

# A Farewell to Urban Planning : Sequel to Urbanisation in South Asia

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## **Introduction**

Asia is becoming a continent of megacities. In 2000 there were 15 Asian cities amongst the 30 largest cities in the world. By 2015 this number will be 18 with a population of 10 million or more in each. A city is an oasis in the desert of rural poverty. There is pseudo-urbanisation and parts of megacities are agglomerations of villages. About 25 to 40 percent of the people live in slums and squatter colonies and there is a growing informal sector of economy. The government needs to spend huge amounts of money for sanitation, water supply, garbage disposal, infrastructure development, housing and community facilities. Increasing health hazards, traffic congestion, crime and violence with unemployment have surfaced with politics at every sphere of life. Some megacities have centralised governments like Shanghai or Seoul, some have fragmented geographical authorities like Dhaka or Manila and some have an urban development authority like Kolkata or Karachi. Yet there is an absence of linkage between planning and development processes, absence of participatory governance, absence of local capital investment plan and lack of technical capacity and implementation of fiscal measures (Edralin, 1998). There is also little coordination between these development authorities and municipalities and the difference between rich and poor is becoming wider. In such cities globalisation has been advocated with liberalisation and privatisation.

A review of Brundtland Commission's Report (Safting, 1998) says that 'Globalisation is a kind of blanket concept. Such concepts have a tendency to hide rather than reveal'. Uneven development has been an inevitable outcome of the new global economy (Lo and Yeung, 1998).

The French Revolution had a bye-product- the bourgeois class of people; globalisation has a bye-product of an elite class, a new colaburger dot com society- with new consumption standards, foreign goods, exclusive houses, cars etc. This is true in some western cities and someone has said 'homeless people and stretch limousine are two fastest growing items on the streets'. The conflict of ideologies make globalisation and its impact on cities complex. The Chinese leader Deng Xiao Ping's famous statement can be quoted 'the colour of the cat is unimportant so long as it catches mice.'

The pattern of urban development is the same. Some highrise buildings at the centre destroying the historic buildings and quarters and depleting ground water and creating problems in sanitation, traffic etc. and a suburban sprawl destroying agricultural and forest cover and filling waterbodies. There are pockets of slums and pockets of housing estates,

gated, grilled and protected. The economic boom has led to ecological doom. Some people thought that with globalisation and rise of information technology, rise of education and economic level of rural people and development of electronic and celulloid culture there will be decentralisation of megacities. But these work only marginally, and centrality remains. The agglomeration economies will continue to play a vital role in increasing the productivity of wide range of economic activities and services. One World Bank report (The World Bank, 1999) says, 'In the future the faces of globalisation including trade liberalisation and financial integration will continue to influence the importance of urban agglomeration economies.'

There are some characteristics of urbanisation in the Indian subcontinent of Pakistan, India and Bangladesh. These countries are mostly agriculture based rural countries where the level of urbanisation is low. In 1950, Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) had 4.2 percent, Pakistan 17.5 percent and India 17.3 percent urban population. In 2000, the percentage of people living in urban areas has become 21.2 percent, 37.0 percent and 28.4 percent and by 2015, the level of urbanisation will be 30.8 percent in Bangladesh, 46.7 percent in Pakistan and 35.9 percent in India. The levels of urbanisation in Iran, Indonesia, Korea and Philippines are much more.

In 1950 only Kolkata and Bombay were included in the list of 30 largest cities in the world. By 1970 Delhi was added and by 1980 Karachi was included. Interestingly Dhaka became the 28th city in 1990 only but in 2000 it became 15th and by 2015 it will become the 5th largest city in the world with 19.5 million population i.e. next to Bombay. By 2015, Kolkata, Bombay, Delhi, Hyderabad, Karachi, Lahore and Dhaka— seven cities will be in the list of 30 largest cities with a combined population of 119.8 million. These cities contain most of the urban population i.e. only a few cities have become megacities. In 2000, Dhaka contained 40.41 percent of the urban population of the country. Karachi contained 20.37 percent. Within the State of West Bengal in India, Kolkata contains two thirds of State's urban population. Bangkok, Jakarta, Yangon and Manila have the same characteristics (The United Nations, 1998).

In pre-partition Bengal, Kolkata was the most dominant city. Within the next 15 years' time Dhaka became the most dominant city. During 1990-95 the average annual growth of population of Dhaka was 6.35 percent and during 1995-2000 it was 5.01 Percent while in Kolkata these figures were 1.88 percent and 1.58 percent. Kolkata has the slowest growth of all megacities in India and also in Asia.

After partition, the then East Pakistan had the advantage of having many urban centres besides Dhaka like Chittagong, Mymensingh, Khulna, Rajshahi and others.

In 1950, Chittagong had 1.5 times more population than Dhaka (629,000 compared to 420,000) but in 2000 while Dhaka's population exceeded 10 million, Chittagong's population was about 3 million only. The absence of regional planning, Pakistani regime's neglect and lack of clear cut decentralisation policy were responsible. In case of Kolkata, the situation was difficult as Kolkata was the most dominant centre not only in the State of West Bengal but also in the entire Eastern Region. The Kolkata Metropolitan Planning Organisation with Ford Foundation Consultants emphasized regional planning,

encouraged development of Haldia, Durgapur and other towns and later on initiated development of small towns and with election of rural councils (Gram Panchayet) extensive rural improvement and agriculture development were taken up. With one-third of the elected members being women, local development became important and despite political conflict, migration to Kolkata slowed down. Kolkata's growth is now due to natural increase and migration from other States of India. But with increasing communication and transportation, day time population has become bigger putting strain on services.

### **Pattern of Programmes**

During the last few decades various urban development and environmental programmes have been taken up and urban planning vis-a-vis metropolitan planning for many Asian cities has followed the same pattern. A long range master plan or development plan for larger area is prepared with intensive surveys, and studies, sometimes with foreign technical consultancy. The plan is oriented towards landuse and infrastructure development like transportation, sanitation etc. and a patch work like Central Business District, shopping complex, industrial areas, satellite towns and housing estates. Some decorative features are added, conservation of historic buildings and areas, and environmental improvement are the latest additions to the list of programmes of infrastructure development and programmes to alleviate poverty and provision of basic services in slums and low income areas. The dream is painted and various government agencies, municipalities and the private sector start implementing such dreams often without coordination. There are expensive metropolitan level projects and local level small projects. Often local problems overshadow the metropolitan problems. Private real estate developers take advantage of infrastructure facilities provided with public expenditure. Profit making values collide with socially rooted values. Cities cease to become communities, they are considered commodities. Politicians and administrators want some dream projects and they want their cities to look like New York on picture postcards.

There are several experiments— ecovillage, ecopolis, sustainable communities, green architecture etc. While micro-environmental factors or brown agenda are for the city, macro-environmental factors or green agenda are essential for the habitat. Sustainable human settlement has broader dimensions as it goes beyond the building and infrastructures.

The World Bank, separately and also with the United Nations Organisations, has taken up a number of plans and programmes. The Urban Management Programme (UMP) has been initiated in a number of cities focussing on five areas— management, infrastructure management, municipal finance and administration, environmental management and poverty alleviation. Sustainable cities programme is another programme emphasizing citizen participation and partnership of all stake-holders. There is the Healthy Cities programme launched by the World Health Organisation. All these are trying to make cities livable.