

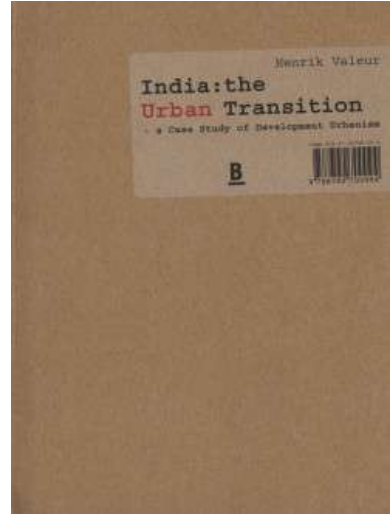
Sustainable Urbanism

Pallavi Dalal

One of the most striking features of urbanisation is its dynamic nature. This is due to varying intermittent phases of the process whereby human society moves from being predominantly rural to being largely urban. Henrik Valeur in his book “*India: The Urban Transition - A Case Study of Development Urbanism*” talks about the factors affecting this transition citing mainly Chandigarh and Bangalore as examples.

Henrik Valeur is a Danish architect-urbanist based in Copenhagen. He is concerned about ever-increasing consumption leading to exhaustion of natural resources, disruption of eco-systems and reduction of biodiversity, besides the production of hazardous waste and greenhouse gasses contributing to global climate change. Valeur is a self-confessed Indophile, during his visits to India, he has collaborated with architecture schools, city authorities, planners and NGOs mainly in Chandigarh and Bangalore. He has compiled his experiences and outcomes of studies in a form of this book with fresh perspective towards these two Indian cities.

In his book, Valeur foregrounds his concerns about air pollution, contamination and depletion of freshwater resources, lack of proper housing, environmental and human



India: The Urban Transition A Case Study of Development Urbanism

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health problems, food and transportation. The book highlights these concerns through a collection of essays, interviews, opinions, research articles and project proposals. The book is divided in five basic chapters: Air, Water, Housing, Food, and Mobility. The author has also ventured in providing some ideas towards solutions to these issues to improve liveability of these cities. Interesting as they are, they remain localised and sometime piecemeal. He points out use of plantations and natural ventilation as common sense solutions of which we have lost sight.

The book advocates a phenomenon of development urbanism rooted in sustainability to reduce poverty and minimise damage to the environment. Essentially, it is to raise questions regarding the “right” kind of urban development. Valeur believes, we have to understand human relations in a different way. We depend on each other - both locally and globally - therefore we should collaborate more and compete less. That we have to treat the cities in a different way, not as dumb machines, but as sophisticated ecologies, in which people coexist and co-evolve, while adapting to a constantly changing environment.

In Valeur's view, although Chandigarh is a result of a modernist project and Bangalore evolved as a colonial garden city, both cities suffer from the peculiar problems encountered by most of the cities in the world. Author observes that Bangalore is a fast growing city in India but offers deteriorating quality of life because of congested roads, pollution and lack of space for social activities. In the case of Chandigarh, he observes, poor cannot afford to

live in planned city and get pushed to reside in fringe areas, creating chaotic conditions and mobility issues. Author suggests that the possibility of ending up in slums may discourage people from moving to cities and this can be one of the reasons for Indian's slow urban growth. In case of Bangalore, he rightly draws attention towards need of reviving and conserving existing water channels, this issue has been highlighted by many urban conservationists.

This book is just a beginning of ongoing experiences and works of Henrik Valeur that can be an indicator of urbanisation in India. A book titled as “India: The Urban Transition” is mainly about two cities. One cannot generalise about whole country, however, it should be possible to discuss guiding principles. The book also delves to compare development patterns of India and China as fundamentally different approaches. For those who are concerned about changing scenario of urbanisation in India, the book provides an environmental viewpoint with case studies of two cities. ■

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