

## GURGAON an ISOLATED URBANISM

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Honorable Chief Guest: Mr. SP Gupta, Prof. J.R. Bhalla, Prof Ram Sharma, all the Speakers, Panels and Chairs of each session, students, colleagues and friends. As Symposium Coordinator, I must take this opportunity to underline the guidance of the Director and the team effort of each faculty member, helped by the Support staff and students, which made this endeavor possible.

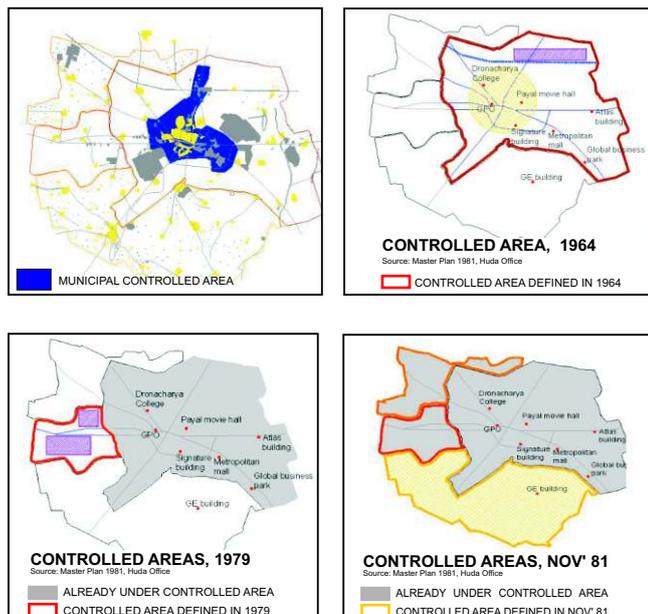
Working on Gurgaon started in 2000, when the stretch of Mehrauli-Gurgaon road between Sikandarpur and IFFCO Chowk was taken up for research, documentation and Design exercise of 4<sup>th</sup> year Urban design Studio in Sushant School. Later, other design studios, dissertations, thesis projects, based on Gurgaon were taken up. All those works are being exhibited here in the School and I would request everyone to have a look at that and comment.

My presentation, today, is primarily based on all those academic works, I have been involved so far in this school, my publication on Gurgaon in architectural journals and my traveling within this city for last six years I have been coming to Sushant School.

### Urban Expansion:

*Gurugram To Gurgaon To 'Glocal' Village*

Gurgaon, a 'city' in Haryana, borders the southern limits of the metropolis of Delhi. Mythologically, this place had a reference in the *Mahabharata* as '*Gurugram*' - the birthplace of Guru Dronacharyya. Historically, Gurgaon was a stop-over point for the Muslim pilgrimage between Delhi and Ajmer. Around that time, a small, local market started developing in today's older part of the city. An important phase of urban growth was later initiated with the coming up of the Railways, which helped to expand commercial activities to the regional level. At that point, settlement grew towards the railway station. The first controlled area in 1964 was defined around the intersection of the major roads and the existing settlement. It also included the railway line around which was proposed an industrial area. This industrial area did not develop as it was expected and one of the reasons could be the popularity of road-based transport over the rail-based one. In 1979, the potential of industries growing around major roads was recognized and that led to the extension of the controlled area to include the remaining stretch of Old Gurgaon Jaipur road (Biswas. S,2002).



Urban Expansion of Gurgaon

However, the single-most remarkable event that changed the face of this town was the advent of the Maruti in 1980's. From a primarily agriculture-base North Indian small town, Gurgaon, then, surfaced on the industrial sector of the nationwide economy. A stronger network with the larger city of Delhi got established. At this stage, urbanization was observed along the new Delhi-Jaipur Highway. A different set of working people started coming into Gurgaon, which led to the emergence of residential colonies. Real estate initiatives from government agencies and private organizations began (Biswas.S,2002)...

In May 1981, Industrial growth was proposed around the Pataudi road and, hence, the controlled area was extended to the region. The development eventually did not take place and the area remained agricultural. In Nov '81, with the growth of Gurgaon as the major industrial sector, the demand for residential areas increased in order to accommodate the working class and migrating population from the adjacent

metropolis. This controlled area was extended at a time, when the private developers started buying land to develop townships in the area.

After the mid 90's, with the 'opening up' of economy and subsequent 'globalization' process (both economic and cultural), Gurgaon has witnessed a tremendous change in its urban & natural fabric. In 1995, Sector formation and distribution initiated in 1980s, almost got the final shape. Increasing relevance of the NCR 2001 plan, well-connected road network with South and West Delhi, proximity to the airport and lower land-rates are some of the major factors catalytic to this development. In the Final Development plan of Gurgaon in 1995, within the land use of 10562 hectares controlled area, residential contains about 59%, industrial 12.7% and commercial is about 2%. This kind of land use distribution is, perhaps, an indication that a decade back, Gurgaon was conceptualized as an 'industry based residential town'. However, the ground situation today seems different (SSAA Reports, 2005).

Name	Population (in lakhs)
Faridabad	10.56
Panipat	3.54
Yamunanagar	3.07
Rohtak	2.95
Hissar	2.63
Gurgaon	2.29
Sonipat	2.25
Karnal	2.21

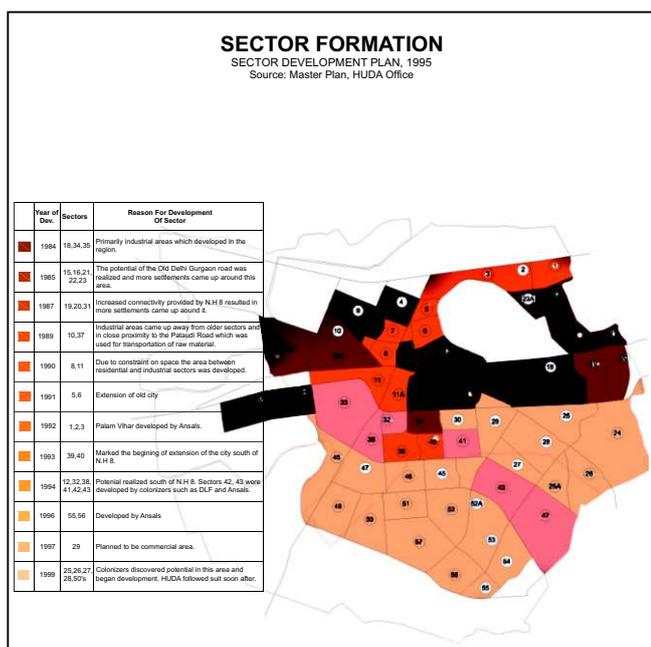
Principal Urban Agglomeration in Haryana in 2001

Source: <http://www.citypopulation.de/india-Haryana.html>, dated 10.10.06

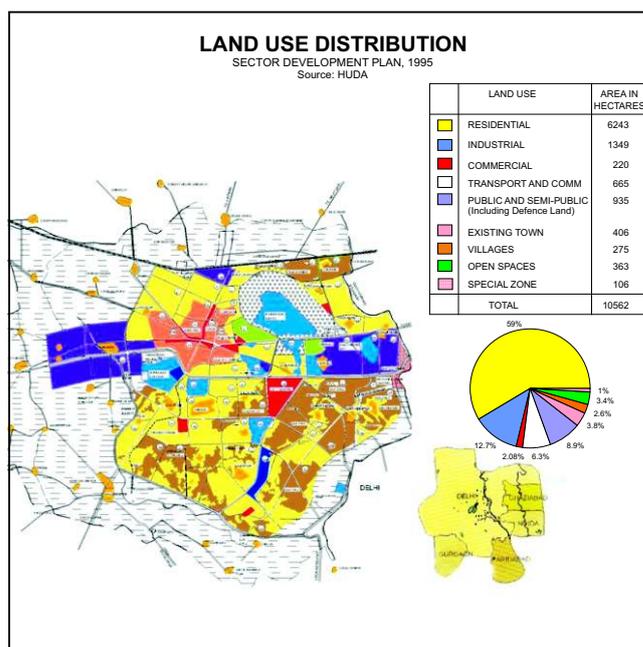
## ISSUES

On one hand, Gurgaon epitomizes the popular perception of 'hi-technology', 'development' and 'the way of living'; but on the other, unplanned and unchecked growth, insufficient infrastructure facilities, mindless encroachments to nature, ceaseless loss of agricultural land may sum up the present development trends here. Specific ecological and environmental aspects like, the ridge and the land profile, existing gorges, water channels, vegetation, are completely ignored. Possibilities of surface drainage, groundwater collection and recharge, forestation are thoroughly compromised (Jain, S, 2005).

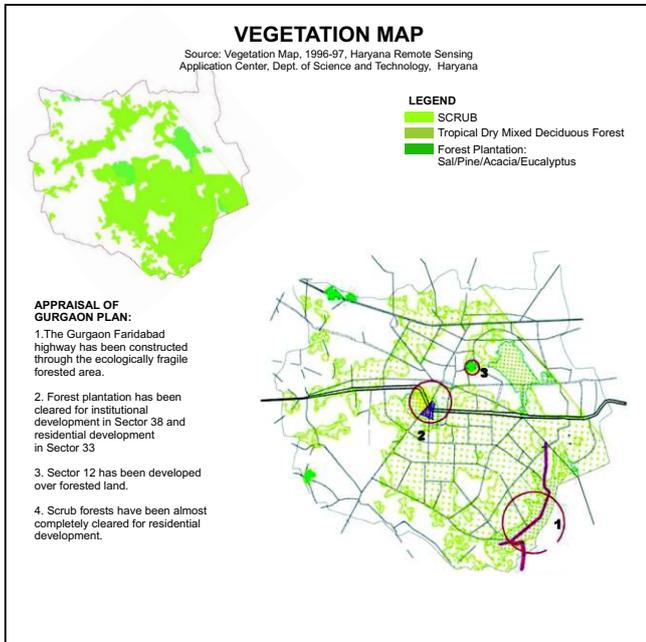
Shine and gloss of glass and steel, unique building forms and ever-changing skylines make Gurgaon an interesting collection of artifacts. But the urbanism may be termed as 'Isolated Urbanism' as it remains an ad-hoc arrangement of disjointed sets of enclaves. Through the process of periodic acquisition and consolidation, the land was controlled by few large land holdings. These land holdings contributed towards making the city a 'Patchwork', which unfortunately in the absence of any central idea of planning and urban design approach, became both socially and physically unconnected. Even if one looks at the precinct level in MG (Mehrauli-Gurgaon) Road, one may also find the similar sets of 'Gated Enclaves'. There is no internal linkages... one has to go out of one's enclave to the MG Road in order to access most of the public facilities ... and the MG Road is one of the most unfriendly roads of its kind – with boundaries of large plots, non-existent pavements and unruly vehicles. Recent physical



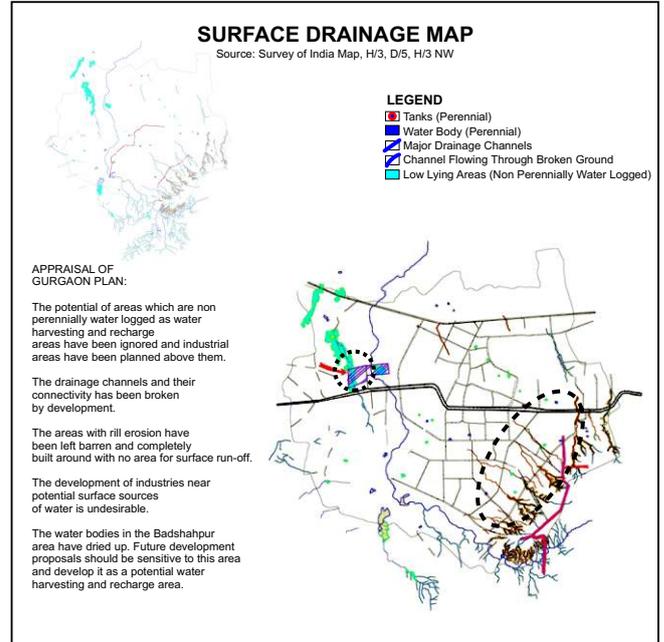
Sector Development Process



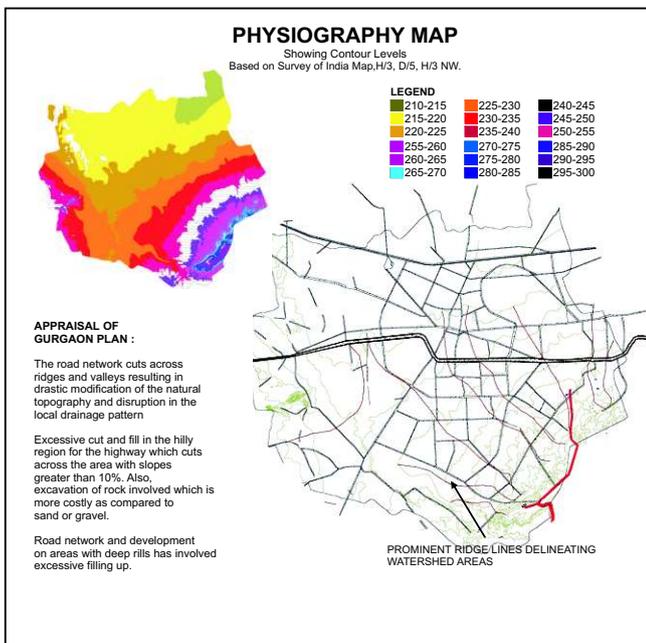
Final Development Plan, 1995



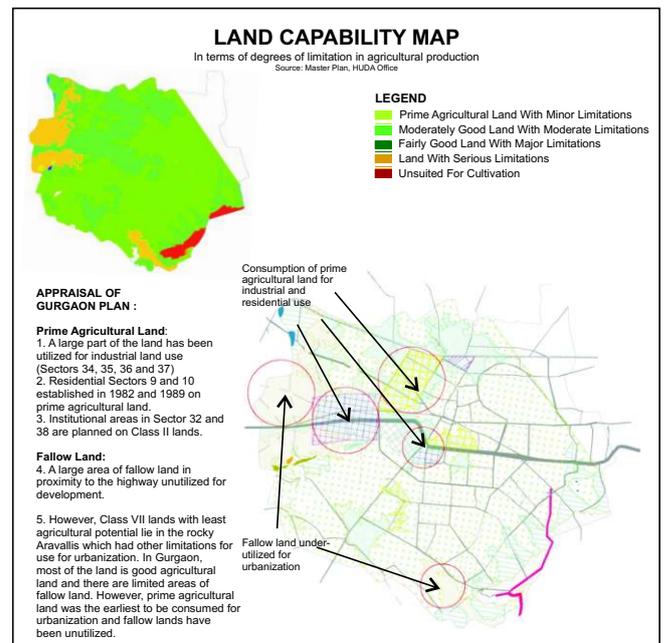
Loss of Forests



Lack of Surface Drainage



Erosion Of Slopes / Ridges



Loss of Agricultural Land



Source of above Maps & Analyses :  
Snigdha Jain, 'Ecologically Sustainable Planning for Gurgaon Town', An Unpublished dissertation under the guidance of Prof. Aresh Maitra, Sushant School of Art & Architecture, 2005

surveys by a group of Sushant students reveal that almost 50-60% of the road length of the MG Road from Sikandarpur to IFFCO Chowk is not pedestrian friendly and in most places, does not even have proper footpath.

Due to 'not-so compatible' land uses adjacent to each other and lack of thoughtful urban form guidelines, abrupt variations of urban scale and building bulk may be noticed on and around most of the major roads and urban precincts. Study of building types, based on parametric understanding of built vs. un-built relationship, permeability, building bulk and visual scale also reveals juxtapositions of too many 'typological' variations on a small stretch of MG Road. This, to an extent, seems to represent the 'essence' of urbanity of Gurgaon ...

All these lead to the fact that **Gurgaon lacks an overall concept of city building**. It is developed in an empiricist manner in which the land value has been the only determining factor. However, an interesting feature of Gurgaon, one would like to highlight, is its 'Urban Texture'. Owing to the phased-out land acquisition from smaller land holdings by different organizations, land parcels remained unique and sometimes, awkward. As urbanization expands on to the agricultural land, the urban texture takes the configuration of the agricultural land ownership mosaic. This is a relief from the one-shot land acquisition and subsequent machine-like plot-making in Delhi that, in general, led to a regimented, boring urban texture and pattern. This urban condition in Gurgaon, in fact, highlights the need for centralized provision of infrastructure and underlines

the importance of detailed urban design exercises for each of the urban precincts, having concentrations of built forms and plots with varying sizes and shapes.

## DISCOURSES

To conclude, I would now briefly touch upon three discourses, relevant in the context of Gurgaon in terms of exploring theoretical possibilities of reading the nature of its *urbanity*.

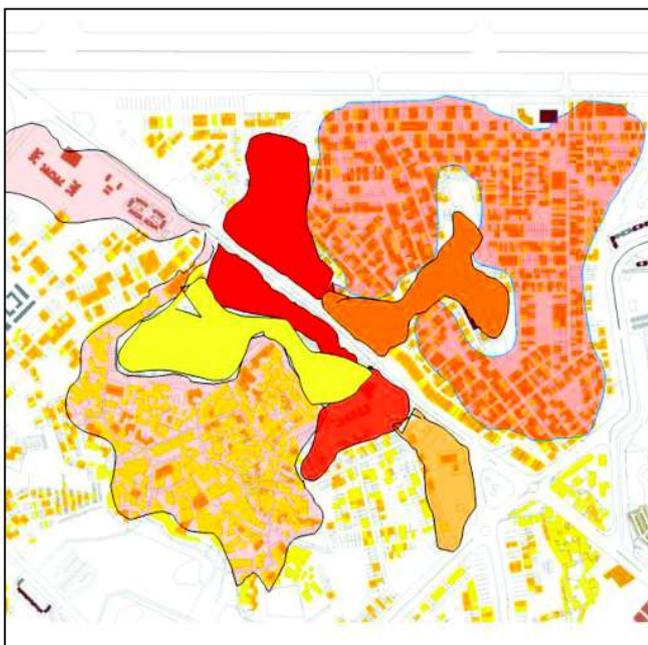
### Difference... Identity... Hybridity (AlSayyad, N, 2001)

'Isolated Urbanism' of Gurgaon, as it exists, is rooted in an inherent urge of identification.

#### "Who needs the identity"?

Taking clues from Jacques Derrida's notion of *différance*, one may also state that the process of identification operates across the difference by differing and deferring -- and in the context of architecture in Gurgaon, in terms of both 'time' and 'space'. Any new building or project tries to achieve its own sense of specific 'identity' by working upon the notion of 'contrast', mostly in its architectural representation, with whatever is existing.

Also, generic issues of identity in the context of representation of architecture in Gurgaon today, tend to go away from the conventional purity of styles or codes of representation. Thus the connotation of 'hybridity' will become apparent where it is no longer the mix of x and y but X and x and x is the partial presence of X.



Isolated Urbanism - too many Gated Enclaves: MG Road, 2000



Urban Form of M.G. Road in 2000



Mapping Of Building Types: MG Road, 2000

## Edge Cities (Soja. E, 2002)

“The restructuring of urban form, in combination with mass movements against increasing taxes and for smaller government, is creating a new round of fiscal crises in post suburbia, leading to an increasing number of the constellation of local governments that comprise the postmetropolis to the edge of bankruptcy, and beyond... But the crises that are affecting the off-the-edge cities are even deeper and more difficult to address.”

– Edward Soja, on Postmetropolis

These observations by Edward Soja seem quite fitting with respect to the coming up of Gurgaon over the years and especially, due to ongoing 'Sealing Drive' in Delhi, Gurgaon, a long-time 'favourite' destination for the corporate, is now becoming a 'desperate' address for the service sectors. That creates more pressure on infrastructure, increases the real estate price and restructures the business processes and strategies. Edge Cities, a concept advocated by Joel Garreau in 1991, views that the restructuring of urban form emphasizes not just the increasingly poly-centric nature of the post-metropolitan city-scape, but revolves specifically around its most visible landmarks. The shopping mall and office-centred developments. In the case of Gurgaon, that seems quite relevant.

## Landscape Ecology (Talen. E, 2006)

In order to look for creating diverse places, one may require to look beyond the 'unit mix' and the 'mix use'. One possible source of ideas, may be 'Landscape Ecology', “a field devoted to exploring the connections between landscape design and ecological health” (Talen. E, 2006, p.4). Since ecological health is often a matter of sustaining plant and animal diversity, it may also be useful for evaluating the design for diverse human habitat and considers patches/ edges/ boundaries/ corridors/ networks as possible tools for urban reading and design, especially in the context of proximity of diverse socio-economic groups, urban form, land use, as they exist in Gurgaon. Planners may take a clue from this notion to be able to instill unique requirements of diverse urbanity. Recently, there are works done in this aspect and one would like to introspect into this line of discourse in the future.

### Notes:

All factual information, photographs and drawings (unless mentioned otherwise) are taken from:

- A. Unpublished Report on *Urban Studies of Gurgaon*, done as a part of the *Urban Housing Studio 2005* at Sushant School of Art & Architecture, under the faculty supervision of Suptendu P. Biswas, Vishal Aggarwal, Ashish Bhalla and Ashish Choudhury.



Stage 1: Texture of the Field



Stage 3: Overlaying urban texture into the field



Stage 2: Irregular land parcels and plots



Stage 4: Urban texture completed

Source of Images: [www.googleearth.com](http://www.googleearth.com)

B. From Unpublished Compilation of Research & Documentation of *The Urban Landscape of Mehrauli-Gurgaon Road within Gurgaon*, conducted as a part of the *Urban Design Studio 2000* at Sushant School of Art & Architecture under the faculty supervision of Avtar Singh, Suptendu P. Biswas, Ashish Bhalla and Manu Gupta.

## References:

AlSayyad. Nezar: *Hybrid Culture/Hybrid Urbanism: Pandora's Box of the "Third Place"*, from *Hybrid Urbanism on the Identity Discourse and the Built Environment*, (ed) Nezar AlSayyad,, Praeger publishers, UK, 2001, pp. 1-18.

Biswas, Suptendu P: *Gurgaon: A Mega Corporate Park*, Architecture + Design, Nov Dec 2002, pp. 68-73

Jain, Snigdha: *Ecologically Sustainable Planning for Gurgaon Town*, An Unpublished dissertation under the guidance of Prof.

Asesh Maitra, Coordinators: Prof. Rajat Ray & Suptendu P. Biswas, Sushant School of Art & Architecture, 2005

Soja. Edward: *Six Discourses on the Postmetropolis*, from *The Blackwell City Reader*, (eds.) Gary Bridge & Sophie Watson, Blackwell publishing, UK, 2002, pp. 188-196 (for detail discussions).

SSAA Report: Unpublished Report on *Urban Studies of Gurgaon*, done as a part of the Urban Housing Studio in 2005 at Sushant School of Art & Architecture. Primary Source of information was taken from HUDA office at Gurgaon.

Talen. Emily: *Design for Diversity: Evaluating the Context of Socially Mixed Neighbourhood*, Journal of urban Design, vol 11, pp. 1-32, Feb 2006, Taylor & Francis, UK. This research paper initiates this discourse in terms of suggesting a method of evaluation for the physical form of socially diverse areas by exploring cases in and around Chicago in the US.