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Encountering the reality of the planning process in peri urban areas of Kolkata: Case study of Rajarhat

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ABSTRACT

Planning of the peri-urban area is one of the significant challenges in coming decades that most of third world cities have to face. Rajarhat New Town a recently developed major planned satellite township located in the peri urban areas of Kolkata. Township project was officially announced by the government of west Bengal on the 1st June 1995. The paper have two main sections first part dealt with the evolution of the peri-urban areas of Kolkata and second part composed of the brief history of Rajarhat area, land acquisition process and the role of the state, urbanization process and its socio-economic implications of the Rajarhat with special emphasis on environment destruction.

Key words: Peri urban, Satellite town, land acquisition, Urbanization

INTRODUCTION

Planning of the peri-urban area is one of the significant challenges in coming decades that most of third world cities have to face. It is apparent that in older industrial or post-industrial countries peri-urban is a zone of social and economic change and spatial restructuring, while in newer industrializing countries, and most of the developing world, the peri-urban is often a zone of chaotic urbanization leading to sprawl.[i] Megacities of a developing country are confronted with the rapid growth of population in the peri urban areas. In fact many cities peri-urban areas are larger compare to the core city.[ii] A global remote monitoring study by Schneider and Woodcock (2008) found that there are four main types of urban growth: low-growth cities with modest rates of infilling; high-growth cities with rapid, fragmented development; expansive-growth cities with extensive dispersion at low population densities (generally North American); and 'frantic-growth' cities with very high land conversion rates and population densities (found in developing countries).[iii] So many of the third world countries moving towards the planning of the urban areas like China and India through building planned townships in the peri urban areas. It is necessary to understand the story behind the expansion of metropolitan areas toward peri urban areas.

Rajarhat New Town a recently developed major planned satellite township located in the peri urban areas of Kolkata. Township project was officially announced by the government of west Bengal on the 1st June 1995.[iv] After the two decades of the plan formulation it is time to understand the whole planning process of this satellite township by the wider framework.

At this juncture the paper tries to understand the role of planning politics in building this township and the role of state as an active agent of the planning process. Lastly to explore the contemporary situation of the people gave their land to make the township.

The paper have two main sections first part dealt with the evolution of the peri-urban areas of Kolkata and second part composed of the brief history of Rajarhat area, land acquisition process and the role of the state, urbanization process and its socio-economic implications of the Rajarhat with special emphasis on environment destruction.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Methodology:

Data has been collected from several sources which include documents, census reports, EIA reports, studies, news paper articles, in depth semi structured interviews and observations. Informants included the landowner, local politician, academics and commercial developers.

The data were collected in the year 2013 by administering a semi structured and pre-tested interview schedule which includes socio- personal characteristics, economic status of the land loser and the involvement of the land acquisition process.

Literature Review

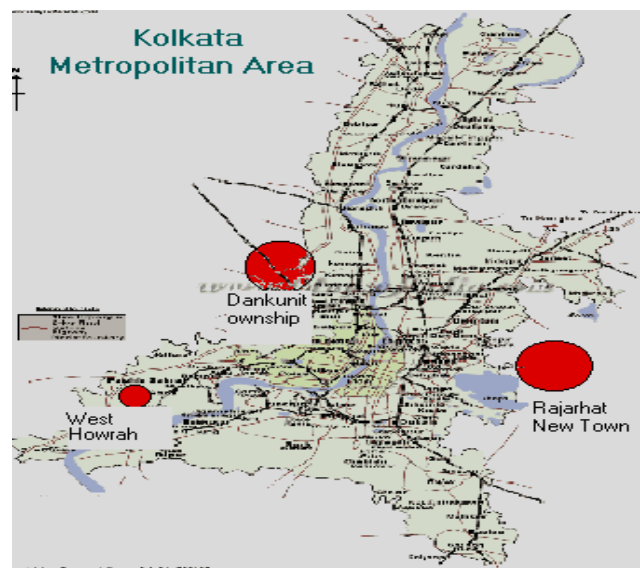
The ecological theory of metropolitan expansion was given by the Hawley (1950) in the decade of fifty on the basis of McKenzie's (1933) work of growth of city size.[v] Schnore((1965)) also noted that central thrust of the early Chicago school was to explain the shifting internal differentiation and expansion of the metropolitan areas.[vi] Hawley also pointed out the Population pressure as the endogenous engine for spatial growth of metropolitan area and this process of expansion is accomplished by the virtue of concentrating administrative and coordinative function within the community centre.

While the Marxian approach toward the expansion of the metropolitan area or engulfment of the rural area into urban area is based on capital accumulation and class struggle. It was first elaborately advocated by the French social scientist Henry Lefebvre (1970) speaks about the historical development of urban area from agricultural to industrial to an urban world. He clearly mentioned that capitalism overcomes its inherent crisis through the production of space. According to him, second circuit of capital is the "real estate," which is produced due to the land and its advanced capitalist relations of production. However separate class of landowners is absent at this situation. Therefore, it is a way to channelize money through the construction of housing, the development of space, financing, and speculation in land for acquiring wealth that is relatively independent of the "first" circuit, industrial production. He further pointed out that this second circuit is one of the essential forces of society and a source of surplus value creation.[vii] Harvey further elaborating the idea and provide a theoretical interpretation for this developmental process. In Harvey's view an under-standing of the capitalist mode of production, of investment flows and fractions of capital, and of capital-labor struggles is essential to under-standing the development of cities and of the consciousness of city people under capitalism. According to him in the primary circuit commodities will be produced and consumed allowing expansion of capital.[viii] However, eventually, overproduction will occur and or declining profit rates will then limit the scope for further investment of such expanded capital in the primary circuit. Consequently, the surplus capital will be channeled into the secondary circuit through the financial and state intermediaries. Since the secondary circuit of capital is the fixed capital in the built environment, a switch of investment flow into the secondary circuit means the formation of large scale long term assets. On the other hand, the nature and form of the financial and state institutions and the policies they adopt can play an important role in checking or enhancing flows of capital or into specific aspects of it, for example, transportation, housing and public facilities. A major facet of Harvey's argument about the secondary circuit is that investment in the built environment is undertaken not only for use-value reasons, but also for purely financial reasons, that is, solely in a quest for the highest rate of return on investment. In addition, state institutions are required to guarantee large-scale real estate projects. Both State and financial institutions would play a reconcile role in regard to shifting capital flows into the primary and secondary circuits.[ix] The urban process is the foundation of infrastructure for production, circulation, exchange, and consumption. The built environment is long lived, difficult to alter, spatially immobile and absorbent of large lumpy investments consequential from the over accumulation in the primary circuit. He further advanced his analysis on the propositions of the tendency to over accumulate and then under invest, by constructing a cyclical model of investment into and out of the built environment, whereby there are temporal and geographical ebbs and

flows of investment into the built environment. This rhythm is dictated by the rhythms of capital accumulation. To him 'global crisis of capital preceded by massive movement of capital into long-term investment in the built environment as a kind of last ditch hope to find a production use for rapidly over accumulating capital'. [x] Harvey's more recent lectures on *Megacities* (2000) dealt with the critical issues that are associated with suburbanization and rapid/massive urbanization of the last one or two decades of the twentieth century. He thoroughly sheds light on the negative impact of such urban development and offers a scientific analysis bringing out the differences and dichotomies between the developed and the developing world. While the advanced capitalist countries concentrated to create edge-cities leading to suburbanization, where any simple categorization of populations into urban and rural could be defied, the developing cities of the third world faced wildly uncontrolled pace of urbanization as a part of the 'development' discourse imposed on them. Through these process ecologically vulnerable fringe areas has been absorbed in urbanization process and makes the urbanization more critical. Interestingly enough, both these processes were new and radical attempts geared to sustain the accumulation of capital.

Kolkata's Peri-urban interface and its evolution

Process of urbanization in Kolkata especially during the post colonial period was rapid but chaotic. To understand the spatial transformation of peri-urban areas of Kolkata during the postcolonial period it necessary to retrospect the planning and policy documents that have been prepared by the KMDA. Official demarcation of metropolitan area was first done by CMPO in 1961. Calcutta Metropolitan Planning Organization (CMPO) published its perspective plan namely Basic Development Plan -1966-86. CMPO recommended the setting up of the CMDA in 1970 to prepare the action plan for whole metropolitan area. [xi] Delineated metropolitan area by CMDA has been revised in 2001 the present CMA has been delineated according to the West Bengal Metropolitan Planning Committee Act of 1994 with statutory boundary in 2001. Presently KMA extends over 1851.41 sq. km. and envelopes 3 Municipal Corporations including Howrah, Chandannagar and Kolkata Municipal Corporation, 38 Municipalities and 24 Panchayat Samitis.



Map No-1.1 Kolkata Metropolitan Area and Rajarhat Township

Source: U.K. Roy, 'Development of New Townships: A Catalyst in the growth of rural fringes of Kolkata Metropolitan Area (KMA)', Paper for the Annual Conference of HUDCO Chair Institutes on 'Cities: Engines of Rural Development' at New Delhi. September 8-9, 2005. Available at: www.iitr.ac.in, (date of access: 5.5.2012).

After the failure of the Basic Development plan DPP (development Perspective Plan) quickly realized that spatial structure of Calcutta should not be bi-nodal as conceived by the BDP. Therefore DPP conceived the metropolitan structure as a city centre with number of sub centres to be created to balance between physical distribution of function and population on land. During the period of 60's and 70's growth of urban sprawl accelerated around Kolkata without any concrete plan intervention. Policy of planned growth strategy was started after formation of CMDA. The growth of the urban sprawl from 1960 to 1990 is below.

Table no- 3.8 Urbanization in KMA: Census Definition vis-à-vis Urban Sprawl

Census Definition				Urban Sprawl			
Year	Urban Area (Sq. km)	Addition of the area (sq km)	Annual Growth (sq. km)	Year	Built up area (sq km)	Urban sprawl (sq. km.)	Annual growth (Sq. km)
1921	-----	-----	-----	1922	256.4	-----	-----
1961	590.33	-----	-----	1960	437.1	180.7	4.75
1971	662.45	72.12	7.21	1976	608.3	171.2	10.70
1981	852.23	189.78	18.78	1990	738.2	129.9	9.28
1991	857.02	4.77	0.48	-----	-----	-----	-----
Addition of U.A.		266.67	8.89	Additional Built up area		481.8	7.08

Source: Urban land Use studies of Kolkata, Space application centre and Kolkata Metropolitan Development Authority, September 1991.

Referring to the above table it may be noted that total built up area in 1922 was noted to be only 256.4sq km. The dynamics of urban sprawl over time and space could be evaluated from the growth of the built up land, and it was 738.2sq. Km. in 1990 experiencing an expansion of about 482 sq. Km. over the span of 68 years from 1922 to 1990 with an average annual growth of more than 7 Km. per year.[xii] On the other hand, if we take it from 1960 to 1990 then the area experiencing urban expansion is about 301.1 sq. Km. over the span 20 years with an average annual growth of more than 15.05 sq Km. It is to be noted that annual growth rate (10.70 sq km) of urban sprawl is quite high during the period of 1960 to 1976. The rise of such annual growth can be explained with huge inflow of Bangladeshi migrants in 1971 as well as the internal population growth of the state. Another important aspect of the DPP was that it fails to restrict the eastward urban growth of Calcutta even after assuring to conserve the agricultural filed as well as discourage the urban expansion within the rural area. In reality it was reverse because expansion of east facing urban development is become inevitable to the KMDA and state government because of the failure of the Kalyani and the success of the Salt lake inspires the planners so they have developed Baisnabghata Patuli Township as well as the East Kolkata Township followed by Rajarhat New town. Rajarhat New town did not developed by KMDA. This urban expansion process was clearly the direct intrusion towards the peri urban areas of Kolkata. Therefore it is apparent that there is conflict between locations versus environmental priority.

Table 3.14 Expansion of Urban area and shrinkage of rural area in KMA

Year	Urban area in sq km	Rural area sq km
1965	434 (33)	890 (67)
1971	475 (36)	836 (64)
1981	815.78 (55)	672.22 (45)
2001	1071.43 (60)	713.61 (40)
2003	1105.9 (60)	746.32 (40)

Source: Perspective plan of KMA-2025, Kolkata Metropolitan Development authority, Final draft, 2005

Note: Parentheses figures represent the percentage value

The above table depicts the increasing urban area and decreasing rural area within the KMA over the years. Before 1981 annual growth rate of urban area was very high i.e. 5.49 percent. On the other hand annual growth rate between 1981 and 2003 was comparatively slower i.e. 1.62 percent. Such high growth before 1981 was due to the presence of huge immigrants from Bangladesh and the policy measures by the international aid agencies.

Brief historical background of Rajarhat

Rajarhat has long and valuable political history especially in the context of pre independence Salt Satyagraha movement, Non cooperation Movement and Quit India Movement as well as post independent land reform and redistribution. People from Thakdari, Mahisgot and Mahisbathan areas played an important role under the leadership of local *Zamindar* Laksmikanta Pramanik against the imperialist British. Many were put in British jails and many others lost their lives to police bullets. At the same time, in spite of gathering together with a few *Jotdars* and landlords against the British rule, the farmers and land labourers had always fought the exploitations, deceptions and tyranny of those vested interests. In the post independence period the erstwhile landlords and other powerful interests used their powers to exploit the land reform laws to their benefits. They intimidated the illiterate farmers and recorded large amount of land in their favours. In this manner, they expropriated the farmers from their rightful ownerships of the land. During the early seventies (tenure of S.S. Roy as Chief Minister in WB) the local landed gentry of Rajarhat prospered rapidly with the support of the police and the administration at all levels. They took over large amount of land from the poor farmers. In the late sixties when United Front came to power small farmers and agricultural labourers and *bherry* workers began to gathered under the banner of communist Party to save their land and to claim better pay and related matters. The prominent fish embankments of the Thakdari, Mahisbathan and

Mahsgot area are Chinta singh *Bherry*, Daktar *Bherry*, Munshir *Bherry* and Narkeltala *Bherry*. Many people from Thaakdnari, Mahishgoth, Mahishbathan, Krishnapur, Nayapatti, Polenait, Khashmahal used to work here. The embankment workers created a *bherry* labourers' organisation to express their fight against the owners. The most prominent leader among these pioneers of labour movement in this area was the influential leftist and CPI (M) leader Rajani Mandal. This struggle was further structured and given a more rebellious shape by another very popular leader from the same party, Dulal Chowdhury. When left front government came to power in 1977 struggle against the landowners intensified further. The *Krishak Samiti*, *Bherry Mazdoor Sangha* and the poor go against the landholders of the region under the leadership of CPI (M) and retrieved the occupied surplus land from them and had it distributed among the poor landless. 550 *bighas* were taken from the *Mollahr bherry* and the land divided among the 500 landless people. This was followed by similar actions in *Chinta Singh* and *Patrabaad bherries* where each of the landless families got from one and half to two *Bighas* of land.[xiii] This was the situation before 1990s. In the early 1990s to set up the Rajarhat Township the government used the British colonial Land Acquisition Act (1894) to acquire the 21 *Mouzas* of land. Initially the Land and Land Revenues Ministry issued in 1999 a notice and by the order of the governor the under secretary West Bengal government all the land and water bodies of those 22 *mouzas* were acquired. Later on a few more *mouzas* were also acquired. Work of land acquisition was started April 1996 by West Bengal Housing Board.[xiv] The acquisition triggers the speculation of the value of surrounding land and therefore the land *mafia* started buying up the land from the poor farmers. After the acquisition the livelihood and land use character has been changed suddenly.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Land acquisition and the role of the state

To accommodate the population growth in the Kolkata Metropolitan Area (KMA), the State Government conceived development of the New Town Project at Rajarhat (NTP) in the early nineties to provide land for construction of houses for a population of 7.50 lakh from all income groups with emphasis on housing for economically weaker sections and lower income groups as well as developing a new Business Centre. The State Government engaged five agencies (includes Kolkata Metropolitan Development Authority; Indian Institute of Technology – Kharagpur; Department of Housing, Government of West Bengal; West Bengal Housing Board; and Development Consultants Limited) to prepare concept plan, master land use plan along with traverse survey report, draft project report, environmental impact assessment and financial viability reports, internal drawings, urban infrastructure schemes and plans etc.[xv] New Township Project under the jurisdiction of Rajarhat Block under North 24 Parganas District and Bhangore-II Block of South 24 Parganas District in the North-East of Kolkata comprises of 7089.72 acres of land. Until March 2013 total 6839.31 acres of land has been procured by the respective Land Acquisition Collectors, North and South 24 Parganas Districts for the New Town Project. Rest of the land i.e. 250.41 acres shall be directly purchased from the individual land owner.[xvi] Due to the asymmetry of the bargaining power and disadvantageous position of poor land owner state government appointed West Bengal Housing Board to set the land price regarding land acquisition for poor land owners.

More than 68 percent of agricultural land was acquired for the project from the two districts of North and South 24 Parganas. However 91 percent of the project area's land is under districts of North 24 Parganas. There was complete absence of Culturable waste land. Distribution of agricultural land was not uniform over the project area. There were some mouza which was devoid of agriculture land like Mahisbathan and chandiberia.

Table 1.0 Land use characteristics of the project area

Name of the District	Total land procured in hectare	Percentage of land	Agriculture land	Culturable waste	Non cultivable land
North 24 pgs	2818.5	91.65	1923.91(68.26)	00	894.59 (31.74)
South 24 pgs	256.5	8.35	178.27 (69.5)	00	78.23 (30.5)
Total	3075	100	2102.18 (68.36)	00	972.82 (31.12)

Source: EIA report 1999

Note: Parentheses figures are percentage

It is to be noted that larger *mouzas* have higher proportion of cultivable land compare to their smaller *mouzas*. It has been reported that due to low fertility of the soil the productivity of the land was not good enough.

Table 1.1 Land holding pattern of the study area

Number of Land owner cultivator		Number of Land owner non cultivator	
Less than 3acres	More than 3acres	Less than 3acres	More than 3acres
6448 (98.08)	126 (1.91)	12209 (99.55)	54 (0.44)

Source: EIA report 1999

Note: Parentheses figures are percentage

Land holding pattern can be categorized into two broad types on the basis of the engagement in agriculture. Sizes of the land holdings were small as the land owners got their land due to the land reform programme. Nearly 98 percent of owner cultivator was engaged in the cultivation although number of non cultivator members was comparatively high. In fact, dual type of economy truly existed here before building of the township.

According to some reports total awardees was 43209 people and the total amount was given Rs 132.23 crore. Therefore per capita compensation was Rs 35208 which was truly very low. As most of the land owners have small amount of land so the 95 percent awardees got less than Rs 100,000.

Table1. 2 Compensation Award Data

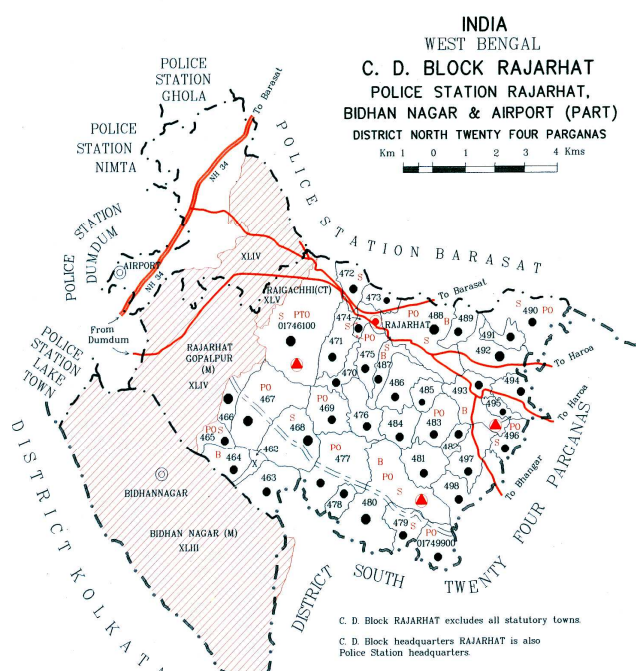
Total awardees	43209
Awards verified	37556
Amount involved	Rs 132.23 crore
Amount per awardee	Rs 35208
Awards < Rs 100,000	35769 (95 per cent)
Awards between 1 and 10 lakh	1782 (4.74 per cent)
Greater than 10 lakh	5 (0.013 per cent)

Source: Mitra, S 2002

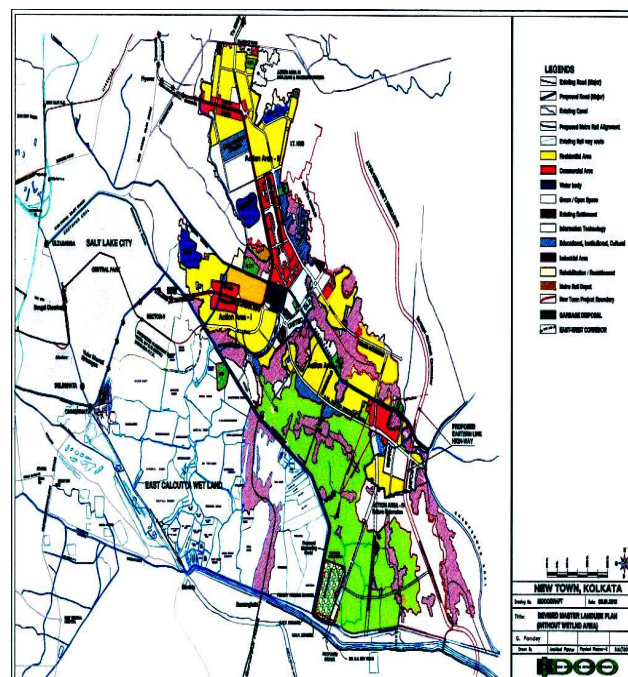
The whole processes of land acquisition and east facing urbanization generates many crucial questions. Role of the state was really interesting because here state is not merely act as facilitator rather it act as an agent of neoliberal capitalist forces and help the corporate forces in acquiring agricultural land by invoking provision of land acquisition act. Apart from this compensation on agriculture and non agricultural land was more or less similar. Compensation was given only to the landowner and not the people who are otherwise associated with land for making their livelihood. It is the urban fringe area where neoliberal capitalism has found a space for financing their activities as Harvey points out that it is long lived, difficult to alter, spatially immobile and absorbent of large lumpy investments. Due to the high growth rate of population in the urban fringe areas of developing countries there is an ever expanding market for housing. So, urban fringes are a “New Player” in urban development. East facing urbanization policy will further aggravate the vulnerability of the dwellers because of encroachment of East Kolkata Wetland would create a major problem. EKW is act as kidney of the core city and development of township around the wetland would damage its ecosystem in near future. Eastern part of the KMC is very much vulnerable due to insufficient infrastructure, unplanned land use, and poor socioeconomic and environmental conditions. Infrastructural problems are getting worse with increased building activity, as these areas have become attractive to developers after becoming part of KMC.[xvii]

Urbanization process at Rajarhat block

Rajarhat block is comprised of 39 census villages and 1 census town e.g. Raigachi according to 2001 census. In 2011 census seven more census town are being added. Over the three decades, Rajarhat has changed its character from typical agricultural area to urban area. Urban population during the 1981 was 67626 where as rural population was 95567. Therefore, it is clear that during 1980s, 41.43 percent of population was under urban area. In 2001, urban population became 66.75 percent.



Map No-1.2 Community Development Block Map of Rajarhat,
Source: Census of India, 2001



Map No 1.3 land use plan map of Rajarhat
Source: HIDCO, 2013

Table 1.3 Profile of Rajarhat

Item	Rajarhat	
Year	2001	2011
Total Population	410,463	592,737
Male	216,544	301,534
Female	200,648	291,203
Urban Population	271,811	402,844
Rural Population	138,652	189,893
Population growth (annual)(1991-2001)& (2001-2011)	4.58	4.44
Urban Population growth (2001-2011)	-----	4.82
Rural Population growth (2001-2011)	-----	3.69
Population Density per sq km	3861	5576
Literacy %	63.78	79.05
Male literacy %	56.66	81.65
Female literacy %	43.33	76.36
No of Household	89461	143608

Source: Census of India, 1991, 2001, 2011 and District Statistical Hand Book, Bureau of Applied Economics & Statistics, Government of West Bengal

The growth of the total population from 1981 to 1991 was much higher than from 1991 to 2001. Annual growth of total population during 1981 to 1991 was 7.52 percent whereas during the next decade it was only 4.58 percent. The process of investing for residential and industrial facilities and infrastructural development of the area has mainly started under the leadership of the then chief minister of West Bengal Buddhadas Bhattacharya in the late 1990s. The governmental master plan envisions a township here at least three times bigger than the neighbouring planned Salt Lake. According to governmental proposals, the township will be extended up to the extreme south of the state, i.e., up to the Sundarban near the Bay of Bengal. Initially 21 mouzas of land of Rajarhat was acquired for New Town project and the process was started in 1999 under the 12/2 section of 1 of the Act.[xviii] So far approximately 3087 hectare of land of Rajarhat and Bhangore has been acquired. The State Government had assigned (April 1996) the work of land acquisition for NTP (New Town Project) to the West Bengal Housing Board. Subsequently, West

Bengal Housing Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (WBHIDCO Ltd Company) was incorporated (April 1999), as a wholly owned Government company, for the purpose of developing NTP. [xix] The work of NTP was implemented in four phase's viz. Action Areas (AA) – I, II, III and IV, cover in. It is to be noted that because of the absence of civic body within the New Town for operating the administration state government have formed New Town Kolkata Development Authority act 2006 under the west Bengal Municipal Act. However New Town Development Authority was formed with effect from 1st January 2009.[xx] The Company (WBHIDCO Ltd) has been asked to acquire additional areas i.e. 19 mouzas of South 24 Pgs and three mouzas of North 24 Pgs for further expansion of the city.[xxi] However additional areas have not been yet acquired because of changing land acquisition policy of the present West Bengal government.

Socio-economic implications of the Urbanization

With this urbanization trend Rajarhat experienced many socio-economic changes. Such changes include literacy rate, availability of paved and metal road, electricity facility etc. apart from such changes occupational shifts are one of major change that have occurred as a result of urbanization process in Rajarhat. As it is a new IT hub of West Bengal, many big corporate have come to established their office at Rajarhat. Literacy rate has increased 4.25 percent from 1991 level in 2001. No of villages having approaches metal and paved road has also been increased to 38 in 2001; it was 28 and 22 villages had metal and paved roads respectively in 1991. Availability of electricity is also has also risen from 15 villages in 1991 to 33 villages in 2001. Apart from this people of this area are experiencing changing livelihood options. Following Table shows how the livelihood options have changed over three decades. Cultivators and agricultural labours have shrunk both in urban and rural area. Non agricultural job opportunities have increased by 20 percent in rural area over the decades. On the other hand, job opportunity for cultivator and agriculture labour has reduced 12.73 percent and 11.94 percent in rural areas.

Table 1.4 Occupational shifts in Rajarhat

Type of occupation	Urban Area			Rural Area		
	1981	2001	2011	1981	2001	2011
Cultivators	126 (0.74)	580 (0.62)	372 (0.26)	5164 (22.43)	4261(9.70)	2,798 (4.82)
Agriculture labourer	577 (3.42)	326(0.35)	349 (1.80)	6531 (28.37)	7217(16.43)	2,473 (4.27)
Household industry	355 (2.10)	1583 (1.68)	2,192 (1.57)	537 (2.33)	2519(5.73)	1,653 (2.85)
other	15831(93.74)	91512 (97.35)	136,397 (97.90)	10791(46.87)	29921(68.12)	50,904(88.02)
Total worker	16889 (100)	94001(100)	139310(100)	23023 (100)	43918 (100)	57,828 (100)

Source: Census of India 1981, 2001, 2011

Note: Parenthesis figures represent percentage value

The annual growth rate of the working population (main and marginal) of Rajarhat has been higher in the period between 1991 and 2001. Growth of rural working population was negative between 1981 and 1991. The prime reason behind the growth of employed population is just because people are getting jobs in various fields like worker in construction. The other big corporate include Capgemini, TCS, E-sermi, IBM, IBM (D), HCL, Genpact, IBM (Global), Vodafone, HDFC bank, Bengal Ambuja and Bajaz Allianz etc. The changing trend could be noticed from formal to non formal sector.

Table 4.12 Annual growth rate of working population of Rajarhat

	1981-1991	1991-2001	2001-2011
Total working Population growth	-0.51	8.16	4.29
Urban working Population growth	1.85	13.58	4.82
Rural working Population growth	-2.83	2.17	3.16

Source: Census of India 1981, 1991, 2001, 2011

Broad livelihood trajectories and casual factors

The main structural changes in the Rajarhat area over the last twenty years are related to

- Land acquisition and transformation of agricultural land into urban area.
- Growth of non-agricultural opportunities which includes construction of new buildings and estates, demand of security guards, gardeners, daily wage labour, etc.
-

Development at the cost of ecology

It is really surprising that when the proposals of formation of New Town came there was hardly any protest as far as the environment is concerned. However, protest has been done by some of the local farmers who had lost their land

because of this project. There were some local organizations like “Rajarhat Jami Bachao Committee” [xxii] who came forward to protect their livelihood but they failed. Few environmentalists claimed that EIA (Environmental Impact Assessment) has been concocted and manipulated. Some PILs (Public Interest Litigation) had been filed; green activist Mr Subhas Dutta at Calcutta High Court ordered that “the project cannot be on the 3,075 hectare and the project area should not exceed 622 hectare”[xxiii]. Hence, the court allowed only 20% of the total acquired for construction. It is to be noted that Local people also pointed out the ecological damage that has been happened for area development project. Some NGOs have also pointed out the degree of ecological damage like

“Mr Shyamal Ghosh, Secretary of Peoples Green Society, said that the project has disturbed the natural sewage and drainage flow. Dhupir Bill and Ghunir Bill have been filled up. The Nowpara Khal has been filled up to construct a road. Since the project area is situated on the Vidyadhari basin, in case of heavy rains the entire Barrackpore sub-division, Bangur, Lake Town and Even Salt Lake may be flooded. Moreover, the township is reeling under water crisis.”[xxiv]

It was not the end of ecological damage. More than 30 water bodies under Ramsar-protected EKW were filled illegally for the production of the Newtown-Rajarhat Township. A letter has been (No. Hidco/planning 13/99 dated 19 November, 1999) written by the erstwhile managing director of HIDCO (Housing and Infrastructure Development Company), West Bengal, Mr. Sanjay Mitra, to the secretary of the fisheries department, sought permission for relaxation of the provision of Inland Fisheries Act, 1984 and West Bengal Inland Fisheries (Amendment) Act, 1993 for filling up of water bodies for the implementation of the New Town Calcutta Project. The size of these water bodies was between 6.05 *Kathas* to 115.5 *Kathas*. [xxv]

CONCLUSION

The greatest challenge for research on urbanization in peri urban areas and urbanizing trends is that often opinions are given on the basis of plans that are specifically designed by hardcore planners. One of the biases that tend to predominate even in the mind of the researcher is that everything is perceived from the perspective of the city. Rural hinterlands and peri urban spaces are dealt as areas that should be best designed and worked at to suit immediate needs and interest of the city. But this is a flawed approach as every space deserves the right to develop in its own way for the fulfillment of its own aspirations. Hence, planners need to focus more on an integrated development that would simultaneously serve both the urban core and non urban periphery. By focusing on particular portion of peripheral conversion tried to explore the greater dimension of conflict and chaos, tension and turbulence in the relationship between city and its peri urban and also its rural interface. By shedding light on numerous social and ecological problem of conversion to urban area the paper attempted to focus on the integrated development and overall spatial progress as important pillars of successful urbanization.

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