

Empowering Poor by Leveraging Physical Planning

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INTRODUCTION

Poverty remains the greatest curse ever perpetuated on humanity and human beings on this planet earth. Majority of growth and developmental ills and maladies facing human settlements have genesis in the existence of poverty. Poverty has numerous connotations and existence of multiple implications for human living and quality of life. Major implications are –

- Poverty invariably leads to lowering the human dignity.
- Poverty is known to adversely impact and compromise with the quality of life.
- Poverty is known to be promoter of criminalisation in the society.
- Poverty degrades and makes human beings helpless and hopeless.
- Poverty adversely impacts the human psyche and mental health.
- Poverty makes human beings face exclusion from society and community.
- Poverty lowers the capacity and capability of individual / family to become a better human beings/social unit.
- Poverty marginalises the human capacity to take care and manage basic human needs, essential for human living.
- Poverty invariably lands human beings in the slums in search for appropriate shelter.
- Poverty transforms and makes human- inhumane.
- Poverty negates the sense of social, physical and economic values in human living.
- Majority of crimes/criminals in society have their roots embedded in poverty.

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- Poverty and development remain inversely related.
- Poverty and education are also negatively co-related.
- Poverty and health remain anti-thesis to each other.
- Drugs and human trafficking have its genesis in prevailing pattern of poverty.
- Poverty turns and makes human being a liability instead of asset for the society.
- Personal hygiene remains divorced when human beings are faced with poverty.

Factors causing Poverty

Poverty is, primarily and essentially, a human problem. It follows humanity like a shadow. Accordingly, it has dedicated origin and destination. Poverty can be caused by numerous factors. Poverty may be by outcome of where one is born or due to the circumstances, environment and place in which one is placed which are known to cause poverty. Majority of factors causing/perpetuating poverty remain beyond human controls. The factors are:

- Poverty can be caused by nature- *nature-led*;
- It can also be the outcome of community in which man is born- *community-led*;
- Poverty can also be the outcome of the family to which one belongs- *family-led*;
- It can also be the outcome of the caste to which one belongs- *caste-led*;
- It can also be caused by the neglect of the place where one lives *place-led*;
- Poverty is also caused by conflicts/riots between nations and communities- *conflict-led*;
- Few nations/states are known for their poverty due to low level of development/resources- *Nation/state-led*;
- Poverty can also be the outcome of adverse circumstances in which one is forced into- *Circumstances-led*; and
- Planning is also known to be responsible for causing poverty among the human beings – *Planning-led*.

Different forms of Poverty

Generally, poverty is understood and linked to lack of adequate financial resources needed for meeting the basic essentials required for human beings including food, clothing and shelter. But poverty has numerous other connotations including; poverty of thoughts, poverty of ideas, poverty of action, poverty to experiment/innovate/ explore; poverty of leadership, poverty of networking, poverty to co-operate and collaborate, etc. These typologies have their own role in perpetuating poverty on the masses and communities. Accordingly, poverty of any kind has its adverse implications on human beings.

Empowering Poor through Urban Planning

Looking at the entire global context, it can be observed that poverty remains widespread, cutting across all man-made boundaries. It is not a local phenomenon but a curse adversely impacting all nations. As already defined, large number of factors are involved in causing and supporting poverty and as long as this poverty is there, humanity cannot be at peace and planet Earth cannot become sustainable and achieving SDGs will be a distant dream. Accordingly, it is important that all nations should pool their resources, come on the same platform to co-operate, collaborate and evolve rational and realistic strategies to eradicate poverty. Eliminating poverty should be the one point agenda, which should be pursued vigorously and sincerely by all nations. However, it needs to be appreciated that poor should not be treated as a liability but as an asset, which has lot of potential and capacity to contribute to the local/national economy and employment, when fully exploited.

Poverty continues to be undefined in absolute terms and remains dynamic, ever evolving, ever devolving, never static and never finite. Despite the fact that India, as a nation is developing rapidly and its economy is growing fast, poverty still remains a major challenge. According to an International Monetary Fund paper, extreme poverty, defined by the World Bank as living on US 1.9\$ less than 2 USD in Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) terms in India, was as low as 0.8 per cent in 2019 and the country managed to keep it at that level in 2020 despite the unprecedented COVID-19 outbreak. According to World Bank, extreme poverty has reduced by 12.3 per cent between 2011 and 2019 from 22.5 per cent in 2011 to 10.2 per cent in 2019. A working paper of the bank said rural poverty declined from 26.3 per cent in 2011 to 11.6 per cent in 2019. The decline in urban areas was from 14.2 per cent to 6.3 per cent during the same period. The poverty level in rural and urban areas went down by 14.7 and 7.9 percentage points, respectively. According to United Nations Development Programme

administrator Achim Steiner, India lifted 271 million people out of extreme poverty in a 10-year time period from 2005-2006 to 2015-2016. A 2020 study from the World Economic Forum found, "Some 220 million Indians sustained on an expenditure level of less than Rs 32/ day – the poverty line for rural India – by the last headcount of the poor in India in 2013. (As per Wikipedia). According to Global MPI Reports 2019 and 2020, 21.9 per cent of the population was poor in the India where the number of poor were pegged at 269.8 million. According to World Poverty Clock in 2021, roughly six per cent or 86,799,498 (86.8 million) of the Indian population is living in poverty. Accordingly, challenge of poverty facing India, as a nation, remains both formidable and well pronounced to be tackled on priority.

Role of urban planning in causing poverty has never been realistically, rationally and objectively studied, understood, appreciated and analysed. It is generally understood in the planning parlance that planned development being people centric, invariably leads to promoting universal public good and focus on achieving and promoting improved human living. But looking objectively at the the manner in which urban planning is viewed, practiced and made operational, it can be seen and observed that Urban planning, as a process and approach, has major role to play in aggravating poverty in the urban context. Current urban planning practices, tools and methodologies invariably are based on catering to riches of the society and exclusion of the marginalised sections of the society. Accordingly, it will be appropriate that existing approach to urban planning is both critically and objectively reviewed, revised and redefined to involve and empower the poor in urban settlements. Accordingly urban planning should revolve around and should lead to:

- ***Eliminating Poverty:*** All urban development policies and programmes evolved at national, state and local levels, must remain poverty-centric and should aim at minimising the challenges faced by the poor and empowering them in the urban space.
- ***Promoting Co-operative cities:*** Cities must be planned on co-operative basis to create joint ownerships for all the citizens so as to eliminate the monopoly of urban resources, facilities and amenities by few elites/riches in the city.
- ***Making Urban Planning poor centric:*** Unfortunately, poor have faced exclusion in the urban development process despite constituting substantial portion of urban population. This has invariably led to making urban planning and

development irrational and illogical for majority of the urban settlements. Making poor people an integral part of city planning and development process while preparing Master plans/Development Plans/Local area plans shall help in understanding, and providing all basic amenities, services and spaces essentially needed by the poor, for making both their living and work qualitative. This approach to urban planning, besides minimising poverty will go a long way in achieving the universal objectives of planned development.

- ***Earmarking dedicated Commercial space:*** Earmarking, acquiring and developing adequate dedicated commercial space for the urban poor to do business by evolving and defining appropriate norms and standards, will help them to contribute to the employment and economy of the city on a large scale.
- ***Earmarking dedicated Residential space:*** Earmarking, acquiring and developing dedicated space for housing the poor in the urban context by evolving and defining appropriate norms and standards would help in minimising growth of slums and shanty towns in urban areas and promote rational residential development.
- ***Skilling Poor:*** Skilling remains major issue and prime reason for causing poverty among the large number of rural migrants, opting to make cities as their preferred place for living and working. Opening large number of skill centers for skilling the urban poor for employment in the urban context will help in empowering them.
- ***Service Centres:*** Opening large number of service centres in the city for providing manpower involved in services related to plumbing, electrification, vehicle repairs, driving, healthcare, households work, landscaping, horticulture, garbage disposal, etc. is essential to overcome poverty in urban areas. Creating space for setting up of such service centres should be made an integral part of urban planning process.
- ***Creating Day Markets:*** Permitting the organisation of the day-markets in different parts of the cities, on rotation basis, for poor to market their products and sell goods required for meeting the day-to-day needs of urban residents, will help in generating employment and creating opportunities for better earning for the poor in the city.

- ***Permitting multiple use of formal urban spaces:*** Planning for permitting poor to use prime urban spaces in the city, after the closure and before the opening of the formal markets, to create space for doing business by the poor will be a game changer in alleviating poverty in the urban areas.
- ***Developing Motor markets:*** Planning dedicated markets for carrying out repairs of the motor vehicles in different parts of the city, will help in creating number of opportunities for employment of the poor having skill in the repair of the automobiles/vehicles etc.
- ***Registering Poor:*** Mechanism of registering poor needs to be introduced in each city, in order to realistically quantify and understand the need and demand for such section of the community for undertaking planning for them in rational and realistic manner. Such an approach will help in targeting right beneficiaries for all poor oriented programs.
- ***Leasing Space:*** Space earmarked for poor should be made available on lease basis with period varying with daily/ weekly/monthly /yearly basis , depending upon the nature of the space allocated and activities permitted to be carried out. No ownership of the space allocated for poor should be ever permitted. Adequate checks and balances need to be created within the system to eliminate speculation / misuse/abuse of spaces allocated to poor.
- ***Promoting Circular Economy:*** Cities planned, designed and developed following the circular pattern of economy, have great potential, capacity and capability to minimize poverty by optimising the use of available resources and converting enormous waste being generated by them into wealth using different options . Accordingly, cities creating large opportunities/ options for converting waste into wealth by making products which can be used /consumed locally, can help in lowering the graph of poverty.
- ***Involving Poor in Planning:*** For rationally understanding the basic requirements and empowering the poor, it will be appropriate to make poor integral part of the urban planning, development and management process. Involving poor in the planning and designing of urban spaces can help in not only making urban planning process more rational, equitable and objective but will go a long way in eliminating large number of ills facing the urban settlements.

- **Using Technologies:** Technology has enormous potential in optimising resources, empowering people, promoting operational efficiency, making innovations, promoting start ups, creating employment opportunities, creating correct data base, effectively monitoring the implementation of welfare schemes, connecting communities etc. It is important and critical to make technology an integral part of all the policies and programs put in operations for empowering poor.
- **Promoting Cross-subsidisation:** Making the mechanism of cross-subsidisation an integral part of the planning process will always help in generating revenue/resources and creating space for the urban poor while planning/granting permission for different projects/schemes launched by the private sector in the city.
- **Prioritising Regional Planning:** Urban planning remains the focus of all the planners in the present context leading to exclusion of the large number of rural settlements and major proportion of population living in the rural areas of the country (placed at 68.9 per cent, as per Census 2011). This has led to lopsided development of the country besides perpetuating poverty on large scale in the urban areas. Poverty remains a human problem but it has unfortunately been reckoned as urban problem because rural poverty gets concentrated in urban areas due to large scale rural- urban migration. Prioritising regional planning will help in not only synergising but also making optimum use of strength, resources, manpower and opportunities available both in rural and urban areas, helping in empowering the poor in the rural settlements by providing them with appropriate infrastructures, services and creating opportunities for better employment locally. Regional planning can then be followed by urban and rural planning to address the development issues and challenges facing the poor at the settlement level.

BOOK REVIEW

A.K. Jain, *Urban and Regional Planning – A Practical Guide*, Delta Book World, 2022, New Delhi, ISBN 978-81-955519-1-0, Rs. 4,500/-, p. xvi + 480.

India's around 8,000 cities and towns with around 380 million population are the engines of its development and socio-economic transformation. However, the cities are threatened by poor infrastructure services and transport, shortage of housing, increasing carbon emissions and deterioration of urban environment. Continuing poverty and unemployment, backlogs of the basic services as water, sanitation, electricity, education and healthcare are the common urban symptoms. The urban poor, children, elderly, women, disabled and the homeless constitute the most vulnerable groups of people. The 74th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 has assigned a greater role to the local bodies in urban planning and governance. These underline the importance of local action in urban development which is inextricably linked with the political and governance system.

According to A.K. Jain, there are conflicts among spatial planning and sustainability due to chronic peripheralization, increasing pollution, transport, energy, land and water consumption. It needs relooking at the repertoire and processes of urban development which should shift from fossil fuel era to the circular concepts of urban planning, renewal, recycling and conservation of natural resources.

The book, *Urban and Regional Planning...* states that since 2014, the Government of India has launched several new urban missions, viz. Smart Cities Mission, Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT), Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, Historic City Development and Augmentation Yojana (HRIDAY) and Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM). The SBM 2.0 and AMRUT 2.0 continue to operate with effect from October 2021. The plans for these missions including 500 cities under AMRUT have adopted the technique of Geo-database Creation, GIS-based Master Plan Formulation and Capacity Building. An MoU has been signed between National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC), Department of Space and Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs for Geo-database Creation.

These missions aim at low carbon urbanisation and the provision of core infrastructure services like water supply, sanitation and solid waste management, efficient urban transport, affordable housing for the poor, 24x7 power supply, IT connectivity and e-governance. These missions emphasize upon participatory planning and governance,

livelihoods, connectivity and providing better education, healthcare, urban safety and smart services, which are intelligent, interconnected and instrumented.

According to the author, in this digital age, all round disruptions are happening. In India, the 20 year model of Master Planning was adopted during the 1950s which does not address the emerging problems of climate change, air and water pollution, public health, employment and disasters. It is also incongruent with the objectives of speed, scale and sustainability. It is necessary that urban and regional plans are prepared for a five year horizon, while their vision may extend to 20 years.

In this pursuit, the city planning should focus upon an integrated approach towards ecology, the conservation of the natural resources and sustainable urban development, including the services like drainage, water supply, air, sewerage, solid waste management, transportation and energy. Accordingly, the planning process can be segregated as per the domain (Government, Development Authorities, Municipal Government, PPP, etc.), levels (Local, Zonal, Master Plan, Policy Plan/ Regional Plan), time frame (short, medium and long term). According to the author, at every stage public and institutional participation is necessary for a sustainable, resilient and low carbon development. This involves the following:

- Local Economic Promotion and Jobs
- Reducing urban Footprint
- Biodiversity, Greenery and Amenity Spaces
- Urban Heat Mitigation
- Water Conservation and Management
- Decentralised and Intelligent Services
- Air Quality Management
- Clean Transport and Transit-Oriented Development
- Green Energy
- Green and Resilient Buildings
- LIFE- Lifestyle for the Environment

The present land use pattern in India indicates shortfall of land under forests and greens, while the lands under agricultural use are being increasingly converted for the highways, airports and settlements. It is estimated that an additional two to three million hectares would be required for human settlements during next 10 years. Sacrificing agricultural land for habitation implies reduction of land for producing

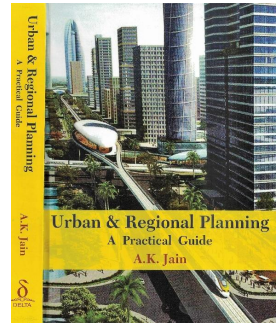
food. The lands that sustain agriculture, biodiversity, surface water and groundwater, fragile and sensitive areas, coastal zones, etc. need protection and conservation.

According to A.K. Jain, the author, urban transport contributes nearly two-thirds of the total suspended particulate matter and 18 per cent of carbon emissions. It is time to think of sustainable modes of transit. It may be necessary to provide Integrated Transit Corridors (ITC) integrating BRT, Metro and trains together with pedestrian and cycle lanes. These can be flanked by public, semi-public, high-density developments. Metro, trains, sub-way and primary roads can run underground for easy bike and pedestrian traffic on the grade. Multi-modal integration, last mile connectivity and e-governance are the pillars of sustainable urban mobility. River/water transport and ropeways can be explored which are almost pollution free and cost-effective. Besides controlling growth of private vehicles, it is necessary to explore parking space in stilts, multi-level puzzle/skeleton structures, on roofs and in underground spaces. Seamless multimodal public transport system comprising bus rapid transit and rail-based mass transport system would work better by adoption of single ticketing and restructuring of land uses by transit-oriented development. Subterranean garages near commuter destination reduce the need for ground parking. Digital parking meters send signals to mobile phones when a space opens up, reducing traffic caused by drivers trolling for space. The concept of walk to work should be the basis of urban structure and city size.

The book explains how to plan a resilient and low carbon city. It comprises smart and green transport, energy, water and buildings with net zero carbon emissions. It produces surplus energy from renewable sources that compensates for all carbon emissions associated with the transport, construction, industries and buildings. Net zero urban development creates an environmental benefit by decarbonisation. Such a city promotes creation of jobs, urban variety, gender equity, digital planning and governance, adoption of micro-climatic design approach and intelligent services. Optimum use of land and natural resources, lifestyle for environment and new partnerships are critical elements of a resilient, low carbon habitat.

All the above has been deliberated upon in nearly 500-page book '*Urban and Regional Planning – A Practical Guide*' by A.K. Jain. The author has reviewed the urban policies and their linkages with the sustainable development goals, socio-economic, environmental and technological contexts. The author also dwells on the issues of climate change and the endeavour to halve the carbon emissions by 2030, which necessitates that the cities shift to cleaner fuels, renewable energy and green technologies.

These demand a new set of strategies of urban and regional planning, which focus on local areas, digital analytics, pollution control, sustainable development and climate resilience. The author has explained various concepts in a simple language. The book in its 24 chapters provides useful information and ideas to build a new perspective of urban and regional planning.



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