

and the treaty-making in India is of recent vintage, starting with the fragmentation of India's party system and the rise of minority coalition governments at the Union level. Apart from the period of P.V. Narasimha Rao (1991–1996), and Manmohan Singh (2004–2014), such para-diplomatic role of the States was recorded in several cases. Since the period of Modi as the Prime Minister in 2014, the Look East Policy of the earlier regimes was continued with renewed vigour. Modi re-christened it 'Act East Policy' to give it a new vigour. Although Modi was originally (when he was the Chief Minister of Gujarat) in favour of States' involvement in certain foreign policymaking endeavours of the Union government, there is, however, little endeavour now on his part to involve the Chief Ministers and other leaders of the Northeast in his Act East Policy when the region was considered the land bridge to the South-East and beyond. This aspect has escaped the attention of Singh. On a closer look and analysis, it has been found that a new centralisation has taken place in respect of the region by forming a Ministry of Development of the North Eastern Region (MDoNER), formed in 2004 when the NDA led by the BJP was in power at the Union level led by late Atal Bihari Vajpayee under a minister with a Cabinet rank but who was not from the region. All subsequent ministers of the MDoNER have also been from other parts of India rather than the Northeast. The existing inter-state advisory body, that is, the North Eastern Council, has been brought under the control of this ministry. Singh has offered details of various judicial verdicts on the issue of para-diplomacy but has not raised the question if this para-diplomacy in India will survive in the days of one-party majority rule at the centre again.

The only major problem with the book is that it contains a lot of avoidable information on other federal countries in the world when the book's title would suggest otherwise. Finally, the book does not seem to have any research question(s), or the central issue that the book is preoccupied with. Also, the book has had too many subjects on the plate which has stood in the way of any internal coherence in the text. Organisationally, some chapters would have better been placed in the earlier part of the book. For example, parts of Chapter 6 (last chapter) should have been placed somewhere in the beginning since here Singh introduced his conceptual distinctions. All in all, it a very useful addition to the growing literature on federalism in India.

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Anil Kumar Vaddiraju, *Urban Governance and Local Democracy in South India*. Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2021, xvii+93 pp., ₹695.00.

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The book under review is timely for two important reasons: (a) three decades of constitutionalisation of urban local government (74th Amendment Act) and

(b) Covid-19- induced crisis, especially in the urban areas. The three decades of journey of urban governance provides an opportunity to assess and examine the functioning of urban local governments in general and the status of implementation of the provisions of the 74th Amendment in particular. As a matter of fact, in India, the studies related to decentralised governance since 1992–1993 have largely focused on enquiring into the rural local governance rather than on issues concerning urban governance. Seen in this context, the book rightly emphasises the need to focus upon the urban governance thereby to deepen the local democracy in cities and semi-urban areas.

The book draws the attention of academia and policy stakeholders towards strengthening the urban governance in order to deal with the challenges of growing urbanisation, especially in the southern states of India. The focus on the southern states is appropriate, given the faster rate of urbanisation in these states, excluding the Union Territory of Puducherry. The formulation of ‘urban-centric policies of development’ (p. xiii) is another reason for selecting these states as mentioned by the author. The book consists of five chapters, including the Introduction and the final chapter that reflects upon the future of urban governance and local democracy. The objective of the work is clearly spelt out by the author as follows:

The study of urbanization is not new, the study of urban governance is still at an incipient stage in India. This lacuna is more pronounced in India, where the prime focus of political science has been on the rural governance and politics rather than the urban. Therefore, this book aims at filling that lacuna to some extent. (p. 1)

To achieve the aforesaid goal, social capital theory has been employed with qualitative and comparative methodology, involving the techniques of interview, participant observation and field observation visits. These data are supplemented by the quantitative data using the Census 2011 figures. An attempt is made to contextualise the social capital theory within the functioning of the urban governing institutions with specific reference to the planning, delivery of certain civic services, issues of social capital and effective governance.

The author makes some valid arguments about the need for studying the smaller cities in particular and urban governance in general. Rapid urbanisation, contribution of mega cities to the gross domestic product and increasing levels of urban poverty are some of the determinants for the possible selection of the urban governance. The rationale put forward by the author is as follows:

Indian democracy ignores the small cities in both ways, while it secures legitimacy by appealing to the rural voter and, post the election process, showers attention on the megacities. Thus, the district-level cities do not have the requisite policy clout for claiming the attention of the governments and policymakers both at the centre and in the states (p. 16).

Patterns of Urbanisation

All the chosen districts from four southern states show growing urbanisation. However, the nature and the dynamics of urbanisation have variations across these states. In Andhra Pradesh (united) and Karnataka, the urbanisation is

revolving around the concept of 'urban primacy', meaning the single-city-centred urbanisation patterns in Hyderabad and Bangalore. Whereas the urbanisation in Kerala and Tamil Nadu shows a dispersed and spatial pattern. This singlecentred and multi-centred growth of the district-level cities in a way determines the effectiveness of governance, efficiency of service delivery and robustness of the social capital. The size of the city also plays an important role in whether it can be governable or ungovernable. In brief, a centralised pattern of urbanisation is seen in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh and a relatively decentralised pattern of urbanisation in Kerala and Tamil Nadu. This aspect was succinctly brought out by the author as follows:

The existing evidence points to a more dispersed or decentralized urbanization. That means that the focus should shift to developing multiple urban centres of equal weight in states. More urban centres means that more people can access the benefits of urban amenities, goods and services (p. 74).

Delivery of Civic Services

The study has assessed the delivery of civic services by the urban local governments with reference to drinking water and sanitation. Except for Udupi, in all other selected districts, there is a problem of drinking water and sanitation. In addition to this, the drainage system, solid-waste-management practices and the inadequate urban infrastructure also appear to be the concerns of the districts. In the context of decentralised governance, the following finding in the Salem district of Tamil Nadu assumes significance: 'The interviews conducted with the citizens demonstrate that they did not complain much regarding sanitation, the drinking water supply and solid-waste-management. The story was that of very effective bureaucratic governance of the municipal local bodies' (p. 64).

The above can be termed as a phenomenon of centralised decentralisation, meaning the effective delivery of civic services is taking place through the bureaucracy but not of the urban local self-government.

Implementation of 74th Amendment

An assessment has been made with respect to the implementation status of the provisions of Article 243W. Some of the specific provisions related to the status and functioning of District Planning Committees (DPCs), providing civic services and urban planning for the overall development of the district-level cities. One of the striking features that was found is that the implementation of the provisions of the 74th Amendment is unsatisfactory in general and urban planning in particular. However, the city governance is effective in Udupi and Salem districts for the varying reasons, that is, synergy between citizens and municipal council in the case of former and the strong bureaucratic governance in the latter. The case of the Udupi district is somewhat an exception due to coherence between local citizens, political parties and civil society, and thereby considerable pressure on the urban local government for the effective governance.

The urban governance in the selected districts is largely carried out by the bureaucracy through district or municipal commissioner's office, negating the role of DPCs as envisaged in the 74th Amendment. This is in contrast with the letter and spirit of the 74th Amendment. However, it reflects the ground reality of the urban decentralised governance reforms even in the pioneering states such as Kerala and Karnataka. The status of the implementation of the 74th Amendment in southern states indicates that the institutionalisation and the efficacy of the urban governance institutions are still a long way to go to achieve the goals of local 'economic development' and 'social justice'.

Status of Local Democracy

The local democracy in urban areas is yet to begin in letter and spirit. Unlike the Gram Sabhas in rural governance, the regular conduct of ward committees, with citizen's participation in the affairs of urban governance, is a non-starter to a large extent. One of the main reasons for this is the unwillingness of the bureaucracy and the politicians to empower the urban local government institutions and the citizens to engage in the democratic processes. The citizen's participation, by and large, begins and ends with voting in the elections. In the absence of institutional mechanisms such as Gram/Ward Sabhas, the local democracy in urban areas is invisible both in letter and spirit. It is observed that 'Local democracy in the district-level cities is in a neglected state. There is little that citizens do other than periodically voting in elections. Beyond that, citizen participation is almost nothing. In this context, urban democracy, particularly urban local democracy, is still a myth' (p. 81).

Notwithstanding this general pattern, the case of Udupi is somewhat better in terms of local democracy owing to the presence of functioning civil society in the form of better social capital. This leads to the final yet critical aspect, that is, nature of social capital and its implications for local democracy and urban governance.

Nature and Working of Social Capital

The study has adopted Robert Putnam's social capital theory. The hypothesis 'better the social capital, the better the urban governance at the local level' (p. 5) is tested in the field. The concept of social capital has been contextualised in the present study in two broad senses, namely (a) as facilitator of effective governance, and (b) as catalyst for communal cohesion or harmony. Among the chosen districts, Udupi, Kurnool and Salem, the social capital seems to be working fairly better as compared to other districts under the study. In fact, the effective governance of Udupi is due to the presence of high social capital, thereby preventing the scope for any kind of communal conflicts, whereas, in the districts of Dharwad and Mahbubnagar, it is a bit fragile in nature exhibiting fluctuations. Both the districts are sensitive to the communal tensions along with other dimensions such as caste, class and gender. The trust in the civil society varies across the districts. The reason for this trajectory is 'that traditionally, civil society organizations and NGOs at the district level concentrate on rural issues rather than

urban ones. There is a near-total absence of civil society organizations working on urban issues in all the four district cities that we have studied' (p. 82).

The case of Udupi provides a kind of social capital model as there is a better co-ordination among the citizens, political parties and the urban local government. However, in recent times, there are communal tensions erupting, thereby creating challenges to the social capital. The success of social capital depends upon how best the various stakeholders resolve the internal disturbances of the society.

The conceptualisation and operationalisation of the social capital theory seem to be given less treatment in analysing the field situations. In other words, to what extent the theoretical propositions of the social capital are seen among the selected district level cities? The strong linkage between the social capital and its effects on the governance and services delivery has not been dealt with in an in-depth manner. To illustrate, among all the districts, Udupi shows high social capital; this observation is fine. The explanation on how this high social capital facilitates better urban governance is largely missing in the analysis. The transition from social capital to better governance does not occur/happen in an automatic way and there must be some intervening processes and mechanisms that lead to improved delivery of civic services. The field analysis should have brought out these intervening processes and mechanisms adequately.

The environment in the urban settings is not really conducive for motivating the local citizens to actively take part in the affairs of governance. The citizens are keen in fulfilling the demands of their day-to-day life rather than showing any interest in the local politics. The coming together of citizens is largely confined to religious/caste associations and their meetings. Beyond this, the coming-togetherness of the citizens has not yet percolated to the political and governance domains. Other factors such as growing urban poverty, exclusionary development and slums expansion hinder the active participation of the local citizens in the affairs of governance. Given these individual and institutional constraints, the application of social capital theory to the urban governance and local democracy needs further fine-tuning. In the current form, the link between these indicators/variables is relatively distant from the perspective of practical issues at the ground. The book could have gained more strength and analytical rigour by the additional inputs for improving the social capital in the districts where it is less on a comparative basis.

The field realities of four district-level cities reiterate the need of urban governance reforms. This has become imperative and ever visible in the context of Covid-19-induced crisis in urban areas where the urban economy has suffered a lot due to the migration of workers to their hometowns. The policy suggestions are worth considering, especially, for the expansion of functional domain of the Zilla Panchayats to the corresponding district-level cities or urban areas, as it is positioned in an integrated manner where the interests and needs of the rural and the urban interact and interface at one point. Other major policy prescription of de-concentrated and decentralised urban development (p. 84) is a serious one and needs to be dealt with utmost sincerity by the policymakers.

Set aside these concerns and issues, the book is the need of the hour and will serve as a reference point for all those who are interested in understanding the state of urban governance and local democracy in the district-level cities.

The students of development studies, regional and urban studies, political science and public administration and local governance and others will benefit from the field insights. Also, the book offers some concrete policy suggestions for the betterment of urban governance. The author deserves appreciation for applying the social capital theory and exploring the dynamics of urban governance and local democracy. The book is a welcome contribution to the knowledge repository of urban local governance.

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Amitabh Rajan, *Ethical Dimensions of Administrative Power*. New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2021, 212 pp., ₹550.

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The SAGE book titled *Ethical Dimensions of Administrative Power* by Amitabh Rajan first tries to set the theoretical framework in its initial chapters, which undoubtedly provide a quality start for reading, Professor Nivedita Menon in her article explains, ‘Social and Political Theories assume power as to the ability to do the things and the ability to produce effects within social interaction; in this sense power is a type of behaviour and specifically derives from the existence of social relationships and organised social interaction’. Further, the literature of social sciences defines the concept of power in multiple forms. If we look at the Marxist understanding of power, they locate power at the collective economic level and attribute it to political structure, and this school of thought views power as distributed unequally in a class-divided society. Feminist theorists also propose a somewhat similar kind of argument; they locate power within the structure of the patriarchy. But Hannah Arendt views power not simply as domination; she theorises power as enabling and generated when people communicate and act together in a shared enterprise.

Amitabh Rajan develops his core argument on power similar to what Menon and Arendt tried to theorise; the author observes: ‘Administrative power is the power of legal intervention. It is also the power of execution of the principles prescribed by the lawmaker, involving use of discretion in operational decisions in a given situation’. The author also opined that ‘in active democratic societies, the constitutional anchor of the people’s sovereign will provide an ethical foundation for administrative power’. These arguments justify that power makes sense in the existence of social relationships and organised human social interaction.