CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Urbanization is the outcome of social, economic and political developments that lead to urban concentration and growth of larger cities, changes in land use and transformation from rural to metropolitan pattern of organization and governance. The phenomenon of urbanization has captured sociological attention owing to its constantly changing and evolving nature which transforms the very structure of the society and gives rise to newer forms of social organization. As Davis (1955) argues, there are primarily four reasons which draw focus on the phenomenon of urbanization within the purview of sociology: first, urbanization in comparison to other aspects of society is a relatively recent phenomenon, and the new urban population has come into existence only in the last couple of years; second, urbanism, though a product of economic growth and technological development, tends to affect the very social fabric of the society, leading to its revolutionary transformation; third, once cities have been established, they become "...centers of power and influence throughout the whole society..."; fourth, urbanization as a process is still ongoing and there is much to be explored in future, as its issues and potentialities are still coming to the fore (ibid, 429).

The world is moving at an accelerated pace towards urbanization in the race for development. Industrialization led to a much faster growth of urbanization during the last two centuries. Thereafter, with globalization we witnessed transnational urbanization as increasingly large numbers of people gravitated to the urban centres. The urban population constitutes 55% of the total world population comprising of 4.2 billion in 2018. It is estimated that by the year 2050, 68% of the world population will be living in urban areas, with Asia and Africa expected to experience the highest rate of urbanization accounting for almost 90% of the total increase in urban growth. The most urbanized regions of the world, which include Northern America, Latin America and the Caribbean, Europe and Oceania, will experience a saturation and urban growth will be concentrated in few countries, most of them in developing regions. It is estimated that in

the duration spanning 2018 to 2050, India, China and Nigeria together will account for 35% of the projected urban growth[i].

With an implosion of population into urban areas, the cities have to undergo expansion and development in order to accommodate the influx. In this regard, the concept of urban space is crucial to understanding the process of urbanization as the city is not merely a physical entity restricted within a limited boundary. Urban space is inextricably intertwined with the physical as well as the social landscape of any given city, and, the utilization of space and the meanings connoted to them are reflections of the underlying structures of the society.

1.1. Statement of Problem

This study explores the changing dynamics of urban space in the process of urbanization of Guwahati city situated in Kamrup (Metropolitan) district of Assam in Northeast India. It examines the process of urbanization of the city and its governance by taking into account the changes in the physical landscape and the socio-cultural milieu of the people.

In the context of the growing significance of the phenomenon of urbanization in the developing countries of the Global South, this study is an attempt to understand and analyze the process of urbanization in the city of Guwahati. The city has a particular locational significance in the Northeastern region of India being the gateway city, to not only the rest of the region, but also as a city that is being projected as India's gateway to Southeast Asia. The rationale behind choosing Guwahati for this study is that it is the most urbanized area and biggest city in the Northeast region and the model of urban growth in Guwahati is taken as a template for other cities in the region.

Guwahati was never planned in an integrated manner, and thus, it has developed in clusters in a haphazard manner. The process of major structural changes began with Assam's capital shifting from Shillong to Guwahati (Dispur) in 1972 under the North Eastern Areas Act, 1971. With the shift of the administration to Guwahati, there

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[i] 68% of the world population projected to live in urban areas by 2050, says UN. *UN DESA*. Retrieved on 18 January, 2022 from https://www.un.org/development/desa/en/news/population/2018-revision-of-world-urbanization-prospects.html

developed necessary infrastructure along with an administrative class and its associated needs. Thereafter, post economic liberalization in India in the 1990s, Guwahati experienced a boost as a consequence of being the gateway to the Northeastern region of India. Guwahati has undergone drastic transformation owing to its strategic location which has manifested into a rapid process of urbanization of the city. As the horizontal expansion of the city is restricted because it is bounded on three sides by hills and on one side by the Brahmaputra River, the city landscape has transformed from within, leading to transformation of its physical landscape and thereby re-shaping the social landscape as well.

The city has experienced rapid surge in its process of urbanization, especially in the last thirty years, which has undeniably created immense pressure on the resources of the city. This study argues that such a rapid pace of this process creates urgency towards development, which results in emulation of standard models of development with an underlying paradoxical dualism of economic viability and urban marginalization. The study finds that Guwahati continues to suffer from a multitude of issues which have manifested as a consequence of this pattern of development, be it in the case of displacement of the city's tribal hamlets, conservation of urban commons, or even in the case of basic service deliverables. The study brings to light that the plethora of urban issues seem to permeate from a fundamental issue of privileging the authority of the Metropolitan Development Authority (in this case, Guwahati Metropolitan Development Authority) over the Urban Local Body (in this case, Guwahati Municipal Corporation) in matters of urban governance, which has led to withdrawal of the state from governance and increased bureaucratization of urban planning.

The study elaborates on how a bureaucratic structure of planning, geared towards revenue generation under a neoliberal state, has led to privatization of basic service delivery, conversion of urban commons into state-regulated public spaces or private commercial/ residential enclaves, and is in the process of creation of a Smart City with emphasis on beautification, which adheres to the aesthetic sensibilities of a developed and urban city. The study highlights the increased role of bureaucratization in the governance structure which has led to progressive marginalization of people's participation; the commoditization of public goods and public spaces resulting in an

exclusionary form of urban governance and gentrification of urban spaces for exclusivist consumption.

1.2. Conceptual Framework

The concept of "urban space" gains significance here in understanding the process of urbanization of Guwahati as the city is in a continual state of growth. The spatial ordering of the city is determined by the interplay between the physical and social landscape which defines the politics of urban space.

Henri Lefebvre, in his seminal book *The Production of Space* (1991), conceptualizes space by unifying three separately understood theoretical perspectives: firstly, the "*physical*" nature of the "Cosmos"; secondly, the "*mental*" which includes "logical and formal abstractions"; and, thirdly, the "*social*" (ibid, 11). He emphasizes that, "*(Social) space is a (social) product*" (ibid, 26), which he considers as the real representation of space as it is based on social practice. As such, he argues that space is in a continual process of creation through an on-going production of spatial relations. He elaborates on this through a "conceptual triad" (ibid, 38-39):

- *Spatial practice* – It is the spatial practice of the society that deciphers the understanding of the society's space. It is associated with perceived space, which combines the reality of the daily life with the urban reality of the society.
- *Representations of space* – This is the conceived space which constitutes of the planning of the urban space with a scientific understanding. As the planning of the city is at the will of the planners, this becomes the dominant form of understanding space in society.
- *Representational spaces* – This comprises of the directly lived space associated with symbolic meanings and ideals of the people comprising the society. This space is experienced passively because the dominant form of space seeks to transform and appropriate it.

According to Lefebvre, in the process of production of space, "*absolute* space", which is the historical outcome of the evolution of the society, is displaced by "*abstract* space".

The abstract space refers to the dominant form of space which is molded under the influence of capitalism. In the process, it seeks to remove any resistance it may encounter. He argues that there is no doubt that capitalism heavily influences the planning of space which is bound up by the social relations of production. This will inevitably result in the exercise of hegemony of one class over others through systemic domination at the level of institutions as well as ideas. He further argues that the hegemony of space does not operate only at the micro and macro level confined by the city; the production of space has to be understood on a world scale with the growing importance of space in "modern" societies.

In this context, Lefebvre's slogan *The Right to the City* (1996) is an outcry demanding the right to reclaim the city and recreate it. He argues that the right to the city is not simply going back to previous forms of traditional cities; the right to the city would lead to a complete transformation and renewal of the urban life. Lefebvre ardently invokes that it is only the working class who can become the revolutionary agent, "… the social carrier or support of this realization" (ibid, 64).

Drawing from Lefebvre, David Harvey (2012, 5) argues that right to the city "…is to claim some kind of shaping power over the processes of urbanization, over the ways in which our cities are made and remade, and to do so in a fundamental and radical way". According to him, the process of urbanization has always been embedded in a class struggle where the control over resources lies in the hands of a few; this control is established by extracting surplus through exploitation and accumulation. The process of urbanization under a neoliberal state furthers capital accumulation through integration with the market, thereby assuring that "…control over the disbursement of the surplus through the state apparatus favors corporate capital and the upper classes in the shaping of the urban process" (ibid, 23).

Harvey argues that a neoliberal state functions through the process of accumulation of resources by dispossession of rights to the city. It upholds private property rights which fragments the city and becomes etched into the urban space; urban life also becomes a commodity for those who can afford to engage in consumerist practices. Such privatization and polarization form the basis of the individualistic ethic of neoliberalism

because of which a coherent urban identity and urban politics becomes difficult to emerge and sustain. This facilitates the hegemony of the neoliberal market and does not pose any challenge to a neoliberal state. The process of accumulation is furthered through urban transformation and restructuring, which "…always has a class dimension, since it is usually the poor, the underprivileged, and those marginalized from political power that suffer first and foremost from this process" (ibid, 16).

However, Harvey argues that the right to the city should not be determined only based on access to the resources of the city. The right to the city, he claims, is a collective right, which "…is a right to change and reinvent the city more after our hearts' desire", something that he considers "…as one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights" (ibid, 4).

Through this conceptual understanding of space, this study is an attempt to analyze and situate the process of urbanization of Guwahati and its governance within the global neoliberal order.

1.3. Review of Literature

The central themes of literature pertinent to this study have been discussed in this section. The review covers the conceptualization and growth of the city, the understanding of a neoliberal state in the global urban order, and the implications of an exclusionary process of urbanization.

Max Weber in his essay, *The City (Non-Legitimate Domination)* (1978), elaborates on the different kinds of cities through the course of history and arrives at an ideal-typical construct of the city, the Occidental city. He states that in order to develop into a "city-commune", a settlement must display a relative predominance of trade-commercial relations, with the settlement as a whole displaying the following features: "1. a fortification; 2. a market; 3. its own court of law and, at least in part, autonomous law; 4. an associational structure *(Verbandscharakter)* and, connected therewith, 5. at least partial autonomy and autocephaly, which includes administration by authorities in whose appointment the burghers could in some form participate" (ibid, 1226).

V. Gordon Childe, in his monumental book *Man Makes Himself* (1936), proposes a new series of four stages of the history of human development – Paleolithic, Neolithic, Urban and Industrial, thereby replacing the "three age system" (stone age, bronze age, iron age). In the article, *The Urban Revolution* (1950), he argues that the city is the result of a revolutionary stage of human development which symbolizes a new age of evolution in the society. He arrives at a minimum definition of city through his deduction from archeological data of ten abstract criteria which distinguishes a city from other forms of organization. Though Childe's understanding of city has been critiqued for being deterministic and rooted in the material economic base of the society, thereby disregarding the non-material aspects of culture, his work is still considered pioneering in providing a historical foundation for the origin and growth of cities.

Kingsley Davis in his article, *The Origin and Growth of Urbanization in the World* (1955), traces the origin of cities from the rise of the early urban centres, followed by subsequent growth and expansion of cities due to better transport and communication. He states that "true urban revolution" was achieved in the 19th century with a considerable proportion of the population residing in towns and cities. He argues that the ongoing process of urbanization does not mean the continuity of a similar process; the growth of the urban population and cities lead to changes in the way of life, with a tendency towards metropolitan expansion.

With cities growing rapidly, the focus was on understanding the process of urbanization and its consequences on the newly emerging urban society. One of the most notable early works in this regard was *The Metropolis and Mental Life* by Georg Simmel (1903), where he states that the psychological foundation of a metropolitan intellectualistic and rational character of an individual is the result of the "intensification of nervous stimuli". He argues that the overstimulation of senses to its utmost reactive capacity results in a "blasé outlook" which incapacitates towards new reactivity, leading to "atrophy of individual culture" and a more stable milieu in the maintenance of the money economy of the metropolis.

With regard to the sociological study of cities, the Chicago School is considered the pioneer of disciplinary urban sociology based on a series of studies conducted between

1915 and 1940. Coming from this school of thought, in the book, *The City: Suggestions for Investigation of Human Behavior in the Urban Environment* (1925) edited by Robert E. Park, Ernest W. Burgess and Roderick D. McKenzie, Park argues, "(T)he city is not, in other words, merely a physical mechanism and an artificial construction. It is involved in the vital processes of the people who compose it; it is a product of nature, and particularly of human nature" (ibid, 1). This school of thought studied the growth and expansion of cities as a process of human ecology and not just in terms of physical or demographic growth, which led to the formulation of the noteworthy model of concentric circles by Burgess.

Lewis Mumford in his article, *What is a City?* (1937), views the city as "a theatre of social activity" which provides the framework for "collective drama". According to him, this collective social drama forms the basis of integration of a collective sense of unity through the lived experiences. As such, the city cannot be understood in its vague physical form. He argues that in order to maintain social harmony, the physical organization of the city must be "subservient to its social needs".

Louis Wirth in his article, *Urbanism as a Way of Life* (1938), formulates a sociological definition of the city as a "…relatively large, dense, and permanent settlement of socially heterogeneous individuals" (ibid, 1). With the growth of the population in cities, individuals who may share no emotional ties with one another have to live and work in close quarters because of its high density. This leads to a process of mutual exploitation as the interaction of urbanites is usually of a segmental nature based on relationship of utility. Through the course of this article, Wirth presents urbanism as a way of life through three interrelated perspectives based on the physical structure, system of social organization, and set of attitudes and ideas (ibid, 19).

However, the analysis of the city and the urban way of life in these studies limited the understanding of cities to isolated units bound by the territory of a nation-state. This underwent drastic change with the opening up of the world economy owing to globalization.

John Friedman in his essay, *The World City Hypothesis* (1986), discusses the central role of cities in the new spatial organization of the global economic order. He formulates the "world city hypothesis" through which he argues that there is a complex spatial hierarchy by virtue of using key cities as base points in the economic order. He further argues that the formation of world cities bring to fore the spatial and class polarization prevalent in the world order at the global, regional and metropolitan level. He also states that the social costs generated by the growth of world cities results in a state of fiscal and social crisis.

Andre Gunder Frank, in his seminal work *The Underdevelopment of Development* (1991), argues that economic development is considered to be attained in stages, with the developed metropolises on the rise and the underdeveloped satellites still struggling at the early stage, which results in a relation of dependency. In the same line of argument, Immanuel Wallerstein in his book, *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction* (2004), propounded the "world-systems theory" to analyze the unequal relation between the core and the periphery based on the process of unequal exchange.

Manuel Castells, in his book *The Rise of the Network Society* (2000), argues that the new global economy ushered in a new age, the Information Age which manifests itself in a new spatial form that shapes the rising network society: "the space of flows". The space of flows constitutes of "a circuit of electronic exchanges" which provides the material support; the structure is comprised of the "nodes and hubs"; and, the articulation of space is at the behest of the "spatial organization" of the managerial elites (ibid, 442-445). The rising informational society in the new global economy has led to the emergence of a new urban form of mega-cities which act as the nodes of the new global economic world order.

Saskia Sassen in the article, *The Global City: Introducing a Concept* (2005), argues that the earlier understanding of centrality of a city located in the central business district (CBD) has undergone drastic change as a result of a grid of cities network globally. This article provides a new form of conceptual understanding of the global organizational structure through the global city model. Sassen theorizes the global city model based on seven hypotheses which establish that globalization led to the formation of a global

urban hierarchy, which manifests itself through contested restructuring of the urban space, resulting in a polarized urban social fabric.

The system of hierarchy underlying the formation of the binary of Global North/ Global South is discussed in the article, *Introduction: The Global South and World Dis/Order* (2011), by Caroline Levander and Walter Mignolo. This article argues that though the categories of Global North/ Global South emerged as a geo-political concept, the Global South has become synonymous with those regions which need to be "emancipated" by the Global North. They state that the Global North/ Global South binary creates a process of othering whereby the South, being a corollary for Third World countries, is relegated to a marginalized state that is always catching up to meet the standardized ideas and discourses produced by the North.

In the context of the cities of Global South, Aihwa Ong in the essay, *Introduction: Worlding Cities, or the Art of Being Global* (2011), urges to shift the attention of urban studies to the alternative visions emerging from the cities of Global South. Ong draws attention to the ongoing art of being global" emerging from the Global South through the process of "worlding", which presents a milieu whereby the cities of Global South are in constant formation. The article argues that the processes of modeling and inter-referencing in the restructuring of cities in the Global South leads to circulation of models which are lifted out from their context and imposed in other cities. The process of modeling leads to the standardization of specific models of urban growth as desirable pattern of development and the practice of inter-referencing leads to the aspiration of competing and equating with more successful cities. This practice of borrowing and experimentation lead to formation of new solidarities in a milieu of emerging diverse ways of being global.

The articles by Susan Parnell and Jennifer Robinson, *Re)Theorizing Cities from the Global South: Looking Beyond Neoliberalism* (2012), and, Ananya Roy, *Worlding the South: Toward a Post-Colonial Urban Theory* (2014), both advocate the need to draw from the diverse urban experiences of the Global South and theorize a holistic understanding of the global urban development. Both these articles state that the focus of the urban studies on the cities of the Global North has led to a bias in the process of

theory-building and application which fails to locate the Global South as crucial to urban theory.

This study is contextualized in the binary of Global North/ Global South and attempts to analyze the process of urban development through the lens of neoliberalism.

David Harvey's book, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005), provides a rich historical analysis of the rise of neoliberalism as an ideological institution and its proliferation on the world stage. He states that neoliberalism has progressed largely through uneven geographical development with the dominance of US hegemony. He traces this trajectory through the Cold War and the Volcker shock, and, thereafter, the economic reform policies by Thatcher, followed by the underpinnings of the IMF and the World Bank. He states that there were four critical components in this process: first, the acceleration of open trade relations in the 1970s; second, rapid transportation and communication facilitated the increase in the geographical mobility of capital; third, the Wall Street– IMF–Treasury complex, along with bilateral trade agreements forwarded by US, persuaded many developing countries to reform their economy along the lines of neoliberalism; fourth; global diffusion played a crucial role in exerting the ideological influence of neoliberalism in the new monetarist economy. This book provides an overview of the prevalent neoliberal regime in practice in a capitalist world, which functions through the accumulation of capital and resources through the process of dispossession, resulting in growing social disparities and global inequalities.

Neil Smith in the article, *New Globalism, New Urbanism: Gentrification as Global Urban Strategy* (2002), explores neoliberal urbanism through the process of gentrification which has taken the form of generalized urban strategy globally. With the transformation of the role of the state and the influence of global economy under neoliberalism, the process of urban regeneration is implemented masked through the strategy of gentrification. He argues that gentrification is the "consummate expression of neoliberal urbanism" as it mobilizes private property rights, planned and supported by the state in favour of the market.

The article titled *Neoliberalism and the Urban Condition* (2005), by Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore, offers a brief overview of the key aspects of neoliberalism. They argue that neoliberalism is an ongoing and evolving process that is intensely contested, on one hand being supplemented by state mobilization of market relations and regulations, and on the other, contested by diverse non-market social forces. As stated in this article, neoliberalism does not simply operate as a state-market relation; rather it is a process that operates at various levels of discourse, ideology and representation. They conceive of neoliberalism as a process that is embedded in urban governance as a modality based on an exclusive spatial and political strategy.

The book, *The Neoliberal City: Governance, Ideology, and Development in American Urbanism* (2007), by Jason Hackworth provides an understanding of the nature of neoliberalism as it operates in the context of American cities. The book explores the process of neoliberalization of the local governance which results in material consequences of uneven development and gentrification manifested in the landscape of the city, resulting in contestations and efforts to replace neoliberalism.

In the article *Neoliberal Urbanism Redux?* (2013), the authors, Jamie Peck, Nik Theodore and Neil Brenner, argue that cities encompassed by neoliberalism have been treated as experimentation grounds influenced by the multi-scalar nature of neoliberalism. They state that neoliberal policies have taken the shape of "*inter*urban phenomena" which relies on a circulatory system that links cities as "policymaking sites", and concomitantly products of a shared discourse. These city models are then replicated and rebranded as putative solutions which contribute to maintaining the hegemony and legitimacy of the neoliberal order. The authors offer a stance on critical urban theory as an intervention towards the dominant ideologies of the hegemonic urban formations and institutional arrangements in order to bring to fore practices of emancipation and social change.

The focus of this study is the contestations manifested in the political ecology of urban commons as a form of urban space. Harvey, in his book *Rebel Cities* (2012), defines commons as a form of space comprising of "an unstable and malleable social relation" of a community with the social aspects of the physical environment which is crucial for its

existence. He draws an important distinction of commons from public spaces; public space and goods, he argues, fall under the power and administration of the state and as such cannot be considered as commons.

Much of the contemporary scholarship on commons is derived from the Hardin-Ostrom debate. The seminal work on *The Tragedy of the Commons* (1986) by Garrett Hardin argues that, because of the finite nature of resources, the world would suffer from the "tragedy of commons" as a result of overpopulation and overuse. He presents two models that present a solution to the commons dilemma, namely "a private enterprise system", on the one hand, or "socialism", on the other. On the other hand, Elinor Ostrom, who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2009 for her work on *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action* (1990), seeks to move beyond the dichotomy of state and market by presenting examples of successful CPR institutions which are rich mixtures of public and private instrumentalities. She arrives at the "eight design principles" for the management of common-pool resources through an understanding of variables, both internal and external, that can either enhance or impede collective efforts in the management of commons

Nicole Stelle Garnett provides a comprehensive understanding of the commons problem in the article *Managing the Urban Commons* (2012). He argues that the confluence of two distinct and opposing approaches, i.e. the re-regulation of urban commons under the governance of urban public spaces and the partial privatization of public spaces, has presented a state of compromise in the process of commons-space management.

In the introductory chapter of the book *Urban Commons: Moving beyond State and Market* (2015), edited by Mary Dellenbaugh, Markus Kip, Majken Bieniok, Agnes Katharina Müller and Martin Schwegmann, commons is defined as a "construct" comprising of three essential elements: "*common* resources", "*commoning* practices", and "*commoners*". They argue that in the context of urban commons, the community has to confront the constant challenge of boundary negotiation due to the development processes that institutionalize the consumption and reproduction of commons. This book provides an extensive understanding of urban commons through the course of its contributions divided into four sections. The first section provides a conceptual

understanding of commons; the second section explores the relation between community and different forms of urban commons; the third section highlights contestations over the institutionalization of urban commons through the practice of commoning found across countries; the focus of the fourth section is an analysis of urban commons as a resource.

The book *Urban Commons: Rethinking the City* (2015), edited by Christian Borch and Martin Kornberger, is based on the premise of examining the city through the various forms of collectivity drawing from a critical perspective on urban commons. In the introduction chapter, the authors argue that urban commons is fundamentally different from common-pool resources which diminish in value with usage. The value of urban commons increases with the act of consumption, because urban commons is valuable as a resource contingent on how it features within the network of activities in the city. The contributions in the book provide reconsideration of the study of cities through the notion of urban commons, which brings to light new insights on the formation and governance of urban collectivity.

To understand the implications of the process of urbanization, references have been drawn from various studies across the Global South.

In the introductory chapter of the book *Mega-Urbanization in the Global South: Fast Cities and New Urban Utopias of the Postcolonial State* (2017), edited by Ayona Datta and Abdul Shaban, the authors state that with urbanization advancing at a rapid pace, the focus has shifted since the last quarter of the 20th century to the Global South as the newly emerging landscape of urbanization with the onset of "fast cities". They argue that speed has become a prerequisite in conceptualizing solutions to urban crisis, the urgency of which is manifested through the rhetoric of achieving sustainable urbanization by virtue of these new fast cities. However, according to them, such fast-paced process of urbanization in fact raises questions of sustainability as it surpasses the process of negotiation of democratic urban development and privileges economic return over social and environmental concerns.

In the article *From Chicago to China and India: Studying the City in the Twenty-First Century* (2018), Xuefei Ren argues that the process of urbanization in China and India

has been understood within the dominant framework of global city and neoliberalism. However, the scale of urbanization in China and India has resulted in infrastructural as well as environmental challenges, which has raised the concern of the "uncomfortable theoretical fit" in understanding the challenges of urban governance and urban realities in these two countries.

In the article *'Nice Apartments, No Jobs': How Former Villagers Experienced Displacement and Resettlement in the Western Suburbs of Shanghai* (2018), the authors, Yanpeng Jiang, Paul Waley and Sara Gonzalez, discuss the case of displacement in Shanghai as a result of one of the largest construction projects to build the commercial hub, Hongqiao. The people who were displaced were relocated in the new Aibo community, but a majority of these relocatees commented that they would rather have access to their sources of livelihood than improved standard of living.

In the article *Africa's New Cities: The Contested Future of Urbanisation* (2018), the authors, Femke van Noorloos and Marjan Kloosterboer, discuss the implication of the growing trend of urbanization in Africa. As a response to the gradually increasing urban population, "new cities" are emerging as the new trend, which are a result of rising private property investments leading to the creation exclusive enclaves. The authors argue that new cities are not designed to accommodate the urban poor but the burden of the aspiration to create such new cities is placed on the displaced urban poor.

In the article *Paradigm or Paradox? The 'Cumbersome Impasse' of the Participatory Turn in Brazilian Urban Planning* (2019), the authors, Abigail Friendly and Kristine Stiphany, present the case of urban planning in Brazil where, despite Right to City being at the core of the mobilizing process to ensure greater equity, the policies after the reform movement were heavily influenced by neoliberal approach with the agenda of market expansion. This is highlighted through the structural inability of the state to provide affordable housing in Brazil due to disjuncture between land structure and real estate market dynamics, leading to uneven development.

In the article *Contextualizing Accumulation by Dispossession: The State and High-Rise Apartment Clusters in Gangnam, Seoul* (2020), the authors, Jung Won Sonn and Hyun

Bang Shin, discuss the reclamation of floodplains by the state in Gangnam to facilitate the growth of high-rise apartments by private developers. Such appropriation, they argue, not only dispossesses citizens of their users' right, but also leads to an intra-class dispossession through constraining zoning regulations, thereby privatizing public spaces.

In the context of India, two articles by Sujata Patel, *Is there a 'South' Perspective to Urban Studies?* (2014) and *Rethinking Urban Studies Today* (2018), foreground the need for a critical perspective to urban studies. The former article urges for a "South" perspective to urban studies, moving away from the epistemic divide between the modern West and peripheral non-modern East. The latter article argues that, in the context of urban studies in India, we need to engage in a critical rendition of the urban experience by moving beyond the bias to analyze the big metropolises and engage in a reflective assessment of the process of urbanization outside these mega cities.

A comprehensive understanding of India's urbanization is provided in the book on *Urban Studies* (2006), edited by Sujata Patel and Kushal Deb. The contributions in this book explore the various contours of the process of urbanization in the context of major Indian cities. Also the book *India's Contemporary Urban Conundrum* (2019), edited by Sujata Patel and Omita Goyal, critically engages with various aspects of the urban experience of India in the early 21st century. This book focuses on five themes: defining the urban; the insecurities of work and living conditions; study of contemporary cities; issues concerning urban planning and governance; the well-being of the environment and ecological concerns.

Soumen Bagchi, in the article *Myth of Empowering Urban Local Bodies* (1999), critically analyzes the 74th Amendment Act, 1992, which is considered a landmark with regard to devolution of urban management and governance in India. The author, however, argues that the political empowerment of ULBs is a myth in the absence of their financial empowerment.

Amitabh Kundu, in the article *Urbanisation and Urban Governance: Search for a Perspective beyond Neo-Liberalism* (2003), argues that the process of urbanization in India is exclusionary in nature in favour of large cities with a strong economic foothold.

The governmental investment in infrastructural facilities in these large cities attracts development through private investments, leaving behind the small and medium towns.

John Harriss, in the article *Antinomies of Empowerment: Observations on Civil Society, Politics and Urban Governance in India* (2007), highlights the exclusionary nature of the neoliberal state in favour of the "consumer-citizen", at the cost of protection or self-realization of the urban poor.

Swapna Banerjee-Guha, in the article *Neoliberalising the 'Urban': New Geographies of Power and Injustice in Indian Cities* (2009), examines the prevalence of neoliberal urbanism through an analysis of the National Urban Renewal Mission, citing examples from cities across the country. The article focuses on the processes of accumulation and exclusion in Mumbai which operates through the underlying logic of neoliberal urbanism, resulting in deepening polarization and the resistance that arises as a consequence of it.

The article, *Changing Trajectories of Urban Local Governance* (2017), by Amita Bhide traces the changing nature of urban local governance in India from the colonial legacy to its reformation through the 74th Constitutional Amendment and postcolonial development beyond. The author argues that the disempowerment of urban governance at the local level has resulted in limited capacity to deal with growing urban challenges, which leads to "apathy and alienation" towards local governments.

In her article, *Urban Governance in India* (2019), Isher Judge Ahluwalia discusses the importance of empowering urban governance at the local level in India in the face of the growing challenges resulting from rapid urbanization. The author provides a comprehensive overview of the urban scenario in India and the challenges therein, which can be tackled only by building capacity of the urban local government.

The article on *Urban Commons* (2011) by Vinay Gidwani and Amita Baviskar highlights that the ongoing denigration of urban commons is a prerequisite of capitalist expansion. Expressing concern over this, they argue that urban commons are not only crucial to the ecology, but are essential to urban collectivities in "learning how to do democracy".

Amita Baviskar's book, *Uncivil City: Ecology, Equity and the Commons in Delhi* (2020), is an expansion of previous works engaging with the politics and negotiations of city spaces in Delhi. The book explores this by looking at different aspects of the city, be it the extraordinary infrastructural spectacles or the ordinary streets, or, the Yamuna River and the Ridge. The author raises question on the ecological capacity of the city to sustain itself with the rising uncertainty and challenge of climate change.

Case studies of few cities in India have been referred to in this study. The article *Land-Use Change and Vocational Transition in East Kolkata Wetlands: Evidence from Time Diary* (2016), by Debanjana Dey and Sarmila Banerjee, discusses the shrinkage of the East Kolkata Wetlands due to encroachment, which displaces the local population whose livelihood depends on it. The article *Chennai's Peri-Urban: Accumulation of Capital and Environmental Exploitation* (2016), by V. Gajendran, discusses the plight of peri-urban areas in Chennai which have become dumping sites for the waste generated in the city, and is also exploited for additional water supply and land accumulation for privatized housing projects. The article *Planning as Commoning: Transformation of a Bangalore Lake* (2011), by Jayaraj Sundaresan, discusses the making and unmaking of the Rajapalaya Lake as urban commons at the interface of democratic participation, political networks and administrative bureaucracy.

Coming to Northeast India and Guwahati, the following literature provided an understanding of the process of urbanization in the region.

The essay titled *Contextualizing Social Development in Northeast India* (2020) by C.K. Sharma historicizes the process of social development practices from the pre-colonial times to the post-colonial period in the Northeastern region of India. The author brings to fore that despite the specificities of the region, the nature of development practices have been largely informed by the agenda of the Indian state which can be seen through the implications manifested in the region as a result of this.

In the article *Learning to Love the City in Northeast India* (2017), Duncan McDuie-Ra states that the study of urban areas and "vernacular urbanism" is difficult to come by, as the research on the region is focused on the politics of ethnicity and cultural change.

Through a walking ethnography in urban areas of the region, he proposes in this article three ways of looking into urban areas: through the lens of spatial violence, visual culture and sensory experiences.

Duncan McDuie-Ra and Lauren Lai in their article, *Smart Cities, Backward Frontiers: Digital Urbanism in India's North-East* (2019), engage in an analysis of ten smart city bids from Northeast India and put forth the argument that these smart city bids are a continuation of the relation of patronage and dependency between the centre and the state. They argue that the Smart Cities Mission accelerates the process of integration of these frontier spaces within the ambit of the national territory, thereby opening up new avenues for the economy.

In the article *Disparity in Development among Urban Centres in Mizoram and its Political Implications* (2010), Benjamin L. Saitluanga discusses the implication of concentrated urban growth in Aizawl, the capital city of Mizoram. As a result of Aizawl's favourable treatment from the state in an attempt towards rushed development, it has led to sprawling in the city which exerts tremendous pressure on the land and economy, and has resulted in increasing municipal deficiencies.

In the article *Urbanisation of a Tribal City: Contestations of the New Shillong Township* (2018), Aashish Khakha analyzes the process of development in Shillong, Meghalaya, which has experienced phenomenal growth in the course of the last three decades resulting in radical transformation in its physical infrastructure and unprecedented levels of urban growth. The paper elaborates on the process of land acquisition for the proposed New Shillong Township which has led to intense contestation among different stake holders, as it is in open violation of the Sixth Schedule provisions that safeguards the interest and welfare of the tribal people.

In the commentary on *The New Land Settlement Act in Arunachal Pradesh* (2019) by C.K. Sharma and Bhaswati Borgohain, the authors highlight the implication of the emerging political economy on the social systems of the tribal communities in Northeast India, which are embedded in their unique systems of land relations. Through an analysis of the new Arunachal Pradesh (Land Settlement and Records) (Amendment) Act, 2018,

the authors argue that this will lead to further dispossession of the traditional resources and livelihood practices of the hill tribes with an onslaught on their customary land relations.

The article *Duality in Urban Development: Marginalisation of City Tribes* (2013) by Purobi Sharma analyzes the creation of a "new marginality" of "city tribes" in Guwahati through several indicators such as literacy, income and livelihood, land holding pattern, and extent of political participation. The paper argues that the process of the growth of the city, which is not just demographic and spatial expansion but an overall transformation of the society, creates a sense of lack of belongingness of the city tribes in the urban scenario with them lagging behind the emerging urban way of life.

In the article *Understanding State Sovereignty and Contestations around Land Governance in Guwahati City* (2020), Trishna Gogoi analyzes the institutional framework of land governance in Guwahati city bringing to fore a form of disjointed governance. The paper argues that the process of land governance operating through ambiguous bureaucratic policies and practices has led to a systemic structural violence against the people due to evictions and dispossession of traditional spaces.

With regard to Guwahati, two studies – one conducted by Centre for Urban Equity (CUE), CEPT University, and the other by ActionAid – provides a comprehensive understanding of the process of urbanization and urban governance. *City Profile: Guwahati* (CUE, 2014) discusses the process of urban growth and development in the city, and identifies key areas of conflict and contestation with regard to the urban planning and governance of the city. *Urban Governance for Whom?: A Study on Public Amenities and Land Use in Guwahati City* (ActionAid, 2019) analyzes the present state of urban governance of Guwahati through an examination of the condition of municipal services and land use patterns.

Apart from the literature reviewed for Northeast India and Guwahati, the book titled *Understanding Urbanisation in Northeast India: Issues and Challenges* (2020) edited by M. Amarjeet Singh and Singha Komol was recently published. Though this book has not been referred to in this study due to its availability only recently, it is worth mentioning

here as it presents a comprehensive understanding of the implications and dynamics of the process of urbanization in various cities across the Northeastern region of India.

1.4. Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this study are:

i. to trace the making of Guwahati city in order to map out the pattern of its urban growth and development;

ii. to analyze the urban planning model of the city and examine the gaps in its approach to urban governance;

iii. to outline the changes in the physical landscape of the city in order to bring forth the political ecology of urban commons in the city;

iv. to understand the implications of production and consumption of urban spaces within the city.

1.5. Research Questions

The abovementioned objectives of this study are supplemented by the following research questions:

1. What is the history of the emergence of urbanization in Guwahati?
2. What are the driving forces behind the rapid urbanization of Guwahati?
3. How does the process of urban planning define the process of urbanization and expansion of the city?
4. What is the structure, process and approach of urban governance of Guwahati?
5. In what way has the meaning of land changed with the changes in the landscape in and around the city?
6. What are the processes and motivations involved in the changing landscape of the city?
7. What are the implications on the environment owing to the infrastructural development as part of urban growth?
8. How is the quality of urban life in Guwahati vis-à-vis the basic amenities?
9. What are the implications of the Master Plan and Smart City Project?
10. How does the process of urban planning and governance impact the urban social fabric?

1.6. Methods of Data Collection

The present work is mainly a descriptive and analytical study. It is qualitative in nature and relies on both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data has been collected through intensive fieldwork supplemented by various techniques of data collection such as, observation, survey, case study, interview as well as focus group discussion (FGD). Apart from this, archival data was collected to trace the history of the capital city, and content analysis of Guwahati Master Plans and Guwahati Smart City Proposal was carried out to assess the future vision for the city. Secondary sources include relevant books and journal articles, archival data, official government documents, newspaper reports as well as research reports of studies conducted by other organizations.

For the purpose of understanding the marginalization of indigenous communities in the making of the capital city of Guwahati, the field data presented in chapter III has been collected through a case study conducted in 2017 of the indigenous Karbi community residing in the Hengrabari area near Dispur, the capital complex. This area experienced the initial impact of the structural changes being located in the vicinity of the capital complex. The first interaction with the community was facilitated by an acquaintance in the form of a house visit of a well-known Karbi elder member. After a discussion with him on the life of the Karbis in the area, he then introduced me to few of his neighbours. From thereon, the respondents for the study were selected through snowball sampling, covering community members across age groups. Semi-structured and open-ended interviews were conducted with respondents from this community. This chapter also contains archival data collected from Assam State Archive to trace the trajectory of the making of the capital city. In addition to this, the chapter includes a content analysis of two Master Plans of Guwahati: one published in 1986 with perspective 2001 and the latest one published in 2009 with perspective 2025.

The field data reflected in Chapter IV was collected though semi-structured interviews and a survey. Purposive sampling technique was used to identify key government officials from GMDA, GMC, GSCL and other departments. The questions were kept open-ended in order to bring forth information on the urban planning and governance of

Guwahati, the responses for which were then probed for further information. A survey was also conducted in the month of September, 2018 in the Uzan Bazaar area, one of the oldest municipal wards, to evaluate the status of water supply, a basic service deliverable. A purposive sample of 30 households (HHs) with piped water supply was taken and one FGD were conducted with 18 participants. Apart from this, respondents were selected through random sampling in the areas around Sola beel and Brahmaputra Riverfront, two areas which have been shortlisted for Area-based projects under Guwahati Smart City Project.

Chapter V presents a mixed range of data complied through interviews, case study, survey and content analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with GSCL officials and GMC Ward Councillors selected through purposive sampling. A case study of Sola beel, a wetland located within the city of Guwahati, was conducted in 2017 to gauge the plight of urban commons in the city. A survey of two markets, Uzan Bazaar GMC market and Beltola weekly market, was carried out in 2019 through random sampling to understand the claim to public spaces. In addition to this, a content analysis of the Guwahati Smart City Proposal was done to bring forth the changing nature of urban planning and governance.

1.6.1. Universe and Period of the Study

This study was conducted in the city of Guwahati situated in Kamrup (Metropolitan) District of Assam, India. Guwahati has experienced tremendous development in the last thirty years by virtue of being the gateway city to the Northeastern region of India. Owing to its locational significance, Guwahati has been in focus for various development schemes towards urban regeneration of the region, be it Jawaharlal Nehru Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), now rechristened as Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT), or the Smart City Mission (SCM), to name a few. With the rapid and continual growth of Guwahati, the city presents an opportunity to explore the changing dynamics of urban space and governance within the paradigm of the global neoliberal order. The study was carried out through intensive fieldwork in the course of multiple field visits during 2016-2019.

Figure 1.1: Locating Guwahati
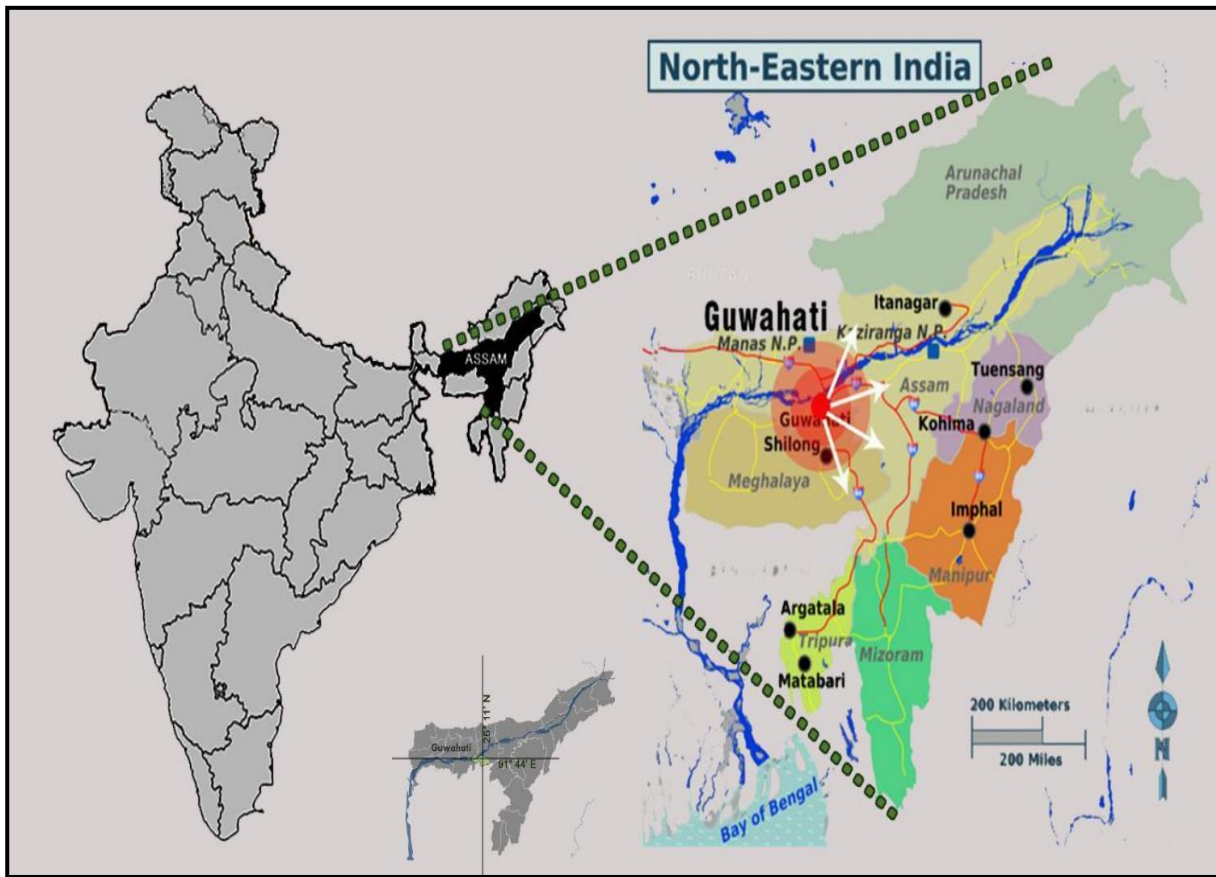
Source: Guwahati Smart City Proposal

Guwahati Metropolitan Area (GMA) covers an area of approximately 262 sq. km. which was proposed to be extended by 66 sq. km. in the Master Plan, 2009 (perspective 2025). At present, GMA comprises of the areas under Guwahati Municipal Corporation, North Guwahati Town Committee, Amingaon Census Town and 21 revenue villages. The Master Plan proposes three New Towns as part of extension of GMA.

Figure 1.2: GMA Coverage Area
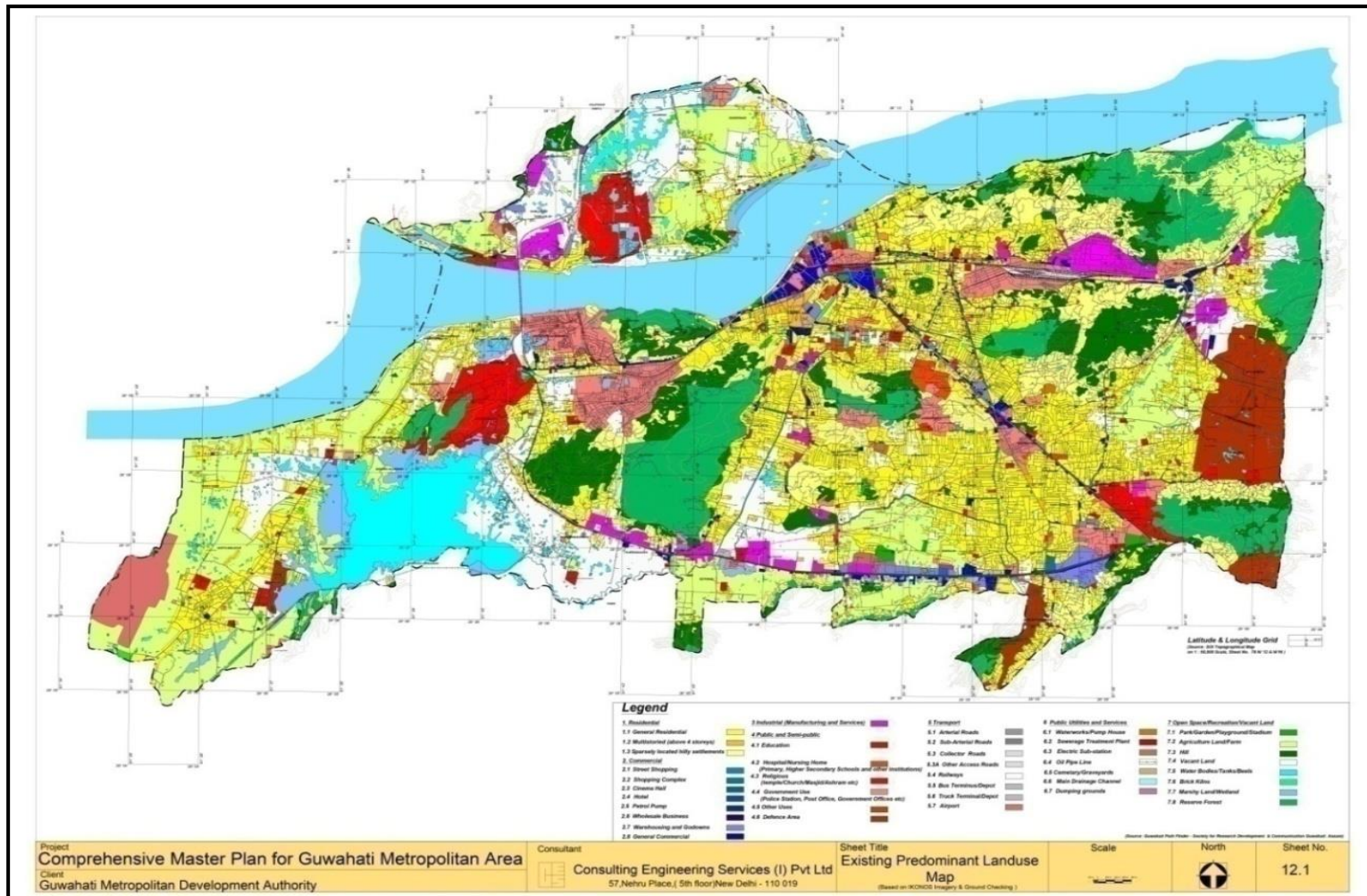
Source: Master Plan (2009)

According to the Census 2011, the total population of GMA is 968,549. The following table documents the growth rate of Guwahati since 1951 up to the last Census in 2011. The table presents the population of GMCA (Guwahati Municipal Corporation Area) and the total population of GMA.

**Table I: Population Growth of Guwahati, 1951-2011**

Year	GMCA		GMA excluding GMCA		GMA	
	Population	CAGR (%)	Population	CAGR (%)	Population	CAGR (%)
1951	43,615	-	53,774	-	97,389	-
1961	1,00,707	8.7	98,775	6.3	1,99,482	7.4
1971	1,23,783	2.1	1,68,436	5.5	2,93,219	3.9
1981*	2,68,945	8.1	1,02,351	-4.9	4,35,280	4.0
1991	5,84,342	8.1	61,827	-4.9	6,46,169	4.0
2001	8,09,895	3.3	80,878	2.7	8,90,773	3.3
2011	9,63,429	1.8	85,998	0.6	9,68,549	0.8

* The Census 1981 was not conducted in Assam. The population figures have been extrapolated on the basis of the 1971-1991 Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR).

Source: Desai, R. et al. (2014)

As seen from the above table, the population growth was high in 1970s (reflected in 1981) due to the establishment of Guwahati as the capital city in 1972. Thereafter, the decline in growth rate reflected in the period 2001-2011 indicates the saturating capacity of the city and stabilizing of the urban population. However, despite the declining growth rate, Guwahati still constitutes 25% of the total urban population of the state of Assam. With Guwahati being planned in the image of a global metropolitan city, the Master Plan (2009) gives an estimated projection of 21.74 lakh population of GMA for the perspective year 2025. With the expansion of GMA in the form of the three New Towns, 4 lakh out of the projected urban population will be in these towns; the other 17.74 lakh population will be located within the present GMA. The Master Plan (2009) also records a 10% floating population of Guwahati during daytime for various activities, which puts the estimated daytime population of Guwahati in 2025 at 22.94 lakh.

Figure 1.3: GMA Population Growth
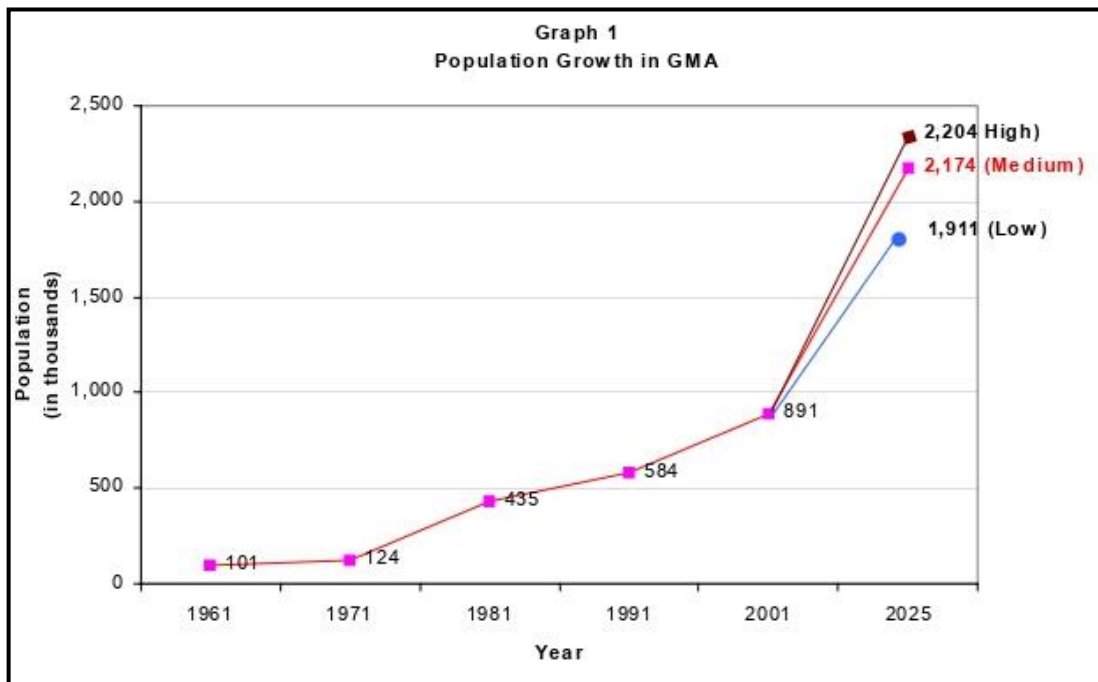
Source: Master Plan (2009)

1.6.2. Limitations of the Study

Urban governance of a city is a vast field of study with multiple aspects which overlap with one another in determining the quality of urban life. For the purpose of this study, the urban planning and governance structure of Guwahati city is examined and analyzed. There are multiple departments which focus on various aspects of urban service delivery in Guwahati. However, this study is limited to largely understanding the role of GMC and GMDA in the process of urban planning and governance of Guwahati. This is a limitation of this study as a comprehensive understanding of the various sub-departments remains to be explored.

1.7. Outline of the Chapters

▪ **Chapter I: Introduction**

The introductory chapter begins with a discussion on the phenomenon of urbanization followed by the statement of problem of the study. The chapter then contextualizes the study within the conceptual framework of urban space as critical to the understanding of

the process of urbanization in a neoliberal world order. This study is contextualized within the framework of urban space and right to city as propounded by Lefebvre, and thereafter by Harvey. Following this, the chapter presents the central arguments of literature relevant to the study. The review of literature covers the conceptualization and growth of the city, the understanding of a neoliberal state in the global urban order, and the implications of an exclusionary process of urbanization. Thereafter, as an introductory chapter, it outlines the objectives, research questions, methods of data collection, universe, and limitations of the study.

- **Chapter II: Contextualizing the Study**

This chapter revisits the debate between the Global North and the Global South, and as an extension tries to understand the relevance of the global order in analyzing the present context of urbanization. The chapter traces the origin of cities and attempts to understand its nature as a way of life. The Chicago School introduced the study of a city but it was nestled in the idea of studying cities as isolated units bound by the territory of a nation-state. The chapter discusses subsequent critiques to this dominant approach that led to the emergence of the concept of global city and the world-systems theory, whereby it was argued that uneven urban development has to be studied both in a broader geopolitical context and in relation to worldwide capitalist production. This chapter locates India within the larger discourse of urban studies in the Global South, and from therein contextualizes Northeast India, and more specifically Guwahati for the purpose of this study.

- **Chapter III: Guwahati: Making of a Capital City**

This chapter introduces the field site of my study. The chapter traces the evolution of the city from a historical military-administrative post to an urban centre during British rule in the 19th century to becoming the major city of Northeast India, followed by the acceleration of growth after becoming the capital city of present-day Assam in 1972. The city gained political importance and underwent major structural changes after the reorganization of the Assam state and with the shifting of its capital from Shillong to Guwahati (Dispur) in 1972 under the North Eastern Areas Act, 1971. A case study conducted as part of this study of the indigenous Karbi community, located in the

vicinity of the present Dispur circle which houses the Assam State Secretariat Office, is discussed to look into the issue of displacement and marginalization in the process of the creation of the capital city. This is followed by a content analysis of two Master Plans of Guwahati – one published in 1986 with perspective 2001 and the latest one published in 2009 with perspective 2025 – which brings forth the shortcomings of the projected visions of the plans for the city. The focus of this chapter is to trace the history of the city through state planning documents in juxtaposition to the lived reality.

- **Chapter IV: Changing Nature of Urban Governance**

This chapter traces the emergence of urban governance in India and elaborates on the administrative structure of the process of urban planning and governance of Guwahati city. The role of the primary agencies responsible for the urban management and governance of Guwahati city, which include Guwahati Municipal Corporation, Guwahati Metropolitan Development Authority and Guwahati Development Department, are discussed here. The chapter locates neoliberalism as a framework that strongly influences the structure of urban planning and governance in the context of Guwahati city. It highlights that the increased bureaucratization of the process of urban planning is the result of the rapidly diminishing capacity of the elected urban local body (GMC) in matters of urban governance, which is being replaced by a bureaucratic body (GMDA) working in close partnership with the private sector. This has led to withdrawal of the state from governance and increased privatization of basic service delivery, thereby leading to an exclusionary form of urban governance and progressive marginalization of people's participation.

- **Chapter V: Commercializing the Urban Commons**

This chapter elaborates on the process of conversion of urban commons into public spaces and analyzes the exclusionary form of governance that emanates from the rubric of urban development for the "public". The chapter focuses on urban commons (here, *beel*s, that is, wetlands) in Guwahati city, which have been converted from community spaces to "public spaces" for the purposes of development. Through a case study of the Sola beel and an analysis of the Area-based projects under Guwahati Smart City Project, the chapter argues that the process of conversion of urban commons to public spaces has

led to exclusivist urban spaces, leaning towards development for a specific class of citizens who can cater towards revenue generation and profitability. The chapter highlights the dichotomy between urban commons and public space which creates an interesting distinction in how urban space is conceptualized and accessed. This chapter problematizes the approach of "development for the public" which has led to gentrification of urban spaces for exclusivist consumption.

- **Chapter VI: Conclusion**

The concluding chapter presents a summary of all the chapters and brings into focus the major findings of the study. The chapter situates the process of production and consumption of urban space in this study within the framework of the "conceptual triad" put forward by Lefebvre. It argues that the process of creation of "public" spaces has resulted in the formation of what Lefebvre refers to as *abstract space*, through the process of "accumulation by dispossession" as posited by Harvey. The chapter also locates the development process of Northeast India, more specifically Guwahati, within the binary of the Global North/ Global South in relation to mainland India. Thereafter, the chapter concludes the thesis by contesting the discourse of "development for the public" which has led to an exclusionary form of urban governance at the cost of welfare and inclusivity.