

URBANISATION IN INDIA: PROBLEMS AND POLICIES OF DEVELOPMENT

Chandan Sengupta

Abstract

Urbanisation and urban problems in India are generally viewed as issues of migration, slums, urban poverty and lack of effective urban planning. Very often solution to urban problems is sought within the framework of urban management and sector-specific programmes. As urbanisation in India is taking place in a predominantly rural society, the nature and dynamics of urbanisation in India are not the same as in the developed countries. In India the process of urban growth has been uneven across the states. It has also unleashed vast rural-urban disparity and urban vulnerability. The distortions in the process of urbanisation are part of the overall uneven development process in the country. Poverty, inequality, concentration of resources and, more specifically, lack of access to basic amenities in rural and urban areas are some of the manifestations of uneven or improper development. The problem of urbanisation in India, therefore, needs a larger focus with a development perspective.

Introduction

Level of urbanisation or, in operational terms, the proportion of urban population in a country is generally considered as one of the indicators of the country's development. By all the indicators of standard of living, including those of the physical quality of life, urban areas everywhere appear more developed than their rural counterparts. This, however, does not mean that urbanisation is an independent variable of development. On the contrary, urbanisation or urban development can be seen as the product of the development process itself. It is in this context that many urban sociologists have questioned

the city's role as an independent agent of social change. According to Saunders, even the founding fathers of Sociology, Marx, Weber and Durkheim, did not consider city as a theoretically specific object of analysis. For them, in the context of modern capitalist societies, the urban question is subsumed under the analysis of larger social factors (Saunders 1986: 14). If one accepts this view then one finds that urban development in developing countries essentially reflects the overall patterns of the country's development. As far as India is concerned, this position holds good to a great extent.

That India's development path has not been smooth and even, has been well documented. The uneven nature of development in India manifests itself in various forms. Poverty, inequality, concentration of resources in the hands of a minority and, more specifically, lack of access to basic amenities are some of the major problems associated with the uneven pattern of development. If development is about the production and distribution of goods and services for the enhancement of the quality of life and also creating conditions for the expansion of freedom of all sections of people (Havens 1972; Sen, A. 2001), then India is doubtless far away from it. Even the policy responses to address the issue of development have been largely ad hoc and haphazard.

Urban development, as part of the overall development process, reflects many of the problems of the larger development process in India. It is not just the growth of the city per se. Urban development envisages a planned process of urbanisation as it has profound impact on migration, human settlement and the wider process of social change. This paper presents a critique of urban development by analysing some major urban problems and points out the need to address the question of urbanisation from a development perspective.

Nature and Problems of Urbanisation in India

One of the characteristic features of the process of urbanisation in India has been the fact that, while the rate of urbanisation in terms of the growth in urban population has been consistently high compared to many other countries, the proportion of urban population has remained small. Since the decade of independence, there has been a steady increase of urban population in India. In 1951 about 62 million people lived in urban India. By 2001 urban population in India rose to 285 million, an increase by nearly five times in five decades. The rate

of urbanisation or share of urban population in the total population, however, has been modest but steady during the same period. The percentage of urban population to the total population of India increased from 17.30 in 1951 to 27.80 in 2001. But the rate of growth in urban population ranged from 26.41 in the decade of the fifties to 46.14 in the eighties. The highest rate of decadal growth in rural population was 21.86 in the sixties and the lowest, 17.94 in the nineties (Table 1).

Table 1

Rural and urban population and the rate of growth in India during 1951-2001

Year	Total Population		Rural Population		Urban Population		Percentage of Urban to Total Population
	Number	Growth Rate	Number	Growth Rate	Number	Growth Rate	
1951	361,088,090	..	298,644,156	..	62,443,934	..	17.30
1961	439,234,771	21.64	360,298,168	20.64	78,936,603	26.41	18.00
1971	548,159,652	24.80	439,045,675	21.86	109,113,977	38.23	19.90
1981	683,329,097	24.66	523,866,550	19.32	159,462,547	46.14	23.30
1991	846,387,888	23.86	628,836,076	20.04	217,551,812	36.43	25.70
2001	1,027,015,247	21.34	741,660,293	17.94	285,354,954	31.17	27.80

Source: Registrar General and Census Commissioner, 2001a

India's urban population in absolute number comes close to the estimated total population of many countries of Europe, America, Asia, Latin America and Africa. In 2003, the three Urban Agglomerations (UAs) in India, Mumbai, Delhi and Kolkata ranked fifth, sixth and seventh respectively in the list of world's 20 largest UAs in terms of the size of population. By 2015 Mumbai is expected to move up to occupy the second and Delhi the third position in the list of world's largest UAs (UN 2004). The large absolute number of people of the UAs and the overall urban population notwithstanding, the proportion of urban population to total population of India is significantly lower than the corresponding proportion in the population of many of these

larger share of urban population (Table 2). High urban growth but low proportion of urban population is an important feature of India's urbanisation. It shows that, while urbanisation has been rapid here, it is not making any significant impact on rural society by way of changing it into urban. A major reason for this is that, unlike in the developed countries, the process of urbanisation in India has not been associated with the process of industrialisation in a significant way. Some demographers have observed that Asia (including India) was so to say over-urbanised at the early stage of the continent's growth in the 1950s in the sense that at a comparable level of urbanisation, the developed countries had a larger proportion of their labour force engaged in non-agricultural activities (Sovani, 1966:1). More specifically, unlike in the developed regions where urbanisation had been induced by industrialisation, in countries like India, urban growth generally preceded productive employment and urbanisation was an "outcome of the process of excessive migration from areas of surplus rural labour" (Gilbert and Gugler 1992: 222). Population pressure on land in rural areas leading to "push" migration has contributed to this phenomenon of over-urbanisation. The process has not only caused distress to a large section of urban poor communities, but also affected the development of the country as whole (Sovani 1966: 1-13).

Table 2
Estimated total and urban population in selected countries in 2000

Country	Total Population (in thousands)	Urban Population (in thousands)	Percentage of Urban to Total Population
United Kingdom	58689	52189	88.9
Brazil	171796	139403	81.1
United States	285003	225434	80.8
South Africa	44000	24416	52.4
China	1275215	456247	35.8
India	1016938	281255	27.7

Source: UN, 2004

countries. Even China with a higher population base than India has a The unevenness of the development process in respect of the urban areas of India is seen in some other aspects of the process of urbanisation. As per 2001 Census, there are altogether 3161 towns and only 27 million plus cities (i.e. urban areas with a population of 1000000 and more) in India. More than 70 million persons or about 26 per cent of the total urban population of India live in these cities. The high concentration of urban population in million plus cities is an indication of the uneven spread of urban population in the country. Within the million plus cities there are a few mega-cities with a population of more than 5 million. Greater Mumbai is the largest of all the million

Table 3

States in India with the percentage of their urban population above and below the national average of 27.8 per cent

Above National Average		Below National Average	
State	Percentage	State	Percentage
Goa	49.8	Andhra Pradesh	27.1
Mizoram	49.5	Madhya Pradesh	26.7
Tamil Nadu	43.9	Kerala	25.9
Maharashtra	42.4	Uttaranchal	25.6
Gujarat	37.4	Jammu & Kashmir	24.9
Karnataka	34.0	Manipur	23.9
Punjab	33.9	Rajasthan	23.4
Haryana	29.0	Jharkhand	22.2
West Bengal	28.0	Uttar Pradesh	20.8
		Arunachal Pradesh	20.4
		Chattisgarh	20.1
		Meghalaya	19.6
		Nagaland	17.7
		Tripura	17.0
		Orissa	15.0
		Assam	12.7
		Sikkim	11.1
		Bihar	10.5
		Himachal Pradesh	09.8

Source: Registrar General and Census Commissioner, 2001b

plus cities in terms of population size of 11.9 million and accounts for more than 16 per cent of the total population of the million plus cities in the country. There is also wide variation in the level of urbanisation among the states in India. There are states where the proportion of the urban to the total population is over 40 per cent, much above the national average of 28 per cent. In some of the large states the share of urban population is as low as 11-15 per cent. In as many as 19 of the states in India the level of urbanisation or proportion of the urban to the total population is below the national rate of 27.8 per cent (Table 3).

Migration

One of the factors that influence the growth of urbanisation is migration. The pattern of migration and its contribution to the growth of urban population in a country are also related to the socio-economic development of the country. In the UAs of the large Indian cities like Mumbai, migrants account for about 35 per cent of the population. States with higher level of urbanisation attract larger number of in-migrants. For instance, Maharashtra, where Mumbai is located and the state's urban population is 42.4 per cent, has attracted the largest number of in-migrants from different states in India during the last ten years. The number of the net in-migrants (i.e. in-migrants minus out-migrants) in the state increased from 0.87 million in 1991 to 2.3 million in 2001. The largest proportion of the total in-migrants in Maharashtra came from Uttar Pradesh (0.9 million), a state that is much less urbanised than Maharashtra. Out-migration is larger in states with lower level of urbanisation. For instance, Uttar Pradesh with 20.8 per cent of urban population experienced high level out-migration in 2001. While 1.1 million persons migrated into Uttar Pradesh, 3.8 million migrated out from the state during the same period, showing considerably negative (-2.6 million) trend in the net in-migration to the state.

The pattern of migration in India is not unidirectional. Rural to urban migration is not the dominant stream of migration. In terms of the number of people involved, rural to rural migration has been the dominant pattern and rural to urban migration stands in the second

position. Urban to rural migration comes last. Table 4 with the data for the years 1991 and 2001 shows this trend in migration. It is also interesting to see that there has been little increase in the number of people who migrated from the urban to the rural areas between 1991 and 2001, while a larger number of persons were involved in all the other patterns of migration during the decade.

Table 4
Number of internal migrants (in million) in India in 1991 and 2001
by the pattern of migration *

Pattern of Migration	In 1991	In 2001
Rural to Rural	46.2	53.3
Rural to Urban	16.7	20.5
Urban to Rural	06.1	06.2
Urban to Urban	11.5	14.3

Source: Registrar General and Census Commissioner, 1991; 2001c

* The figures on migration are based on the criterion of the duration of stay up to 9 years.

During the last decade (1991-2001), the net rural to urban migration was 14.3 million (20.5 million rural-urban minus 6.2 million urban-rural migration). The total increase of urban population in the country during the period was 66 million persons out of which 14.3 million (net rural-urban migrants) or 21.6 per cent migrated from the rural to the urban areas in the country.

It may also be noted that over six million urban people moved out of the towns and cities and went to rural areas. What are the reasons for this pattern of migration? In the absence of a detailed analysis of the reasons for migration under the different patterns (rural-urban, urban-rural, etc.), it is difficult to make a statement on the various causes of reverse or return migration. However, looking into the census data (Table.5) on reasons for overall migration in India, one observes that employment opportunities in the case of men and marriage in

that employment opportunities in the case of men and marriage in the case of women figure as the most important reasons for the movement of people from one region to another. Moving with the migrating household is another important reason of migration.

Reasons for migration by sex (in percentages)*

Reason	Percentage		
	Female	Male	Total
Work/ Employment	03.2	37.6	14.7
Business	00.3	02.9	01.2
Education	01.3	06.2	03.0
Marriage	64.9	02.1	43.9
Moved after birth	04.8	10.5	06.7
Moved with household	18.8	25.1	20.9
Other	06.6	15.7	09.7
Total	100	100	100

Source: Registrar General and Census Commissioner, 2001c

* The data pertain to 2001 census of India excluding Jammu and Kashmir. The figures on migration are based on the criterion of the duration of stay up to 9 years.

According to a number of scholars, the scale and complexity of urban hierarchy in India will increase in the next two decades and the country will experience an increasingly urban future as a sign of development since the "scale of economies and benefits of concentration mean that in most respects urban living is comparatively efficient" (Dyson and Visaria 2004: 129).

Urban Poverty and Slums

One major consequence of the distortions in urban planning and development in India is the incidence of urban poverty and the proliferation of slums and squatters. The extent of vulnerability associated with living in slums and squatter settlements in Indian cities reflects the magnitude of urban inequality and poverty. According to the National Commission on Urbanisation, "the urban melting-pot has dissolved, to some extent, the ritual symbols of inequality, but

shelter environment. A large majority of the poor live in slums and *chawls* and are engaged in low-paid jobs or petty non-formal enterprises" (GOI 1988: 94).

Urban poverty and slums exist in both developed (urbanised) as well as less developed regions in India. This indicates that urban poverty and inequality are not the direct results of urbanisation but are related to the larger development process. The officially defined poverty trend based on the NSS (National Sample Survey) data indicates that the rate of urban poverty in India has been lower than that of rural poverty. In 1993-94 the poor constituted 32.8 per cent of the urban population as against 36.8 per cent of the rural population (Table 6). In 1999-2000 the figure was 24 per cent for the urban and 26.5 per cent for the rural population. This shows a decline in both rural and urban poverty rates during the period.

There are inter-state variations in the rate and trend of urban poverty in India. For instance, according to the NSS data urban poverty in the state of Orissa increased from 40.6 per cent in 1993-94 to 47.8 per cent in 1999-2000. Also, as the data from the NSS for the year 1999-2000 presented in Table 6 indicate, high rate of urban poverty (more than the national urban poverty rate) exists in more urbanised as well as less urbanised states. Urban poverty rate is higher than the national average in the more urbanised states of Maharashtra and Karnataka, and in the less urbanised states of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Uttar Pradesh. In a few states, viz. Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu, the rate of urban poverty is reported to be higher than that of rural poverty. While higher incidence of urban poverty in states with higher level of urbanisation like Maharashtra and Karnataka may indicate extreme forms of urban inequality and concentration of resources, high incidence of urban poverty in a less urbanised region points to the overall backwardness or lack of development of this region. The NSS data on the percentage of the very poor in India have reported similar findings. Some of the states like Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu have

recorded a higher percentage of very poor in urban areas than in rural areas (Radhakrishna et al. 2004). They confirm the phenomenon of inequality and unevenness in the processes of urbanisation and overall development.

Table 6
Percentage of rural and urban poor in the states of India
in 1993-94 and 1999-2000

State	1993-94		1999-2000	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
All-India	36.8	32.8	26.5	24.0
Andhra Pradesh	15.9	38.8	10.5	27.2
Arunachal Pradesh	41.4	05.8	23.4	05.0
Assam	45.3	08.0	40.2	07.2
Bihar	57.9	34.8	44.0	33.5
Goa	05.0	28.2	00.0	06.3
Gujarat	22.1	28.3	12.4	14.8
Haryana	28.3	16.4	07.4	10.0
Himachal Pradesh	30.3	09.3	07.5	04.6
Jammu & Kashmir	18.2	05.1	04.7	02.0
Karnataka	30.2	39.8	16.9	24.6
Kerala	25.4	24.3	09.4	19.9
Madhya Pradesh	40.7	48.1	37.2	38.6
Maharashtra	37.9	35.0	23.3	26.8
Manipur	19.2	06.9	14.1	00.5
Meghalaya	24.3	01.8	06.0	00.0
Mizoram	06.2	00.0	02.8	00.0
Nagaland	01.9	00.0	00.2	00.0
Orissa	49.8	40.6	47.8	43.5
Punjab	11.7	10.8	06.0	05.4
Rajasthan	26.4	31.0	13.4	19.4
Sikkim	31.3	01.0	21.7	04.8
Tamil Nadu	33.0	39.9	20.1	22.5
Tripura	23.3	06.0	16.7	01.4
Uttar Pradesh	42.4	35.1	31.0	30.7
West Bengal	41.2	23.0	31.7	14.7

Source: Radhakrishna et al., 2004: 3124

Slums

Lack of access to shelter and basic services is an indicator of relative deprivation and inequality. Degraded living environment in slums, squatter settlements and pavements, and the insecure tenure status of the squatters create the conditions or basis of vulnerability of the poor in the urban areas. Although it is difficult to find reliable data on the exact figure of the total slum population in urban areas of India, some independent studies have found that in the major cities of India, people living in slums and squatters together constitute about half or more of the total population of these cities. It was also found that in cities like Mumbai, Kolkata, Ahmedabad, Hyderabad, Ranchi, Indore and Lucknow the slum population has grown much faster and remained higher than the general population of these cities during 1981-1991 (Sengupta 2000: 35).

Census of India records only those slums that are legally recognised by the municipal authorities of the states even as there are a large number of unrecognised slums in almost all the towns and cities of India. The Slum Population Census of India 2001 shows that there is great variation in the number and percentage of slum population across towns in the different states in India reporting the existence of slums. However, in the large cities in India the percentage of slum population is significantly high. Out of the slum population of 42 million in 640 cities and towns reporting slums, about 17.7 million people or 41.6 per cent of the total slum population in the towns and cities reporting slums in the country live in the cities with population above one million. Increase in population is thus paralleled by the growth of slums.

However, the percentage of slum population varies widely also among the million plus cities. While Greater Mumbai has the highest percentage of slum population (54.1%), Patna is reported to have the lowest share (0.3%) of slum population among the million plus cities (Table 7). Such variation in the share of slum population in the total population of the different cities is due to the fact that the level of development and nature of activities are different in cities in India. Also, some cities may be better managed and the housing conditions in these cities may not be as appalling as in the others. While cities like Mumbai, Kolkata, Nagpur, Meerat and Faridabad provide

livelihood opportunities to the organised sector and millions of casual unorganised sector workers, in a city like Patna there may not be adequate economic opportunities to attract migrants. Similarly in a city like Bangalore there may be limited livelihood opportunities for unskilled workers or the city may be better managed in terms of housing and other amenities.

Table 7

Total population and percentage of slum population in million plus cities in India in 2001

City	Total population	Percentage of Slum Population
Greater Mumbai	11,978,450	54.1
Delhi	9,879,172	18.7
Kolkata	4,572,876	32.5
Chennai	4,343,645	18.9
Bangalore	4,301,326	10.0
Hyderabad	3,637,483	17.2
Ahmedabad	3,520,085	13.5
Surat	2,433,835	20.9
Kanpur	2,551,337	14.4
Pune	2,538,473	19.4
Jaipur	2,322,575	15.9
Lucknow	2,185,927	08.2
Nagpur	2,052,066	35.9
Indore	1,474,968	17.7
Bhopal	1,437,354	08.7
Ludhiana	1,398,467	22.5
Patna	1,366,444	00.3
Vadodara	1,306,227	14.2
Agra	1,275,134	09.5
Thane	1,262,551	27.8
Kalyan-Dombivli	1,193,512	02.9
Varanasi	1,091,918	12.6
Nasik	1,077,236	12.9
Meerat	1,068,772	44.1
Faridabad	1,055,938	46.5
Pimpri-Chinchwad	1,012,472	12.2
Haora	1,007,532	11.7
Total	73,345,775	24.1

Source: Registrar General and Census Commissioner, 2001d

Apart from poverty and slums, urban India faces several other social issues, such as crime and delinquency, ethnic and non-ethnic violence, drug addiction and homeless street children, and situation of insecurity to life and property. These problems affect not only the poor but also the other sections of the urban dwellers. However, urban poverty and slum dwelling remain as the stark manifestation of urban vulnerability, the product of the uneven and unplanned development of the urban India.

Urbanisation and Quality of Life

Despite numerous problems associated with cities in India, urbanisation occupies a place of its own in the country's development process. Cities raise hopes to millions of people in India even though agriculture is the mainstay for the majority. Based on the comparative analysis of the quality of urban and rural living, some scholars have argued that urban areas provide more opportunities for better quality of life. It has been observed that the indices of the physical quality of life, such as infant mortality and life expectancy have remained consistently higher for urban areas in the country since 1971. Health and educational facilities are more and much better in urban areas. They function more effectively in urban areas (Morris and Mcaplin 1982:61; Karkal and Rajan 1991).

In regard to the basic amenities, the situation of the urban households is much better than that of the rural households. Urban residents in India have better access to drinking water, sanitation and other facilities than rural residents (Table 8). There are a number of other factors such as employment opportunities and income, facility of organisational structures and freedom from the rigidities of the caste loyalties, that are likely to offer better social and economic life in the urban areas. From the development perspective, the chances of the urban areas for a relatively higher quality of life indicate not merely the "difference" between urban and rural ways of life, but the extent of the urban-rural "disparity". With the process of development the disparity has gradually widened over the years at both state and national levels in India (Sawant and Mhatre 2000: 111).

Table 8
Distribution of rural and urban households in India
by basic amenities (in percentages)

Basic Amenity	Rural	Urban	Total
House of good condition	45.0	64.0	50.3
Tap as source of drinking water	24.3	68.7	36.7
Drinking water within premises	28.7	65.4	39.0
Electricity	43.5	87.6	55.8
Latrine with water closet	07.1	46.1	18.0
Closed drainage	03.9	34.5	12.5
Kitchen facility	59.4	76.0	64.0
LPG as cooking fuel	05.7	48.0	17.5

Source: Registrar General and Census Commissioner, 2001e

Urban Development Policies

Urban development in India is essentially a state subject. However, at the national level the Urban Development Ministry deals with specific policies related to planning for urban development. The Ministry intervenes from time to time in the urban planning by formulating sector-specific policies. During the Fifth Five Year Plan, the first major national intervention in the urban affairs was through the promulgation of the Urban Land (Ceiling and Regulation) Act, 1976. Although the central government enacted the legislation, it was left to the states to implement it. During the eighties a host of urban development schemes, such as the integrated development of small and medium towns, poverty alleviation programmes, slum improvement, and community development programmes, were launched. The objectives of these policy steps were to regulate urban land, reduce the pressure on the large cities and alleviate urban poverty. Failure of these policies and programmes in effectively responding to the growing urban problems led to the setting up of the National Commission on Urbanisation in 1986. The Commission looked into almost all aspects of urban planning and development, and was critical

of any ad hoc and piecemeal approach to urban planning. While making many useful recommendations on specific aspects of urban development such as land and housing, it addressed some critical urban issues from the wider perspective of development. For example, on the issue of urban poverty, the Commission reported that it would be wrong to look into the problem of poverty in cities in isolation from the larger forces of social inequality and political economy. The relationship between modern and traditional sectors, the technical structure and social control of productive forces, the distribution of social goods and services "will have to be reconstructed thoroughly to bring the bulk of those who are poor and marginal today into the mainstream of economic and cultural life in India" (GOI, 1988:116).

During 1990s, the issue of local democracy and urban governance shot into prominence. In order to strengthen the local institutions at the bottom of the urban hierarchy, the Parliament of India passed the Constitution 74th Amendment Act in 1992. The act provided the broad enabling framework of democratic and participatory planning process at the local level and identified several areas of decentralised planning and devolution of power. Some of the functions listed in the act cover planning for economic and social development, regulation of land use and construction of buildings, urban planning, including town planning, and slum improvement and up-gradation. More importantly, the Constitution 74th Amendment Act clearly mentions the devolution of financial powers from the state government in order to strengthen the financial capacity of the local municipal bodies. The act also has made provision for the constitution of Ward Committees in municipalities with a population of more than 300000, Metropolitan Planning Committees and District Planning Committees for the preparation of various development plans at different levels.

Many have expressed doubts about the effectiveness of the act. One of the problems related to the act is that the local bodies generally lack the necessary capabilities to deal with the functions listed in the act. Some of these functions involve mobilisation of huge resources, which most local municipalities can hardly do. Thus, if at all there are some gains in the act, only a few large Corporations can actually benefit from it (Kundu 1999).

The present state of urban development in India is under the influence of global city regime. Cities like Mumbai, Bangalore and Hyderabad are trying to acquire the world city status by restructuring the city planning process. The primary aim, in this regard, is to attract as much global capital as possible. For example, the *Draft Regional Plan 1996-2011* of the Bombay Metropolitan Regional Development Authority (BMRDA), suggests an approach that would “facilitate increased investment by private sector and other developments, enable appropriate structural changes in the region’s economy and permit adoption of land-use policies that respond to market potential” (BMRDA 1995:12). The focus of the restructured planning now is on development of international finance and business centre, promotion of high tech, high value-added modern industries, special economic zone and so on. As a result, many old textile mills in Mumbai have been sold off to private parties to allow redevelopment. Several acres of mill land are reported to have been released for this purpose. In 2004, thousands of families settled along the banks of Yamuna in Delhi were reportedly evicted as the land was to be converted into a promenade. In the last two decades such mass evictions have been part of urban redevelopment plans of all Indian metros to facilitate the growth of real-estate market (Sen, K. M. 2006). All these have severely affected the life and existence of many of the working class people in the cities. This is the latest scenario dominating urban development in India, perhaps in many parts of the world too.

Conclusion

Urbanisation is an inevitable force of development and change throughout the world. There is, however, a fundamental difference between urbanisation in the developed world and urban growth in the developing countries like India. The process of urbanisation in India reflects, at best, the uneven pattern of the overall social and economic development and, at worst, a high degree of urban inequality. In India rapid urban expansion is taking place in a predominantly rural society. In developed countries majority of the people live in urban areas. In India only less than one-third of the country’s population live in the several towns and cities. The urban residents in India as a whole enjoy better living conditions and quality of life compared to their rural

counterparts. Rural-urban disparity in the levels of the quality of living in India has remained high since the independence. If urbanisation is at all considered an indication of development, then the fruits of development are going to benefit only the urban proportion of population in the country. The past and present trends in the proportion of urban population show that it will take years for India to achieve the level of half the population in the country obtaining the living conditions available in urban areas. The current scenario of urbanisation is not the kind of development that aims to improve the life-chances of the majority, if not all, of rural and urban population.

There are also regional disparities in urban development in India. The process of urban growth is not uniform across different regions in the country. Some states are more urbanised while many states have very low levels of urbanisation. In addition, a large proportion of urban growth is concentrated in a few large cities. This suggests uneven spread and high concentration of resources and opportunities in the large urban centres.

Another issue related to urbanisation-induced development is whether the urban opportunities are available to all or the majority of urban dwellers. A large number of urban citizens, particularly in large cities live in slums and squatters under degraded living conditions. A significant proportion of these people also live below the poverty line. The phenomena of slum and urban poverty are increasingly becoming an integral part of the urbanisation process in India. The intra-urban disparity in most developing regions like India is no less appalling than the rural-urban disparity.

There are a host of urban problems that are making urban life in general difficult; crime, environmental pollution and overcrowding are a few to name. Adequate drinking water facility and power supply are almost beyond the means of any municipal authority in India. The flood disaster that regularly hits the major cities like Mumbai is the grim reminder of the consequences of poor infrastructure and unplanned city development. The policy response to urban development includes some general legislative measures undertaken by the central government and sector-specific programmes launched at the city level. As the city grows, so its problems multiply. Increasing pressures on the local municipal finance to cope with the requirements of urban planning have forced the government to seek help from many

international donor agencies. Under the influence of globalisation, competition among large metropolises to attract foreign and domestic capital in order to become world-class cities is on the rise. The cityward planning and development has, however, not made any significant impact either on rural-urban disparity or on the problems of slum and poverty within the city. Urban issues are part of the larger development process in the country. Urban development cannot remain confined to technical and professional solution to the problems of city and urbanisation. It should be situated in the wider context of development, which includes rural development as well as the development of urban disadvantaged groups.

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