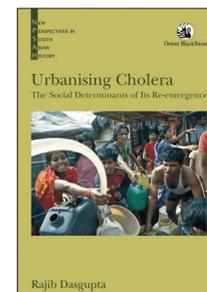


Book Review

Urbanizing Cholera: The Social Determinants of its Re-Emergence

Author: Rajib Dasgupta
Publisher: Orient BlackSwan, New Delhi, India
Year of Publication: 2012
Pages: 1-348
Price: Rs. 1,095
ISBN: 978-81-250-4660-8



This book takes a fresh look at the social determinants of the age old scourge of cholera. It adopts a socio-ecological perspective to trace the pandemics of the disease through the last two centuries to the current times to bring to the fore its transition from a devastating, population destroying disease to a smoldering, milder, endemic entity with a propensity for attacking the urban poor in the megacities. It argues that the social constructs of this disease have their origins in much larger political and institutional factors that far outweigh any individual or household causes. These political-institutional factors result in systematic discrimination against the urban poor resulting in denial of basic infrastructural services such as housing in habitable areas, safe water supply and sanitation - services that are critical in prevention of diarrheal diseases including cholera. The author has chosen to focus on Delhi to illustrate his point, with an in-depth analysis of the cholera epidemic of 1988 in the city.

The processes of urbanization in India, the economic basis for it and the accompanying problem of slum development have been introduced to the reader. The planned development of Delhi as an urban megapolis, the tensions within the various sections of the government in this regard and the challenges to various governmental agencies set by the ever expanding city, the demographic changes and the need to provide basic urban services

have been dealt with. The analysis takes both a spatial epidemiological and socio-ecological approach to argue for the central theme of the book, viz., the institutional discrimination against the urban disadvantaged groups.

“Urbanizing Cholera” is a well-rounded, exhaustive work that explores the social determinants of the disease from a fresh viewpoint. The author has worked within the government in Delhi, in departments responsible for providing many of the services necessary for safe food and water sources. It is this experience, knowledge and insider’s perspective that gives this work its edge. The extensive review of the official documents, schemes, planning, and the processes that attend these have given an additional depth to this effort. The finer nuances in the understanding of the infrastructural and governmental issues have come through because of this experience. The author recognizes the current challenges well-political, social and executive - all geared in favor of the urban elite, and has elucidated these convincingly.

The book is a very timely endeavor with the rates of urbanization increasing in India and expected to rise further, and the accompanying problems only intensifying. It will be useful for both students and teachers of public health who are interested in issues of urbanization, structural social iniquities and infectious diseases. It can also provide very useful lessons to policy makers and government officials in planning for further urban expansion and necessary basic services.

Anjali Chikersal

Technical Officer, National AIDS Control Organization,
Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India.
E-mail: achikersal@yahoo.com

Access this article online	
Quick Response Code:	Website: www.ijcm.org.in
	