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"Citiness" and "Urbanity": The Privilege of Mega Cities?

R.N. Sharma*

The expression of "citiness" and "urbanity" in the context of advanced Western societies finds its manifestation through research on a few mega cities which maintain their centrality of command and control of capital through transnational business and finance. In the process, a bias has emerged against the small cities and towns which are considered as irrelevant or off-the-map due to their low role in such economic centrality. The present paper explores the relevance and operationalisation of terms "citiness" and "urbanity" in the context of Indian cities and towns. It is contended that a few "mass cities" in the country have become the hubs of economic growth and, in the process, privileged in terms of their over-concentrating economic resources and implementing mega-projects towards developing so-called world-class infrastructure. Though the duality of quality of life in these cities is well-manifested through growing slum population, where millions of the poor live a de-humanised life. Given the fact that there exist over 4000 urban settlements in India, with varying sizes and spatial distribution, any scope of attaining "urbanity" and "citiness" by hundreds of small cities and towns is virtually written off, both by the policymakers and the researchers in the field. The present thrust of 'shining India' has turned them as "children of lesser god."

The Context

The experience about urbanisation and industrial growth in India, in the earlier decades since Independence, brings out the fact of over-concentration of urban (and industrial) economy in a few leading urban agglomerations which have emerged as the extensions of their mega cities (see Sharma and Shaban 2006, Shaban 2006, Sita and Bhagat 2007, and Kundu 2009). In the process, the small cities and towns, with their number exceeding 4,000 in the country (Census of India 2001), though for decades serving their hinterlands and regions under influence, are "now" virtually getting written off or becoming "off the map" (Robinson 2002) both for the policymakers and the urban researchers in the country. This paper, while delineating this process, advocates the need of proactive planning for improving quality of life and economic opportunities for the inhabitants of these cities and towns. The paper argues that the perspective about "citiness" and "urbanity," (Rondinelli

1983, Ruby 1999, Clencey 2004, Bell and Jayne 2009) which remained the privilege of mega cities in the developed societies, is now becoming relevant in Indian context (as also in so-called developing countries) where a few leading cities in command and control of capitalist formations are being conceived as representing such "urbanity" and "citiness."

"Citiness" and "Urbanity": The Twin Concepts

Before proceeding further with the above objective of this paper, it would be relevant to present a workable definition of the twin concepts, citiness and urbanity. In simple terms, "citiness" refers to small community oriented towns gradually taking shape as cities, with the expansion of various socio-economic and cultural institutions, including relevant basic services and amenities. During the Middle Ages, the European towns took such forms in terms of spatial expansion, architectural grandeur and growing bases for trade and commerce. As stated by Body-Gendrot and Beauregard (in Beauregard and Body-Gendrot 1999:7): "These cities of the Middle Ages are still the backbones of the current urban fabric in Europe... the most "working class" neighborhoods in Paris today already working class a century ago."

The term "urbanity" has been interpreted in several ways by researchers with the changing forms of cities and their roles in transforming the Middle Ages cities into industrial centres, with the advent of "reasoning" under European Enlightenment and subsequently industrial revolution. Urbanity then carried varied notions to urban researchers and philosophers during the "modern" and "post-modern" (the global) periods. A brief account of it is presented here.

To initiate with the classic writings on city, Max Weber (quoted in Eisenstadt and Shachar 1987:58) "emphasized the complexity, rich variety, and numerous constellations, all historically rooted, of the political, economic and social relations existing in cities. His analysis of different civilizations highlighted the specific historical constellations of forces shaping the political and social structure of society as a whole and its cities in particular." Another great writer on city, Henry Lefebvre (1996:127), referring to the evolving city during the Enlightenment Period, observed: "In the past, reason had its place of birth, its feat, its home in the city. In the face of rurality, and of peasant life gripped by nature and the sacralized earth full of obscure powers, urbanity asserted itself as reasonable." This "urbanity" within the fold of reason was subsequently interpreted by Marxist and Weberian scholars as a product of "modern" and "post-modern" city, mainly in terms of expanding base

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of capitalism, spatial forms and various institutions emerging from relations of class and property. The newly emerging city as an arena of contesting interest groups, originating from class, race, ethnicity and recently environmental activism, is seen creating new forms of urbanity. Thus, Ruby (in Beauregard and Body-Gendrot 1999:241-48) considers the urbanity "...as the shape and social linkage of morals, daily life in the city, and social contact within the city's boundaries...Urbanity does not express itself only through its spatial and material aspects ...we consider the city as a place of sociability, as a system of relations between different spaces, as a simple network of uncontrolled fluxes, as an imposed way of life, and/or as a moment of liberation of human kind...". Thus, for Ruby, citizenship is not only a right but also a collective action. For Jayaram (2010), the citizens would like a more exclusive definition of the citizenship, restricting it by a rigidly defined "nativity."

"Urbanity" is also perceived through social justice which requires that "...existing groups have equal access to material well-being, symbolic recognition, and decision making power, and that future generations inherit an environment that has not seriously deteriorated. To put this is another way, social justice is based on material equality, social diversity, democracy, and environmental sustainability" (Fainstein in Beauregard and Body-Gendrot 1999:251).

Though the modern age brought rapid urbanization in Western societies, with small urban communities transforming into cities and urban agglomerations, it has also increased spatial and economic inequality, ethnic segregation, social movements and contested role of state as an agent of reform (Fainstein 1999) For Neo-Marxists (like Lefebvre and Harvey), the growing "citiness" has also confronted large scale transformation of city mainly under the influence of ever expanding capital and new technologies. This is more evident in the global era where a few cities in the prosperous North are emerging as the centers of transnational finance and headquarters of multinational corporations which command and control expansion of capital and production systems across the nations (Sassen 2000, David Harvey 2008). In the process, core and periphery in the hierarchy of cities (and towns) are emerging not only within the North but also in "developing societies." However, in the process, small cities and towns are being left out to their dismal conditions - more so in developing societies. The above discussion elaborates these new forms which are fragmenting people and their life situations not only within the cities but across various societies.

Facets of Urbanity in Global Era

Elaborating on the role of mega cities in Western societies in influencing the mind-set of policymakers and urban researchers in the field, Bell and Jayne (2009: 684-85) observe:

The failure of urbanists specifically to consider small cities is related to the way in which 'the city' is viewed. Small cities have been considered irrelevant — they are supposed not to be cities that tell a story about urbanity, but rather speak of a failure to be urban. Hence, they are of little interest to serious theorists and theories. Explaining the form, function and meaning of the city at different times - variously described as modern or post-modern, industrial or post-industrial, fordist or post-fordist - has been the key aim of urban writing for over a hundred year.When the most high-profile of urbanists talk about new and transformed urbanity, they have invariably done this via what they consider to be the most high-profile cities.

Pushing forward their argument in favor of small cities and towns, by recognizing their valuable role in sustaining livelihoods of their inhabitants and those under their regions of influence, Bell and Jayne (2009: 685) state: "It is clear that such models of citiness are delineated with reference to a limited number of measures relating to population size and the presence of particular types of economic activity that they are often used to generalize about, or measure the success or failure of, all cities." The economic activity cited in the mega cities refers to "centrality of governance, trade, financial services, insurance, scientific knowledge, mass media, consumption, culture, entertainment, and so on."

Bell and Jayne are not the lone advocates of focusing on small cities and towns for their valuable contribution to the regions and countryside under their influence. There are other researchers in Western context who point out the prevailing bias among researchers in the field and policymakers favoring the large (mega) cities of the first world. Some of these researchers (see, for instance, Harris 1978; LeGtes 1996) highlight the need of recognising such a trend emerging in the "mass cities" of developing societies which over-concentrates economic activity (urban and industrial) — for right or wrong — and tends to replicate so-called citiness and urbanity of the first world. Rondinelli (1983:381-82) also reminds about the prevailing view, more so among the economists, that "in developing countries where capital is scarce, the highest rates of return from investment are achieved in the larger cities and the vast size to which some primate cities were growing in the developing world was not economically inefficient." For Rondinelli (1983:382), "the arguments do not hold for a wide range of processing, commercial, service, and

small-scale manufacturing activities. They can be efficiently located in secondary cities and small market towns."

There are other factors which bring out the darker side of these mega cities due to over-concentration of economic activities and therefore population-sizes. Rondinelli states (1983:382):

The growth of primate cities and metropolitan areas have created serious economic and social problems, and most developing countries lack the resources to cope with them. The largest cities in Latin America are experiencing severe problems in housing, transportation, pollution, employment and service supply. High levels of unemployment among squatters and recent immigrants to metropolitan areas continue a poverty stricken existence. (Moreover), in calculating the returns from investment in primate cities, macro economists often overlooked or undervalued the social costs of massive urban agglomeration.

Robinson (2002: 535) aptly summarizes the above situation: "In both the broader and the more narrow economic approach to identifying world cities, a view of the world of cities emerges where millions of people and hundreds of cities are dropped of the map of much research in urban cities, to service one particular and very restricted view of significance or (ir) relevance of certain sections of the global economy." Here one can recall the often quoted view of Sassen (2000) about "global cities" which are turning out the key agents of global economy. Her key point is that the spatially dispersed global economy requires locally-based and integrated organization, and this, she suggests, takes place in the global cities (quoted in Robinson, 2002:535).

The Indian Scenario

What relevance the foregoing discussion in Western context, where the "urbanity" and "citiness" are seen through the mirror of globalization and global cities, has for Indian cities (and towns)? This paper makes a modest effort to seek an answer to it. In Indian situation, historically, a few cities which served colonial interests of trade and administration emerged as the growth engines or primate cities for their regions, leaving behind hundreds of medium cities and towns, which, though neglected, served as "bazaar" towns for their regions and countryside. This process kept on reinforcing the concentration of business and industrial growth in a dozen million-plus cities. The rapid urbanization in the last twenty years or so in the country coincides with the liberalization of its economy in 1991, under the market-driven global agenda. In 2001, 35 million-plus cities in the country sheltered a staggering 107.88 millions of people,

with an average of three million persons in each of these cities (Sharma and Shaban, 2006:21). This phenomenal growth of "mass cities" has resulted in over-concentration of economic activity on the one hand, and vast inequalities within their populations, reflected through growing slum populations, on the other. According to an estimate, during 2003-04, the top eight million-plus cities of India accounted for 36.1 percent of the total bank deposits in the country, 51.4 percent of the formal bank credit and 33.3 percent of the total equity (the FDI) (Sharma and Shaban:28). Such is the background of less than a dozen mega cities in command and control of capital and its direction of use, against the total no. of 4,368 cities and towns in India (the Census of India 2001). Within Maharashtra State, such regional inequalities are revealing. Over one-third of the total urban population of Maharashtra is concentrated in the Mumbai regions alone. Almost a half of the "net share in domestic product" of the State comes from only the two agglomeration economies - the Mumbai and Thane and the Pune - Pimpri-Chinchwad (Sharma and Shaban 2006:27).

The statistical (Census) data for the growth of various categories of towns in India, with its spread over a century, again, brings out the fact that over the decades the Class I Cities (with population over 100,000) have been gaining rapidly in their population sizes, as compared to the small towns whose populations remain stagnant or even decline (Table 1). In fact, presently, the 35 million-plus cities account for 37.81 percent of the total urban population in the country (Census of India 2001).

Table 1. Number of Towns and Percentage of Urban Population by Size Class

Census years	No of Towns by size class						Percentage of urban population by size class					
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	I	II	III	IV	V	VI
1901	24	43	130	391	744	479	26.0	11.2	15.6	20.8	20.1	6.1
1911	23	40	135	364	707	485	27.4	10.5	16.4	19.7	19.3	6.5
1921	29	45	145	370	734	571	29.7	10.3	15.9	18.2	18.6	7.0
1931	35	56	183	434	800	509	31.2	11.6	16.8	18.0	17.1	5.2
1941	49	74	242	498	920	407	38.2	11.4	16.3	15.7	15.0	3.1
1951	76	91	327	608	1124	569	44.6	9.9	15.7	13.6	12.9	3.1
1961	102	129	437	719	711	172	51.4	11.2	16.9	12.7	6.8	0.7
1971	148	173	558	827	623	147	57.2	10.9	16.0	10.9	4.4	0.4
1981	218	270	743	1059	758	253	60.3	11.6	14.3	9.5	3.5	0.5
1991	300	345	947	1167	740	197	65.2	10.9	13.1	7.7	2.6	0.3
2001	393	401	1151	1344	888	191	68.6	9.67	12.2	6.8	2.3	0.2

Class I: Greater than 1,00,000 population Class II: 50,000--1,00,000 population

Class III: 20,000---50,000 population Class IV: 10,000---20,000 population

Class V: 5,000---10,000 population Class VI: less than 5000 population

Source: Various census reports

This over-concentration of urban (and industrial economy) in a few mega cities and their satellite towns (urban agglomerations) is getting reinforced under the global era. According to Sita and Bhagat (2007: 59), "the overwhelming functional dominance of these cities is out-of-all proportion to their numbers." They further observe (2007:63-68):

The fast growing metro of Faridabad has emerged adjacent to Delhi along with Meerut. Surat and Pune (near Mumbai) are also growing fast....Two clusters of metropolitan dominance are clearly emerging, centered around the cores of Mumbai and Delhi....The growth in Delhi UA is primarily due to the Census towns that have shown extremely high growth rates in 1991-2001. Ghaziabad, Loni, Noida, Faridabad, Gurgaon and Bahadurgarh also experienced higher growth than the Delhi UA.

The growth rate in Chennai UA is primarily due to numerous satellite towns, namely Abattur, Avadi, Tiruvottiyur, etc. The satellite towns of Mumbai UA, that is, Thane, Kalyan-Dombivli, Ulhasnagar, Mira-Bhayandar and Navi Mumbai (all now municipal corporations) have growth rates (1991-2001) varying as 20.03, 47.42, 196.29 and 128.76 percent; while the Gr. Mumbai UA showed a growth rate of 29.94 percent. Bangalore UA's constituted towns' growth is amazing, with the Dasarahalli, Bhatarayanapura, Mahadevaoura, and Yelahanka showing a growth rate (1991-2001) of 567.97, 902.17, 440.66 and 85.49 percent respectively. Likewise, the constituent towns of Hyderabad UA show a growth rate for the above period, varying between 55 percent and over 100 percent.

In the "shining India" (under the market-driven economic growth), a strong advocacy is emerging among the planners and other growth-agents for the market efficiency and cost effectiveness by pushing the agenda of growth through 'viable' urban agglomeration economies. As aptly observed by Kundu and Bhatia (1995):

There is an advocacy for market efficiency and restructuring of the existing institutional system for urban economic development....Implicitly this supports the process of emergence of a few global cities linked with the national and international markets, often at the cost of small and medium towns. Also, it amounts to outright dismissal of the strength of local level institutions in the smaller towns....Indeed many of these towns have played a healthy role in the development of their regional economy. Unfortunately, the growth potentials of these towns are being ignored or underplayed in the present perspective of globalization....A strong lobby is emerging, particularly in large cities; pleading for vigorous implementation of management solutions....This pro-liberalization perspective would enable the larger cities to corner much of the advantage from the system.

As stated above by Kundu and Bhatia, there is a governmental view - more prevailing among the present policymakers (of the "shining India") and a few economists - that considers urban agglomerations as inevitable, given their favorable cost-effect and external economies. For

instance, Rakesh Mohan (2006:63), a leading contributor to urban planning in the country, observed: "Agglomeration economies are very important for reducing the costs of new firms as they enter the manufacturing world. There are also many economies of scale in the provision of urban infrastructure....Hence agglomeration of economic activities and people, that is urbanization, should be seen as positive for overall development. Hence, it should be supported by policy actions....For him, 'the problems of different sized towns have to be dealt with according to their respective needs. Large cities have to be regarded as national cities. While each of them is a regional centre, each performs national functions as well. They should be seen as performing a useful as well as productive role for the region and the country as a whole' (Mohan 2006:72).

A similar view is expressed by Arup Mitra (2007:165): "Concentration (of economic activities) not only strengthens forward and backward linkages but also reduces the cost of operation by developing complementary services. The effective price of infrastructure services like power, water supply, roads, etc. gets reduced if there is concentration of users of these services. In all, interdependence of industries in terms of input-output linkages, ancillarisation and availability of infrastructure contributes to the growth of agglomeration economies."

A somewhat more favorable approach for a decentralized industrial/urban growth was long back advocated by economists, Lefebvre and Datta-Chaudhuri (1971). By recalling John Lewis' foreseen dangers of excessive population concentration and industrial agglomeration in the four largest cities of India on the not unreasonable assumption that "the incremental social over-heads requirements of the large urban concentrations will prove to be relatively greater than those of smaller complexes," Lefebvre and Datta-Chaudhuri considered it "not very impossible to place large industries in towns with population of one to two lakhs, as has already been demonstrated by Government of India by setting up several heavy industries in isolated and less developed regions...." They also admitted that the "efforts to promote private investment in non-industrial areas were not successful in spite of considerable subsidies and capital expenditure to provide the basic infrastructure (Lefebvre and Datta-chaudhuri:170-71)."

Indian Mega-Cities Replicating "Citiness" and "Urbanity" of Global-North?

Given the logic and direction of urban/industrial growth in a few "mass cities" of India, under the agenda of market-driven economy linked to

transnational business and trade, the issue emerges: what should be the relevance of concepts "citiness" and "urbanity" in Indian context? And a corollary of the above: what status then over 4,000 small cities and towns carry in terms of their right to "urbanity" and therefore a decent quality of life? The following sections of this paper highlight the above issues.

Given the hegemony of a few mega cities of the global-north on command and control of finance and trade, and therefore, their centrality in representing the citiness and urbanity, there has emerged a favorable perspective among the theorists from developed societies about their playing the role of "world class" cities. The issue then emerges about the status of "mass cities" from several "developing" societies in terms of their representing such urbanity and citiness - if not at the global level - in the context of their own societies. Here the observations of Robinson (2002:534-35) are relevant:

In World-Systems Theory more generally, countries across the world are seen to occupy a place within the hierarchy of the world economy, and possibly make their way up through the categories (core, periphery, semi-periphery) embedded in the world economy approach....The country categorizations of core, periphery and semi-periphery in world-systems theory have therefore been transferred to the analysis of cities, and overlain, albeit with a slightly different geography, on an extant but outdated vocabulary of categorizations (such as first/third world) within the field of urban studies....This 'league table' approach has shaped the ways in which cities around the world have been represented - or not represented at all - within the world cities literature.

The "non-assigning" status of "world cities" to the "mass cities" of Third World, perhaps, is due to their lack of proper infrastructure, overcrowding with a large proportion of population living in slums in dehumanizing conditions, lack of "civility," poor institutional set up for promoting (private) business, and limited role of finance and trade across the nations. It is imperative to understand the status and image of mega-cities in the global-south (more so in Indian context) vis-à-vis the vast number of small cities and towns existing for decades in these societies. Ironically, the step-motherly treatment by researchers or policymakers to small cities and towns in Western societies appears to be (more than) replicated in Indian society. Several researchers (e.g. Bose 1973, D'Souza 1985, Kosambi 1994, Kundu and Bhatia 1995, Rao, Bhat and Kedeker 1991, Patel and Deb 2006, Bhowmik 2009) have highlighted such a bias of urban researchers more focusing on large cities. Kundu and Bhatia (1995: 5), in this regard, observe: "Indifference on the part of research community on issues relating to urban structure, thus helps in institutionalizing existing inequality and accentuating the bias against small and medium towns in the developing world."

Even researchers beyond India like: Preston (1979) and Rondinelli (1980) have advocated a more balanced and dispersed growth, given variety and backwardness of different regions in the country:

Most Asian countries suffer from gross imbalances in spatial development, aggravated by overall population growth and rural-urban migration. The set of solutions suggested for rectifying the situation is to disperse urbanization so that large cities on the one hand and rural communities on the other are linked through village service centers market and small cities, and intermediate cities and regional centers, and to check rural to urban migration through multi-faceted rural development.

The above valuable suggestions for a balanced urban and regional growth might be realistic, say, two decades back. Today no such direction of growth is visible. Instead, a few mega cities, as discussed earlier, supported by present growth paradigm and promoted by their respective states, are competing to become "world class" for attracting foreign investment, mainly under capitalist formations. The centrality of mega cities in the global-north is being operationalized, in Indian context, in the form of their turning into the "core" for influencing the regions under their influence, and, in turn, functioning as the "peripheries" to the global-north centers of business and finance. This is taking shape through urban renewal by investing billions of rupees in creating high grade infrastructure, luxury housing, shopping malls, skyscrapers, corporate offices, tourist centers, and so on. This is happening mainly through the debt financing (Harvey 2008). Metro rails, widened roads with flyovers (for rapid transit systems), tapping water supply sources from even 100 kilometers away, and pushing the poor-inhabitants away from central parts of these cities are visible all-around (for details, see Sharma 2010). Speculation and profiteering in the real estate has emerged as the most visible outcome of such a mega-transformation which leaves no scope for a majority of average citizens to own even an ordinary house in extended suburbs of these cities. International standards (as claimed) in health, education and related services are emerging - again beyond the reach of even middle class inhabitants. Thus, mega transformation of these "mass" cities is resulting in creating wealth for the privileged (with an unholy nexus between the builder mafia and corrupt bureaucrats and politicians), while a large section of ordinary citizens are being pushed into further deprivation and hardships.

This is the form of "urbanity" and "citiness" taking shape in a few rapidly growing cities under the present "shining India" project. These cities are emerging as the hubs for business, more so the information technology, and high cadre (and costly) educational, health and related

institutions. They are creating consumer culture for the privileged, while the millions of slum dwellers in these cities struggle for their day to day survival. For the latter, the right to city for a decent living is as elusive as it is for the inhabitants of small cities and towns.

The future agenda of urban planners appears to further compound the concentration of population and economic activity in these growth engines. It is projected (and accordingly the planning process initiated) that in next 10 to 15 years, the population of Gr. Mumbai UA and the Delhi UA would reach around 25 millions each. In Mumbai, in order to give boost to the real estate even beyond Navi Mumbai, another floating road (across the sea) of around 22 kilometers. at the current prices of Rs. 9,000 crore is proposed which would connect the Nava Shiva (in Navi Mumbai) to Shewri (in Mumbai City) (Sharma 2010:81). The metro project in Mumbai, linking Varsova-Ghatkopar-Mankhurd has already begun, with an estimated cost of Rs.19,000 crore, though the transport experts in the city, like Sudhir Badani, estimate the final cost of the project four times higher than the estimated one by Maharashtra Government.

The scenario of future growth of Delhi UA is mind-boggling. The Delhi-planners (the DDA) have conceived five 'mega cities' within the national capital of India, for housing another 73 lakh people. According to the news (The Hindustan Times, Mumbai Edition, January 8, 2008), "These mega cities have been planned to accommodate 60 percent of the 230 lakh population by 2021. The DDA Board has cleared the draft zonal plans, which provides for these mega cities." The future growth of other economic hubs like Kolkata, Chennai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad and Pune would not lag behind.

There are no research studies available to ascertain the implications of such over-growing urban agglomerations on the regions under their influence. The extent of resources (natural or otherwise), being appropriated from distant regions for sustaining the fast growing consumer cultures of these mega cities, is not researched. For instance, Delhi UA now gets water from the Tehri Dam, over 150 Kilometer away from the city. Mumbai UA is appropriating water from far areas at the cost of diversion of such water meant for irrigation and drinking in rural areas of the region. Moreover, this all is happening in a country where over a half of the population, mainly in rural areas, is still struggling for "food security." And lastly, what is the relevance of such a growth to over 4,000 cities and towns spread all across the country? The following and the last section of this paper looks at the fate of these cities and towns.

Relevance of "Urbanity" and "Citiness" to Small Cities and Towns

According to the Census of India (2001), among the counted 4,368 cities and towns in the country, the Class I cities with population of one lakh and above are only 393. In contrast, 401 towns are with a population range of 50,000 to 99,000; 1,151 with the population between 20,000 and 50,000; 1,344 towns within the range of 10,000 to 20,000 and 1,079 towns with the population 10,000 or below (Srivastava 2009). There are no detailed analytical studies across categories of these cities and towns for understanding their economies, quality of life, spatial forms and institutional administration dealing with basic services and public utilities. A possible explanation for such a dearth of research in the area emerges from the observations of Rao, Bhat and Kedeker (1991:1-2): "There is a view prevalent in some circles of sociologists that the distinction between rural and urban sociology is not meaningful in the Indian context because about 80 percent of the people live in villages...and there is no dichotomy in India between the village and the traditional city as both are elements of the same civilization." However, this view has gone a sea-change in the last 20 years or so, not because a large population has become urban (till this date not more than 30 percent Indian population is urban), but due to rapid transformation of a few mega cities under present global era, which are influencing the traditional India in a significant way. This change is emerging through rapid growth of consumer markets, growing neo-rich upper-middle class with fair consumer power, significant growth of knowledge workers in the IT-sector, impact of new media (through television, electronic gadgets) raising aspirations of people all-around and, above all, emerging forward and backward linkages of market-driven economic growth in these leading cities and their regions under influence (for "political-economy of this transformation," see, for instance, Banerjee-Guha 2009). It is, therefore, not surprising that the traditional rural India, which, for centuries, remained an egalitarian culture within Hindu-civilization, is now being written off as no more a dominant cultural entity. So much so, Gupta (2005:751-58) finds today's Indian villages more as a "rural debris." In his own words: "The village in India, once considered with life "unchanging" and "idyllic" has in recent decades seen profound changes...The town is not coming to the country, as much as the country is reaching out to the town, leaving behind a host of untidy rural debris...The village is shrinking as a sociological reality, through it still exists as space." What Gupta states about today's Indian villages, is also fairly applicable to hundreds those small cities and towns which are being written off by the "shining India."

Researchers like Kundu, Mathur and Sivaramakrishnan have been writing on the need of research and policy interventions for these small

cities and towns. The Commission on Urbanization, set up by Govt. of India in 1986, also tried to highlight the neglect and stagnation of these urban settlements which are spread all across the regions. A few studies of small settlements on the peripheries of large cities were conducted by researchers in the field, but these settlements have now become a part of their respective urban agglomerations.

Given such a poverty of research in the area, a more often quoted assessment by Kundu, Bagchi and Kundu (1999:1893-1906) of basic services in these urban settlements is reproduced here for depicting their poor quality of life:

According to the 1991 Census data, the percentage of households having all the three amenities (toilets, electricity and drinking water) in Class III, IV and V towns (with population between 5,000 and 50,000) is about 30 percent, while that for Class I cities (more than 100,000 population), it is twice as large..... More specifically, the state governments and para-statal institutions did not exhibit sensitivity in favour of small and medium towns.

A few other interventions, without any significant outcomes, can be recalled here. Since the V Plan, Government of India has been implementing a scheme, known as "integrated development of small and medium towns" (IDSMT), but nothing significant has been achieved for making them viable to attract private investment (see, Sharma and Shaban 2006). The Commission on Urbanization (1986) identified 538 small cities and towns as "generators of economic momentum" (called GEMS), but the recommendation of Commission for developing them got lost in bureaucratic red-tape. A recent evaluation about the "Poverty, Levels of Living and Employment Structure in the Small and Medium Size Towns" in States of Punjab, Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh (see, CSO Project of Institute for Human Development:1-13) brings out more the darker status of these towns than their bright future. The study, which covered the period 1987-88 to 1990-00, observed:

The analysis shows that in all regards, that is with respect to various dimensions of development, there is significant disparity across different size class of urban centers. In fact, level of development in urban centres is very much a function of the size of the urban centre. This is true for all the states in India, where the small and medium towns are at a greater disadvantage as compared to the large cities and particularly with regards to the metropolitan cities. And the gap between the metropolitan cities and the small towns is quite large with regards to all aspects of development.

Interestingly, the present 11th Five Year Plan has suggested the need of a long term National Urban Policy (Para 11.7), in order to prevent the haphazard growth of urban areas by strengthening the IDSMTs. The

scheme appears to be subsumed in another scheme meant for the large cities (Bhowmik 2010). Government of India (GOI) now appears to be committed for the mega transformation of large cities. Though it is also true that given their poor quality of infrastructure and resource base, these cities needed large funds since decades for creating better living conditions and economic momentum. Government's new urban renewal scheme, called the "Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Mission" (JNNUM) for funding infrastructure and related projects in over 60 large cities (the million-plus or nearing million-cities), at a huge cost of Rs.150,000 crores (around \$33bn) in a period of 10 years, is a case in point (see, the Website of JNNURM). It is assumed that once they create the momentum of growth, their impact would help the small cities and towns to grow in their regions.

Small Cities and Towns: "Children of Lesser God"

One of the leading experts on urbanization in India, Ashish Bose often quotes his favourite phrase: "god made the city in heaven, while the devil made the town." In terms of quality of life, opportunities for growth and basic dignity of life, small cities and towns appear to have no future in India. Other than routinized government jobs in institutional set up, like local self governments, region based administrative services, low profile educational and health institutions, and routinized trade and services, there are no attractive growth potentials for skilled or non-skilled man-power. As discussed earlier, even the basic amenities like water, transport and electricity are in a very poor condition or somehow being managed by para-statal bodies. Though the modern media like television, mobile phones and (basic) computer education have reached a majority of these settlements, the same have more raised aspirations (and therefore the feelings of deprivation and uncertainty) among their youths who do not have adequate outlets for achieving a better life status. Those a few who excel in their educational and skill achievements rush to large cities for better avenues.

The basic issue therefore is almost the absence of institutional infrastructures for retaining skilled manpower through attracting economic opportunities. Most pathetic is the irregular electric and water supply to these small cities and towns, which not only makes the life of their inhabitants difficult and frustrating but also create low momentum for reversed migration from large cities to these settlements. One can see with own eyes, groups of youths from all across the classes more disorganized (and even criminalized) than living a purposeful and dignified life.

These small cities and towns of today's India are really "children of lesser god," with hardly any rights and privileges for offering a dignified and meaningful life to their inhabitants. Their "citiness" and "urbanity" are a "non-issue" before the "shining India," where the privileged and the neo-rich classes (minus the squalors) in a few mega cities are competing for a "world class" city life. The "right to city" (Harvey 2008) is a highly divided reality in urban India.

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