

Urban Living and Discontented Regeneration of Cities: Reflections on Planning, Social Inclusion and Challenges in the Post-Neoliberal Reforms India

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Abstract: *Cities of India are undergoing a phase of tremendous change in their urban geography and development practices. With the neoliberal economic reforms introduced in the country in the early nineties, urban places, preferably large cities and towns, have been comparatively advantageous. They come out as forerunner in attracting investment, increasing attention to urban governance and importantly spatial transformation in relation to growth in sectors of urban economy. Since Indian economy has been passing through the neoliberalization, there seems a common concern that how urbanization is managed has implications for both economic efficiency and equity. This is equally witnessed by a growing interest among policy makers and planners towards better improvement of urban infrastructure, public utility services and urban poverty alleviation. However, rather than achieving holistic regeneration of urban places leading to decent livings, the spatial practices at work seem discontented.*

Keywords: *Cities, Inclusive Planning, Neoliberal Reforms, Regeneration, Urban Development*

1. INTRODUCTION

At present, India is going through neoliberalization. In neoliberal processes, the economic policy and reforms aims at strengthening globalization by bringing into action public, private and corporate sectors. India is indeed one of the major economic powers and with a GDP of two trillion dollars; it has positioned itself amongst the ten largest economies of the world. However, there is less to cheer about this growth. Many cities of the world are the crucibles of growth and development. For instance, Tokyo has a GDP of over \$1.5 trillion, New York and Los Angeles together (both over \$1 trillion) have a GDP that is larger than that of India- indeed, the top 10 cities of the US tote up a GDP over \$6.5 trillion. Seoul has a GDP of over \$650 billion and London of over \$725 billion.

The impacts of complex economic transition, sectoral growth and development in India are prominently visible both in rural and urban areas. Spatial practices related to economic restructuring, growth and development are predominantly urban-centric in the post-neoliberal reforms India. With this, the very present form of urban development is by and large influenced by politico-economic decisions and results in urban-spatial reconfigurations. Urban places are variably marked as “centres of investment”, “motors of development” and “engines of growth”. In fact, cities in most countries are the centers of economic growth, exemplifying hopes of social and economic advancement. At the same time, they also concentrate poverty, socio-spatial segregation and environmental degradation. A study of the United Nations Population Division (2014) estimated that less developed regions consisted of almost 75 percent of the world urban population in 2014. The level of urbanization in India is much lower than that in its BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) counterparts- Brazil (84.6 percent), Russia (73.8 percent), China (50.6 percent) and South Africa (62 percent). Despite a low level of urbanization (about 31.16%) in India, cities and towns contribute to more than 60 percent of national GDP. In the year 2016, the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) in Ecuador, which witnessed by presence of the formal and the informal national and international organizations, pointed out the persistence of multiple forms of poverty, growing inequalities, social and economic exclusion, spatial segregation and environmental degradation remain as some of the major obstacles to sustainable development worldwide.

However, large cities and metro cities are undergoing a rapid and huge spatial-makeover as they experiment with modernization and creating an investment-friendly urban environment and selective regeneration of urban places. This is further coupled with increasing demands for a ‘world-class city’ including smart solutions to urban problems. The urban reality is as such that every problem cannot be solved by smart technologies alone, rather people’s collective response is equally desirable. Urban development is prerequisite for a healthy urban habitat and it very much depends on quality infrastructure. According to the Report of the Expert Group on the ‘commercialization of infrastructure projects (1996) estimated annual urban infrastructure investment requirements phased over ten years at round Rs 280 billion in 1994-95 of prices of India (cited in Vyas and Pandyas : 2008). However, the way urban developed has progressed over the past years, it has been away from an inclusionary process. It is not hard to see around demolitions, evictions and forced displacement of low-income and marginalized urban residents in cities. In a sense, more often than not, the sanitization drives and environmental degradation concerns have actually impacted the urban poor. This is because the interests of the urban poor are suppressed against the elite-class demands and the capitalist-urban restructuring all around us.

Though India’s urban policy regime has began actively aiming at urban poverty alleviation, empowerment of urban poor with a focus on women and provisions for housing, the reality has been otherwise and efforts have been largely ineffective. Nandita Chatterjee in *State of the Urban Poor Report 2015* by The Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, clearly states that “urbanization in the developing countries has resulted in an exclusionary process due to urban poverty, overcrowding, casualization of labour, and inadequacy of basic services” (2016: 2). It’s a universal fact that a majority of urban poor are engaged in the informal sector which is largely insecure, unregulated and lacks in social security to the labour. The priorities in urban development obviously undergo a change when state-power relations change. But rarely a comprehensive urban plan is put into action. Globalization in India, which triggered-off with economic reforms in 1991, has a tremendous influence on urban development process not by making it more inclusive but as a process which draws a large chunk of labour migrants to the urban areas in search of livelihoods and leaving many of them residing in slums and slum like conditions. Investment of capital in various components of urban economy had led urban development being a fragmented process. In fact, urban living is in a high crisis for millions of urban dwellers in India. For long, urban development remained prioritized towards improvement of physical infrastructure but benefits from this practice has not resulted in its equitable and fair allocations in urban space leaving behind myriad layers of deprivation and disempowerment. Having realized the importance of urbanization in the overall economy, a bunch of policies are launched to improve, upgrade, rejuvenate and regenerate the cities in the post-neoliberal reforms India. As a new move, urban regeneration can be seen as an action for well being of citizens and as a tool for improving citizens’ quality of life with provisions for better physical and social environment and housing. This paper is an attempt to examine and discuss the status of urban living in India which comprises of performance across social, economic, behavioural and infrastructural dimensions at present and the efforts and initiatives taken towards urban regeneration so far and kind of challenges lie ahead in the process. Author is conscious enough to the fact that present form of urban regeneration where both state-driven and market-driven spatial practices (like gentrification, rehabilitation) do not remain confined to ‘reinvestment of capital into disinvested spaces’ (Ghertner: 2014, 1554). Rather it operates differently in different contexts like India.

2. CONCEPTUAL APPROACH

This paper adopts a critical geography approach to look into the nature of urban development and planning practices with special reference to urban living and regeneration of urban spaces in post-neoliberal reforms India. In the discipline of Geography, critical scholarship has a long tradition but in recent times it has been subverted by other theories. Banerjee-Guha rightly points out that ‘fetishism of space has become almost a byword with (Indian) human geographers. It has continued to make them see space as a mere container of social processes, if not solely a unique phenomenon’. Now, critical geographic discourse embrace wide-ranging perspective including current urban dynamics, spatial effects of structural changes, changing social relations and forms of urban exclusion and deprivation which go on in contemporary stage of urbanization. ‘Reconstruction and recreation of space as a part of a larger capitalist production, associated economic and cultural nuances of globalization at regional and city levels’ invites a critical assessment of what is happening in the cities

in Global South including Indian ones. Thus, this framework allows examining the actions of state, aims of planning, spatial transformation and their impacts on urban dwellers and response there from. A geographical perspective here covers some interesting cases to supplement the argument and interpretation in context of Indian urban development.

3. INDIA’S URBAN SCENE

As per the Census of India 2001, around 27.8 percent of the population, that is 286 million people, lived in urban areas. As per the provisional data from Census 2011, the urban population had gone up to 377 million persons, which represents 31.16 percent of the total population of the country. During the last decade, India's urban population increased at a faster rate than its total population. This reveals that urbanization in the country has increased faster than expected and reversed the declining trend in the growth rate of the urban population observed during the 1980s and 1990s. However, such a growth process is often termed as “the urbanization of poverty”, as share of urban poor and slums is increasing in cities. An escalating urbanization trend in India is established from the increase in the total numbers of towns by more than 50 percent from 2001 to 2011. Between this period, number of census towns increased to more than 185 percent, rising to 3894 from 1362, whereas the number of statutory towns increased to 4041 from 3799. This trend implies that the census towns are increasing sharply, so much so, that they are slowly at par with statutory towns. Such rapid rise in census towns coupled with a stagnant growth of statutory towns is a managerial challenge in the urban areas. Further, the UN population projections project that 542 million will live in urban India by 2025 (see Table 1). The High Powered Expert Committee’s ‘Report on Indian Urban Infrastructure and Services 2011’ projected that the number of metropolitan cities with population of 1 million and above has increased from 35 in 2001 to 50 in 2011 and expected to increase further to 87 by 2031. The McKinsey Global Institute Report also has a similar projection of 590 million residents in urban areas with 68 cities with a population above 1 million by 2030.

Table 1. *Urban Population Projections for India*

Indicator	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020	2025
Rural Population (000)	7,62,313	8,06,755	8,45,839	8,79,712	9,03,866	9,16,767
Urban Population (000)	2,91,585	3,33,288	3,78,775	4,28,509	4,83,044	5,42,191
Percentage Urban	27.7	29.2	30.9	32.8	34.8	37.2

Source: After Mishra and Dasgupta in *State of the Urban Poor Report*, 2013

Integral to this urban growth is migration. Migration from rural to urban areas is likely to see an increase and become an important factor contributing to the process of urbanization of the Indian economy. Time and again, a series of initiatives have been directed, on the one hand to enhance city-level productivities for ensuring that India achieves a high growth rate and on the other hand, to make the process of urbanization inclusive and sustainable. Unbeatable reality is that cities of India lack in an effective economic plan or urban economic development plan integrated in urban and spatial planning. This is may be because urban sector has remained 'ambivalent' for a long time in India's development. In a sense, this existent puzzle in development practice is associated with the functioning of post-colonial state in India.

4. POST-COLONIAL DEVELOPMENTAL STATE AND ITS PROMISES

In order to contextualize positions of ‘development’ and marginality a relook at the construction of modern state and the promises of democracy offers a better understanding of functioning of a nation-state in postcolonial settings. The emergence of the modern nation-state had become possible by believing in certain normative premises- it would have to “both universal and particular”. Chatterjee elaborates that “The universal dimension is represented, first, by the idea of the people as the original locus of sovereignty in the modern state, and second, by the idea of all humans as bearers of rights” (Chatterjee: 2009, 29). What happens then subjects are turned to citizens whose rights are constituted by a nation. To operationalise the normative idea of nation-state another set of ideas were, to substantiate the rights, “freedom” and “equality”. In order to bring freedom and equality closure, two mediating concepts of property and community proved instrumental in resolving the contradictions both at individual and community level. Chatterjee reminds us of modernization practices in the ‘Western’ world by noting that “...it was within the specific form of the sovereign and homogenous nation-state that universal ideals of modern citizenship were expected to be realized” (Ibid, 30). In

political arena, the individualist or communitarian or republican thought that political institutions must “be nested in a network of norms in civil society”. This sort of civil society was foreseen to sustain and provide “the social base for capitalist democracy” in order to abide by the laws and regulations of the state. Even in the advanced democracies of the West two distinction emerged out were between citizens and populations. The former is central to the structuring principles of the state whereas the later is largely dependent, care to be taken by state and falls in the domain of policy and programs. Being heterogeneous in nature concept of population is empirical.

The history of non-western world reveals that their “chronological sequence” of citizenship was not the same occurred in the West. Because of long existence of colonial rule, the ‘technologies of governmentality’ have been quite different in the non-western world like India and predate the formation of modern nation-state. The fact is that populations were ruled as subjects not citizens during the colonial empire because it did not gave importance to the popular sovereignty. In the postcolonial world, democracy has become a global discourse with an internationally endowed normative force that could reshape the geopolitical order of the world. In postcolonial democracies like India, state and government rule has overtaken the ideas of republican citizenship and emerged as a “developmental state”. All that transition happened when large populations (subjects) do not own property, not have right to property model (central to civil society), they cannot access the laws easily, were not equal members, and they were not civil society. So, the postcolonial India a developmental state “promised to end poverty and backwardness by adopting appropriate policies of economic growth and social reforms” (Ibid., 37). The process of modernity and the growing democracy, based on certain rights enshrined in the constitution, has not been uncontested in practices in postcolonial India. Therefore, two conceptual connections have become important in the context of postcolonial nation-states. First, “One is the line connecting civil society to the nation-state founded on popular sovereignty and granting equal rights to citizens. The other is the line connecting populations to governmental agencies pursuing multiple policies of security and welfare” (Ibid., 37). To a large extent the features of marginality, poverty and socio-economic disadvantages have evolved and developed within this later framework of governing. Thus, varying access to political domain and the state determines (the everyday) politics of city development in contemporary times.

5. NEOLIBERALISM’S URBAN EFFECT

In the post-independence India, the pattern of urban development and spatial organization in the cities is the outcome of the relationship between planning exercises by the planning agencies or authorities and private initiatives and responses. Having been introduced in the colonial era the nature and content of urban planning in India has considerably transformed, but it has not reinvented itself to be inclusive, equitable and egalitarian in practices. While reviewing urban or town planning practices in India, this author has noted somewhere that “what has been common is ‘adjustment mentality’ in planning domain through overlapping of adopted planning strategies applied in one and other city overriding the earlier experiments” (Gavsker : 2013, 379). These planning practices are being exacerbated of by the neoliberal growth strategies and development agendas of State. Shaw’s study revealed that “the idea of the modern city, as visualized by the post-independence planners and policy makers, did not come with the idea of universalism but with that of inequality” (Shaw: 2004, 43). Thus, urban development remained an exclusionary in practice further exacerbating the intra-city differences and wider variations in the availability of infrastructural facilities as well as access to state.

A widely discussed concern of present times is that “Rise of urban population and changed view of economy will also bring new changes in activities in cities” (Sekhon: 2011,77). Here, Sekhon is pointing out towards the changing perception and recognition of urban places in the ongoing globalization of national economies. The opening of national economies and reductions in the public sector controls expenditure and investment in several fields is the pivotal point of strategies of liberalization, privatization and globalization. For Hariss, “[G]lobalization implies economic fusion between national economies so that interactions decisively affecting national economic activity start and end not only beyond the power of national government, but usually beyond even its knowledge” (Harris: 2003, 2536). The notion “time-space compression” justifies the contemporary global circulation of flows and capital and the increasing mobility. Since mid-1970s, the developed nations

have shown the growing application of neoliberal policies and development strategies. It happened because the institutional rigidity and hierarchy, national centralization and over emphasis on the master plan approach could not restrain the countries and cities from slipping in economic downturn. It reached to the global South by way of economic structural adjustment programs in the mid-1980s and early 1990s. Neoliberalism has its roots in classical liberalism, which advocated for market-induced political and economic system based on private property rights in the form of the newly emerging capitalist mode of production.

Neoliberalism differs radically from the laissez-faire liberalism or to an extent the social liberalism that highly prevailed in the post-second world war. The increasing concerns in neoliberalism can be mentioned as follows: neoliberals envision a state that both elevate the market overall else and adopts market logics to guide its own conduct; the state is expected to ask what is efficient, instead of what is right, fair or possible; and, the neoliberal (social) imaginary strives to embed market logics into the everyday calculations (see Bordie: 2007). Neoliberal policies have their spatial implications and effects on the existing urban structure. Sager noted that in neoliberal policies “[M]ore weight is put on economic indicators of the effectiveness of the political-administrative management system compared to indicators measuring the democratic aspects of politics” (Sager: 2011, 149).

Brenner and Theodore explained that the “neoliberal doctrines” justifies “the deregulation of state control over major industries, assaults on organized labor, the reduction of corporate taxes, the shrinking and/or privatization of public services, the dismantling of welfare programmes, the enhancement of international capital mobility, the intensification of interlocality competition, and the criminalization of the urban poor” (2002, 350). Anyways, state holds constitutional and discretionary powers in designing and shaping the policy prescriptions, enacting the laws, and making amendments in the existing rule of laws to facilitate the neoliberalization and globalization. “Ideology is a force that affects human agency; and it is the strength of globalization that lies in its ideological influence in peoples’ lives” (Heron: 2008, 88). It is perpetuating the market (demand and supply) system where individuals are advised to have freedom of choices in shaping their everyday lives. The relation of neoliberalism with geography depicts its spatial diffusion that is context-specific and uneven across spaces, places and territories. The territoriality is not eroded but reconfigured and re-scaled under the process of deterritorialization central to neoliberal practices. In India “the political reforms being undertaken today have a more radical aspect in that they represent an attempt to incorporate market rationality into the structures and practices of the state” (Joseph: 2007, 3213). Therefore, such processes results in the concentration of economic and commercial activity, blurring limits of urban and rural areas, and rapid expansion of urban settlements in the metropolitan regions make them as crucial units for analyzing current characteristics and dynamics. The corporate mutual understanding rationalizes the increase in the economic growth as a priority in urban development. Consequently cities tend to acquire new capabilities and competing one another in redevelopment and standardization of urban landscape. Ipsita Chatterjee, while discussing about current urban condition in most of Third World cities, argues that “the central logic that connects (all these) processes is the concept of exploitation- someone somewhere is being oppressed as a result of contemporary urbanization, and this exploitation is usually operationalized through some form of displacement- someone somewhere must move and hence produce space for someone else” (2014, xiv). This points to how cities in the emerging economies are aspiring to redevelop, clean-up, produce global-standard infrastructure to themselves, and doing so usually causes unrest among the people and fights for right to the city.

6. CHANGING CONTOURS OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT

There is uneven connectivity of regions and metropolises as appropriate entry points and first destinations for liberalization-induced globalization in emerging economies like India. Exposure to wider economic network of cities shapes their internal social geography, organization and distribution of infrastructural facilities. For instance, the economic capital of India, Mumbai seems appropriate example to be cited here. State has adopted proactive policy in making Mumbai an important centre of finance, services, transnational companies’ headquarters and the gateway of capital flows at the cost of conventional industrial decline and leaving aside poor on their own capacities.

Besides the World Bank Funded ‘urban development projects’ in pre-globalization period, a centrally sponsored Scheme (Mega City Scheme) for infrastructural development in Mega Cities (having a

population of four million-Bombay, Bangalore, Calcutta, Madras & Hyderabad) was launched in 1993-94 in India. The major goal of the Scheme was “to improve the overall quality of urban infrastructure in the metro cities and tap institutional finance and capital market for such infrastructure development” (See NIUA Report 2002). The sharing between Central and State Governments was in the ratio of 25:25 and the balance 50% was expected to be met from institutional finance/market. Under the scheme, projects were of three categories: (A) projects which are remunerative, (B) projects for which user charges levied, and (C) basic services oriented projects with low returns. According to an Assessment Report (2002), more than half of the total projects (302) were taken up under category ‘C’ in Mumbai, Chennai, & Bangalore. In Hyderabad and Calcutta, the category ‘A’ and category ‘B’ projects taken together constituted about 94% and 75% of the total number of projects, respectively. Conceptually it was an attempt in making cities competitive, environmentally clean and green, and attractive for investments and growth in the service sector of economy. In an eloquent way Janaki Nair writes about Bangalore metropolis that “Between the technocratic imaginations of planners, leaders of the new economy, and the bureaucrats, on the one hand, and the social life of various groups, on the other hand, lies a very wide and contested range of meanings of urban space” (2005, 120). In one way or other this situation reflects a conflicting relation between the modernizers and the large populations who are victims of out of context designed redevelopment plan, urban visions and policies aimed at making cities so-called “global”.

Of the current dominant paradigm that shapes the ‘policies’ in India, displacement and resettlement has become a common phenomenon in processes of development in general and urban development in particular in India. Amidst neoliberal practices, land has become a very contentious commodity and its legitimized acquisition for “public purposes” largely affects lives and livelihood chances of people dependent on it for their survival. Equally responsible is rapid urban expansion, where changes in land uses and the loss of agricultural land to new urban projects and townships are a common phenomenon as reported from studies on medium towns. Shahab Fazal (2000) in a study on Saharanpur city (western Uttar Pradesh) highlights that with a tremendous increase in the urban area between 1988 and 1998 (of 84 percent) a total of 1683 hectares of fertile agricultural land were lost due to the city’s expansion. In the domain of formal planning, one of the impacts of land use regulations has been excessive urban sprawl and expansion. Land use regulations about the Floor Area Ratio (FAR) and Floor Size Index (FSI) turn out as restrictions amidst unprecedented urban transformation. Repealing of Land Ceiling Act in several states stating smooth availability of land would help supply of housing, slum dwellers and the urban poor face severe threats from urban development.

With a focus on Mumbai, Patel et al. noted that “when they (planners) talk about turning Mumbai into Shanghai, they are only considering an increase in the floor space index but not the public areas” (2007, 2725). The middle class concern is that Mumbai needs planning, organization, governance, public parks, and greenery, not dug up roads, overflowing garbage and chaos. Dupont’s study on Delhi reveals that “public housing policies have, however, failed to respond to the demand of large sections of the urban population, in particular the lower-middle classes and the poor who have had to resort to the informal housing sector” (2004, 161). Exclusionary and centralized planning practices lead to a polarization in Delhi city i.e. North and South. This very South zone in the city has been a favoured zone for the middle and upper-middle class residences and for establishment of new educational institutions, offices, shopping enclaves, hotels and commercial centres. Further, the state’s decision in organizing mega-events by bringing in the corporate lobby, development of unused lands, and latter on authorities earning a huge capital out of it depicts spatial practices producing unprecedented and eventual urbanization of peri-urban areas in the country. Consider, for example, mega-event oriented development in Delhi. Millennial Delhi’s highest profile development project was the Commonwealth Games (CWG) Village, built on land reclaimed from the floodplain of the Yamuna River through a public-private partnership with the Dubai-based developer, Emaar. Once the CWG ended, the Delhi Development Authority purchased 711 of the Village’s luxury flats that had been used to house athletes during the event. It successfully auctioned off the first 80 of these flats in June 2012, leading to estimates that it would generate over US\$500 million in profit off the 711 flats. Here, capital found productive investment not in the rehabilitation of disinvested land, but in land that had never before been capitalized.

In the post-neoliberal reforms, under the city-centric growth strategies major cities have prepared urban ‘Visions’ promising the quality infrastructure, civic amenities and facilities in making cities of

world-class status. Notable is Vision Mumbai which envisaged “to become a vibrant international metropolis” and further states that “Mumbai must ensure that its economic growth is comparable to world-class levels while simultaneously upgrading the quality of life it provides to its citizens” (see Vision Mumbai 2012). The core areas of strategy which can be acted upon to reach such a vision are: economic growth (from 2.4 percent to 8-10 percent), transportation facilities, housing, social infrastructure, financing, and governance (corporate). In Andhra Pradesh, Hyderabad has emerged as a Hi-Tec City with the active involvement of regional politics elites and by adopting policies that offers state subsidies for the investors in various sectors. Similarly, State of Uttar Pradesh in 2010 decided to convert the entire rural belt along the Greater Noida-Agra expressway into an urban zone, making it the biggest urban corridor. Such global city-centered imaginations are common features in India’s cities. While the local governments are already overloaded with tasks, the lack in funding and reluctant to decentralization, the current spatial practices and policies have affected urban disadvantaged, marginal groups and the poor adversely by depriving them from the basic services and civic amenities. In the south, the Silicon Valley of India Bangalore is already in the race for becoming a ‘world-class city’. City has initiated several infrastructure projects like a mega-Bangalore-Mysore Infrastructure Corridor with modern townships. The high involvement of corporate organization in urban development like BATF (Bangalore Agenda Task Force) has strong influence on governance structure roping in state and corporate, and private sector are as stakeholders. However, more often than not the contemporary urban spatial practices indicate most of city visions and plans are meant to be achieved by getting into global-financial market and focusing on high on economic returns as through real estate and paying lip-services to the mass. Peri-urban and suburban areas are experiencing a fragmented urban development where public utility services not at par with growing urban expansion not only in large cities but in cities-to-be-in-transition-to-million status. Singh and Abbas’s study on Aligarh city (western Uttar Pradesh) indentified that “public utility services have not developed uniformly in all the residential suburban areas. This shown that it has not kept pace with the urban growth and expansion of the city” (2013, 83).

7. URBAN LIVING

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation’s *Inclusive Urban Planning – State of the Urban Poor Report 2013* bluntly criticizes the present urban development practices in the country. The Report highlights that “fast-paced urbanization in India has produced an urban crisis, which is marked by the lack of adequate infrastructure and growth management as well as by sharp social divisions. The urban planning system in India- commonly known as master planning or modernist urban planning- has played a key role in institutionalizing these urban exclusions”. Studies reveal, as states Aiyar (2017), that most urbanization at present in India is ratification or retrofitting of unplanned expansion- where opportunity meets capital to fund construction with scant regard to past tragedies or vulnerabilities of the future. India’s economic boom in post-1990 era has shown the fastest growth of urban centres with an increase in the number of homeless and relatively poor people in the cities. Interestingly, the concept of quality of life is far cry. Basic amenities that denizens of other paved economies take for granted are promised here as boons, but scarcely delivered. This further exacerbates urban poverty. In *Development as Freedom*, Amartya Sen defines poverty as the deprivation of the basic capabilities that provide an individual with the freedom to choose the life one has reason to value. These capabilities include good health, education, social networks, control over economic resources and influence on the decisions that affect one’s life (1999). This is all what a developmental state has not been fully able to deliver to its citizens. The Census of India 2011, indicates that a total of 8 million households in Indian cities do not have access to toilets and defecate in open, bearing a significant health coast. As per the Census 2011, about 17 percent of India’s urban population (13.75 million) lives in slums. Since 2001, the slum population has registered a decadal growth of around 37 percent. Nair and Sharma explains that “these informal settlements are typically considered to be the bad pages of the good book of urban utopia, specifically incongruent with the idea of a smart city” (2017). In general, the coverage of basic services are improving, of great concern is the quality of services delivered, which still remain quite weak. A majority of urban dwellers are engaged in informal economy. Way back in 2007, the report on Conditions of Work and Promotion of Livelihoods in the Unorganized Sector prepared by the National Commission on Enterprise in the Urbanized Sector revealed that out of India’s total workforce, 92 percent worked in the formal economy. The State of the Urban Poor Report 2015 by the Ministry of Housing and Poverty

Alleviation reveals that “economic growth and gender equality are positively correlated. Although gender issues have been widely debated in the context of urbanization and urban poverty alleviation policy framework, it has yet to be addressed perceptibly”.

Urban environment is going through unprecedented degradation and crisis. Urban areas generate 61,948 million litres of sewage, of which just 37 percent is treated- and untreated sewage is flowing into rivers and seeping into ground water resources despite launch of several policies and programmes to improve urban environmental conditions. Most of urban places lack in sustainable urban living where each household or individual, irrespective of social and cultural affiliation, has easy access to civic amenities, infrastructure, housing, clean air and equitable employment opportunities. The fact is “our cities are sinking- contaminated water, choked roads and bad air” (Thampu: 2017). Thampu notes that “Bengaluru, our version of the Silicon Valley, sinking into geriatric degeneration. It is projected to become unlivable in ten years, unless the present trends are reversed” (Ibid.). This carries along with it huge health implications. Reality is that we hurtle from disaster to disaster- floods in Bombay and Chennai, acute water-logging in Delhi, lethal levels of air pollution in all our metropolises- and express indignation and dismay for a while, but nothing changes.

8. SPATIAL PRACTICES OF URBAN REVOLUTION

Under the capitalist process of “accumulation by dispossession”, the marginalized, urban poor and disadvantaged people in metro cities and around urban places are continually ousted from their lands and livelihood resources. For instance, the Delhi slums demolitions is the best suitable example in neoliberalizing India. In a pedestrian culture country, argues Badami (2009), “urban road infrastructure projects are being implemented at great public expense” (2009, 44). In pursuit of making urban transportation facilities better and feasible to meet upper middle class’s demands, these modes of transportation models are highly contested by the ‘civil society’ organization such as Citizens for a Better Public Transportation in Hyderabad by exposing the murky deal of Hyderabad Metro Rail (see Ramachandraiah: 2010).

Kundu and Kundu argued that “[D]espite governments putting forward a positive and liberal perspectives on urbanization and migration, they have gone in for ‘sanitization drives’, pushing out ‘low valued’ activities including slum colonies from the city core to the peripheries” (2010, 14). Urban infrastructure and transportation projects in persuasion of world-class city model further enforce displacement of marginal communities, including slum clearance and relocation; the establishment of industrial and commercial estates; the building and upgrading of sewerage systems, hospitals, ports, etc, and the construction of communication networks, including those connecting different urban centres. Critics argue that “to recreate such (world-class cities) cities, a homogenized planning vision is being floated that is remapping the very concept of ‘urban’ by intense gentrification of the urban space and recasting of the urban form and governance” (see Banerjee-Guha). Middle-class seeks decent environment and aesthetic qualities by stopping illegal encroachment of public spaces, including parks, pavements etc. through ‘public interest litigations’. In the support of evicting illegal occupants on the public land, the Indian judiciary has allowed the state power to clear streets, encroached sites, spaces in the interests of urban order and sanitization process. The politics over “illegality”, as Ramanathan (2006) nicely explained, is visible in the court orders on slums and Jhuggi-Jhompris demolitions to be carried out by the Delhi Development Authority and other public agencies is a signifier a kind of nature of public interests and non-local priorities in the globalization of cities. Ghertner argues that “most areas called ‘slums’ (or the more accurate vernacular terms such as basti or kachchi abadi in northern India) emerged through the self-help housing practices of residents, who gradually expanded their homes as and when resources, time, and state support became available” (Op. Cit., 1558). Since this slum-sprawl is also embedded in the local political practices, the politicians are involved in facilitating early squatting by using sub-standard materials on the urban land. Truth is that “this process of incremental investment is common to most of the world’s informal settlements, confirming that they are underinvested, not disinvested, areas that find incredibly productive uses of the scare fixed capital available. Slum removal, therefore, does not fit the standard narrative of gentrification as reinvestment in disinvested space” (Ibid. 1558). In addition, the displacement and the global-local politics surrounding it particularly forms the root of urban exploitation.

In the Post-neoliberal reforms India, a politics of reclamation, resettlement and rehabilitation witnesses that decision over whether a place to be cleared, (re)developed or not the social and political factors become stronger than the universal applicability of laws (see Chandra: 2011). For Instance, in Ahmedabad, over 200 families were relocated by the Sabarmati Riverfront Development project in 2009, from informal settlements located on the city’s riverfront to four-storey flats away from the original sites. The relocated sites are failing encourage and help people in restoring the livelihoods. Chatterjee while reflecting on the condition states that “the essence of the urban condition is manifested in the spaces on which the contradictions of urban life get etched- the contradictions of huts versus hotels, of children changing goats versus joggers running in parks, between those flushing in their toilets and those who do not have flushes” (Op Cit., 2). The economic rationale for the demolition and evictions of slums in relation to distant peripheral zones is that the value of the land occupied by informal settlements in the city becomes much higher than in the relocation sites. But geographical shift of the urban poor severely affects their modes of living and it puts extra burden on them in terms of expenditure on transport to get to the workplaces. Cernea reminds us that “People’s ‘place’ is their land too, not only the roof above their heads. Land is livelihoods and identity” (2011, 95).

On policy front, the period from 2005-12 has seen various new efforts initiated and structured by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation which include the design and implementation of the flagship subsidy driven Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) and the development and implementation of the Rajiv Awas Yojana (RAY). Program termed as Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) covered around 63 cities divided into three categories and two sub-missions which emphasis on the preparation of ‘city development plan’ as a complement to Master Plan. Through the Public-Private Partnership approach, private sector assisted projects got higher priority compared to projects submitted by the Urban Local Bodies. The Finance Ministry liberalized Foreign Direct Investment restrictions for the real estate and construction sectors in the same year, lifting the previous 40% cap on foreign ownership. The insiders’ research reveals that the branding exercises through the Mission mode urban (re)development failed to meet the promise of rapid urban transformation in India rather JNNURM worked “in an uncoordinated project-by-project manner” (Mahadevia: 2011, 56). Alongside, the first phase of Rajiv Awas Yojana was initiated in 2011, after an exercise where all funding for plan preparation for the first set of close to two hundred cities across the country was provided by the central government. The present government at the Centre launched the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) in 2015 subsuming the Rajiv Awas Yojana. The centerpiece of the PMAY is providing housing through credit-linked subsidies- enabling even the very poor to pay for new affordable housing. But more than two years later, very little progress has been made. Interestingly, the mission has been hobbled by many issues, the primary one being land-related as land is scare within cities. Having realized some of these constraints, the government has come up with new initiatives towards making housing more affordable to Middle Income Groups by enhancing carpet area against subsidized home loan interest rates (Singh: 2017).

Unwisely centrally framed policies often fall-short of their targeted goals, and states get away from their implementation in desired time. For instance, even as people in many urban areas of state of Odisha are deprived of uninterrupted supply of safe drinking water and are facing considerable challenges for treatment of sewage, poor planning and funds constraint have led to cancellation of several projects to be taken up under recently launched Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (The New Sunday Express: 2017).

A study in the city of Pune on Avoid Varying Policies for Resettling the Poor reveals that “under JNNURM, the beneficiaries are expected to contribute 10-12 percent to the cost of constructing their houses whereas under SRA (Slum Rehabilitation Authority) the houses are provided to the poor completely free”. Dual practices of providing housing to the poor seems less feasible and less equity oriented until the socio-economic data on urban poor and property less is properly available and updated on regular basis. Informal settlements clearly differ in land ownership, tenure systems, levels of participation, and neighborhood organization. Broadly speaking, urban gentrification as such is not really a conceptualization of what is occurring and happening in most of cities in India, rather it seems a kind of urban revolution. It is not of place to mention what Ghertner argues that “unlike

‘gentrification’, which implies a reinvestment in already-capitalized spaces, ‘urban revolution’, on this formulation, can be taken to mean the incorporation of new areas into formal property markets via the financial instruments of real estate (deeds, mortgages, assessments, property taxes, etc.)” (Op. Cit.,1560).

9. “SMART SOLUTIONS” TO COMPLEX URBAN SYSTEM

The ‘Smart Cities’ mission was launched by the central government in June 2015 to transform and (re)develop some hundred cities by 2019-20. The Centre provides five-hundred crore to each city over five years for various projects. As of now, ninety cities have been identified through three rounds of competition. Taking a look at its promises towards urban regeneration with smart solutions, Nair and Sharma reiterate that “ first, the Smart City project has nothing extra to offer; and second, there have been several instances of the governments’ failure in (the past) dealing with land allotment, rehabilitation and providing basic amenities to the slums dwellers” (Op. Cit., 2017). They further note that the current proposal document of the Smart City Project finds meager mention of the urban slums. It scantily talks about the upgradation of the slums settlements and straightaway fails to explain how and when this upgradation will be carried out. With launch of the mission followed by identification of certain cities, the economic motives of the state have got a push and real issues pertaining to make cities more convenient and inclusive places are being surpassed. For instance, following on the national initiatives towards Make-in-India and Smart Cities, the state of Odisha has planned to develop around ten more industrial clusters in the vicinity of the Capital City to facilitate investment proposals received during investors’ meet at Mumbai and Bengaluru besides the Make-in-Odisha conclaves at Bhubaneswar recently (The New Sunday Express : 2017). This is going to make huge spatial changes in terms of change in land values and infrastructure by transforming the peri-urban areas and rural fringe.

In contrast, sustained growth in an urban context is equally dependent on the creation of conditions within which economic development can continue to take advantage of the economies of scale that cities provide, matched by the availability of adequate infrastructure and services and a skilled and healthy workforce including women. The biggest challenge of our times is whether advanced technologies can resolve all the urban problems and inequalities through smart solutions? The answer is not very easy. Thoughts reveal that there is a slight difference between technological determinism and techno-utopianism. The first focuses on the machine’s capability to bring positive and negative changes in human life, where latter paints only a rosy picture of human life surrounded by technologies (or smart solutions). In this context, the Smart City project is a case of extreme optimism about technology solving all the problems faced by the urban dwellers and paying less attention to social conditions and embedded complexities. Holland (2008) suggests that the authenticity of any city’s claim to be smart has to be based on something more than its use of information and communication technologies (ICTs). The point he makes is in relation to increasing obsession towards wider use of ICTs and less involvement of active citizens who can indulge in democratic debate including, both in common public and at Urban Local Body, on improvement of urban environment and livings. Managing urbanization effectively in the country demands an attention to three priority areas. Firstly, to enhance productivity, policymakers should invest in the institutional and informational foundations to enable land and housing markets to function efficiently. Secondly, to improve livability and social inclusion, policymakers should rationalize the rules of the game for delivering and expanding infrastructure services such that service providers can recover costs yet reach out to poorer neighborhoods and peripheral areas. Thirdly, for both growth and inclusion, investments in improving connectivity between urban cores and their peripheries are very much needed since these are the areas that will attract the bulk of people and businesses in coming times..

10. CONCLUSION

Cities of India are undergoing a phase of tremendous change in their urban geography and development practices. With the neoliberal economic reforms introduced in the country in the early nineties, urban places, preferably large cities and towns, have been comparatively advantageous. They come out as forerunner in attracting investment, increasing attention to urban governance and importantly spatial transformation in relation to growth in sectors of urban economy. Since Indian economy has been passing through the neoliberalization, there seems a common concern that how

urbanization is managed has implications for both economic efficiency and equity. This is equally witnessed by a growing interest among policy makers and planners towards better improvement of urban infrastructure, public utility services and urban poverty alleviation. However, rather than holistic regeneration of urban places leading to decent livings, spatial practices at work seem discontented.

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