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Changes in society
Life in the city

Preparing for the session

SESSION AT A GLANCE

Stories/ Information/ Discussion
Sweet-n-sour

Debate
Heaven or hell ?

Home activity
Worksheet 7
Life in the city

This session explores a major change that has transformed our society and continues to do so even today – urbanisation. In the first activity, a flipchart combining stories and statistical information is used to provide an idea of the impact of urbanisation today. There are many details in the flipchart, so read it at least a couple of times before using it in class.

The next activity is a debate on urban life – different topics have been suggested for children living in urban and rural areas, so select the one that is appropriate for your class. The idea of the debate is not so much to reach a conclusion as to get children to think about the issue. It also helps them develop their skills of articulation.

Remember to keep the cue card containing the mantra of change ready in advance so that you can add it to the appropriate kite at the end of the session.

There are separate worksheets for children from urban and rural areas so make sure you distribute the appropriate one at the end of the session.

You will have to arrange for materials marked with ✋.

Main ideas

- One of the most significant changes in our society is the increasing trend towards urbanisation. The urban population in our country is growing rapidly.
- Cities offer greater opportunities for employment, more freedom and more facilities as compared to villages. That is why more and more people are migrating to cities.
- The rapid growth of cities has, however, resulted in overcrowding and great pressure on basic facilities like housing, sanitation and transport. Living in a city is also much more expensive.

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To conduct the session you will need

- Flipchart : *Sweet-n-sour*
- A bell (for the debate)
- *Kites of change*
- Copies of Worksheet 7 (one copy per child)

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Conducting the session

Recap

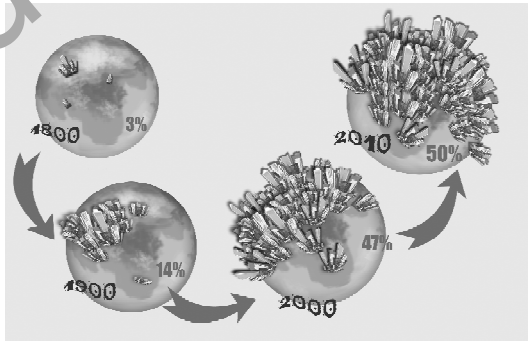
Spend a few minutes asking the children to recall the last session and the fact that more and more people all over the world are living in cities today. Tell them that in this session we will try to understand a little more about city life - its complexities, its joys and sorrows. Then proceed to the next activity.

Activity 1
Stories/ Information/ Discussion

Sweet-n-sour

Use the flipchart to provide information on life in a city. Some of the frames give information and others contain stories, followed by a few questions - make sure that you have a discussion with the class using these questions.

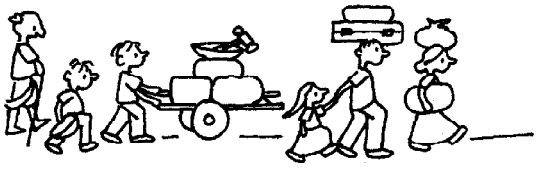
Frame 1 : *Growing cities*

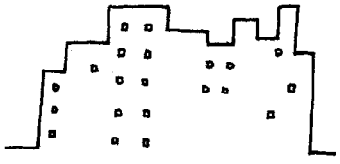


Through most of history, human beings have lived a rural lifestyle, dependent on agriculture and hunting for survival. It is estimated that in 1800, only 3% of the world's population lived in urban areas; by 1900, almost 14% were living in cities. A hundred years later, in 2000, about 47% of the world's population lived in cities. It is predicted that more than half the world's population will be living in urban areas by 2010.

This trend is also seen in India. Over the last few decades, there has been an increase in the number of people living in cities. In 2005, almost 30% of our population lived in urban areas.

In the following flipchart we will get to know a few of these people and what their lives are like.





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Frame 2 : *Sonu Singh*

Time : 1.30 a.m.

Place : In Sonu Singh's taxi outside Indira Gandhi International airport, New Delhi.

Sonu Singh gazes longingly at the photo of his village home, pasted right next to the steering wheel. Not a day has gone by in the last 30 years when Sonu has not thought of his village in Punjab – the lush green fields; rushing straight from school to join the menfolk for lunch; the rich damp smell of the earth as he worked; the gentle breeze drying the sweat on his back. He had never imagined leading any other kind of life. But here he is in a taxi, in the middle of the night, in a big city, waiting in a queue for a passenger. He makes enough money here – he has his own taxi and sends money to his father back in the village. He is well liked here - they love his sense of humour as much as the regular supply of delicious pickles from his village.

Sonu was only 19 when he came to Delhi. His uncle had a taxi here and had brought Sonu with him. Sonu hadn't had much choice. Things had changed in the village – a growing family meant division of the land. His father was getting old; his two older brothers took over. They could not make ends meet by farming alone. Money was needed all the time : for new kinds of seeds, fertilisers, electricity and water charges; for medical expenses; for his sister's wedding . . . They had had to take loans and the debts had kept mounting. That was when his brothers had decided to send young Sonu to work in the city. He had not objected, though his heart had been heavy. After all, in this way he could be of use to his family and save their land from being sold.

Sonu is not unhappy in Delhi - the city has been good to him. It has given him a new identity, new friends; it has shaped a good future for his children. His daughter is a teacher and his son is studying in

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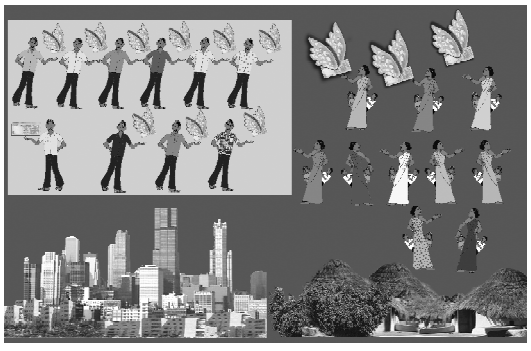
college. Back in the village he could never have educated his daughter ! And most important of all, he has been able to save the farm which is so dear to him. Though he is aware of all this, he dreams more often of his village these days, longing to spend his old age there, relaxing in the shade of the trees in the farm. But will his brothers welcome him the way they do today if he can't provide ready cash ? Will they understand the sacrifice he has made for the family ?

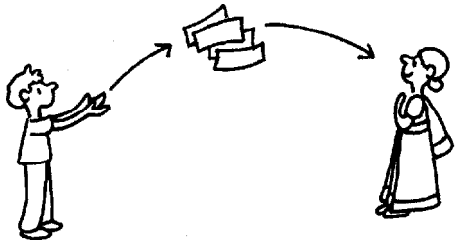
No, maybe it is better here - he is loved here just for being Sonu Singh. Here he can sit in his taxi, look at the picture of his village and transport himself to that dreamland . . .

- Why was it difficult for Sonu to stay on in the village ?
- Do you think Sonu is unhappy in the city ? Why ?
- *(For city children only)* Do you know people like Sonu Singh who send money to relatives in their villages ?
- *(For children living in villages)* Do you know of people who are dependent on a family member sending them money from the city ?

Frame 3 *Employment*

Some studies have shown that almost 90% of **people who leave their villages in search of work, send money back to their families.** There are villages in some parts of India where almost one-third (more than 30%) of the people depend entirely on money sent by migrant family members.





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Frame 4 : *Mrs. Sujata Rane*

Time : 6.30 a.m.

Place : Mrs. Rane's kitchen in Dombivili, a suburb on the outskirts of Mumbai.

Mrs. Rane is busy preparing a large quantity of sabudana khichdi for her friend's birthday party in the local train. You may wonder – a birthday party in a local train ? But the mystery will be solved when you learn more about Mrs. Sujata Rane.

Mrs. Rane's day begins around 5 a.m. Time whizzes past - making breakfast, packing everyone's tiffins, making lunch for her in-laws, washing up, helping her daughters with their unfinished school work, then finally a quick bath, puja, and out of the house ! There is not a minute to breathe, but she has now mastered this act.

She often wonders how a small town girl like her has managed to fit in so well in a big city. They moved here after her first daughter was born, when her husband was transferred here. Life in the city was expensive and so, much against the wishes of her in-laws, they had decided that she should also find work. Since she was a graduate and had a B.Ed. degree she had got a job in a school. But the school was far away and she had to travel by train every day - how terrified she used to be of those crowded trains in the early days !

Life is tough in a big city ! The double duty - work at school and at home – and the long train travel exhaust her. But if asked whether she would exchange this life for that in her small town, she would say 'no'. Because here, for a few hours every day, she can be Sujata - not someone's daughter, wife, daughter-in-law or mother – just herself ! Here she gets a chance to meet new people, to learn new things. There are many like her in her school and particularly, on the train. They are friends and enjoy each other's company. They don't speak the same language or even belong the same age group.

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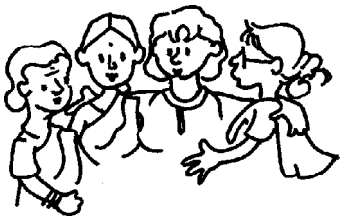
Their gods are different, their caste may be different and their food is definitely different. But when these ladies board the 7.55 train in the morning and meet each other, they shed their problems for a little while and don new skins. They share one another's joys and sorrows, advise each other, celebrate their friends' achievements, and when required they just hold someone's hand and tell her, "We're here, don't despair". Their time in the train is like a tonic - it revives them and replenishes them. Every day each one of them brings a part of her lunch for her train mates. They share food and recipes. Today is Rashida's birthday - she is going to bring her famous biryani, Mrs. Dastur will bring cake and Sujata, her sabudana khichdi. They will have a party till the way till her stop in Dadar.

It is now 7:53. Mrs. Rane reaches the station just as her train enters the platform. She makes a dash for her compartment - the heavy bag with the big tiffin of khichdi hardly slowing her down. A hand stretches out from within the compartment as the train begins to move. She grabs it and clambers on. From now until Dadar station arrives she will stop being Mrs. Rane and be just Sujata !



- What does Sujata like about her daily commute by train ?
- Do you think women in cities have more freedom ? Why ?
- Do you know anyone like Sujata ?

Frame 5 : *Opportunities for women*

Women enjoy greater freedom in urban areas and have more opportunities for personal growth. The average age of marriage for women in cities is 22 to 26 years, while in rural areas it is around 14 to 16 years. In urban areas 65% of girls / women are literate; the figure is 30% in

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rural areas. A larger proportion of women are also able to find independent work in cities.

Frame 6 : *Waqarbhai and Aminabi*

Time : 8.30 a.m.

Place : Egmore railway station, Chennai.

Waqarbhai, Aminabi and their two sons, 12–year-old Yunus and 9–year-old Shakil, have just returned from their village in Tirunelveli district in Tamilnadu. They had gone for their annual summer visit to see Aminabi's parents. The children had had a great time at their grandparents' home and had been pampered as usual. Everybody had praised them for studying in an English medium school and for being intelligent, smart boys. Waqarbhai too is proud of his sons but their unceasing demands for things worries and irritates him.

Waqarbhai's father came to Chennai from Tirunelveli in the 1940s and started working in a tannery as a labourer. He was able to educate his children and today Waqarbhai is a manager at a leather goods store. He earns a good salary, enough to keep his family comfortable and provide a good education for his children. But these days, as they are growing up, he cannot keep up with their ever-increasing needs and their endless demands. Sometimes it's fancy clothes and expensive shoes; at other times, video games and toys; then there are birthday parties and outings ! And of course there are necessities like medical treatment for his aging parents, school and tuition fees for the children. Recently they had bought a fridge because the boys had pestered their mother, saying that all the neighbours had one. Waqarbhai has already taken two loans from his boss and it will be years before he can he can pay them back.

His relatives in the village seem so content with simple things. They are not well-to-do but they seem to be satisfied with their lives.

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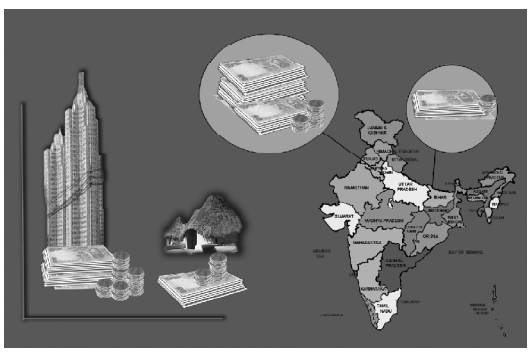
When Waqarbhai and Aminabi bring them small gifts, all of them especially the children are so happy, it is unbelievable. Having grown up in a poor family, Waqarbhai understands the difference between needs and wants. But his children don't. They are dazzled by TV advertisements, attractive shop windows displaying fancy items and the lifestyles of their school friends. Waqarbhai just doesn't know what to do about the growing distance between himself and his children. He feels inadequate, confused and worried about his family's future.

- Why is Waqarbhai anxious about his children's demands ?
- Would they have made such demands if they had stayed on in the village ?
- Do you think that life is more expensive in a city than in a village ? Why ? What is your experience ?

Frame 7 : *Cost of living*



The cost of living in big cities is considerably higher than in villages. Food, housing, fuel, travel etc – the cost of fulfilling even one's basic needs - is high. Things come to a city from all over the country and so they are more expensive. In addition, the lure of advertising and the influence of the media makes people want more and more of the new products available in the market. People spend much more in cities than in villages. In the year 2001, it was estimated that on an average, a person in a city would spend around Rs 855 per month. In rural areas on the other hand, a person's average expenditure per month was Rs 486. There is a huge variation in these figures between different areas; for example, in Delhi, expenditure per person (in the year 2001) was Rs. 1,384 per month, while in the villages of Bihar it was Rs. 384 per month.

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Frame 8 *: Nondita*

Time : 3 a.m.

Place : A basti in Kolkata, near Howrah bridge.

Nondita is wide awake and waiting for her cousin to wake up. Her uncle's cramped little house is hot and smelly. Her uncle, his wife, two daughters and a son are sleeping in the small house, which is basically a single room, partitioned to create a seating / sleeping space and a cooking / washing area. Nondita's family in the village is very poor, but their house has more space. All the houses there have courtyards, small kitchen gardens, separate kitchens and rooms for the women. Here there is no privacy, either inside or outside the house - houses are arranged in two rows facing each other with an open gutter running in between them.

Nondita has been here for nearly a month, taking care of her mother, who has been admitted to a special hospital. Every morning, at around 5.30 a.m. her older cousin and her aunt get up to fill water from the public tap near their house. Nondita too gets up to help them, for if they don't queue up at the tap as soon as possible, they do not get enough water for the day. Invariably there are fights and arguments with the neighbours. Nondita hates to begin her day with these fights. In her village, they have no water nearby. They fetch it from a small pond they call *pukur*, which is about 10 minutes away. In summer if the pond dries up they have to walk for 45 minutes to get drinking water from the river. But there are no fights, at least !

She hardly gets any sleep these days but that is the least of her problems - the real problem is the toilet ! There are a few toilets about 10 minutes away from her uncle's house, but she hates going there because they are unbearably dirty. And men keep staring at all the young girls. The other option is the lane near the river behind their basti. These days she goes there with someone from the family to accompany her. She is used to the open fields in her

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village where there are distinct areas for men and women. In the city, the traffic starts as early as 4.00. If she makes it before the day dawns, it's okay; otherwise she's so conscious of the passing vehicles and men's comments, it's terrible ! Countless families here, including her uncle's, have learnt to live with all this, but for Nondita it is an ordeal every day. She is waiting for her mother to get better so that they can return to their village once again. If only it was possible for her mother to get good medical treatment in the village itself !

- Why do cities have problems with water and sanitation ?
- Does everyone in a city have such problems ?
- Why is nothing done to solve these problems ?

Frame 9 : *Sanitation*

It is not just that cities are growing; the number of poor people living in them is also increasing. Nearly 30% of urban dwellers live below the poverty line. 25% of them do not have access to safe drinking water and 50% do not have adequate sanitary facilities.

A study of slums in Mumbai in the year 1992 revealed that on an average there were 203 users for every tap in slum settlements and that in some cases, the number went up to 8600 per tap ! The situation with toilets was worse. There were no toilets in nearly half the slum settlements.

The government itself admits that more than half of the 1.2 crore residents of Mumbai live in slums – on once vacant lands, along railway tracks, on pavements and along the seashore. Yet they occupy only about 6% of the total land area of the city.

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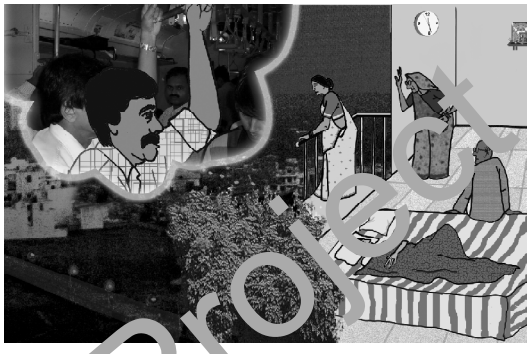
Frame 10: *Hakubhai Shah's family*

Time : Past midnight.



Place : Hakubhai Shah's flat in Vasai, a suburb on the outskirts of Mumbai.

Nainabhabhi, Hakubhai's wife, and her in-laws are sleepless with worry, for he has not yet returned home. After dinner with their Dadaji, the children have gone to bed, but the two women of the house are waiting for Hakubhai.

Hakubhai has a small stationery shop in Bora bazar in the central commercial area of Mumbai. They lived in the chawl above the shop earlier but as the family grew, they needed a bigger house. It was impossibly expensive to find one in that area, so finally he decided to move to the suburbs. After a lot of thought and consultation with friends and relatives, he bought a two-bedroom flat in Vasai, one of the busy suburbs, and moved there with his old parents, wife, daughter and son. The flat is airy and has some surrounding greenery unlike the earlier house, but Hakubhai has to travel for nearly two hours to reach his shop and the same to get back. The travel is an ordeal – the trains are overcrowded, to say the least. During peak hours each compartment is packed up to four times its capacity. As the train arrives at the station, people wait at the edge of the platform and push themselves into the moving train. There is often no space even to stand and many people travel by hanging outside the train or sometimes even on its rooftop. This is obviously very dangerous. To add to this, Hakubhai hardly gets any time with his family. In fact, spending time with the children is possible only on Sundays. In the morning when he wakes up, they are in a rush to get to school; by the time he gets home it is about 11 p.m. and the children are already asleep.

It is well past his usual time today.The shop closes at 9 p.m., then why hasn't Hakubhai come home yet ? The trains are terribly erratic - often some technical fault or an accident slows down the whole service and these days there are bomb blasts too.

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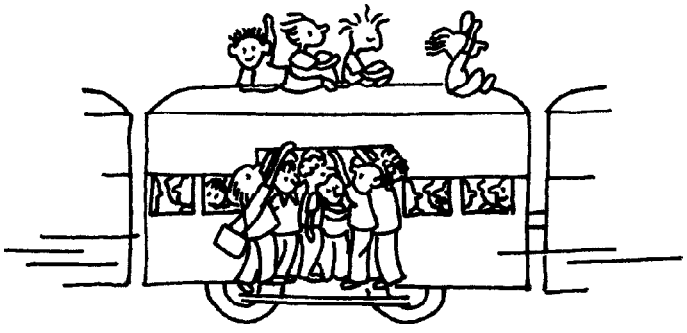
The monsoons are the worst; if it rains heavily the railway tracks get flooded and the system breaks down for days. Ever since the family has shifted to this place they worry about Hakubhai every day till he is safely back home. What has kept him away today ? Why hasn't he come home yet ?

- Why is Nainabhabhi worried ?
- Why do so many people in cities travel long distances every day ?
- Can Hakubhai find a job nearer home ?
- Do people in small towns and villages commute like this ?
- Does anyone in your family have to commute ?

Frame 11 : *Commuting*

In most big cities the place of work is very far away from the place of residence, and so large numbers of people have to travel long distances every day. This is called commuting. In Mumbai, for example, nearly 45% of the people commute long distances to work. Although there is a good public transport system in the city, trains and buses are extremely crowded and inadequate for the increasing population. Local trains designed to carry about 1000 passengers each usually carry more than 5000 passengers during rush hours. It is estimated that suburban trains in Mumbai carry about 60 lakh passengers every day !



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Frame 12 : ***Changdev Mahato***

Time: 2 p.m.

Place : A small hotel in Bangalore.

Changdev is too hungry to continue work. Informing the shop manager, he heads towards a small restaurant around the corner. He occupies one of the two vacant seats there and places his lunch order. He is enjoying the comfort of the fan whirling above him, when a well-dressed man, a sahib, enters the restaurant and prepares to take the only other unoccupied seat, next to Changdev. Immediately Changdev gets up and apologetically makes place for the man, saying, "Maaf kijiye, sorry, please take a seat !" The man looks at him in surprise and says, "Aap bhi baithiye na, why are you getting up ?" The waiter who has just brought Changdev's order is also surprised. Embarrassed, Changdev sits down and begins to eat, but mentally he is kicking himself. "Why do I always do this ? This is Bangalore, not my village. Here I too can sit at the same table as the sahib ! Here everyone can travel in the same buses, eat in the same places, go to the same cinemas . . ."

Changdev has been living in this city for 17 years but he has still not forgotten the ways he learnt in his village, where he had been looked down upon because of his 'low' caste. For centuries his people had been forced to clean the village and the houses of the upper castes; they had to live far from the main village; they couldn't pray in the village temple, couldn't use the village well for water. Even at school, boys of his community had been made to sit separately in the classroom. Changdev still remembers one of his teachers saying, "Why do you bother to study ? You are born with a jhadu and you'll die with it."

In the village it had been unbearable. Changdev couldn't tolerate the daily humiliation, nor could he bear the thought of living the life of a slave like his forefathers. He was forced to give up school

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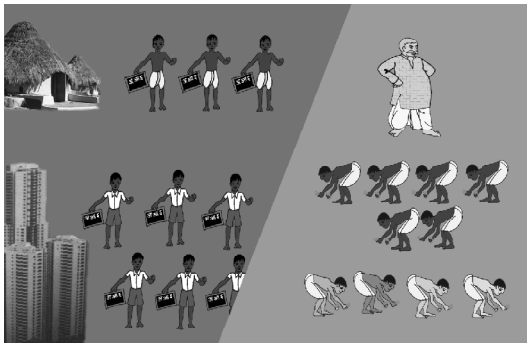
at an early age and start working on the landlord's farm. But he remained obsessed with the idea of escaping from his surroundings. One day he heard something that shocked and shattered him. In the district next to his, about 40 people of his caste had been forcibly blinded because they had refused to obey upper caste landlords. That very night Changdev ran away from his village. He was lucky. Landing in Bangalore, he found a place to live with a relative, who helped him learn a new trade - carpentry.

Today Changdev is a skilled carpenter and has a job in a furniture shop. It's crowded, dirty and difficult in the city, but for Changdev it is better here. His children go to a school and are good students. They are baffled when they see him move aside as a smartly dressed person walks past him on the street or sits beside him in a bus. They will never understand what he has gone through. In the city too there are divisions between rich and poor, but it's different here. One's identity goes beyond one's caste – a person is recognised for his work. Most importantly, everyone is like everyone else, even if he is actually a nobody. This is what Changdev loves about life in this city.

- Why does Changdev like living in a city ?
- Do you agree that people are less conscious of caste in cities ?
- Do you have friends belonging to different castes and religions ?

Frame 13 : *Caste discrimination*



After more than 60 years of independence and in spite of having a Constitution based on principles of equality and justice, caste discrimination continues to exist in our country. Even today in our villages we have bonded labourers and nearly 60% of these people are *dalits*. In urban areas the condition of people from lower castes is relatively better; for example, the rate of literacy amongst dalits in urban areas is 54% as against 32% in rural areas.

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At the end of the flipchart ask the class if they can see a common thread in the stories. Let them respond, then tell them that the common thread is that all the stories were about people living in cities. However, each story focused on a different aspect of city life.

Encourage the class to identify these aspects of urban life. As they respond, write down the points on the blackboard, noting the positive and negative aspects in two separate columns.

(These are the points that may emerge : Lack of space, commuting, shortage of water, absence or mismanagement of sanitation facilities, high cost of living and the pressure of an expensive lifestyle, dirt, squalor, pollution, crowds, crime and violence, opportunities for work, freedom from traditional oppressive systems like caste, more freedom for women, opportunities for interaction with people from varied cultural and linguistic backgrounds, opportunities for education, health facilities, glamour and entertainment, access to several other facilities.)

Sum up the activity by making the following points.

> We know that lakhs of people live in cities today and that cities are growing. All over the world, and especially in India, migration from rural areas to urban centres has been increasing and the trend seems irreversible.
>
> Through the lives of some city-dwellers, we have seen that cities have a lot facilities and opportunities which the villages lack; at the same time, city living has a large number of problems, and there are many positive aspects of village life that we cannot recreate in cities.
>
> Which is better then – city or village ? The next activity will help us find out !

Activity 2

Debate

Heaven or hell ?

Tell the class that the next activity will be a debate. The topic for the debate is **Life in a city is sheer hell** (for students from urban areas) or **There's nothing worthwhile left in villages** (for students from rural areas).

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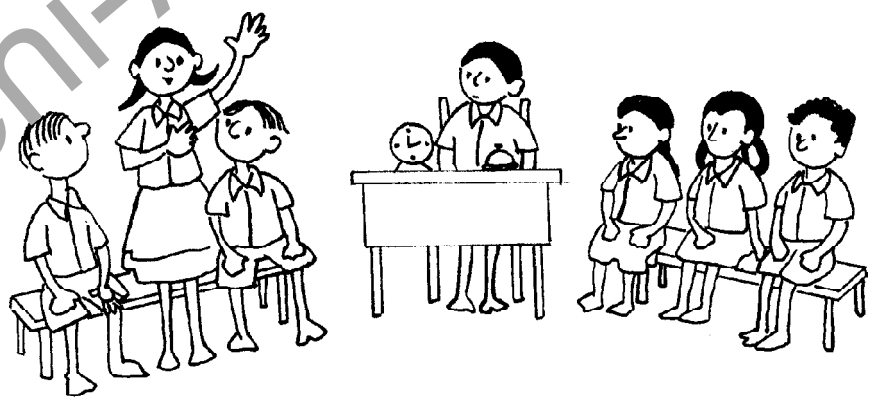
Call for volunteers to participate in the debate. Let the class select two teams of three members each. Then explain to them the topic for the debate and the rules for conducting the debate.

- The two teams will debate on one of the topics given above. One team will argue in favour of it and the other, against it.
- The teams will be given five minutes for preparation : they have to discuss the issue and decide who is going to present which part of the argument.
- Each team member will get two minutes to present his or her arguments.
- One student will act as timekeeper and will ring a bell when each speaker's time of two minutes is over.
- The rest of the class should, in the meanwhile, note down their own opinions, so that they can participate when the debate is thrown open to them.
- To start with, a member from the team that is arguing in favour of the topic will speak, followed by someone from the other team. In this manner all the six debaters will present their case.
- No speaker should be interrupted. Anyone who has an opinion should await his or her turn.



Conduct the debate as described above. Then throw it open to the class so that other children can express their opinions.

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At the end of the debate, sum up the activity by making the following points.

> There is some truth in both sides of the argument. As with most things, there are two sides to living in a city. While urban life does have many advantages, it also has many problems – this was brought out not just in the debate but also in the flipchart that we discussed earlier. People in cities are also forced to give up many of the advantages of rural life – whether it is clean air or close community ties. What we know for sure however is that in spite of all the disadvantages, more and more people are migrating to cities – in search of a better life, in search of jobs or to break away from traditional oppressive systems. Therefore, we are going to see more and more people living in cities if conditions in villages remain the same.

Kites of change

Draw the attention of the class to the *Kites of change* displayed in the room. Conclude the session by attaching the previously prepared cue card to the appropriate kite and asking a student to read it out.

Kite 3 : Living in cities has changed people's lives as well as their beliefs and attitudes.

Home activity

Worksheet 7

Life in the city

Distribute copies of Worksheet 7. Ask them to complete the worksheet at home and file it in their personal folders. Please note that there are different worksheets for classes in rural and urban areas so ensure that the right one is distributed.

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