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Anil Kumar Vaddiraju, *Urban Governance and Local Democracy in South India*. Routledge, 2021, 112 pp., ₹695. ISBN: 9781032045795 (Paperback).

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Traditional economic thinking has considered urbanisation a necessary condition for economic growth (Harris & Todaro, 1970; Lewis, 1954). In the post-war period, however, urbanisation began to be seen as both a challenge and an opportunity for development, as urban cities became centres of power and inequality, which makes urban governance a vital topic for discussions. The 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments paved the way for decentralisation in India. Through his book, Vaddiraju has attempted to explore the problems surrounding urban governance and local democracy in the urban areas of South India with comparative frameworks.

The book, spanning five chapters, follows the framework of social capital theory made popular in political science and governance by Robert Putnam, Michael Woolcock, Helen Sullivan among others. Written from the political science perspective, the book discusses the governance in small district-level cities and raises critical questions on the nature of urban planning, major ongoing issues in local governance, current state of affairs of public utilities like drinking water and sanitation, and problems of social capital in realising urban governance in the states across South India. Vaddiraju has focused on the aspects of constitutional governance and analysed from within the framework of social capital theory while following the methodology adopted by Rob Jenkins (2004), who made a similar comparative analysis across India's states. Vaddiraju's study is based on the 2011 census for secondary data and it is reported that the level of governance and decentralisation could be interpreted with help of primary data.

The introductory chapter deals with the concepts of urban governance and local democracy, theoretical framework, and methodology. The book defines cities with a population more than 100,000 as urban areas, not following the concept of Census Towns (CTs) as recommended by the Directorate of Census. It

scrutinises urban governance in terms of decision-making powers, urban planning and the provision of two essential basic amenities namely drinking water and sanitation.

Vaddiraju, while carefully discussing the rationale of the study, observes that Indian democracy ignores the small cities and the current urbanisation process in South India is an offshoot of economic reforms. In India, urban poverty is worse than rural poverty in absolute terms (p. 15). Vaddiraju also notes that the 73rd amendment to the constitution was relatively successful in terms of implementation when compared to the 74th amendment. Development in Bengaluru and Hyderabad—the capital cities of Karnataka and erstwhile Andhra Pradesh, both known for being top information technology hubs—are predominantly urban-centric. Meanwhile, the urbanisation process in Kerala and Tamil Nadu appears to be more dispersed across many districts. Vaddiraju has used extensive data and references while comparing Karnataka and Maharashtra, but such data-centric comparison, however, appear to be limited in the case of Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

The urbanisation process in the former Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka has been spatially concentrated (top-heavy urbanisation), which ultimately leads to political concentration and a serious lack of decentralisation of urban development (p. 31). Vaddiraju opines that urban studies are yet to be given adequate academic importance in Andhra Pradesh. This book consists of a chapter on microstudies of Udipi and Hubli-Dharwad from Karnataka and Mahbubnagar and Kurnool from Andhra Pradesh, as the book spotlights the problems these cities face like water supply and solid waste management. Though there seems to be statements of generic nature such as ‘communalism was observed in Dharwad, but not in Udipi’ (p. 43), and ‘in Mahabubnagar, city planning is almost absent’ (p. 50), it would have had stronger reach had they been supported with numbers and adequate shreds of evidence.

While examining the urbanisation pattern, Vaddiraju notes that Tamil Nadu and Kerala—the two states at the forefront of urbanisation in South India—have experienced a more dispersed urbanisation process over the inter-census period from 2001 to 2011 (p. 57). Tamil Nadu, he argues, is the most balanced urbanised state and represents the ‘classic model’ of economic development. The evenly distributed manufacturing sector, active entrepreneurial class and good infrastructure strengthen this model. However, he expressed apprehension about the present situation of urbanisation in Tamil Nadu, as the Chennai population keeps growing, whereas the number of other urban agglomerations in the state has been on the decline (p. 64). Though Vaddiraju collected so many variables to make a comparison with Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, a similar pattern was not followed with Kerala and Tamil Nadu, which adversely affects the uniformity in analysis while disrupting the flow of arguments.

The final chapter presents a summary of the discussions. The macro-policy of urban governance in all the Indian states needs to be guided by the 74th constitutional amendment. However, there are differences in its effective implementation. The book calls attention to both structured urban governance and functional local democracy to counter the problems of expeditious urbanisation in

these states as also furnishing policy lessons from the process of urbanisation. Vaddiraju observes that the role of elected representatives in planning and administering the city is limited across these states, as he rightly points out the issue of bureaucracy and its impact on the district's urban planning. Though there are improvements in the provision of drinking water, problems still persist in sanitation and solid waste management in all these states. The country lacks local civil society participation and social capital in the urbanisation process. The book concludes with some interesting questions on digitalisation and the sustainability of the cities while presenting some of the recent programmes and schemes, and how they contribute to the future of these small district-level cities. The book also cautions that services through e-governance cannot substitute for basic infrastructure.

In spite of its perceived shortcomings, Vaddiraju's work is a significant addition to the literature underscoring the importance of urban governance and decentralisation of powers and responsibility at the local level, as acknowledged by Amitabh Kundu in his foreword to the book. This book will aid academicians and policymakers alike in understanding the ground reality of policy implications in urban governance. It would have been a welcome addition had the book incorporated the primary survey data into the text and the schedules, and questionnaires used for the study as an appendix.

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