



LESSON 17 URBAN COMMUNITY PART-I

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17. URBAN COMMUNITY PART-I

17. Objectives

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to understand and learn about:

- Concept of Urban Community
- Features of Urban Community
- Problems of Urban Community and
- Advantage and Disadvantage of City Life

17.1 Introduction

The 'urban community' means the city community. "The history of every Civilization is the history, not of its countryside, but of its cities and towns. Civilization means the city, and the city means civilization. Man originally built the city, and the city, in turn, civilized man." Man became a citizen when he became a member of a city-state. With the rise of the world-city, as

Spengler tells us, "There were no longer nobles and bourgeoisie, freemen and slaves, Hellenes and Barbarians, believers and nonbelievers, but only cosmopolitans and provincials. All other contrasts pale before this one, which dominates all events, all habits of life, all views of the world." The city is culture par excellence; it is the epitome of culture. It is mankind's greatest work of art—and of artifice—because it contains all others. Culture, a manufactured environment, surrounds the city man. "It is an environment of bricks and steel and mortar and cement, of bridges and tunnels, of sidewalks and streets, of monuments and buildings, of elevators and subway platforms." The city is the product of man and his own achievement. The city "has everything that is 'tawdry' and everything sublime. It holds both hope and despair. It encompasses millions of people, and it can be the loveliest place on earth... It is a vital centre of every civilized society... It is both a place and a state of mind."— **Robert Bierstedt**.

17.2 The Meaning of Urban Community

Urban Community life represents the city-life. Though the term 'Urban' popularity used, it is not properly defined. There is no single definition of a city or urban community.

- I. The urban sociologist **Howard Woolston** in his 'Metropolis', defined the city as a "limited geographic area, inhabited by a largely and closely settled



- population, having many common interests and institutions, under a local government authorized by the State."
- II. Park in his "The City" says that the city far from being a mere collection of individuals and of social conveniences is rather a "state of mind, a body of customs and traditions, and the organized attitudes and sentiments that inhere in these customs."
 - III. James A. Quinn in his "Urban Sociology" viewed the city as a "phenomenon of specialization", as a population aggregate whose occupations are non-agricultural.
 - IV. Adna F. Weber in his "The Growth of Cities" defined the city as any incorporated place with a minimum of 10,000 inhabitants.
 - V. Lowis Wirth in his essay "Urbanism as a way of life" writes: "For sociological purposes a city may be defined as relatively large, dense and permanent settlement of socially heterogeneous individuals."

Though some sociologists have tried to define the concept of 'urban' no one has given a satisfactory definition so far. **Bergel** writes, "Everybody seems to know what a city is, but no one has given a satisfactory definition." **Kingsley Davis** writes, "Much ink has been wasted in trying to define urban". **MacIver** remarks, the two (urban and rural communities) there is no sharp demarcation to tell where the city ends and country begins." Every village possesses some elements of the city while every city carries some features of the villages. Different criteria are used to decide a community as an urban. Some of them are population, legal limits, types of occupations, social organization.

17.3 Characteristics of Urban Community

The Characteristics of urban community is listed below:

i) Social Heterogeneity

An urban society is heterogeneous. The city life is complex and many sided. Wide difference is found in the ways of living of the people. Uniformity and similarity are rarely found. It is more characterized by diversity. As Louis Wirth in his "Urbanism as a way of life", points out "the greater the number of individuals participating in a process of interaction, the greater the potential differentiation between them...." Louis Wirth further says that "the city has been the melting-pot of races, peoples and cultures, and most favorable breeding ground of new biological and cultural hybrids." He also says that the city "has brought together people from the ends of the earth because they are different and thus useful to one another, rather than because they are homogeneous and like-minded." The ways of thinking, behaving, acting, the habits, morals, religious beliefs and practices, food and dress habits, occupations, etc., of the people differ significantly. Differentiation is potent in urban life.



ii) Secondary Relations

The urban community is characterized by secondary relations. A city by virtue of its size cannot be a primary group. It is a secondary group. People are indifferent towards one another. Face-to-face, friendly or intimate relations may not be observed among people. Mass media of communication such as telephone, radio, press, post and telegraph, etc. are often resorted to by the urbanites for contacts. In cities people rarely take personal interests in others concerns. Superficial form of politeness and manners are commonly found. Physical contact rarely results in intimacy and closeness. Even the neighbours are often found to be strangers. Private interests prevail over the common interests.

iii) The Anonymity of the City Life

The city is an Ocean of strangers. Heavy concentration in a limited space makes it impossible for people to know one another. Every one appears to be a stranger for every other person. There prevails a state of namelessness in which the individual identities remain unknown. This kind of namelessness that is found in the city is often referred to as anonymity of the city life. The anonymity of the city life makes more complex the problem of social control.

iv) Secondary Control

Control of social behavior is more difficult in a city. Predominance of secondary relations makes it more complex, the social control. The social behavior of people is no more regulated by customs, traditions, religion and group standards. Instances of social deviation are commonly found in a city. City is the ocean of strangers. Violations of standards of behavior may pass unnoticed and unchecked. In this way, informal means of social control are not very effective. Regulation of social behavior is largely done through the specialised agencies like law, legislation, police, court, etc. The larger the city, the greater becomes the problem of control and more complex the agencies of secondary regulation.

v) Large-scale Division of Labour and Specialization.

An Urban community is known for its large-scale division of labour and specialization. Specialization is visible in every walk of life. The larger the city, the greater is the specialization. Hence we find different people in society engaging themselves in different kinds of activities like mechanical, commercial, educational, political, recreational, artistic, literary, and scientific and so on. There are skilled, unskilled and semi-skilled workers, the artisans, the technicians, the 'paper expert', the 'white-collar' employees, the financiers, the businessmen, administrators, the politicians, the artists and others in society specializing themselves in some particular kind of activity or the other. City depends on division of labour also. York is divided among people on the basis of interests, talents, efficiency, opportunities, age, and sex and so on. Division of labour and specialization are possible because of co-operation.



vi) Large-scale Social Mobility

An urban community is characterized by intense social mobility. 'Social mobility' refers to the movement of people from one social status to another, from lower status to higher status or from poor position to rich position. An individual's position in an urban community is determined more by his achievements than by his birth. The status is not predetermined. High stress is laid on accomplishments. Urban life in this way is highly competitive. The city its elaborate division of labour; its competitiveness, its impersonality, has a tendency to emphasize the achievements of people. A city judge's status according to what the individual does and how he speaks and what he accomplishes.

An urban society provides for social mobility in countless ways. It provides for occupational mobility and geographic mobility on the one hand, and horizontal social mobility and vertical social mobility on the other. Individuals are busily engaged in improving their "career". An element of chance is always present in city. Maclver and Page write—"An accident, a lucky contract, a sudden opportunity seized or missed, a change of style or fad, a happy or unhappy forecast of some event far beyond his control, may revolutionize his prospects in a day."

vii) Individuation

In an urban community people are more individualistic in their attitudes. As Kingsley Davis points out, "The secondary and voluntary character of urban association, the multiplicity of opportunities and the social mobility all force the individual to make his own decisions and to plan his life as a career". The concentration of people in a limited space has the effect of emphasizing individuality. The city dweller takes his independent decisions on such matters as education, marriage, occupation, enterprise, adventure, and so on. He is more selective in his choice and more individualistic in his preferences. He is guided by his own whims and fancies. He is detached except for the attachment of his own choice. He is not tied to any particular relationship or any particular cause. As Davis points out, "The individual stands over against the whole city, never completely absorbed by any one social group." The city provides wide opportunities for the adventurous spirit of the individuals. **Simmel** observes, "The city person is free in behaviour, less restrained, more individualistic, more formal and less sympathetic, and less of a conformist than the country person."

viii) Voluntary Association

An urban community is the breeding centre of a number of voluntary associations. The size of the urban population, its close proximity, diversity, and easy contact, make it the proper ground for voluntary associations. "No matter what a person's hobby or vocation, national background of religion, age etc., he can always finds others with a similar basis of interest." As a result new kinds of groups arise, based



on extremely specialised interests. The group must organize or its cause will perish. People normally become members of a number of associations which may be called a secondary group' in order to fulfill their varied interests.

ix) Social Tolerance

Social tolerance characterizes city life. Diversity of population, impersonality of contacts and heterogeneity in living style make it almost inevitable for the city people to develop the spirit of tolerance. "People rub elbows with and become indifferent to extremes of all kinds—extremes of opinion and interest, extremes of poverty and wealth, extremes of education and background." The spirit of tolerance gives the strength of unity in diversity to the life in a city. "Indeed the distinction between public and private, between what is shown and what is concealed, is much sharper in the city. It is the public behavior that the city regulates, the private behavior that it ignores. Its control is impersonal and general, that of the country personal and particular."

x) Spatial Segregation

Due to its very nature, the city is bound to be overcrowded. It attracts a large number of people from the village areas. It is found that various types of business tend to concentrate in different spots of the city. Occupational groups of people also prefer to live together in distinct zones of a city. That is to say, some kind of functional segregation is found there. Commercial activities in the form of big departmental stores, show rooms, fancy stores, legitimate theatres, fine hotels, jewellery stores, etc. are located in the centre. The same is true of high-priced professional services—e.g. clinics, law offices, accounting firms, government offices, etc. Retail grocery establishments, filling stations, cleaning and pressing shops, shoe repair shops, garages, drug stores, etc., may be found at the cross-roads of the entire city. In the city land is so costly that the buildings expand vertically, filling the centre of the city with skyscrapers.

xi) Unstable Family

It is said that the urban family is not firmly organized. Many of the traditional functions of the family are transferred to the external agencies. Family is no longer the economic, educational, protective, recreational and effective unit. Family has lost much of its control over its individual members. Individualism is developing even inside the family. Even the women are getting employed outside the family. Relations between the husband and wife, parents and children are strained to some extent. Some sociologists have even remarked that the urban family is much more disorganized.



17.4 Urban Problems

The process of industrialization has added much to the phenomenal growth of cities. Due to the rapid industrialization cities have grown in an unsystematic manner. Industrialization and 'urbanizations have brought along with them many vices.

- i) The Problem of Concentration. Concentration of people in a definite limited space is one of the problems of the urban society. Due to the attraction of city life ('Pull-factors') men have started flocking towards the cities. Lack of job opportunities in the rural societies ('Push '-factor) also forced people to desert villages and start moving to the cities. This has led to urban concentration and rural depopulation.
- ii) The Problem of Facilities. Concentration of people has resulted in other problems such as overcrowding, congestion, housing problems, lack of water facility and fresh air, insanitation, etc.
- iii) The Problem of Slums. Increasing industrialisation and urbanisation have created slums in the city. The slum dwellers live in horrible areas, Their living conditions are really unfortunate. The low-paid workers live in these slum areas. The facilities that are found in the cities are not found in these places. Slums consist of sub-standard, ill-ventilated, insanitary and poorly lighted houses. They consist of houses which are unfit for human habitation.
- iv) The Problem of Privacy. Lack of privacy and intimacy are the natural outcome of the city life. Due to the indirect and impersonal relationships, closeness and intimacy will not develop. Life becomes mechanical, competitive and charmless.
- v) The Problem of Vices. The city is a centre of economic insecurity, mental illness, gambling, prostitution, drunkenness, crimes, juvenile delinquency, alcoholism, environment pollution and such other vices. There is poverty in the midst of plenty. The city life endangers the physical, mental and moral health of the people.
- vi) The Problem of Individuation. The urban community encourages individuation. Individuals are moved by their own aspirations, ambitions, aims, and interests. They have become more and more career-conscious. They are invariably caught in the competitive race for a successful career. The competitiveness of the city, places one over against everyone else. The materialistic outlook that a city-dweller develops may often result in what is known as the 'loss of community'. An individual may become "'alienated' from his own community, his own people, his own profession. This state, when it reaches the extreme, may drive a depressed and an 'alienated' man to commit suicide.

Urban community has both side of impact so here we are explaining advantages and disadvantages of city life.



17.5 Advantages of City Life

- (i) The city offers opportunities and facilities for making full use of one's abilities and talents.
- (ii) It can make life joyful and comfortable. Major Service agencies are centralised in the city to satisfy various interests of the people such as work, education, recreation and politics.
- (iii) It encourages new ideals and inventions,
- (iv) It quickens social movements and enlarges social contacts, Social mobility becomes easier.
- (v) There is less social distance being kept among people of different castes, races and religions. Hence there is more tolerance towards others.
- (vi) The city is dynamic. This dynamism contributes to social changes. The city has liberated women from the exclusiveness of domesticity. It has made women to stand on an equal footing with men.
- (vii) The city provides various means of recreation. In a city there is scope for personal advancement. The multifarious associations of the city cater to the multiple needs, interests and tastes of the people, that is why, as Quinn says, "the great civilisations of antiquity—Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Greek, Roman,—were cradled in cities, that urban communities typically have led in the creation of art, the advancement of science, and the dissemination of learning.

17.6 Disadvantages of city life

The city has its dark or the ugly side too.

- (i) The city makes life materialistic and mechanical. It takes away from man his human aspect.
- (ii) Secondary relations are dominant in the city. People are indifferent towards one another. Superficial forms of politeness and manners are commonly found. There is lack of intimacy and privacy in the city.
- (iii) The city has made the people to become individualistic, selfish, rationalistic and calculative. Relations are commercialised. All relations are means to means and to no final ends.
- (iv) The city has posed a challenge to family. The urban family is in doldrums. Individualism is ripening within it. Divorce, desertion and separation are increasing. Joint family has disappeared. The family is cut to size.
- (v) Social control is complex and less effective in the city. Instances of social deviance are more in the city.
- (vi) The city has made the life to become uncertain, insecure, and competitive. The city is said to be the centre of economic insecurity, mental illness, gambling, prostitution, drunkenness, crime, juvenile delinquency, etc. Concentration of people in the city creates problems of housing, water and electricity facility, over crowdedness, insanitation, etc. The cities are condemned as 'abnormal seed-beds of sin, scepticism, greed, crime, misery, filth and congestion'. It is branded as the



centre of 'corruption, vice and misery.

17.7 Conclusion

In summing up the multifaceted character of urban life, it becomes evident that cities present a profound paradox: they are simultaneously the apex of human achievement and the crucible where many of our most pressing societal and ecological challenges are forged. As dynamic epicenters of innovation, economic dynamism, and cultural exchange, cities undeniably serve as powerful magnets, drawing individuals with the promise of unparalleled opportunities, access to advanced infrastructure, and a rich tapestry of social and recreational experiences. The sheer diversity and intellectual ferment concentrated within urban boundaries foster an environment conducive to specialization, personal growth, and the pursuit of individual freedoms often unattainable in more traditional settings.

Yet, this relentless urban gravitational pull generates immense pressures that manifest as critical urban problems. The strain of overpopulation, coupled with often inadequate planning, gives rise to ubiquitous issues such as debilitating housing shortages, the proliferation of informal settlements, and chronic infrastructure deficiencies in sanitation, water, and transport. Furthermore, the very activities that define urban vibrancy—industrialization, dense populations, and high consumption—are simultaneously the drivers of significant environmental degradation, including pervasive pollution and the irreversible loss of natural habitats. This creates a challenging living environment, exacerbated by socio-economic disparities that fuel urban poverty, heightened crime rates, and, paradoxically, a sense of social isolation amidst the crowd.

Ultimately, the future of human civilization hinges on our ability to navigate this urban paradox. As highlighted by the principles of social ecology, the health of our societies is intrinsically linked to the health of our environment. The problems within cities—from air pollution to social alienation—are not merely isolated technical glitches but symptoms of a fundamental disconnect between human aspirations and ecological limits. Moving forward, the imperative is clear: urban development must transcend a purely profit-driven or expansionist paradigm. It must embrace principles of sustainable urbanization, prioritizing equitable resource distribution, green infrastructure, community-centric planning, and robust governance that explicitly acknowledges and respects the interconnectedness of human well-being with environmental integrity. Only by fostering cities that are truly resilient, inclusive, and ecologically conscious can we ensure that they remain engines of progress rather than conduits of pervasive peril, securing a viable future for both human society and the natural world.

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