
BLOCK 4

**GLOBAL CONCERNS IN
URBAN GROWTH**

Unit 11
Contemporary Urban Concerns

Unit 12
World Cities and the Production of Space

Unit 13
Urban Ethnography

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UNIVERSITY

UNIT 11 CONTEMPORARY URBAN CONCERNS

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Learning Outcomes

After reading this Unit the students will learn to:

- Define the need for anthropological focus in the urban areas;
- Describe the various topics on which anthropological research has been conducted;
- Examine critiques within urban anthropology which helped the sub-discipline to reflect and grow; and
- Evaluate the continuity in urban anthropology with old concerns of research and new topics of investigation.

11.0 INTRODCUTION

‘Urban’ is problematic to define, it is often a socio-economic construct for administrative use, and does not have any globally accepted definition of what constitutes an urban. What is more, the manner in which national statistical offices define “urban” varies from country to country and often over time within countries. The criteria considered to define ‘urban’ also defers across geographies: while minimum population threshold or population density are often among the key criterion for recognising an urban space, other criteria such as proportion of workforce employed in non-agricultural sectors and availability of infrastructure or of education, health and other services might also be potential administrative considerations (UN, 2018). The world is seeing an escalating growth in urban population. UN estimates showed that where in 1950, 30% of the global population was living in urban areas the proportion increased to 55% urban population in 2018, and it is estimated that 60% of the world population would have moved to urban areas by 2030. It is predicted that transition will be most acute in Asia and Africa, wherein by 2050 most of the world’s urban population will be concentrated in Asia (52%) and Africa (21%) (UN, 2018).

Contributor: Dr. Indrani Mukherjee, Post-Doctoral Fellow, Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi, Delhi

This increase in urban population growth is a function of the natural population growth of the people living in urban areas, migration of population into the urban areas, the extension of urban areas to assimilate neighbouring areas into their ambit as well as the spouting of new urban centres. This urban growth is (not always, but) often accompanied with the process of **urbanisation or “urban transition”** which can be understood as “a shift in a population from one that is dispersed across small rural settlements, in which agriculture is the dominant economic activity, towards one that is concentrated in larger and denser urban settlements characterised by a dominance of industrial and service activities” (UN, 2018). This has led to urban areas becoming major economic hubs with the World Bank estimating that more than 80% of the global GDP is generated in cities. However, rapidly increasing urban capacity in terms of both population as well as geographical boundaries brings forth a number of concerns and challenges. It brings to question infrastructural necessities to accommodate population density, the provision for basic amenities, like food, water, sanitation, shelter, health and medical facilities, education, transportation and so on. The constantly changing population, and admixture of population through internal and international migration brings forth vulnerabilities and social concerns like crisis of/in identity, exploitation, marginalisation, economic disparity and abject poverty, crime and substance abuse, relegation to the peripheries of the urban spaces, gender/ caste and class based/ racial or religious discrimination, violence and more. In addition to this, encroachment of expanding urban spaces into neighboring rural spaces, and the emulation of western culture in the non-western societies lead to culture shock changing lifestyle along with transformation in family and kin relations. Exemplifying these challenges and concerns is the extreme ecological pressure on limited natural resource, and the power politics with reference to resource allocation and distribution, and many more. Equally true in today’s reality of a globalised world is the presence of transnational and multinational institutes and organisations which often situate their key hubs in urban areas lend to geopolitical and economic influences and manipulation within the urban domain, bringing to light subjects like identity, citizenship, civil society and social movements, access to retail goods and services, artistic expressions and popular culture etc. These concerns and challenges do not just inspire, but necessitates anthropological enquiry and research in order to facilitate their in-depth understanding and actionables therein.

Anthropology as a discipline had its genesis within the study of the more obscure communities in tribal areas and rural and peasant settlements; however, with the increasing advent of urban concerns it was only fair that anthropologists increase their horizon of exploration into the foray of urban studies. For the perspective of the disciplinary history of anthropology urban concerns are themselves a contemporary enquiry, and most highlights in this subsection has a contemporary bearing. The attention towards exploration of urban concerns began within anthropology around the 1930s however the sub-discipline of urban anthropology came into being in a significant manner since the 1960s. In the next sections we look at how anthropology has understood and explored urban concerns, leading up to the more contemporary perspectives of research in today’s context.

11.1 CRISSCROSSING OF ANTHROPOLOGY AND SOCIOLOGY

Early anthropological foray into urban inquiry was influenced by sociological thought and theory, with crisscrossing of boundaries and scholars between the discipline due to shared scholarly approaches and methodological perspectives. Prominent scholarly works in this regard, with reference to nineteenth century industrial society, were that of Ferdinand Tönnies's work on "Community (Gemeinschaft) and Society (Gesellschaft), which established a distinction between the feudal community, characterised by intimate relations and collective activities, and the capitalist society, characterised by impersonal relations and contractual bonds" (Prato and Pardo, 2013: 81) and Emile Durkheim, who in his work on suicide brought forth the concept of 'anomie' and argued that anomic suicide was a phenomenon common to impersonal settings, such as modern cities, that lacked the traditional cohesive social institutions, and were displaying a sudden flux in social hierarchy. Theoretically there was a dichotomic understanding of rural vs urban with the "view of the city as a fragmenting, rather than unifying place; that is, a place of greater freedom and opportunities for the individual but also a place of isolation, conflict and bureaucratisation of all aspects of life" (Prato and Pardo, 2013: 82). Similar sentiments were later echoed by Louis Wirth, a sociologist of the Chicago school of thought, in his work 'Urbanism as a Way of Life' (1938). Here "Wirth described the city as a specific 'social institution' with distinctive attributes, which were reflected in the urban physical structure – that is, the urban plan and the city's size – in the urban social organisation and in the attitudes and ideas of city-dwellers. According to Wirth, the city's social heterogeneity and population density promoted differentiation and occupational specialisation. Therefore, he argued, social relations tended to be impersonal, transitory, superficial and instrumental. In this context, Prato and Pardo pointed out that "such a weak social integration would eventually result in anomie" (2013: 82-83). Influenced by Wirth's work, Robert Redfield (an American anthropologist) theorised on 'folk-urban continuum' (1947) with 'folk' and 'urban' societies as two opposite ideal types with peasant communities as the link between the two. This western centric juxtaposition between the rural and urban continued for a long time within the disciplinary forte and is also evident from the definition of **'urbanisation' as understood by international organisations like the UN (in administrative parlance) as mentioned in the previous section. However,** Redfield does contribute to understanding different types of cities in his work with Singer, titled 'The Cultural Role of Cities' (1954).

Urban anthropology was also influenced in a big way by the Chicago School of Thought which saw significant contributions since the 1930s. This group of scholars concentrated their effort on neighbourhood studies, focusing on a specific area of a city, more often than not treating them as bounded entities. These included the visualisation of cities as ecosystems segmented in 'natural areas' (by scholars working on urban ecology) or as 'ordinary' neighbourhoods, white neighbourhoods and slums and ghettos for immigrants and African Americans (in works of sociology and criminology). The school also saw a number of interesting methodological explorations in urban studies. These

include the work of W. I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki who wrote five-volumes on 'The Polish Peasant in Europe and America: Monograph of an Immigrant Group' (1918-20). The study was based on the writings of migrants including letters and diaries, and developed life histories to establish its participants' point of view, it also contrasted and reflected on how the migratory process was represented in newspapers. The research included fieldwork in both the United States and Poland and was a reflective of primary initiative of a transnational study. Within urban studies, Thomas brought out an "interest in organisation (and disorganisation), social interaction (contact and assimilation), and meaning (attitude), as well as the overarching significance of location to social facts, and ultimately the critical importance of collecting primary data" (Jones and Rodgers, 2016: 3).

Other scholars alongside W. I. Thomas to influence the direction of urban studies at Chicago school were Robert Ezra Park, Ernest Burgess, Louis Wirth. Some initial approaches consisted of studies of areas that were subject to laws of residential succession, they used research methods including historical evidence, interviews and, quantitative demographic and statistical material to understand changing residential patterns and related social problems. This was followed by works that were based more on anthropological methods. Carolyn Ware's work 'Greenwich Village, 1920-1930' (1935), used qualitative 'ethnographic method' to understand the incorporation of Greenwich Village into New York and the process by which it maintained its distinctive character, while William Foote Whyte's 'Street Corner Society, The Social Structure of an Italian Slum' (1943) applied the classical anthropological method of participant observation; and W. Lloyd Warner's 'Yankee City' (1941) which was a long-term study of a small New England town in United States, was an ethnographic perspective with formal interviews. Some other interesting works of this school consist of "Nels Anderson's, The Hobo (1923), Frederic Thrasher's, The Gang (1927), Paul Cressey's, The Taxi Dance Hall (1928), Louis Wirth's, The Ghetto (1928), Harvey Zorbaugh's, The Gold Coast and the Slum (1929), Clifford Shaw's, The Jack-Roller (1930), Pauline Young's, The Pilgrims of Russian-Town (1932)" (Jones and Rodgers, 2016: 6) etc.

The Chicago school also produced a number of influential urban studies in the area of crime, delinquency and criminology contributing to theoretical concepts like 'social disorganisation' (Shaw & McKay), 'power control theory' (Hirschi), 'routine activity theory' (Cohen & Felson), 'institutional anomie' (Merton, Messner & Rosenfeld), 'strain theory' (Cohen, Cloward & Ohlin, Agnew), 'differential association, social learning theory and subculture theory' (Sutherland & Cressey), 'labeling theory' (Lemert, Goffman, Sherman) etc. Sutherland (1940) also reflected on the idea of white-collar crime among the urban upper class; a concept that was hitherto unspoken of as perpetration of crime was until then associated with the lower class and poor neighborhoods.

One of the main critiques of the early urban sociological works of the Chicago School was that their neighbourhood studies conceptualised the concern of study as a socio-culturally bounded area, and in that it failed to consider the 'holistic approach' which is a corner stone of anthropology and missed out on understanding how the wider world influenced these areas. In spite of this, the early scholars of the Chicago School were influenced by the works

of classical anthropologists like Boas, Radcliffe-Brown as well as Mauss and Malinowski, and a number of scholars from this school were identified as both sociologists and anthropologists and their works paved the path towards urban anthropology.

The 1930s to the 1950s, saw anthropological works on rural migrants living in slums and shanty towns of Mexican and other Latin America cities, focused on understanding the impact of ‘urbanism’ on their lives, in what was recognised as problem centred research of minorities and poverty. A similar interest was pursued in African countries British anthropologists, working through the Rhodes Livingstone Institute, based in the British territory of then Northern Rhodesia. A number of studies were conducted on the process of urbanisation and ‘detrribalisation’. 1941, saw the appointment of the South-African-born anthropologist Max Gluckman as the Director of the Institute. Gluckman drafted a ‘Seven Year Research Plan’ for research in both rural and urban areas. He focused on the mining area known as the Copperbelt, looking at the migration of labour force from rural areas to new mining towns and their exploitation therein as they entered a new web of relationships that were believed to be typical of the ‘urban system’ (1961). A significant body of work was created on African urban ethnography under Gluckman’s direction and is known for its research methods of case and network analysis.

These studies were however criticised by Raymond Firth (from the Department of Social Anthropology at the London School of Economics), who himself was engaged in a study of kinship in South London for their focus on small communities and minorities in continuation of the anthropological interest in the exotic other. “The key point is that early anthropological studies in cities focused on traditional anthropological topics, thus leading to the study of urban kinship, of ghettos and slums in shanty town communities, of the perpetuation of folklore and rituals, and so on. Throughout the 1960s, such disciplinary interest focused on new urban residents; urban problems, such as poverty, urban adaptation and ecological factors; the role of dominant social groups; minority communities (the problem centred approach)” (Prato and Pardo, 2013: 85). In spite of criticism the reality of these social situation remains true even in today’s context.

Check Your Progress

1. Define urbanisation or ‘urban transition’.

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2. Elaborate on urban realities that inspire and necessitates anthropological enquiry.

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3. Mention some key scholars and works of Chicago School of Sociology that influenced urban anthropology.

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4. Mention a critique of early urban sociological work by the Chicago School.

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5. On what grounds did Raymond Firth critique urban anthropological research?

11.2 ANTHROPOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE CONCEPT OF ‘URBAN’

In the introduction, we realised that the category ‘urban’, in the realm of administrative considerations, recognises population density as one of its primary parameter; while urbanisation recognises a shift from agriculture to industrial and service-oriented economy. Anthropologists added notably to socially nuanced aspects to this understanding. Beginning with the work of sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies who (did not use the word urban, but) proposed the term *Gemeinschaft* for community (which was recognised by intimate relations and collective activities) and *Gesellschaft* for society reflective of capitalist society (characterised by impersonal relations and contractual bonds). While the western centric scholars focused on the urban/cities as a function of industrialisation, Redfield and Singer in ‘The Cultural Role of Cities’ (1954) recognised two types of cities, based on how these cities affected culture change and transformation. The first, they termed as ‘orthogenetic cities’ where “pre-existing folk ideas and values are transformed by a group of urban literati and transmitted back to the people (folk) among whom they originated. They argued that such a process of elaboration and codification of the folk culture becoming a Great Tradition creates an indigenous civilisation” (Prato and Pardo, 2013: 87). The second contrasting city was ‘heterogenetic cities’ which were centres

of technological and economic changes, recognised by the encounter between folk and external culture accompanied with forces that “destroys the ancient tradition and brings about dissent, rootlessness and anomie” (Prato and Pardo, 2013: 88). Further, Southall (1983) spoke of ‘urban’ in terms of ‘spatial density of social interaction’ rather than demographic density, and encouraged comparative analysis of historically established metropolises, to take the earlier debate on classifications of city types forward. His research in African ex-colonies recognised two categories of cities –

Category A includes cities that had a historical existence from before colonisation, were slower in taking to the development process and had strong interconnections with the neighbouring rural areas as well as their subsistence economy.

Category B consisted of cities that came into being as a part of the colonising process, centred on mining or industrial economy, with rural migrants’ labourers as their key employee and population.

Gutkind (1983) reflected on ‘class struggle’ being the essence of urban life and posited that social relations and social institutions in an urban setting are significantly different from rural settings. Gluckman maintained that ‘the starting point for an analysis of urbanisation must be an urban system of relations’ (Gluckman, 1961: 80).

These debates brought to the forefront key reflections like historicity, economic relations, social institutions, social structure, social relations, rural to urban migration, class struggle, rootlessness and anomie etc., into focus in the understanding of ‘urban’ and remain relevant even today. However, they were criticised by Leeds (1972), who pointed out that urban anthropology ‘has been done as if, (a) the city were an isolated unit and (b) as if the thing studied in the city has some intrinsic relation to the city’ (Leeds 1972: 4). Two key contributions in understanding interconnectivity in context of urban beyond its boundaries, came from Pocock and Leeds himself. Pocock (1960), in the context of the Indian city, argued that in case of Indian cities traditional social values were reflected in the caste and kinship system, erroneously and hastily associated with ‘Western values and influences’ (Pocock 1960: 65). Thus, for Pocock, the urban was an extension of the rural. Leeds on the other hand advocated an ‘understanding of the ‘totality’ of the city as part of a wider totality; that is, the state and the global context to which it belongs’ (Prato and Pardo, 2013: 89). He writes that “cities are simply one form of population nucleation, all of which precipitates in localities of an extraordinarily complex system of interactions which constitute a society” (Leeds 1972: 4-5), and specifies the relevance of the macrocosm in influencing local realities. Similarly, other anthropologists increasingly realised that cities could not be regarded as subordinate units of centralised states and that urban phenomena should be contextualised in the global system.

11.3 INCREASING INTEREST IN URBAN RESEARCH

‘Urban anthropology’ (though still not necessarily slighted under the sub discipline) saw an encompassing of newer concerns, along with the old from

the 1980s onwards. Research continued to look at neighbourhood as their focus, however, the local dynamics was now linked to broader historical and international processes. Research conducted in the “Middle East addressed the Israeli-Arab conflict, looking at the influence of religious education in political processes (Fischer 1980), the significance of ethnic demographic movement (Shokeid and Dresden 1982) and historical processes of nation-state formation (Aronoff ed. 1986) in relation to significant external factors” (Prato and Pardo, 2013: 92).

The concept of ‘study up’, also came into practice, where anthropologists did not just restrict themselves to researching the marginalised and less privileged, but social groups that might have substantial power in the society. Some examples of this are the work on “inherited wealth by (G. Marcus 1980) and Congressional patronage and ritual (Wheatherford 1985)” (Prato and Pardo, 2013: 92), conducted in the USA. This kind of study was also proposed in the development paradigm to study the complete chain of institutions and agencies involved in policy and practice, rather than just the grassroots and community level initiatives.

Research continued on topics like elderly, gender (feminist-oriented), education, crime, ethnic minority and new migrants, ethnic relations, ethnic and religious identities, work and women’s role in economy, class and gender, town symbolism and urban planning, sex tourism, power relations in industry, women factory workers, housing, urban restructuring and new settlements at urban peripheries, homelessness, addiction and drug dealing, and so on. African studies looked at dramaturgy of power, the emergence of new indigenous leaders and entrepreneurialism. Urban anthropological research “variously recognised the ways in which regional diversity (cultural, social, economic and political) affects urban life. Anthropologists have paid attention to: a) a rethinking of theories of urbanisation and patterns of urban growth; b) different patterns of urban social interaction and urban conflict in traditionally multi-ethnic states and ‘multicultural’ processes in Western cities; c) the ways in which people in different regions and under different political regimes respond and adapt to the demand of global policies (e.g., developing countries, post-socialist countries, post-industrial settings); d) the visibility and relevance of urban research, and anthropology generally, in the broader society” (Prato and Pardo, 2013: 92).

Methodological concerns also became primary in urban research. Classical anthropologists were already critical of anthropologists working on urban concerns. It also came to be questioned if classical anthropological methods were sufficient to understand complex societies and study urban realities. In a number of cases anthropologists remained bound through the focus of their topic, i.e., neighbourhoods (physical/geographical/spatial boundaries), ethnic or religious minorities (cultural boundaries), or groups confined by gender, age, work, class etc., and boundaries traversing between the micro-processes within these bounded constructs and macro-processes at regional, national and global levels. “Undeniably, anthropologists found it increasingly difficult to define their field of study, for global changes forced them to take into account data that were academically ‘allocated’ to other social sciences and to the humanities; in particular, sociology, political science, economy and history”

(Prato and Pardo, 2013: 94). This led to invariable multidisciplinary inputs to the sub discipline. Simultaneously, other disciplines and especially sociology also started to explore the ethnographic method. “New urban research followed thereof on the interactions between economic, political and cultural aspects, which contextualised local dynamics and change in national and global historical processes (Prato 1993, 2000, 2009). Others (Spyridakis 2006 and 2010) have taken on such an approach looking at the relationships between local and national processes and policies of global restructuring that fundamentally influence the local reality and people’s everyday life” (Prato and Pardo, 2013: 95).

Anthropologists like Pardo (1989) researching on death, in Naples reflected that participant observation along with construction of case studies can yield holistic study in the anthropological tradition in urban areas. George E. Marcus on the other hand proposed the idea of ‘multi-sited’ ethnography to understand the contiguity between micro and macro processes, ‘connections between places’ and ‘complex objects of study’. He described a developing set of ethnographic practices appropriate to the increasingly non localised nature of the lives of those who anthropologists study, that captured and helped to conjure the limits of ill-defined social geographies. Multi-sited ethnography, Marcus (1995) maintained, embodies a research design best suited to examining the “circulation of cultural meanings, objects, and identities in diffuse time-space” (Marcus. 1995: 96).

Methodological inclusions continued as the 21st century included researches on industrial relations, citizenship, religion and modernity, political ideologies and urban planning, violence and conflict, movements of resistance, problems of multiculturalism, urban symbolism, cultural meaning and use of urban space, environmental issues. These research concerns find continuity into the conception of sustainable cities.

Check Your Progress

- 6. Explain the difference between ‘orthogenetic cities’ and ‘heterogenetic cities’.

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- 7 What was Leeds critique of urban anthropological research being carried out in the 1960s?

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8. Who proposed the idea of multi-sited ethnography? What is its mainstay?

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11.4 SUMMARY

We find that anthropology has addressed myriad of urban concerns through research. The historicity of the discipline in this forte carries relevance even in contemporary urban realities. For example, Subhadra Mitra Channa in her work “Being Urban in the Context of Global Urbanisation: The Case of India” (2018), draws from the work of Redfield & Singer, to explain that dichotomies like urban/non-urban are fuzzy and fluid, in the case of Delhi and cannot necessarily be understood through a western lens. Urban anthropology has also opened a space for multidisciplinary engagement which (though criticised by classical anthropologists) has a significant role to play in anthropology itself as even village life is far more complex in ways not before imagined; and with increased mobility, urbanisation is seeing high urban influences and vice-versa. Globalising influences and penetration of information and technology is adding to the complexity of urban spaces; and all these realities contribute to the potential for anthropological enquiry, reflection and action.

11.5 REFERENCE

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11.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Refer to the 2nd paragraph in Section 11.1
2. Refer to the 2nd paragraph in Section 11.1
3. Refer to the 2nd and 3rd paragraphs in Section 11.2
4. Refer to the 5th paragraph in Section 11.2
5. Refer to the 7th paragraph in Section 11.2
6. Refer to the 1st paragraph in Section 11.3
7. Refer to the 3rd paragraph in Section 11.3
8. Refer to the 5th paragraph in Section 11.4



UNIT 12 WORLD CITIES AND THE PRODUCTION OF SPACE

Contents

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 - 12.3.2 Capitalist Production and Consumption in Urban Spaces
- 12.4 Critical Analysis
- 12.5 Summary
- 12.6 References
- 12.7 Answers to Check your Progress

LEARNING OUTCOMES

After reading this Unit the students will learn to:

- Define the concept of cities, world cities and urban spaces from an anthropological vantage point;
- Identify characteristics and types of world spaces;
- Describe the impact of globalisation on urban and rural spaces;
- Integrate global trends and regional differences in the world cities; and
- Demonstrate spatial understanding of capitalist production and consumption in urban spaces.

12.0 INTRODUCTION

Anthropological explorations have always been identified with the study of the ‘primitive people’, an archaic term to address indigenous communities that is considered derogatory and redundant in the present times. The notion of city within the ambit of urban anthropology is a significant field of inquiry even though it is fairly recent. The city is a concept that has been historically explored and situated through interdisciplinary discourses instead of a distinct anthropological perspective. To urban anthropologists the closest affiliates in

the study of urban spaces are urban sociologists who study a wider population compared to more intimate interactions between anthropologists and their informants. They began with separate and unique methodologies but with time, the boundaries between urban sociology and urban anthropology seem to have faded. Admittedly, urban anthropology traces its origin from urban sociology but the distinct focus on an in-depth data gathering method to facilitate the notions of holism, participant observation, and cross-cultural comparisons distinguishes urban anthropology from other associated disciplines.

Within the spectrum of contemporary approaches to study rural and urban scapes of the world, urban anthropologists often employ ‘developmentalism’ as a way to understand the changing face of these spaces. An idea that does not recognise every urban space with the quality of ‘cityness’, instead it acknowledges the gaps in terms of its current state and the state of development envisioned by its administrators (Robinson, 2002).

At the outset it is pertinent to point out that the world’s geography is divided not merely on the basis of whether a region may be considered rural, semi-urban, or urban but on the basis of several factors that are historical, politico-economic, and cultural in nature. This creates an obvious divide between the urban theories applicable in the west and the parameter of developmentalism reserved for the so called ‘third world’ nations (Andrusz, Harloe, & Szelenyi, 2011). Scholars like Robinson (2002) posit that urban theories are primarily promulgated and experienced in the west which limits their applicability and relevance in the non-western parts of the world. Consequently, in the subsequent sections it is important to include discourses on the relevance of the theoretical ideas that guide the notions of cities and urban spaces around the world.

12.1 BEGINNINGS OF STUDIES IN URBAN SPACES AND GLOBALISATION

The 21st century has been a witness to rapid urbanisation in every part of the world, but the roots of global movements were established in the 1980s in the west and in early 1990s in South Asia. The face of the rural and urban spaces changed as a result of significant shifts in the world economic order. Additionally frequent technological innovations were responsible for establishing a dynamic globalised society that undergoes rapid economic transitions. In the 1980s, ‘city’ or ‘cities’ came to be recognised as a ‘city of flows’ which meant it was considered significant for ‘circuits of labour, capital, goods, and services moving ever more rapidly through space, time, and the internet; and a space of places, that is, the physical locations of social reproduction, recreation, and the home’ (Low, 2014:15). Shortly before this phase, urban anthropologists had rejected the ethnographic method for being far too restricted in terms of recording the complexities of modern existence in an urban space.

However, in recent decades anthropologists have realigned the ethnographic approaches with a more contemporary theoretical work on urban systems, labour flows, social networks and the inclusion of multidisciplinary approaches from the disciplines of geography, political science, and sociology. As a result, interest in ethnography of urban areas was rekindled by the turn of the century. ‘The most distinctive aspect of an anthropological approach to the study of the city is the centrality of ethnography and the production of urban ethnographies of groups of

people in urban settings, called “anthropology in the city” ... urban ethnography is the cultural anthropological study of cities, urban peoples, networks, systems, and environments... Urban anthropologists retained the use of culture as a theoretical construct, but at the same time challenged its essentialised nature and deconstructed the concept to produce a more fluid and complex notion. At the same time, urban ethnography expanded to encompass historical, political, and economic as well as spatial analyses advocating an anthropology of the city, rather than in the city. The “urban” then, became re-conceived of as a set of processes rather than a setting, and its material and spatial form integrated into the study of social relationships’ (Low, 2014; pp. 16-17). Urban space and its social construction became crucial to anthropological studies especially those that were concerned with urban architectural planning projects, and began to include methods that included spatial analyses, behavioural mapping, demographics and a general observation of urban lifestyle. The techniques and methods of urban ethnography are reminiscent of a typical ethnographic study in anthropology that heavily relies on participant observation techniques, and intensive interviews to provide a sound qualitative as well an empirical base to the findings of the anthropologists. Using ethnographic techniques in a more effective manner contemporary urban anthropologists are able to explain how lifestyle of urban occupants is a consequence of complex interrelationship shared between global socio-economic and political forces and the local policies, community practices as well as the socio-cultural realities of people. This was a significant departure from the previous studies carried out by Anthropologists in European villages in the years following the Second World War, when they believed that analysing the influence of modernisation in rural Europe would provide an understanding of how regions across the globe were undergoing changes (Cole, 1977). In the years to come anthropologists witnessed a paradigm shift in terms of the focus of the discipline from rural to urban spaces. Hence, researches in the urban spaces that were referred as ‘cities’ became a preoccupation for urban anthropologists, especially in the years following the global boom in international economic alliances.

Check Your Progress

1. Discuss the relationship between urban anthropology and urban sociology.

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2. Explore critically the concept of “cityness.”

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- 3. Explain with examples how urban ethnography helps in construction of the urban city space?

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- 4. At the end of the Second World War the villages of Europe underwent a change. Discuss the history of development of cities.

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12.1.1 World Cities and Spaces - History, Definition Characteristics, and Types

As discussed in the previous sections, the earliest anthropological explorations of urban spaces were largely influenced by sociological theories of the nineteenth century which distinguished communities on the basis of urban and rural lifestyles. The theoretical foundation of sociological studies and urban anthropology could be traced from the works of Ferdinand Tönnies’s research on *Gemeinschaft* and *Gessellschaft* published in 1887, Emile Durkheim’s theory of *Anomie* and *Suicide* in an urban setting published in 1897. In the late 19th century, the urban lifestyle was perceived as a fragmented and individualistic life characterised by conflicts and lack of community cohesiveness, a notion that was borrowed by anthropologists to understand the concept of city. The Chicago School of Urban Ecology especially the work of Robert Ezra Park on cities was quite the roadmap for both sociologists and anthropologists. The Chicago School considered cities as regions that included several segments such as ordinary neighbourhoods, slums, ghettos, etc., and followed residential succession laws in order to establish ownership on the property. Understanding this segmentary division allowed the Chicago School scholars to gain a deeper insight into the social problems of city life. Urban anthropologists in America drew upon the Chicago School for paving a path for developing a combination of empirical and ethnographic methodology to carry out research in urban areas. They also borrowed from the qualitative perspective of sociologists like Carolyn Ware (Greenwich Village), William Foote Whyte (Street Corner Society), and W. Lloyd Warner (Yankee City) (Prato & Prado, 2013).

Another scholar Louis Wirth influenced anthropologists with his theorisation of ‘urban life’ through his seminal essay *Urbanism as a Way of Life* (1938). Wirth conceptualised city as a social institution that had a distinct character in terms of its physical attributes, social organisation, and the overall attitude of its occupants. The city was also characterised by distinct occupational specialisation, social heterogeneity, which led to impersonal and superficial social bonds that would invariably result in weak social bonds and a state of

Anomie. Wirth also proposed that ‘the juxtaposition of divergent personalities and modes of life tends to produce a relativistic perspective and a sense of toleration of differences which may be regarded as prerequisites for rationality and which lead toward the secularisation of life’ (Wirth, 1938).

A more exclusive anthropological approach to study urban life was utilised by Robert Redfield who proposed the ‘folk-urban continuum’. Redfield drew upon examples from Mexico, India, and other parts of Latin America. Much like Wirth’s findings, Redfield also explained how peasant communities within the city did not form an isolated community within the urban area rather they were influenced by the urban elites and non-peasant communities of the city. Redfield introduced several anthropologists to ethnographic study of the city which gave rise to researches in the area of rural-urban migration, poverty and slums in Latin America. This approach was widely criticised for its exclusive focus on small scale communities and the margins of the city, and for lacking any understanding of the larger communities that interacted with the margins on a regular basis (Prato & Prado, 2013).

British Anthropologists like Raymond Firth began studies in South London urban society in 1947 and encouraged fellow anthropologists in the London School of Economics to explore modern urban society in Europe. Subsequently several British anthropologists began to engage with urbanism and its impacts in the growing number of cities in many countries of Africa during the later 1930s under the aegis of Godfrey Wilson who was the Director of Rhodes Livingstone Institute. Following Wilson, Max Gluckman charted a ‘Seven year Research Plan’ to support researches in the area of rural urban migration in Central Africa and to also explore the impact of British colonialism on the tribal economy (Prato & Prado, 2013).

Following intensive sociological and anthropological researches in the field of urban studies, the city came to be recognised as a distinct social institution. From a Marxist point of view, two scholars Southall and Gutkind characterised urban as a space that had different kinds of social relations than that of rural space and class struggle was yet another facet of urban life. (Prato & Prado, 2013).

Robert Redfield and Milton Singer attempted to classify types of city in their essay “The Cultural Roles of Essay” published in 1954, where two polar categories on a continuum were attributed to cities, an *orthogenetic city* and the other, a *heterogenetic city*. The basis of these categories was to explain cultural change and transmission through the city (Redfield & Singer, 1954). The ‘orthogenetic’ cities are the product of endogenous development, a product therefore of ‘primary’ urbanisation. In the context of orthogenetic cities, pre-existing folk ideas and values are transformed by a group of urban literati and transmitted back to the people (folk) among whom they originated. Such a process of elaboration and codification of the folk culture into a ‘great tradition’, they argued, creates an indigenous civilisation. In contrast, they described ‘heterogenetic’ cities as products of a ‘secondary’ kind of urbanisation; the product, that is, of the encounter between a folk culture and a different (often colonial) culture. In this second case, the outcome is not the creation of a ‘great tradition’ of indigenous civilisation but a new form of urban life which is often in conflict with the indigenous folk culture’ (Prato & Pardo, 2013: 87-88).

Around the same time, many sociologists and anthropologists had carried out intensive urban researches in Africa and Asia. For instance, Holmstrom's research in unorganised industrial sectors in India, Smart's research among street hawkers in Hong Kong, and Gates's research on Chinese working class in Taiwan. Many of the researches in India tried to include the aspect of gender in the work culture and migration studies, for instance M. N. Srinivas's work on caste mobility, and Caplan's research among the middle-class Hindu women (Prato & Prado, 2013).

Another significant sociological research on India was by David Pocock who claimed that Indian cities did not bear significant western influences and that they were mostly Indian in their disposition (Pocock, 1960). As per Pocock there was hardly any colonial legacy in most of the cities of India and that there was a disconnect between rural and urban spaces in India, a claim for which he was criticised as he had overlooked years of colonial impacts on some of the significant cities in India (Parry, 2012).

It is interesting to note that there were only eleven cities in the world with over million people at the beginning of the twentieth century (Lo & Yeung, 1998). However, with rapid urbanisation, and development the cities around the world have witnessed massive changes. The concept of 'world cities' was recognised as early as 1915 by Patrick Geddes in his book *Cities in Evolution*. According to Hall (1998) a definition of world cities given in 1966 is still valid despite such dynamic shifts in the world economy. Thus world cities are 'centres of political power, both national and international, and of the organisations related to government; centres of national and international trade, acting as entry points for their countries and sometimes for neighbouring countries also; hence centres of banking, insurance, and related financial services; centres of advanced professional activity of all kinds, in medicine, in law, in higher learning, and the application of scientific knowledge to technology; centres of information gathering and diffusion, through publishing and the mass media; centres of conspicuous consumption, both of luxury goods for the minority and of mass-produced goods for the multitude; and centres of arts, culture, and entertainment, and of the ancillary activities that catered for them'. Hall foresaw world cities as not only hubs of significant economic activities like production of goods but he believed in times to come world cities would also include 'informationalisation of the economy' i.e., the occupants of world cities would engage in handling of crucial information regarding every stage of their economic practice. The centrality of occupation in world cities would no longer be linked with manufacturing of goods and its supply across the border, rather it would extend to gathering and regulating information in a manner that ensures a higher rank for the city on the global map. So, while production of goods would be a common mode of sustenance in several cities/hubs around the world, the handling of information and specialised services with regard to the global economic activities would become more restricted to a relatively less number of 'world' or 'global' cities (Lo & Yeung, 1998: 18). Robinson (2002) considered world cities responsible for aligning local, regional, and national economies into a global economic enterprise. They could be arranged in an order of ranking based on their economic control. Consequently, the economics of world cities tend to account for economically viable populations only and overlook those that are irrelevant to the economic framework of the global market.

Check Your Progress

5. Emile Durkheim’s theory of *Anomie* and *Suicide* published in 1897 is integral to the understanding of the process of urbanisation. Justify with suitable examples.

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6. What are “orthogenetic” cities and why are they known as “primary cities”? Differentiate between orthogenetic and heterogenetic cities.

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7. Who proposed the folk urban continuum and what is its significance?

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8. Explore critically the many divergent discourses that have contoured several aspects of the city.

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9. Explain the characteristics of world cities.

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10. Discuss the relevance of information in case of cities

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12.1.2 World Cities and Spaces in Global South & the World

The world economy has changed dramatically since the 1980s and this has brought about significant changes in the way cities around the world interact in terms of their operation. However, it is important to remember that the world and global cities of the northern hemisphere have always been the benchmark for globalisation and economic development for the financial hubs of the global south. In order to imbibe the values of the northern hemisphere world cities, there have been major structural adjustments made by cities in Africa and Asia. The technological advancements of the late 20th century in material sciences have been responsible for minimising the dependence of the world cities on global south for raw materials, and other primary commodities. This in turn resulted in a debt crisis among the developing countries that would heavily rely on export of raw produce and fuel to the developed part of the world for their economic expansion. While African countries could not cope with the crisis that effectively, South East Asian countries could quickly ensure foreign direct investment owing to rapid technological changes to suit the needs of the cities around the world (Lo & Yeung, 1998). Many of the cities from South Asia and South East Asia developed into 'Global Factories' and they have played a significant role in the development of the region. These cities began as industrial and financial hubs in the post-colonial times that supplied raw materials to the nations that manufactured the products and sold them products back to the cities in the global south. With time and technological improvements, the cities have developed their own industrial units that have begun catering to the needs of their own population and the client base on the international map as well. However, this created a stark contrast between the city elites and the working class. The elites are mostly the occupants of the world cities and the wealth is concentrated within these cities. One can draw examples from Shanghai, Bangkok, Singapore, Hong Kong, Beijing etc., in order to understand the concepts of mega cities, and global cities.

12.1.3 Impact of Capitalist Globalisation on Urban Spaces

Cities whether mega, global, or world, have been the most effective carriers of capitalist globalisation around the world. The globalisation has accorded a transnational character to these cities that facilitates a market competition on the basis of raw material, labour, capital, ease of doing business, location for investment as the key determinants for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) majorly from America and Europe. Obviously, this means enhanced interconnectedness and structural dependence between cities that ensure cash flow to mega-cities in the middle income to low-income service provider nations. Since globalisation is synonymous to decentralisation of control which means greater flexibility in terms of space and location of industries. Most of the decisions in the globalised world are being controlled by technology driven innovations which means the centre for control is not situated at a particular physical space, rather it is monitored digitally or by electronically generated space. This has invariably led to an increased polarisation of economic forces across the urban spaces of the world (Lo & Yeung, 1998).

Saskia Sassen, a formidable urban theorist coined the term '*global city*' in 1991 and provided an explanation regarding the significance of a global city that moves beyond national boundaries owing to its emphasis on its position in the global finance system. A global city is therefore a hub of information and wealth flow and since it is not confined to its national boundaries, it is not like the world cities of the 19th century. It is for this reason that global cities like New York, London, and Shanghai tend to have financial services concentrated within their boundaries. Sassen provided seven hypotheses about the global city and their financial network –

- a. 'The geographic dispersal of economic activities that marks globalisation, along with the simultaneous integration of such geographically dispersed activities, is a key factor feeding the growth and importance of central corporate functions.
- b. These central functions become so complex that increasingly the headquarters of large global firms outsource them: they buy a share of their central functions from highly specialised service firms.
- c. Those specialised service firms engaged in the most complex and globalised markets are subject to agglomeration economies.
- d. The more headquarters outsource their most complex, unstandardised functions, particularly those subject to uncertain and changing markets, the freer they are to opt for any location.
- e. These specialised service firms need to provide a global service which has meant a global network of affiliates... and a strengthening of cross border city to city transactions and networks.
- f. The economic fortunes of these cities become increasingly disconnected from their broader hinterlands or even their national economies.
- g. One result of the dynamics described in hypothesis six, is the growing informalisation of a range of economic activities which find their effective demand in these cities, yet have profit rates that do not allow them to compete for various resources with the high-profit making firms at the top of the system' (Sassen, 2004; pp. 28-30).

This conception of global cities is significant to understand as it clearly distances the global city from its neighbouring cities that are not global in nature. A global city is also characterised by an extremely capitalist mind-set where capital remains concentrated with a handful of people and most of the working population remains in the margins owing to their limited capacities and their inability to match with the specialised demands of the financial hubs.

12.2 GLOBAL INTEGRATION AND TERRITORIAL RE-DIFFERENTIATION OF URBAN SPACES

Most of these world cities have acquired a transnational character where they connect their nations to the international markets and develop urban economies (Low, 1996). This 'hyper-urbanisation' distances the cities from their national

and cultural identity while creating income disparity for its occupants. These are considered *Primate Mega-Cities* capable of providing labour and finance to both national and international clients. Mega cities generally have economically viable population of 8 million or above (Friedman, 1995). It is noteworthy that these urban spaces are more integrated to the rest of the world than the nation in which they are situated by virtue of their role in the global market.

A mega city or a global city is almost always characterised by rural to urban and urban to urban migration which indicates a dual process of deconcentration of the city and the recentralisation of the space within the city. ‘Globalisation mediated by migration, commerce, communication technology, finance, tourism, etc., entails a reorganisation of the bipolar imagery of space and time of modern world view, which is also expressed in modern anthropological theory. It is a progressive bipolar time stretching between the beginning and the end of history. The spatial correlate of this time has metropolitan centres and peripheral sites stitched together by dendritic lines of communication that are replicated in hierarchical branching systems of classification and administration. Globalisation entails a shift from two-dimensional Euclidian space with its centres and peripheries and sharp boundaries, to a multidimensional global space with unbounded, often discontinuous and interpenetrating sub-spaces. Movement, in this direction has gone hand in glove with theory and research that refocused attention from communities bounded within nations and from nations themselves to spaces of which nations are components’ (Kearney, 1995; p. 549). Thus, a world city ceases to be a space with non-porous boundaries rather it is not a physically and strictly bounded territory. The global capitalist forces ensure a de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation of power on a spatial bases within these cities hence it is preposterous to assume that these urban spaces are landlocked or air-locked regions. If anything, according to Umberto Eco these cities have hyperspaces that carry the same universal character and are detached from any local reference e.g. airports, industrial production sites, and franchise retails or restaurants (Eco, 1990).

Check Your Progress

11. Explain the relationship between cities of northern hemisphere and the global south. Use a city as your case study to explain this structural equation.

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12. Discuss the impact of globalisation on cities.

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13. Elaborate on Sassen’s notion of global city.

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14. Justify how globalisation of cities causes economic disparity and disconnect between its population.

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15. What are primate Mega cities?

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16. Explain how and why hyper spaces do not have a local reference or cultural identity?

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12.3 GEOGRAPHICAL SCALE AND SOCIAL PRODUCTION

Space in anthropology acquires a crucial position because theorists and ethnographers have been using spatiality to understand culture of a community from several years before spatiality became of any consequence in urban anthropology. However, in the later 20th century several urban ethnographers used physical and material space as a key determinant in the anthropology of city. Their researches were influenced by French theorists like Foucault and Rabinow who constructed an understanding of space from the perspective of power dynamics of spatial relations.

12.3.1 Social Construction of Scales

One of the major contributions to the social production of space is by Henri Lefebvre’s theorisation of space which is essentially a social product (Marston, 2000). According to Lefebvre ‘space is never transparent, but must be queried

through an analysis of spatial representations, spatial practices, and spaces of representation as they became the basis of many anthropological analyses' (Nonini, 2014: 20). 'The social construction of space is the social, psychological, and functional transformation of space – through peoples' social exchanges, memories, images, and daily use of the material setting – into scenes and actions that convey symbolic meaning. Both processes are social in the sense that both the production and the construction of space are mediated by social processes, especially being contested and fought over for economic and ideological reasons. Understanding them can help us see how local conflicts over space can be used to uncover and illuminate larger issues' (Low, 2000). In order to understand Lefebvre's notion of space, one needs to combine the ideas of geographical cartography and scales with that of a social constructionist approach. Marston (2000) aligns the theoretical ideas of Lefebvre with a geographer's proclivity to build scales in order to explain globalisation. A geographic scale cannot be separated from the social realities of the space and scales are a means to understand the range of social interactions within a space. Thus there is no tangible boundary between a house and locality or a locality and a nation, rather it is the social interaction that determines the scale of the space.

12.3.2 Capitalist Production and Consumption in Urban Spaces

In the light of above discussion, it is imperative to understand that geographical scales are quite literally determined by processes like capitalism and globalisation as they tend to change the patterns, forms, and practices of urban spaces. In turn, these scales are also a way to understand the structural changes that are a result of changing systems of politics, economy, and even social interactions within global cities. Thus, 'within contemporary capitalism in the core countries of the world, social reproduction of the material bases of society involves not only the large-scale physical infrastructure of capitalism, such as delivery of service and the building of schools and roads, but the small scale social, physical, cultural, and emotional infrastructure of the household where labour power is reproduced on a daily basis. The social relations of the household are not entirely mediated by capitalism, however, for instance, the gender relations that inform most heterosexual households and that are constituted usually through marriage and the family are also important mediators (which is not to say that gender relations are not also important mediators in the workplace or that other relations such as those based on age or sexuality are not relevant)' (Marston, 2000; p. 233).

12.4 CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Cities have always been the cradles of growth and progress in modern times. They have been the seat of technological, scientific progress that has mapped the direction of human life and society at large. The future of mega cities is hinged upon the future of the growth of ever evolving population as well as the subsequent urban rural divide. The 21st century has witnessed a traction of population towards urban metropolises. In developing countries magnanimous shift from rural to urban sectors creates acute shortages in food supply. There has been a steady decline in excess per capita land and subsequent per capita food production since 1984. Initially in the 1960s it was the wonder of

Global Concerns in Urban Growth

biotechnological inventions that had boosted food production but by the 1980s certain limits of exhaustion of such enhanced productions had already been reached. Countries like China have over the years exhausted arable land and many other developing countries of the world are rapidly moving towards dwindling food grain production owing to the urban rural flux of population migration. Sustainable development and planning and management of major cities such as New York and Los Angeles, London and Paris, Jakarta and Bangkok, Mexico City and Sao Paulo are at this point imperative for balanced economic growth and subsistence of all humanity. These cities through interconnections to their nearing suburbs (through well-developed road, bus, train networks) can provide an alternative to such lopsided migratory practices that provide immense strain on all possible natural resources within a specific geographical bound.

Check Your Progress

17. Discuss the significance of space.

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18. How does spatiality help in our understanding of city?

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19. Briefly discuss the role of geographical scale in understanding space.

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20. Discuss Lefebvre’s theory of space and how it is significant in understanding globalisation.

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12.5 SUMMARY

This unit elaborates on the concept of world cities, mega cities, and global cities as a by-product of major economic overhauls of the 20th and 21st century. It primarily focuses on the history of development of city as a theoretical and operative concept and its negotiation with global economic policy as a result of globalisation and technological innovations. The unit includes sections on world cities of the northern hemisphere and the southern hemisphere and the consequent economic ties between the two and the impact of globalisation on both the categories. The subsequent sections focus on the unique global identity that world cities enjoy in terms of their culture, location, and the impact of capitalist forces on its occupants. The last part of the unit dedicates a section on the importance of scale and spatiality.

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12.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Refer to the 1st paragraph in Sections 12.0 and 2nd paragraph in Section 12.1
2. Refer to the 2nd paragraph in Section 12.0
3. Refer to 2nd paragraph in Section 12.1
4. Refer to the 2nd paragraph in Section 12.1
5. Refer to the 1st paragraph in Section 12.1.1
6. Refer to the 6th paragraph in Section 12.1.1
7. Refer to the 3rd paragraph in Section 12.1.1
8. Refer to the 9th paragraph in Section 12.1.1
9. Refer to the 9th paragraph in Section 12.1.1
10. Refer to the 9th paragraph in Section 12.1.1
11. Refer to the 1st paragraph in Section 12.1.2

12. Refer to the 1st and 2nd paragraph in Section 12.1.3
13. Refer to the 2nd paragraph in Section 12.1.3
14. Refer to the 2nd paragraph in Section 12.2
15. Refer to the 1st paragraph in Section 12.2
16. Refer to the 2nd paragraph in Section 12.2
17. Refer to the 1st paragraph in Section 12.3
18. Refer to 1st paragraph in Sections 12.3 & 12.3.1
19. Refer to the 1st paragraph in Section 12.3.1
20. Refer to the 1st paragraph in Section 12.3.1



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UNIT 13 URBAN ETHNOGRAPHY

Contents

- 13.0 Introduction
- 13.1 Research in Urban Anthropology
 - 13.1.1 Fieldwork in the Cities
 - 13.1.2 Research Methodologies in Urban Anthropology
- 13.2 Ethical Concerns in Urban Anthropological Research
- 13.3 Summary
- 13.4 References
- 13.5 Answers to Check Your Progress

LEARNING OUTCOMES

After reading this Unit the students will learn to:

- Define the basics of urban anthropological research;
- Identify research methodology and set of methods used for data collection in urban anthropology; and
- Examine the ethical concerns regarding research studies based in the urban setups.

13.0 INTRODUCTION

Anthropologists took up the studies of urban spaces quite late in comparison to that of sociologists in the 1960s. However, individual efforts to establish a link between rural and urban had begun from the studies of Robert Redfield long before when he proposed the concept of folk-urban continuum. Gradually urban research became one of the major focuses of socio-cultural anthropology as the world saw expanding cities and forces of urbanisation taking over the rural life. Some scholars even opined that the future of anthropological research lies in understanding the dynamic character of cities and urban setups (Kemper, 1991). This even marked the conception of some important academic journals like- *Urban Anthropology*, *The City and the Society and Urbanities* etc. These journals promoted the idea of urban research while reflecting on the increasing relevance and focus of anthropological enquiry on understanding the urban life.

As a result, urban anthropological studies majorly progressed in two ways- one that was concerned with the anthropology of the city and the other that considered the anthropology in the city (Eames and Goode, 1977). The major difference in these two approaches is the distinction between the topics of research. Anthropology of the city focuses on urban problems and contexts

Contributor: Ms. Aayushi Malhotra, Research Scholar, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, BITS Pilani, Rajasthan

that are relatively newer to the discipline and observe a city as a single unit of analysis. In this approach, many scholars consider a city as a social institution in itself (Prato and Pardo 2013). For example, based on particular characteristics of the city, Banaras in India is recognised as a religious city while Bangalore is associated with the corporate sector specially the IT services. This approach stresses on studying the city as a whole instead of fragmented population segments. Whereas, anthropology in the city considers studying the discrete traditional topics including kinship, marriage, social structure etc. amongst a chosen sample population within the city. In simpler words, this approach continue to pursue the traditional anthropological research but with a change in the setting. Here, the conventional rural or tribal population gets substituted with the urban dwellers (Prato and Pardo, 2013).

Urban anthropological studies pioneered by the scholars including Robert Redfield, Richard Fox, Max Weber etc. thrived from 1960s onwards when the world observed an increased pace of urbanisation. Their studies resulted in rich anthropological accounts of those times that highlighted the transitioning nature of the urban world and established the essential connections between urban and rural setups. An increasing interest to study urban contexts led to more and more of such studies on urban issues. These studies have not only provided the thick description of urban events but have also contributed significantly in framing the policies concerning the everyday life of urban city dwellers. For example, Kemper (1991) in his paper on ‘Urban Anthropology’ describes how the various anthropological studies on the issues of urban health care needs, shifting jobs from “old” industrial cities to “new” post-industrial facilities or the roles of non-profit sector, corporate world, and the state in community economic development in the urban areas resulted in major shifts in the policies.

Apart from the shifting interest to study and contribute in solving the urban problems, many scholars even believed that anthropology as a discipline would lag behind if urban studies were not given a due share of focus. Therefore, with the urban areas becoming the centre for innovation and development of skills, hubs of product markets as well as the socio-cultural and material transformations, urban research became an important subspecialisation and field of research in anthropology. Urban with its elaborate architectures, pervasive poverty, complex economies and intricate bureaucracies gave anthropologists a new sense of purpose in exploring the city life.

Having understood the backdrop of research in urban anthropology, we will now focus on a few questions including how these studies are conducted, what are the methods used for data collection and what are the important ethical dilemmas an anthropologist face while dealing with the urban contexts.

Check Your Progress

1. What are the two research approaches in urban anthropology?

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13.1 RESEARCH IN URBAN ANTHROPOLOGY

Anthropological studies aim to collect first hand data directly from the people or the site of event as per the set objectives of the study to understand social reality. Therefore, the fieldwork tradition becomes utmost important where the presence of the researcher in the field provides crucial insights about the topic being researched. Urban anthropological research mainly focuses on studying the human settlements that are designated as urban and therefore fieldwork is carried out in the spatial settings of a city. Here we need to keep in mind that the urban is a relatively defined category and the definition for urban is not universal (Refer Unit 4).

Urban anthropological studies aim to understand the processes of urbanisation in a holistic manner while the discipline of sociology that has been focusing on urban phenomenon since long before, has limited interests in studying urbanism in a fragmented form (Bhandari, 2010). However, there lies no clear distinction in the topics of investigation but the scope of urban anthropological studies remains broader than that of sociological research. Urban anthropological research raises particular questions regarding the issues of migration, economic surplus, rural-urban continuities, constitution of urban culture etc. that set its disciplinary focus. These studies aim to understand the heterogeneity of urban living by dividing the city spaces into smaller enclaves of culture. The research questions in urban anthropology are not limited to the theoretical understanding of cities but provide practical insights to deal with arising urban challenges. The urban theories, methodologies and topics of study are constantly evolving with the dynamic nature of cities and expanding forces of urbanisation all over the world.

Urban anthropological research advanced primarily under the guidance of American anthropologists including Franz Boas and A.L. Kroeber. Therefore, their ideas remain the influential forces in shaping the course of research methodology used in such studies. Majorly research in urban anthropology uses a qualitative fieldwork strategy that employs a set of methods initially developed for studying the simpler societies and distant communities. A long-term and immersive fieldwork remains a prescribed methodology to collect in-depth data from the natural settings of people or events in order to generate rich urban ethnographies. Unlike sociological research, which majorly depends on the survey methods and quantitative data collection techniques, urban anthropology uses qualitative or mixed methods while conducting engaging fieldworks. It uses 'multiple field techniques using participant observations, note taking, open interviews, case studies of significant situations, audio and visual recordings' to produce detailed ethnographies (Prato & Pardo, 2013, p. 94). As a tradition pioneered by Bronislaw Malinowski, participant observations of the events or people's behaviour in the natural setting of their occurrence provide important data for anthropological research. Using this method in combination with other qualitative techniques, a researcher gets as closer to the social reality of the population being studied as possible. Such observations require participation in the research scene both as a member of the group as well as a conscious observer who take notes of everything happening around him in a detailed manner. According to Bernard (2006), while conducting participant observations a researcher immerses himself into the daily lives of people he is

studying to get a first-hand experience. However, simultaneously he needs to withdraw from that setting to put the data collected into a perspective and write about it convincingly. It involves making descriptive notes and collecting all the verbal and non-verbal nuances one observes in the field. A researcher can ensure reliability and validity of the data collected by using a combination of methods to verify the information.

‘Urban ethnography’ as a term implies two meanings- one, where ethnography is a research method and the other, where ethnography is an outcome of a research study. As a research method, urban ethnography employs a wide range of qualitative methods mentioned above, while as a form of writing it presents a thick description documented over time. Before going into the details of urban research methodologies, let us shed some more light on the basics of fieldwork in urban settings.

Check Your Progress

2. How is urban sociology different from urban anthropology?

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3. What do you understand by urban ethnography?

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13.1.1 Fieldwork in the Cities

Conducting a fieldwork to collect all forms of data has remained a baseline for anthropological studies. This methodological orientation initially followed to study the distant areas, villages or rural settlements in anthropology has proven equally applicable for the study of contemporary urban contexts. However, it needs several modifications in the fieldwork methodologies and procedures to facilitate the research in urban conditions. For example, fieldwork in urban areas can be conducted in phases while a researcher stays at a different location than that of the respondent population because staying in the field for a long time at a stretch or sharing the same living space with the respondents might not be feasible in urban context. Fieldwork methodologies evolve over time to suit the urban lifestyle and research requirements. Along with that, such modifications also offer a flexibility to keep the data collection process iterative, multi-sited, while allowing the researcher to study the macro (global) and micro (local) urban processes simultaneously. Therefore, it will not be wrong to say that urban anthropology uses a combination of adopted as well as adapted fieldwork methods that help in developing an understanding of the cities and urban phenomena thoroughly.

For any urban anthropological research, the primary step after defining the research problem is to choose a site to carry out the fieldwork. Considering the challenges of studying the whole city population at once, categorising and choosing a sample population based on a justifiable reason is important. As the study of entire city is not feasible by a solo researcher, a smaller unit that could be easily managed is selected for conducting a fieldwork. This unit can be a population group affiliating to a particular religion, locality, immigrant group, political ideology, occupation or even an urban institution like a school, bank, dispensary etc. Foster & Kemper (2018) call this procedure of selecting and delineating a representative population in the urban setup as the foremost step in urban anthropological fieldwork.

Conducting a fieldwork in the cities is not an easy task. There is a set of challenges that a researcher faces while carrying out research in urban areas-

- Geographical expanse of the city makes it difficult for the researcher to follow the respondents everywhere they go. This hinders the process of participant observation as the researcher only gets to observe a bit of the everyday life of a respondent.
- Heterogeneity in urban population and infrastructure along with the busy everyday routines of urban dwellers obstructs the flow of research at times. For example, if a researcher is studying the social networks at corporate firm, it becomes very difficult for him/her to follow the research participant in the working spaces of his office. These spaces are highly formal in nature and remain inaccessible to the researcher without due permissions unlike rural settings, where a farmer can be followed to his fields while carrying out a casual conversation.
- Establishing rapport with the research participants, which remains an integral part of fieldwork methodology is all the way more difficult in cities in comparison to the rural areas. Researchers often are seen suspiciously for their intruding behaviour and personalised questions. In urban areas, people are more reflective and therefore question the intent of research along with making some suggestions that influence the discourse of research. It not only makes rapport building very time consuming but also might have some altering consequences for the research design.
- Another major challenge a researcher faces in urban setup is the lack of proximity with the research participants. Usually in the urban setup because of small living spaces, increased desirability for privacy as well as hectic work schedules, the chances of the researcher residing with the focused population group remain less.

Apart from the above-mentioned challenges, the data in urban setup is often collected as per the availability of the participants. For example, Luhrmann (1996, p. vii) in her study on the Parsis of Bombay used an approach called 'appointment anthropology'. She successfully collected the data through in-depth interviews that were scheduled as per the prior appointments given by the research participants. Her interviews at times were concluded in one meeting and the participant was never met again while some of the connections she developed over these interviews lasted a lifetime. Therefore, there always

remains an uncertainty around developing long-term relations with the research participants in urban contexts. Because of this reason, sometimes the fieldwork methodology is critiqued for its short-term involvement with the research participants and dislocation of a person from his/her natural setting while collecting data. However, on contrary it even emerges as an important data collection technique that helps in building rapport informally over a cup of tea besides providing critical qualitative information on the chosen research topic. This example of ‘appointment anthropology’ shows us how fieldwork methodology in urban contexts can evolve and adapt as per the researchers ideas and research requirements.

Check Your Progress

4. Describe the main steps of data collection process in urban anthropological field research.

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5. As per your understanding what are the challenges of conducting a fieldwork based research study in urban areas?

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6. What do you understand by ‘appointment anthropology’?

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13.1.2 Research Methodologies in Urban Anthropology

Anthropological fieldwork uses multiple methods to collect relevant data as per the research design and the selected topic. The focus of urban anthropological research remains on the ethnographic means that could capture broader contexts in holism and in a processual manner (Eames and Goode, 1977). Few of the important research methodologies one should be familiar with before setting onto study an urban context includes-

- 1) **Myth Debunking-** Eames & Goode (1977) call myth debunking to be a sophisticated scientific research method mainly useful in urban research studies. According to them, this method helps in challenging the generalised urban myths and assists the researcher in generating in-depth ethnographic

data. This research methodology comes handy when the researcher's focus is to prove or reject a commonly discussed assumption that has a dependent and independent variable. For example, in her study on the Samoan adolescent girls, Margaret Mead worked on a hypothetical argument that biological puberty (independent variable) is related to adolescent role confusions and revolt (dependent variables). Through her qualitative ethnographic findings after conducting an elaborate fieldwork among Samoans she proved this cause-effect relationship not to be universal. Therefore, her study debunked a myth prevalent in social sciences.

This method in urban anthropology helps in "testing the universal assumptions about urban life using cross cultural data to refute myths and stereotypes" (Eames and Goode, 1977: 262). Any general assumption that circulates in the social sphere about urban living and depicts a cause-effect relationship can be tested using this method. For example, in general understanding we assume that urban dwellers are unhealthy because their street food consumption is high. Here, health of the urban dweller is an independent factor while street food consumption is a dependent factor. A study of food consumption in an urban setting using myth-debunking methodology can shed light on this matter at length. Similarly, there can be many such hypotheses that could be studied using this research method.

- 2) **Case studies-** Another important research method in urban anthropology is case studies. As the term *case* reflects, this method stresses on only one unit of analysis that can be a particular event, specific institution, or even a single person. Using case studies method a researcher can generate detailed data highlighting the uniqueness of a particular context. Several cases when analysed thematically present a comparable set of data that potentially helps in studying the underlying cultural patterns, similarities and differences between them. Through these comparative case studies, the processes of generalisation of results become easier. For example, a researcher studying the social impacts of corona virus outbreak interviews a vegetable vendor in an urban locality. The data generated from this particular interview becomes a case study for the research.
- 3) **Network analysis-** With the generally accepted idea that 'social systems are the networks of social relations' (Wolfe, 1978), urban anthropological studies are increasingly using network analysis methodology to study the city life. This methodological experimentation provides a systematic approach to the anthropological study of urban communities (Wolfe, 1978). It uses the variable concepts like linkages, centrality, range, flow etc. to define and trace the social relationships in urban setup. With the networks becoming a natural object of study in urban contexts, this methodology serves as an important focal point in the upcoming urban research to deal with wide range of topics including job recruitments, health services, elections etc. This method works under an assumption that the city life unfolds itself in the form of networks, which are distinct from the kinship groups or clans as observed by anthropologists in their studies of tribal or rural areas.

Apart from the above mentioned research methodologies there exists several other approaches that a researcher can employ in an urban context. Ranging

from the survey and questionnaire based quantitative studies to the descriptive and holistic qualitative accounts, urban anthropologists use a varied set of methods of data collection and analysis to comprehend urban living and the embedded processes.

Check Your Progress

7. What do you understand by myth debunking? Suggest a problem that can be studied using this research methodology.

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8. With the help of an example, discuss how the case study method is useful in urban anthropological research.

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9. How can network analysis help in urban anthropological research?

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13.2 ETHICAL CONCERNS IN URBAN ANTHROPOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Urban research that involves face-to-face interactions and respondent’s participation in data collection process encounter many challenges and constraints. These constraints often result from the ethical dilemmas a researcher faces in the field. Many universities, institutions or organisations that conduct urban research lay generalised ethical guidelines for the researchers. A research plan is only sanctioned after getting the ethical clearance from the designated committee. These guidelines ensure that the research project maintains a prescribed moral ground and prevent any kind of harm to the respondent population. However, there remain many uncertain field situations where the subjectivity and personal discretion of the researcher comes into play.

In urban research, conducting fieldwork and collecting the first hand data is not only methodologically difficult but also ethically challenging. Although, there is not much difference in the ethical recommendations for fieldwork in

rural and urban areas, but just because cities offer different set of challenges, ethical issues also vary. Few of such situations that an urban researcher should carefully consider are discussed below-

- Urban population, often because of the higher literacy rates are more reflective and have a potential to influence the course of study through their opinions or suggestions. They scrutinise the research objectives carefully ruling out the possibility of conducting any covert anthropological research in the urban settings. Moreover, to collect the data in an urban context a researcher might need to apply for several formal clearances before he/she progresses with the study. For example, getting permission from regional government body to collect sensitive data on crime related issues in the region or approvals from a residential welfare association while studying the informal networks in any residential complex. For all such kind of urban anthropological studies, researcher needs to **convey the purpose of the study in an honest and most transparent manner** to avoid any confusions (Eames and Goode, 1977: 290)
- An **informed consent** from the research participants is another important ethical recommendation. It needs a researcher to declare all his/her interests that the data collected during the research would serve. These interests can range from academic documentation to journal publishing. It includes getting the written permission letter or recorded oral consent from the research participants after informing them about why, where and how the data collected from them would be utilised. Many respondents may even ask for the copy of research outcome that should be provided by the researcher at the end of the study.
- Another major concern of collecting information directly from the people is about the **reciprocal obligations** (Eames and Goode, 1977). There remain many ethical concerns about the transactions in researcher-respondent relationships. While some scholars justify the direct payments to the respondents for their valuable time and the information they provide, others stress on the need of developing a rapport without monetary exchanges. Although, giving of gifts and lending a helping hand in daily chores can remain as an occasional personal offering.
- Maintaining the **privacy of the respondents** in urban contexts is another ethical concern from the research point of view. There are many sensible topics where **anonymity** of the respondents is required or is demanded by the respondent personally. It becomes the responsibility of the researcher to respect the privacy of respondents and prevent disclosing the sensible personal information to avoid any harm.

Apart from the above-mentioned guidelines, there are multiple ethical concerns that the field situations could present. In such conditions, it remains the responsibility of the researcher to maintain high moral grounds and not compromise the safety of the respondents or the data collected from them.

10. Imagine yourself to be conducting a research on the usage pattern of a community hall in an urban locality. What are the possible ethical guidelines you need to follow while conducting such a study?

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13.3 SUMMARY

Urban anthropological research broadens the scope of the discipline as it studies the cities, urban life and related issues. With the majority of the world population now living in urban areas along with the expanding forces of urbanisation, it becomes imperative to understand the dynamic nature of human settlements that cities exemplify. Urban anthropological research is therefore, a quest to understand the urban phenomena using anthropological theory and methods. Ethnography being the primary methodological approach is widely used in urban anthropological research to produce in-depth accounts of various topics and problems observed in the daily urban lives. Research methodologies like case studies, myth debunking and network analysis are used to conduct the studies in urban settings. All these methods follow different procedures of investigation but the aim remains to understand the problem in hand in detail. Along with that, an urban anthropologist needs to keep many ethical concerns in mind while pursuing a research in an urban setting.

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13.6 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. The major two approaches are-
 - Anthropology in the city
 - Anthropology of the city

Refer to the 1st paragraph in the section 13

2. Urban sociology differs from urban anthropology in terms of-
 - Topics of research
 - Methodologies used

Refer to 1st and 2nd paragraph in section 13.1.

3. Refer to 4th paragraph in section 13.1.
4. Refer to 3rd paragraph in section 13.1.1.
5. Refer the bullet points in the 4th paragraph of section 13.1.1.
6. Refer last paragraph in section 13.1.1.
7. Refer to point 1 in section 13.1.2.
8. Refer to point 2 in section 13.1.2.
9. Refer to point 3 in section 13.1.2.
10. Refer to the bullet points in section 13.2.