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The Dichotomy Of Suburban Vs Urban Kolkata In Abheek Barua's City Of Death

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Abstract

Urban and suburban entities are inseparable stipulations with reference to the metropolitan life. Urban area is the centre icon of the city; whereas suburban is the inner-city or an independent part of a city consist of a defined community. Both the areas have their own peculiar geography which is in secure correlation with the inhabitants. Metropolitan cities comprises of urban and suburban parts. First is populated with the elite class and latter by the fewer powerful and upper middle class. The present paper discusses the dichotomy of urban and suburban areas of Kolkata city focusing on its impact upon the cultural, social, geographical, religious and political views on the populace. The dialectical relationship between the people and the place can also be studied through this paper.

Keywords: urban, metropolis, suburbanisation, city-scape.

Introduction

The dichotomy of country and city is an extended metaphor in Literature. Topography influences cultural practices, occupation, food habits and population of a community. Many regard country life as untainted and naive whereas city remained as a centre of power politics, corruption and opulence. This monopoly increases the pace of urbanisation which in turn ends with immigration. As a result of the mass migration, big metropolises risen up and life became more easy and flexible. Urban, suburban and suburbanisation are three cross connected concepts and active in majority metropolitan areas. Suburbanisation is the process of urban encroachment towards the inner part of cities. 'Suburbs' are bridging gap between cities and rural areas. For rural people it's an attraction and up gradation to their inaccessible life whereas city people find it as a comfort zone to uphold their status quo. Suburbs offer much more space compared to

narrow city spaces. Elite classes never think of suburbs as substitute for urban areas. Upper middle class consider it as a solace, a free and liberated space.

Objectives

- To find out the urban- suburban dichotomy of Kolkata city.
- To identify the impact of suburbanization upon the inhabitants.
- To analyse the dissimilarities of urbanisation and suburbanisation.

Research Questions

- What is suburbanisation?
- What is urbanism?

Theoretical Framework

Present paper is a qualitative study of Abheek Barua's novel *City of Death* with a special emphasis on the rural and urban provinces of Kolkata city. A comparative study of urban and suburban areas of Kolkata can also be done. Theories like Urban Studies and Spatial theories can be utilized for the proposed study.

The Dichotomy of urban and suburban Kolkata in *City of Death*

Abheek Barua's crime thriller *City of Death* has a female cop Sohini Sen unfolding the obscurity behind the murder of Ahona Chatterjee. The setting of the novel is anonymous, but possible to discover it as the city of Kolkata. Sohini Sen, the frustrated detective in charge has a suicidal tendency and chosen Goa as apposite place to finish her life. She takes medicines to tranquil up her uneven mind. "She wants to spend her last moments away from the stench of garbage..." (9), says author. She called Kolkata as a 'sun-surfeit city'. Her entire generation has moved away from the city in seek of more prospects. Abheek Barua notes down the idiosyncratic features of Kolkata city, such as long political rallies and traffic, small tea shops on the streets and private share holding companies regarded as 'architectural icon of the city'. Barua has presented the paradox of urban and suburban Kolkata city life through various symbols in a balanced way.

Eastern Vs Southern parts

Eastern parts of Kolkata city were once marshes and underwent a mega transition by the Sethia's, a prominent real estate group of the city. Others hegemonic powers too contributed to the transition. River is used as a symbol to designate the disparities between the eastern and southern parts of city. River in Kolkata stands as a dividing oblige between two parts; one part is city's industrial suburb and next is the populated urban area. Industrial suburb is a 'heterotopic' site; both real and imagined. People subsist and pass away inside the industrial suburbs; simultaneously it is like a hallucination for those who live in the opposite side of the river. City is a paradise of drugs. Arjun Sinha, Sohini's assistant, was formerly engaged in an investigation in the southern region and was dazzled by the country scenes. Barua calls him a 'city animal' coiled inside the tediousness of city. Arjun is the representative of mass city dwellers, who were longing for more nature and space even in small amounts. Most of the characters in the novel usually take a tour to the opposite side of the river for a mental their reconciliation with the urban mundane life.

Clear climate Vs rain

Climatic condition is a major aspect that gives manifold manners to the city. Suburban areas presented in the novel as spaces with clear day, unlike the city, which is foggy with a slight rain. Rain is a recurring symbol throughout the novel. Most of Kolkata city's midnight is marked with a drizzle and it makes streets desolate. In London: the Biography Peter Ackroyd refers to London fog as mysterious and an evil force that makes city inexplicable. Anonymity thrives within the fog. In *City of Death*, the natural climates in the urban spaces are capable to create a murky ambiance for delinquent tendencies. The media people and the curious multitude of city dwellers are deliberately attentive in Ahona's high society murder; curiously her domestic space is always presented in the backdrop of rain. Novel opens up in the midnight with a drizzling rain and the murderer walking towards the empty street under neon lamp shade after the murder. The drizzling rain has paralysed the city and made it so desolate.

Landlords Vs Professional class.

Barua provides a brittle view of Kolkata's class hegemony in this novel. The rustic areas of Kolkata city were mostly occupied by the landlords and the segregated peasant community. These traditional ones declined at the beginning of 19 century with the arrival of colonisation and city witnessed a rise of professional class later in the century. Ronen Chatterjee, Ahona's father is one among them, educated at Cambridge and foreign in fortitude. Ronen's generation "the boxwallahs raised on a routine of gin and tonics on Friday afternoon and golf at the weekends" (45). His wife Nayantara Chatterjee too belongs to the professional Bengali class. Partition had an impact on their family and they fled to Delhi for refugee. Ahona's brother Shonjoy and wife Atreyi are also professionals considering Kolkata as insufficient and aims for an enhanced metropolitan space to move on. They were actually living in the 'commercial heart of the city' but the city backwater is not sufficient for them to move forward.

Slum Vs City

Slum is the 'other' of the vibrant city and occupied by the financially backward classes. Developed metropolises generate slum and crimes attached to it. It's the dwelling place of the 'poorest of the poor', migrant people and prostitutes struggling to calm up the fire of hunger. Slum is the carrier of city's unwanted prospects; both live and dead. Its atmosphere is suffocated with the stench of public toilets and rotten wastes flowed down from the city. City is more clean and sophisticated. Raju, Shonjoy's driver and a close associate of Chatterjee family lives in the industrial slum of Kolkata. He was born in a small village away from the borders of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Village drought, poverty and exposure to alcohol tempted him to take a journey away from the rural Kolkata which welcomed him with more enticing drugs. Sandip Chakraborty, Ahona's doctor hated to work in small towns because of people's patriarchal attitude towards mental illness. He says "I wanted to live in a city. I'm little tired of the provinciality of small towns" (121).

Conclusion

Urbanism or Urban Geography is the study of the characteristic features of town, cities and its relationship with the people. The extended growth of urbanism into the rural areas created suburbs or inner cities having features of both country and city. City's gradual takeover to suburban areas is termed as suburbanization. Kolkata, one of the largest metropolises in India, witness a challenge between the

growth of urban and suburban areas. The paradox of country and city is a long lost memory for Kolkata people. People are in pursuit of more money and comfort. Murders become daily occurrences: not for getting financial or sexual endeavors but to elope from the psychological stiffness of mind.

In *City of Death* Abheek Barua introduces a typical suburban killer and a psychopath who pangs to get a relief from his drug withdrawal symptoms. Here, killer chooses an urban victim who also besieged with a psychological disorder. Ahona's life is inexplicable like the desolated flat in the center of Kolkata city. Briefly, both prey and predator underwent a similar victimization by city.

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