CHAPTER II
CONTEXTUALIZING THE STUDY

The aim of this chapter is to revisit the debate between Global North and Global South, and as an extension understand the relevance of the global order in analyzing the present context of urbanization. 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. Subsequent critiques to this dominant approach led to the emergence of the global city theory, whereby it was argued that uneven urban development had to be studied both, in a broader geo-political context, and in relation to worldwide capitalist production. In the recent years, the urban scholarship on Asia and Africa is reflective of this critique, which brings forth the implications of an imposed model from Global North and marks the emergence of new trends stemming from within Global South. This chapter recounts these developments and locates India within the larger discourse of urban studies in the Global South. It then contextualizes Northeast India, more specifically Guwahati, for the purpose of this study.

2.1. Introduction: Origin of Cities

Urbanization is the outcome of social, economic, and political developments that have led to urban concentration and growth of larger cities, changes in land use, and transformation from rural to metropolitan pattern of organization and governance. The process of urbanization essentially represents a change in population distribution from scattered rural areas to more compact towns or cities, denoting a diffusion of the influence of urban centres to a rural hinterland. Urbanization has advanced at a rapid pace over the last two centuries and cities are becoming the predominant course in the spatial organization of the world's population.

The emergence of the first cities, small and undistinguishable from towns, dates back to the Neolithic Age sometime between 6000 B.C. and 5000 B.C., owing to inventions which facilitated the productivity of agriculture. During this time, cities grew in areas with favourable topography and were confined mainly to the valleys and flood plains, like the Nile, the Indus, and the Hwang Ho. However, these cities were not as

widespread due to difficulty of communication and transportation, along with the existence of diverse local tribal cultures, which made the formation of large urban-centered units (known then as city-states) virtually impossible. The limitations of the first phase were overcome during the period 600 B.C. to 400 A.D., with the development of large-scale river and sea transport, and the introduction of roads for chariots and carts. Greece and Rome flourished during this time with increased trade and production, which supplemented an effective political unit and expansion of population. However, it is the transformation in the 19th century that marks a true form of urban revolution. Unlike the presence of few scattered towns and cities before, the period post industrialization marks actual urbanization, as a significant size of the population started living in towns and cities. The process of urbanization has escalated at a much faster proportion during the last two centuries, owing to globalization, thereby leading to a metropolitan expansion (Davis, 1955).

In tracing the origin of cities, Childe's monumental book *Man Makes Himself* (1951) replaced the three-age system of human development (stone age, bronze age, iron age), and in its place, proposed a series of four stages – Paleolithic, Neolithic, Urban and Industrial. The transition from one stage to the next is marked by revolution which led to fundamental shifts in the history of human development. The first revolution was agricultural which marked the shift from hunting and gathering to settled agriculture; this was the Neolithic Revolution. The next momentous shift was the Urban Revolution which marked the transition from agriculture economy to city-based manufacturing and trade, and movement of people from villages to cities, with complex social and political systems that characterized the earliest cities of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the Indus Valley. The third major shift in the history of development was the Industrial Revolution of the 18th and 19th centuries.

Childe (2016) argues that the history of civilization is etymologically connected to the concept of city, which in itself is very ambiguous, making it very hard to define. Nevertheless, he deduces ten abstract criteria from archeological data to arrive at a minimum definition of city. 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 considered pioneering in providing a historical foundation for the origin and growth of cities.

2.2. Understanding the Nature of City

With the rapid growth of cities post industrialization, urban sociology emerged as an attempt to understand this process 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). Simmel argues that the psychological basis that draws individuals towards a metropolitan life is the result of intensification of nervous stimuli, which leads to an intellectualistic character of the metropolis mental life. The swiftly changing nature of external and internal stimuli in a metropolis leads to an intensification of the consciousness and degree of awareness, which creates a mental predominance for the metropolitan individual, who primarily reacts in a rational manner rather than emotionally.

This intellectualistic and rational quality is in close integration with the money economy, which is the basis of a metropolis. As Simmel argues, "(T)he purely intellectualistic person is indifferent to all things personal…", and such rationality is essential in a metropolis in order to reduce "…all quality and individuality to a purely quantitative level…" (ibid, 12). This indifference results in a "blasé outlook" (ibid, 15), which, on one hand, leads to homogeneity as there is no differentiation between things, but, on the other hand, everything is devoid of its specificities and uniqueness, and is reduced to a quantitative value where money becomes the common denominator. Simmel states that this blasé outlook is the result of the overstimulation of senses to its utmost reactive capacity, which is exhaustive and incapacitating towards new reactivity. This leads to "atrophy of individual culture" (ibid, 19) and a more stable milieu in the maintenance of the money economy of the metropolis.

Unlike Simmel, who views the social reality of a metropolis based only on its materiality, Mumford (2016) brings to fore the social aspect of the city with his claim that, the biggest handicap of city planning is the unclear view on the social functions of the city. He views the city as "a theatre of social action" (ibid, 12), which does not cater

only to the economic life, but also serves the cultural processes. As such, "(O)ne may describe the city, in its social aspect, as a special framework directed toward the creation of differentiated opportunities for a common life and a significant collective drama" (ibid).

According to Mumford, the collective social drama is what lies at the basis of integration of a collective sense of unity, as individuals do not understand the city in its vague physical form, but through their lived experiences. The physical organization of the city can deliberately make this drama more rich and significant, or, may reduce or stifle it, thereby leading to personal disintegration. As such, the city limits in terms of its size and expanse must always function based on the social relations to be served, because there is an optimum limit of urban growth beyond which it does not serve the purpose of furthering important social relations. Thus, to maintain social harmony, the planning of the city and its physical organization must be subservient to the social aspects and needs.

With the growing significance of the city, Wirth (1938) formulates a sociological definition of the city which is inclusive of the essential characteristics common to different types of cities as a social entity. According to Wirth (ibid, 8), "(F)or sociological purposes a city may be defined as a relatively large, dense, and permanent settlement of socially heterogeneous individuals", which he argues are the identifying characteristics of a city. With the increasing growth of cities, it comprises of a large aggregate population, which limits the possibility of knowing everyone personally and makes it impossible to interact as full personalities. This is what leads to the "schizoid character of urban personality" (ibid, 12), because the interaction of urbanites is usually of a segmental nature based on relationship of utility, which finds institutional expression in the form of specialized professions.

This transitory nature of urban social relations forms the basis for the rationality ascribed to city-dwellers, as a result of which "…the individual gains, on the one hand, a certain degree of emancipation or freedom from the personal and emotional controls of intimate groups, he loses, on the other hand, the spontaneous self-expression, the morale, and the sense of participation that comes with living in an integrated society" (ibid, 12-13). With concentration of population in cities, because of its high density, individuals who may

share no emotional ties with one another have to live and work in close quarters; this fosters a competitive spirit and mutual exploitation. However, being exposed to the glaring contrasts in the city, and interaction between a wide array of personalities in the urban milieu, leads to breakdown of the rigidity of caste with the establishment of a complex class structure, which accounts for the cosmopolitan nature of the city. Based on these variables, Wirth presents urbanism as a way of life through three interrelated perspectives:

> (1) as a physical structure comprising a population base, a technology, and an ecological order; (2) as a system of social organization involving a characteristic social structure, a series of social institutions, and a typical pattern of social relationships; and (3) as a set of attitudes and ideas, and a constellation of personalities engaging in typical forms of collective behavior and subject to characteristic mechanisms of social control. (ibid, 18-19)

2.3. Growth and Expansion of Cities

2.3.1. City as a Unit of Study

The Chicago School of Sociology is considered the pioneer of disciplinary urban sociology based on a series of urban sociological studies conducted between 1915 and 1940. The exponential growth of the city of Chicago, and the increasing number of cities in America, brought forth issues concerned with the rapidly growing unplanned cities. This led to the formulation of American Urban Sociology by analyzing the city of Chicago through the lens of human ecology.

Park (1936) argues that human societies are not unorganized assemblages that merely happen to live together; in fact, the human society is organized on two levels, at the biotic level and at the cultural level. Like any biotic society, the web of life of a human society is also based on the manifestation of three processes: competition, dominance, and succession. However, what distinguishes human ecology is that, unlike in plant and animal societies with unrestricted competition and dominance, the symbiotic social order is limited by the cultural order. As Park states, "(T)he cultural superstructure imposes itself as an instrument of direction and control upon the biotic substructure" (ibid, 15). Therefore, the attempt to study cities through the lens of human ecology is to investigate

and understand the processes which lead to the maintenance or disturbance of "the biotic balance and the social equilibrium" (ibid).

This understanding of human society through human ecology has significant intellectual bearing on 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. It is established right in the beginning of the book by Park that, "(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).

As such, Burgess argues that it is not sufficient to study the growth and expansion of cities in terms of just its physical growth; rather expansion of city should be studied as a process. Thus, to understand the typical process of expansion of a city, Burgess puts forth the model of concentric circles "…which may be numbered to designate both the successive zones of urban extension and the types of areas differentiated in the process of expansion" (ibid, 50), as depicted below.
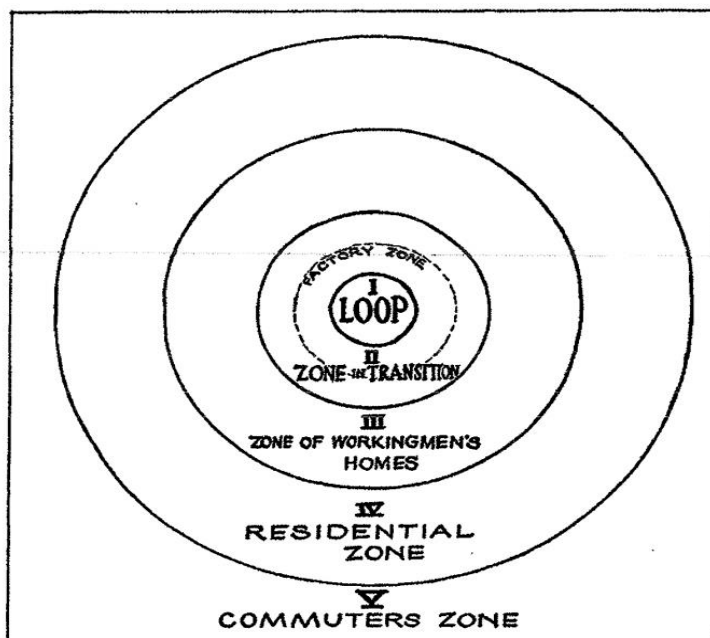
Figure 2.1: Burgess Model of Concentric Circles

CHART I. The Growth of the City

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This model brings forth the nature of succession inherent in the process of expansion of the city because of the tendency of the inner circle to expand through invasion of the outer circle. The city, as elaborated through the case of Chicago, expands radially from the central business district (CBD) towards the outer limits of the city. This book presents the approach adopted by the Chicago school by presenting the methods of investigation in its study of the growth of city, namely,

> …to describe urban expansion in terms of extension, succession, and concentration; to determine how expansion disturbs metabolism when disorganization is in excess of organization; and, finally, to define mobility and to propose it as a measure both of expansion and metabolism, susceptible to precise quantitative formulation, so that it may be regarded almost literally as the pulse of the community. (ibid, 61)

A modification of this model was proposed by Homer Hoyt (1939)[i], who argued that cities do not grow in the form of rings but sectors, which radiate outward along transport linkages. However, these models attempted to study the growth of cities as isolated units bound by the territory of a nation-state, which underwent drastic change owing to globalization.

2.3.2. Global Expansion of City

In the 1950s and 1960s, states and regions were competing on who had the best model cities that would facilitate economic development through a good business climate for investment. The competition heightened in the 1970s with more open and fluid system of trade relations; the success of certain states or regions (in this case, the UK and the US) led the way for everyone else to follow their lead. Harvey (2005, 87) argues, "(T)he general progress of neoliberalization has therefore been increasingly impelled *through* mechanisms of uneven geographical developments". According to him, 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

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[i] *Sector Theory*. Retrieved on from 25 October, 2020 from
https://www.townandcountryplanninginfo.com/2020/08/sector-theory.html

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.

The new global economy, according to Castells (2000), 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*. Castells explains it as, "(T)he space of flows is the material organization of time-sharing social practices that work through flows" (ibid, 442). He further elaborates on this abstract concept of space of flows by discussing the three constituting layers of its content: the first layer which provides the material support is constituted by "a circuit of electronic exchanges"; the second layer comprises of the "nodes and hubs" forming the structure of the electronic network; the third layer is "the spatial organization of the dominant, managerial elites" who direct the functions which form the basis of how space is articulated (ibid, 442-445).

With the new social organization being constructed around the practice of flows, it has led to the emergence of a new urban form: mega-cities. Mega-cities are the nodes of the new global economic world order, whereby they "…articulate the global economy, link up the informational networks, and concentrate the world's power" (ibid, 434). What makes mega-cities a new urban form is their distinctive characteristic of being globally connected, but locally disconnected, based on flows of capital and information.

Castells and Harvey revolutionized the study of urbanization by linking cities directly to the world economy. In this context where cities are integral to the new global economy, we can situate the "world city hypothesis" by Friedman (2013), which he discusses through seven interrelated theses:

1. The form, function and extent of integration of a city with the world economy decisively influences the structural changes occurring within the city;
2. There is a complex form of spatial hierarchy of the world cities which results from using the key cities as base points in the economic order;

3. The dynamics of production is reflective of how the global control of world cities functions;

4. World cities accumulate major share of international capital;

5. A large number of migrants, both domestic and international, gravitate towards world cities as their point of destination;

6. 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;

7. The social costs generated by the growth of world cities results in a state of fiscal and social crisis.

As such, it can be seen that globalization gave rise to a new form of organizational structure, which required a new form of conceptual understanding. This was supplemented by the "global city" model. Sassen (2005) theorizes the global city model through seven hypotheses:

1. The significance of central corporate functions is highly dependent on the extent of simultaneous geographical dispersion and integration of economic activities;

2. With the increasing complexities of central functions, these are outsourced to highly specialized firms;

3. Because of the engagement of these specialized firms, the urban environment becomes an information centre of an agglomerate of economies;

4. As a result of the previous, global cities are highly networked and specialized which is a distinctive characteristic;

5. Consequent of this globalized network, there is a transnational network of cities;

6. Increasing degree of specialization leads to increasing socio-economic and spatial inequality in these cities;

7. It also leads to growing informalization of economic activities as a way of adapting with the conditions.

Because of the global nature of the economy, Sassen argues that the relation with centrality of the city or the central business district (CBD) has undergone drastic change owing to the network of global cities. As she states, "(T)he emphasis on the transnational and hypermobile character of capital has contributed to a sense of powerlessness among local actors, a sense of the futility of resistance" (ibid, 38). This gives rise to a "new

geography of centrality and marginality" whereby "…cities have become a strategic terrain for a whole series of conflicts and contradictions" (Sassen, 2013, 311). Thus, the global city theory establishes 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 (Brenner and Keil, 2016).

2.4. The Global North/ Global South Debate

As can be seen from above, the rise of the global cities led to the formation of a new global hierarchy of states. Wallerstein (2004) propounded the "world-systems theory" to analyze this unequal relation between the core and the periphery. Wallerstein argues that the concepts of core and periphery are relative as this relation is dependent on the process of unequal exchange. In a globalized world, trade relations are not between equals. The core countries are economically stronger due to monopolization of core functions of production which renders a greater share of profitability; the peripheral states are in a state of constant competition amongst themselves to cater to the requirement of the world economy dominated by the core states. This leads to an unequal relation between the core and the periphery because "…there is a constant flow of surplus-value from the producers of peripheral products to the producers of core-like products", which results in an unequal exchange (ibid, 28).

This inequality reflects through the focus on the developed metropolitan countries in the world economy as opposed to the underdeveloped satellites. A.G. Frank (1991) argues that the present underdevelopment is shaped largely by the history of unequal economic relations, shaped by the colonial legacy and, thereafter, with the advancement of the capitalist system. 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. As a result of this metropolis-satellite structure of the world economy, Frank argues that this leads to the development of the metropolises and the underdevelopment of the satellites.

This has resulted in the formation of the binary of Global North/ Global South that underlies a system of hierarchy; this binary segregates patterns of growth and development based on geographical situatedness, with the South always catching up to

meet the standardized ideas and discourses produced by the North. As Levander and Mignolo (2011, 4) state, "…the global south is only understood in relation to the global north, both entangled in long lasting historical relations of Western imperial expansion". Such an understanding further intensifies an already existing gap, with the South lagging to adopt the patterns and practices outlined by the North. With the conception of such a binary, there occurs a process of othering whereby the Global South, being a corollary for Third World countries, is relegated to a marginalized state.

Though the categories of Global North/ Global South emerged as a geo-political concept, the Global South is not simply a geographical location; it has become synonymous with those regions which need to be emancipated by the Global North. Not taking into consideration regional or local specificities creates a discourse of emancipation for the *other*, whereby the nuances of localized contingencies, be it the political, social, or ecological landscape, takes a back seat. As Caison and Vormann (2014, 66) argue, "…a binary understanding of a discrete Global South and Global North reproduces traditional sets of stereotypes and narratives of history…". Both the regions are marked by varying histories which is not accounted for when only one pattern of growth and development is considered to be the natural progression of history. Therefore, there is a need to contextualize development and urbanization within regional specificities for effective planning and governance. To quote Caison and Vormann again, "(R)eading place in a more granular way, particularly with a focus on cities and city-regions, allows us to see the contours of power that might otherwise be occluded by uniform national narratives in which the North-South divide is often embedded" (ibid).

As such, instead of focusing on the process of catching up by the Global South to the benchmark cities in the West, Ong (2011) urges to shift the attention to the alternative visions emerging from the cities of Global South. Unlike global cities whose rank in the global order is dependent on its achievements, Ong draws attention to the "ongoing art of being global" (ibid) emerging from the Global South. Major cities in the developing world have posed a challenge to the hegemony of the global binary and have managed to stake their claim to global significance. As such, the cities in the Global South should be understood through the process of worlding which formulates a non-ideological approach to shape alternative visions. Rather than catching up to what is considered a

given, worlding presents a milieu whereby the cities of Global South are in constant formation. Ong states, "(W)orlding projects remap relationships of power at different scales and localities, but they seem to form a critical mass in urban centers, making cities both critical sites in which to inquire into worlding projects, as well as the ongoing result and target of specific worldings" (ibid, 12).

Roy (2014) also argues for the necessity to draw from the urban experiences of the Global South to create "new geographies of theory". She advocates theorizing on the Global South in order to rework and revise urban theory, because merely empirical descriptions do not have the universal applicability of theory. The issue with the existing urban theory is that "(W)hile cities of the global north are often narrated through authoritative knowledge, or Theory, cities of the global south, are often narrated through ethnography, or idiosyncratic knowledge" (ibid, 16). As a result, the focus of urban theory on global cities has failed to understand the role of cities of Global South as "…worlding nodes: those that create global connections and global regimes of value" (ibid, 17).

In the same line of argument, Parnell and Robinson (2012) state that the focus of urban studies on the cities of Global North has led to a bias in the process of theory-building and application. They advocate the need to "…also engage with the distinctive intellectual formulations drawn from the diverse and not always well understood physical, social, and economic realities of cities in the South" to arrive at alternative conceptions (ibid, 596).

Because of the lack of such an understanding, what has happened in the 21st century is that with unprecedented urbanization in the Global South, the standard development model of the Global North has been replicated uncritically, which has resulted in the production of stark inequalities and a plethora of other urban issues. As Ren (2018) highlights about China and India,

> (T)heoretically, it (urban scholarship) has largely adopted the global city thesis and the neoliberalism framework, interpreting urban restructuring in China and India since the last quarter of the twentieth century in the context of globalization

and deregulatory reforms. It is only in the last three to five years that a small number of scholars have begun to question the "uncomfortable theoretical fit" between theories and concepts derived from the West and the urban realities of China and India. (ibid, 504)

The implications of such a borrowed model can be seen across nations in Global South, with few examples stated below, where fast-paced economic development is given preference at the disproportionate expense of the local needs.

One of the cases where this trajectory can be observed is the case of Shanghai, China. In order to build a commercial hub, Hongqiao, a population of 11,000 people were displaced from their villages and forced to move into apartment blocks in the periphery. These people who were resettled nearby experienced a dramatic change around them; though the areas were familiar, with the construction of the commercial hub, they had lost their means of livelihood with inadequate compensation provided by the authorities (Jiang et al., 2018).

Similar pattern can be observed in Brazil as well. Despite Right to City being at the core of the mobilizing process to ensure greater equity, the policies after the reform movement in Brazil were heavily influenced by the neoliberal approach with the agenda of market expansion. With reduced oversight of the State, and housing projects outsourced to private enterprises, the master plans bring into light the disjuncture between land structure and real estate market dynamics. This results in the state's structural inability to provide affordable housing in Brazil (Friendly and Stiphany, 2019).

Even in the case of most countries in Africa, "new cities" are emerging as the new trend, with investment from the private-sector, as a response to the gradually increasing urban population. However, these new cities are not designed to accommodate the urban poor. These are directed towards meeting the aspirations of the middle and high classes, for instance, through smart cities, technology hubs and SEZs. The creation of these consumption enclaves, exclusively for the higher class, is buried under the rhetoric that these new cities are the urgent need to address the growing rate of urbanization.

However, the burden of the aspiration to create such new cities is being passed on to the displaced urban poor (Van Noorloos and Kloosterboer, 2018).

This is also the case in Gangnam located in Seoul, the capital city of South Korea. The strategic appropriation by the state, through reclamation of floodplains in Gangnam, to facilitate the growth of high-rise apartments by private developers brings into context the process of "accumulation by dispossession". This is like privatization of public spaces; such appropriation not only dispossesses citizens of their users' right, but also leads to an intra-class dispossession through constraining zoning regulations (Sonn and Shin, 2020).

Consequently, as Brenner (2014) argues, the global urban age cannot be understood just in terms of global cities or limited to urban/rural distinction. It is operating at the level of the entire planet in the form of ecological plunder to facilitate the acceleration of an intensified process of urban industrial development. As such, he advocates for a new model for urbanization which is oriented towards a collective form of reappropriation and a democratic mode of self-management of the entire planetary space, as it is a vestige of the collated work of the whole of human species. For this, he argues that there is a need to develop "…theories, analyses and cartographies that situate such operational landscapes – their land-use systems; their labor regimes and property relations; their forms of governance; their ecological impacts; and their rapidly changing social fabrics – quite centrally within our understanding of the contemporary urban condition" (ibid, 28).

2.5. Contextualizing the Study

There is a need to re-examine the dominant perspective in the study of urbanization which claims that the models of Global North are universal models of social change. Urging for a South perspective to urban studies, Patel (2014) argues that the present urban studies is Eurocentric in its understanding of global urban change. Drawing from the works of Samir Amin and other critics of this dominant model, Patel highlights how the crystallization of the Global North model results in entrenching the epistemic divide between the "I", comprising of the modern West, as against the "other", comprising of the peripheral non-modern East. As such, she 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 metropolis, and, engage in a reflective assessment of the process of urbanization outside these mega cities (Patel, 2018).

In the absence of such a critical gaze, we see that despite the escalating challenges in major cities, the newly emerging cities are also following the same model of development. We can draw from the urban experience of the metropolises in India that the standard model of the global capitalist world leads to increasing inequalities and hierarchies through polarization and exclusivity. Consequently, the implications of this can be seen in the case of the major cities such as Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai, Bengaluru, etc.

Mumbai, on one hand, is the financial capital of the country and, at the same time, is also the home to Asia's largest slum, Dharavi, where people live in appalling conditions. Delhi's expansion into a National Capital Region, or its various beautification projects (for instance, during the 2010 Commonwealth Games), or even the project to clean the polluted Yamuna river only led to the displacement of people living on the peripheries (Baviskar, 2020). The East Kolkata Wetlands is shrinking due to encroachment, which displaces the local population whose livelihood depends on it (Dey and Banerjee, 2016). Most of the lakes in Bengaluru, which were part of the natural drainage system, were filled up and converted into private property and the local villagers were pushed out (Sundaresan, 2011). The peri-urban areas in Chennai have become dumping sites for the waste generated in the city, and is exploited for additional water supply as well as for land accumulation for privatized housing projects (Gajendran, 2016).

Because of the focus on the metropolises and mega cities in India, the process of urbanization becomes exclusionary in nature, whereby only large cities with a strong economic foothold can afford to be engaged in the process of development (Kundu, 2011). As such, to be incorporated into the global urban order, newly emerging cities are also "…undergoing drastic transformations in their form and governance to become equipped to function as incubators of neo-liberal strategies in the Global South" (Banerjee-Guha, 2009, 96).

2.5.1. Northeast India

Urbanization in Northeast India is a relatively new trend; but one that is advancing at a fast rate. However, the development process implemented in the region by a neoliberal state is reflective of the Global North-South binary. Northeast has always been treated as *the other* in relation to *mainland India*. The region, a bridge between South and Southeast Asia, is home to various ethnic groups, a large number of them being indigenous communities with their unique socio-cultural and livelihood systems. Despite the specificities of the region – political, social, cultural or environmental – the region's development process appears to be a result of developmentalist agenda of the Indian state, following the same linear and standardized model geared towards revenue generation and resource exploitation (see Sharma, 2020).

On account of its geo-political location, the region has been treated as a security frontier by the Indian state, and development policies in the region are often informed by strong security concerns (Sharma, 2020). While many urban centres in the region are centered around military camps, several urban centres in the tribal hill states with insurgency activities are result of a process of grouping and resettlement of existing remote villages along the main roads for easy access to the security forces. It is such a disjunctive process which made Mizoram the most urbanized state in India (Sundar, 2011).

Aizawl, the primate-capital city of Mizoram, has experienced a very fast urban growth in comparison to other towns. Aizawl receives highly favourable treatment from the state with concentration of infrastructure development as well as better avenues for employment as compared to other towns. Consequently, it attracts people and resources from other district capitals, smaller towns and villages. As a result, more than 50% of the state's urban population is located in Aizawl, whereas Lunglei, the second biggest town, comprises of only 10% of the total urban population. With the rapid growth of the population of Aizawl, it has led to sprawling in the city, which exerts tremendous pressure on the land and economy, as well as on its inadequate infrastructure and services which have barely managed to cope. The accumulation of resources and capital in Aizawl reflects the bias towards rushed development of this city at the cost of other towns, which has led to growing discontent and demand for the creation of other districts. On the other hand, even Aizawl is facing serious issues as a consequence of this rushed development resulting from lack of spatial planning and increasing municipal

deficiencies (Saitluanga, 2010). The concerning issues and discontent will only increase now that Aizawl has also been shortlisted for the Smart Cities Mission.

Another city in Northeast India which has witnessed phenomenal growth in the course of the last three decades is Shillong in the state of Meghalaya. Shillong is one of the oldest townships in the Northeast region, and in the course of the last three decades, the city has experienced radical transformation in its physical infrastructure and unprecedented levels of urban growth. Consequently, the city is becoming increasingly congested for want of space with respect to transportation, parking, housing and development of commercial area. As a result of this, during the preparation of the Second Shillong Masterplan (1991-2011), land acquisition for the creation of the New Shillong Township was proposed. However, the creation of the new township would facilitate the state to allot land for development by dispossessing the tribal people. As such, this had led to intense contestation among different stakeholders, as it is in open violation of the Sixth Schedule provisions that safeguards the interest and welfare of the tribal people (Khakha, 2018).

Such instances bring to light the implications of an imposed model of development which become a cause of serious concern with urbanization rapidly expanding in this region. Though according to the 2011 Census of India, the urban population in Mizoram constitutes an astounding 52% of the total population, followed by Nagaland with 29%, Tripura with 26%, Sikkim with 25%, Arunachal Pradesh with 23%, Meghalaya with 20% and Assam with 14% urban population, in reality this percentage is more, and one that is on the rise. The areas which have been classified as urban here may have obfuscated the actual urban growth because,

> (I)n much of the Northeast this classification carries additional significance given that land laws, which protect indigenous and tribal communities, are often non-applicable to designated municipal areas. Historically, city-level governance, compared to state and district level, has always been weak in India; an issue further complicated in the Northeast by overlapping layers of authority (including traditional decision making bodies), and until recently there has been little incentive to expand the territory under municipal authority. (McDuie-Ra, 2017, 30)

We can see the scenario rapidly changing in favour of becoming urban, especially owing to various policies to open up the region, such as Look East[ii], Act East[iii], JNNURM[iv], AMRUT[v], Smart City[vi], etc. However, the process of adopting such strategic planning policies largely undermines the unique land relations and social systems of the protected indigenous communities in the region (Sharma and Borgohain, 2019). This holds true, even more so, in the case of smart cities in Northeast India. In the case of the upcoming Smart City Projects, as argued by McDuie-Ra and Lai (2019, 68-69), "(T)he smart city bids from Northeast India seek funds for conventional infrastructure in keeping with a long history of dependency, state-led development, and centre-state patronage"; this is reflective of the Global North-South dynamic between the centre (mainland India) and the state (Northeast), whereby a model is espoused and imposed upon the latter.

It is in this context that I have attempted to locate this study on the changing dynamics of urban space and governance of Guwahati city. Guwahati has a particular locational significance in Northeast 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. As such, it becomes critical to analyze the process of urbanization of Guwahati as the city continues to suffer from a multitude of issues which have manifested as a consequence of urban development, be it in the case of displacement of tribal hamlets, degradation of urban commons, or the inefficacy in the case of basic service deliverables.

[ii] Look East Policy of India was launched in 1991 by the Government of India to boost India's economic relations with the Southeast Asia.

[iii] It is a new avatar of the Look East Policy after the later was rechristened in 2014.

[iv] Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) was launched in 2005 under Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty, GoI, focusing on providing housing and basic services to the urban poor.

[v] Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) was launched in 2015 under Ministry of Urban Development, GoI, to establish infrastructure for ensuring adequate sewerage networks and water supply for urban transformation.

[vi] The concept of Smart City was introduced in India by the present Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, during his 2014 election campaign. The agenda included development or rather upgradation of 100 select Indian cities into smart cities in accordance with the established international standards.