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BOOK REVIEW

Reflections on 21st Century Human Habitats in India : Felicitation Volume in Honour of Professor M.H.Qureshi

By Mahabir S. Jaglan, Rajeshwari (Editors)

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The felicitation volume "Reflections on 21st Century Human Habitats in India" collates the contributions made on distinct dimensions of human habitations in the country. The editors Prof. Mahabir S. Jaglan and Prof. Rajeshwari have done a great job in selecting the authors, most of whom have been disciples of Prof. M.H. Qureshi in whose honour the volume has been brought out.

The basic concerns exemplified in the book include: the nexus between environment resource base and livelihoods; economic growth and regional disparities during the post economic reforms period; and the socio-spatial inequalities. The issues covered have been the favoured areas of research of Prof. M.H. Qureshi. There are 15 chapters in all, organised in four well-marked sections.

The introductory chapter written by Mahabir S. Jaglan and Rajeshwari (editors), provides general overview in a very lucid manner along with a good explanation of the issues raised in studies comprehended in the book. The memoirs of Prof. Qureshi given in this section are inspiring for young geographers. It is followed by Section II in which four chapters dealing with environment, resource base and livelihoods in India have been included. Section III contains five chapters relating to economic growth and regional

disparities. The remaining four chapters constitute the content of Section IV on the theme of socio-spatial inequalities.

The central contributions to the collection in Section II, by Partap and Partap (2021), Sen (2021), Kumar and Jaglan (2021) and Singh (2021) have highlighted the manner in which livelihoods of people get affected by climatic factors such as fluctuations in temperature and rainfall; scarcity of common resources; unequal access to basic resources like groundwater and land in different parts of the country. All four studies of this section have conducted in-depth analysis of primary and secondary data and have made recommendations for effective policy initiatives in order to safeguard the interests of stakeholders, with an overall objective of protecting livelihoods of people. The section has effectively addressed livelihood issues of social groups/communities juxtaposed in only the rural resource base and environment. The concerns of urban habitations, which are equally complex, have been missed.

Human habitations, in situ, are centres of economic, social, cultural and even political growth. These habitations actually control the provision of different types of opportunities in their own territories. During the post reforms period, phenomenal changes of varying

magnitudes have taken place in various facets of these habitations. As a consequence, regional disparities in levels of development, in the country, have widened. Contributions towards addressing these disparities have been very logically included in Section III of the present volume. Specific mention here is made of the chapter on socio-cultural spaces and dynamics of transformation in rural India by Sinha et al. (2021). In this study, the authors have examined the institutionalisation of traditional democratic principles. They have found that dominant social groups make use of traditional socio-cultural values to forge alliance with forces of modernization and in the process weaker sections of society get bypassed. Through case studies it has been shown that effectiveness of institutions of democratic polity remains segmental, sporadic and disparate in geographic space. The chapter dealing with locational changes in commercial and industrial activities during post reforms period by Shaban and Sattar (2021) finds decline in employment and jobless growth during this period in the country. The already developed regions have been found to have attracted more of large enterprises, widening further the inter-regional disparities in levels of development in India. The chapters, Changing Characteristics of Traditional Commodity Specific Markets in Varanasi City (Alam et al., 2021) and Assessing the Pattern of Socio-economic Development in Ahirwal region of Haryana (Yadav and Jaglan, 2021), have added value to the section. These studies have demonstrated how forces of economic liberalization have brought changes in basic character of these areas and have increased the gaps in levels of development.

In Section IV on socio-spatial inequalities, chapters on health and education infra-

structure have been included. It also has one theoretical chapter on Urban Spaces and Gendered Resistance. In the chapter contributed by Rajeshwari and Mehra (2021) critical spatial gaps in healthcare infrastructure have been noticed in Haryana state. Sabharwal's (2021) work on access to higher education in India has highlighted emerging new inequalities in educational opportunities. Similarly, unequal access to water in urban centres like Delhi has been reported to be governed by economic status and social hierarchies in a chapter contributed by Sarkar (2021). Datta (2021) in her theoretical study on Gender, Urban Spaces and Gendered Resistances has made an attempt to build the idea of gender sensitive and fear-free inclusive urban spaces. The author has ably examined the significance of contemporary urban movements and gender resistance to reclaim space and inclusivity at different scales. This section has adequately justified the overall theme of the book. The extent of unequal access and inadequacy in health care infrastructure with a focus on Covid-19 pandemic in the country, somehow, could not attract much needed attention of the editors for including a chapter.

The volume has very successfully brought to light different facets of human habitations in 21st century India. The findings of studies included in the collection are interesting and meaningful from both research and policy point of view. Reading this book would certainly be rewarding to geographers, scholars from allied disciplines and policy makers. It is a befitting felicitation to a stalwart-Prof. M.H. Qureshi.

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