Spatial Planning and Urban Governance Perspectives in India: A Critical Overview

Author: Purushottam Kesar

1. Introduction

India is a home to 1210\(^1\) million people and accounts for nearly 17.6%\(^2\) of the world population, next only to China. It’s associated with the developing league of BRICS Countries and is undergoing a rapid shift in its urbanization pattern and morphology of its towns and cities both in terms of land use and socio-economic patterns.

![Figure 1: Key Population numbers Morazan et. al. (2012)](http://censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/data_files/india/Figures_At_Glance.pdf)

The size of urban population in India stands at near 31% or 377 million (Census, 2011), almost the population size of USA. The absolute percentage numbers however, are on the lower side (Asia, average urbanization by 2025 ~ 50%)\(^3\), but the growth rates over the years suggest a trend of rural to urban shifts.

The decadal population growth rate was recorded at 17.64%, versus decadal urban population growth rate of 31.8% during 2001-11 periods.

The urbanization trend is somehow sustained by the corresponding growth in the Indian economy which has hovered between 5-8% annual growth rates. (Bhagat, 2011). The annual exponential urban population growth rates in India have stabilized to 2.75% since last two decades.

2. Spatial Geography

Cities and urban areas in India and elsewhere have a distinct functional connotation i.e. they act as engines of growth, home to innovation and entrepreneurship, showcase of cultural diversity to name a few. The imprint is no different for Indian cities. Urban areas have steadily contributed to 60%\(^4\) of India’s GDP. As of date, India has 53 nos. of cities and urban agglomerations (UA’s) with a population exceeding one million (called “million plus”). Apart there are three urban agglomerations which have a population size exceeding ten million.

The “million plus” cities and UA’s has increased from 35 in 2001 to the present numbers, an increase of almost 50%, which itself speaks the challenges urbanization has offered in the last decade.

The last decade from 2001-2011 has seen a phenomenal urban activity with a jump of over 50% of areas categorized as towns and near a quarter as urban agglomerations than the corresponding period (Table 1).

![Figure 2: Urbanization trends in India Bhagat,(2011)](http://indiansmartcities.in/)

\(^1\)http://censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/data_files/india/Figures_At_Glance.pdf
\(^3\) (Except Japan) Baqui, Abdullah (2009), Global Urbanization: Trends, Patterns, Determinants, and Impacts, ohns Hopkins University
\(^4\)http://indiansmartcities.in/
Geographically, the population and urbanizations patterns are skewed with the former concentrating in the northern states and the latter along the western edge. More than 55% of the population is concentrated in six out of twenty nine states and seven union territories.

The regional distribution of top five urban agglomerations by population size is as following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Urban Agglomeration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Southern India</td>
<td>• Chennai (8.7 million)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Bengaluru (8.5 million).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern India</td>
<td>• Delhi (16.3 million)</td>
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Similarly, is the case with the 28 or 53% of million plus urban agglomerations (UA’s) and cities i.e. they located in the west and southern states. It would be apt to conclude that the urbanization is more rapid in the west and the south of the country. One amongst the possible argument is the recent growth in the Information Technology Enabled Service (ITeS) sector and manufacturing sector in this region as well as the emergence of Mumbai (Financial), Bangalore (ITeS) and Chennai (manufacturing and services) as commercial hubs in the last decade.
Density is another important factor in spatial geography which has a direct bearing on the carrying capacity as well as the ‘biotic’ potential of the urban areas, a key factor for measuring ‘livability’. It has direct impacts on the environment, natural resources, infrastructure resources and the governance patterns. Density in India has shown a linear trend, almost doubling in the past three decades.

The density in India is 382 persons per sq.km (Census, 2011) which has increased from 325 persons, and an increase of 18% in the last decade.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Density (persons per sq.km)</th>
<th>Increase (%) 2001-11</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North East</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>17.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The “Gangetic plain has constituted to subcontinents (extending over India and Bangladesh) demographic heartland for near two millennia” (Census, 2011) and the demographers suggest a similar pattern in the future years.

The states with highest density of population are Bihar (1102 person per sq.km) and West Bengal (1029 person per sq. km), both of which lie in the Gangetic plain. The marked outcome of density has been the spread of urban sprawl. It had led to a “significant proportion” of the population living outside the...
municipal boundaries in unplanned, with minimal utility services and least public hygiene (IIHS, 2011).

3. Urban Governance

India is a federal polity with a decentralized governance structure and a defined competency relationship between the state and the center for legislative and executive functions. The key competencies such as land, public health, water supply are with the state and therefore the center assumes an advisory role assisting states in policy formation. The policy implementation rests solely in the domain of the state. Local bodies are vested with functions of urban planning and regulation of land-use.

However, the fiscal federalism is highly skewed towards the center i.e. the state governments are seldom fiscally equipped to undertake key infrastructure works such as land development, urban and transportation infrastructure development to name a few.

Therefore, the model of undertaking urban development works in most of the cases is a center-state partnership with fiscal and implementation support divested in the center and state governments respectively.

The spatial governance in India has progressed in an organic manner, with various institutions formed as response to the prevailing challenges of the day, since pre-independence British era. Improvement trusts and municipalities with functions bestowed for maintaining hygiene (public health) and cleaning (waste management, water supply) functions have evolved to the present day local bodies administering city level functions with fiscal responsibilities.

The planning commission is apex body which guides the trajectory and the focus of urban planning in each plan period (5 years). The commission works in sync with the state governments and other infrastructure and socio-economic departments to shape a cohesive urban policy framework. “Planning Commission plays an integrative role in the development of a holistic approach to the policy formulation in critical areas of socio economic sectors” including “urban development”.

Apart, various autonomous institutes/agencies provide organizational and technical support for framing of urban policy.

The 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments, adopted in 1992 was the key legislation to give a push to local governance mechanisms, however, the reform process is at a slow pace. The municipal sector in India is at its novice stage accounting only 0.75% of the GDP in revenue (Mohanty, et.al, 2007) far less as compared to 5-6 % ratio for Brazil and South Africa. The total numbers of local bodies are little over 4000 (12th Finance Commission, India) when the total “census towns” have grown near 8000 in 2011.
cities. The district planning committees and metropolitan planning committees are the key coordinating agencies to prepare draft development plans at the district and the metropolitan scale by actively engaging with the local bodies and various other agencies. However, the preparation or implementation of “metropolitan and district plans” have been undertaken by very few states so far.

The local bodies and the state administration adopt variety of plans such as perspective plan, regional plan, development plan to name a few, each with a different purpose and detail. A terminology of spatial plans is explained below:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Table 3: Terminology of various spatial planning documents</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perspective plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local area Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Area plans</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Draft UDPFI Guidelines, 2014, MoUD, GoI

However when it comes to preparing master plans or any kind of strategic plan or document, the urban local bodies fare badly, more worse in case of smaller urban areas. Amongst the 7935 (approx.) towns only 1800 or 22% towns have any plan or a strategic document for its future planning.

4. Urban Planning and Policy Trends

A chronology of spatial planning or urban development practice in India can be split into four major eras staring from the first five year plan period i.e. 1951 till the present day.

Figure 12: Key milestones of urban policy framework in India (Batra, 2009)

However some issues have remained as “bottom line” problems to be addressed in the planning policy at every five year plan period (Batra, 2009). These include affordable housing, slum clearance, and decongestion. The “bottom line” problems have always been on a “carry forward” mode to the next plan period. There are some fundamental policy issues that have adversely affected the urban governance. The service level benchmarks for 28 pilot cities undertaken by the Ministry of Urban Development in India, with the help of various organizations have confirmed these apprehensions, where local bodies have utterly failed in provision of basic urban services.

Figure 13: Results of service level benchmarking in 28 pilot cities of India, World Bank (2009)

An elaboration of fundamental policy issues plaguing delivery of urban services is explained herewith:

a. Increased Reliance on Master Plans

The Anglo-Saxon instrument of master planning and zone- based land use regulation as remedy to all the urban problems is contrary to the Indian settlement pattern (Batra, 2009). The model has grossly failed as it involved a shift from the existing mixed use urban fabric
and entails a huge capital cost to implement, difficult for fiscally starved state and local bodies.

b. Overlapping Institutions and Jurisdictions

The institutional dynamic, as explained has evolved from the days of British era, but instead of any ordered change, various institutions fit into the new model of local governance which emerged after the 1992 reforms. The multiplicity of functions and reach leads to delays in policy planning and implementation.

Figure 14: Functional overlapping of various institutions involved in urban governance and spatial planning

c. Structural Imbalances in Local Self-Governance

The 1992 amendments (73rd and 74th constitutional amendments) for decentralization of urban functions do “demarcate the functional domain of municipal authorities”, but it remains quiet for a corresponding “municipal finance list”, which has been left to the discretion of the State Governments (Mohanty et al., 2007). The dependency of ULB’s seriously impairs their capacity. As a natural circumstance, absence of fiscal independence leads ULB’s focusing on ensuring service delivery functions and urban planning functions (spatial planning) are least prioritized.

d. Others

Other factors include lack of public/stakeholder participation and vacuum in urban leadership.

5. Some Recent Initiatives

As evident, the urban areas and cities today face twin problems. Firstly, a plagued and incomplete self-governance model and secondly, lack of planning formulation for undertaking future developments. The twin policy problems are addressed through various “mission programmes” launched with the center-state partnerships. A few notable initiatives are illustrated to provide an overarching impression of contemporary spatial development.

Jawahar Lal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission Programme (JNNURM)

A policy vacuum in the urban development agenda along with the decline in basic infrastructure services to support the current levels of urbanizations posed serious constrains on the ability of cities to function efficiently. An investment estimate of 15.5 billion euros for a seven year period starting form 2005-06, with an annual fund requirement for 2.2 billion euros was suggested to solve burgeoning urban issues. However, delegating such a huge amount necessitated a shakeup in the functioning of urban local bodies for effective results.

Therefore, a reform oriented fiscal support programme was rolled out in 2007 which is presently in the implementation stage. A total of 67 cities which included seven numbers of 4 million (& excess) and 28 numbers 1 million (& excess) population size cities and the rest other cities with important functions were covered for the enhancement of infrastructure and spatial governance.

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8 Euro = 77.33 INR
An implementation model of this programme is illustrated below:

**Figure 15: JNNuRM Implementation framework**

Delhi Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC)

DMIC is a mega scale industrial land development programme aimed at building high end manufacturing enclaves with various support amenities. It is poised to take advantage of the planned Dedicated Freight Corridor (DFC) which would run from Delhi to Mumbai, a length of 1483 kilometers. Clean energy, smart utilities are some of the key features of these so called “Smart Industrial Cities” (DMICDC). The project background is based upon the Japanese model of cities dotted along the “Shinakansen” or the high speed trains route. It entails of building cities of size 100-200 sq. km in area with a predominant industrial land use (nearly 30-40%). The project is still at a planning stage. On similar lines, various development corridors with a similar clustering of industrial cities are planned in the east and south of India.

**Figure 16: Proposed corridor development in India**

Source: DMICDC

6. Way Forward

The spatial planning and urban governance in India is still to mature and to be backed by a robust and an efficient regulatory framework. The emphasis on de-centralization and empowering of urban local bodies is still to be prioritized and is not visible in the current urban policy framework. Capital spending for infrastructure improvement is the emerging thought process, where shoddy implementation, maintenance and negligible stakeholder and public participation have failed to improve the urban experience. The stakeholder and public participation happens at a very minimal scale for large urban development projects. Measures to reduce urban poverty and increase inclusivity of public services (both qualitatively and quantitatively) are still a farfetched idea, although successive five year plans have focused on them (Batra, 2009). The way forward for improving the efficiency of urban interventions / governance includes:

- Improving the capital adequacy of local bodies by strengthening of their fiscal autonomy
- Making inter-governmental transfers and grant in aids to municipalities more robust and prioritized.
- Improving urban-information database management by various tools and strengthening of the capacity of local bodies

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Rethinking of the scale of intervention, place based focused interventions to be prioritized over implementation of grand master plans.

Strengthening of state level urban governance and spatial planning capacity

Introducing organizational restructuring to avoid overlaps and multiplicity of functions in urban governance

Grooming urban leadership by evolving a think tank approach for urban policy formation.

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Definitions:

Statutory Towns: All places with a municipality, corporation, and cantonment board, notified town area committee, etc.

Census Towns: All villages with a minimum population of 5,000 persons in the preceding Census, at least 75% of male main working population engaged in non-agricultural activities and a population density of at least 400 persons per square kilometer.

Urban Agglomerations (UAs): A continuous urban spread comprising one or more towns and their adjoining out growth(s)

Out Growths (OGs): Areas around a core city or town, such well recognized places, like, Railway colony, university campus, port area, etc., lying outside the limit of town.

Source: Information cited in this part is from Paper 2, India – Census of India 2011 (Provisional) & Primary Census Abstract – India–Census of India 2001