

Beyond the 'desire of the city' Urban Boundaries & Inequality

Supriya Kukreja*

School of Planning and Architecture, Bhopal, India

Abstract

» Urban spaces make some people into strangers while others are not noticed at all«

Steve Pile's (1999: 18)

Cities are born, and grow throughout ages; they deform under the assaults of life - an evolution more or less serene is disturbed by the repercussion of successive political-social-economic invasions. Urban processes, spatial transformations, urbanization, segregation, deterioration into slums, gentrification, pollution, and human migratory movements indicate upon the social issues facing us today. The depiction of different urban zones, local areas or neighbourhoods is rarely a matter of drawing lines on a page: it now creates social categories, sets apart communal groups, and demarcates public problems to what David Harvey (1973) refers to as the systematic 'urbanization of injustice'.

Cities depicting these diversities are not only an urban fact but also a principal urban value. The question of how physical places with imbalanced distribution of civic resources and prejudiced land holdings pullulate often appears in urban analysis. How do cities as diverse, distended and desecrated expect safety, survival and future coherence for long?

The author tries to focus in brief on the transformation of space in a city approached with problem of urban migration. Medium sized cities in India are perpetuating vulnerable spaces in wrath of boundaries and inequality. Most crucial to understand of urban equation today is 'not that cities contain a lot of people and pack them in tightly but that cities need to rethink-revive and organize the differences between them for their future sustenance.'

Keywords: Urban Planning, Urban transformations, Internal Migration, Urban Poverty, Social equity

Corresponding Author: e-mail - ar.supriyakukreja@gmail.com

Introduction – India THEN and NOW

Borders of partition uprooted over 10 million people in 1947 and remain the greatest social upheavals post independence in India. Massacre and migration due to religious demography represented a human tragedy of enormous proportions. 1950 hence, the country started to reform the laws that guided the customary division practises. Among them the legislative rules on matters such as abolition of untouchability, the removal of caste restrictions on entry to temples, the ending of interdictions on inter-caste marriage, the prohibition of polygamy, and the recognition that women had equal rights of inheritance were substantial for its immediate communal life. Sixty years hence, until today the country's political perceptions and social realities encounter the above insecurities multiplied in various forms. The democratic constitution held promise of eradication of the caste system and communities of the past and venture it into a nation of equality, only to find it more incapacitated for future.

India is a population of 1.21 billion people in 2011 (17.5% percent of the world population) with an estimated 29.8% of Indians living below the country's national poverty line.¹²³ A 2013 UN report reveals India to have a greater share of the worlds poorest than it did thirty years ago accounting for one-third - 400 million people.¹²⁴ However still, India's income per capita rank at 149 in the world and since 1991, India's GDP has quadrupled and is among the top 10 nations in terms of foreign exchange reserves.¹²⁵

Baffling are the statistics which point us to paradox of India's development together with its growth-inequality. Though the country enjoyed rapid economic growth post liberalization, the mass population did not benefit from the acquired wealth and registered an increasing inequality and persistent poverty. *India's citizens are poor and impoverished yet its global profile is one of rising economic and political power* (Nayar and Paul 2003). Evidencing to above irony of growing inequality is the understanding of uneven distribution of the country's wealth. This crisis is leading to a widening divide – and resulting into an increasingly violent struggle for survival.

Observing the urbanization pattern, this disparity manifolds its impact on the Indian cities and there living. With the increase from 27.8 percent in 2001 to 31.16 percent in 2011, the growth of Indians living in urban areas is rendering the cities imbalanced.¹²⁶ Further polarization shows urban inequality in India is much higher than rural inequality. Per-capita income-based Gini coefficient has moved up 13% for rural India — 0.38 in 1995-06 vis-à-vis 0.41 in 2004-05 — and as much as 15% in urban India — 0.39 vis-à-vis 0.43. At the all-India level, the Gini coefficient has moved up from 0.43 (1995-96) to 0.45 (2004-05).^{127 128}

Nonetheless, the migration to urban areas continues while hugely altering the demographic makeup of the cities and actively participating in extreme social segregation. The desire of the city allures 4% per year estimating over 15 million persons every year revealing India's urban population growth from 62 million in 1951 to 377 million in 2011 according to the government

¹²³ Census of India 2011, Government of India, <http://censusindia.gov.in/>

¹²⁴ India has one third of world's poorest, says World Bank. The Telegraph. 18 Apr 2013

¹²⁵ How the Indian economy changed in 1991-2011. The Economic Times. Jul 24, 2011

¹²⁶ Statistics by Minister of state in the Urban Development minister Saugata Roy. The Economic Times. Aug 22, 2012

¹²⁷ A Gini of zero denotes absolute equality, while a value of 1 (or 100 on the percentile scale) means absolute inequality

¹²⁸ "Income inequality up both in rural and urban areas". The Economic Times. Shailesh Dobhal & Bhanu Pande, TNN Feb 7, 2008

of India 2001 Census data. (Fig. 1 & Fig. 2) Thus population growth and rapid urbanization indicates larger and denser cities with increased pressure on civic structure such as water supply, sewerage, drainage, public transport and also availability of housing.

While the recent UN report points to two thirds of India with no access to sanitation, the country also has huge shortage of 24.71 million housing. Highlighting the case of Mumbai, India's biggest city with a population of 20 million - almost 60% of the city's lives in slums, and at least one third of the city's population is without access to clean drinking water. Thus, growth and escalation of urban poverty and inequality in a city is creating impermeable boundaries of urbanization of injustice.

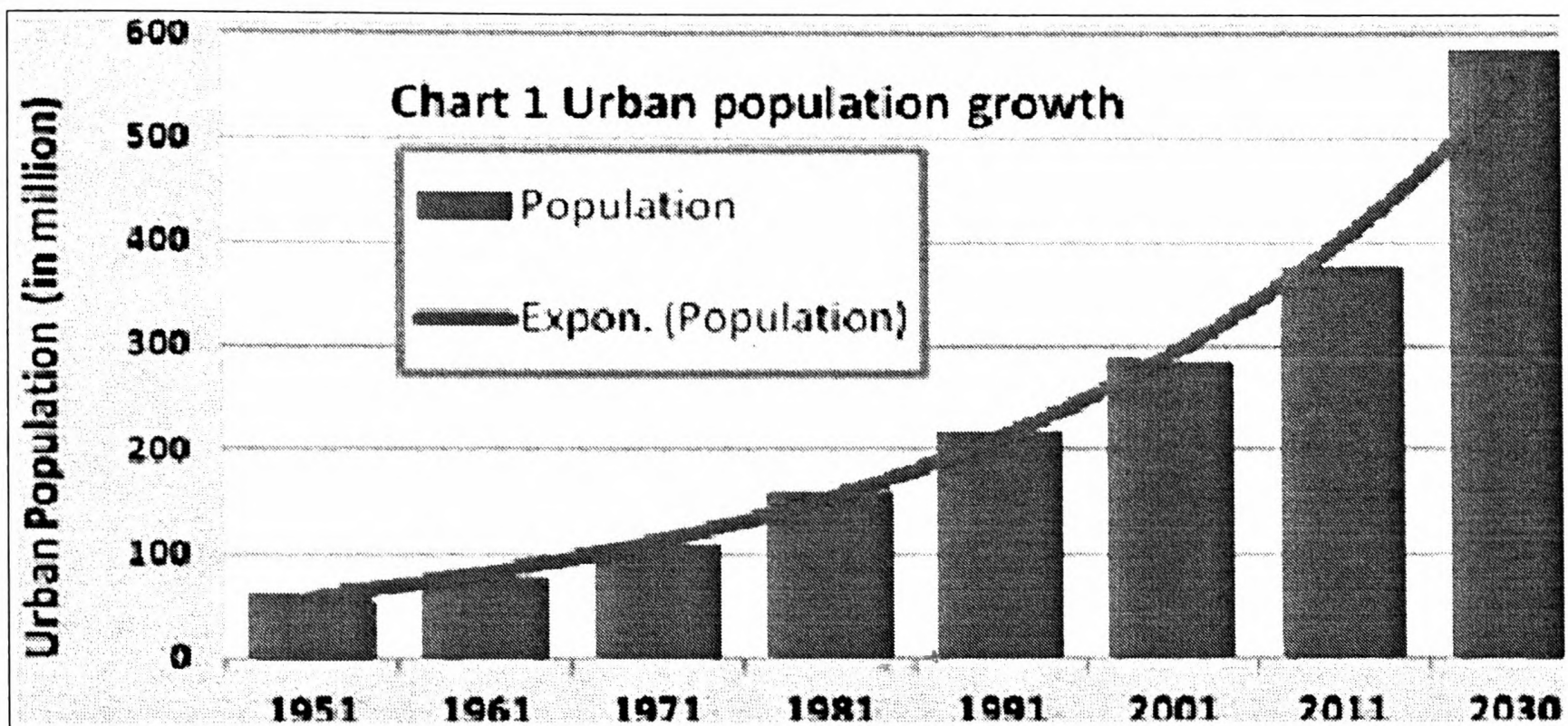


Fig. 1: Urban Population growth
 Source: Census of India 2001

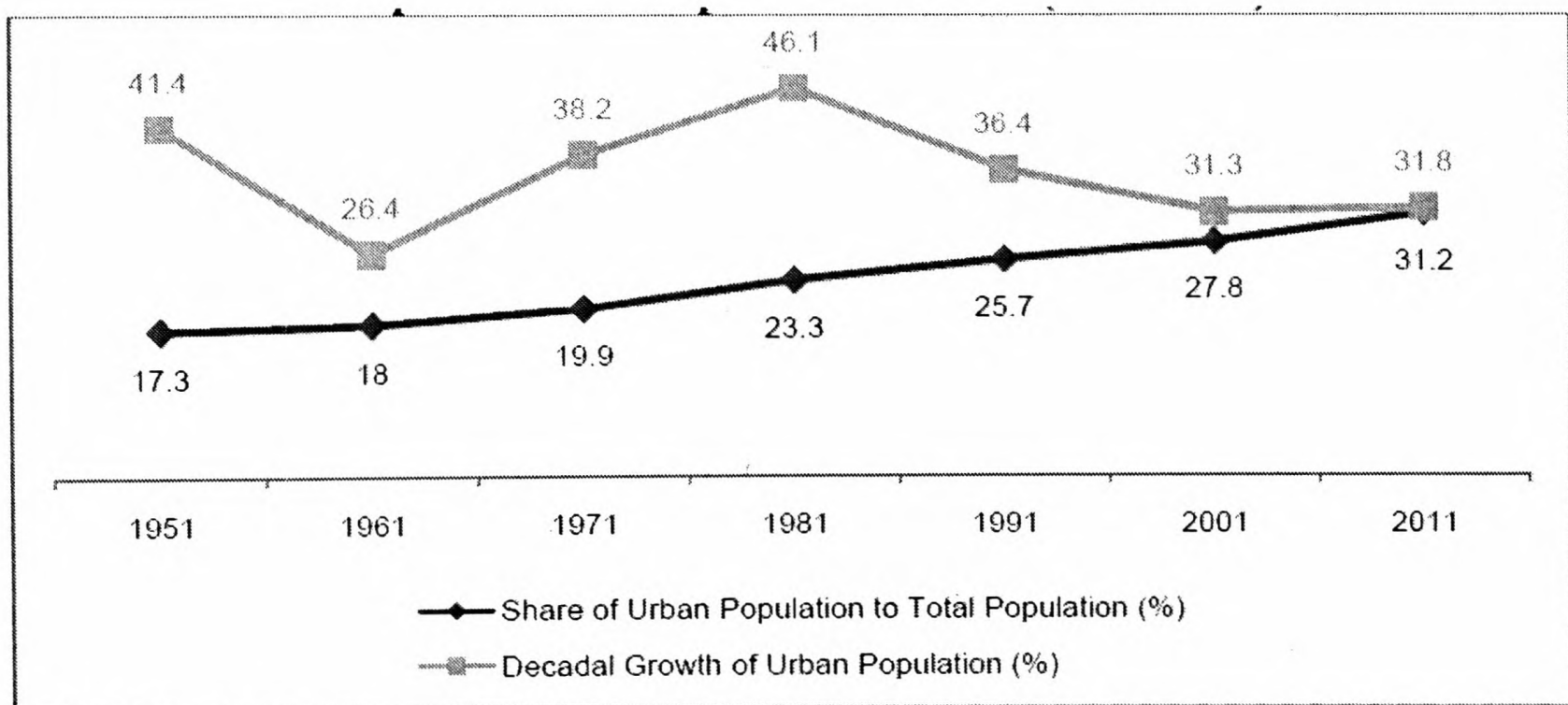


Fig. 2: The urbanization trend in India (1951-2011)
 Source: Census of India from 1951-2011; 2011 data from the provisional tables

Large and Small Differences - STATE OF DISTRESS

The traditional city seems to have transformed itself in the wake of the social, economic and cultural consequences of large scale migration, decline of organised labour and growth of the precariat and the crises that are shaking the global capitalist system. Phases of development, modernization and mass-urbanization have rendered ever greater densities of population vulnerable. With divided economic zones and formation of diverse social spaces gaining stratum, cities today raise issues of disparity and disintegration in heightened and often visible ways. *India's multilayered diversity and cultural heterogeneity creates a further potential for different axes of inequalities—religion, caste, income, gender, age, tribe, and region.*

Though many histories refer to city life - that is held to thrive where there is a density of different kinds of people and a diversity of uses¹²⁹. Community mix is not simply a cultural but a *functional* feature of urbanism as a way of life. It entails a range of occupations, of incomes, of building type, age and tenure. The question of how physical places relate to discrimination of these diversities is what often appears in urban analysis. The depiction of different urban zones, local areas or neighbourhoods is rarely a matter of drawing lines on a page: it now creates social categories, sets apart communal groups, and demarcates public problems. They lead to deeper transformation in establishment of structure and social order. Hence, the 'social mix' has now become a complex matter of social inequality, as social and economic distance polarizes different groups of residents within urban areas.

Patterns of-inequality and lines of exclusion have scored beyond the common spaces of cities. Disproportion is generating a kind of 'stain' on the urban landscape, marking out different areas; which go beyond their economic functions or physical conditions. As put by Robert Park (1967a: 6); In the course of time, every section and quarter of the city takes on something of the character and qualities of its inhabitants. Each separate part of the city is inevitably stained with the peculiar sentiments of its population. These sentiments germinate violence when approached with discrimination and resulting with peripheral and interstitial and territories in cities worldwide.

Who can address the problems of emergent inequalities and poverty in spatial divisions? How can we neutralize the segregation that is making increasingly difficult for low-income or marginalised groups to find decent housing at affordable prices? How do we make our cities sustainable when urban sprawl and spread of low density settlements is one of the main threats to our planning development?

These questions and the possibilities of addressing problems of can be better answered if we uncover the cities of their existing scenarios of boundaries and unequal divisions. Since, there are limits, however, to how much difference modern cities can take and these limits need to be sought with solution- sooner for their endurance.

¹²⁹ Barthes, R. (1997) 'Semiology and the urban', in N. Leach (ed.) *Riithin'king Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 166-:-72.

Urban boundaries and Inequality – an example of INTERNAL MIGRATION

Both illiteracy and slavery help predict inequality today. For nearly six decades now and with the end of colonial rule, some states in India still own their basic livelihood under the powerful hands of wealthier capitalist state. Internal Migration accounts for 30% (309 million) of total population of India (Census 2001), i.e. an increase of around 37% from 1991(226 million) and 100% since 1971(159 million). (Fig. 3) It has become one of the most important spatial phenomena in urban areas contributing to high level of urban population growth. Two major reasons of movement point towards the unavailability of employment opportunities and the lack of basic life amenities. As the case with most Indian cities, the paper establishes an observational study by taking an example of medium sized city with the problem of migration and its outcomes of deteriorating urban space quality and living. The constraints of multifaceted reasons of looking at a sociological problem in a city, the author focuses on the internal migration as an issue of spatial quality and proposes restructuring of the model of construction with affordability and awareness.

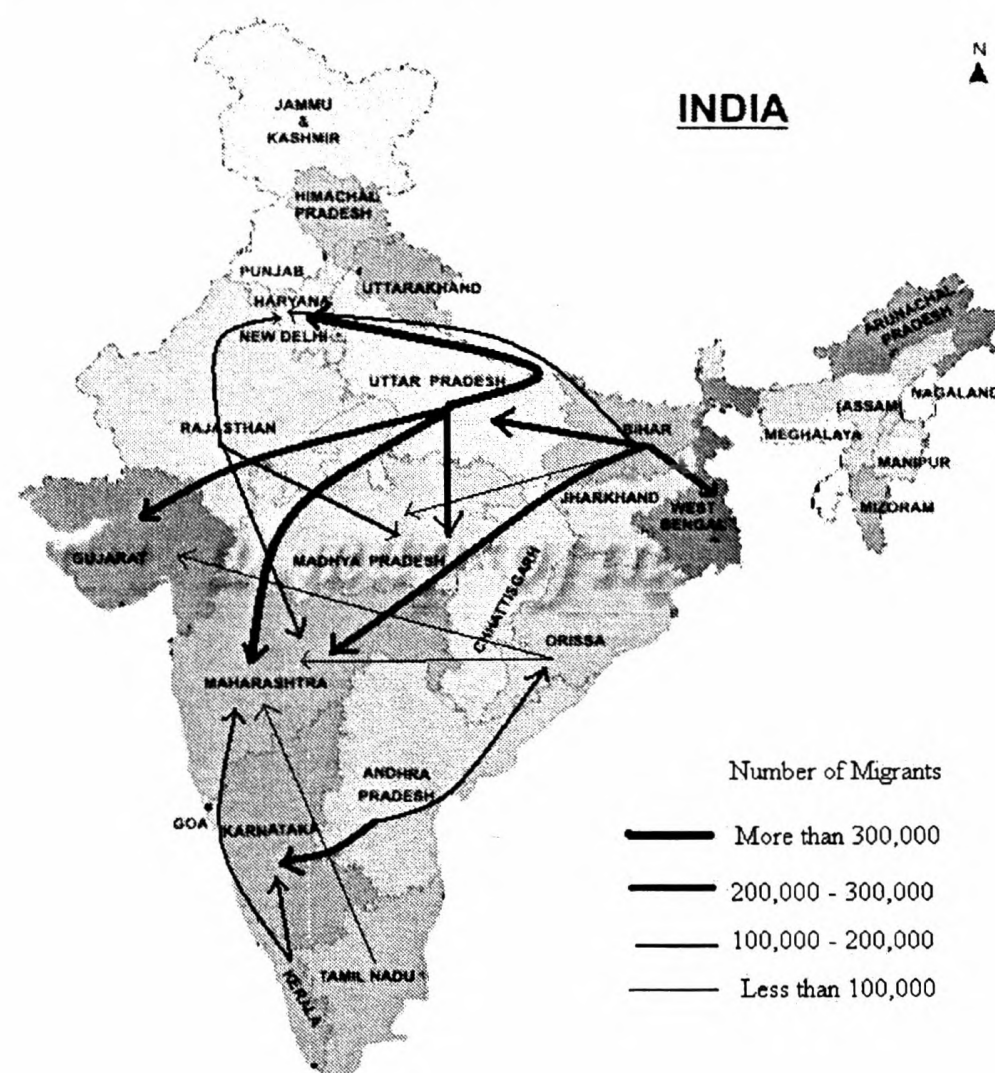


Fig. 3: Inter-state migration flows between some major states of India (1991-2001)
Source: Singh, 2011

Case Study: - Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh

Centrally located, the city of Bhopal - the capital city of Madhya Pradesh with a population of 2.36 million in an area of 697 sq km¹³⁰ accounts the highest of 80% urban population and also accounts for highest urban poverty ratio among all Indian states. Bhopal is a medium sized rapid growing city constituted under the Y class city.¹³¹

¹³⁰ According to current master plan, the municipality covers 697 square kilometres.

¹³¹ The Classification of Indian cities comprises a ranking system used by the Government of India to allocate House Rent Allowance (HRA) to public servants employed in different cities in the country.

Ruled from 1819-1926 under the reign of Muslim women rulers the foundation of the city was laid and developed in the older part of Bhopal. Post independence as geographic spread shifted to the newer parts of the city the old city has been neglected of most of its economic and infrastructural developments. Setting up an administrative headquarters, the geographic higher parts of the city started to develop into government settlements. Comprising of uneven elevation and five hills within its boundaries, the elevated Idgah hills and Shyamala hills in the northern region, katara hills in south region and Arera hills in the central region are occupied by city administration and higher official urban residents.

With service opportunities created at all minor levels of rank employees and other domestic help, the city attracted huge influx of migration labour from in and around the states. Proximity to workplace resulted in informal settlements and radial development along the territorial slopes. Significant to the region, these gradual slopes germinated into widespread occupancy pockets. Planned for administrative settlement but lack of planning for these urban poor, Bhopal witnessed a massive growth of notified and non-notified slums in the last twenty years resulting to concentration of the 40% slums within the city. According to a Situational Analysis of Poverty Pockets in Bhopal carried out by Water Aid, UN Habitat and Bhopal Municipal Corporation in 2006, Bhopal has a slum population of 1,28,170 households living in 380 slums¹³².

A primary difference between local and national level inequality is that the local inequality is driven to a large extent to the area's occupational character, decision of people and the manner in which cities are governed. Above observation supports the chief characteristics of "the Dual City" (Sassen, 1992) - the rich own land and move money throughout the formal economic system while the poor, independently and outside of these processes, scratch out a living anyway they can through unregulated, often illegal activities of the informal economy. In a nutshell, the dual cities model posits that urban poverty today is propagated by the same forces that simultaneously create prosperity at the high end of urban living. Benefits and subsidies flow upward; as unregulated sources of cheap labor for the lowest forms of work with no benefits, no career development, and no job security.

These social groups and migrant labor struggle to seek out space in the urban setting to proliferate themselves while the consumerist and civil interests seek to minimize their public visibility. The spatial practice followed by urban poor to multiply exposes a challenge to the planned city spaces, disrupting the intended development by the authorities. Contesting their survival in the urban network with limited or no basic resources like clean drinking water, sanitation and sewage network etc these marginalized social groups live life "in-between spaces" divided by boundaries of visible/invisible walls.

Hence, the city thrives to be prime site for the germination of difference, division, separation, or repulsion. These accelerated distinctions further pushed these poverty pockets to the periphery of the city leading to a wider urban sprawl. Urban sprawl is a specific form of land takes, resulting from the spread of low-density settlements, and is one of the main challenges that cities face. It is very difficult to control, as the land being consumed by sprawl often lies outside the cities' administrative areas. Uncontrolled high volume of internal migration today contributes to ever growing sprawl, overcrowding, inequality and poverty, traffic congestion in the inner city, pressure on infrastructure, unemployment and housing shortage. (Fig. 4 & Fig. 5)

Cities are classified as X, Y and Z, on the basis of their population, as recommended by the Sixth Central Pay Commission in 2008.

[^] http://finmin.nic.in/the_ministry/dept_expenditure/miscellaneous/hracca.pdf

¹³² Municipal Action Plan for Poverty Reduction (MAPP), Municipal Corporation, Bhopal, 2006

Implementation of Pro- poor reforms under Central Initiatives introduced in Bhopal were –

- 1) National Urban Housing and Habitat Policy 2007 (10-15% of land in every new public/private housing project or 20-25% of FAR/FSI whichever is greater reserved for EWS & LIG)
- 2) JNNURM, 2005 (housing need for urban poor, slum up-gradation, provision of infrastructure etc.)
- 3) 11th 5-Yr. Plan (poverty eradication and pro-poor governance with the involvement of poor in policy making, planning, implementation and monitoring)

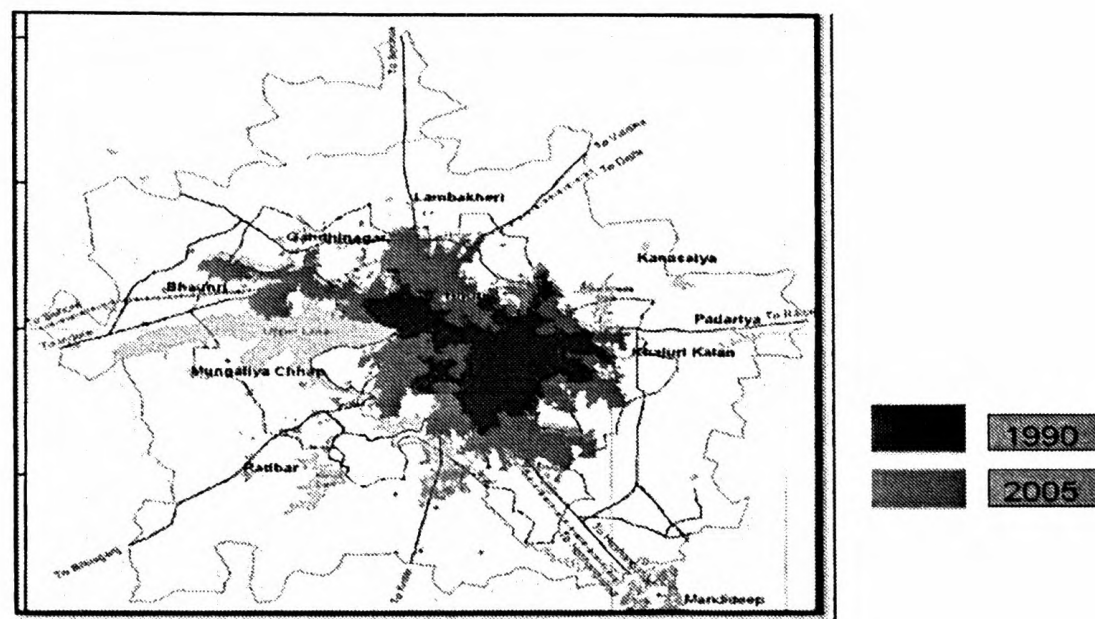


Fig. 4: Urban Sprawl of Bhopal (1990-2005)
 Source: City Development Plan, Bhopal



Fig. 5: Extension of Urban sprawl under Bhopal Municipality (2012)
 Source: Dainik Bhaskar, Bhopal Edition, 15 February, 2012

Also, the state initiated reservation of 15% of developed area for Economic Weaker Sections (EWS) and Low Income Groups LIG most of which embezzle in the handle of private capitalist land owners. Nothing seems to change or alter the problem of providing aids and amenities to the poverty pockets and upgrading the living standards. While one side of the road is the elite market area the opposite faces the sight of open defecation each morning. Half the city traverses its way through the internal city slums with overcrowded roads, encroached footpaths and deteriorating temporary shelters. Any further or proposed construction in the

city evacuates the existing slum site and pushes these people to relocate around or on footpaths. The case is not peculiar to Bhopal; rather most of the Indian cities vacillate today in their survival and existence. Urban poverty in India is large and widespread. The shape cities are taking at present is an identifying factor to the prime sociological problem ahead of us in India. With accelerating deterioration rate and with little or no hope of improvement, the cities are pushing further into darkness of their endurance. With numerous government schemes implemented, how successful have they been in catering to the urban poor still remains a real question?

Conclusion – The future of the present: RETAINED DIVERSITY

Cities remain to be lucrative to massive migrant influx for the reason of its better employment opportunities, fascination of enhanced per capita income with superior educational and living prospect. Hence, there is marginal elimination expected of the socio-economic divide and inequality. However, certain measures can be taken to solve the issue and the same can be achieved through Government intervention in more controlled capacity. *Migration should form the central concern in city planning, and the city development agenda should seek to include and integrate migrants politically, economically, socially, culturally and spatially.* (UNESCO, 2011)

Good housing conditions and infrastructure are vital of making a city and its amassment affable and liveable. The biggest challenge for these cities is to operate proper integration strategies for the less qualified social groups and up-gradation of its slums. Social polarization and spatial segregation have made it increasingly difficult for the marginalised population to find affordable housing and living amenities thus pushing them only in darker squalors. The gentrification of city centres and the increasing cost of housing make it increasingly difficult for a number of people to find decent or reasonably priced housing.

Government's weak planning regulations and its enforcements are common place in our country making way for the private interests to manoeuvre rapid developments with short term profit logic in which the mass public interest is not valued. Privatization of housing estates and mass construction companies build blindly ignoring the constraints and norms of architectural quality, land use or possible master plans. They further breed grounds for visible social segregation that both sell for the reason of similar occupancy status and class or stringent gated boundaries and promise of superior living amenities. A thorough mixed use of housing typology, commercial and residential, public and private, urban and open space is central to a methodical master planning.

Flourishing and active small and medium-sized cities are vital for the sustenance of their own urban inhabitants and surrounding rural and marginalized population sectors. They act as facilitator for balanced territorial development by avoiding surrounding rural depopulation and keeping urban drift in control. Newer model of governance is crucial in understanding these problems and finding solutions.

- Urban development vision to cities of tomorrow has to adopt a proportionate sustainable model of cohesive distribution.
- Restore and reorient moderately the role of public sector institutions like housing boards and development authorities to focus on housing the urban poor. Traditionally involved with providing affordable housing to EWS/LIG, these agencies need to participate in public-private partnership with capability of achieving shared visions.

- State governments to acquire land at appropriate locations, accessible to basic infrastructure and transportation facilities and also create land banks that could be used for the creation of future urban regeneration.
- A strong community-based, people-friendly and transparent mechanism should be put in place and enforced in action and spirit.
- Private sectors also to be provided with cross-subsidization opportunities for development of social and affordable housing to encourage more improvement within fixed tenure and timeframe.
- Government to provide extensive capacity building support for technical, financial and legal aspects of affordable housing delivery
- Formal and informal sectors to cooperate in order to guarantee rational spatial development and a proficient use of resources.

Beside partial involvement in reviving the government social housing boards, government should become an influential facilitator by framing policies, implementing them, monitoring them and penalizing the offenders.

- Strongly implement construction of new houses for the poor on the land parcels which have been earmarked under the National Urban Housing and Habitat Policy 2007, monitor the same diligently.
- To supervise the land-use, area norms, architectural quality and standardization of materials and products for satisfactory outcome of housing typology.
- Provision of guaranteed loan assistance to afford rehabilitation to the EWS/LIG groups.
- Allotment terms should be extremely competitive and affordable to the target groups. A robust method to be used for its lending.
- And even stricter actions for tracking observation of common practice i.e. – to control the rehabilitated groups in moving back to slums by renting there accommodations to earn extra income.

Lines of division mercilessly cut through cities. Within wider political, economical and cultural regulations, the cities merely act as a platform of these dissected lines. But urban spaces on the other hand transform the entire operation of these objectives with measured and quantified, as well invisible and symbolic boundaries, which operate with local knowledge and social meanings. Communities and neighbourhoods are generators of constructive structural, cultural, economic and political survivals along with healthy spatial conjuncture of human society.

References

- Barthes, R. (1997) 'Semiology and the urban', in N. Leach (ed.) *Riithin'king Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 166--72.

- European Commission — Directorate General for Regional Policy, *Cities of tomorrow - Challenges, visions, ways forward*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. 2011, viewed on 10 July 2013.
- Harvey, D. (1973) *Social justice and the City*. London: Edward Arnold. *Johns Hopkins studies in urban affairs Policy Studies in Employment and Welfare, No. 18*. Johns Hopkins University Press
- Jacobs, J. (1961) *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Modern Library.
- Joseph, L. (2008), *Finding Space Beyond Variables: An Analytical Review of Urban Space and Social Inequalities*, *Spaces for Difference: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 1(2), Department of Education, UC Santa Barbara, Permalink: <http://www.escholarship.org/uc/item/3tz160nq>.
- Kundu, A. (2007) *Migration and Urbanisation in India in the Context of Poverty Alleviation*, viewed on 15 July 2013, http://www.networkideas.org/ideasact/jun07/Beijing_Conference_07/Amitabh_Kundu.pdf.
- Park, R. E. (1967a [1925J]). *The city: suggestions for the investigation of human behaviour in the urban environment'*, in R E. Park et al. (eds) *The City*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 1-46.
- Park R. E. (1969) "*Human Migration and the Marginal Man.*" *The Classic Essays on the Culture of Cities*. Ed. Richard Sennett. New York: Appleton- Century-Crofts. pp. 131-142.
- Sassen, S. (1992) "*The informal Economy.*" *Dual city: restructuring New York*, John H. Mollenkopf, Manuel Castells. Russell Sage Foundation. pp. 79-103.
- Sassen, S. (2000) *The new inequalities within Cities*. Thousand Oaks Calif.: Pine Forge Press. Singh, D.P. (2009), *Regional Inequality, Poverty and Migration*, Urban Poverty Report, New Delhi.
- Singh, V. K., Kumar, A, Singh, R.D., and Yadava, K.N.S. (2011), *Changing Pattern of Internal Migration in India: Some Evidences from Census Data*, *International Journal of Current Research*, Vol. 33, Issue, 4, pp.289-295, April, 2011.
- UN-HABITAT's Global Urban Observatory, (2007/2008), *State of the world cities, Urban Inequalities: Regional Trends*, United Nations, viewed on 12 July 2013
<http://www.rrojasdatabank.info/statewc08092.2.pdf>