

Inclusion for Urban Sustainability

Urbanisation is one of the essential ingredients that define human civilization. Large agglomerations make for interactions on a large scale, which make quantum leaps in the arts, science, technology, culture, and the economy possible and fruitful.

As a large country, with a sizeable population, India has also been going down that road. The much touted 'India Shining' campaign was the result of the massive progress that was made in these last few decades since independence.

But the exclusion of large sections of the population from this process dented that 'shining'.

*The lessons of the futility of such exclusion have not been learnt. The same class of interests that marketed the 'shining' have in substance co-opted the new UPA government. **Sainath** shows us that it is this same mindset that goads the Maharashtra government, part of the UPA parivar, to publicly equate 'good' urban governance with mere removal of 'eyesores', while surreptitiously allowing greedy realtors to reap unlimited benefits.*

*Such narrow visions are self-defeating, not just for political and electoral consequences, but for the economic, social and cultural well being of society - even of the very classes that bemoan urban blight. Enlightened self-interest apart, **Neuwirth** reminds us of ethical and moral issues of rights, equity and justice.*

*These insights are important not just for the metropolitan dwellers, but also for the small towns that are bulging at the seams, as the same narrow vision prevails across the regions in South Asia, and elsewhere. **Vidal** says these are as impoverished as the rural areas we normally associate with poverty, and even more exploited and polluted.▶*

The Unbearable Lightness of Seeing, *P. Sainath*, The Hindu, Saturday, Feb 05, 2005.

<http://www.hindu.com/2005/02/05/stories/2005020500611000.htm> [C.ELDOC.1077546]

Patriotic and Worthy, *Dilip D'souza*, The Hindu, Sunday, Jun 05, 2005.

<http://www.hindu.com/2005/06/05/stories/2005060500020100.htm> [C.ELDOC1. 0507/ Patriotic-and_worthy.html]

Towards Cities of Poverty, *John Vidal*, Frontline, Volume 21-Issue 20, Sept 25 - Oct 8, 2004.

[C.ELDOC.1076812]

The unbearable lightness of seeing

P. Sainath

How agonised we are about how people die. How untroubled we are by how they live.

NUMBER OF homes damaged by the tsunami in Nagapattinam: 30,300. Number of homes destroyed by the Congress-NCP Government in Mumbai: 84,000.

How agonised we are about how people die. How untroubled we are by how they live.

Maharashtra's Chief Minister, Vilasrao Deshmukh, says every Chief Minister would like to leave behind a legacy. His own, he believes, will be that of the man who cleaned up Mumbai. Mr. Deshmukh, in short, wishes to be remembered.

He will be. His Government wiped out 6,300 homes on a single day. A record the Israeli army would be proud to match on a busy afternoon in the occupied territories. It is a figure their bulldozers, with tanks and air force support, have not quite notched up yet.

The Mumbai mass evictions – now in pause mode – demolished a lot more than slums. They reflected well an elite mindset towards the deprived that fully matured in the 1990s. It is a lot about how we see the poor today. About a view marked by contempt for the rights and suffering of ordinary people. Unless that suffering is certified as genuine by the rest of us.

Mr. Deshmukh now says the destruction of "some" houses was "an accident." Not intended. Which perhaps places his Government in the category of natural calamity. However, most of Mumbai's beautiful people, some of whom attended 'tsunami



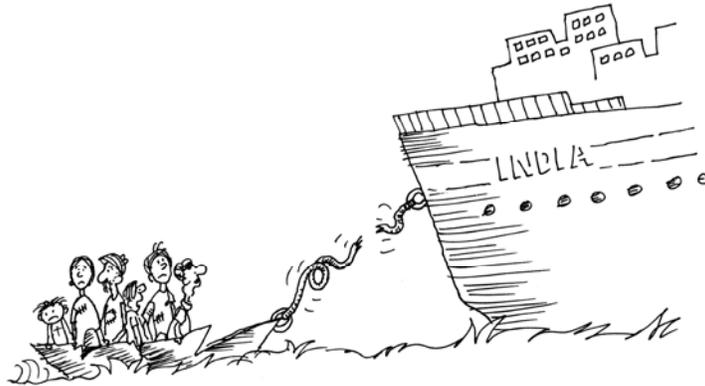
dinners' after expressing satisfaction over the city's mass demolitions, are firmly with their Chief Minister. No one from that fraternity has 'adopted' a demolished slum for adoring cameras. Nor organised relief operations for people, including many babies shivering without shelter, in one of the coldest winters.

Instead, Mumbai's elite now feels the need to carry the logic forward. Last year, 11 prominent Maharashtrians moved the Bombay High Court to bar slum dwellers from voting. This year, the city's Municipal Corporation itself asked the Chief Electoral Officer to drop residents of the demolished slums from the voters' lists. (A curious move in a society contemplating voting rights for NRIs and PIOs.) No one uses the real word – disenfranchisement. But it is what they mean. One way or the other, take away their vote. That should teach them they cannot live amongst us.

It would also blunt the one weapon ordinary Indians have and use. Unlike, say, their American counterparts, the Indian poor have the audacity to believe their votes can change things. They certainly did that right here. Mumbai's slum dwellers played a critical role in defeating the BJP-Shiv Sena in the 2004 Assembly polls. (Quite a few local leaders of the Congress know this well

and are fearful of a backlash. What if slum folk attempt similar adventures the next time around?)

Of course, excluding large numbers from voting involves minor problems of constitutional rights. But the *avant garde* amongst the elite have found the answer to that one: criminalise them. That would be a good start. "Book them for trying to steal public



property," is one bright idea. The Mumbai police have obligingly promised criminal trespass cases against dazed victims hanging around their razed homes. Satisfying, but annoyingly it would still leave them with the right to vote.

Maybe India will move towards – as on most other things – the American model. As a Human Rights Watch Sentencing Project report shows, 1.4 million African-American men – 13 per cent of their total number – are denied voting rights because of their criminal records. As many as 15 American States bar former felons from voting even after they have completed serving their sentences.

In Alabama and Florida, nearly one in every three African-American men is permanently disenfranchised. In six other States

the ratio is one in four. All this in States with significant African-American minorities. As the report notes, no other democracy denies as many people the right to vote because of their criminal records. A feat that could be eclipsed in India if the current mindset towards the poor goes the distance.

America has around two million human beings behind bars – more than any other nation in the world. Of these, 63 per cent are African-American and Hispanic. Consider that these two groups together form only 25 per cent of the population. You are far more likely to go to prison – and lose your vote – if you are African-American. Substitute poor for African-American and it is an idea much of India's and Mumbai's elite would go for.

Total disdain for even the foreseeable future is another element of this mindset. According to a UN Habitat report, one in every three human beings could live in a slum by 2030. Many of them Indians. Imagine how many voters we could do away with by criminalising slum dwellers. Just 'reform' the laws. Adopt the Mumbai idea nationwide – and India will be demolishing more homes than it has ever built.

"Many people will be inconvenienced and will have to make sacrifices if the city has to develop..." says the Chief Minister. The city's builder and real estate mafia will not be amongst those inconvenienced. The sacrifices are to be made by the poor. The power of those driving the process is immense. The protests and appeals of the slum folk themselves are simply dismissed. Those of some 28 slum dwellers organisations, housing rights and human rights bodies, political parties and trade unions are sought to be played down. It was anxiety over the fallout (at far higher levels of the Congress in New Delhi) that led to some slowing down of the demolitions. And to Mr. Deshmukh's admission of "accidental" evictions.

Class interests are asserting themselves across the major parties here. The Congress elite is far more in tune with Bal Thackeray

on this issue than it is with its own panicking base. The Sena chief has praised the Government for the terror visited on the slum populace. This is also one issue that unites the otherwise bickering Nationalist Congress Party and Congress. Hopefully, the coalition of a large number of organisations protesting the action will create a basis for some relief and resistance.

A crucial part of the mindset is the idea that promises made to the poor have no meaning. It matters little that millions of such people in Mumbai helped the Congress win a State it would surely have lost. At the Centre too, that party came to power riding a wave of popular anger against the policies of the National Democratic Alliance Government. And then quickly buried its anti-'India Shining' campaign. Today, a Montek Singh Ahulwalia can signal moves towards the privatisation of water without batting an eyelid. All earlier assurances on not making life harder for the deprived mean nothing. That was an election. This is reality.

That is why the better off – anyway miniscule in numbers – hardly bother to vote. The rich run governments by other means. Not by electing them. When governments have reneged on their most fundamental promises in the past 15 years, the media have welcomed this as "pragmatic." It is pragmatic to lie to the poor. It is also pragmatic to break your commitment to the 1993 United Nations resolution which terms forced evictions "a gross violation



of human rights."

A vivid symbol of the pragmatic new world was the Sensex soaring to a record peak – at the height of the tsunami damage. This phenomenon was repeated across most of the tsunami-hit nations as "markets sensed" a windfall in reconstruction spending.

The mindset is visible in our dealings with tsunami-hit citizens, too. We are now in the process of converting people's entitlements into our charity. Health care, access to clean water, sanitation, schools – all these might now happen because of our generosity. Not because human beings are entitled to them. You might get a house because we feel sorry half your family was washed away. Not by right of your citizenship of a decent nation and society.

There is one thing larger than Mr. Deshmukh's bulldozers: The process by which millions are uprooted from the countryside and forced to seek a living in the nearest city. What India is building is not an employment guarantee but an unemployment guarantee. As agriculture collapses and people vote with their feet, the Deshmukh Doctrine is the best we can think of. Mopping the floors with the taps all open and running.

The Indian elite wants a society geared up to deal with disasters that may or may not strike once in a hundred years but shows no urgency at all when it comes to ongoing misery not caused by nature. Towards the destruction of the livelihoods of millions by policy and human agency.

We want effective and advanced planning for events distant and hard to predict. But reject planning for the near future in favour of 'the market', which alone should be the one true guide. We want to build walls against the sea all along the coast after having done away with nature's own – the mangroves and sand dunes. Maybe we will build walls around Mumbai next to keep

the plebeians out. Mr. Deshmukh's legacy would then be forever secure.

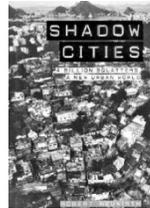
P. Sainath, Opinion, The Hindu, Saturday, Feb 05, 2005

Book

Patriotic and worthy

Dilip D'souza

Read Neuwirth to understand what slums are really about and what cities must do to tackle them.



**Shadow Cities:
A Billion Squatters,
A New Urban World,**
Robert Neuwirth,
Routledge, 2005, p.335, price not stated.

One way you can read **Shadow Cities** is as a voyeur: use it to peer into the lives of people who live in what we more genteel folk think are dreadful conditions. Do that, and you'll find plenty of images to gape at in wonder: flying toilets; the fan that threatens to but never quite does decapitate; pipes that need oral resuscitation... do such things really happen?

Oh yes they do, and **Shadow Cities** offers other opportunities to gape as well. But it is more useful by far as an examination of attitudes and policies towards squatters, in the four cities Robert Neuwirth lived in while researching it, and historically, in several famous Western cities. Look at it that way, and you may wonder with Neuwirth "about the morality of a world that denies people jobs in their home areas and denies

them homes in the areas where they have gone to get jobs".

And that's the issue, isn't it? In Mumbai earlier this year, an elected government tore down nearly 1,00,000 city homes, leaving nearly half a million citizens homeless. All on the grounds that these homes were "illegal". Funny, the jobs this city generates – the jobs that, as an engine of vibrant economic growth, it will naturally generate – are in no sense

illegal. But when affordable rental housing is essentially nonexistent, where must the people who fill those jobs live? Answer: Where they can. Often, in slums.

Where's the morality?

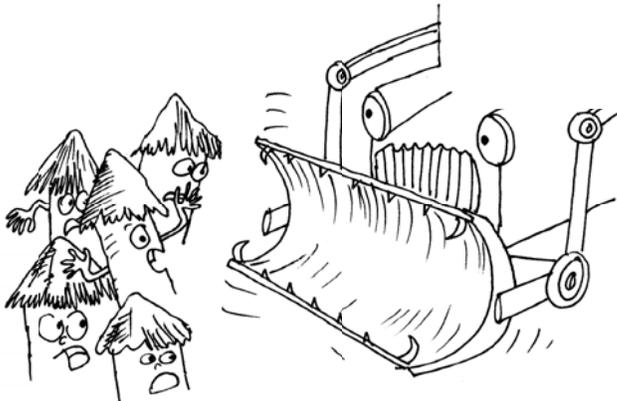
And yet, when they do that, the Shobhaa Des and Vilasrao Deshmukhs – indeed, all of us – climb the moral sand dune of "legality". We use that to deny them homes, or smash their homes. Where's the morality? Why does it seem to me like perversity and nothing else?

Neuwirth got a MacArthur grant to do something few journalists would. For months at a time, he "embedded" himself in slums – he objects to the word, but he'll indulge my use of it here – in Rio, Nairobi, Mumbai and Istanbul. The result is this work of hard-nosed, yet compassionate and thoughtful journalism.

In his time in Mumbai, living in one room in a Goregaon slum, Neuwirth became something of a star. Local journalists interviewed him with an odd air of wonder: for them "it was important", he realised, "to have face time with a strange nonsquatter who had become a squatter". And with this air of wonder, or perhaps even without it, they would often not even listen to him or pay attention to his experiences. There was the time he told a reporter who interviewed him that "of course, there was some crime in squatter communities", but not in the ones he had lived in. Besides, he felt safe in his Goregaon home, where he "never saw any crime". In print, the reporter had him saying: "There is high crime in slums, certainly".

"I felt", writes Neuwirth, like I was entering a twilight zone where journalists had no compunction about bending the facts to fit the mould they thought their editors or readers wanted". Because that is what we all – journalists, editors, film stars, Deshmukhs, Des – want to believe. That slums are writhing with crime, their residents filthy, their very existence illegal. Think like that, and destroying half a million lives becomes just one of those things you need to do to "beautify" the city, turn it into another Shanghai, make it "more liveable".

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More liveable for whom? Not for those half million unfortunates, clearly. Yet, think what might change in these numbers, these attitudes, if more of us recognised what Neuwirth does in this book: that they might be squatters, yes, but these also are people. And these people building

homes for themselves – which is what squatters do – is a process that's

"sensible, patriotic and worthy of a true citizen".

"Patriotic"? "Citizen"? You're spluttering, I know. Illegal encroachers, and they're "patriotic"? Tax-evaders, and they are "true citizens"? What's the man been smoking?

The unstated message

Whatever it is, it's humane, practical stuff. But you don't need to smoke it yourself. Read Neuwirth to understand what slums are really about and what cities must do to tackle them; to understand what a monstrous exercise in futility, destroying their homes amounts to. Futility, because such destruction, such

attitude, is the sure way to perpetuate poverty and slums. To me, this futility is the unstated message of this book.

And correction: they do pay taxes. In Mumbai, something called octroi forms well over half of municipal revenue, and it's paid by every single one of its citizens every time they buy anything at all: pin to vegetables to a Skoda Superb. Yes, every citizen. Even the "illegal" ones. So maybe it's time we started thinking of them as Neuwirth does: as people. ▶

Towards Cities of Poverty

John Vidal

Humanity is all set to cross the line from beginning a rural Species to an urban - a transformation that will redefine culture, politics and the way people live.

HONUFA came to Dhaka last year. Severe erosion on her family's patch of land on one of the islands in the mouth of the Ganga Forced the young Bangladeshi woman to leave her village for the capital. She took a boat and then an overnight bus ended up in a shanty town called Bari badh, which sprawls on the slopes of a new flood embankment.

Hounfa was lucky to find work immediately. She gets about £ 4.40 a day breaking bricks with a hammer. A tenth of what she earns goes on fresh water, the same on transport, but almost a third is needed to pay the rent for the room that she shares with two other women and three young children.

It is 0.6 sq meters, built of a bamboo rusty corrugated iron and cardboard and squats on stilts over a fetid lagoon. The monsoon-swollen water swirls just a few feet below the floor. A latrine at the end of a walkway empties straight into the water. In August, the whole community of 5,000 people was flooded out.

Bari Badh is not typical of Dhaka's slums, some of which are long established and reasonably secure with electricity and drainage. It appeared three years because businessmen are already filling in the lagoon with rubbish in advance of building more solid homes.

When that happens, Hounfa and the others will be moved on to new, equally vulnerable slums on a new edge of the world's most rapidly growing cities. Dhaka, growing more than 5 per cent a year, will have exploded from fewer than 600,000 people in 1961 to a projected 22 million in 2030. The number of slum dwellers like Honufa could double within 25 years to more than two billion people, almost one in four of the world's projected population. According to the United Nations Population Fund almost 95 percent of the expected 2.5 billion increase in global population expected over the same period will be in African and Asian cities. By then, more than 80 percent of North America, Europe, Australia, and Latin America, and half of Asia and Africa will probably be living in urban areas.

Put the Global population and poverty trends together and it is clear that the world is making a major transition at a breathtaking pace. Some time in the next two years, humanity will cross, probably forever, the line from being a rural species to an urban one. It will mark a turning point, a revolution potentially as significant as the passage from the Middle ages to the modern age, which will redefine culture, politics and the way we all live.

The scale of the redistribution of people now taking place is vast. Just 100 years ago, only one in seven of the world lived in a town or city and there were 16 places thought to have more than one million people. Today, there are more than 400 cities with over one million and in 15 years time, a further 150 are expected to join the club. The global urban population increased 36 percent in the 1990s alone.

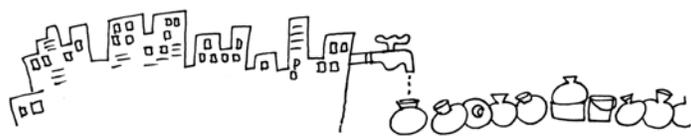
Contrary to popular imagination, however, the future is not expected to be a world of mega cities like Dhaka, Cairo or Manila. According to a new book by a group of Demographers working with the Washington - based United States national research Council (NRC), the lion's share of the world population

increase over the next 25 years will be in towns and cities with fewer than one million people. They expect these places to account for 60 percent of the developing country urban population.

The authors suggest that the largest cities, although stretched to the limit in poor countries to provide even minimal services for their inhabitants, will be well placed to attract international money for housing, infrastructure and services. In 15 years, they expect 60 cities to have more than five million people.

Of these, a primer league of about 30 “world cities” is developing. All of which are becoming dominant in their regions. The economic globalisation process, says the NRC team, is forcing them to compete more strongly with one another for events such as the Olympics, but also the world’s financial markets and business centres.

The authors fear, however, that the smaller cities will be increasingly left out and will be under - served by governments who will choose to funnel money into ever more dominant capitals. “The implications of globalisation for smaller cities are potentially disturbing. If capital is diverted from smaller cities to prepare large cities for their global debuts, significant costs for many of the developing world’s urban dwellers could result”, the



author say.

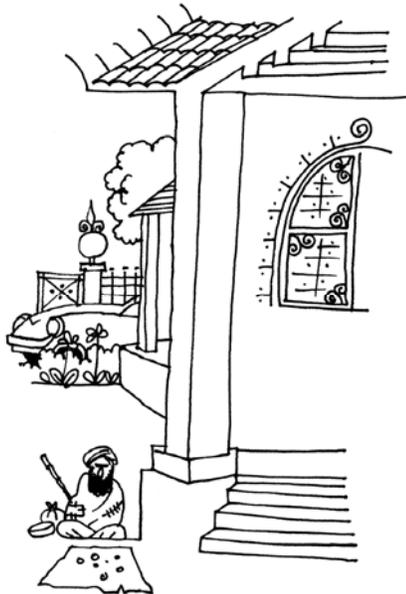
Massive urbanization means hundreds of already near-bankrupt cities trying to cope in 20 years with the kind of problems London or New York only managed to address with difficulty in

150 years. The strains are showing in a growing global fresh water and sanitation water crisis, air pollution leading to continent - wide smogs and 48- hour traffic gridlocks, and reports of dwindling food reserves in many countries.

According to the United Nations, hundred of cities will be in real trouble within a decade. In China, where urbanization has been extreme in the past 15 years, 400 out of the 670 biggest cities already have serious water deficits. Elsewhere, many cities are depleting underground stocks and finding that salt water is getting into the aquifers. Competition for supplies is leading to increased conflicts between industry and agriculture, and, while better management could clearly improve supplies in many places, cities are often right up against their financial or physical limits.

What scares many governments, planers and policy - makers is the real prospect that the majority of cities in developing countries will become sprawling slums, with people living without piped water or sanitation, with poor standards of housing, and health and nutrition problems on a par with anything found in the most poverty stricken rural areas today.

Last year, the U.N commissioned a 300- page report on the growth of slums. The authors found that slum - dwellers account for an average 43 percent of the population of



developing countries. In sub-Saharan Africa, the proportion of urban residents in slums is highest at 71.9 percent. While Oceania (Australasia and island groups of the South Pacific) had the lowest at 24.1 percent. South - central Asia accounted for 58 percent, East Asia 36.4 percent.

They concluded that local authorities were already failing to keep up with the infrastructural problems posed by rapid urbanization. More surprisingly, they suggested that the greatest underlying reason for the growth of slums *laissez - faire* globalization - the tearing down of trade barriers, the liberalization and privatization of national economics, structural adjustment programmes imposed on indebted countries by the International Monetary Fund, and the lowering of tariffs promoted by the World Trade Organization (WTO).

According to the authors, this “fundamental” economic restructuring of the world, which is seeing rich countries move away from Manufacturing and poor countries industrializing, drove rapid urbanization in the 1990’s. In South Korea , cities have been flooded with new arrivals since world trade rules allowed cheap, subsidized rice and other food imports to flood the market. Fishermen in Senegal, Mexico, Ghana and elsewhere had left the country side because the global fishing fleets have not only denuded catches, but made it impossible for small operators to compete with big foreign fleets.

The young of Burkina Faso and Mali had largely left for cities throughout West Africa and hope of work, rather than try to scrape a living off marginal land. It was seldom the process of globalization alone that may people leave the land, the authors found, but often the expectation of work and fulfillment, fuelled by global TV networks.

But the authors found that globalization was not just one of the major causes of urbanization, it was actually making life worse

for the poor in cities. It may have offered unparalleled opportunities for entrepreneurs, but barely any of the benefits of increased trade work reaching the poor. Research in sub-Saharan countries found conditions deteriorating throughout the 1990's in many cities.

In the past decade-the period of the greatest wealth creation in history, as well as the largest recorded growth in cities- the rich had gained and the poor had lost. Some developing countries, the others suggested, would have done better to stay out of the globalization process altogether if they had the interest of their own people in mind. The situation may actually be worse than imagined. According to Diana Mitlin and David Satterthwaite of the International Institute for Environment and Development(IIED) in London, the state and depth of Urban poverty is under estimated because of the way poverty is measured in poor countries. They suspect that the poorest half of the Urban population may be malnourished, ill and exploited as the poorest people in rural areas. If this is the case, it demands a different approach from governments and international charities who traditionally focus on rural areas.

But is it possible to have cities free from slums? The consensus is yes, but only if countries help to prevent their cities being swamped by congestion, environmental degradation and social unrest. The onus will be on cities themselves, and particularly the self organizing slum/dwellers, to find solutions.

The solutions, says David Satterthwaite, may not be with global bodies or national governments but with local authorities and urban grass root groups. He says large scale self help community groups are now working together and beginning to take over from traditional developers.

"It is easy to be pessimistic about the problems", says Mitlin. "But the energy of people to improve their environments is

enormous. People are investing a lot because it means so much to them. You can see real progress when people have a vision and get together with local government”.

Local government is critically important, she says.

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