

**City Planning – Two Coins in the Fountain:  
Exclusion and Exclusivity  
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The year was 1981 and the Municipal Corporation was planning to evict pavement dwellers from the streets of downtown Bombay. At this time, a disturbed journalist filed one of the first “public interest” petitions to protect the rights of the pavement dwellers. In 1986 the Court gave a landmark judgement in what came to be known as the Olga Tellis case, that held that the Right to Life included the Right to Livelihood, and hence, the pavement dwellers could not be arbitrarily evicted as their livelihood was dependent on where they lived. It was in this same city that the Slum Clearance Act had been passed in the early 70s, while the Slum Upgradation Scheme was conceptualised in the 80s, which later became the Slum Redevelopment Scheme of the 90s. And it was in the very same metropolis that, at the turn of the century, the government moved with massive force, with helicopters and armed police, to evict 73,000 families from the periphery of the Sanjay Gandhi National Park. Curiously enough, this action was in response to Court orders in another “public interest” petition, but filed this time by the Bombay Environmental Action Group (BEAG). What the BEAG appeared to be concerned about was the protection of a 28 square kilometre “National” Park, particularly the one-third reserved for “tourism”. But no one seemed to be bothered by either the sundry religious Ashrams inside the Park or the proliferating blocks of private apartment houses on its boundary. What, then, was common to the nature of “public interest” espoused by Tellis and the BEAG, and how did the Court view either or both? And were there any radical social changes in the twenty years that intervened between the two?

The first petition, of what would come to be subsequently known as Public Interest Litigation (PIL), was filed in the Supreme Court of India, in 1979, on the issue of the violation of fundamental rights of under-trials in prisons. An advocate filed a *habeas corpus* petition under Article 32 of the Constitution (Right to move the Court for enforcement of fundamental rights) on the basis of newspaper reports describing how these under-trial prisoners had already been imprisoned for longer than the maximum sentence that could be imposed upon conviction. For the first time, the Court had to adjudicate in a matter where the affected party was not directly approaching it for redress. Seeking to overcome the hurdles imposed by traditional jurisprudence, the Court gave a landmark judgement touching upon several such cases before it. It stated: “Where the weaker sections of the community are concerned, such as under-trial prisoners languishing in jails without trial, inmates of the Protective home in Agra, or Harijan (Untouchable caste) workers engaged in road construction in the district of Ajmer, who are living in poverty and destitution, who are barely eking out a miserable existence with their sweat and toil, who are helpless victims of an exploitative society and who do not have easy access to justice, the Supreme Court will not insist on a regular writ petition to be filed by the public-spirited individual espousing their cause and seeking relief for them.” But, unlike Tellis, the BEAG was clearly not espousing the cause of “helpless victims of an exploitative society”. Thus, it appears that in two decades, the notion of the “public interest” had dramatically changed, as had the notion of a “planned” city.

This phenomenon does not appear to be peculiar to the Congress and Shiv Sena’s *mahanagar* of Mumbai. In Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam’s Chennai, where 40% of the population is reported to be living in slums – as compared to Mumbai’s 55% - there are 69,000 families who have been identified to be living on government land and they are to be relocated to areas far removed from the city. The areas they will vacate will be taken over by railway tracks, hotel resorts, commercial and residential complexes, and modern businesses. Much of the “clearance” is being undertaken in the name of “beautification” and tourism. The same notions of “environmental improvement” are prevailing in Left Front-governed Kolkata where

Operation Sunshine was launched in 1996 to evict over 50,000 hawkers from the city's main streets. Currently over 7,000 hutments are being forcibly demolished along the sides of stormwater drains and the Metro and Circular rail tracks. Rumours are rife that boats full of tourists will ply on the restored Tolly's Nala. At the same time, lavish commercial and residential complexes are coming up unhindered along the Metropolitan Bye Pass, where the real estate prices rival those in the elite areas of South Calcutta. And the Congress-ruled State of Delhi, where sub-standard settlements house as much as 70% of the city's population, leads the way in environmental activism. Not only have vendors, cycle-rickshaws, beggars, shanties, polluting and non-conforming industries, and diesel buses already been "evicted", but next on the hit-list are those 75,000 families who live along the Yamuna's banks and are being held responsible for the river's pollution.

Smaller cities, where 15-20% of the people are living in slums, are in the grip of the same malaise. Hyderabad was distributing land titles and housing loans to the urban poor in 1977 but the Telugu Desam Party is now merrily leasing large tracts of land at heavily subsidised prices to business groups, international airports, cinema halls, shopping complexes, hotels, corporate hospitals, and railway tracks. Over 10,000 houses of the "weaker sections" have been demolished to make way for the new face of "Cyberabad". Bangalore under the Indian National Congress is in keen competition as it upscales to accommodate lounges and pubs, parks and apartment complexes, malls and layouts, "clean" industry and "green" business. Even the Court has begun to intervene in the debate on whether flyovers are superior to underpasses. Ahmedabad is not far behind with its "slum upgradation" scheme complementing architecturally bizarre housing blocks. But the Bharatiya Janata Party has been innovative in using communal frenzy as a means of evicting large sections of the "unwanted". Chandigarh displaced almost 40 villages when it was built, then it displaced those labour camps which housed those who originally built the city. Now the administration (first under the Akalis and then with the Congress at the helm) is again "beautifying" the environs by evicting the service class that inhabits the occasional slum. Under the Ganga Action Plan, not only is Varanasi's sewerage being "improved" (although the Ganga remains as polluted as before), but sections of the immigrant population are being selectively targeted for removal in order to "protect heritage". It has made no difference as to who has been ruling the State. Indore, again presided over by the Congress, has already seen the negligible impact of slum upgradation under an award-winning Rs 65 crore Habitat Improvement Project, and now the same upgradation is being scrapped in the name of riverfront development.

Three trends become apparent when we look at this recent history of urban reform. Firstly, large sections of the urban poor are being displaced from space that they have occupied for many years by every government – regardless of political affiliations. These sections are often the ones who have been employed in the informal sector or are self-employed in the tertiary services sector. Their displacement has as much to do with the space they live in as with the work that they perform, and has been promoted by the bilateral and multilateral funding agencies. Secondly, the geographical and occupational space that they occupied is being transferred to larger private corporate entities or wealthier groups, such as commercial complexes and residential layouts. These units are also often coupled up with labour-replacing devices ranging from automatic tellers and computer-aided machines to vacuum cleaners and home delivery services, thus taking over the work earlier done by the lower rungs of the urban population. Thirdly, while the driving force behind these changes is manifestly the new globalised economy, it is offered on an environmental platter of "cleanliness" and "beautification". This environmental activism, in turn, is the bread and butter of those professional "non-government organisations" (NGO) that are taking up the "public cause", as well as the judicial, legislative, administrative, and commercial apparatuses – including a very amenable media – that provide them with legitimacy and political support. In vicious combination these three trends are transforming the urban landscape from the city as "home" to

the city as “estate”. Concepts of urban planning too are changing in harmony with these trends although, as we shall see later, the seeds were sown long ago as capitalist empire spread its hegemony over the world.

The attack on work coincided with the early 90s when India fell into the trap of structural adjustment laid by the global multi-lateral funding institutions. It is thus, revealing how decisions taken in one part of society affect another. It was in 1985 that an NGO filed a “public interest” petition in the Supreme Court against the limestone mines in the Mussoorie hills, arguing that they were devastating the Himalayan ecology as well as despoiling the air of the valley below. After a series of hearings and investigations, the Court eventually ordered the closure of the mines on the grounds that the Right to Clean Environment flowed from Article 21 of the Constitution (Right to Life). However, when the workers in the mines protested that they would be deprived of the Right to Livelihood – as interpreted by the Court in the *Tellis* case – their appeal was rejected. The Court held that the Right to Clean Environment was “superior” to the Right to Livelihood. In this manner, of two children emanating from the same parent, the highest court in the land held that one was more important. In the last fifteen years the same line of “environmental” reasoning has been used by various vested interest groups who have urged the courts to demolish the livelihoods of many millions of ordinary working people. “Violations” of the “Master” plans have been used as the pretext for penalising the poor in almost all the urban conglomerates. Much of this has happened in Delhi – as befits the capital city of a “resurgent” India, being led by a Presidential rocket scientist into the new millennium. Since 1995, when the first “green” judgements were handed down, the judges have led the charge against the urban working class.

The attack on urban shelter began much earlier, sometimes even in the 60s when large scale evictions took place as the first Master plans came into being. The climax was reached during the late 70s when the declaration of a National Emergency suspended all human rights and the administration had a free hand to demolish and recast as they pleased. It is also important to note that the era of “public interest” litigation followed the Emergency, as the Court genuflected towards mass discontent and restored many of the civil liberties, particularly of the poor. But the wheel has come full circle. There are at least a dozen judicial orders that have now ordained that slum dwellers have limited rights to what is being euphemistically called “free” shelter. Administrative concern can be assessed by the fact that, on Independence Day in 2001, the poetic Prime Minister announced his Government’s intention to provide every urban poor family with a house to live in by 2010. Six weeks later, on World Habitat Day, the Union Cabinet cleared the Valmiki Ambedkar Awas Yojana with a munificent grant of Rs 2000 crores for the period of the next Five-Year Plan. Next, the Union Minister for Urban Development declared that 4 lakh houses would be built every year by public sector institutions for the urban poor. However, spread over 5161 towns and cities, and at the rate of Rs 50,000 per house, the number of houses built would average out to 15.5 per urban centre! So the Group of Ministers arbitrarily revised the target to 20 lakh houses per year. Real estate developers, on the other hand, estimate that for a family to acquire a one-room kitchen tenement, situated in the distant suburbs of metro cities, would cost a minimum of Rs 2 lakhs. The monthly instalment for a 15-year loan would be Rs 1860, or roughly 75% of the average monthly income of a slum dweller!

The events cited above, therefore, give rise to several questions about the nature of “planning” itself. Who makes these plans, and who are they made for? Do the planners take into account actual data from the study of how cities grow, or do they make constructs from what they think cities should be like? Where does reality end, and where does imagination begin? What are the basic theories of urban planning, do they differ from each other, and how have they changed over time. Is it true that city planners only “plan” cities, they do not “make” them? Do cities have their own organic logic of growth, with different interests competing with each other to make the city the way they want it to be for their own survival? Should more planners

begin to understand this, so that they will be able to plan for the city as it is actually growing, rather than for an idealised notion of what the city should be? And if planners fail to see this central truth will they eventually end up catering only to the needs of those whose interests are most powerful? Perhaps, in order to answer these and many related questions, it would be instructive to explore the history of Delhi, a settlement with over ten centuries of recorded experience in the construction of urban conurbations. Delhi has also been the site for multiple conquests and regimes, the nerve centre of political and administrative power, and the source of ideas and wealth. It is also the area where the *Pandavas* possibly built their *Indraprastha* on the banks of the Yamuna. The architect of this capital, the first city planner, was, appropriately enough, a “demon” named *Maya*, or “illusion”.

The other settlements which have left their imprint on the territory of *Dilli* are the forts of *Qila Lal Kot* (1024 AD), built by Anangpal, and *Qila Rai Pithora* (1170 AD) of Prithviraj Chauhan. Qutb-ud-din Aibak built his citadel and the *Qutb Minar* in the same area in 1199. All these cities were built on the *Kohi* (hilly) area in the south where the northern end of the long Aravali ridge intrudes into the Gangetic plain as a series of rocky outcrops. Thus, the town planner of that time was obviously locating for defence and commerce, as well as looking for sources of water which could be entrapped. It was in 1302 that Ala-ud-din Khilji cautiously descended from the *Kohi* into the more fertile basin to the north and built a new capital at *Siri*. But for the water supply to his new city his engineers had to also construct the imaginative *Hauz Khas* on one of the many streams leading into the Yamuna. This city was plagued by problems of defence, because in 1320 Ghiyas-ud-din Tughluq moved back south on to the *Kohi* and built *Tughluqabad* with its massive fortifications. However, the Tughluqs had to abandon this fort within five years because of a shortage of water, and Muhammad Shah Tughluq moved back to the lowlands and built the city of *Jahanpanah* in 1334. His son, Firoz Shah Tughluq, conceived of the idea of diverting the water of the Yamuna into an old bed of the river and bringing it all the way south, irrigating prime agricultural land and adding considerably to the revenues of the state. In a way, this was an environmental enterprise because the canal was constructed as a drought-relief measure. It was perhaps in order to be closer to this productive venture that his planners created *Firozabad* in the north in a wedge between the river on the east and the last of the Aravali ridge on the west.

In 1530, Humayun, the second of the Moghuls, built his *Deenpanah*, on top of a mound immediately south of *Firozabad* where the river provided a first line of defence and water was available in wells. The Afghan King, Sher Shah Suri, settled his *Dilli* next to this fort in 1542. Shahjahan moved further north into the apex of the wedge to build *Shahjahanabad* between 1638-44 with the *Lal Qila*, or Red Fort, as its fulcrum and a ring of satellite forts at *Tihar*, *Palam*, and *Patparganj* to protect the trade routes. The planners designed a series of tanks and wells to ensure a dependable supply of water, and extended the old Tughluq canal all the way into the heart of the city at *Chandni Chowk*. The necessities of defence, trade, revenue, and water kept all these cities located within the strategic basin to the east of the Ridge. They had elaborate layouts and considerable engineering but we do not know enough about the principles of city planning in that period. However, it is known that Shahjahan built *Shahjahanabad* because the residents of the older capital, Agra, would not let him broaden the streets there for his processions. A study of the layouts of *Lal Kot*, *Siri*, *Tughluqabad*, and *Shahjahanabad* shows that this grand processional way, with the royal palace at one end and a significant landmark (like a place of worship or a *hauz*) at the other, was the principal feature of all these cities. This, then, was the designed formal city of the upper classes, and it was surrounded by the flexible informal settlements containing *bazaars* and *katras*, *dharamshalas* and *hamams*, *akhadas* and *makhtabs*. These informal settlements were officially controlled by the city's elite but what really characterised them was that they were allowed to grow organically with formal protection being granted to those working classes who produced for, transported, and served the elite.

By the end of the eighteenth century the East India Company had begun making its deep inroads into the territories of Mughal India. This necessitated the military planning and construction of barracks and Company quarters near and within every large town, including *Shahjahanabad*. The confluence of the newly-commissioned Grand Trunk road and Bombay-Agra road made Delhi a place of strategic importance. The aftermath of the revolt of 1857 led to further enforcement of armed control and the area around the Red Fort was completely cleared to enable the military to assert its supremacy. Several of the *katras* and *bazaars* were razed to the ground and there was even a proposal to blow up the entire walled city. Fortunately, a shortage of gunpowder made that impossible, but the shortage of housing forced the European and British civil servants to move out of *Shahjahanabad*. Civil administration was now centred around the Secretariat built next to the northern ridge within the safe confines of the Civil Lines. The new Viceregal Lodge with its protective barracks was built at an even safer distance across the ridge. Thus, the military and commercial imperatives of colonial rule began to refashion the rules of town planning. This was reflected in the formation of the Municipal Committee in 1863, which proposed construction of a commercial square outside *Lahori Gate*, continuing into a new commercial quarter between the Gate and *Sadar Bazar*. These were supposed to be profitable enterprises in the tradition of the East India Company. The close of the century also saw the intrusion of the railway line as it thrust through and demolished the ramparts of the Red Fort and *Shahjahanabad*.

This new mode of transport not only displaced the old trade routes and their *sarais*, but it also marked a radical break from the previous concepts of town planning. Thus, the railways continued their expansion in the beginning of the twentieth century and, in the process, the new planners pulled down the bastions of the Walled City and filled the city's protective ditches and canals. In a curious anticipation of modern practice, much of this was justified in the name of "cleanliness" and "fresh air"! The *Delhi Sadar* station was constructed between the old town and *Sadar Bazar*, disrupting the organic linkage between the two, while a Mercantile Boulevard was proposed between the *Kabul* and *Ajmer Gates*. A second city began rapidly growing in *Pahargunj*, *Sadar Bazar*, and *Sabzi Mandi* across the railway tracks. This led to the appointment of an Assistant Commissioner in 1908 as Officer on Special Duty to "plan the future expansion of Delhi on an orderly basis". This officer promptly recommended the westward expansion of the city across the ridge and the "improvement" of the older areas. By 1912, the dream of an Imperial city at Delhi was being transformed into reality and a Town Planning Committee was appointed for the purpose. This Committee continued to adopt the same military and commercial objectives of the early colonisers. One of the founding principles of such a view was that not only had the "new" to be constructed afresh, but the "old" had also to be demolished. This was predicated on the argument that if the old were allowed to survive it would pose a threat to the new order. Hence, while earlier rulers had moved coordinates and built new cities, the British proposed to build the new on the ruins of the old itself. This laid down the fundamental premise of all "planned" eviction and displacement.

This Committee oversaw the acquisition of extensive areas in the southern basin for the construction of New Delhi. The architects Baker and Lutyens located the new Viceregal palace on the imposing height of *Raisina* hill with the new city spread out at its feet. The processional avenue of King's Way (now Rajpath) from the Palace (Rashtrapati Bhavan) to India Gate followed the vision of the older formal city. But the space alongside was not allotted to shops, residences, and temples in the manner of Chandni Chowk. Moving further outwards, what would have been the informal settlement in earlier times, was also formally planned with a strict sense of military hierarchy. Connaught Place was given over to commercial enterprise. Huge acreages were laid aside for the bureaucracy and ruling elite with spacious avenues and parks dominating the landscape. Scrub forests and agricultural farms were cleared to make a series of bungalows in descending order of size according to the rank of the occupant. Even the size of the family to potentially occupy the servants quarters was specified! With their passion for measurement and

“science”, the new rulers ensured that everything was in its “proper” place. In the process, the roads cut in straight lines across the city as if on parade. Revenue was codified as if the rains would arrive on time, the crops grow at regular intervals, and markets function according to the rules of Empire. Much of the earlier drainage pattern, which had taken the run-off from the Aravalis to the tombs and gardens of the earlier rulers, was destroyed to make way for a new regime of stormwater drains. The Committee also assigned the Western Extension Area (WEA) for expansion, particularly for settling the “poorer classes”. It decided to completely demolish the remaining city wall “to provide access of air to the congested area”. And, for the first time, land was acquired next to the railway lines for the establishment of separate industrial areas.

We get a glimpse of the reconstruction of the city when, in 1924, the Basti Harphool Singh clearance project was sanctioned to forcibly move the poor population to the WEA. The Basti was curiously placed because it housed the labour coming into the textile mills on the road to the cotton-rich Punjab, but was uncomfortably close to the bungalows of the sahibs to the north. Not surprisingly, three years later, in 1927, it began to be reported that there was a population of 15,000 in the WEA living “in much discomfort owing to lack of services”. Consequently, a northern expansion was recommended, beyond Civil Lines and across the Grand Trunk Road, on the outskirts of the old *Sabzi Mandi*. Thus, the city planners were clearly promoting yet another displacement of the working population. Several new roads with adjacent commercial developments were built in the new areas and each one of these showed good financial returns. However, civic conditions continued to deteriorate so much that, in 1936, an officer was specially appointed to go into the whole question of “congestion in Delhi” and suggest appropriate measures. The recommendations of this officer formed the basis for a further expansion of the city towards the Agricultural Institute in the west with new industrial areas next to the railways there. For this purpose, the *Najafgarh jheel* had to be drained and the Yamuna canal was filled up to the *Andha Mughal* bridge to “prevent malaria”. The poor were evicted from “evil slum areas” of the Walled City (now no longer with walls), the *Mohtaj Khana* next to the *Sabzi Mandi*, *Rehgarpara* in *Karol Bagh*, and *Kala Pahar* near *Sarai Rohilla*. The lands they vacated were converted gradually into middle-class residential areas. A vast area of prime agricultural land south of the Agricultural Institute was reserved for the army.

The next few years were politically tumultuous years and there was little time for mundane matters like town planning. But, with the partition of the country in 1948, there was a mass exodus from across the border and 4.5 lakh refugees arrived almost overnight at Delhi. The Ministry of Rehabilitation was entrusted with the task of resettling this huge population and it accomplished this by setting up a circle of colonies around the periphery of the city, mostly within the boundary set by what is now Inner Ring Road. Not only were the displaced families rehoused but opportunities were also liberally made available for them to economically and socially rehabilitate themselves. The Ring Road itself acted as a spur to commercial development. So massive was the investment that, by 1951, the Ministry considered that its job was over. However, this huge planned expansion had its corollary effect on the city. In 1955 there was an epidemic of jaundice within the core of the city and 700 people died. In the subsequent investigation it was discovered that considerable amounts of untreated sewage from some of the newly planned colonies were being discharged into the Najafgarh nala which, in turn, was releasing its load into the Yamuna just downstream of the pumping station at Wazirabad. The city’s water supply was thus contaminated, resulting in the spread of the epidemic. In response to the disaster the Ministry of Health immediately set up a Town Planning Organisation (TPO) and a barrage was constructed across the river at Wazirabad to separate the nala discharge from the water intake. The TPO also produced an Interim General Plan in 1957, which is a good example of how planners respond to the outcome of planned disasters.

In order to provide better administrative and financial support to the planning exercise, Delhi was declared a Union Territory in 1956. The Delhi Development Authority (DDA) was

constituted in 1957 by an Act of Parliament “to check the haphazard and unplanned growth of Delhi . . . with its sprawling residential colonies, without proper layouts and without the conveniences of life, and to promote and secure the development of Delhi according to plan”. For the next three years the TPO, guided by experts from the Ford Foundation, developed a Master Plan for Delhi for 20 years and this was presented along with maps and charts for unprecedented “public” discussion in 1960. The public debate on this initial document elicited over 600 objections and suggestions from “the public, cooperative house-building societies, associations of industrialists, local bodies, and various Ministries and Departments of the Government of India”. An ad-hoc Board was appointed to go into all these objections and it gave its recommendations to the DDA in 1961. Eventually the Master Plan of Delhi was formally sanctioned in 1962. Predictably, the first concern of this Plan was the growth in the urban population and the planners proposed to restrict it by building a 1.6 km wide green belt around the city and diverting the surplus population to the adjacent “ring towns”. It was also decided that the “congested” population of the walled city would be relocated in New Delhi and Civil Lines. At the same time several new industrial and commercial areas were declared for promoting growth. Thus, the DDA saw merit in both earning more revenue through industrial expansion as well as reducing expenses by curbing population increase, without examining the necessary linkage between the two.

It should come as no surprise that, by 1971, it was becoming clear that the city was going to grow far beyond the conceptions of the planners. The total number of industries had increased to 26,000 and there was a huge spurt in the squatter and “unauthorised” population. So, in a frenetic burst of activity to “restore order”, the administrative machinery swung into action and, from 1975 to 1977, 1.5 lakh squatter families were forcibly moved out of the centre of the city into planned resettlement colonies on the periphery. Each family was entitled to a plot of only 25 square yards with common services, and 60,000 such plots were demarcated on the low-lying Yamuna flood plain alone. Interestingly enough, all the resettlements were located very near the new industrial and residential areas, presumably designed to provide cheap and docile labour. This labour force was further enlarged by another 10 lakhs in 1982 when the Asian Games overtook the city. Numerous stadia, shops, roads, hotels, flyovers, offices, apartments, and colonies were constructed to cater to the needs of the Games and the anticipated commercial spillover. The second Ring Road became a magnet for further commercial and residential development. But the city could not cope with this additional burden. In 1985, the National Capital Region Board was set up in an attempt to plan for the balanced growth of the extended region around the capital. Also in 1985, the first draft of the second Master Plan was published for comments. However, unlike the first Plan, this one was not summarised or translated into Hindi and Urdu, nor was it distributed publicly. Nevertheless, the draft came in for severe criticism from the government itself as being “conceptually defective” and the Delhi Urban Arts Commission (DUAC) was asked to prepare another plan.

The DUAC took a close look at the failures of the first Master Plan to detail its own Conceptual Plan. But their plan was not to the liking of DDA and it was not put up for public hearing but discussed in a select committee. In order to avoid the process of public consultation and parliamentary debate, it was decided that the second plan would only be “precisely a comprehensive revision of the first one”. This revised version identified that the major part of the city’s problems originated outside and their solutions lay beyond its territory. It too called for “limiting” the population by de-industrialisation, maintenance of ecological balance in the Ridge and the Yamuna, decentralisation into districts, and provision of multi-nodal mass transport, with low-rise high-density urbanisation. Interestingly enough, it called for a special area status for the walled city as “it cannot be developed on the basis of normal planning policies and controls” – gobbledygook for saying that the planners did not really understand the principles underlying *Shahjahanabad* and the older settlements. The truth is that the planners did not even understand the implications of what they themselves had done. An outbreak of cholera in 1988

reminded them of this when 1500 people died in the 44 resettlement colonies they had planned in 1975. It was recognised that the disease had spread through ground water contaminated by inadequate sanitation measures in the low-lying areas but an embarrassed administration shied away from being held responsible. Thus, the new plan was not only unable to tackle the problems created by the earlier one, it did not even incorporate its own analysis of the failures and weaknesses of past planning into its recommendations.

This systemic failure of modern planning is evident in the situation as it obtains today, as the date for yet another Master Plan approaches. Delhi has spread far beyond the confines of the Outer Ring Road. The original green belt has largely fallen victim to land developers, including the DDA itself. The resettlement colonies and industrial areas, that were once supposed to be at the fringe of the city, have been drawn into its ambit. The ring towns are now contiguous urban sprawls and the arterial roads and national highways are the most congested in the region. Increasing numbers of the poor continue to live in shanty towns without services. It is presently estimated that as much as 60% of the population lives in sub-standard housing. Rapidly shrinking employment opportunities and crusading environmental activism have made the situation significantly worse for them. While the city gets the Clean City Award from far-off California, it's own citizens grimly face critical inadequacies of work, shelter, civic amenities, and governance. The guidelines for the new plan issued by the Ministry of Urban Development refuse to address these issues. Instead they focus on how to promote private participation and market competition in land, housing, and services; how to protect heritage, encourage tourism, and increase revenues; and how to obey the twin dictates of military order and profitable commerce. The fact is that the planners have not learnt any lessons from past disasters, such as the jaundice and cholera epidemics and the Asian Games. The jubilant and manipulated voices that accompany the announcement of the Yamuna channelisation plans and the gigantic mall on the Ridge and the looming Commonwealth Games testifies to the total bankruptcy and arrogance of the planning process.

The trends visible in almost all cities and towns are very much in accordance with this face of globalised, "free" market, and foreign investor-friendly urban planning. The chorus of "resurgence" may conceal this ugly face for a while or keep it away from the gaze of the byte-hungry media, but the truth speaks through many forms, many eyes, and many pains. As the huge mass of people gets evicted and goes hungry, as their children gaze at the remorseless wasteland around them, and the social balance goes berserk, whose sweat will maintain the behemoth of 8% growth? The politicians may swear by reforms, the administrators can rail against corruption, the judges be as activist as they come, and the glossies swoon over the latest scandals from never-never-land; but somewhere there glows the ember of protest that will ignite to shake empire and all that stand for it. There is a nascent plan in the womb of those "who are living in poverty and destitution, who are barely eking out a miserable existence with their sweat and toil, who are helpless victims of an exploitative society and who do not have easy access to justice". If today the presiding juridical deities are unwilling to play midwife, then there are other conceptions, other weanings – indeed, other worlds! Because city planners do not make cities, they only imagine them!

Dunu Roy  
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