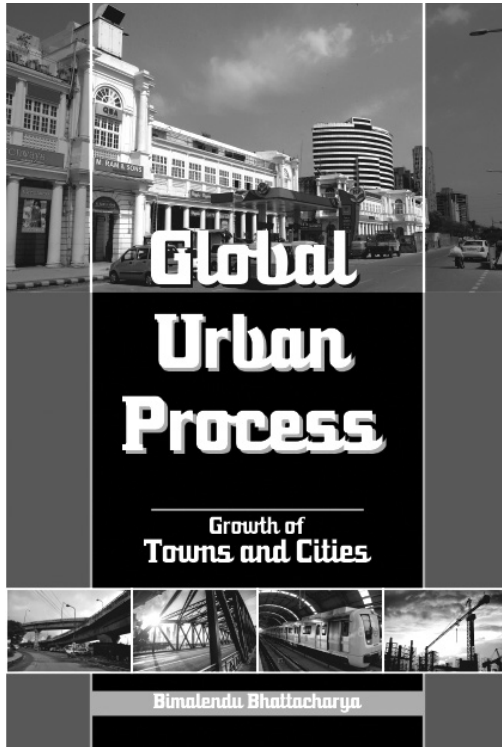


Book Review - 2

Global urban process: Growth of towns and cities by Bimalendu Bhattacharya

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Whether the ongoing process of the growth of towns and cities is sustainable or not is highly debatable. There are studies that have been undertaken at national or local levels, and there are scholars who are working on the theme, all of whom appear to be uncertain about the sustainability of the current urbanization particularly as they are unfolding in the developing world. The issue at the global level is certainly less researched

and requires different approaches compared to the analysis undertaken at the national or sub-national scale. Bimalendu Bhattacharya effectively takes up this challenge in this commendable scholarly work on Global Urban Process: Growth of Towns and Cities. The book provides a brilliant analysis of the global urban process from historic times to the modern. Urbanization, according to the author, is man's best achievement, forming a very small fraction of human history/existence on this earth and has gone through a series of transformations effected and affected by various forces. Bhattacharya identifies the mid-twentieth century as the watershed in the course of urbanization both in its regional spread as well as in sharpening the 'urban divide', propelled by changes on the political map of the world resulting from decolonization. The politico-economic changes along with the fast-changing lifestyle of people especially in the developing world open up new debates on the future of urban development in the present century. The book under review is only a logical culmination of Bhattacharya's earlier work on urbanization in India including 'Urban Development in India: Since Pre-Historic Times' (New Delhi), and 'Urbanization, Urban Sustainability and the Future of Cities' (New Delhi).

Despite definitional diversity regarding what constitutes 'urban' across nations-so essential for the purpose of comparison, the author makes a serious effort to bring a semblance of comparability across different countries. This has made it possible to get an insight into the overall global urban process right from 1800 AD and till 2050 AD. With a text running over 481 pages classified into ten very relevant chapters each dealing with an important aspect of urbanization, supported by fifty tables and fourteen figures, and some two hundred and seventy bibliographies reveal the scholarly endeavour of the author.

The book begins with a historical account of the global urban process tracing the growth of cities and towns as they have transformed into different phases. The analysis meanders through the lanes and by-lanes of the complexity of the urbanization process. This includes the concentration of cities in the river valley to begin with, and the emerging economic powers with the industrial revolution. The author pays special attention to the outer layout and internal structure of the cities too. The role of various trading links and market areas of the world, laying the foundation for further development of control and command cities of the world too makes interesting reading.

This is followed by an analysis of urbanization and global economic profiles focusing upon the comparative analysis of the level of urbanization during the 16th and 17th centuries and then up to mid 19th century- up to a point when the urban growth was still very low. Only some regions in Europe and America were experiencing urban growth and development. The focus

then shifts to post 1950 urban growth, in the post-war period as the world witnessed several important changes in the wake of industrialization and economic development when urban growth began to take shape in countries which were hitherto more rural in their population composition. It is this period that the author considers as a watershed as far as global urbanization is concerned.

The pattern of global urbanization underwent substantial modification with the number of cities, the share of urban in the total population and size and classes of cities in the world, changing at a rate unprecedented in history. However, the spatial pattern and the inherent disparities too increased significantly, particularly between the developed and the developing world; the latter experiencing much faster growth. The growth of the cities especially in the developing world saw a change in lifestyle because of an increase in the GNP and GDP of these countries. Small cities in the developing world multiplied like never before. The cities then responded to a new phenomenon popularly known as suburbanization, while many cities/towns declined with shrinkage in their economic and social bases or due to long term economic depression, political decision and reclassification of cities.

The increased pace of global urbanization also created new problems of concentration of poverty and the development of slums. The author focused on the urban poor which now shifted from the rural areas to the towns and cities changing the spatial character of the urban areas in the wake of increasing disparities and income inequalities leading to urban segregation, unequal access to social infrastructure and amenities in the city.

In one of the chapters, the author reflects on the new urban trend experienced in the developing world. Though the developing world is the home of early urban transformation such as those in Mesopotamia or Indus and Chinese civilization, it is these countries that experienced urban growth under a completely different socio-political condition of colonization which had a remarkable impact on the pattern and structure of urban development in the developing world. The process of urbanization in these countries responded to metropolitanisation of the colonial powers that shaped and reshaped the urbanization process depending upon its own needs and requirement.

A captivating chapter devotes itself exclusively to the urban development in two of the largest countries of the world namely China and India. By comparing these two countries containing over half of the human population in the globe, the author provides a detailed account of the urban growth in these two countries experiencing contrasting realities but sharing many similar concerns. One such issue discussed at length is the role of migration and its impact on an urban area, and the other concerning the development of peri-urban, urbanism and gated communities in china. As regards India, the author concentrates more on the historical background which starts from early settlers, then the medieval period which is followed by the arrival of European merchants and then British occupation and the urban situation at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The colonial period until independence receives much attention while the overall urban development in the last hundred years is quite revealing.

The author then turns his attention to the health of the cities in the context of making the city green and sustainable focusing on Green and Brown's agenda. According to the author environmental actions will be crucial in making cities sustainable irrespective of their location. In this regard, he cites examples of the New York Green City Programme and various other efforts at the international level such as IPCC, UN-HABITAT, and SDG which aim to make cities livable. The author then draws attention to ecological footprints, the importance of urban agriculture and their role in making cities sustainable.

The book then turns to issues pertaining to the future of the global urban turn. Undoubtedly the world is urbanizing fast and a majority of the people now live in urban areas. The growth will continue into the future albeit at a reduced pace. The twentieth century has been a century of an urban explosion. The 21st century will have to deal with urban problems in its various manifestations posing serious challenges to living and livelihood. The author makes a significant contribution to understanding these challenges and opportunities.

The term urbanism coined by Louis Wirth as a way of life is explained differently by the author. The concept explained by Louis Wirth talks about the growth of cities and the urbanization of the world is one of the most impressive facts of modern times, as it has given rise to a *Reshaping of the Mode of Living*. The differences in urbanism might be in the context of ideological background which determines China's urban growth. According to the author, sustainable urban development is not possible only with

the physical environment. The concept of urbanism will help to change the perception of the people living in urban areas with their day to day lives.

The book is a complete package for the academician to understand the global urban process. In a rare display of scholarship, the author, with his intense understanding of the urban issues, has craftily handled multiple aspects of urbanization and urban growth in its spatio-temporal frame in a single book. The book under review can easily be classified under those few contributions on urbanisation which has very skillfully combined all the ingredients

of a book writing project that conjures up a genuinely scholarly work. The ability of the author to synthesise diverse dimensions of urbanization at the global level is the most admirable quality of the book that stands out as the most significant contribution in advancing the frontier of knowledge. It is a must-read for all those who are interested in urban issues.

Ajay A. Gawari

Assistant Professor,

Department of Geography,
Savitribai Phule Pune University,

Pune - 411 007