

THE URBAN SOCIAL SITUATION IN INDIA *

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THE rapid pace of urbanization in recent years in India and other under-developed countries of South-East Asia and elsewhere has attracted considerable attention. A number of social scientists have tried to analyse it, and several hypotheses have been put forward. Some have taken the cue from Max Weber, who, nearly three decades ago, drew attention to the contrast between the cities of the East and the West, and have gone on to discuss urbanization as a dependent variable of culture. Others, treating it as an independent variable, have proceeded to discuss whether urbanism, as a way of life, has developed along with urbanization in these countries. Some of these have elaborated an analysis of what they call, 'overurbanization' of these countries.¹ All these discussions have to concern themselves with examining rural-urban differentials and the urban social situations in these countries, and the data for doing this are extremely meagre. They are also not always carefully handled. This has resulted in conflicting and contradictory analyses, and, as a consequence, the whole field of discussion is in a very unsatisfactory state. The first step towards improving this situation must be to line up and to evaluate properly the available data in each country, and to map the broad contours of the urban social situation in them as clearly as possible. I am not attempting this heroic task here. My modest aim is to attempt to do this for India.

In India there have been several recent surveys of individual towns and cities and of rural areas and individual villages. Though these provide considerable amount of data, they do not throw sufficient light on rural-urban differentials. For example, they do not help to answer such questions as : (i) Is the urban social situation sufficiently different from the rural social situation in India, and if so, are the differences between them similar to those found in the West? (ii) Are the differences in different size-classes of towns and cities in India significant and similar to those found in the

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¹ There is no need to adduce a comprehensive bibliography of the literature here. I list only two publications which contain a variety of authors and themes in this field : (i) *Role of Cities*, Report of a Conference, published in *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, Vol. III, Nos. 1, 2, 3, 1955; and (ii) *Urbanization in Asia and the Far East*, Proceedings of the joint UN/UNESCO Seminar, Bangkok, 8-18 August, 1956, Tensions and Technology Series, UNESCO, Calcutta, 1957.