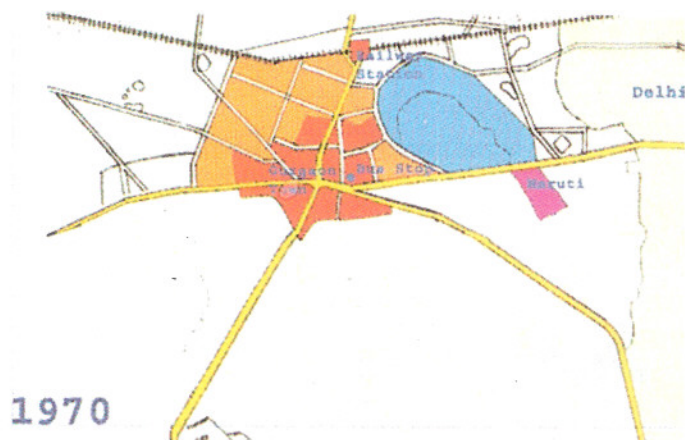
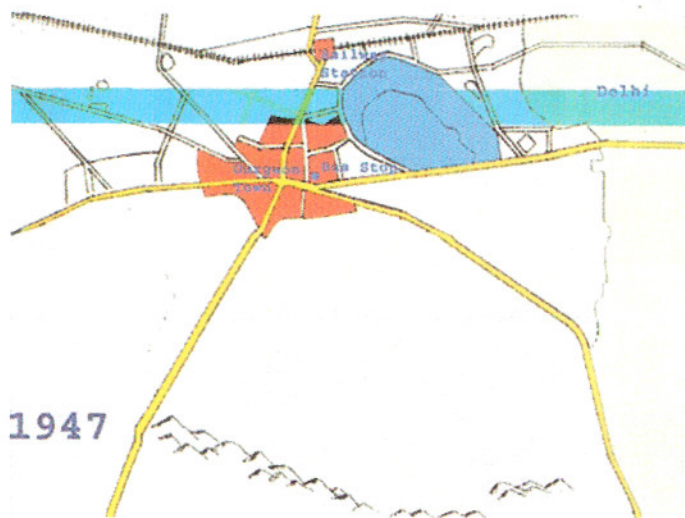


# Gurgaon: A Mega Corporate Park

Suptendu P. Biswas

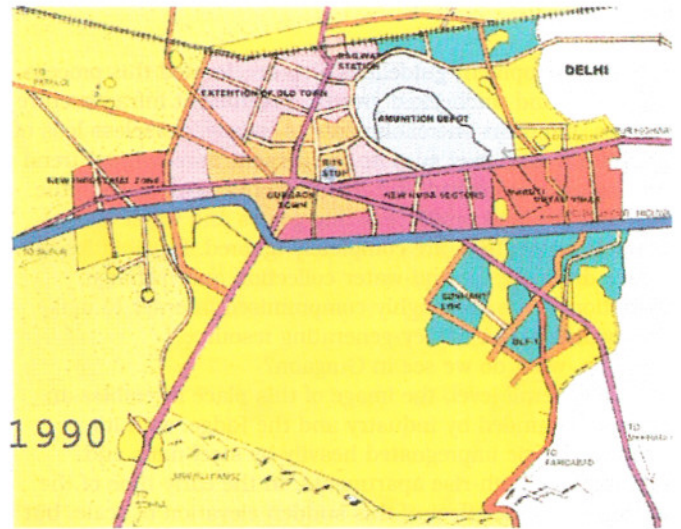
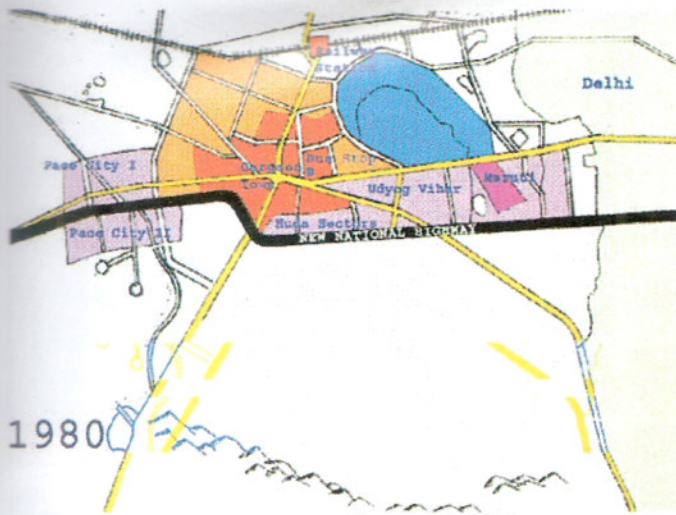
The office culture in India is coming of age with the advent of globalization. Gurgaon a satellite town to Delhi has emerged as a favourite destination for corporate who have realized the futility of searching for office space in Delhi. Today, Gurgaon can be called a mega-corporate park with every major corporate having its office here and at the same time meeting the housing and recreational demands. Whether this changing skyline of Gurgaon is beneficial to the town or not, is a contentious issue but what cannot be denied is its sharp transformation from a small suburb to a dynamic hub of urbanization.

**G**urgaon, 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 Dronacharya. Historically, Gurgaon was a stopover point for the Muslim pilgrimage between Delhi and Ajmer. Around that time, a small, local market started developing in today's older part of Gurgaon. The next important phase of urban growth was initiated with the coming of the railways, which helped to expand commercial



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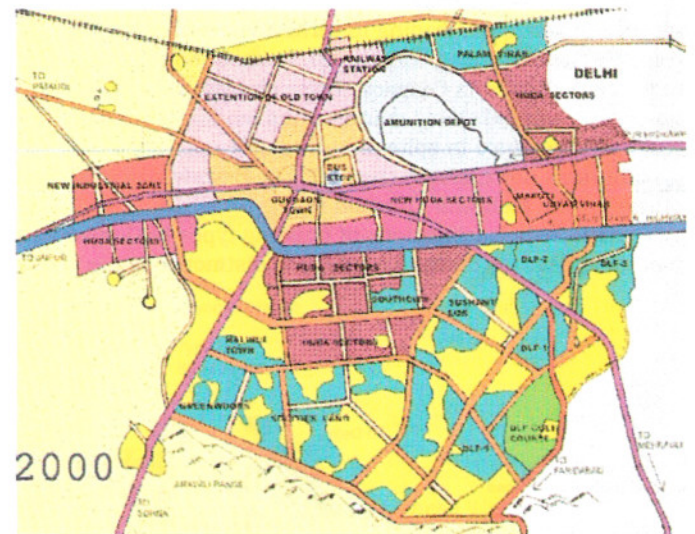
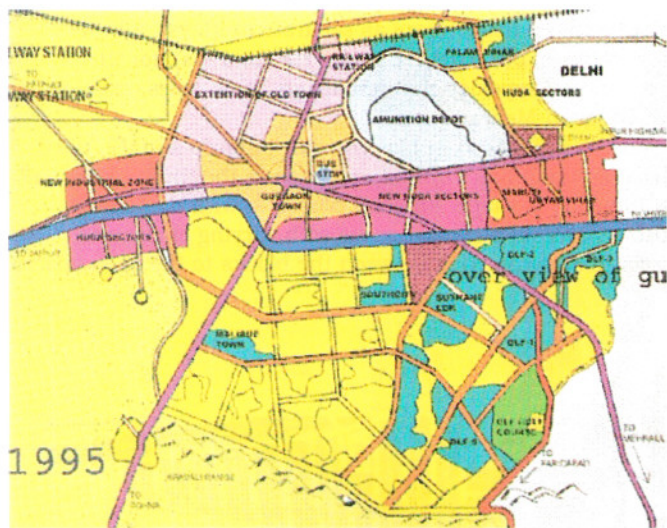




activity. At this point, settlement grew towards the railway station. The single most remarkable event that changed the face of this town was the advent of the Maruti in 1980's. From a primarily agriculture-based north Indian small town, Gurgaon, then, surfaced on the industrial sector of the nation-wide economy. A stronger symbiotic relationship with the larger city of Delhi began. At this stage, urbanization was observed along the new Delhi-Jaipur highway. A new set of people started coming into Gurgaon - mainly for work. Simultaneously, a new residential population was slowly settling in, primarily due to initiatives from private

developers.

During the last ten years, especially after the mid-nineties, with the opening up of economy and subsequent globalization process, Gurgaon has witnessed a tremendous change in its urban and natural fabric. Inclusion of Gurgaon in the National Capital Region (NCR), decentralization of commercial centres in Delhi, well-connected road network with south and west Delhi, proximity to the airport, lower landrates - are some of the major factors catalytic to this suburban development. Easy manipulation of almost non-



existent development guidelines also accelerated this process. Unplanned and unchecked growth, insufficient infrastructure facilities, *mindless encroachments to nature*, *ceaseless loss of agricultural land* may sum up the present development trend here. Specific ecological and environmental aspects like, the ridge and the land profile, existing gorges and water channels, vegetation, are completely ignored. Possibilities of surface drainage, ground-water collection and recharge, forestation — are thoroughly compromised in order to make land available as a money-generating resource.

.....So, what do we see in Gurgaon?

On an overall level, the image of this place resembles an island, surrounded by industry and the Ridge, with its horizontal fabric impregnated heavily by steel nails and mushrooming high-rise apartments. In the early time of the day, fog hides the effect of this sudden elevation of scale, but the afternoon sun makes both the scale and the glint of steel unbearable to the eye. At the fall of night, this place has an altogether different image of dark hovering silhouettes and transparent corporate towers lit from inside. Both these overshadow the image of the plotted housing and villages.

The image of Gurgaon consists of smaller and distinctive memories of parts. The making of the image structure, here, happens at different levels: the first level instinctive impression while approaching Gurgaon and the second level learnt experience while comprehending distinctive image districts. Based on scale, legibility, architectural typology, mass / density, Gurgaon apparently possesses an overall distribution of six distinctive image-districts: (a) low-rise plotted bungalows, (b) high-rise housing pockets, (c) mixed height high density housing, (d) dense urban villages, (e) series of plotted, large factory buildings and (f) corporate towers/ commercial buildings. In Delhi and its surroundings, the change of image happens usually on a long stretch of movement corridors, leading to certain image foci (for example the Ring Road conditions). Instead, on major movement arteries in Gurgaon, these co-exist side by side in an abrupt, unpredictable manner thus lending a confused residual experience in spite of having different image distributions (for example the SMP, FIP, Beverly and such others on the Mehrauli-Gurgaon road).

Generalized classifications of building types in Gurgaon tend to appear as derivatives of these distinctive image

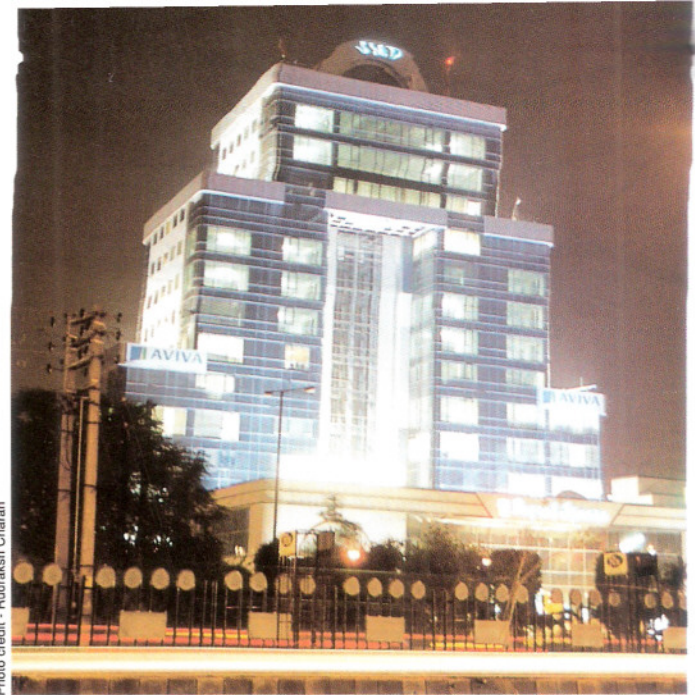


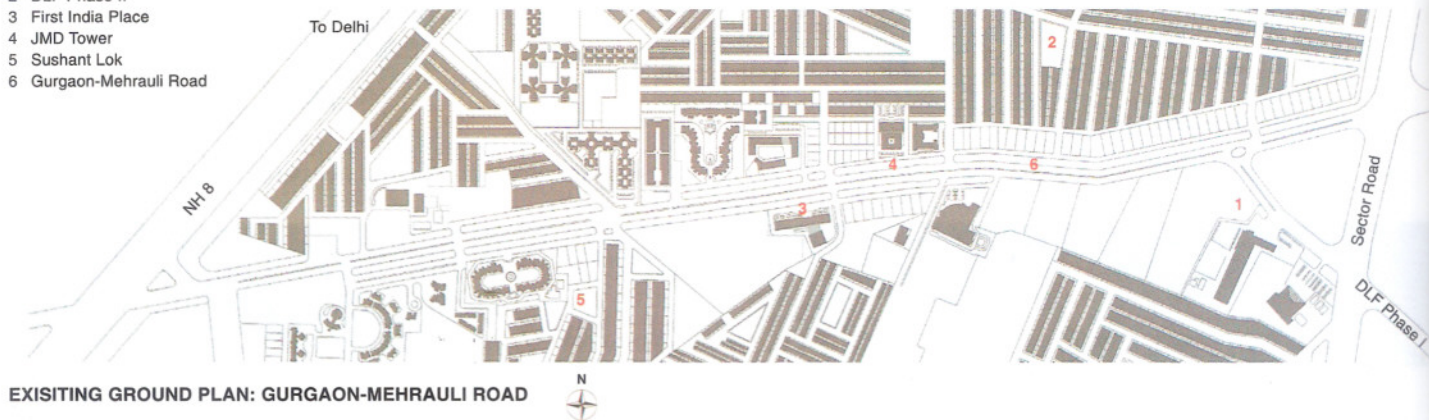
Photo credit - Rudraksh Charan

JMD Tower, Gurgaon-Mehrauli Road, Gurgaon

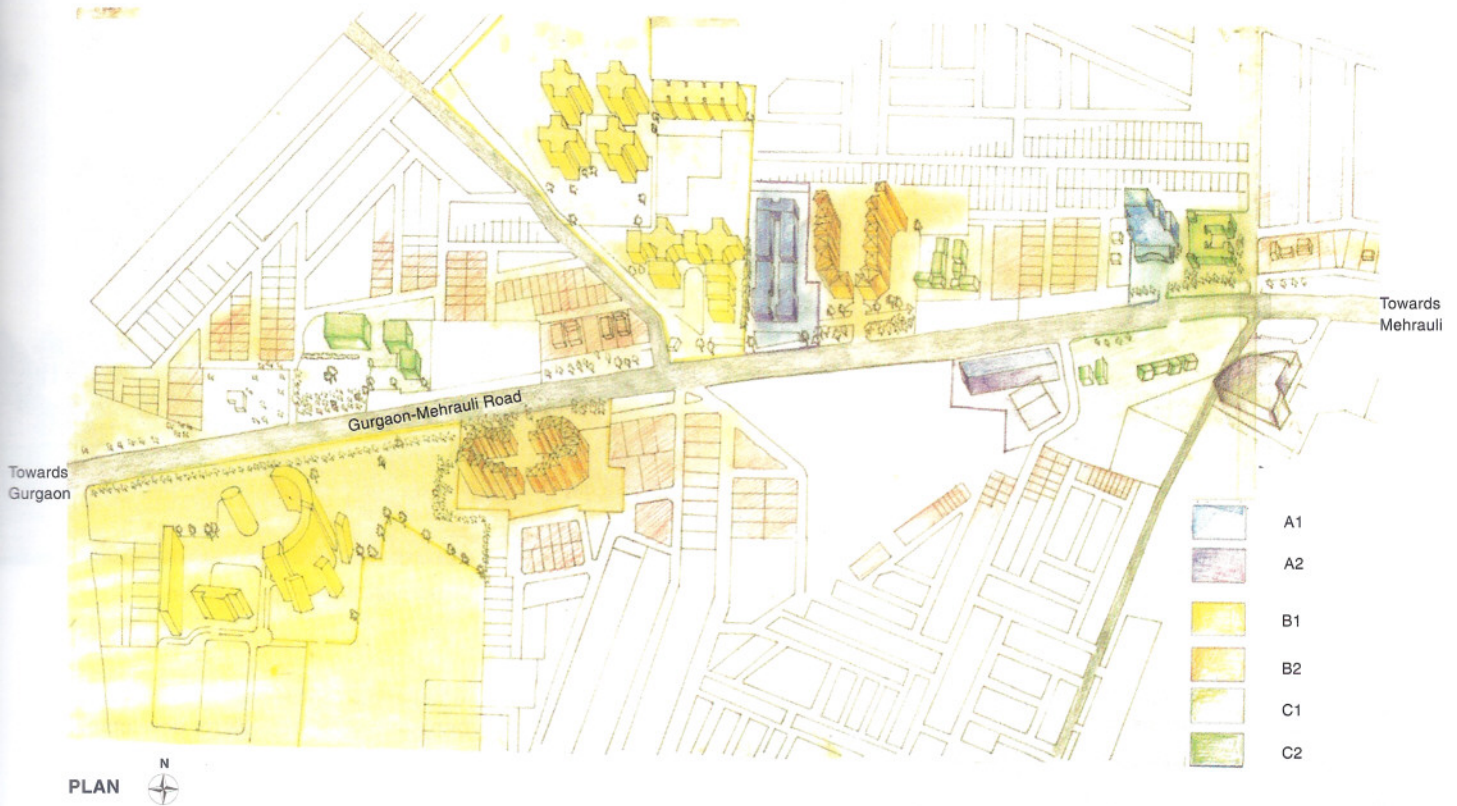
districts, based on the understanding of image and function. However, architectural typology is essentially an abstraction "formed through a process of reducing a complex of formal variants to a common root form"<sup>1</sup>. An empirical scrutiny of formal configurations of buildings, adjacent to the Mehrauli Gurgaon road, led to the mapping of four elements (permeability in terms of approach/entrance, building bulk in terms of dispositions, visual scale in terms of dominant surface modulations and built/ un-built relationship in terms of open space distribution) as separate overlays<sup>2</sup>. All these four overlays, put together, evolve the final map for the architectural typology that reveals six basic types, existing on the Gurgaon-Mehrauli road.

(a) Tower, (b) Slab — block/s with uniform surface, open space around, direct frontal approach to the built block. Tall multiple: (c) U-shape, (d) point blocks — with modulated surface, around a central space with varying enclosures, direct frontal approach between the blocks to the open space.

- 1 Bristol
- 2 DLF Phase II
- 3 First India Place
- 4 JMD Tower
- 5 Sushant Lok
- 6 Gurgaon-Mehrauli Road



EXISTING GROUND PLAN: GURGAON-MEHRAULI ROAD



## TYPOLOGY

### Legends

	Built vs unbuilt	Permeability	Building bulk	Visual scale	
A1					<b>Type 1</b> JMD Global Business Park
A2					<b>Type 2</b> First India Place Sahara multiplex Metropolitan
B1					<b>Type 3</b> Beverly 1 Beverly 2
B2					<b>Type 4</b> Heritage Society Pilot Society DLF Corporate Park
C1					<b>Type 5</b> Moets Shyamal Market
C2					<b>Type 6</b> Sikanderpur

(e) Large isolated block/s around large semi-enclosed space with recessed approach. (f) small low height, multiple adjoining blocks with combinations of smaller spaces with multiple approaches.

Variety of towers and boxes of glass and steel, some ridiculous concrete lumps, that range from mediocre reproductions of commercial buildings of Malaysia and Singapore to out of proportion, gable-hole adorned/capped high-rise housing; may capture the fashion of architecture in Gurgaon today. Most visible in this fashion are the Corporate

buildings. In formal configurations, these 'Corporate' buildings mostly conform to the above six types, among which the most pre-dominant ones are: *Type 1* (the JMD Tower, Gateway tower etc.) and *Type 2* (the First India Place and others) Architecture of these buildings draws upon constructional references of materials like metal and glass, to reflect contemporary technology and new way of the working of multi-national offices. However, technological options adopted in these buildings are far from advanced/hi-tech and do not necessarily address issues of climate or resource



DLF Gateway Tower, National Highway 8, Gurgaon

modification as part of building systems. Instead, highlighted is the stylistic propriety, which, with the use of materials, merely emulates formal appearance of the similar buildings in any part of the world. Corporate architecture in Gurgaon, by and large, attempts to signify the meaning either as a status symbol (like, offices of leading business corporations) or, as a symbol of the functions of the business itself. The focus is primarily on the image-making agenda through packaging and marketing of architectural expressions as advertising hoardings.

As a result, we witness two major trends in the making of corporate architecture in Gurgaon: on one hand, thoughtless reproduction, and on the other, various attempts to create bizarre architecture to startle and delight the curiosity. In both the cases, architecture tends to get vandalized; thus, replaced with only hyper-real imageries, and in the end, fatigues attention.

While addressing the popular market-demand, architecture of other commercial buildings or complexes (for example shopping malls, cineplex etc.), too, has begun to imitate these corporate offices as models. Increasingly larger building programmes (like, City Centre), mega-structures and giant complexes of public uses (for example Sahara Mall, Metropolitan and the like) are the subsequent cultural alternatives for the public domain in Gurgaon. Single-entry/detached public and private realms, absence of public



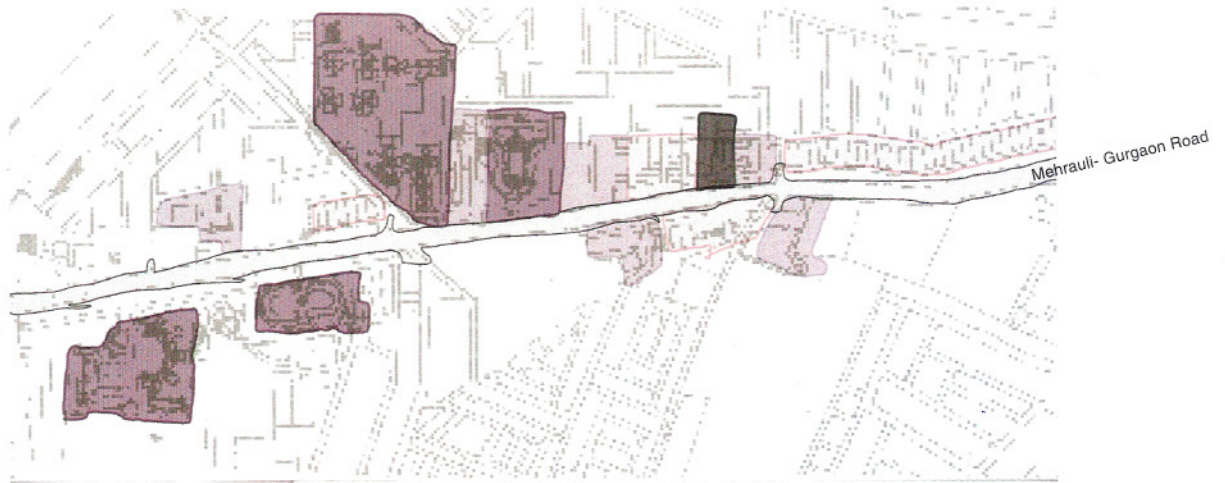
Global Business Park, Gurgaon-Mehrauli Road, Gurgaon

transport system and negation of street-life, to an extent, contribute to the urbanism of Gurgaon. Here, developers are creating colonies after colonies of their own, thus reducing the city to a mere assemble of disjointed gated enclaves without any meaningful, wholesome approach towards development.

The understanding of the present ownership pattern, on and around Gurgaon-Mehrauli road, also confirms the existence of these gated enclaves even more (DLF Phases, Sushant Loks, Beverly Parks, HUDA Sectors, etc.) Various ownership situations, like, affluence disparities, varied plot sizes for different sections of residents — living quality and amenities, land-holding by different developing agencies (both private and government), as well as drastic land-use variations (for example high-end commerce next to villages) exist side by side, which highlight this social segregation. Lack of public place for the city and crisis of security in the non-private realm are nothing but the repercussions of this segregated, introverted urbanism.

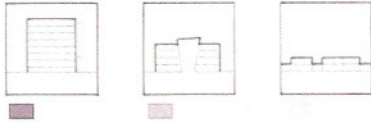
Existing urban villages in Gurgaon, like Chakkarpur, Sikandarpur, etc. are completely encircled with newer developments, having different ownerships and usages. This has exerted tremendous pressure on the village fabric, leading to changes in occupational pattern (due to loss of agricultural land), composition of social structure (through the gentrification process) and also in the physical fabric (owing to uneven transformation of usage, image and resultant architecture). Glimpses of the original rural setting, with predominant residential use, may still be traced in some inner areas of these villages. On the outer edges, abutting main roads, such as the Sikandarpur condition, the residences following the ownership of properties, were converted to shops with smaller frontage as a result of the first phase of transformation. In the second phase, when large agencies like banks, showrooms, etc. came in, a number of residential properties have been bought together at a time. Subsequently, larger commercial buildings were erected. Presently, commercialization is also seeping into the inner

## VISUAL SCALE



## PLAN

### Legends



areas through lateral linkages in a predictable manner. Insensitive developmental approach to these settlements, earlier observed in Delhi and now in Gurgaon, exposes the inability of both, the trained planners and the money-making developers.

From Delhi to Gurgaon, in the last 50 years, the urbanization process touches upon two extreme approaches. In Delhi, a deterministic master plan approach is being carried out by the state-owned development agency. Whereas, in Gurgaon, an empirical approach, solely dictated by the market-forces, is adopted by the private developers. In both the cases, it resulted in gross generalization. Once again, the need for a rationalist urban design framework comes to the fore, which takes clues from the understanding of specificity and, can guide a way of life and quality of life in the city

through laying down urban controls and guidelines for phased-out interventions. ✚

**Suptendu Biswas** is a Delhi based architect interested in analytical architectural writing

### References

1. Carlo Argan, Giulio: 'On the Typology of Architecture', from 'New Classicism', ed. Papadakis and Watson. H. Rizzoli, NY, 1990, pp. 117-118.
2. Decorative elements are not included in this classifications because in Gurgaon, unnecessary stylistic variations/adaptations co-exist.)

All factual information, drawings and photographs are from the research works, done by the students in the Urban Design Studio in Sushant School of Art & Architecture (session 2000-2001) with faculty supervision of Suptendu Biswas, Ashish Bhalla, Manu Gupta, Avtar Singh, unless mentioned otherwise.

## ACA FORUM

The Indian Institute of Architects is hosting the tenth Asian Congress of Architects, ACA 10, at Hotel Grand Intercontinental, New Delhi, from 2nd to 7th December '02. The 23rd ARCASIA Council Meeting will be held alongside. The theme of the event will be 'People centric architecture'.

The 9th ARCASIA Students Jamboree will also be held simultaneously from 4th to 7th December '02, New Delhi. In addition to the normal events, senior architects and teachers from within the country and from amongst the delegates have been invited to spend time with the students.

Details are available at [www.aca10iianewdelhi.org](http://www.aca10iianewdelhi.org)