

Book Review

Annapurna Shaw, Oxford India Short Introductions: Indian Cities, 2012: Oxford University Press, pp 200

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Indian Cities authored by Annapurna Shaw gives a good summary of complexities of urbanization process in India. Though it is titled as a short introduction, it tries to cover wide range of historical and sociological reflections of Indian Cities. This kind of survey supplemented by a lot of data and maps is certainly a good starting point for understanding the urbanization process in India.

Oxford India Short Introductions claim to be concise and stimulating guides to different aspects of India that discuss topical and still enduring subjects and also emerging areas of study and debate. Introduction on Indian cities is as per the claims of the publisher, unravels different and complex elements of urbanization process and presents an evolutionary process of Indian cities. The author points out how urbanization of the developing world and its giant expanding cities is different from that of the West.

A genuine exercise by the author presents methodological difficulties like difficulty in defining a city and fitting it into particular category due to wide differences of population size, economic and social composition of Indian cities. A standard for defining a city in Western and Northern India may not be suitable for the North East region. Also, the census definition of city is old and the cut-off decided in 1950s is not realistic in current scenario. These cities are not comparable as they are different from each other and present different structural and demographic complexity.

With a look at the map showing geographical distribution of cities of all sizes, one finds dense distribution of cities whether small, medium or large, in the plains of Uttar Pradesh. Western Rajasthan being the desert and interiors of Orissa and Andhra show sparse distribution of cities. Remaining India shows a network of cities throughout the territory. Though mere establishment of cities can't ensure balanced regional development, the map showing horizontal vertical expanse of city network visually supports the claim of the author that such a strong network of medium and small sized cities could hold a key to

balance national development due to presence of cities in all corners of the country.

Indian City and Indigenous Modernity

This is a story of India's urban awakening that unravels a different trajectory traversed by Indian cities. It touches upon a debate of Indigenous Modernity or Alternative Modernity.

Cities of developing world can't be represented as they are misfit into western definitions and categories. Indian cities can't be measured by the yardstick of borrowed modernity as the cities in India present a contrast to cities in the West. Indian urban reality is full of slums, squatter settlements, lack of rules, are rather chaotic and show disorderly growth. But a new interest in the cities of developing world was aroused as some cities began to do better and exceed the economic growth of the West. The book brings out a journey of the western experts from a normative outlook towards Indian cities to a positive one. The urban base of cities of developing world was questioned initially, and then a U turn taken by these scholars for accepting the unique nature of these developing cities after studying them from a new and neutral lens and an effort to understand these cities as they are, considering their complex nature and different past.

The author uses this alternative lens to reconcile with the urban reality of India especially with its informal economy, an informal process of city-building in India through centuries. The book sheds light on visible and not-so-visible changes in Indian cities. It explores the expanse and depth of Indian city.

Changing cityscape

Even the cities and their complexities in India are undergoing a change. Pune of eighties has not remained same in 2010. It has changed with globalization. While explaining the **Generic city**, the book talks about its buildings, façade of the city, lifeline i.e. transport system, entertainment and industry, physical and non-living aspects, signs of prosperity and also a struggle for upward mobility among the city dwellers. It also covers how cities are changing with global influence and internationalization.

Annapurna Shaw examines concepts like kinetic and static city depending on the dynamism of cities. **Kinetic City**, a city of impermanence and temporary structures, according to the author, is coexisting with the established and permanent city. The book presents a city not as a conglomeration of population but a way of life. It presents different practices that influence the form and growth of the city and also diverse forces that shape the city.

Seven chapters present past, present and future of the phenomenon called a city. It starts with a historical perspective that presents a brief history of

Indian city, its development in pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial era. City expansion was largely ad-hoc and informal as also organic response to changing requirements. Dual pattern of urban development was inherited by the post-colonial state. In early decades of independence, more new towns were created. City building process was a planned response by the authorities as also unplanned extension made by poor and middle classes to get rooted in the cities.

Urban Growth in the Post-liberalization Era reveals drivers of economic growth and their effects on the city. Cities changed to encompass the growing income and aspirations of emerging middle class. Growth of new economy industries on the peripheries of metropolitan area brought about growth of cities. It tries to show that only Foreign Direct Investment has not been a major contributor to urban projects in the last fifteen years. Investment patterns in large metropolitan region spilling over from the urban cores indicate rapid growth of cities. Also the chapter present different growth pangs and land acquisition conflicts occurring in Indian cities.

Economic Activities of Indian Cities highlights the formal and informal economic activities of cities. It underlines coexistence of formal and informal economy ensuring supplemental phenomenon that make up an Indian city and also notices that there is a gradual formalization of the informal sector is seen in domestic service sector. The book presents a case-study of redevelopment of Lake Market in Kolkata Municipal Corporation and impact of new market on the old market vendors thereby underlining the economic conflict between formal and informal segments of the city.

In the chapter on Identity, Class and Migration, an effort is made towards understanding social fabric of these cities. The author identified two processes of change viz. gentrification and informalization occurring simultaneously to produce hybrid cities of developing countries. Gentrification is transforming older and manufacturing sites into shopping centres, office complexes, middle and upper income residential areas. Informalisation is responding to the needs of poor and middle class for living and working space in the cities and its peripheries.

It also focuses on the role of developers and other actors from the city in changing its face and nature. Also it focuses on city dwellers and their residential clustering based on class, caste, religion etc. It tries to uncover pluralistic cultural history affects the city development process. Also it brings out a shift in city-modeling, changes in building style, acceptance of cosmopolitan global ambience and cities having gated communities with high security and restricted entry. It shows different axes of residential separation in cities, a shift from ethno-lingual residential clustering to an income based one showing a transition from ascription based residential clustering to achievement and status based. An example of Mumbai shows residential differentiation

taking place over decades and how a gradual separation as one of the cosmopolitan and liberal cities started to change making it a sectarian, violence-prone and sons-of-the-soil-driven city harming its plural diversity. The book discusses the quality of life of city dwellers and the limitations in an urban scenario of uneven access and scarce resources. It observes that it is a long way to go for Indian cities if justice needs to be given to the urban poor.

Future of Indian Cities and role of the State

Liveability of cities, their future trajectory is an important aspect that has been discussed along with different challenges that have grappled the cities like providing universal access to basic services, prioritizing, taking care of concerns about health and safety of urban dweller, ensuring inclusive growth and making Indian cities a satisfactory living habitat for urban dwellers.

Integration of public and private actions is essential to tackle major problems of cities in order to make them inclusive and sustainable. Selection of a growth strategy for cities catering to the needs of different socioeconomic classes is the responsibility of the state. Informal ways of city expansion need to be recognized and facilitated so as to manage the haphazard growth.

Though the book states that the role of the state is diluted due to privatization, the state can't remain aloof in the urbanization process. The book claims that 84% of housing sites in Indian cities has been created by the private sector, but such facilitation has certainly been supported by the state itself. Vote-bank politics is connected to city growth. Unauthorized buildings and settlements outside the purview of planning are seen to get promises for regularization. Lack of proper land records and maps are responsible as no open spaces can be traced especially on the fringes. Land regulations are so ambiguous that give the state greater discretionary powers and deciding legality of the land. Also middle class tries to legalize unauthorized structures while poor need support of NGOs or experience eviction and displacement.

Communalization of politics is a common feature found in cotemporary cities. Political parties are seen divided along religious lines engaging in competitive politics. Here the state has an important role to play in aligning diverse and conflicting interests to promote strategies of urban growth and practices of urbanism that allow for equitable and sustainable development of its cities. As the ideas of citizenship and right to the city are changing, a state has a definite role and responsibility of keeping the cityscape together.

Indian Cities: a heterogeneous reality

The whole book revolves around Indian cities. The author has divided cities as large, medium and small based on broad categories of population. But still Indian cities can't be classified into three categories. Some are megacities,

some are metropolis, some are state capitals, some got developed in British era, some are newly emerging cities, some are consciously planned cities, however all are clubbed together. Their development trajectories are different. Cities like Chandigarh and Hyderabad like shared capitals have different dynamics. Politics of investments, attracting FDIs give different flavor altogether. Such subtleties have not been considered. Plural and diverse past is reflected but plurality of forces of development does not get reflected in the analysis.

Though the book brings out political dimension, it talks about general political aspect however, politics of core city and of suburbs show changing dynamics, it gives the shape to city, but that has not been captured by the author. Also the book is silent on urban renewal though it discusses future of cities. A programme like JNNURM which was launched with an objective of urban renewal does not find a place in the analysis presented in the book.

Though the book focuses on the aspect of quality of life, due to the limited scope of the theme, it concentrates on basic needs and services. Considering the complexity of urban reality, analysis of higher needs would have supplemented the analysis and brought out areas that need policy measures for improvement.

It is interesting to see the phenomenon of urbanization of India with the help of a unit of city. But surprisingly there is no mention of rural or hinterland development that affects the city's growth. Peripheral growth has been included in the analysis, however, **urban reality** of India, semi-urban nature of regions surrounding cities doesn't get reflected to the required extent.

The book is full of data about urban population, its distribution, growth rates, investments with their sources and its distribution among different sectors, tables showing concentration of poverty, slum population, migration and its patterns supplemented by maps and other visuals prove to be very handy resource for further research. Author's effort of giving definitions and clarifying different terms leads to clarity about different concepts for the benefit of readers also it helps in demystification of certain myths related to urbanisation.

With the economic transformation and technological advances, magnitude of transition of cities is very high and also has many-layered impacts which are far reaching. The book tries to catch the essence of complex nature of urbanization and simultaneously captures the human and social dimension that makes the city a complete and interesting phenomenon.