[35]

In order to set up the township in Rajarhat, the government acquired land covering 21 Mouzzas using the colonial Land Acquisition Act (1894) issuing a notice in 1995 and later a few more Mouzzas were added to that. In 1984-1985 a land agent named Kamal Gandhi and the people he knew in the Marwari community began buying huge chunks of land in the area paying a much higher price compared to the then market price. A substantial portion of the acquired land went under the ownership of Sarala Maheswari, a former CPI(M) member who was also a relative of Kamal Gandhi. The closeness with CPI(M) leadership gave Gandhi access to different plans regarding the Rajarhat township which further helped him in executing an orderly land procurement plan. Gandhi was helped by the CPI(M) leadership along with the Police and the anti-social elements supported by them in carrying out the process. Gandhi paid thugs

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[34] Sengupta, "A History of the Brutal Rajarhat Land Acquisition".

[35] Sanat Kumar Sinha, "Rajarhat: Land of the King's Market", *The Telegraph*, August 20, 2019.

to coerce people around the area to sell their lands. It took a few murders but they finally identified and isolated the farmers whose lands they needed and could successfully get them to sell their land. Later in 1993, 2 years before the land acquisition notification was issued in Rajarhat, CPI(M) ensured that a notorious anti-social, Lewis, came to power in the Panchayat elections. Along with Lewis, the CPI(M) party backing him went on a spree grabbing lands from the locals, with the active involvement of administration and Police.[36] The reign of terror that was unleashed upon the people would later go on to become much of the reason why the land transfer process in Rajarhat to develop New Town came to be seen as largely peaceful. However, the land acquisition process in Rajarhat officially began around April-May 1999. The farmers who expressed their unwillingness to abide by the notice were subjected to brutality by the goons. Some were forced to accept terms of negotiation at gunpoint which eventually led to the formation of Rajarhat Krishi Roksha Committee by some farmers resisting the government's decision. The organisation was not supported by the opposition TMC as well, some of the members of which were also involved in the forceful land grabbing. The intelligentsia, the media along with the civil society, against land grabs in Singur Nandigram refused to recognise the problem in Rajarhat, enamored by the possibility of jobs and economic development resulting from an SEZ.[37]

a) Location of the Study Area

The project region is roughly located between latitudes 88°27'E and 88°32'E and between longitudes 22°33'N and 22°37'N. Rajarhat New Township is located 4 km from Ultadanga Railway Station and 10 to 12 kilometres from the Central Business District, often known as B.B.D. Bag. Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue, also known as V.I.P. Road, is located to the east and runs just 1 km between N.S.C. Bose International Airport and the project area. There are bus lines, and a sizable number of buses have already begun operating through Rajarhat Road and V.I.P. Road, linking the project site with various locations throughout Kolkata. Furthermore, National Highway No.

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[36] Sengupta, "A History of the Brutal Rajarhat Land Acquisition"

[37] Sengupta, "A History of the Brutal Rajarhat Land Acquisition"

34, which connects to North Bengal, is extremely close to the project region. The Eastern Metropolitan Bypass, Kona Expressway, and Belghoria Expressway are also giving a connectivity to Rajarhat New Town, as are other regional roads like Vidyasagar Setu and Vivekananda Setu over the Hooghly River. Within 9 kilometres of the location lies Dum Dum Railway Station, which is also a significant adjacent railway station that offers interface and transfer capabilities between suburban railways, circular trains, and metro railway.[38]

b) History of the Space Before the Project

L. S. S. O'Malley described Rajarhat as a land that had salty marshes and vast water bodies with the the river Bidyadhari separating the city from the sea, in the District Gazetteer of 24 Parganas[39]. According to a report published in 2010, the District Human Development Report (North 24 Parganas), Rajarhat had a combination of relatively higher literacy rate of 74.83 per cent which was ranked 5th among the district blocks and low work participation of 30.33 per cent ranking 17th among the blocks which gives way to speculation about the availability of the nature of work opportunities there that would support the non-working population which now has been destroyed by land acquisition. However, other indices like access to electricity connections, primary schools, roads, welfare centres and clear drinking water along with a literacy rate of 70.99 per cent among the 9.13 per cent of the total municipal population that lived in the slums, indicated Rajarhat to be a comparatively developed area, unlike some of the other villages like that of the Sunderbans, which is why it has been speculated that the economy and society of Rajarhat has been dealt a death blow with the new town plan.[40]

As a substantial part of the area was wetlands of the east Kolkata, it was naturally dependent on fishing and agriculture. According to an environmental report, close to 17000 depended on recovery systems through growing vegetables and cultivating fish

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[38] Jhantu Saradar, "Land Use Change and Perception Mapping of New Town, Rajarhat, North 24 Parganas, West Bengal", *International Journal of Remote Sensing & Geoscience,* 2(2013): 28-32.

[39] L.S.S. O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers - 24 Parganas* (Calcutta: The Indian Secretariat Book Depot, 1914).

[40] Ishita, Samaddar and K. Sen, *Beyond Kolkata.* 5-8.

in the wetlands and recycling waste[41]. The same report points out how in the preceding two decades agricultural land was continuously converted to non-agricultural land use. This eventually resulted in the decline of average size of marginal land holdings, reduced flow of water laden with sewage to the fisheries, soaring prices of land making middle-scale fisheries unprofitable, poor storage facilities for agriculturalists and fishermen along with the farmers and fishermen dealing with near absence of institutional credit. However, the report cited that simply constructing a new town was not going to be the solution to the problems of the area. The report instead suggested that steps be taken to clear the existing canals through dredging, removing settlements from canal banks, imposing a tax for treatment of sewage and most importantly, declaring that the wetlands would be a no-development zone.

The report declared that the area was even below the nation's average when it comes to the poverty situation, which made Rajarhat follow a consumption pattern that was highly slanted with approximately 70 per cent of the total consumption expenditure being spent mostly on food and the expenditure on health being at 0.9 per cent[42]. To summarise the report, the area was described as a fragile environment with very low cost subsistence economy, which resultantly, provided inputs to the Kolkata metropolis at a highly subsidised rate like low cost fish and vegetables along with fresh air. The report also suggested another opinion that the coming of new town would mean the break down of the waste-recycling system, increased water-logging in the suburbs, expected difficulties in the economic rehabilitation of the population that was dispossessed and deprived of livelihoods, loss of biodiversity, growing social unrest and the deprivation of vegetables, fish and agricultural products for the metropolis at a cheap rate. As the report itself delineated that the challenge was: the agenda of New Town which was in sync with whatever was going on for about 20 years almost along the east of the city (both north and south) with the capture and filling in of vast amount of wetland and the subsequent hand over to the promoters

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[41] Kunal Chattopadhyay, Report on Environmental Conservation and Valuation of East Calcutta Wetlands, 1999–2000, mimeo. Kolkata: Economic Research Unit, Indian Statistical Institute.

[42] Chattopadhyay, Report on Environmental Conservation and Valuation..

and land dealers. The report was of the conclusion that the emergence of New Town will only aggravate the situation further.

This account was in many ways a commentary on the possibility that the transformation of the space held. It is an account of the return of primitive accumulation, of postcolonial capitalism, of the critical role space plays in transformation and eventually how the emergence of New Town, in the history of accumulation, is accompanied by receding of the colonial city. In the vortex of gloablised time, Rajarhat was to emerge as a saga of people, capital and space.

C. Understanding the Structural Space of Urban New Town

The main goal of the New Town planning was to provide housing opportunities for different population groups in West Bengal and beyond according to their needs and economic viability. This section studies the "Land use and Development Control Plan for New Town Planning Area" prepared by West Bengal Housing Infrastructure Development Corporation (WBHIDCO). Land use policies and patterns thus demonstrate the strategic planning importance of the proposed New Town. Thus, the plots developed were mainly used for residential purposes along with different services and facilities. Another application which was to be significant, was in the green industry. The new business district and other commercial areas are also of interest. In addition to being the focal point of the city primarily in terms of residential purposes, the New Town was also conceptualized to be developed as an organic whole, providing a place for various categories of people to work and live, which could be an efficient, attractive and healthy environment to produce composite fabrics for a variety of required uses. Effort had been made to promote a development pattern that in addition to well-planned traditional land-use planning efforts, selectively promotes environmentally sound mixed use to ensure a healthy environment with comfort, attractiveness and high economic viability.

The Government of West Bengal in collaboration with its approved agencies had marked out the objectives to make the Rajarhat New Town an ideal human habitation with attractive effects so that it could be treated as an illustrious icon in the process of

making New Town. The prime objective that was cited among others was to disperse the huge population from Kolkata to a well planned town which is to be within its close proximity with an appropriate healthy housing facility. Next, was to relieve the city life of Kolkata which was experiencing over crowding for long. The chaotic sprawl and urban growth which is continuing without any commensurate urban plan and facility in the fringes of Kolkata needed to be controlled.

The inner layout of New Town was to be laid out in such a way that it will play as a catalyst to accommodate the emerging industrial and economic activity through a provision of new centre of business, trade and industry which will continue to generate new employment for the residents. It was to make land available for setting up various industries that would be non-polluting and non-hazardous in a certain sector of the new town so to make it self-contained. It was envisioned to make a wide provision by creating new areas that could absorb future metropolitan growth with lakhs of people also getting residential facilities.

In maintaining an aesthetically attractive new urban settlement, the aim of the project was to make an environment friendly and functionally integrated plan along with the future metropolitan structure. In order to make it functionally efficient and effective there was a plan to provide social infrastructure with better education and health facilities as well as market, cultural and recreational centres etc, and at the same time every effect would be made to avoid unplanned urban growth which will aggravate the existing deficiencies of human quality.

The plan to create new drainage channels, large water reservoir or lakes and water bodies within the project area was with a view to control and to protect the new unplanned existing settlement areas from flooding and drainage congestion. However, it is to be noted that New Town still does not have a proper waste management system. There was a specific mention in the project report to establish New Business District for implementing the metropolitan level of functioning like that of the Central Business District of Kolkata. Area was also to be allocated for setting up of centres at the regional level that provide facilities to the entire community.

In order to make effective utilization of land and to create energy efficient settlement area with provision of recycling of resources. The prevention of unplanned growth of settlement in the vacant areas is to be ensured by providing planned infrastructure facilities for sustaining the residential and business activity. The "aesthetics" of the area was to be protected with an extensive landscape programme that would be inclusive of trees and flowering plants in the parks and play grounds inside the complex for controlling the dust and noise pollution.[43] The rehabilitation and resettlement of displaced persons as per the norms of the Government of India and to maintain a suitable human management was to be done by providing suitable working conditions in order to alleviate the socio-economic stress.[44] The report promises a harmonious path to development by following the Land Use and Development Control Plan (LUDCP). The development should also be kept in cognizance with the requisite peripheral development of the adjacent villages in terms of water supply, rural electrification, drainage and road development to avoid detachment and alienation from surrounding areas.

All of these were listed as the preliminary objectives which were subject to change with better modifications, additions or alteration of the ongoing project. The attitude created in the press regarding the project was very much optimistic as it was believed to be aimed at opening up a new chapter in the quest of human habitation that would not only provide the most desired healthy housing facilities but would add new flavour of life to each and every citizen in terms of a wide spectrum of living standard.[45] But from the study it appears that in the New Town land made available at subsidized price for the LIG (Low income group) and EWS (Economically weaker section) group of population is negligible which may, in due course, endanger the very sustaining harmonious fabric of the society as a whole within that region.

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[43] New Town Kolkata: Comprehensive Environmental Impact Assessment and Environmental Management Plan, Housing and Infrastructure Development Corporation, 2000.

[44] Government of West Bengal, New Township Dum Dum Rajarhat, Project report of C.M.D.A Directorate of Planning and Development West Bengal, Kolkata, 1982.

[45] Suman Chakraborti, "West Bengal seeks "smart green city" tag for New Town", *Times of India*, July 6 2014.

As per the outline of the project, plots and residential clusters to be supplied to people of various income groups without being fragmented from the entire network to make sure harmonious living situation among residents. It was advised that low rise high density settlement pattern should be ensured. It is a common struggle among the cities around the world regarding housing shortage that is faced by many communities and the urban building typology that was floated for decades which without reducing the quality of life would increase housing units is low-rise, high density. It had emerged around 1960s and 70s as an antidote model to the "tower in the park" credited to Le Corbusier and others. It was hoped that this typology of housing could overcome the major downsides of urban renewal in the context of its community and livability scale. The low-rise, high density housing is one of the most sought after models in urban planning as it is viewed as an economical land use policy with diverse social advantages like accessibility of services along with permitting closer contact with nature and ground.[46]

Low income groups were to be provided with affordable dwelling facility. The over all settlement pattern was to be designed in a such manner that the same could integrate both aesthetically and functionally with the existing pattern of settlement in the surrounding area. The provision for 'Service Villages' at different sections in New Town was made with the objective to provide the service population both satisfactory work and living conditions. The educational institutions of different disciplines were to be planned within the residential areas. Facilities like convenient shopping and neighbourhood shopping was to be designed within the easy reach of all inhabitants. The industries permitted in reidential areas were the non-hazardous, non-polluting and non-offensive kind with a provision of providing employment to local people. Another interesting point that was made is that as it is not possible for civilized society to live only on bread, cultural centers, community halls, library, auditorium, parks and playground etc. were to be incorporated in planning with due importance. This should quickly remind one of the goal of life as propounded by Plato, the good life[47] and then J.S. Mill's "higher-quality pleasures"[48].

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[46] Karen Kubey, "Low-Rise, High-Density Housing: A Contemporary View of Marcus Garvey Park Village", *Urban Omnibus* (July 18, 2012).

[47] Plato and Allan Bloom, *The Republic of Plato*. (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

D. Contradictory Aims of Building New Town, Rajarhat

A lot of what New Town is today has been created by erasing the history and to a great extent, the geography of the place - a process that urbanisation entails. Compared to Singur and Nandigram, the urbanisation story of Rajarhat, New Town is known to be relatively peaceful because the protesting voices were effectively stifled with the joint forces of politicians, Police and local goons operating under the security of the then CPI(M) rule in Bengal. The dissenting forces could not find the support of the opposition TMC as well, some of the members of which were also involved in the forceful land grabbing. The intelligentsia, the media along with the civil society, against land grabs in Singur Nandigram refused to recognise the problem in Rajarhat, enamored by the possibility of jobs and economic development resulting from an SEZ.[49] If we take a look at some of the provisions that were allowed in the planning of New Town, the contradiction apparent in the very aim of the project will become clearer.

The plan to create new drainage channels, large water reservoir or lakes and water bodies within the project area was with a view to control and to protect the new unplanned existing settlement areas from flooding and drainage congestion. However, it is to be noted that New Town still does not have a proper waste management system. And these two points combined reflect poorly on the planning of New Town on an already ecologically sensitive area which was also called the "kidneys" of Kolkata as "wetlands" continue to be converted into commercial complexes.[50] Among the many landscape components that are affected, freshwater retaining zones continue to be the most affected. Standing at this juncture of history rolling into future, it is impossible that urbanisation or associated developmental activities will be brought to a halt but it is absolutely imperative that water bodies and built up area complement each other.

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[48] John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* (London: Parker, Son and Bourn, 1863).

[49] Sengupta, "A History of the Brutal Rajarhat Land Acquisition".

[50] Deblina Mitra and Suranjana Banerjee, "Urbanisation and changing waterscapes: A case study of New Town, Kolkata, West Bengal, India". *Science Direct*, (August 2018): 109-118.

This can be done by the continuous monitoring of the process of urbanisation using technologies as such as GIS and RS.[51]

Another major application was to be in the "green" industry. The new business district and other commercial areas are also of interest. In addition to being the focal point of the city primarily in terms of residential purposes, the New Town was also designed to be developed as an organic whole, providing a place for various kinds of people to work and live, which could be an efficient, attractive and healthy environment to produce composite fabrics for a variety of required uses. Effort had been made to promote a development pattern that in addition to well-planned traditional land-use planning efforts, selectively promotes environmentally sound mixed use to ensure a healthy environment with comfort, attractiveness and high economic viability. But the contradiction of the vision is apparent in understanding how this model was being built out of a place that was already naturally self-sufficient. Rajarhat was considered to be one of the main fertile areas of not only the state but perhaps the country. Keshtopur, Bagjola along with three adjacent canals irrigated the land and it used to produce 3-4 crops anually. The farmers working here would get adequate water supply from these canals and there was no need for any aid from the government irrigation canals. The land did not even need a lot of fertilizer and hence, it was relatively easy to grow crops here. The crops that were grown here were different kinds of Khariff and Ravi, Aush and Aman crops along with different kinds of seasonal crops, fruits, vegetables and flowers. The yield from the land was abundant enough to meet about 20 to 25 per cent of demands from the nearby town of Kolkata and its suburbs after satisfying the need of the local markets in the area. Moreover, during the monsoon season, the residents of the area could get supply of their fish from the local fishing embankments called bherries and from the overflowing canals in the area. This was especially beneficial for the poor because they could get fish in really cheap prices from the local bherries.[52] However, it is the same land that was reported to be a low yield agricultural land as per government reports[53] which would

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[51] Chioma Innocent, "GIS and Remote Sensing", GEOINFOTECH, August 8, 2022, accessed on September 1, 2022: https://geoinfotech.ng/gis-and-remote-sensing/

[52] Sengupta, "A history of the brutal Rajarhat land acquisition".

[53] P.K. Biswas, "New Town Kolkata at a glance".

make it easier to acquire the lands for the New Town project. Again, the lack of an integrated solid waste management strategy is a major problem. Solid waste is not sorted at source and is disposed of in environmentally friendly zones outside city boundaries. This is extremely shameful for a township that aspires to be a model for urban innovation and is built on an already sensitive ecological area.

Low income groups were to be provided with affordable dwelling facility. The over all settlement pattern was to be designed in a such manner that it could integrate both aesthetically and functionally with the existing pattern of settlement in the surrounding area. When a space is designed to house affordable housing for low income groups, it needs to first be connected with effective transportation facility that will allow the people to travel and commute using local transports and not depend on private mode of transportation because we are talking about an income group that cannot inherently afford effective private transport facilities. In such a case it is not enough that there be transportation facility for the locals but it should be frequent, sufficient, effective and affordable. When we look into the planning and aspiration of New Town, Kolkata it seems that in creating a space that could hold some of the state-of-art facilities, elite institutions and business projects, the state did not pay adequate attention to the fact that no matter how many times it reiterates low income groups as one of its key focuses in the planning project, their vision does not reflect that. The area without a strong transportation and communication network will be highly inhospitable for low income groups which had the highest population among all the income groups with 53.3% and economically weaker sections being 27.4% of all income groups in the area[54]. New Town, without an effective transportation and communication network is only suitable for people with their own private cars, which is again, contradictory to what the planning of the project aspires for the place to be.

The planning report also mentions that rehabilitation and resettlement of displaced persons as per the norms of the Government of India and to maintain a suitable human management are to be done by providing "suitable working conditions" in order to alleviate the socio-economic stress.[55] Suitable working conditions is the only solution

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[54] Perspective Plan of CMA-2025; CMDA(2000)

[55] Government of West Bengal, New Township Dum Dum Rajarhat.

proposed to the problem of rehabilitation and resettlement, not alternative adequate living conditions or compensation but the entire problem of resettlement and rehabilitation is to be tackled by assuring suitable working conditions for the displace. However, what the plan does not take into account is that the displaced persons were not only devoid of their livelihood but in most cases, also their homes. The report promises a harmonious path to development by following the Land Use and Development Control Plan (LUDCP). The development should also be kept in cognizance with the requisite peripheral development of the adjacent villages in terms of water supply, rural electrification, drainage and road development to avoid detachment and alienation from surrounding areas. The fact that the report recognizes that it is not desirable to invest in the development of a place in isolation by detaching and alienating it from its surroundings talks about the vision in terms of connected-ness where the planners envision the state to be connected to its surroundings. However, there is absolutely no provisions provided in assuring that it will be effectively executed.

CHAPTER - II

Understanding New Town as an Urban Space

The study of the urban space is about looking at the social relations, political economies and symbols manifest in the city and interrogating the urban, not as a type or category but as a process. Within cultural studies, urban studies is given optimum importance. To introspect and theorize on the city is obligatory to be able to understand the postmodern world and advanced capitalist society in which we live. The city allows us to understand cultural and social practices, observed through the prism of everyday practices. In the west, we have the concept of the deindustrialized city but in case of Kolkata, industrialization is still taking place as the city is still trying to thrive in the light of real estate and IT boom.[56] The space-time compression which is represented by postmodern city as a urban social life feature, was proposed by David Harvey[57]. Once the cultural logic of late capitalism refabricates the form and functioning of the city, it takes the shape of a post-modern urban space. The postmodern city has been referred to as the "non-place urban realm"[58], the "city of illusion"[59], the "city of senographic sites"[60] and the "city of cultural consumption"[61].

The idea of postmodern hyperspaces that were created to act like depthless surfaces, are used to explain the visual impact that the mirror glass surfaces have on new urban

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[56] Neil Brenner, "Global Cities, Glocal States: Global City Formation and State Territorial Restructuring in Contemporary Europe", *Review of International Political Economy*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Spring, 1998): pp. 1-37.

[57] David Harvey, "Between Space and Time: Reflections on the Geographical Imagination", Annals of the Association of American Geographers, Vol. 80, No. 3 (Sep., 1990): pp. 418-434.

[58] Charles Rutheiser, "Making Place in The Nonplace Urban Realm: Notes on The Revitalization Of Downtown Atlanta", Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development, Vol. 26, No. 1, Atlanta: Capital of the 21st Century (Spring, 1997): pp. 9-42.

[59] M.C. Boyer, "The city of illusion: New York's public places", in *The Restless Urban Landscape*, edited by P.L. Knox (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1993), 9-42.

[60] Ibid

[61] S. Zukin, *The Cultures of Cities*. (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1995)

architectures. The city provides the space for street hawkers to sell their products next to shopping malls and transnational corporate buildings. These shopping arcades and corporate buildings are the product of forces of creative destruction that is emblematic of the postmodern condition. One form of being or living is destructed to create another.

Students of politics are increasingly attracted to the topic of urbanization. The growing importance of urban development for different political systems is well-reflected in this concern with the expanding landscape of urban settlements and more people living in the cities. However, the expansion of urbanization continues to complicate political and administrative affairs. It becomes the responsibility of the Government to provide and finance different public services that can encourage the emergence and growth of an inter-dependent urban community. It requires the organization of specialized agencies and staffs to carry out different tasks for the smooth operation of a city, like providing urban services as such as garbage collection, water system operation, traffic direction etc. Issues like migration, housing, land use, distribution of benefits and costs give way to difficult policy questions. Even the division of authority at the territorial level between central and state governments along with other sub-national units is further complicated by the emergence of new cities. The competing interests pertaining to division of land, services, jobs and other benefits lead to conflict, which is only further intensified with the presence of a diverse urban population inclusive of different communities and groups of castes, classes and tribal, ethnic and racial populations. Across societies, certain aspects of urbanization will be similar. The analysis of urban politics in different regions, therefore, offers a fertile ground for comparative analysis. In general, similar features of rural-urban migration can be noticed in Indonesia, Brazil, Nigeria along with India. Similarities can also be noticed in traffic congestion in Tokyo, Manila, Istanbul, London and some other major cities across the world. [62] Resultantly, the characteristics these regions typically share in terms of urban development are responsible for generating similar issues of conflicts, pressures and also choices for similar solutions and political systems. A study of the methods adopted and solutions

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[62] Henry Bienen and Michael N Danielson, "Urban Political Development", *World Politics*. Vol. 30, No. 2 (1978): 264 – 265.

developed to different issues in a particular case of urban development can lead to deeper understanding of the process of urbanization in terms of the questions that are generated by the phenomenon and the possible answers to them.

A. New Town as an Open Space

Richard Sennett in his work on 'The Open City' talks about cities as a physical place and the other a mental compilation of perceptions, behaviors and beliefs. He points out the basic element of the relationship between dwelling and building: an asymmetry, a conflict. There is a structural conflict between the two aspects of our lives - the way people are obliged to live and the way cities are built. Sennett makes a distinction between open and closed cities where an open city is a democratic one which sometimes has to be opened in undemocratic ways and yet closed cities can also be desirable to live in. Sennett points out the manner in which capitalism closes cities which often coincides with the desires of the inhabitants to get away from difficulties or from other people in the city - basically to flee difference.[63] An open system is concerned with wrong answers regarding why a particular system does not work. The incapacity to deal with difference feeds into a capitalist economy that can profit from making people want to do only what is comfortable and familiar to them.

Open space is an urgent necessity in any town planning. The New Town at Rajarhat is not an exception to that case. As such, 47.6 percent out of total land under the project area is to be used for open space system with green areas, water-bodies, large takes etc.[64] As per the plan, the charted open spaces, however, should be integrated and planned with the proposed development in such a way that it should not be encroached by squatter settlement. The open space apart from being used as above would also be used for recreational purposes. The facilities that are to be provided to the residents of different income groups include Golf Course, Rowing and Swimming arrangements, Picnic spots with outdoor recreational areas, Parks and planned open

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[63] Richard Sennett, *Building and Dwelling: Ethics for the City* (United Kingdom: Penguin Books Limited, 2018).

[64] Ishita, Samaddar and K. Sen, *Beyond Kolkata.* 30.

spaces, Dairy Farm, Poultry Farm, Urban Horticulture and provision for Urban forestry and Ecological Parks etc.[65]

Besides, all these, there is a plan to provide Scenic Linear Parks with walking trails on both sides of the Bagjola Canal. There is also provision for local open spaces to be used as neighbourhood scale parks and playgrounds including adequate open spaces of different scale for residential areas. The open spaces between the residential clusters shall be developed as green corridors with required public amenities, like pedestrian trails, resting places and bicycles tracks etc.[66]

In the book 'Beyond Kolkata - Rajarhat and the Dystopia of Urban Imagination' the authors Ishita Dey, Ranabir Samaddar and Suhit K. Sen discussed the 'Vision of Planners and Architects' under the chapter "Logistics and Nightmares" which should be indicative of a larger issue. The planners were supposed to look into issues of physical planning. In carrying out the New Town project, the drainage system of Kolkata region was harmed beyond repair, so the planners were tasked with the responsibility of managing the project area's drainage requirements along with the vicinity. But along with this there were additional tasks assigned to them, that the project area should be effectively integrated with its surroundings in a way that makes expansion possible in the future and that the settlements existing within the project area be integrated keeping dislocation to a minimum while ensuring rehabilitation sites for settlers who are inescapably affected. The further expansion was supposed to mean commercialisation of more land, more Olive Gardens and Vedic Villages, more estate-like schools for the affluent class and more land grabbing. Thus, the whole idea of New Town integrating with the surrounding was actually about the surrounding integrating with what it is meant to be the characteristic New Town. But this integration also meant that the ones who had lost their livelihood and land in the process of the land acquisition but were still living with the project area, in order to be integrated with the New Town economy, would have to resort to sundry jobs of domestic work, vending, cart pulling, etc. The places they lived in would go on to

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[65] Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, *The Smart City Challenge: Stage 2*, India Smart City Mission, WB-01-KOL, Government of India.
https://smartnet.niua.org/sites/default/files/resources/KOL_Upgraded%20SCP.pdf

[66] Ibid.

become the service villages in the structured and contoured plan designed for the project area.[67]

As per the land-use plan, it has been observed that 47.6 per cent of the area was earmarked for water bodies, open spaces and green areas, 8 per cent was for expressways, outer ring railway lines and major roads etc., 5.5 per cent was for other commercial areas and a new business district, 7 per cent for industries, and 30.5 per cent for residential areas.[68]. The regional cultural, health and educational facilities were to take up 1 per cent of the total area. This land use plan eventually underwent a lot of mutations which are still ongoing. The residential sector would get 3000 large plots of 400 sq m, along with 100,000 additional dwelling units nested in high rises for middle and higher income groups, plus small plots were allotted for villages of servants which were euphemistically referred to as the service settlements. These settlements were directed not to be tall which was necessary to ensure that they were not to be seen from the outside, marked by the planned and designed 'low rise high density settlement pattern'.[69] These residential sectors were supposed to have banks, police stations, schools, post offices etc.

The open space was crucial for parks, garden, rowing facilities, ecological parks, a golf course etc. The Bagjola Canal was supposed to get scenic linear walking trails and parks on both sides of it. A central cultural complex was also planned as a centre of attraction that would embody the spirit of Kolkata in quality and scale. A permanent exhibition complex was also planned along with modern hospitals, a technology park, polytechnics and shopping complexes[70]. Similarly, there was supposed to be an expressway which would be connected to arterial roads going into sub-arterial roads, collector and local streets. These arrangements would require water. Kolkata did not have the capacity to provide for the water requirement and it also raised the issue of finances[71].

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[67] Ishita Dey, Ranabir Samaddar and Suhit K. Sen, *Beyond Kolkata*. 137.

[68] Government of West Bengal, *New Town at Rajarhat*, Project Report, Task Force, New Town, Housing Department, Government of West Bengal, September, 1995, 11-18.

[69] Government of West Bengal, *New Town at Rajarhat*, 11-18.

[70] Government of West Bengal, *New Town at Rajarhat*, 11-18.

[71] Ishita Dey, Ranabir Samaddar and Suhit K. Sen, *Beyond Kolkata*. 32-33.

However, as has been already mentioned, in understanding New Town as an open space it is not how much of an open area, geographically speaking, is provided for the citizens that becomes the main concern here. But how far is New Town a democratic space, the point of this exercise is to find out how inviting to differences New Town is in terms of the people that will find their homes in this space, how diverse in terms of the social-economic groups its facilities will allow access to and how vibrant a city life it can provide for its people, are some of the questions that this section will be expected to answer. So most importantly, understanding New Town as an open space is an attempt to understand how willing is the structure of its design to allow differences to co-exist within its boundaries which is one of the primary prerequisites in designing a city which is not only a city of services and conveniences but which can also problematise our everyday existence to the point where we are forced to inquire about some of the more fundamental questions of being.

A city which while making room for us also allows us to confront everything we are not, promoting an active dialogue between the Self and the Other, leading us to a better understanding of ourselves as formal and informal collisions with a diverse form of life within the city space can often lead to. It is imperative to point out that public spaces for recreational activities, sports, amusement parks or simply sidewalks which allow room for everyday interaction for the citizens, hosting frequently, travellers, strangers and professionals alike become hotbed for such interactions to take place and hence, the question of how far New Town is an open city cannot be answered without looking into the design of the city space and the interactions it encourages.

B. Inclusivity of Urban Facilities

A criterion that informs the vision of any planner when planning a city is inclusivity. Although cities go on to be notorious for imbibing and projecting exclusivity in terms of certain income groups, communities or professionals that it may attract because of geographic, social or economic specifications, that is almost never the vision that

inspires city planning. Therefore, the planning of a city begins with urban facilities that would address the need for all income and professional groups along with different communities residing in its premises. In an ideal city, if there could be one, it would never be enough to have a Multiplex placed within a shopping mall. The very structure of that design is exclusionary in as much as there would be a section of population that would not shop from the shopping malls or watch a movie in the multiplex which often charges exorbitant prices for their shows. However, movie ticket prices around the country are becoming cheaper to attract footfall[72] but that is besides the point, the structural design of these facilities are often uninviting for a large section of people who still depend on institutions that are more attuned with the locality of the space in order to fulfill all their needs, including entertainment. In this regard, it is important to mention an incident where a popular restaurant in Kolkata, Mocambo had denied entry to a woman because she was accompanied by her driver, who according to the restaurant was 'ill dressed' as per their standard.[73] For this one incident that was reported there are many hundreds that do not come up on to the public sphere for discussions but the exclusionary ideals of structures of affluence are etched in the minds of the excluded more vividly than the ones included may ever realise. In such a scenario, it becomes absolutely imperative to discuss the inclusivity of the urban facilities in New Town.

One of the basic criteria by which a New Town can be judged to be ideal is the availability of urban facilities to meet the needs of "modern" living standards. The emphasis on 'modern'[74] is particularly intriguing as something that is repeatedly quoted in the government documents but those reports are largely unclear about their intention behind the use of this word. It is nowhere specified whether 'modern' is to

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[72] Rishabh Suri, "The ₹75 effect: Ticket prices again slashed to ₹100 at theatres, industry learns it's lesson?".*TheHindustanTimes*,September27,2022.

https://www.hindustantimes.com/entertainment/bollywood/the-rs-75-effect-ticket-prices-again-slashed-to-rs-100-at-theatres-industry-learns-it-s-lesson-101664272869940.html

[73] Express Web Desk, "Kolkata restaurant Mocambo refused to serve woman and her driver; gets slammed on social media", *The Indian Express*, September 13, 2016.

[74] Sudipta Kaviraj, "An Outline of a Revisionist Theory of Modernity", *European Journal of Sociology,* Vol. 46 No. 3 (2005): 497-526.

be understood in terms of the relevance of these facilities to the context of its time or it indicates a valued ideal from the past that has informed the vision and model for all cities of the future. As such, the New Town of Rajarhat is believed to be in the process of conforming to globally accepted and implemented standards for the facilities it is to provide to its citizens in as much as it projects itself as a Smart City, which by definition relies on information and communication technology for operational efficiency.

It aims to provide recreational areas and a central cultural complex to maintain a comfortable social atmosphere for all income groups. One such development, the Eco Park in New Town which offers something for everyone including rides, restaurants, musical fountain show, flower and butterfly gardens looking over a huge water body. The success of the place as an important urban facility lies in its capacity to attract all income and age groups. The place was also renamed as Prakriti Tirtha by the Chieft Minister of West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee[75] owing to the abundance of nature, albeit man-made in the place of an ecologically sensitive area, it exhibits. The exhibition halls to promote business and handicraft is a particularly interesting addition which could become a place for cultural exchange.[76]

Educational institutions are one of the basic and most important criteria for the development of the region, but the kind of schools present in that area is also going to have an effect on the demography of the place. New Town has also been proven to be suitable for educational facilities given the vast area of land that was made available for this purpose in the planning. Some of the schools present in the area are ABC Euro school - Flagship School of the Mumbai based group, Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur, West Bengal National University of Juridical Science, National Institute of Fashion Technology, Satyajit Ray Film and Television Institute, West Bengal University of Technology, St. Xavier's College, Kolkata along with

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[75] Team MP, "A major success: Eco Park's footfall crosses 75 lakh". HIDCO New Town Report.

[76] Government of West Bengal, *New Town at Rajarhat*, 11-18.

Islamic Madrassahs.[77] The diverse group of educational institutions ensure that the place will be frequented by diverse group of people further contributing to the vibrancy of city life.

There is currently no acclaimed hospital or health care unit with medical colleges currently being planned in the project area.[78] Among the medical facilities there, one of the most notable will be the Chittaranjan Cancer Research Center, an intensive care hospital along with a state-of-the-art Tata Group Cancer Research Center. The region needs to establish more of its own medical facilities, either by private organizations or by the government. In 2019, a health centre was opened by the Government which would provide free health care, recognising the residents' long-standing demand for integration within the health network of the State Government but it is still not substantial in terms of its capacity or facilities.[79] The absence of good medical facilities at affordable prices mean that there is no infrastructural arrangement to provide health care facilities to low income groups. The nature of medical facilities available in a place will also dictate the kind of income groups that will frequent the area which will give a space its characteristics. The presence of a good government hospital in the locality would mean that not only the people from the area but from the nearby areas across the city would visit the place to access healthcare but in absence of that, healthcare in the area becomes significantly expensive and inaccessible for the lower income groups and it can be said that New Town is only convenient for people who can afford to travel long distance to avail healthcare facilities. People in areas with emergency medical facilities usually go to nearby Salt Lake City or Kolkata for treatment, which significantly reduces the city's ability to actively include all income groups within the aegis of its urban facilities.

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[77] Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, *The Smart City Challenge: Stage 2*, India Smart City Mission, WB-01-KOL, Government of India.
https://smartnet.niua.org/sites/default/files/resources/KOL_Upgraded%20SCP.pdf

[78] Suman Chakraborti, "New Town to get medical college, health centre", *The Times of India*, February 13 2021.

[79] Brinda Sarkar, "New Town gets a govt health centre", *The Telegraph*, March 11 2019.

For a city that is projected as the Smart city and the Green city[80], power supply in the form of electricity is an integral part of the design which is the case for all planned cities in a world where we are being forced to explore alternative ways for generating power supply. The Rajarhat New Town Authority has accordingly emphasized this aspect. The power required to meet demand is estimated at about 200 MW, which can be received in bulk from two substations for receiving and transporting bulk power, each with a capacity of about 100 MVA. However, there is a lot in the stage of phased implementation. Power supply, meanwhile, is arranged through the region's existing transmission grid and substation system to meet the growing demand.[81] It is also important to mention that solar energy is also being considered as an alternative source of power generation, in addition to the existing normal power supply system. The progress of ongoing projects is expected to escalate as living standards in the area gradually improves. In May 2021, the New Town Kolkata Development Authority commissioned the 500WHp canal-top solar plant, which is the second solar plant to start operating in New Town with another canal-top solar plant of the same capacity already in operation in the area.[82]

A safe and clean water supply that meets the needs of all city residents is another fundamental component of a desirable city. Especially considering that water purifier is a privilege that not all income groups can afford and it is a valued luxury for some, water supply becomes an important aspect to evaluate the inclusivity of urban facilities in a city. In the case of Rajarhat New Town, water supply is well regulated to avoid supply uncertainty. Treatment plant at the Action Area - I of New Town uses a 10.2 km long pipeline to treat water from Hooghly river which is then made available to the residents of New Town.[83]

One of the basic urban infrastructures is road connections with different parts of the country. The planning of the New Town was thought out to emphasize on this special

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[80] Suman Chakraborti, "West Bengal seeks "smart green city" tag for New Town", *The Times of India,* July 6 2014.

[81] Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, *The Smart City Challenge: Stage 2.*

[82] Suman Chakraborti, "2nd canal-top solar plant begins ops in New Town", *The Times of India*, May 4, 2021.

[83] "Hooghly water for Kolkata's New Town by August", *The Times of India*, May 21, 2015.

aspect, without which the project could not be considered to be sustainable in the long run. Therefore, the transportation system of New Town was designed to connect South Bengal and the border of Bangladesh via National Highway Nos. 34 and 35. The Hooghly Wall connects it to the rest of India on the west bank via the Vidyasagar Setu (Second Hooghly Bridge) and the Vivekananda Setu (Bally Bridge). Regional road connections across the walls of these two bridges are provided along the Kona Expressway, the Belgoria Expressway and the Eastern Metropolitan Bypass. There is also the provision of a railway link from the Bidhannagar railway station to the New Town and the scope and proposal for the establishment of the outer Ring railway which would run east of the New town project area and the proposed stations will be within close proximity of the New Town project area boundary. Thus apart from road network which would basically serve the transportation system of the New Town and which has been planned to be of `Gridiron Structure' the railways which would also be of importance in New Town Area which would be given a high priority too.[84] However, the residents of New Town are still suffering in their daily commutes because of lack of transportation options. The need for proper and adequate public transport is being acutely felt around the area as residents demand more buses.[85]

In the New Town Development Plan there are provisions for gradual, efficient and incremental development of the different transit systems including the proposed extension of the Metro Line in the North-South and East-West direction as well as water transport through Krishnapur Canal. The Para-Transit modes, like taxis, auto rickshaws, cycle rickshaws etc. are already in operation and some are under consideration since the same are performing important roles in the transit scene of Kolkata. Other transport facilities, like freight transport, road corridor for good movements, truck terminals inclusive of wholesale trading centers with easy availability of delivery mechanism had been considered in planning of the project. Truck Terminals and Wholesale Trading Centres have also been planned to shift at four locations under Kona, Dankuni, East Kolkata and Madhyamgram which are major centres around New Town and will be well connected with the New Town and

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[84] Government of West Bengal. *Annexure Smart City Proposal.* Development Authority West Bengal, WB–01–KOL_SCP New Town Kolkata Annexure 2. New Town, Kolkata.

[85] Snehal Sengupta, "New Town residents demand more buses", *The Telegraph Online*, April 14, 2022.

at the same time.[86] This immediately paints the picture of a place that is yet to receive a vibrant city life with travelers and residents crossing each other at major interactive and transactional points within the city.

The basic criteria for developing New Town, as has been repeatedly pointed out in the government documents was to provide accommodation. Land allocation for residential purpose was given high priority during the planning process. Although, New Town was designed to release the pressure of increasing accommodation from Kolkata, whether or not and how far a place is desirable as a residential spot depends on a variety of factors, some of which have been explored in the section. Although the planning reports mention that the project was designed to provide affordable housing options to all income groups, in the absence of proper transportation facility, the area is bound to be popular with people who can afford private cars, rather than the lower income groups who rely on local and public transport to meet their daily needs. Also, with strings of unoccupied flats and buildings (60%) which are already readied for transfer to the owners by the developers and some of them already owned but not lived in[87], inspires comparison of New Town, Kolkata with ghost cities which are built but never inhabited[88].

The prime proposition for the planning of New Town was to give more importance to provide housing facility to people who have not been able to accommodate themselves comfortably in the city of Kolkata because of its saturation level which again coupled with ever increasing migrated population. From that point of view, New Town has been planned to be self sufficient in all reports. New Town supposed to have a separate nuclei of its own as well as self sufficiency in terms of commercial activities. However, major facilities have been planned to be provided within a New Business District which are to be located along the main Arterial Road. It was supposed to have office complex, both for the public and the private sector, head quarters and/or regional offices of banks, insurance companies, Financial institutions etc., hotel, shopping and other major cultural complexes and various other

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[86] Government of West Bengal. *Annexure Smart City Proposal*. Development Authority West Bengal, WB–01–KOL_SCP New Town Kolkata Annexure 2. New Town, Kolkata.

[87] Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, *The Smart City Challenge: Stage 2*.

[88] Civic Data Design Lab, "Ghost Cities: Built but Never Inhabited", Urban Next.

commercial recreation facilities. The place was designed to have a well integrated city life with shopping mall, entertainment and food park, hotel and cultural facilities which contribute to the vibrancy of the cities. However, it can be said that the economy and commercial facilities of the New Town could remain restricted within the different service segments only. Thus the economy of New Town in due course of time risks being tagged "Elite-economy"[89] instead of "Mass-economy"[90].

C. Formation of HIDCO and NKDA

Looking into the resources to collect the money needed to execute the process, a government company was formed to mastermind the investment of Rs 35 billion at current prices for building all facilities and developing the land that would go on to attract additional commercial and industrial investment of Rs 100 billion - for a population of 500,000. Hence, came into existence the West Bengal Housing Infrastructure Development Corporation or HIDCO[91].

The New Town strategy already included marketing and promotion. This stage required the mobilisation of architects, engineers and designers. All this would be done by securing an EIA which has been accused of being illegally procured using false declarations, half truths about environmental reality of the space, flora and fauna, nature of land and existing population and their settlements. There were also accusations of procuring the land through coercive measures, using threats and persuasion by political bosses and mobilising cadre, deploying the Land Acquisition Act and using money[92]. The project report was envisaged to be a participatory process where people from different walks of life were to be invited for participation. The private sector was to be involved in a major way. The central and state undertakings along with private business houses were to be called for participation. This structure was deemed necessary for 'future metropolitan structure of the mega city'.[93]

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[89] The term is used to mean an economy that is driven by the elites.

[90] The term is used to mean an economy that is driven by the masses.

[91] Government of West Bengal, *New Town at Rajarhat*, 11–18.

[92] Ibid.

[93] Ibid.

But the question remained still, how this participatory decision making was going to be carried out. The ones invited for the 'participatory decision making' were not the dispossessed, the local labourers or their organisation, the local peasantry or the different associations representing, but the private business establishments, institutions and financial undertakings. The initial cost of Rs 14,980 million required to build the New Town was also supposed to be paid not by HIDCO, which operated with zero paid-up capital but the landed villagers of the place whose land was land was supposed to be sold at a much higher cost compared to the value paid to them.[94]

Also apparently in an area with no water bodies, HIDCO required Rs 2,414 billion for land filling, which was also the second biggest item in the list of expenditure that was proposed and the first among them being the price of land acquisition itself, which was Rs 4,125 million. The task in front of HIDCO therefore was nothing short of a gold rush, that was to attract an investment of Rs 135.23 billion with this expenditure.[95]

Interestingly, the project report had discussed nothing about the local population or the fate of the local labouring lives and the villages they lived in. Obviously, the interests or conscience of the technocrats were not involved with this question. Their enthusiasm was going to be limited to the prospect of developing another park, another SEZ, one more Infinity Tower and so on. The ambition to expand was truly limitless and the gold rush was propelled by this ambition.

With the aim of rendering the civic services and amenities within the New Town, Kolkata, the New Town Kolkata Development Authority, was constituted under The New Town Kolkata Development Authority Act, 2007 (The West Bengal Act XXX of 2007) and came into effect in November 2008. As per the official website of NKDA, the New Town, Kolkata was created for two main purposes in the eastern outskirts of Kolkata. The first purpose is to establish a new business centre that would reduce the pressure mounting on the existing CBD (Central Business Districts of Kolkata) and the second purpose was to create new residential units to increase housing stock

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[94] Government of West Bengal, *New Town at Rajarhat*, 11–18.

[95] Ibid.

supply.[96] Now, whether the order in which the purposes have been categorically delineated signify the order of the government's priority in envisioning a New Town which was primarily touted as a residential town remains a topic worth exploration.

a) Development of New Town under NKDA

NKDA has launched various projects to improve the quality of living in New Town. Here are the names of few projects as titled in the report: Project Sustainable Environment, Save and Safe Water, Smart Metering, One-NKDA, Social and Culture, Project Mobility & Connectivity and Safe Citizen and Economic Opportunity under which it classifies all the key visions it has delineated for New Town. Along with these projects, the NKDA has also launched some Central Government projects in New Town to make available the key components of its pan city proposal including high speed wi-fi facility, using shared space on public cloud, conducting mass scale digital literacy drives, digitizing all records for online availability and upgrading and integrating m-governance with the new technology platform.[97]

Under Smart Urban Form NKDA looks into the development of stretch of Link Canal by construction of linear parks, informal markets, kiosks, pedestrian links and walking tracks along the canal. As per the report the iconic structure of proposed Gateway of Kolkata at the junction of Action Area 1B, 1C and 1D adds to the "imageability of the city" along with viewing deck at the top floor and solar powered energy efficient automatically controlled lighting system. The New Town Clock Plaza has been reorganized with fountains transform into an interaction zone with Wi-Fi, laser shows, street food, live performances and provision for roller skating. Under the Smart Urban Form falls the enhanced walking environment which includes among others covered sidewalks, curb cuts, signage, street furniture and designed intersections. The city envisions a bicycle track for enhancing mobility of citizens in the area along with ramp at multi-level junctions for the differently abled, Street Furniture and Transit Infrastructure, to develop Metro station as Intermodal exchange points, design street

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[96] Ibid.

[97] Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, *The Smart City Challenge: Stage 2*, India Smart City Mission, WB-01-KOL, Government of India.
https://smartnet.niua.org/sites/default/files/resources/KOL_Upgraded%20SCP.pdf

signage based on local art form, enhance the green cover of footpaths by planting trees and monitoring tree growth, redesign bus stands and terminuses with LED display boards for information dissemination and install e-kiosks along with LED display boards / video walls for information dissemination and citizen self-service. It also mentions covering construction sites with flex print of proposed façade to avoid disruptions in urbanscape or streetscape. In an extremely brief "Mixed Use" section the report mentions the need to create additional spaces which could be used as destinations of mixed use like planned informal sector that would allow visitors which could be an interesting feature in the planning of this project but no efforts were made to elaborate on it. New Town Kolkata is also covered under different central and state programmes like "Solar City Program" of the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, resultantly, a Solar City Master Plan has been developed. The city had set up and operationalized the Solar City Cell. Under the Smart Metering project, WBSEDCL has been mandated to undertake a number of activities in New Town Kolkata under the Mission. It will introduce Advanced Metering Infrastructure with Peak Load Management, distribute Transformer Health Monitoring and Net Metering Facility. NTESCL, the joint venture entity between WBSEDCL and HIDCO will implement the project in New Town.[98]

Under the Save and Safe Water Project, the City Administration had spent approximately INR 350+ crores in implementing the program by virtue of which surface water is being supplied, treated and distributed in New Town from November 2015. Smart City Mission will be leveraged to install smart water management systems like SCADA. The City Administration is in the process of implementing the program by virtue of which storm water discharged on roads will be captured, treated and re-used in New Town from 2019. HIDCO has been tasked with funding the development of the physical infrastructure for this initiative. NKDA is also constructing 11 community toilets leveraging this programme at Action Area 1A, 1B and 1C under the Swachh Bharat Program.[99]

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[98] Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, *The Smart City Challenge: Stage 2.*

[99] Ibid.

Bidhannagar Police Commissionerate, under which New Town Kolkata falls, is included in the Safe City Program. The detailed DPR for the project had been developed with a budget of INR 28 crores. CCTV camera purchase & installation, integration of "Dial 100" with "Anandababu" and sharing human resources to attend to emergencies was planned to be leveraged under Smart City Mission. Under the IOT of DeitY, proposal for converging IOT / public service delivery with Digital India initiative has been made already. With the Jan Dhan Yojana project, technology standards were to be adopted such that it allowed RuPay card transactions enhancing universal financial inclusions. Under the Department of Electronics and Information Technology (DeitY), the IoT solutions for Smart Utilities, Mobility, Citizen and Environment were to be designed and developed in partnership with CDAC leveraging DeitY funds. In the East-West Metro Project, the multi modal para-transit planning would be developed considering the design of upcoming Metro stations as specified in the East-West Metro DPR.[100]

The Pan City solutions were also designed to complement the solutions proposed under Area Based Development program of NKDA. The Pan City solutions were designed to leverage the future investments including upcoming Metro rail corridor and 14 health & 25 education facilities, the existing eGovernance and mGovenance solutions already developed by NKDA and HIDCO, the smart infrastructure projects like the wifi on 11 km stretch of the Major Arterial Road and the experience of NKDA/ HIDCO of implementing various ICT based projects. These solutions are meant to function leveraging three layers - City Database, City Business Processes and City Maps and will be supported by One-NKDA centers, Citizen Kiosks, City Command & Control Centre and city level wifi.

The pan city solution was developed to be the backbone for addressing the priority areas emerging from the multiple stakeholder citizen engagement process. eKiosks, One-NKDA centers and "Anandababu" – the 24/7 multi-lingual phone based citizen facilitation centre along with mobile and internet based access to citizen services, as part of the One-NKDA IGS was expected to be beneficial for citizens in lower income group as well as higher age groups for whom availability of computers/ access to

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[100] Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, *The Smart City Challenge: Stage 2.*

internet/ using computers may be a constraint.[101] The module for City Safety was created to improve perception of safety & security for all including women & elderly. The solutions proposed as part of Pan City Smart & Safe Mobility and City Mobility module of One-NKDA IGS including Smart Bus Stands, app based Auto-Toto tracking and integrated multi-modal transport planning around upcoming Metro Station would address the first/ last mile connectivity in an inclusive manner. To existing and future businesses, City Biz module (of One-NKDA IGS) will provide investor services and thus enhance the ease of setting up industry, providing an impetus to economy & employment. The Centralized Command & Control Centre and the Utility Map will facilitate city management ensuring ease of work for city administrators. In conjugation with these measures, the city proposed to undertake large scale digital literacy campaigns in order to increase the awareness of all citizens. These solutions would strive to enable the city reach the overall strategic focus in an inclusive manner.

In developing and formulating these programmes, NKDA claims to have adopted best practices from other models from the time when solutions similar to the proposed ICT enabled citizen service delivery and governance mechanism had been implemented in cities like Bhopal, Delhi, Thane, Utrecht, Vienna, Birmingham and Cape Town. It also opted for solutions similar to the high speed wi-fi facility that had been implemented in cities like Kolkata (Park Street area), Venice, Barcelona, Adelaide, and Birmingham. The solution, however, had been successful due to the uninterrupted availability of the facility 24/7 along with large scale digital literacy of the citizens it catered to. Public information system (PIS) revamp with bus guides had been implemented in all bus stands in Seoul was also an inspiration for NKDA. The traffic analysis using CCTV and mobile devices had been piloted at Pune and vehicle tracking system that was implemented in London, Seoul, Bogota and Mysore were some other things that the NKDA claims to have been inspired by in planning New Town.[102]

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[101] Tasmayee Laha Roy, "Smart Anandababu becomes the icon of smart city project", *The Economic Times,* November 18, 2015.

[102] Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, *The Smart City Challenge: Stage 2.*

Implementation of these solutions in the respective cities were believed to have revolutionized the way urban governance is managed and services delivered. The design of the ICT enabled citizen service delivery and governance mechanism and mobility related solutions though implemented independently across many cities, New Town has reportedly been planned to integrate the two solutions for greater complementarity and to ensure better benefits for its citizens. New Town Kolkata would leverage its extensive experience in conducting pilots in the area of providing wi-fi facility, e-governance, m-governance and other predictive solutions to leverage the complementarity between the two solutions and derive synergy form them.[103]

b) Extent of citizen's involvement is shaping Visions and Goals

Leveraging a well formulated 5 stage citizen communication strategy spread over 50 days, NKDA reportedly engaged with around 83% of the residing population (29880 residents) to obtain their feedback on city profile and understand their aspirations, vision and goals. Approximately 21% respondents (7560 persons) provided inputs for formulating the Smart City Plan through 138 events. Respondents included senior citizens, housewives, students, professionals including IT employees, informal sector workers, children, non-resident property owners, citizens seeking to relocate to New Town in near future, entrepreneurs, developers, businessmen, city administrators, elected representatives, academicians and other government institutions along with visitors to the city.[104]

Citizens were encouraged to give offline inputs through Vision Competition, Seminars & workshops and Smart Fridays. Feedback on key issues and suggestions were collected through Feedback forms, Smart City Suggestion Booth & Off-line Voting, Ideas Camps, Focus Group Discussions, Workshops conducted by FCC, ICC and NASSCOM. Online inputs were also collected through online feedbacks on website and online votes were conducted on website for key issues and suggestions

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[103] Institute for Smart Government, *Smart City Development Plan for New Town Kolkata Smart City Project*, National Institute for Smart Government, 2016.

[104] Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, *The Smart City Challenge: Stage 2.*

with email responses to NKDA, MyGov, Online Votes and Facebook.[105] But the nature of participation in these activities remain to be seen because it is not enough to have provisions for an interactive decision-making process but it should have engagement with the people to be successful. There is no document provided by the authorities in-charge to shed light on citizen engagement.

As per the report, the engagement strategy of New Town Kolkata was aimed at reaching maximum number of people through networking and connecting with all groups of the community including visitors for deliberation, feedback, generating ideas, co-creation of solutions and refining & finalizing the smart city plan. Various programmes were arranged by the NKDA including inauguration of "Smart City New Town Kolkata" initiative through a 'City Level' citizen meet cum workshop, publication of an information brochure and citizen involvement procedure, citizen challenge workshop by Future City Catapult, UK. Multiple activities were conducted across the electronic media, print media, social media through competitions, discussions, polls, awareness campaigns, talk-shows, along with visit to housing complexes by officials with laptops and data cards to enable citizen participation. There are also dedicated WhatsApp group, drop box facility, Smart City help Desk, Smart Fridays organized at NKDA to facilitate discussions on vision/ goals and co-creating innovative solutions. However, none of these efforts are documented to offer citizen participation or engagement report. There were also events during Durga Puja, Lakshmi Puja and Diwali - "Masti Ki Caravan", "Kiosk cum Walk in Ideas Camp", "Smart City Puja Stalls", SMS campaign to provide information, conducting citizen poll, validate key findings and obtain feedback[106].

Although different methods were used by the NKDA to reach out to the residents, it cannot be ascertained which are the income groups that participated in these processes, an information that would be crucial in evaluating New Town's merit as an inclusive urban space. The mediums used in order to reach out to the public are Electronic Media which includes NKDA website, MyGov website, Radio, Television, Mass Email and Mass SMS,   Print Media which includes Newspaper, Pamphlets, Banners

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[105] Ibid.
[106]   Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, *The Smart City Challenge: Stage 2.*

and Information Brochure, Social media which includes Facebook, Twitter, Personal Blog, YouTube and WhatsApp and through other activities like Face to Face Interactions, Workshops, Roadshows, Focus Group Discussions, Smart Friday /Saturday, Help Desk, Drop Box, Durga Puja/ Diwali specific events, Sit and Draw Competition and bi-cycling rally. Various competitions were conducted to understand the aspirations of citizens. These include Logo Competition, Essay Competition, Vision Competition and Drawing Competition. These competitions (except the Drawing Competition which was an offline event) were conducted through offline and online means. Additionally multiple visioning workshops were conducted with select citizen groups and officials from NKDA/ HIDCO. Additionally, Future City Catapult, UK, with over 120 participants from across various walks of life conducted a visioning activity. NKDA also used structured feedback forms to solicit citizen inputs. Smart Fridays were conducted for co-creating solutions. Although these activities, if successful in drawing participation, would indicate a vibrant city life but 'city' includes all its residents and it is difficult to understand how far these activities could reach all.

According to the citizen polls conducted by NKDA, three priority areas were identified. The Citizen Priorities were Transport and walkability, primarily health & educational, safety & security, economic development & employment and waste management. Areas of preference were also marked out with the most critical issues being walkability, last and first mile connectivity and perception on safety & security. [107] This sort of exercise that marks out the important areas for the administrative bodies to focus on, is seemingly extremely effective in building a vibrant democratic space.

The report also highlights key inputs from citizen's valuable feedback, which attempts to capture the imagination of the citizens, economically, socially, spatially and environmentally. Economically New Town has been envisioned as developing into a "Digital City", "Dream IT City", "Health and Education Hub", "Service Hub", "Hi-tech City" with great opportunities for employment and economic activities , while socially, it aspires to be a "cosmopolitan", "culturally sustainable", "inclusive

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[107] Institute for Smart Government, *Smart City Development Plan for New Town Kolkata Smart City Project*, National Institute for Smart Government, 2016.

city" which is "safe and corruption free" and provides "great urban governance", with spatial leverage on its proximity to the international airport and Naba Diganta to become an "connected city", to promote "entrepreneurship" and to become "communication focused and connected" and environmentally, it is envisioned as an "environment friendly", "energy efficient", "clean and eco-friendly" city which promotes use of "non-conventional energy"[108]. These terms identified by the administration are extremely crucial in understanding how New Town appears in the imagination of its citizens, a dialogue which should continue to inform the administration about its responsibilities, providing a direction for future projects.

As has been pointed out that in understanding New Town as an open space it is not how much of an open area, geographically speaking, is provided for the citizens that becomes the main concern, but how far is New Town a democratic space, the point of this exercise is to find out how inviting to differences New Town is in terms of the people that will find their homes in this space, how diverse in terms of the social-economic groups its facilities will allow access to and how vibrant a city life it can provide for its people, are some of the questions explored in this section. Looking at the different provisions made to ensure citizen participation in the planning process while increasingly developing the space as a Smart City under Smart Cities Mission, it can be said that the vision behind this model entails the increased use of technology to offer various local and administrative services to the residents, which can be extremely exclusionary for people who are not well-versed with technology. Hence, Smart cities are either not meant to include the people that cannot stay or become up-to-date with its technological Smart-ness or it is simply designed to silently ignore the existence and the need of the population that cannot benefit from the facilities and virtues it is designed to promote and practice.

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[108] National Institute for Smart Government, *Smart City Development Plan for New Town Kolkata,* Smart City Project. 2016.

CHAPTER - III

The Ideals of a Planned City

New Town is the first planned production of suburbs of West Bengal in the context of post-liberalisation. Presenting a complex area of study, it is an interaction of divergent issues that offer unique circumstances requiring unique solutions. It is interesting to note how the state plays the role of balancing the two opposite imperatives of development and economic growth with providing opportunities to people who are "at the bottom of the pyramid"[109]. The starting point of the investigation of how far the state has been able to achieve its welfare goals then has to begin with an inquiry into its structure of development, which this section attempts to do by looking into the intricacies of planning. Each section here is an effort to capture the vision that worked behind the planning of New Town and the goals and methods that were adopted in its execution.

A. Who wants the New Town?

The main people who were excited about the New Town were primarily the architects as plans were being drawn out to turn the space into one of a kind model in Kolkata and for the rest of India to take a cue from and the other excited party were the politicians waiting to credit for all that emerges as laudable.[110] The planning began with action areas and designing sectors, which would then go on to become busy in designing bus stands, new markets and malls, new transport system, traffic intersection placements and so on but the challenge for a 'smart green city' is to manifest them into reality in their greenest form[111]. The plans are supposed to be viewed and understood in the context that Rajarhat, as insisted upon by the planners,

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[109] Prahalad C K, Fortune at the Bottom of the Pyramid: Eradicating Poverty Through Profits (Prentice-Hall, Upper Saddle River, NJ), 2010.

[110] Suman Chakraborti, "West Bengal seeks "smart green city" tag for New Town".

[111] Suman Chakraborti, "West Bengal seeks "smart green city" tag for New Town".

was soon going to be powered by technology from the US, India's first zero-energy town.[112] A goal that it is still far from achieving.

Realtors are meant to follow the dreams of the architect but sometimes as had also been pointed out in the works of Richard Sennett[113], that it is a completely different situation. Even though only a few infrastructural facilities were essential for the area, it is unreal to expect the architects to get excited about them as either the absence or the presence of these structures were of no concern to them and were to be left to the mercy and discretion of municipal engineers and town planners to debate their fate. The schools in the project area were supposed to have more space, amenities, designed buildings and so on. With a highly priced developing land of New Town, every facility including the schools were supposed to be seen as business. Some of these schools like the Delhi Public Schools should be modeled to become 'ideal' in their fields with affluent facilities like huge open spaces, community grounds, halls and playgrounds etc. With different aspects prioritised in different sections of the schools like higher secondary, primary and nursery. Hence, this necessitated the creation of 'educational zones' which would allot additional space for parking facilities in peak office hours[114]. There was supposed to be designated places for institutes for vocation and training, with no space left for a university as pointed out by an architect because it was not viable to go with the conventional design of college or university in a large area without being supported by government subsidy.[115] Approached at a regional scale, effective planning was going to provide preferred commercial and industrial activities the appropriate promotion. As per the vision of the architect, the jobs that would be generated in turn would serve as an attractive livelihood option for people from the rural surroundings.[116]

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[112] Ajanta Chakraborty, "Rajarhat to be first zero-energy town", *Times of India*, July 27, 2010.

[113] Richard Sennett, "The Fight for the City", *Eurozine*, 14 February 2019.
https://www.eurozine.com/the-fight-for-the-city/

[114] Uttam K. Roy, "Changing Scenario and Emerging Planning Norms for Educational Infrastructures in Planned Townships: A Case Study of New Town, Kolkata", paper presented at East Zone Conference of Institute of Town Planners India, Mesra, 2007. http://www.atiwb.gov.in/U6.pdf

[115] UK Roy, "Changing Scenario and Emerging Planning Norms".

[116] UK Roy, "Changing Scenario and Emerging Planning Norms".

It was also up to the urban architect to plan and execute the faster circulation of people, commodities, service and money among other things. So, the acquirement of 'smart buses' by HIDCO in that aspect was deemed as a necessary move and was celebrated in the newspapers with a hint of hope and ecstasy.[117] Hence, all this was quick to raise a question regarding the difference between Rajarhat and Kolkata that was being planned, executed and realised at a structural level with promoting Rajarhat as the emergence of something which Kolkata is not. This makes one wonder whether the difference is only about urban style or the way of living and experiencing an urban lifestyle or with the emergence of a new model of smart green urban new towns, we were noticing a structural divide in the question pertaining to the understanding of city. This was an important juncture in deciding whether or not the new developmental imagination can dissolve within its heterogeneity the formal totality that we understand as the city to the extent that it becomes emptied of all historical context.[118] Following Henri Lefebvre's work on the philosophy of space, it is important to note the historical and dialectical evolution of space referred to as the city, which following the narrative and historic logic of capital, is disintegrated into a heterogeneity of spaces that confront each other as irrelevant and unfamiliar. In the transformation of space, it is becoming imperative to look for the public space which is integral to public action.(cite)

a) The Unreal Expectations

The plan to set up the New Town was initiated by the Government of West Bengal in the early 1990s. A technical committee was set up by the department of housing in May 1993, which was mandated to structure a preliminary report on New Town. The CMDA (Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority which was is now KMDA with 'Calcutta' being changed to Kolkata) was also approached to prepare a concept plan. This concept plan by CMDA which was submitted in May 1994 was revised by the housing department with the help of a task force it set up, comprising of experts and technical officers from various relevant departments in consultation with Bengal Engineering College (which has now been renamed as Bengal Engineering and

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[117] Suman Chakraborti. "In a first, electric buses roll out in New Town", *Times of India*, May 3 2018.

[118] Ishita Dey, Ranabir Samaddar and Suhit K. Sen, Beyond Kolkata. 34.

Science University), the director of School of Planning and Architecture in Delhi and the Department of Architecture and Town Planning. It was with the input from the experts in these institutions that Kharagpur's Indian Institute of Technology was approached to prepare the first project report.[119] It was this report that for the first time had envisioned New Town as an 'environment-friendly' city populated with water bodies, large areas of parks, open green land and so on. It was supposed to be a residential town primarily which meant that the developed land would be principally used for residential purposes along with community facilities and ancillary services. Due importance was also to be given to commercial zones and a new business district which would supplement the central business district of Kolkata and there was provision for 'clean industries'.[120] However, it is absolutely necessary to understand that the land use plan that was drawn according to this proposal was significantly changed over the years.

The provision made for large open spaces was drastically altered to the point that only quarter of the originally allotted area remained in the final plan. One very interesting aspect in the original project report was that it wanted to do away with exclusive zoning patterns and instead wanted to follow mixed-use patterns that would allow creation of neighborhoods that encouraged the co-existence of sections from different income brackets. Each neighborhood was to be supplied with amenities like shopping centres, parks, schools, health facilities including both specialised and general hospitals, police stations, community and cultural centres with auditoriums, gyms and libraries, telegraph and post offices etc. Provision was also made to include mass transportation facilities, along with efficient infrastructural facilities like piped gas grid, solid waste management system, adequate power supply, telephone exchange, hygienic sanitation system and a captive water supply system and drainage system.[121]

The neighborhood's residential clusters were supposed to get facilities like a network of pedestrian paths and bicycle tracks. The town was supposed to be dotted with 'service villages' meant for the 'service population' but there was hardly any clarity

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[119] Government of West Bengal, *New Town at Rajarhat*, 11-18.

[120] Ibid.

[121] Ibid.

on this concept.[122] These villages were possibly deemed important even for the rehabilitation perspective because a section of the displaced population were expected to turn service providers. The service villages, were interestingly designed to be high density but low rise with dwelling units that would be affordable for low income groups. Most homeowners have not yet moved onto their land (approximately 60% are vacant), and the area's population size and density are low, resulting in limited social and economic dynamism. Moreover, due to its small population, NKDA does not qualify to benefit from central government programs such as AMRUT and Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana.[123]

In the original plan, the 47.6 per cent of the total area reserved for open spaces was supposed to have swimming and rowing facilities, golf course, outdoor recreational areas, planned open spaces and parks, picnic spot, poultry and dairy farms, forestry, horticulture and urban agriculture, pisciculture etc., along with walking trails and scenic linear parks along the Bagjola Canal.[124] It is important to reiterate that this was according to the original plan drawn out for the New Town area of Rajarhat which was meant to be a residential settlement primarily with a portion of land allocated for industry, where IT was added as a late afterthought. It was this 'ultra-modern' imagination of the Left Front government and the ones who conceptualized the New Town which had the ultimate bearing on the project. A great deal about this conceptualization, if not surreal, was inestimably bizarre. It was only about 15 years later that the imaginary urban space would reveal its unreality. A report presented for the financial year 2008-2009 by the CAG (Comptroller and Auditor General), Government of India, revealed a scathing indictment of the entire planned project. It started its evaluation by pointing out that HIDCO (West Bengal Housing Infrastructure Development Corporation) had failed to formulate any strategic plan to fulfill or practically realise its objectives. While instead of doing that HIDCO was accused of going ahead with the implementation of the project in the four designated action areas. The CAG report went on to categorically delineate how the absence of strategic planning in the project reports presented by HIDCO in October 1999 and

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[122] Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, *The Smart City Challenge: Stage 2*.

[123] Ibid.

[124] Team MP, "Illuminated Bagjola canal adds to nightlife charm in New Town", *Millennium Post*, April 7, 2019.

August 2003 resulted in unavoidable delays in synchronisation between allotment of land and development, creation of infrastructure and finalizing selling prices and break-even cost of plots. As per the CAG analysis, HIDCO's 1999 report had planned 210 km of roads for New Town without specifying a definite schedule for the completion of the task in each action area. The work on drainage network was running far behind the planned schedule, according to the CAG report. The report also pointed out the abysmal condition of demand for water against the estimation provided by HIDCO. A similar problem was seen in the power sector as well.[125] Without strategic planning, there were requirements for temporary arrangements, as in the place of a hi-tech township what the CAG report revealed was a shabby reality mocking surreal imagination.

B. A Future without A Past?

New consumption pattern is linked to virtual production sites which gives way to new lifestyle that shapes an urban self, standing at the intersection of private desires and social aspirations for self-advancement. The emergence of new consumption centres and episodes of dispossession are important from the viewpoint of the idea of the neo-liberal charter re-shaping life. The milieu of private-public partnership has brought in an absurdity that would not allow the mauzas and villages tucked into the extreme corners of the New Town and Rajarhat to change. The SEZ buildings and the glassy high rise which are only going to increase with time will serve to juxtapose the spectacle of private wealth against the poverty of low-quality public infrastructure.

In his writings on Paris, Walter Benjamin had noted that every public outcry and revolt had served to install new architectural wonders. He had used the example of redesigning of Paris led by Haussman and the barricades, the arcades of the city and the ubiquity of the vagabond. He was of the opinion that with these collectors' items, landmarks abounding the city, the city reflected the 'collective consciousness'. According to him, these edifices represented a classless society's utopia - places

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[125] Audit Report (Commercial) for the Year 32 March 2009, The Controller and Auditor General, Government of India (hereafter CAG Report 2009), in Ishita Dey, Ranabir Samaddar and Suhit K. Sen, *Beyond Kolkata*. 27-32.

accessible to everyone where one could walk around carrying the memory of a primal past, the deposits of which had been left in life's various configurations, from edifices that endure to fashion that quickly passes.[126]

But the question is, if Rajarhat is going to carry, like Kolkata, the city's historical associations with popular protest and popular life - in the form of a memory now or in the form of an architectural wonder? Landmarks like Town Hall and Victoria Memorial Hall in Kolkata, had these popular associations. It was Victoria Memorial Hall and Town Hall where hunger and national revolutionary movement had ushered along with the utopia of a vibrant public sphere where intellectuals and public figures like Rabindranath Tagore would address the nation and the city.[127] This is not going to be the story of Rajarhat. New Town will not have any immobilised images from which it may be possible to receive what preceded them, gone into moulding them and also disappeared in them, only to be manifested in the image. In fact, Rajarhat is the place where maximum commodity fetishism could operate.

The five banking institutions that were allotted plot in the area were UCO Bank, State Bank of India, United Bank of India along with UTI Mutual Fund and Industrial Financial Corporation of India. [128] Apart from this, New Town will also be headquarters of several financial and banking institutions, insurance and stock exchange companies accompanied by integrated educational, hospitality and IT complexes. The staff of these institutions which get offices in the hub will be opting for accommodation in the area as well. As per Hidco officials, this hub might become India's second financial hub closely following Mumbai's Bandra Kurla, making Kolkata a destination for big-budget investment.[129] This explains the role of the State's finance department as the nodal agency entrusted with the responsibility for setting up the hub while Hidco will set up the infrastructure.

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[126] Leslie Esther, Walter Benjamin, *Overpowering Conformism*, (Reaktion Books, 2007). 59.

[127] Bishwanath Ghosh, "A Building Rich in History", *The Hindu*, August 19 2022.

[128] Government of West Bengal, *New Town at Rajarhat*, 11-18.

[129] Atmadip Ray, "CPM faces tough challenge in West Bengal assembly polls", *The Economic Times,* 23 April, 2011.

Hidco's Managing Director, Saurabh Das had mentioned that as the gateway to the South-East, the hub will play an important role in furthering the Look East policy. The financial exchanges that the authorities are expecting are mostly from South-East Asian countries like Thailand, Myanmar and Singapore.[130] However, given how the land prices in the Bhangar-Rajarhat area which was under the now dissolved BRADA or Bhangar Rajarhat Area Development Authority and New Town astronomically shot up, it is quite evident that the monetisation process has not been simple or straightforward.

The places of notified land had their prices shoot up with land sharks of questionable reputation interfering to offer farmers arbitrary prices whenever they eyed a piece of land as profitable to take over. While in the early days, per cottah in New Town was priced by Hidco at Rs 8,000-12,000, the same was sold by Hidco at a higher price of Rs 5,00,000 to Rs 3000,000 per cottah. Looters had a greater freedom in the BRADA area. Projects that required huge areas like Delhi Public School, Vedic Village and even Olive Garden were quickly acquired by or were planned on plots owned by land sharks or people who had strong political connections. The prices that were offered in cases like this was somewhere between Rs 400,000 to 600,000 per cottah.[131] A cut was set aside for BRADA, government increased its revenue but that did not lead to any development in the local infrastructure. Beyond a point, the only option left to the farmers were to evacuate the place by selling their lands or resort to sundry jobs. This is the way in which de-peasantisation proceeded in New Town, Rajarhat with party leaders, managers and local gentry of different kinds making phenomenal gains in the name of development.

The difference between Kolkata and Rajarhat is that if it is a social citizenry that Kolkata represented with obligations and powers derived from subscribing to a collective body, the subject for Rajarhat was less about being a social citizen in a

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[130] Suman Chakraborti, "Rajarhat finance hub draws big business", *The Times of India*, 13 January, 2011.

https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kolkata/rajarhat-finance-hub-draws-big-business/articleshow/7272383.cms

[131] Ishita Dey, Ranabir Samaddar and Suhit K. Sen, *Beyond Kolkata*. 90-91.

similar way and more about being a product of largesse and public loot, with personal fulfillment driving the energetic pursuit and continuously determining the factors that could aid the achievement of this fulfillment. It is necessary to conclude by pointing out that planning of the space had a huge role to play in the conceptualisation and subsequent emergence of Rajarhat as a consumption-oriented new subject of urban development. The old public spaces of street corners, parks and railway stations were to be theoretically replaced and physically transformed into shopping malls, libraries and multiplexes and also book libraries and flower kiosks.

Interestingly, the concept of "Frontier Urbanism" discussed by Rajarshi Dasgupta and Shubhra Gururani[132] brings about an interesting twist here. The authors talk about the heterogeneous politics of land that is taking place in the urban-agrarian hinterland of South Asian countries and term the phenomenon as "frontier urbanism" where frontier assumes a generative category as a landscape that is constantly evolving and reshaping. They understand this place to lie both inside as well as outside of the capitalist accumulation regimes simultaneously. These edges which are in character agrarian-urban are the grey zones which in the scheme of urban planning are treated as if they are spaces without a past - without a history of use and dwelling. And that is the same conclusive argument an overview of the urban planning in New Town would be taking us towards but the treatment of the people in these areas as backward and village-like who could use some discipline, urbanisation and need to be integrated within productive models of economic prowess, as pointed out by the authors, merit consideration. The article makes an important remark in arguing that "the rural does not just continue into the urban or that the urban just meets and encompasses the rural but that the agrarian and the urban are materially and symbolically co-produced".[133] Pointing out that the agrarian question is never dealt with in as much as the urban theory is fixated with the city, it makes an appeal to fully explore the "non-city" counterparts of the cities of today in its granular dynamics of nature, countryside and wilderness.

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[132] Rajarshi Dasgupta and Shubhra Gururani, "Frontier Urbanism: Urbanisation Beyond Cities in South Asia", *Economic and Political Weekly*, LIII no. 12 (2018): 41.

[133] Dasgupta and Gururani, "Frontier Urbanism," 43.

In this context, the case of New Town is an example of the phenomenon that has been described. As the frontiers have been categorically described, the New Town too shares characteristic similarties fitting of the label. The frontiers are typically made up of poor, dispossessed and displaced tenants, migrants and peasants who begin a struggle for space with the advent of urbanisation at their doorstep sharing it with the new upper and middle class housing enclaves, offices, shopping malls and other urban facilities. With the beginning and settling of the urbanisation process through the generative frontiers of South Asia, the treatment of these spaces without any history is both theoretically and practically untrue but what does inform the process of studying these spaces is a categorical denial of their past, primarily because the agrarian is still view as the metaphorical 'other' in the urban literature. The two categories which are both existential and functional counterparts have not met each other at the depths of their own being, which is why it may be convenient to deny a past for New Town in a sense that is familiar and convenient for the category of 'urban' to incorporate and reminisce with pride but it is not possible to hide that denial. Therefore, the history of New Town is what it has been in the past, where it shares its story and fate with numerous spaces standing and awaiting a spot in the urban frontiers but how far that history will contribute to the sense belonging to a city for its residents depends on how far along the city has come in understanding its complex roots of origin.

C. Utopic Cities or Dystopian Nightmare

The main reason the government had been able to maintain a fervour of utopia regarding the New Town is because of the expectations from a space, the label on which had no precedent in the minds of the people projected under the tags of "Smart City" and "Green City"[134]. Glossy terms that were yet to receive meaning and structure in the urban imagination of the vast majority, people ended up waiting for spaces to give meaning to these concepts by grounding in reality what felt like a name for some fantastical superficiality. The articles in the newspapers which would from time-to-time announce the projects that were to drive the curiosity of people and keep

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[134] Suman Chakraborti, "West Bengal seeks "smart green city" tag for New Town".

the excitement alive, were one of the main tools of promoting and maintaining this utopia, at least in imagination if not in reality.

A smart city has been described as a municipality which uses ICT (information and communication technologies) to share information with the residents, improve both the citizen welfare and quality of government services and increase operational efficiency.[135] In the National Portal of India, the Government of India has described the smart city as a new and innovative initiative to improve the quality of life for people and drive economic growth by harnessing technology and enabling local government to create smart solutions for its citizens. As per the definition on the portal, a range of approaches are tapped into by the Smart City initiative like best practices in urban planning, innovative digital and information technology, policy change and public-private partnerships to make a difference. The focus of this initiative is on the development being inclusive and sustainablet and to create a replicable model both 'within and outside the Smart City' which will be seen as a lighthouse for other aspiring projects catalysing the advent of smart cities all over the country.[136]

In June 2021, out of the 100 smart cities in India, New Town was ranked 8th with a certification of "Enabled" status in the Data Maturity Assessment Framework 2.0. As reported by the NKDA (New Town Kolkata Development Authority) officials, the announcement was made by the ministry of housing and urban affairs. The assessment was conducted on the basis of how much data was being made available online. NKDA primarily uses their official website, www.nkdamar.org to make major civic services like building plan sanction, assessment and payment of property tax, trade licence, completion and occupancy certificates for residents including birth and death certificates be catered to online. Even in the CSCAF (Climate Smart Cities Assessment Framework) 2.0 assessment, which is an initiative by the Government of

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[135]   TWI, "What is a Smart City? Definition and Example", *TWI*.
https://www.twi-global.com/technical-knowledge/faqs/what-is-a-smart-city

[136]   National Portal of India, "Smart Cities Mission: A step towards Smart India", india.gov.in.
https://www.india.gov.in/spotlight/smart-cities-mission-step-towards-smart-india#:~:text=The%20Smart%20Cities%20Mission%20is,What%20is%20a%20Smart%20City%3F

India to inculcate a climate-sensitive approach with regards to urban development and planning in India, New Town received 2 out of 5 stars in 2021. NKDA is known to be presently focusing on creating a pollution free environment by using more electric buses, solar panels, battery run vehicles and developing canal-top solar plants and also promote the use of renewable energies.[137]

In 2021, New Town had also been awarded the certification of Platinum Green City by the Indian Green Building Council. This certification came in the light of the initiatives taken up by the NKDA authorities which include developing water bodies, cycle-friendly infrastructure, e-mobility, waste water treatment, rainwater harvesting, rules for green buildings and integrating land use with open and green spaces meant for the public.[138] At some point in 2016, as announced in The Indian Express, the West Bengal government had reportedly decided to dump the Smart City project initiated by the Government of India in New Town, Kolkata and wanted to develop the space as India's first Green City.[139] As per news reports, the Chief Minister of West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee, had decided to develop selected cities in the state along the line of its own vision of the 'Green City Project'. The Green City is much like the Smart City but with a key addition - "green buildings", as outlined by the Indian Green Building Council to enable sustainable built environment for all. A green building is one which in its construction, design or operation, eliminates or reduces the negative impacts and can furthermore create positive impacts on our natural environment and climate.[140] Now, this vision is aligned with making India a global leader in sustainable built environment by 2022.[141] The decision of the West Bengal government to opt out of the central project was made clear stating that the

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[137] Suman Chakraborti, "Data maturity: New Town is India's 8th smartest city".

[138] Suman Chakraborti, "Data maturity: New Town is India's 8th smartest city".

[139] Aniruddha Ghosal, "West Bengal: Mamata dumps Centre's Smart City project, to develop cities on its own", *The Indian Express*, 19 August 2016.

[140] Mike Anderson, "Green City: What is a sustainable city and why is it important?", *One Key Blog* (blog), October 25, 2021, accessed on January 20, 2022, https://onekeyresources.milwaukeetool.com/en/green-city

[141] Sudipta Sengupta, "India aims to clinch world no. 1 spot in green buildings by 2022", *The Times of India,* 27 September 2019. https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/hyderabad/india-aims-to-clinch-world-no-1-spot-in-green-buildings-by-2022/articleshow/71318908.cms

state government had decided against applying for the status of "Smart City" for Salt Lake as well. The two reasons cited for the decision was the nature of the investment from the Centre and the state which seemed skewed and the imposition of water tax which was made compulsory for smart cities. In the first public appearance by the CM of West Bengal after winning the elections in 2016, she had made the statement that the "theory" and "idea" behind the Smart City project was "wrong" deeming it unwise to spend Rs 500 crore on the Centre's Smart City project, adding that it would be better to spend that money as per the own understanding of the state government.[142] After all these announcements in 2016, in June 2021 New Town was ranked 8th out of 100 Smart Cities in India and certified "Enabled" because of their online civic services.[143]

a) The Vision of New Towns in India

It is crucial to understanding the history of New Town that we recognise the development of the concept and the examples worldwide to be following particular historical paths that are both country and region specific. The nature of emergence of industrial spaces in South Korea, Malaysia and even in Haldia or Bangalore might look similar given its reflection in the mirror of globalization. However, any place that has attempted an operation in ignorance of its own unique reality to establish a New Town has had to cope up with an superimposed version of an illusionary ideal by making adjustments along the way that once again gave way to a new path, route and dimension to the process of birthing a New Town into existence.

The history and path for each of the projects is different both in regards to its physical roots and material aspirations. In establishing a national capital region in Delhi, the idea obviously involved huge amounts of investment, which would partly require to be diverted from different areas and issues of national priority. This development also entails building infrastructure, recognising desertification, arranging water supply and

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[142] Aniruddha Ghosal, "West Bengal: Mamata dumps Centre's Smart City project".

[143] Suman Chakraborti, "Data maturity: New Town is India's 8th smartest city" ,*The Times of India*, 29 June 2021.

https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kolkata/data-maturity-new-town-is-indias-8th-smartest-kolkata/articleshow/83943513.cms

shifting old industries which could be seen as polluting the new town to the outskirts, which eventually leads to the unimaginable rise of real estate prices. The firms that stand to gain in the process are IT and IT-enabled ones. It is by following this process that Gurgaon came into existence.[144]

Gachibowli is another example of an Indian new town from the outskirts of Hyderabad. The work of Sheela Prasad and C. Ramachandriah poses the question if it is a model of IT city after narrating the story of Hyderabad's makeover. They argue that these new towns in conception are post-metropolis and in the form of cyber city, it is the emergence of a new urban form. Their work explains how everyday urban life is mediated by a cyber city, in effect creating urban spaces that are more inegalitarian, creating an urban topology of control and power, which raises the question about who the city belongs to. Witnessing the third phase of a cyber city in the making, which has also been called 'cyberabad', from the airport the city has straight links which bypasses the city. The Hyderabad Urban Agglomeration was used for the implementation of unequal policies affecting different segments of the affected population differently. In the same way, master plans were used to develop certain fringes diverting resources which were to be subsumed in the newly created township. The idea was to create a high-class IT infrastructure with digital connectivity that would make Andhra Pradesh the primary destination choice for world class IT companies, which would also double as India's premier IT education center. But this is a story from the years when Satyam was growing in power and influence and the Chief Minister of the State was being promoted as its CEO, aiming to run like a company the state he was leading. But even with the Satyam bubble had burst in due course along with the IT bubble partially bursting the CM's party losing the elections, Gachibowli does retain some strength and credibility. But in places where the supply of water is only meant for company buildings, instances of people gathering around water taps which hardly had provision for public water supply, rightly paints a grim

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[144] Manavi Kapur, "India's glittering Gurugram remains a model of how not to build a new city", *Quartz India*, 10 October, 2020.
https://qz.com/india/1900650/indias-gurugram-remains-a-model-of-how-not-to-build-a-new-city/

picture of the Gachibowli project. But even with the huge loss of public space, the country undoubtedly got another new town to marvel at.[145]

Similar governmental instruments went into developing the new town at Bangalore which ritualistically involved mega planning, master planning, private-public partnerships, developing and building special districts and area development techniques among other things. The IT sector witnessed rapid growth which increased the demand on the city and its periphery for land and infrastructure. The idea of an IT corridor connecting Electronics City in Bommanahalli to Mahadevpura's International Technology Park Limited, has now unleashed upon the urban space of Bangalore another round at redesigning and partitioning.[146] Likewise, Hinjewadi in Pune, has another story of urban planning to tell with Rajiv Gandhi Infotech Park. Instead of boasting a good connectivity via public transport, this place is well-connected with private vehicles and modern cars. The boost came from the state policy of Maharashtra, which offered the IT industry a range of benefits, fiscal and non-fiscal both. Development and planning in the park is happening in phases with allowing exclusive access to its vicinity. It has been reported to be housing a silver zone with jewellery and gems sector, wine park for processing grapes, floriculture, electronics and food processing centre with thirty percent of the area allotted to be a green zone. This too tells a story of booming real estate projects, increasing prices benefiting the speculators along with displacement and opposition from locals on issues of justice. It still remains a question whether local people stand to benefit from any of this.[147]

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[145] C. Ramachandriah, and S. Prasad. "The Makeover of Hyderabad: Is It the Model IT City?" in *High-Tech Urban Spaces: Asian and European Perspectives,* ed. C. Ramachandraiah, A. C. M. Van Western and Sheela Prasad (New Delhi: Manohar. 2008), 293–318.

[146] B. Parthasarathy "The Political Economy of the Computer Software Industry in Bangalore, India". In *ICTs and Indian Economic Development: Economy, Work, Regulation,* ed. A. Saith and M. Vijabhaskar (New Delhi: Sage 2005),199–230.

[147] Pune Nirvana Hills Slum Rehabilitation Project, Kumar Urban Development Limited, Project Number: 44940, March 2012.
https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/project-document/59945/44940-01-ind-rp-01.pdf

b) The Vision of New Town in Rajarhat, West Bengal

The experiences in Bangalore, Hinjewadi, Gachibowli and Gurgaon, along with the experience of some other places in India of establishing New Town prove that there has been a national trend in addition to the global pattern. These domestic instances cannot be said to be replicating western models. These examples reflect a mixed scenario but the way Rajarhat new town was planned indicates a clear evolution in the techniques of the Government. As it has already been discussed in both first and second chapter, the project did not start as a designated technology park but it was initiated by the housing department with accommodation as the basic criteria for the project. However, planning is crucial for spaces to be partitioned and reorganized. In all these cases, it has already been established that the agenda posed by physical planners often seems to be going against the logic embodied in the old space signified by integrated cities and villages. It attempts, as if, to reverse the earlier order and division of territorial specialisation.

Any new opening of space inevitably entails a new closure, which necessitates that all existing entities be subordinated to the hi-tech space that is newly emerging. In this sense, planning does not stand to mean that economic activities will be directly controlled by the state but what it means is guiding the former to a predestined goal. Thus, it is not entrepreneurs that plan new towns but government bodies. The goal is to open all cities as far as possible to the world economy, to scale down or completely close a city's old manufacturing base, to make it a centre of services that are tradable, like education, healthcare, skill development etc., to adjust the urban economy to macroeconomic reforms and moreover, to develop the city as a service centre catering to various interests like hospitality, healthcare, culture, trade, finance, programming, data processing and so on where the idea of national economic development seems old and redundant.

To colonise land in the old colonial days, the contract methods and land tenure systems prevailing at that time, had to be changed, altering land use patterns, for

example, to force indigo cultivation.[148] Similarly, for the new towns to emerge, it was once again necessary to change land use patterns and tenure systems either by force or by legislation. Thus, the land in Rajarhat was taken away, water bodies filled up, legal principle of a small peasant's inalienability of land was ignored, malls and hotels were built on altered status of agricultural land and thus, what is otherwise viewed as instances of exception becomes a norm in urban processes as such as this. A bureaucratic authority takes up the charge of new areas marked by financial riches, while municipal bodies that are democratically elected are entrusted with the administration of old areas marked by financial constraints, bringing forth an urban governance normalized in its new regime.[149] The technologies that are now used to restructure urban spaces have all emerged and gained traction in the last few decades. From setting up urban commissions and renewal missions, creating master and mega plans and even setting up ATM machines in every corner of the city, monetising everything only serves to continuously partition the city. It is these norms, regulations and guidelines that become the legitimating tool for urban domination and expansion, because all that is then left for executioners, architects and planners is to comply with them.

D. Are Models of Urban Innovation Exclusionary at Premise?

Even if we keep aside the curiosity to interrogate the aspirations behind the vision of a 'modern' city which continuously haunts the planning and project documents of New Town, Kolkata, the newer and more immediate fascination with "Smart City" cannot be overlooked for its obsessive desire to replace the more human components of a city with things that are known for their operational efficiency and by definition uses information and communication technology to proclaim its existence. As has been pointed out in the 'Smart City Project' report itself, the place risks becoming a ghost town with a string of unoccupied buildings reserved in the name of a glorious economic future that will dawn upon the area. And as New Town builds itself and emerges through the present to move into its future, it is working with a past that was

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[148] Sanjukta Das Gupta, "Accessing Nature: Agrarian Change, Forest Laws and their Impact on an Adivasi Economy in Colonial India", *Conservation & Society*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (2009): 227-238.

[149] Ishita Dey, Ranabir Samaddar and Suhit K. Sen, *Beyond Kolkata*. 199-203.

constantly written and erased through series of projects and now fails to deliver any solid foundation for the living entities of New Town for whom 'Smart Cities' and 'Green Cities' are essentially designed.

The high dependence of the residents on private transports, evidently living in an area that the Government report itself recognizes as being akin to ghost town, would invite only a certain section or economic group to reside in the area which is a big threat to inclusivity and assimilation, no matter what initiatives are taken to open public spaces for mixed use and to invite people from all walks of life to use such places. This directly impacts the vibrancy of the city where residents in choosing to get comfortable in the familiarity of being surrounded by people like themselves, which closed socities primarily aim to do, end up avoiding the complexity and changes that gives a city its characteristic flavour of being divergent. Robbing cities of its colors and character is also the vision of an ideal city without being backed by a solid waste management system which in principle denies to take responsibility towards a greener future for its own existence.

A city cannot function efficiently without sorting its impact on the environment and the fact that the plan for magnificent "New Town" was conceived without planning for an effective waste management system when the project was being built on an ecologically fragile area to begin with, goes on to speak volumes about the aspirations of New Town as a model city for the future. It is essential to note that the city still does not methods to segregate the waste at source or treat it in an environment-friendly way.

The definition of "Smart City" suggests that it uses ICT to improve the efficiency of its operation, this probably explains the introduction of eKiosks, One-NKDA centers and "Anandababu" – the 24/7 multi-lingual phone based citizen facilitation centre along with mobile and internet based access to citizen services, as part of the One-NKDA IGS or the Intelligent Governance System. But as pointed out in the "India Smart City Mission" report published by the Ministry of Urban Development, Government of India there are numerous issues regarding public services and governance that were identified during the citizen engagement and city profiling. We can identify or to some extent, attempt to understand the vision behind the tag of

"Smart City" by looking at the Pan-city proposal or solutions to different issues offered by the NKDA. For example, some of the issues that were pointed out in the report are high waiting and travel time for obtaining different municipal services which are primarily delivered physically through the main office building of NKDA in Action Area I and also the absence of solutions that would be inclusive ensuring that all sections of society including nurses, laborers, household helps and drivers can can use them. The initiatives proposed by NKDA to address these issues are setting up of 120 interactive kiosks and 12 One-NKDA centres to be spread across key locations in the city and Pan city wifi for all citizens. The solution is meant to be inclusive but it is yet to be addressed how interactive kiosks are meant to make things easier for the population that still struggles with technology. If aspiring for a "Smart city" means the replacement of physical jobs headed and conducted by humans with technological advancements that would make the city more futuristic then it needs to be mentioned that such a vision excludes a certain population from enjoying the benefits of or reveling in the advancement of new age cities as such as this.

Hence, futurisitic aspirations that rely on technological marvels to become a lived reality for cities that are groomed under tags like "Smart city" and "Green city", hardly address how exclusionary their vision seems in terms of the population they are aimed at benefiting. As Richard Sennett had opined that the city that everyone desires ought to be safe and clean, with efficient public services, should provide cultural simulation, have the support of a dynamic economy and at the same time work to actively heal the divisions in society which exist in the form of ethnicity, race and class etc. He claims, however, that these are not the cities in which we currently reside.[150] By pointing out that cities should be attempting to heal social divisions, Sennett throws open a very different dimension regarding what an ideal city should look like as much of his work on the "Open City" and the "Closed City" has successfully done. Directly attacking the weak critical imagination in building cities of our times, Sennett wants to draw attention to the urban obsession with order and control constrained by the capitalist values of integration, equilibrium and homogeneity. This is what made cities not only predictable, but made them lose their vibrancy and diversity. This is the same picture that is painted by gated communities

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[150] Richard Sennet, "The Open City", 23-25.

that give these cities their desirability as residential towns, based on how safe, controlled, orderly homogeneous a space it can offer to the people moving in a new place but looking for the familiarity of their kind and often willing to pay more to opt for communities that are more tightly designed to keep away differences, unfamiliarity and the other. Cities like New Town not only endorse the idea of the Closed City in through its gated communities but also in its urban imagination of building an inclusive city, which simply involves the presence of more technological amenities through out the city, irrespective of any consideration to whether that solution itself is inclusive.

Another major issue that Sennett points out in his work is the contrast posed between gated complex and communities and open streets[151] which forces us to face the differences we would rather avoid. A similar kind of contrast can be built by throwing open spaces of recreation for all income and age groups. Museums and zoos are typically places where all groups of people can go to visit and these spots typically throw open a space for more complex social and cultural interaction. In as much as a space can hold these contradictions within itself, the more diverse, vibrant and complex it becomes. Although, it is not possible for a city to have such facilities in great numbers as the city has other functions to manage but it is desirable that the openness of mixed use be followed in principle for various structure of social, economic or political use. In New Town, Eco Park is a place that has been able to invite audiences from all sections of the society and yet that is the goal to be achieved with planning commercial places, local parks and other urban facilities, ensuring that they largely be seen as open spaces. The problem with designing open spaces is that it is not enough to create open spaces that allow for more complex interactions in the urban corners of the world but the challenge is to ensure that the places are inviting as well. As it has already been pointed out with example of Kolkata's Mocambo restaurant[152] that structures and facilities can be exclusionary in the outlook itself even though when they propound to be inclusive in theory. There will be some facilities that will not be availed by a certain population because of their lack of

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[151] Richard Sennet, "The Open City", 56-59.

[152] Express Web Desk, "Kolkata restaurant Mocambo refused to serve woman and her driver; gets slammed on social media", *The Indian Express*, September 13, 2016.

knowledge of the technology used in its operation or some buildings or shopping complexes that will not be entered by people from all income groups even when they are open for all. While these structural problems cannot be entirely eliminated, these also gain prominence and are strengthened in the context of urban models like "Green Cities" or "Smart Cities" where the strong reliance on technology to make urban spaces more fitting of the tags they carry, also exclude a section of the population who may not be well-versed in handling e-kiosks or website bots, are left out from benefitting from these "advancements".

Conclusion

The dissertation attempted to understand the basic framework designed by the West Bengal government to carry out the New Town Project in Rajarhat, Kolkata which in revealing its priorities and motivations, also paints an understanding of the abstract vision behind planning the urban space of New Town, Rajarhat. Analysing the Smart City Challenge Report of New Town in the second chapter, where different aspects of the project was evaluated to determine its qualification as a Smart City, as designated by the government, helped me understand the meaning and aspiration behind the Smart City Project and nature of urban life in New Town as imagined by the Government of India. The final chapter unpacks the understanding of a 'modern city' as urban projects like New Towns have been repeatedly referred to as in the government documents.

The theoretical understanding I have derived from the project has been shaped by the manner in which the nature of the plans repeatedly changed under various authorities and then under the different governments, to the now ruling TMC government announcing in 2016 that it no longer wants to develop New Town as a Smart City and also changed their minds about applying for the Smart City status for Salt Lake City and instead wanted to develop New Town as a Green City.[153] This came after the Chief Minister, Mamata Banerjee, had already changed her mind once about making New Town a Smart-Green City from Smart City.[154] Now, this vision is aligned with making India a global leader in sustainable built environment by 2022.[155] After all these announcements in 2016, in June 2021 New Town was ranked 8th out of 100 Smart Cities in India and certified "Enabled" because of their online civic services.[156] Therefore, the political landscape getting to determine the future of a planned urban city which changes so fast and so abruptly, where it is constantly emptied of all its

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[153] Aniruddha Ghosal, "West Bengal: Mamata dumps Centre's Smart City project, to develop cities on its own".

[154] Suman Chakraborti, "West Bengal seeks 'smart green city' tag for New Town".

[155] Sudipta Sengupta, "India aims to clinch world no. 1 spot in green buildings by 2022".

[156] Suman Chakraborti, "Data maturity: New Town is India's 8th smartest city".

meaning and given new labels to wear, to make it more attractive to investors, real estate owners and businesses has been the most important lesson from this exercise.

In the first chapter titled, "New Town, Kolkata - A model for urban innovation in India", I have learnt about the contradictory aims of building New Town, Rajarhat. A lot of what New Town is today has been created by erasing the history and to a great extent, the geography of the place - a process that urbanisation entails. Compared to Singur and Nandigram, the urbanisation story of Rajarhat, New Town is known to be relatively peaceful because the protesting voices were effectively stifled with the joint forces of politicians, Police and local goons operating under the security of the then CPI(M) rule in Bengal. New Town is built on an already ecologically sensitive area which was also called the "kidneys" of Kolkata as "wetlands" continue to be converted into commercial complexes where the new planned project were designed to earn labels like that of a "Green City". Another important application was to be in the "green" industry. The contradiction of the vision is apparent in understanding how this model was being built out of a place that was already naturally self-sufficient where Rajarhat was considered to be one of the main fertile areas of not only the state but perhaps the country.

Secondly, when a space is designed to house affordable housing for low income groups, it needs to first be connected with effective transportation facility that will allow the people to travel and commute using local transports and not depend on private mode of transportation because we are talking about an income group that cannot inherently afford effective private transport facilities. When we look into the planning and aspiration of New Town, Kolkata it seems that the state did not pay adequate attention to that which raises the question if the project was exclusionary in its planning.

In the second Chapter "Understanding New Town as a Urban Space", in understanding New Town as an open space, I have been able to interrogate how far the urban planning of New Town was inclusive. In understanding New Town as an open space it is not how much of an open area, geographically speaking, is provided for the citizens that becomes the main concern, but how far is New Town a democratic space, the point of this exercise is to find out how inviting to differences

New Town is in terms of the people that will find their homes in this space, how diverse in terms of the social-economic groups its facilities will allow access to and how vibrant a city life it can provide for its people, are some of the questions explored in this section. Having analysed the different provisions made to ensure citizen participation in the planning process while increasingly developing the space as a Smart City under Smart Cities Mission, I have understood that the vision behind this model entails the increased use of technology to offer various local and administrative services to the residents, which can be extremely exclusionary for people who are not well-versed with technology. Hence, Smart cities are either not meant to include the people that cannot stay or become up-to-date with its technological Smart-ness or it is simply designed to silently ignore the existence and the need of the population that cannot benefit from the facilities and virtues it is designed to promote and practice.

In the third chapter, "The Ideals of a Planned City", I have attempted to understand how through the first planned project by the Government of West Bengal, the state plays the role of balancing the two opposite imperatives of development and economic growth with providing opportunities to the groups that are at the bottom of the pyramid. In this section, I have discovered that the main people who were excited about the New Town were primarily the architects as plans were being drawn out to turn it into a model not only for Kolkata but also for cities across the country. More than people being actively involved in the process of planning New Town, it is their aspirations and the state's needs that get reflected in the urban space. The provision made for open spaces that were considerably bigger in area was drastically altered with only quarter of the originally allotted area remaining in the final plan. One very interesting aspect in the original project report was that it wanted to do away with exclusive zoning patterns and instead wanted to follow mixed-use patterns that would allow creation of neighborhoods that encouraged the co-existence of sections from different income brackets. Something that went on to be significantly altered in the final plan that was carried out.

Again, unlike Kolkata, New Town, Rajarhat was not going to have a strong association with its past. The difference between Kolkata and Rajarhat is that if it is a social citizenry that Kolkata represented with obligations and powers derived from subscribing to a collective body, the subject for Rajarhat was less about being a social

citizen in a similar way and more about being a product of largesse and public loot, with personal fulfillment driving the energetic pursuit and continuously determining the factors that could aid the achievement of this fulfillment. It is necessary to conclude by pointing out that planning of the space had a huge role to play in the conceptualisation and subsequent emergence of Rajarhat as a consumption-oriented new subject of urban development. The old public spaces of street corners, parks and railway stations were to be theoretically replaced and physically transformed into shopping malls, libraries and multiplexes and also book libraries and flower kiosks.

However, I have also realised that with the beginning and settling of the urbanisation process through the generative frontiers of South Asia, the treatment of these spaces without any history is both theoretically and practically untrue but what does inform the process of studying these spaces is a categorical denial of their past, primarily because the agrarian is still view as the metaphorical 'other' in the urban literature. The two categories which are both existential and functional counterparts have not met each other at the depths of their own being, which is why it may be convenient to deny a past for New Town in a sense that is familiar and convenient for the category of 'urban' to incorporate and reminisce with pride but it is not possible to hide that denial. Therefore, the history of New Town is what it has been in the past, where it shares its story and fate with numerous spaces standing and awaiting a spot in the urban frontiers but how far that history will contribute to the sense belonging to a city for its residents depends on how far along the city has come in understanding its complex roots of origin.

Through my research, I also discovered that the main reason the government had been able to maintain a fervour of utopia regarding the New Town is because of the expectations from a space, the label on which had no precedent in the minds of the people projected under the tags of "Smart City" and "Green City". Glossy terms that were yet to receive meaning and structure in the urban imagination of the vast majority, people ended up waiting for spaces to give meaning to these concepts by grounding in reality what felt like a name for some fantastical superficiality.

Lastly, I raise the question if the cities that are projected to be models for urban innovation are exclusionary at the premise. The high dependence of the residents on

private transports, evidently living in an area that the Government report itself recognizes as being akin to ghost town, would invite only a certain section or economic group to reside in the area which is a big threat to inclusivity and assimilation, no matter what initiatives are taken to open public spaces for mixed use and to invite people from all walks of life to use such places. This directly impacts the vibrancy of the city where residents in choosing to get comfortable in the familiarity of being surrounded by people like themselves, which closed socities primarily aim to do, end up avoiding the complexity and changes that gives a city its characteristic flavour of being divergent. Robbing cities of its colors and character is also the vision of an ideal city without being backed by a solid waste management system which in principle denies to take responsibility towards a greener future for its own existence.

Futurisitic aspirations that rely on technological marvels to become a lived reality for cities that are groomed under tags like "Smart city" and "Green city", hardly address how exclusionary their vision seems in terms of the population they are aimed at benefiting. The solutions are meant to be inclusive but it is yet to be addressed how interactive kiosks are meant to make things easier for the population that still struggles with technology. If aspiring for a "Smart city" means the replacement of physical jobs headed and conducted by humans with technological advancements that would make the city more futuristic then it needs to be mentioned that such a vision excludes a certain population from enjoying the benefits of or reveling in the advancement of new age cities as such as this.

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