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Metropolitan Dominance, Regional Disparity and Urban Planning in India: Observations from National Planning Measures of Japan

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Abstract : *Process of urbanisation in India in the post independence years has been closely associated with metropolitan dominance and acute urban primacy. The trend of urban growth clearly indicates that mega cities are growing at alarming rates causing regional disparity at different levels and marginalisation of large areas in the interior. Largest cities together with their metropolitan regions continue to receive huge investments from public as well as private sectors. Also the socio-economic difference between the economically dynamic regions and slow growing or stagnant regions has got accentuated. Urbanisation process in Japan also has not been free from over-concentration and centralisation trends. However, since the last three decades, several planning measures have been undertaken in Japan to correct the above trend. The National Development Plans of Japan have played formidable roles in these efforts by initiating decentralisation of regional functions leading to the materialisation of the concept of 'multi-polar dispersed pattern of land development' supported by strong inter-regional transport and communication network. In view of the comprehensive nature of the objectives and purposes of these plans, it becomes imperative for any country including India to carefully examine their content.*

The present paper aims first at analysing the nature of metropolitan dominance and regional disparity in India and the prevailing urban policies. The paper then highlights the policies and planning measures of the National Development Plans of Japan that address the above problems and finally draws observations from specific measures of these plans that are relevant for Indian planning.

Introduction

Anybody familiar with urbanisation and development literature will know that the world is rapidly urbanising and that by the year 2005 more than half of the world's population will live in urban areas (United Nations, 1993). Urbanisation has been the most visible manifestation of the enormous population upsurge of the past four decades. Furthermore, a very large percentage of this urban population is getting increasingly concentrated in the already large overpopulated cities for various economic and social reasons (Banerjee-Guha, 1993). In recent years this has become one of the major concerns of the planners and governments of the developing countries. With strained budgetary conditions the task of providing even basic levels of infrastructure and urban services has also become daunting. Despite the varying perceptions and manifestations of urbanisation, urban primacy or excessive concentration of population in one city or the few largest cities in a country, has certainly become a source of universal concern (Jones and Visaria, 1997), thereby increasingly occupying the centrespace of urbanisation and related planning literature.

The present paper, with the above perspective, examines the issues of metropolitan dominance and regional disparity in India and subsequently draws relevant observations from the National planning exercises of Japan.

Metropolitan Dominance and Regional Disparity in India in the Nineties

Growth process in India during the colonial period was characteristically unequal with selective urban centres enjoying access to transportation and other locational facilities attracting much of the industrial and other investments. Post – colonial India thus inherited a socio-economic space dominated by agglomeration economies and core cities with the latter having ambivalent roles in regional development. Urban growth in later years also reflected a weak or negative relationship with regional development having a very high rate of rural – urban migration and stagnating settlements in interior regions. In spite of promises made to develop backward regions, the mixed economy that developed in India accentuated imbalance.

In eighties, the spatial pattern of urbanisation and development indicated polarisation as a dominant process. Benefits of development were found to be concentrated in selective pockets making the hiatus of developed cores and impoverished peripheries a stark reality. The curve of socio-economic well-being peaked at a few metropolitan centres and selective cores and declined steeply at smaller towns and rural areas. All the three regions of North, East and West barring the south reflected a condition of overconcentration and urban primacy. In early nineties the above pattern remained unchanged, despite trends in agricultural changes in some districts of Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. Besides the old metropolitan cities, a number of second order metropolitan cities were found to emerge as areas of investment, but with the same pattern of concentration. The 300 urban agglomerations with a population of 1,00,000 or more accounted for more than 65 per cent of the urban population in 1991. The number of metrpolitan cities also rose from 12 in 1981 to 23 in 1991. Out of them, six (Mumbai, Kolkata, Delhi, Chennai, Hyderabad and Bangalore) with a population of 4 to 8 million, met the United Nations criteria to be termed as 'mega cities'. Other cities and areas remained out of the minimum threshold line and continued to experience outmigration and backwash. High expenditure of very large cities on consumer durables, infrastructure or their share in the total bank deposit corroborated the situation. In 1991, the four cities of Mumbai, Kolkata, Delhi and Chennai accounted for more than 35 per cent of the total bank deposit of the country. Industrial growth and urbanisation experienced a limited spread in nineties while technology and input oriented agriculture did not prove to be of much benefit for the larger section of the agricultural workers. The very low level of development in the central parts of the country manifested a double conjunction of distress in both agriculture and industry leading to a narrowing down of the domestic market. However, increase in the level of inequality between different states and regions in terms of agricultural production and productivity in early nineties seemed to emerge as a bigger problem than industrial spread. During this period, large scale industry also became more inclined to export - oriented growth (Banerjee-Guha, 1999).

With the opening up of the Indian economy, second order metropolitan cities like Bangalore or Hyderabad got stimulated to make new hubs of urban growth centered on the manufacture of software, electronics and related industries. The older large cities by then had already started experiencing a shift in their economic structure. Percentage of male and female workers engaged in manufacturing in these cities declined from 27 per cent and 26 per cent respectively in 1983 to 23.6 per cent in 1993-94. During the same period,

percentage of male and female workers in service sector increased. Aggregate data on urban areas indicate that increase in banking and finance activities and the growth of service sector were negatively correlated with the growth of the traditional manufacturing sector. Increased significance of the newer metropolitan cities was also related to the above structural shift of the urban economic base (Banerjee-Guha, 1997). The convergent impact of all these processes went to make metropolitan areas and regions significant locations and creators of space than the formal core cities especially in terms of large scale grandiose projects. Trend of metropolitanisation, however, continued unabated. Mumbai, Chennai and Delhi along with their respective metropolitan regions continued to attract considerable investment in late nineties. Larger share of investment of these cities went to their metropolitan areas than to the city proper. Thus, large projects went to Ghaziabad, Faridabad and Gurgaon than to Delhi proper or in case of Mumbai it went to New Mumbai or further down to south west Konkan. Fabrics, paper , chemicals and metal based industries were the major areas of investment. Similarly in Greater Chennai region also considerable investment was made in transport, textile and other industries. Besides these older metropolitan regions, the other important investment destinations were the second order metropolitan centres as mentioned earlier. However, the centres were highly selective. Bangalore and Hyderabad were two such cities that received the highest investment amongst all such centres. The areas of investment for both the cities were computer and related industries as well as IT and related industries (Shaw, 1999).

Pattern of urban growth in India during nineties thus did not show any structural change. Rather there was a perpetuation of the earlier pattern. Firstly, very large cities together with their metropolitan regions continued to receive huge investments . Secondly, the dynamic sectors that were getting incorporated in the economic base of these cities were limited in number with a high degree of specialisation. Therefore, they could only generate a restricted demand of labour and that too of a specific level for which they could not act as engines of growth for their surrounding areas in terms of creating employment opportunities for a larger section of the population. Thirdly, with the intensification of the liberalisation policies, the socio-economic difference between the economically dynamic regions and slow growing or stagnant regions got accentuated (Dutta and Goswami, 1997). Technological and organisational changes created further space specific disintegration and the depressed areas started offering themselves as vantage locations for flexibilisation and informal manufacturing operations. The vast impoverished periphery identified in eighties continued to stretch more vigorously in central India, western Rajasthan, eastern and north-eastern India, eastern Maharashtra and western Andhra Pradesh including the metropolitan regions of some eight metropolises. The above periphery comprised of the less urbanised and industrialised areas as well as agriculturally the less productive regions and states (Friedman, 1982). The emerging areas of significance were a new set of metropolitan cities and regions perpetuating the above pattern only in a restructured manner. The remaining metropolises were deprioritised and other cities, medium and small towns virtually bypassed.

Without a prior development in economic base, infrastructure or basic amenities, these urban centres are losing their viability of sustenance. About 25 per cent of the population in the smaller towns live in extreme hardship in terms of basic amenities (Kundu et. al, 1996). In smaller and medium towns, the economic base is also poor with lack of

employment opportunities in the organised sector. Instability in income is quite explicit in many ways in these settlements. Many of them are not in a position to generate funds to provide basic services to all sections of the population.

Since Ninth Plan (1998-2002), the metropolitan cities are expected to make capital investment for various infrastructural services besides covering the operational cost. Thus most of the developmental projects have been envisaged to be undertaken through institutional finance than budgetary support. The cost of borrowing for the respective government departments has thus substantially gone up which has come in the way of taking up socially desirable but relatively less remunerative projects. In such situations, a large number of towns that have come to depend on grants-in-aid primarily due to their poor economic base and incapacity to mobilise adequate tax and non-tax revenues suffer the most with the decline in central and state assistance. All these make it imperative to examine the national urban policy in India that is directly related to the state of urban affairs and issues of metropolitan dominance in planning.

Urban Policy in Post–Independence India

At the outset, it is important to point out that the main corpus of the national urban policy in India primarily concerns the larger cities, and, therefore, has affected them the most. The smaller towns and non-metropolitan areas, for all practical purposes, have grown without any properly formulated policy either at central or state level. Though urban policy and planning in India are state subjects and the central government does not have any power to pass legislation on urban planning without constitutional amendment and can only issue directives or provide advisory services which the state governments have no legal obligation to follow, very few state governments have taken proper initiative of drawing up urban policies for their respective urban areas. At the most, the job has been entrusted upon special planning bodies that are not in a position to take up an all round perspective. Hence, the Central Government's statements on urban policy, as given in the national Five Year Plans, assume considerable significance (Shaw, 1999).

In the earliest two plans there was a persistent mention about the need for a proper management of the urban areas. During this time various bodies and institutions were created for such purposes like the ministry of urban affairs and the town and country planning organisation affiliated to it, school of planning and architecture in New Delhi, regional and town planning department in the Indian Institute of Technology, to name a few. Both the First and Second Plans mentioned about the haphazard urban growth in the country and the consequent need for enactment of town and country planning legislation in all the states (Ramchandran, 1989). However, it was only during the Third Plan that the necessary financial and legislative measures were taken to facilitate the process and urban planning and land policies were formulated with a broad objective of balanced urban development between rural and urban areas. This plan was the most vocal in terms of decentralisation of industries and dispersal of urban growth. Directions on urban land use were also laid down and accordingly concrete measures were formulated on intra-city planning. The Plan provided funds for master plans for metropolitan cities and other urban centres and suggested centre-state cooperation in such endeavours. The Fourth Plan experienced the establishment of organisations like HUDCO for providing funds for metropolitan development and several large urban development projects

including creation of new state capitals were also taken up. Redevelopment of private land was included as an agenda and for the first time the question of self financing the urban development plans came up. In the Fifth Plan thus concerns about generating maximum possible revenues through public participation in urban land development and various types of land tax were seen. Simultaneously a thrust on the larger cities in the various development plans was noticed from this time onward (Shaw, 1999). Seventh and Eighth Plans were different from the earlier ones in some important ways. While both continued to emphasise the need to strengthen the smaller towns, at the same time they were in favour of granting more power to urban local bodies to make them self - sufficient. Metropolitan development was also suggested to be made self - financing. By the eighties decentralised administrative structures and bottom up planning became popular, but without much consideration towards strengthening the tax base of smaller urban areas. Since 1991, with the introduction of new economic policy, objective of balanced urban development became secondary. As a major policy initiative the Central government launched the mega city programme in 1993. Role of state in urban development was drastically reduced. Serious objections were raised from various quarters about transferring the responsibility of implementing infrastructural projects to the private sector based on cost recovery and cross subsidies. Given the nature of the distributed urban hierarchy in India, priorities in urban development need to continue to address wider questions relating to the urban system structure, intra-urban reconfiguration, reorganisation of metropolitan areas and regions, need and desirability of mega city hypergrowth and the related costs and side by side the population carrying capacity of the small and medium towns and the need to reinforce them. One may also ask whether the existing large cities are efficient enough to offer agglomeration advantages, or some selected smaller urban centres may be better locations for new industry. Once the questions of efficiency are answered, the policy – makers need to deal with equity and evaluate the distributional aspects of the new policy. It is because of the above priorities in planning and the related issues of metropolitan dominance and regional disparity that a critical review of the National Development Plans of Japan becomes significant with special reference to spatial planning measures undertaken in various periods.

National Development Plans of Japan: An Overview

Process of urbanisation in Japan has also not been free from overconcentration and centralisation trends. After the Second World War, even though the new constitution granted more autonomy to local public organisations with the central government aiming at decentralisation, a steady increase of concentration of population, employment, services, information and capital continued to take_place in Tokyo creating a 'new centralism', popularly known as 'post-war centralism' in Japan. The high rate of economic growth in the country resulted in an increasing degree of population mobility leading to heavy inmigration in Tokyo and its surrounding areas. The strong controlling identity of Tokyo allowed only a few cities to emerge as alternate centers. Conversely, in many rural areas and old industrial regions, reduction of economic activities and process of depopulation emerged as simultaneous trends (Tsutsumi, 1996). In recent decades with furtherance of the process of technological modernisation, the centralisation trend has got intensified resulting in the further growth of the already overgrown Tokyo-Osaka-Nagoya area – a huge urban mass stretching

over a continuous area of 600 kilometres (Murayama, 2000).

Since the early years of the national development plans of Japan, concerns have been expressed about the problems of overconcentration that have obtained due to the overgrowth of Tokyo-Osaka-Nagoya area and the associated depopulation of various regions. The National Development Plans have played formidable roles in identifying the problem areas and suggesting suitable measures like decentralisation of regional functions to various order of cities and materialisation of the concept of multi-polar pattern of land development. The following pages offer a brief review of such policies.

The First Plan, formulated in early sixties, had an overall aim to construct a welfare nation in which all regions would enjoy the affluence of life and modern conveniences. The Plan envisaged not only a proper development and utilisation of resources but also a rational and appropriate allocation of such resources amongst the regions to ensure a balanced regional development. It was mentioned in the preamble of the plan that organisation of both public facilities and infrastructure would be done with the perspective towards correcting regional disparity (Ministry of Land, Japan, 1962). The Second Plan was formulated in late sixties, revised in 1972 setting the same objectives towards dispersion of population and industries to prevent further expansion of overgrown cities and reduce inter-regional differentials that had already grown into serious proportions. It suggested a new strategy of nodal development in which 'new industrial cities' and 'special areas for industrial consolidation' occupied a special place as growth centres. The Plan envisaged a nationwide transportation and communication network that would systematically help release the concentration of central management functions and the prevailing system of physical distribution. It would also serve as a national axis linking the seven major cities from north to south through Tokyo. The necessity of relocation of capital functions was mentioned for the first time in this plan (Ministry of Land, Japan, 1972). The Third Plan, formulated in the late seventies, in spite of admitting the economic affluence that Japan had achieved at international level, expressed concern about high population density in few cities and the associated problems of regional differentials. The other problem areas that got special mention in the plan were loss of contact with nature in the daily lives of people, increase of commuting distance from home to places of work arising out of overconcentration of economic activities and employment and pressure on housing and public facilities in selective areas of concentration. The Plan put special stress on developing local cities that could serve as economic, social and cultural centres of their respective areas and thus adopted a spatial policy known as the 'Integrated Local Settlement Policy' as a planning methodology. On the one hand, relocation of material production functions was planned while, on the other, agriculture, forestry and fishing industries were promoted (Ministry of Land, Japan, 1979). The Fourth Plan, formulated in late eighties, admitted that despite considerable success of dispersal programmes undertaken in the previous plans, a renewal of population inflow had been noticed in Tokyo area since early eighties due to technology based growth which might affect the living conditions of the Tokyo metropolitan area and simultaneously create severe problems of imbalance between resources and human activities. The Plan expressed concern about the stagnation of regions that had suffered due to restructuration of industry and the depopulation of rural regions. Thus various industrial promotion measures were suggested by this plan that were significant for vitalisation of different areas . The Plan

recommended a speedy completion of the nationwide transportation and communication network , undertaken earlier , and decided to continue with the programme of 'Local Settlement Area Policy' with a much wider perspective . The Fourth Plan also contemplated a proper development of the Northern territory of the country that had lagged behind and mentioned the plan's continued stress on a balanced national land development with a multi-nodal spatial economic pattern. However, it was in the Fourth Plan that for the first time the need towards international integration and reorganisation of global city functions was mentioned . The plan suggested two distinct measures, namely, (a) rearrangement of the regional structure within the Tokyo metropolitan area, and (b) sharing of global city functions among areas, particularly the Kansai and Nagoya metropolitan areas. It is appropriate to mention that the above plan was formulated at a period when worldwide reorganisation of metropolitan functions had already assumed significance(Ministry of Land, Japan, 1987). The Fifth Plan, formula-ted, in late nineties is the recent most plan that has addressed the above problems with a still more wider perspective. The Plan has suggested the continuation of the national land development policy while reiterating its concern about the unipolar concentration pattern in Tokyo that has got aggravated in the recent decades with technological modernisation. While accepting the importance of Tokyo as a global city, the plan thus has kept decentralisation as its primary agenda for which local governments have been given more power and autonomy ensuring greater independence in their operation . More and more voluntary and non-profit organisations are being encouraged to take up various development projects . Significant changes have been planned for employment including institutional reforms for greater mobility of labour force . The Plan has also decided to establish closer contact with nature through various local area based programmes (Ministry of Land, Japan, 1998). It is, however, pertinent to note that although from the very first plan the central government has expressed concern about overconcentration and accordingly formulated various measures, the pattern of unipolar development has continued unabated.

Relevant Observations from the National Development Plans of Japan

Problems of regional disparity and the prevailing pattern of metropolitan dominance in India cannot be compared with that of Japan at one to one level. The basic reason is that the two countries do not have similar levels of economic development or similar policy environment. Further, in spite of the recent liberalisation environment in India following the introduction of new economic policy in early nineties, its politico-economic structure and the administrative set-up is not only different from that of Japan, but also more complex. It will be thus worthwhile to draw relevant observations from the various national development plans of Japan that specifically address these problems and focus on respective policies. Suitability of the administrative modalities and economic feasibilities of such initiatives and projects in India can then be taken up.

Specific policies of the Japanese national development plans that are most relevant to Indian planning are the region specific growth initiatives formulated in each of the successive plans right from the first one. An overview of these policies will be appropriate here. In the First Plan, specific policy was formulated to locate cities away from the overconcentrated centres that would shoulder some functions of the large cities. Such cities would either act as regional development centres with befitting functions or grow with large industrial districts, depending on their locational and resource characteristics. Special measures were also

planned for the underdeveloped regions for increasing their interaction with large development centres and regions. The Second Plan opted for a nodal system of development with large-scale industrial development projects (continuing the idea from the First Plan) and 'broad activity zones' for this purpose. Besides large cities, small-scale local cities were also identified as such zones. Improvement of inter-regional transportation network was planned to connect them. Industrial development projects, besides other measures, depended heavily on the policy of relocating industries away from overconcentrated areas. Environment conservation programmes of this plan need mention as special programmes were undertaken for the regional hub centres and rural areas with an eye towards maintaining their local characteristics. The Third Plan was more categorical about the need for developing local cities and preserving their regional distinctiveness. The Plan thus laid out a special policy known as the 'Integrated Local Settlement Policy' popularly known as 'Teijyu-Ken' to check maldistribution of landuse in such cities, improve the deteriorating living condition of the surrounding rural and farther interior areas, revitalise their traditional economic activities in an economically viable manner, promote local industries and thereby check outmigration from these areas and thence depopulation and economic stagnation. Special policies of relocating material production functions and promoting agricultural, forestry and fishing industries were drawn up to reduce inter-regional income differences. Although the Fourth Plan initiated policy for international integration and promoting Tokyo as a global city, it specifically formulated a Multi-polar Integrated Interaction Policy towards decentralisation, reduction of inter-regional disparity and regeneration of stagnating rural areas. Special programmes for regional revitalisation were drawn up on the basis of regional blocks for boosting up the regional economies based on local potentials and preserving their environment. Mention should be made about the encouragement given to the cooperative organisations for such purpose. Following the same line, the Fifth Plan took measures to form 'National Axial Zones' in several areas of Japan even incorporating distant and less developed areas. Thus while formulating redevelopment policies for each axial zone including policies for relocation of industries, the multi-axial perspective remained as a strong basis.

The overall thrust of all these policies are decentralisation and regional revitalisation. In India, the sub-region of North-east, northern part of West Bengal, Northern Himalayas including Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, southern Bihar, Jharkhand and parts of Orissa and Andhra Pradesh are suitable areas for regional revitalisation programmes as they have a rich base of local resource. Specific types of economic activities or industries can be planned in these areas on the line of 'Integrated Area Programme' or 'Integral Local Settlement Policy Programme' of the National Development plans of Japan. Local city development programmes can be initiated in each of these areas in the already identified growth centers. In other less developed areas like Rajasthan or Madhya Pradesh, policies of developing tradition industries or landscape based industries or activities can be promoted. Finally, the multi-centred pattern of development which India is already having because of a well laid out urban hierarchical structure and a large number of big cities, needs to be strengthened. India may not need to relocate capital functions as there already exist considerable distribution and division of functions between the central and state capitals. But there is an urgent need to decentralise the economic activities from the large metropolitan cities to their surrounding regions and smaller cities. In all such efforts there has to be greater cooperation between the central and the state governments and the local bodies.

In India with many states, each with significant intra-state diversities and various political, ethnic

and religious representations, the actual implementation of decentralisation policies is extremely complex. Role of each state government becomes significant in this respect as they have to largely own up the responsibility of decentralising planning in a meaningful manner. Their monitoring rather than redistributive capacity thus assumes greater significance. Finally, however, the success of region specific planning with a decentralised mechanism lies in the harmonious partnership among the state governments, their respective organisations, local civic bodies and, last but not the least, participatory organisations of various communities.

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