

Vol. 8, Issue-II (April 2017)

ISSN: 0976-8165

THE CRITERION

An International Journal in English

Bi-monthly, Peer-Reviewed, Open Access eJournal



UGC Approved Journal [Arts and Humanities, Sr. No. 40]

Editor-In-Chief - Dr. Vishwanath Bite

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ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

www.galaxyimrj.com

The Effects of Urbanization in Dehra Dun and Mussoorie in the Works of Ruskin Bond

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Article History: Submitted-01/03/2017, Revised-03/04/2017, Accepted-06/04/2017, Published-30/04/2017.

Abstract:

When a village develops into a small town or a small town develops into a city or a city develops further there are many changes that take place. There is an increase in population due to a population shift from rural to urban areas, pollution, and deforestation. There is added pressure on all resources of the place.

Ruskin Bond is credited for presenting the real spirit of India in his work. An India that he feels exists more in small towns, more in the cheerful smiles and kind faces of the villagers especially mountain dwellers than in any metropolitan city. Most of his essays, stories, travel pieces, novellas are based on the people, places, flora and fauna of the Himalayas. They are set in small towns and hill stations like Dehra Dun, Shamli, Shahganj, Shahjahanpur, Mussoorie, Landour, Nandprayag.

His works not only show what Dehra Dun and Mussoorie were in the past but also what they have become. The effects of urbanization are expressed in his works.

This paper highlights the effects of urbanization on the environment of Dehra Dun, Mussoorie and the difficulties now being faced by the common man in his day to day life. It questions the good brought about by urbanization in terms of development or progress. Further it tries to make man search his soul and perhaps find a type of balanced development which is in harmony with nature.

Keywords: Urbanization, population shift, pollution, deforestation, resources, environment, common man, harmony, nature.

The history of mankind has always been a witness to changes brought about by development and progress. As stated in an article on Urbanization in Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, “Urbanization is a population shift from rural to urban areas and the ways in which each society adapts to the changes” brought about by this shift. It is the process by which towns and cities are formed and become larger. It creates many big social, economic and environmental changes which exert their positive and negative effects. Rural culture “characterized by common bloodlines, intimate relationships and communal behavior” is replaced by “distant bloodlines,

unfamiliar relations and competitive behavior.” (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urbanization>) People leave rural areas and settle down in urban ones as it promises greater access to education, jobs, housing, transportation, health and employment. However they end up getting the very opposite of what they expect. Values like kindness, helping each other, mercy and gratefulness are lost forever. The increased income is at times cancelled by increased expenditure. The quality of life deteriorates when unplanned development takes place. It increases the pressure on all resources which actually leads to less empathy and less development for the entire society.

Literature captures a writer’s thoughts, feelings and experiences. It embodies and expresses life in a particular time period. Ruskin Bond is credited for presenting the real spirit of India in his work. An India that he feels exists more in small towns, more in the cheerful smiles and kind faces of the villagers especially mountain dwellers than in any metropolitan city. Most of his essays, stories, travel pieces, novellas are based on the people, places, flora and fauna of the Himalayas. At times they also include historical facts about Mussoorie and its surroundings and legends told by hill folk and the old British residents. The book *Mussoorie and Landour : Days of Wine and Roses* tells the reader about the old buildings, landmarks and legends of Mussoorie and Landour. It takes us back to the year 1765, when Gurkha warriors from Nepal first entered the Kumaon and Garhwal region, to 1815 when the entire Doon Valley was ruled by the British. It then depicts the life in the hill stations from 1820 onwards. *Ganga Descends* contains sixteen essays based on Ruskin Bond’s own travels in the Garhwal hills. The essays describe the Himalayas, the remote villages, the natural backdrop, rural people, historical landmarks and famous Hindu pilgrimage sites.

His works not only show what Dehra Dun and Mussoorie were in the past but also what they have become. The evil effects of urbanization which destroy and disrupt not only the natural environment but also human values are expressed in his works.

Ruskin Bond’s book *A Town Called Dehra* published in 2008, contains journal entries, poetry, extracts from his memoirs, non-fiction and stories set and inspired by Dehra. He makes his intention explicit when he writes, “However, as my intention is to give the reader a picture of Dehra as I knew it, the stories in the collection are all set in Dehra Dun and its immediate environs.”(xi) “Evocative, wistful and witty as only Ruskin Bond can be, *A Town Called Dehra* is a celebration of a dearly loved town as well as an elegy for a way of life gone extinct. (*A Town Called Dehra* cover) Ruskin Bond takes us on a journey to the by gone years of 1940s and 1950s, to his beloved town, Dehra where he spent most of his childhood, youth and manhood, a town that features in most of his stories. The stories are a breadth of fresh air and remind us of a time when life in Dehra Dun was easy going, calm and peaceful. The mad rush of city life was unknown to the people living in Dehra Dun.

A town, which, when he knew it, was one of pony – drawn tongas and rickshaws;
a town fond of gossip but tolerant of human foibles; a town of lush lichi trees,

charming winter gardens and cool streams; a small town, a sleepy town, a town called “Dehra.” (*A Town Called Dehra* cover)

During the 1940s Dehra Dun had a population of only 40,000 which presently as per the District census of 2011 is 1696694. Ruskin’s grandfather’s bungalow and other bungalows in Dehra Dun had flower gardens in front and orchards at the back. In the orchards grew common fruit trees like lichi, papaya, guava, mango, lemon, and the pomals, which was a sort of grape fruit. In the autobiographical works like “Uncle Ken” Ruskin tries to bring to life the happy years that he spent with his grandparents in Dehra Dun. The Dehra Dun that he writes about in his stories is smaller, greener, less crowded. You can walk through its streets anywhere and at any time. The story “My Father’s Trees in Dehra” reminds us that Dehra is a place where trees flourish. The valley of Dehra Dun lies between the first range of the Himalayas and the smaller but older Siwalik range. It has moist air and hospitable soil which make it a heaven for trees. “This is one part of the world where trees are a match for man. An old pipal may be cut down to make way for a new building; two pipal trees will sprout from the walls of the building.” (*A Town Called Dehra* 185)

As the valley soil is fertile and the rainfall heavy, “Dehra was always a good place for trees.” (*Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra* 42) The roads were lined with neem, mango, eucalyptus, Persian lilac, jacaranda, amaltas and others. The gardens of the bungalows were filled with mango, litchi, guava, jackfruit and papaya trees. Bond’s mother and stepfather lived in the Dalanwala area not far from the dry bed of the seasonal Rispana river. Therefore, gazing out from the big window of his room at the marigolds, litchi trees and wild blue flowers that grew in the garden was his favourite occupation. There was a big jackfruit tree in grandmother’s garden which she had planted when Ruskin’s father was a boy. Grandmother’s house was surrounded by many trees like an ancient banyan tree, neem, peepul, jackfruit, mango and papaya.

The Dehra of 1951 forms a part of most of Ruskin’s novels and short stories as he was familiar with it and had inculcated a deep bond with it. He observed trains, washermen, wrestlers and played football and cricket in the maidan. He wandered around Dehra with his friends. All his experiences in Dehra Dun during those years left an indelible mark on him and were expressed in his stories. Some of the stories, such as “A Handful of Nuts” and “Living Without Money,” though written long after he had left Dehra still contain the atmosphere of the place. He feels “When a writer looks back at a particular place or period in his life, he tries to capture the essence of the place and the experience.” (*A Town Called Dehra* xii). It is interesting to compare the Dehra Dun depicted by Ruskin Bond and the mythological, historical, geographical, agricultural and other details about Dehra Dun as compiled by G.R.C. Williams, the Assistant Superintendent of the Doon Valley in 1871. In his book *Memoir of Dehra Dun* he writes that Dehra Dun, the most northerly district in the Meerut Division comprises of the Doon Proper and Jounsar Bawar. The Doon valley is made up of two valleys – one sloping down to the Jumna on the North – West and the other to the Ganges on the South – East. They are bounded by the Himalayas on the north- east and the Sewaliks on the south- west. The Doon was included in the

mysterious region of Kidarkhund, the abode of the great God Shiva, the Destroyer. During the Sutyra, Treta and Dwapur ages after the war between the Gods and Titans the place was only frequented by ascetics. It is believed that Lord Rama and Luckshman on the advice of the sage Vasishth came to the region to do penance and atone the death of Ravana. While Lord Rama lived in Rishikesh, Lackshman lived at Tapobun. In the Dwapur Yug, Drona Acharya, is believed to have come to the region. In the Kul Yug, the five Pandava brothers, Yudhishtir, Bhima, Arjun, Nakul and Sahadev passed through here with Draupadi. Bhimghora, a place close to Hardwar is a holy spot where Bhim was posted when the Ganges descended from heaven. A cavity in the rock nearby is believed to have been created by the feet of Bhim's horse. Guru Ram Rai settled down in Dehra Dun during the reign of Futeh Sah. The region has a thick forest cover, perennial streams and nearly all animals are found here. The sal, sain and pine trees are found on the Siwaliks. The forests provide shrubs and timber trees like the sal, toon, sheesham, cheer, khyr, siris, sain, oak and walnut. The pear, the fig, the blackberry, the lemon and the strawberry all grow wild. Flowers like violet, primrose and roses grow in abundance. The rhea plant grows wild also. Wild elephants, tigers, sloth bears, leopards, hyenas, jerow, spotted deer, four-horned deer, the goorul, barking deer, pigs, porcupines, monkeys, languor and other wild cats inhabit the Siwaliks. Among the birds the black partridge, the grey partridge, the peafowl, florikan, snipe, quail, woodcock, bittern, jungle fowl, kalege pheasant, duck, teal, goose, woodcocks, black eagle, brown eagle, fish eagle, vultures, kites, hawks, pelicans, cranes and hornbills are found in the region. There are monetary rewards for killing wild animals like tiger, leopard, cub-leopard, bear and hyena. The Ganges enters the Doon at Tapobun and the Jumna enters after travelling for a distance of 110 miles from its source. They have two tributaries the Sooswa and the Asun. The Sooswa meets the Song at a point and then they flow on together. Compared to the Western Doon the Eastern Doon has forests and swamps as the Song and the Sooswa flow through it. An extraordinary phenomenon that took place in February 1814 in Dehra Dun was that it had snowed and the snow covered Dehra for two days. Huts of the poor in the Doon valley are made mostly out of grass while those on the slopes of the Himalayas are made out of stone and mud. Good brick houses are few as only the well to do could afford them. The food most commonly eaten is rice, vegetable curry, bread and chapattis made of wheat, mundwa, tour or oorud. The people living in the hills also consume barley and mussoor.

Ruskin Bond paints a magical and peaceful atmosphere of a hill station and a valley that existed years ago - a time when crime or violence were not known and the people were kind, hospitable and trusting. His longing for the past arises from two reasons. One being the loss of his father and a yearning to bring back the most happy years of his life spent with him. The second being the change he witnessed when he returned to Dehra Dun in 1955 and later near his Maplewood Lodge at Mussoorie – the evil effects of modernization and development which destroy and disrupt not only the natural environment but also human values and which are felt only by the sensitive heart of a poet.

When Ruskin Bond returned to India in 1955 he decided to settle down in Dehra Dun.

Bond decided to remain in the small town in the Doon Valley below the Himalayas, the place he felt was “home” in India, the surroundings of his childhood and young adult memories...However, the Dehra he loved had changed. Not only had his old friends from 1951 moved out, he regretted that “the march of time and the pressures of population” had destroyed the old lifestyle of Dehra. (Khorana 41)

He was unhappy to see the changes – the overcrowded bazaars, scooter rickshaws and taxis instead of tongas, new buildings and dwindling wildlife. *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra* published in 1991 opens with a short piece on Bond’s return to Dehra Dun. Ruskin remembers his old Dehra and compares it to the present town. The old Dehra was a place of mangoes and lemons and other trees planted by his father. The house has since then been sold to Major General Mehra. The town has grown “hard” – it is no more the small town where people knew each other, where neighbours loved each other. Modernization has not only corroded the fabric of the town but it has pierced the hearts of the once warm cheerful people of the hills. Most men when they come back home, come home, as strangers as the people of their hometown do not know them. But nature does not forget, the old family trees planted by his father still growing in Dehra welcome him. The trees planted still thrive and so does his deep rooted love for the town. Ruskin is bitter about the changes that are taking place because though they are undertaken in the name of development for mankind they have always meant death and destruction of nature. Man in order to develop has always from time immemorial disregarded the presence and importance of nature. Leave alone the fact, that he himself will be destroyed if nature is. This selfishness will finally lead to the extinction of man. Most of the compounds and grounds in Dehra have now been converted into housing estates, shopping malls and complexes. Dehra Dun’s population has rapidly increased and the small quiet town has now turned into a hustling bustling city. The pedestrian has to be on guard while walking through its streets. Ruskin Bond misses the days of carefree walking on the streets of Dehra when he felt like singing in the rain. He keeps to the side of the pavement and tries to locate the old landmarks – an old peepul, a familiar corner, a surviving bungalow, a bookshop, the sabzimandi, a bit of wasteland where once he played cricket with his friends. Ruskin Bond laments the passing of time and in a nostalgic mood he pens down a “Dirge for Dehra Dun.” He feels sad that the place that he loved and cherished so much that he depicted it in his prose, as a heaven on earth, has lost its charm and essence.

I wonder where the green grass went?

All buried under new cement.

I wonder where the birds have flown?

They’ve gone to find another home.

I wonder where the footpath’s gone?

Right underneath your car my son.
I wonder where the old folks go?
The Nursing Homes will surely know.
What grows so fast before my eyes?
A garbage dump, a million flies.
Is this the place you celebrate?
In prose you made it sound so great!
It was ... before I knew its fate. (*A Town Called Dehra* xvi)

Change is hinted in “All Creatures Great and Small,” where Ruskin mentions that forests near Dehra Dun were being cut down and the tiger, pheasant and the spotted deer were beginning to disappear.

Ruskin Bond becomes nostalgic when the new threatens to destroy the old and also when he contrasts a small town with a big city.

The big city represents Bond’s dissatisfaction with the fast – paced life that he believes is not in tune with the environment. While the small town may have its darker side – corruption and exploitation by people in power – it is nevertheless a symbol of a simple lifestyle and harmony with nature. (Khorana 61)

Later we learn that the peace and tranquility of the hillside near Maplewood was destroyed when a new road was built in the mountains by P.W.D. “Death of Trees,” is an expression of the pain he felt at the killing of his tree friends when a bypass was planned that ran right across the Maplewood cottage. In it, Ruskin refers to the trees as human beings and gives a poignant account of their killing in the name of development or progress. The walnut tree, his acquaintance for ten years was the first to be cut down. He had watched it grow up just as Prem’s son Rakesh, “Looking forward to its new leaf – buds, the broad green leaves of summer, turning to spears of gold in September when the walnuts were ripe and ready to fall.” (*Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra* 93) The deodar another tree whom Ruskin had helped to grow was the next to go because of the road just as his young brother who died in a road accident. Twenty oak trees were felled near the cottage and he knew that by the time the bypass would reach Jabarkhet, about six miles from his cottage over a thousand oaks, maples, deodars and pines would lay down their lives for human progress. The story also depicts people’s attitude towards trees and wild animals. Trees and shrubs are only important as long as they meet their needs. Bond’s milkman thinks that the only useful or necessary tree is the one whose leaves are used for fodder while for the contractor only felled trees and shrubs are useful. A young man once told Bond to visit Pauri because there were no trees to block the terrific view. The destruction of the forest leaves many

animals and birds homeless. The scarlet minivets, the long tailed magpies, the barbets, the langurs and many other animals have left the place. The only jarring sounds that are now heard are that of the truck at night, the grinding of gears and the blowing of motor horns. Such change is not welcome as it disturbs the delicate equilibrium of nature. Just as the animals and birds dwelling there have left the place to look for new homes on a new mountain, Bond must also leave along with them.

Bill Aitken his neighbor and a famous writer in his critical write up “When Neighbours Become Good Friends: A Memoir of Ruskin Bond as a Person,” tells:

Modest by virtue of the freelancer’s hand to mouth existence life at Maplewood Lodge was very much in the lap of nature. The valley at the extreme eastern end of Mussoorie was both green and unspoiled and the trees with whom Ruskin appeared to be in conversation did in fact acquire distinctive personality. Then a bypass was planned that would run right in front of his window and this was followed by the gross sacrilege of falling sylvan friends. Those trees he had lavished his attentions upon were rudely felled and devoured by Mussoorie’s inordinately greedy contractors. Older hands on the hillside advised him to ignore the insult but Ruskin’s pagan instincts told him it was time to pull up his own roots. (Singh 177-178)

Ruskin moved to Ivy Cottage, Landour.

The various occupations of the people of the hills and the influence of the mountains on the people are also realistically described. Most of them are farmers, tillers of their own lands. Others are forced to leave home and come down to the hill stations or plains in order to earn a living. Here they work as waiters, servants, cooks, truck drivers and vendors. Though they find work and money they somehow always realize that they belong to the mountains and return. Perhaps it is a reflection of the writer himself because he too had forsaken the life of big cities and returned to the mountains. In “The Summer Season,” during the warm and sunny spring Visni, a hill boy makes his appearance in a hill station. Visni, is a fourteen year old hill boy. “He had the light, soft - brown skin of the hill people, with black eyes and dark unruly hair.” (Bond, *Time Stops* 92) Like most hill people, Visni has to leave his home and come to the hill station in search of work. Visni’s village is behind two mountain ranges and thirty miles away from the hill station. While he is away looking for work his mother, sister and two small brothers look after their fields in Garhwal. Roxy, the hill station’s only cinema hall remains open from April to October, for six months. It does good business during this period as the town is full of tourists from the plains. During the winter months the hill station is empty and shops and restaurants remain closed. When the Roxy closes in September all the boys have to leave. During Visni’s last night in town it snows. In order to reach home he walks through snow covered forests and stops at villages to take refreshments. He takes refuge at night along with other travelers and

mule drivers in a small village. The atmosphere created is one of peace, calm and friendship between simple hill folk.

They built a fire and crowded round it, and each man spoke of his home, and someone sang, and someone told a story of evil spirits and mysterious disappearances – happenings that were peculiar to that area. Visni felt at home with these strong, simple men and fell asleep listening to their tales. (*Time Stops at Shamli* 96-97)

Visni's village and the mountain stream that passed through the village is full of snow. When he reaches home he receives a warm welcome from his family and his mother's big black Bhotia dog. He vows never to leave his village.

There was no need to hurry now. He would be with them for a long time, and the manager of the Roxy would have to find someone else for the next summer season...It was his house, and they were his fields; even the snow was his. When the snow melted he would clear these fields, and nourish them, and make them rich. He felt very big and very strong as he came striding over the land he loved. (*Time Stops at Shamli* 97)

Ruskin Bond writes about simple rural folk, who live in the foothills of the Himalayas. He writes about ordinary people whom we meet frequently – hawkers, sweepers, servants, beggars, kite makers, truck drivers, watchmen, children, neighbours, gardeners, farmers and wrestlers. They have a deep affinity with nature and they imbibe nature's attributes like purity, simplicity, innocence and contentment.

The mountains and forests are inseparable parts of Ruskin's consciousness. Ruskin has inherited his love for trees and animals from his grandfather and father. Trees are depicted as having humane qualities of humility, goodness, friendship, wisdom, spirituality; serving as guardians and possessing the power to connect man to God. This is evident in stories like "Great Trees I Have Known," "Great Spirits of the Trees," "Growing up with Trees," and "Death of Trees."

Life in the hills is full of hardships. Adults as well as children have to work hard to survive. Children living in the hills have to shoulder some of the responsibilities of their parents. More than playing and enjoying themselves they have to do chores like taking the cattle for grazing, cutting grass, gathering wood, fetching water, taking milk to the nearby shops, helping in the fields etc. The children depicted in Ruskin Bond's stories embody the very spirit of the mountains – the beauty, serenity and the difficulties. In the short story "Binya Passes By" Binya is a sixteen year old girl who lives with her grandmother and younger brother in a small village in the hills. We meet her gathering bilberries on the hillside as she loves these green sour cherries. She has to go to the top of Pari Tibba and sometimes to the valley beyond to gather wood, cut grass and graze her cattle. The sickle with which she cuts grass is held by the cloth

She is tied firmly about her waist. She wears a faded and torn dhoti made out of a rough home spun sari and silver bangles. Binya is happy and content with what she has in her own simple world and does not need progress. She embodies the open countenance, innocence, sweetness and simplicity present in the people of the hills. She is a breath of life, fresh and life giving as are the mountains.

Binya represented something else – something wild, dreamlike, fairy – like. She moved close to the spirit – haunted rocks, the old trees, the young grass; she had absorbed something from them – a primeval innocence, an unconcern with the passing of time and events, an affinity with the forest and the mountains; this made her special and magical. (*Our Trees* 77)

Living with the mountains and in the lap of nature his characters learn some very invaluable lessons that they do not forget throughout life. Binya learns the happiness of giving and that people are more important than material things, Visni and Nathu learn that though money is required for living it is not everything and that there is no place like their home in the hills. Kishan Singh, in the short story, “The Tunnel,” has been the watchman of the tunnel in the forest for many years. Kishan Singh is a protector of the human and the natural world and the tunnel is a place where both the worlds meet and exist. He is a firefly for the train and its passengers and also a savior of the leopard.

Ruskin in his work not only brings to life the quintessence of life in the hills and the majesty of small towns, villages and forests in the Garhwal region but also makes the reader do some soul searching and become aware of the destruction and ecological imbalance caused by people for material gain. There exists a balance between human and animal worlds which humans continuously overlook to make short term material gains. Whenever they cross their limits nature strikes back. Many of Ruskin’s stories about animals and wildlife though not didactic make the reader aware of the fact that man is thoughtlessly destroying nature and in turn destroying himself. This is what he feels:

The anguish I have often felt at the rapid disappearance of our forest and animal wealth is expressed in “Tiger, Tiger, Burning Bright” in which I identify with the tiger, a loner in a rapidly changing environment. The empathy I have for birds and animals even extends to the world of the crow. In “A Crow for All Seasons” I became a crow – and great fun it was too. (*Time Stops* 10)

Further there is a conflict between the urban and rural worlds. According to Manish D. Bhatt, Dehra symbolizes peaceful life with idyllic surroundings and Mussoorie a place of serenity, divine splendor and interaction with God. They stand in sharp contrast to the hectic life of densely populated cities and towns. The urban world with its materialistic ideals usurps the simple dignified and humble world of the Himalayan towns and villages. The city is depicted as exploiting the village or small town. The changes that are caused by this are regretted and sadden

the hearts and minds of sensitive people. They grow nostalgic thinking and remembering the bygone days and dreaming and wishing for them to come again.

In *The Blue Umbrella*, the beautiful blue umbrella which arouses feelings of jealousy, greed, pride, selfishness and hatred in the simple people of the hills is an object brought by a lady from the plains. Only by giving it up is Binya able to bring back peace in the village.

The poem “Parts of Old Dehra” in *A Town Called Dehra* contrasts the remains of the old town of Dehra to the new city of Dehra. Ruskin in the first stanza writes that few parts of old Dehra still remain like a familiar peepul tree, flying foxes in a mango grove, a moss encrusted wall, and old bungalows. Change has come over the place because change though unwelcome is inevitable.

A garden town's become a city
And the people faceless
As they pass or rather rush
Hell – bent
From place of work
To crowded tenement.
So change must come,
Fields make way for factories,
The trees succumb
To real – estate,
The rivers plunge
Silt – laden
To our doom ... (218-19)

All this is a result of population explosion – the earth has not grown in size but the people have increased in number. The poem ends on a hopeful note for all those who love mother Nature. Referring to them as “Do gooders” Ruskin asks them not to despair because Nature has the power to repair what man destroys, long after man himself turns to dust.

In a recently published article, “Environmental issues ignored by successive governments,” Ruskin Bond says, “I am disturbed at the way Uttarakhand has developed haphazardly over the years. Successive governments have grossly neglected its environmental

issues.” He points out that Uttarakhand is facing the problem of pollution, poor sanitation and sewage disposal, unavailability of basic healthcare in remote areas, lack of government support for art, culture, literature. “Whichever party comes to power, it needs to save Uttarakhand from becoming smog filled like cities such as Delhi.”

I hope and pray that this small endeavour serves as a ‘wake up call’ for all of us. Man must find a way to live in harmony with nature, without destroying the delicate balance which is essential for his own survival. Urban planning must be undertaken and regulatory laws establishing standards for housing, sanitation, water supply, sewage and public health conditions, proper use of land, introduction of parks and playgrounds into congested city neighbourhoods must be passed and strictly implemented

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