

Slums in India : The Mirror of Indian Urban Problems



Desh Deepak Singh
Research Scholar
Department of Geography
University of Allahabad

Abstract: The present paper attempts to highlight the problems of Indian urbanisation arising out of poorly planned or haphazard growth of Indian urban population. Slums are the outcome of the combination of demographic, socio-economic, administrative and political reasons like rural-urban migration due to unemployment or poor infrastructural facilities in rural areas, rapid urbanisation, urban poverty, faulty planning of cities, disasters and so on. The major problem with the slums are its identification due to absence of a proper definition of slums that is universally applicable. The paper also tries to suggest planning measures so that the problem that urban India is facing in the forms of slums could be minimised.

Keywords: Slums, urbanisation, urban problems.

Introduction:

The exponential growth in urban population has put tremendous pressure on the available infrastructure and other natural resources of the country. This unprecedented growth in urban population is due to the process of superimposed urbanisation in India. When urbanisation occurs due to diffusion and contact it is said to be termed as superimposed urbanisation. It may occur due to many reasons including industrialisation and is comparatively faster than the self-induced urbanisation.

There are mostly three ways in which urbanisation in any area occurs. First, due to natural growth i.e. when birth rate is greater than the death rate. Secondly, due to rural to urban migration and lastly due to reclassification of areas when rural areas are reclassified as urban area. In three of them migration is the factor which is prominently responsible for the development of slums in India.

Slums generally grow due to rural-urban migration dominated by the people from poor economic background. They come to the city in search of employment and better living standards. Slums are most often located near those areas of the city where there is a possibility of getting employment for semi-skilled or unskilled persons mostly in informal sector. The informal economy remains largely invisible and unregulated due to which it makes it even more difficult to define slums.

Census of India (2011) defines slums as “residential areas where dwellings are unfit for human habitation by reasons of dilapidation, overcrowding, faulty arrangements and design of such buildings, narrowness or faulty arrangement of street, lack of ventilation, light, or sanitation facilities or any combination of these factors which are detrimental to the safety and health.” Slums have been categorized into three types especially for the purpose of Census as Notified Slums, Recognized Slums and Identified Slums. Identified slums are compact area of at least 300 population or about 60-70 households of poorly built congested tenements, in unhygienic environment usually with inadequate infrastructure and lacking in proper sanitary and drinking water facilities.

The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) defines a slum as one or a group of individuals living under the same roof in an urban area, lacking in one or more of the following five amenities:

1. Durable housing (a permanent structure providing protection from extreme climatic conditions)
2. Sufficient living area (no more than three people sharing a room)
3. Access to improved water (water that is sufficient, affordable, and can be obtained without extreme effort)
4. Access to improved sanitation facilities (a private toilet, or a public one shared with a reasonable number of people)
5. Secure tenure (*de facto* or *de jure* secure tenure status and protection against forced eviction).

The differences in the definition and identification of slums can lead to divergent priorities between the international community and local governments. This lack of coordination ultimately affects the whole process of planning and implementation and thus further deepening the problem.

Research Objectives:

1. To highlight the problems of Indian urbanisation arising out of poorly planned or haphazard growth of Indian urban population.
2. To suggest planning strategies to overcome the problems that urban India is facing in the forms of slums.

Since independence India has experienced exponential growth in the number of slums. The two reasons are attributed to the development of slums in India. One is Partition of India and the other is industrial revolution. From 1950 to 1968 the number of slums increased to 18%, in the 1970s they had a huge surge and by 1980 slum dwellers were half of the entire city's population (Joshua Arbury, 2006). According to Census of 2011, out of 4,041 Statutory Towns Slums reported from 2,543 Towns (63%). Total Slum Enumeration Blocks (SEBs) in Census 2011 is about 1.08 lakh in the country out of which Notified Slums accounted 37,072 SEBs, Recognised Slums accounted 30,846 SEBs and Identified Slums accounted 40,309 SEBs.

Slums are not static in nature and is constantly changing. The urban morphology of slums are changing on daily basis as new households move into slums every day who move to the cities in search of employment or in need of better infrastructure and cannot afford the proper housing facilities in the areas outside slums. On the other hand some of the slum dwellers are moving outside to live in the non-slum areas or to some other slums. Hence, there is a need of constant monitoring of slums so that the planning could be done in accordance with the changing needs and aspirations of the slum dwellers.

The settlements in slums are built in congested areas near industries, railway lines, airports, rivers and other water bodies. The settlements are built with the materials like corrugated sheets or gunny bags or polythene bags. It becomes extremely unhygienic during monsoon when there is flooding due to heavy rain or improper drainage system. Availability of clean drinking water is very difficult in the slums due to irregular supply of water. There is no proper drainage system to drain water out of the slums. Poor sewage system enhances the risk of water borne diseases if waste is thrown into the water bodies if the slums are located near a water body. There are no proper sanitation facilities and people tend to defecate in open or in limited public toilets with no hygiene at all. Paucity of electricity supply in slums generates favourable condition for illegal activities to be carried out that further reduces the security of people and their property.

However, for the redevelopment of slums governments are constantly taking initiatives but all the efforts are going in vain as the problems of new migrants that are moving towards city are placing themselves illegally

wherever they find space resulting in the expansion of slum areas. This problem is draining huge sum of public money and also putting pressure on available resources of cities.

However, cities have been described as the engines of economic growth they are also responsible for the most of the present day problems that the world is facing. In the coming decades India is going to have majority of urban dwellers. Therefore, it has become necessary to dig out the roots of the problems and hence retarding the further growth of slums.

There may be a two way solution to the problem of growth of slums. Firstly, the situation of Indian cities could be changed by discouraging people from coming to large cities. Proper development of secondary cities and also rural areas is inevitable to check further growth of slums in India. Secondly, planning and other regulatory and financial policies coupled with rationing of urban services will actually prevent people from moving to cities and hence make them more liveable (Whitney&Kelkar, 2004).

Conclusions:

Besides developing smart cities we need to develop smart villages to check the rural-urban migration. Every city is different in its geography and socio-economic conditions and has peculiar problems and solutions too. Developing cities in an appropriate way requires local solutions. Decentralisation of power not only at the level of implementation but also at planning level is the key solution. The formation of new slums should be prevented with proper local strategies involving general public. Urban poor need to be recognised as an asset for the economy of the city and not as a liability. There is a need to manage informal sector in the slums for financial benefits of the slum dwellers. Basic infrastructural facilities should be developed like housing, water, sanitation, energy, and urban services, such as garbage disposal to improve the living condition and health of slum dwellers. These services and infrastructure must reach the poor living in informal settlements or slums. The development of cheap and efficient transportation facilities from rural to urban areas to check migration could be beneficial for rural and urban areas both.

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