

Urban Renewal Stage in City's life and its Impact on Slums and Slum Dwellers – A Case Study of Noida City

Abstract

Slum settlements are very common in developing countries. Slums and slum dwellers both are considered as 'by-products of the urbanisation process'. In this era of Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation, urbanisation is an inevitable reality and so is the slums. There is a direct relationship between urbanisation and slums in most developing countries like Bangladesh, China, India, Pakistan, etc. (UN Habitat Report 2003). India is no exception as it houses 2,613 slum settlements across different states (NSSO, 2014). "A slum is a compact settlement with a collection of poorly built tenements, mostly of temporary nature, crowded together usually with inadequate sanitary and drinking water facilities in unhygienic conditions" (NSSO, 2014). India is home to more than 1.3 billion people. According to the Census 2011, 2613 slums reported from cities and towns accounts for 12.92 million slum households across the country. In total, 65.49 million people occupied these slum households (NSSO, 2014).

The slum population faces unique challenges within the slum settlement and outside slum settlement as citizens. Their challenges are very different from the normal citizens of the country. Like proper citizens, they do not have access to basic rights like the right to shelter, right to education, right to health and so on. It is assumed that conditions of extreme social inequality make the articulation of citizenship impossible in any meaningful sense (Chatterjee 1999). Following rights of the slum-dwellers are compromised while living in a slum settlement and post-eviction - rights to adequate housing, right to education, right to health, right to privacy and security, right to livelihood, right to a decent standard of life, right to live with human dignity, etc. Most of these rights are intensively compromised post-eviction. Post-eviction many slum dwellers are denied even the right to life as many become destitute due to the faulty resettlement schemes of the state.

It is a well-known fact that slums are not fit for human living. Slum-dwellers face problems like poor sanitation & hygiene, poor health and socio-economic backwardness apart from getting marginalised, ostracised and discriminated against. Slum populations remain vulnerable to harsh modern realities like extreme poverty, inequality, poor health, low education levels, etc. In this context, the slum population needs sympathetic behaviour from the state. However, as the city moves towards development, the state begins to consider shifting the slum population from high valued slum land to some faraway cheaper land or matchbox type flats.

The same is the story of Noida city and its slum population. Noida is emerging as one of the best metropolitan cities. Noida's slums are homes to nearly 30,000 households. These people migrated from states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Bengal, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, etc. after the year 1976 when the Noida city was established as a hub to small scale industries. Now Noida city has reached a stage of 'urban renewal' (Weinstein and Xuefei 2009) where it is planning to shift its slum population to alternate accommodations. As part of the scheme, Noida city will shift all slum households to 31 sq. meters 1 BHK flats. In every city's life, there is a time when they plan 'urban renewal'. Apparently, the time has come where Noida city is also going in the same direction. It is a sign of an economically developed city where they could think on the lines of making some structural changes in the spatial features of the city. A beautiful city in terms of world-class infrastructure always attracts more money than a city that is relatively not beautiful enough. There is a notion that poverty, which is reflected through slum settlements, makes the city ugly, which is considered not so good site to look at. However, due to the inherent structure of the modern-day world economy, slums are inevitable in cities of most developing countries. This phenomenon or relationship between urbanisation and slums has become quite common in developing countries, for example - India (Mumbai - Dharavi, Delhi, Noida), China, Bangladesh, Pakistan, etc. (UN-Habitat Report 2003).

As mentioned above, cities that are developing with impressive speed would always keep 'removal of slums' at the top of their priority list. As a result, slums are cleared to make way for infrastructural improvements and megaproject development. Sadly, the time juncture when the city plans removal of a slum, poses a socio-economic crisis for the slum dwellers. Slum-dwellers who lack understanding about their citizenship rights and housing rights in the country, fear losing their shelter and livelihoods. Hence, housing rights of the urban poor i.e. slum dwellers are compromised in the process of urban renewal.

Henri Lefebvre gave us the concept of 'the right to the city'. The slum dwellers become an integral part of the city as they provide continuous labour in the city's development. As they play an important role in the development of the city, they should have 'the right to the city'. David Harvey propounded that those who have the right to the city, do not merely have a right of access to what already exists, but a right to change it after our heart's desire (Harvey 2003). Contrastingly, the slum dwellers mostly are not asked to be part of the 'urban renewal process of their slum area'. This shows that slum dwellers are not seen as the stakeholders in the city's life. Moreover, the Noida city is also planning the removal of slums without asking the slum dwellers about their interests.

In this research, the focus will be kept on "Impact of Noida's Resettlement Scheme on slum dwellers". The research will cover broader themes like city, urbanisation, slums, community, civil society, citizenship, etc.

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