Chapter 7: India's Urban Landscape

Exercise 7.1 — Questions and Activities

Q1 What are some common features of cities?

Cities are areas with a concentration of human populations and a wide variety of businesses and occupations. They have government institutions, elaborate transportation and communication systems, and elected local bodies responsible for developing infrastructure and amenities. Compared to villages, cities have higher population density, diverse economic activities ranging from industry to services, and cultural facilities such as museums, stadiums, and libraries. They also face challenges like pollution, traffic congestion, and housing pressure as populations grow.

Q2 Can you think of a city or town near you that has grown in population? What could be the underlying reasons for the urban migration?

Model answer — Bengaluru is an example of a rapidly growing Indian city. Its population has expanded greatly due to the growth of IT firms, start-ups, and educational institutions that created a large number of skilled jobs. People migrated from villages and smaller towns in search of employment, better education, and improved living standards. As companies clustered together, infrastructure — roads, housing, and services — developed further, attracting even more people. The chapter notes that India's urban population grew from 17 per cent in 1951 to about 40 per cent in 2025, reflecting this nationwide trend of rural-to-urban migration.

Q3 With reference to the epigraph at the beginning of the chapter, who are the participants in the making of the city and what could be their contribution?

The epigraph by Jane Jacobs states: 'Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody.' This means every group in a city is a participant in its making. Residents, workers, traders, urban planners, government officials, artists, and even slum dwellers who perform informal work — all contribute. Planners design roads and public spaces; businesses create jobs and services; citizens keep neighbourhoods clean and participate in governance; and informal workers such as vendors and domestic helpers support daily economic life. A city thrives when all these participants together shape and maintain it.

Q4 In what ways can urbanisation affect rural areas? Do cities also depend on rural areas? If yes, how? In what ways can rural and urban areas help each other develop?

Urbanisation draws people away from rural areas, reducing the agricultural workforce and sometimes weakening village communities. Infrastructure investment tends to concentrate in cities, which can widen the rural–urban gap. However, cities also depend heavily on rural areas for food, raw materials, and labour. Farmers supply cities with agricultural produce, and rural regions provide the natural resources that fuel urban industries. In return, cities can support rural development by providing markets for farm goods, generating remittances sent home by migrant workers, and extending infrastructure like roads and electricity into surrounding areas. This interdependence means rural and urban development are closely linked.

Q5 What is urban planning? What are the risks of ignoring sustainable urban planning as cities expand into villages and forest areas?

Urban planning is the process by which professionals called urban planners decide how land in cities and towns is used — where homes, businesses, parks, schools, hospitals, and transport networks should be located — with the aim of optimising infrastructure and quality of life for residents. Ignoring sustainable planning as cities expand into villages and forest areas leads to serious risks: loss of green spaces and biodiversity, reduced groundwater recharge as natural land is paved over, flooding during monsoons, worsening air and water pollution, and the creation of unplanned slums with poor sanitation. Bengaluru's lake crisis — from around 1,000 lakes reduced to about 200 due to encroachment — illustrates how unplanned expansion can damage essential ecological systems.

Q6 Observe your own neighbourhood. What signs of good or poor planning do you notice? How do they affect daily life for you and others?

Model answer — Signs of good planning include wide, clearly marked roads, proper footpaths, parks or green spaces, regular garbage collection, and easy access to schools and hospitals. Signs of poor planning include waterlogged streets during rains (indicating inadequate drainage), encroached pavements, illegal construction, frequent power cuts, and open drains. Poor planning directly affects daily life by causing traffic jams, health hazards from poor sanitation, and difficulty in accessing essential services. Well-planned neighbourhoods, like the grid layout of Jaipur with its wide streets and market squares, allow people to move freely, trade easily, and enjoy a better quality of life.

Q7 Imagine you are an urban planner, what are the things you would consider to plan a city? Do groups like children, the elderly, and people with disabilities get easy access to parks, toilets, and public transport? What changes would you introduce to make it more inclusive?

As an urban planner, I would consider the population size, types of jobs, and diverse transportation needs, ensuring roads, metro, buses, and cycling paths are well-connected. Homes, offices, schools, hospitals, parks, and cultural centres should be distributed across the city so no area is neglected. To make the city inclusive, I would ensure ramps and lifts at all public transport stations for elderly and disabled people, child-friendly parks with safe equipment, accessible public toilets with special cubicles, lower bus steps, and adequate lighting on footpaths. Singapore's community-centred design, which integrates senior housing with healthcare and childcare, is a useful model for inclusive, intergenerational urban planning.

Q8 Suppose your town, village or city has 100 people. Draw a rough map of the place on a graph paper. Imagine each square on the paper represents a specific area of the place, like residential neighbourhoods, parks, schools, factories, post offices and so on. Now, distribute the 100 people throughout the area. You can decide where the people will live, whether they all live in the residential areas, or some live in the commercial or industrial areas. Write this number in each of the boxes. In your depiction of the map, which areas are heavily populated and which are not? What were the reasons behind your choices of allocation of people?

Guidance — Draw a grid on graph paper and label squares for: residential areas, a market/commercial zone, a school, a park, a factory/industrial zone, and a post office. Distribute 100 people: allocate the most (say 60–70) to residential zones; a few (10–15) near the commercial zone (shopkeepers, vendors living above shops); a smaller number (5–10) near the factory for workers who live on-site; and leave the park, school, and post office squares with 0 residents. The residential zone is most populated because people need homes near workplaces and services. The industrial zone has some residents because, as the chapter shows for Jamshedpur, factories often attract workers who settle close by. Present the map and reasoning to the class.

Q9 Observe the satellite view of Mumbai and Gangtok, respectively. Find out their population density and likely reasons for the difference.

Mumbai has a very high population density (approximately 20,000–21,000 people per sq. km in the city proper), while Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim, has a much lower density (roughly 1,000–2,000 people per sq. km). Mumbai's density is driven by its role as India's financial capital and a major port city, its concentration of industries, the Bombay Stock Exchange, the film industry, and decades of migration from across India. Gangtok is a hilly town in a mountainous region where terrain limits the buildable area, the economy is smaller, and there is far less industrial and commercial pull for large-scale migration.

Q10 Find out how the city of Beijing, China, tackled the problem of air pollution. Prepare a report outlining measures that can be taken in India to mitigate air pollution in cities.

Guidance — Research Beijing's measures: the city introduced vehicle-use restrictions (odd-even licence plate rules), shut down or relocated coal-fired factories, invested heavily in electric public transport, increased the share of renewable energy, and planted millions of trees around the city. For your report on India, suggest similar steps: strict vehicle emission standards and phasing out old petrol/diesel vehicles, expanding electric buses and metro networks, banning crop burning in states near cities (a major cause of Delhi's high AQI, which the chapter notes frequently exceeds 400 against a safe limit of 50), promoting rooftop solar, enforcing industrial pollution norms, and creating more green belts. Reference the chapter's mention of NCR's dangerously high AQI levels to set the context.

Q11 Talk to a family or community member who has moved from a village to a city. Ask them the reason for the same and their experience, challenges and opportunities. How does city life compare to rural life?

Guidance — Identify a neighbour, relative, or community member who migrated from a village. Prepare questions: Why did you move? What work do you do in the city? What do you miss about village life? What opportunities has the city given you that the village could not? What difficulties did you face when you first arrived? Record their answers and present them in class. Based on the chapter's content, expect that common reasons for migration include lack of jobs in agriculture, desire for better education and healthcare, and the pull of diverse employment. Challenges likely include high cost of living, overcrowding, and cultural adjustment, while opportunities include varied jobs, access to schools and hospitals, and higher income.

Q12 Learn about urban planning in other cities around the world. In what ways can some of those aspects be adapted for a city near you?

The chapter highlights Singapore as a global model of urban planning. Key features include a long-term Concept Plan (looking up to 40 years ahead), a Master Plan updated every 5 years, mixed-use spaces where homes, offices, and parks coexist, an integrated mass rapid transit system connecting rail, buses, and cycling paths, high-rise buildings with rooftop and vertical gardens to manage limited land, and community-centred design for intergenerational living. For an Indian city, relevant adaptations could include: building cycling lanes and pedestrian corridors (like Gangtok's M.G. Road pedestrian zone), creating rooftop gardens on apartment blocks to reduce urban heat, updating city master plans regularly, and developing mixed-use neighbourhoods to reduce long commutes and traffic congestion.

Q13 Explore and suggest action points with respect to urban planning in cities to mitigate the challenges below and write a report. Two have been completed for you.
Waste Management: Conducting a 'Segregate at Source' awareness drive in residential areas with demos on dry/wet waste disposal and composting.
Traffic congestion: carpooling, high taxes on vehicle purchase, etc.
Inadequate safety of residents
Poor mobility within the city
Expansion of slums
Heat waves during summers

Inadequate safety of residents — Install adequate street lighting in all neighbourhoods, establish more police patrol points especially in densely populated areas, set up community watch groups, and create well-lit public spaces. Safe sidewalks with clear pedestrian crossings reduce accidents and make streets accessible for everyone including children and the elderly. Poor mobility within the city — Expand and integrate public transport (metro, buses, shared electric vehicles) so all parts of the city are reachable without private cars. Build dedicated cycling lanes and pedestrian walkways. Singapore's mass rapid transit linking rail, buses, and cycling paths is a model. Expansion of slums — Implement affordable housing schemes (like the Pradhan Mantri Aawaas Yojana mentioned in the chapter) so migrants have proper housing options. Improve water, sanitation, and electricity services in existing settlements to make them liveable while new housing is built. Heat waves during summers — Increase green cover through tree planting, rooftop gardens, and vertical gardens on buildings (as Singapore does) to reduce urban heat island effects. Mandate reflective or green roofs for new construction and create shaded public spaces and water bodies in city parks.

Q14 Find out about a slum rehabilitation program where people moved from slums to proper housing in your city. What do you think its possible benefits could be for the communities there?

Guidance — Research a slum rehabilitation scheme in your own city or any well-known one in India, such as the Pradhan Mantri Aawaas Yojana (mentioned in the chapter as providing affordable housing to economically weaker households). Find out: where the slum was located, how many families were relocated, what facilities (water, electricity, sanitation) the new housing provides, and whether the community was consulted. Possible benefits include improved health due to clean water and sanitation, safer living conditions, children's regular school attendance (as a stable home address enables school enrolment), reduced vulnerability to flooding or fires (common in informal settlements near railway tracks or industrial areas), and a greater sense of security and dignity for the community.