

## Book Review:

# Understanding Urban Poverty in India: Experiences from Mumbai

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The major theme of this book is to reflect on “Urban Poverty in India” with special reference to the city of Mumbai, 5<sup>th</sup> most populous city in the world containing half of the population in slums or is homeless. The book is compiled addressing several key elements which have direct correlation with the above said issue. The book has covered range of topics of social sciences, from economics to population studies and feminist epistemology. In this book, urban poverty is approached from multiple angles through different contributors in the different articles and each article is independent of its approach to the said issue. The broad topics cover in this book is on Economy, Health & Hygiene and Food & Shelter.

The book gets underway with nine chapters dealing respectively with redefining poverty, water scarcity, street diaries related to issues on Gender, poverty and homelessness, economic inequality in maternal and child health in India, contraceptive use behavior among slums and non-Slums, economic impact of illness on the Nepalese community, lifestyle and decision making among youth, employment patterns among informal sector, disparities in healthcare in slums and the last chapter contributing to the quest for an operational definition of begging.

Chapter 1 portrays a meticulous assessment of poverty debate and questions the consequence of simple poverty based on caloric measures as a yard stick of poverty in today’s India. The paper then moves deeper into the trends of poverty in India and the politics of poverty. It also emphasizes the major problems with present poverty and put forward a ‘new and more realistic poverty that envisions poverty in India in humane words rather than animal life levels of present definition’. Chapter 2 discovers the quantity of water used in domestic houses in seven major Indian cities, namely, Delhi, Kanpur,

Kolkata, Ahmedabad, Mumbai, Hyderabad, and Madurai. The endeavor here is to investigate equity in consumption of water across diverse socio-economic groups.

Chapter 3 draws primarily from in-depth interviews and focused group discussions conducted with homeless women in three different settings – on streets, in temporary shelters of non-government organizations and in government institutions. This chapter attempts the nuances of the meanings of home and homelessness. Chapter 4 basically examines economic disparity in maternal and child health meters in urban India by means of the first and third round of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) conducted during 1992-93 and 2005-06, respectively. It is put forward that in order to enhance the reproductive and child health circumstance in the country, the focus should be given to the urban poor along with the rural population.

Chapter 5 examines the attitude concerning contraceptive use among slum and non-slum dwellers in Mumbai using secondary data from nationally representative survey – (NFHS) carried out in 2005 – 06. Chapter 6 provides a brief account of Nepalese diaspora in India and then shifts on to the assessment of use of different health care providers, per capita income and expenditure. Chapter 7 provides an insight into the lifestyle of young from urban slums in Mumbai. It unveils the patterns of lifestyle, specifically substance abuse and peer group interactions.

Chapter 8 looks at the employment patterns among informal sector workers in slums of Mumbai. The paper explores the pattern and characteristics of informal sector workers and throws light on their plight. Chapter 9 unveils several factors affecting healthcare utilization in an urban setting. Chapter 10 presents researchers and

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policymaker's definition on beggary and then, social scientists paradoxical description on begging. Finally, the author proposes an operational definition of begging, distinguishing begging policies, begging strategies and begging techniques.

This book represents the efforts of scholars, social workers and researchers to share their expertise on poverty and reflects belief that comprehensive a multi-dimensional approach of poverty can only deepen the understanding. The book does claim in generating a debate involving economist, geographers, sociologist, educationist, psychologist and other social scientist. At the end of this work, one comes to what is hoped will be the grand climax of finding out recommendation, how Urban Poverty could be eradicated from the society and cease to exist but in the end failed to get it. A careful reading leaves the reader disappointed and dissatisfied. The book does have some

repetition and many abbreviations are not clarified. After this mighty labor the reader do gets quality information on urban poverty in Mumbai but failed to relate it with entire country.

This book based on immense learning presents many profound insights into the whys and wherefores of the Urban Poverty in modern society. One gets the impression that the book has lacked measures to overcome and uplift the vulnerable from poverty. It also leaves behind a biases and slanted views which requires a careful and critical reading. One with less objectivity may get influenced with the presentation made using combination of methodologies and data from national surveys to bring in the authenticity. Overall it is brilliant contribution which presents a close and detailed view of Urban Poverty from different angles and lenses with multiple understandings of urban poverty. This book sets up a most interesting practical frame of reference for urban poverty analyses, and the analyses often reveal deep insights of the different authors.