

Slums and Squatter Settlements

Keerthan Pagadala

Department of Sociology, Shiv Nadar University (SNU)

ABSTRACT:

Urbanization in India has led to an unprecedented growth in the increase of squatter settlements. This report aims to bring out an objective understanding of a Slum in India through a social point of view. It also aims to uncover the problems of the inhabitants at ground zero. The factors for slum growth remain constant through the lengths of our country, with the slum dwellers facing the same socio-economic problems. A comparison of studies by scholars has been done to throw light on this matter and draw out useful conclusions.

KEYWORDS: Dwellers, Culture, Factors, Policies, Growth

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Over the last decades, migrations and population displacements have produced new peripheral spaces throughout the world, on the margins of national states and of urban territories. Among these sites are refugee camps, slums, squatter settlements, resettled enclaves, and so forth. At best, migrants live in buildings or camps provided by their employers. Yet the key features of most of these spaces are the non-permanent and transitory conditions, the vulnerability and the poverty of the populations.

UN-HABITAT defines a slum as “Contagious settlement where the inhabitants are characterized as having inadequate housing and basic services. A Slum is often not recognized and addressed by public authorities as an integral or equal part of the city”.

Slum household is a group of individuals living under the same roof that have one or more of the conditions:

- No access to safe water
- Insecure residential status
- Poor quality of house
- Improper sanitation

A squatter settlement therefore, can be defined as a residential area which has developed without legal claims to the land and/or permission from the concerned authorities to build; as a result of their illegal or semi-legal status, infrastructure and services are usually inadequate. There are essentially three defining characteristics that helps us understand squatter settlement: the Physical, the Social and the legal with the reasons behind them being interrelated.

1.2 Physical Characteristics:

A squatter settlement, due to its inherent "non-legal" status, has services and infrastructure below the "adequate" or minimum levels. Such services are both network and social infrastructure, like water supply, sanitation, electricity, roads and drainage; schools, health centres, market places etc. Water supply, for example, to individual households may be absent, or a few public or community stand pipes may have been provided, using either the city networks, or a hand pump itself. Informal networks for the supply of water may also be in place. Similar arrangements may be made for electricity, drainage, toilet facilities etc. with little dependence on public authorities or formal channels.

1.3 Social Characteristics:

Most squatter settlement households belong to the lower income group, either working as wage labour or in various informal sector enterprises. On an average, most earn wages at or near the minimum wage level. But household income levels can also be high due to many income earners and part-time jobs. Squatters are predominantly migrants, either rural-urban or urban-urban. But many are also second or third generation squatters.

1.4 Legal Characteristics:

The key characteristic that delineates a squatter settlement is its lack of ownership of the land parcel on which they have built their house. These could be vacant government or public land, or marginal land parcels like railway setbacks or "undesirable" marshy land. Thus when the land is not under "productive" use by the owner, it is appropriated by a squatter for building a house. It has to be noted here that in many parts of Asia, a land owner may "rent" out his land for a nominal fee to a family or families, with an informal or quasi-legal arrangement, which is not however valid under law.

2.0 CULTURE OF A SLUM

The slum has a culture of its own, and this culture is a way of life. This learned way of life is passed from generation to generation, with its own rationale, structure, and defense mechanisms, which provide the means to continue in spite of difficulties and deprivations. One writer has commented on the slum that "it is because people themselves produce blight, or more correctly, the cultural patterns operating through people produce blight. This distinction between people themselves and the cultural patterns operating through people is an important one, because people themselves produce neither slums

nor well-kept neighborhoods. It is the habits, customs, behavior patterns people have learned and which they hold that move them to act in particular ways” (Clinard, 1970) Near all slum dwellers are of the lower class, with few exceptions, they live at the poverty level, but not all lower class or poor urban people live in slums. The culture of the slum has number of characteristics that vary only in degree. Although these cultural patterns are typical of the slum from an over-all perspective, they vary in detail from slum to slum, from ethnic group to ethnic group, from society to society. Each individual in the slum is influenced in different degrees by the general slum culture. Furthermore, certain people may live in a slum area, and may even be poor, yet remain removed from the slum culture (Clinard, 1970). The concept of a culture of poverty was introduced by American anthropologist, Oscar Lewis in the year (1968) as a result of studying the Urban poor in Mexico and Puerto Rico. The culture of poverty constitutes a "design for living" that is passed on from generation to the next. Individuals feel marginalized, helpless and inferior, and adopt an attitude of living for the present; they make little use of banks, hospitals and the like. According to

Lewis, the culture of poverty perpetuates poverty. It tends to perpetuate itself from generation to generation because of its effect on children. By the time slum children are aged six or seven, they have usually absorbed the basic values and attitudes of their subculture and are not psychologically geared to take full advantage of changing conditions or increased opportunities which may occur in their lifetime. According to Lewis Oscar „Culture of Poverty“ also maintained that this was not just a matter of deprivation or disorganization but a design of living with ready set of solutions for human problems. Hence, it serves a significant adaptive function. In the words of Lewis: the lack of effective participation and integration in the major institute of the larger society is one of the crucial characteristics of culture of poverty. This is characterized by many factors such as up rootedness and isolation, caste, economy, and wage labour, high rate of unemployment, low wages, lack of social, economic and political organization and personal inadequacy and inferiority complex arising out of the dominant value on accumulation of wealth and property. Stokes (1962) also attributed poverty to incapability. Distinguishing slums of hope and

despair, he holds the view that the slums of despair are the homes of the poor not only in income terms but in terms of poor ability to be employable. Valentine (1968) and other have rightly characterized the concept of culture of poverty on logical conceptual and empirical grounds and it is hardly necessary to go into its details (Upreti, 2004). Lewis has also analyzed the culture of poverty as both an adaptation and a reaction of the poor to their marginal position in a class-stratified, highly individuated, capitalistic society. The most likely candidates for the culture of poverty are the people who come from the lower strata of a rapidly changing society and are already partially alienated from it. They have low level of literacy and education, do not belong to labor unions, are not members of political parties, generally do not participate in the national welfare agencies, and make very little use of banks, hospitals, departmental stores, museums or art galleries. A similar situation was also found among the slums of Parole town which indicated the existence of culture of poverty among them.

Lewis Oscar describes the „Culture of Poverty“ on three different levels. Firstly, on the local community level, one finds poor housing conditions, overcrowding, gregariousness, and,

above all, a minimum of organization beyond the level of the nuclear and extended family. Occasionally there are informal temporary groupings or voluntary associations with slums. The existence of neighborhood gangs that cut across slum settlement represents a considerable advance beyond the zero point of the continuum that one has in mind. Indeed, it is the low level of organizations that give culture of poverty its marginal and anachronistic quality in the highly complex, specialized, organized society. Most primitive people have achieved a higher level of socio-cultural organization than the modern urban slum dwellers. In spite of the generally low level of organization, there may be a sense of community and esprit de corps in urban slums and in slum neighborhoods. This can vary within a single city or from region to region or country to country. The major factors that influence this variation are the size of the slum, its location and physical characteristics, length of residence, incidence of home ownership and landownership (versus squatter rights), rentals, ethnicity, kinship ties, and freedom or lack of freedom of movement. When slums are separated from the surrounding area by enclosing walls or other physical barriers, when rent are low fixed and stability of residence is great (twenty or thirty years), when the population constitutes a distinct ethnic, racial, or language group or is bound by ties of

kinship, and when there are some internal voluntary associations, then the sense of local community approaches that of a village community. In many cases this combination of favorable conditions does not exist. However, even where internal organization and esprit de corps are at a bare minimum and people move around a great deal, a sense of territoriality develops that sets off the slum neighborhoods from the rest of the city. Secondly, on the family level the major traits of the culture of poverty are the absence of childhood as a specially prolonged and protected stage in the life cycle; early initiation into sex; free union or consensual marriages; a relatively high incidence of the abandonment of wives and children; a trend toward female or mother-centered families, and consequently a much greater knowledge of maternal relatives: a strong predisposition to authoritarianism, lack of privacy, verbal emphasis upon family solidarity, which is only rarely achieved because

of sibling rivalry: and competition for limited goods and maternal affection. Lastly, on the level of the individual the major characteristics are strong feelings of marginality, of helplessness, of dependence, and of inferiority. Other traits include the incidence of maternal deprivation, of morality, and of weak ego structure, confusion of sexual

identification, lack of impulse control, strong present time orientation, with relatively little ability to defer gratification and to plan for the future; sense of resignation and fatalism, widespread of male superiority, and high tolerance for psychological pathology of all sorts. People with a culture of poverty are provincial and locally oriented and have very little sense of history. They know only their own troubles, their own local conditions, their own neighborhoods, their own way of life. Usually they do not have the knowledge, the vision, or the ideology to see the similarities between their problems and those of their counterparts elsewhere in the world. They are not class conscious although they are very sensitive indeed to status distinctions (Lewis, 1968).

2.0 INFRASTRUCTURAL CHARACTERISTICS OF INDIAN SLUMS

Slums seem to be universal phenomenon, however, their nature, extent and conditions are rooted in the history of societies. Like the Asian slums, Indian slums are characterized by rural world view. The case of major cities of

India present varieties of slum life style with malnutrition, unsanitary and poor living condition, crime, indebtedness, prostitution, unemployment and general poverty (Gupta, 1983). Slums and squatter are considered as problem areas for urban development in third world countries. They are illegally occupied houses, creating a nuisance of environmental pollution and degradation of living conditions. Slums are the marginal areas of cities where the facilities are poor, people are illiterate, drinking water supply is miserable. Slum dwelling signifies as a common phenomenon of degraded life of urban dwelling itself. A slum represents a microhabitat institute that exists within a larger framework of urban built up space. The presence of slum as a part of urban habitat refers to a condition of defective physical, social and economic environment. The socio-economic substandard denote an area of degenerated living “an adobe of half starved”, a place of poverty, the house of criminal and so on. The slum and squatter lack basic services and pose enormous risk of disease fire and range of social problems. Slums are dusty urban places where the drains are full of mud and refuge water of houses, full of filth and files, mosquitoes and insects abound.

The roads are full of potholes, where even passersby have to walk through muddy water and creating a sense of danger in walking even during day time, what to talk of night. The slums have mostly no road light, prevalence of services, latrines and road corner are full of heaps of garbage. Sometime the roaming of pigs and strange cattle are creating troubles for passers –by with the growth of urban population. Now a day’s slums have created a panic for cities level. It has been a serious issue for the town planning (Mandal, 2000). Bose (1995) defines a slum “as a deprived human settlement, which is demographically, economically and environmentally vulnerable. Extreme overcrowding, high density and high levels of morality and typical demographic features, a large unorganized sector, low levels of productivity and extreme poverty are the usual economic feature and the lack of access to basic services like water, sanitation and clean environment make these areas environmentally hazardous”. Most of the urban poor in India live in slums. Slum settlement are often of high density, but can be located in all different areas of a city. Slum houses are usually permanent or semi-permanent structure built on government land. The residents’ source of livelihood is usually near

their homes in the city centre; men often work as labourers in small and large industries, while most women serve as domestic help in nearby middle class houses. Families living in slums typically make a significant contribution to the economic activity of the city. Since most slums are close to the middle class colonies, they have access to transport facilities, schools, electricity and water (Ali, 2006). According to the Report on the United Nations Urban Land Policies a “slum is a building, group of building who are characterized by overcrowding, deterioration, insanitary condition or any of them, endanger the health safety or morals of its inhabitants or the community”. Three common points emerge from various attempts of several scientists in defining a slum. First slum refers to an area or a situation which does not constitute an isolated building. Secondly, it can be identified by a combination of a physical attribute and not with reference to any single attribute. Thirdly there is a considerable range of variation in regard to the manifestation of each one of the physical attribute.

4.0 SLUM DEVELOPMENT POLICIES IN INDIA

Slum settlements and Poverty in cities and towns are commonly observed in much of the world.

According to the Global Report on Human Settlements 2003, almost one billion people or 32 percent of the world's urban population, live in slums, the majority of them in the developing world. The same report observes that “slums represent the worst of urban poverty and inequality” and points out that “without concerned action on the part of Municipal Authorities, National Governments, Civil Society Actors and the International Community, the number of slum dwellers is likely to increase in most developing countries, and if no serious action is taken, the number of slum dwellers worldwide is projected to rise over the next 30 years to about 2 billion”. Decades of experimentation with alternative approaches to dealing with slums and urban poverty have shown that solutions lie not so much in providing a water link or constructing affordable housing units but in improving Governance, in strengthening the capacities of citizen groups and local authorities, and more important, in developing strategic and inclusive responses, involving the slum and poor communities (Global Report on Human Settlements, 2003).

There are serious deficiencies in urban infrastructure as a result of the rapid growth of urban population and low investment in urban development. In general, the smaller the town, the less likely it is to have a wide coverage of amenities and the poor in such towns face correspondingly higher deprivation (Thudipara, 2007). City attracts migrants from all the social and economic strata of the rural society but among these migrants, mostly those who are at the lowest economic ladder make slums as their abode. The cities have wealth but the poor who live in them do not share that. They service the city, clean the house of the rich and cook for them, they provide labour for factories, shops and restaurants, they are the main carriers of goods, and yet they continue to be poor. The chapter discusses the various Urban Programmes initiated by State Government for the upliftment of slums and their impact on the selected slum. According to the Global Report on Human Settlements (2003), Slums are the products of failed policies, bad governance, corruption, inappropriate regulation, dysfunctional land markets, unresponsive financial systems and a fundamental lack of political will. Each of these failures adds to the load on people already deeply burdened by poverty, and also constrains the enormous opportunity for human development that urban life offers. There were studies highlighting the

government policies meant to mitigate the problems of the poor and make provisions for the basic amenities in order to improve their quality of life. Several policy interventions were made and several programmes were launched. Among them, Urban Community Development Programme (1988), Environment Improvement of Urban Slums (1972), Integrated Development of Small and Medium Towns and Integrated Child Development Services are important. But these schemes did not have the derived impact because of the sectoral approach and lack of community improvement. The Urban Basic Services Programme (1985-90) and Urban Basic Services for the Poor (1990-95) envisaged an integrated approach to the problem of slums and poverty by involving the slum population in the decision making process (Mohanty, 2005). Today Slum Improvement Schemes have been undertaken in our country for since long. However, the emphasis of these schemes has been on provision of basic civic amenities in urban slums and they are only ameliorative in nature. Slum up gradation on the other hand, which allows a long time and permanent solution, consistent with the principle affordability, cost, recovery, are now being thought by some cities. These programmes have apparently been successful in some selected large cities. Some other cities are now planning to

undertake slum up gradation programmes along with slum improvement programmes. Despite the breakthrough in addressing the slum problems in some cities, there are many issues in planning the slum development programmes for which there are no universal solutions. These issues will have different type of solutions for different type of cities. In order to attain development in slums especially for checking the growth, a strong local administration is very essential. Creation of focal centres for attraction in the form of satellite towns would serve to counteract the push from the rural to the already existing urban centres (www.Tcpomud.gov.in). Government of India has been

initiating targeted schemes and programmes to improve slum conditions since 1960s. But its policy focus has undergone a change over a period of time. In the 1970s and 1980s, the Indian Government had a policy of 'no slums cities'. This warranted forceful resettlement and rehabilitation of slum dwellers. However, this didn't help in making cities slumfree. Then the Government started implementing Slum Upgrade Programmes under which infrastructure development was encouraged. Since 1972 the Government of India initiated a programme called Environmental Improvement of Urban Slums under which priority to drinking water and

sanitation was given.

Again in 1996 Government initiated the National Slum Development Programme with substantial fund allocation. It had a specified focus on providing drinking water and community toilets. After spending close to Rs 3,100 crore in nine years, it was discontinued. It was estimated that 46 million slum dwellers were benefited from it. In 2005 Government started the Jawaharlal Nehru Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), an initiative to encourage reforms and fast-track planned development of certain cities. It has a financial commitment of Rs 1, 50,000 crore during 2006-12. The larger objective of the mission is to enhance integrated development of infrastructure services; accelerating the flow of investment into urban infrastructure services; planned development of cities including the peri-urban areas and universalization of urban services to ensure their availability to the urban poor.

5.1 CONCLUSION

Clearly, majority of Slum people are not satisfied with the typology of houses specially those people living in katcha houses, because they argued that during rainy seasons there is leakage from walls and roofs and it becomes difficult to live here. Therefore the type of the houses clearly depict the life style of the people and shows that how

poverty prevails among them. It was found that majority of slum dwellers i.e. 58.47% had no concept of room because they don't have enough space and money to make a well settled house and they had to adjust all their belongings and miscellaneous things in a single room. 35.39% had two rooms, 4.62% families had more than two rooms and only one family lived in tents. The people argued that the space available to them is not enough and the one's living in one or two rooms with the number of family members argued that the lack of space resulted not only in unhygienic living condition but even resulted in lack of privacy. They further argued that the condition even became worse during rainy and cold season as they have to manage everything in the space available. Having katcha houses on the one hand and one room on the other hand had added to their miseries. It has observed that little attention was paid towards maintenance of these houses and there was little differentiation in the use of rooms-kitchen, dining-room, living-room, etc. Also another important issue which was raised by the people was that even their social interaction was affected because of lack of space. They argued that their social interaction was loosened because their relatives would not visit them due to lack of space.

REFERENCES

1. Advani, Mohanty. (2009). Urbanization, Slums and Environmental health. Jaipur: Rawat Publication.
2. Bose, Ashish. (1995). Urbanization and Slums. New Delhi: Haranand Publications.
3. Desai, A. R. and Pillai, S. D. (1970). Slums and Urbanization. Bombay Popular Parkashan.
4. Gupta, Ashok, K. (1993). Slums in New Industrial Cities. New Delhi: Manas Publication. Jain, A. K. (2009). Urban Housing and slums. New Delhi: Readworthy publication.
5. Lewis, Oscar. (1968). A Study of Slum Culture. New York: Random House.
6. Thudipara, Jacob, Z. (2008). Urban Community Development. Jaipur: Rawat Publication.