

Slums

According to the UNESCO, "a slum is a building, a group of buildings or area characterized by over-crowding, deterioration, unsanitary conditions or absence of facilities of amenities which because of these conditions or any of them, endanger the health, safety or morals of its inhabitants or the community". Traditionally the slum has been defined as a street, alloy, count etc, situated in a area of a town or city and inhabited by people of low income classes or by the very poor; a member of these streets and counts forming a thickly populated neighborhood of a squalid & wretched character. This term is applicable to those parts of the Indian cities which may be considered unfit for human habitation either because the structures are old, dilapidated, grossly, congested & cut of repairs, or because it is impossible to preserve sanitation for want of sanitary facilities including ventilation, drainage, water supply etc, or because of sites by themselves unhealthy. These areas with similar characteristics features, are called 'channels in Bombay, 'busters' & 'Katra' in Delhi, 'busters' in Calcutta, 'abadis' & 'ahats' in Kanpur and 'Cheris' in Madras.

Nearly 30 percent of the population in metropolitan cities in India lives in slums & the number is increasing. The development of slums have taken place as a result of industrial expansion in the fringe areas; lack of imaginative integrated housing development; in the residential areas; & non-availability of cheap and reasonable housing accommodation for the lower middle class people in urban centers have forced a section of this group to seek residence in slums with Industrialization a large member of people migrated to thee cities for gainful employment. Slum growth in central city areas is mainly due to the whole sale trade in which hand carts, lorries & two wheelers are used for transport. Skilled & semiskilled workers are employed in the loading & unloading activities as well as in lifting and transporting of industrial & commercial goods. Since these people cannot afford proper housing they reside on the roadside rear public offices & by the sides of important. Transport centers in the central city area. Sometimes old & discarded building, incomplete buildings and even grave yards & other places of non-residential nature are encroached by there people.

Slum creation has been following a set pattern in many of the cities. One common feature of slum development has been slow encroachment into public & private plots by these poor people. After encroaching, these people try to organize themselves to put up a common defence against eviction by invoking sympathy through political, religious, linguistic & humanitarian appeals. In central city area where such public or private plots are not available, they squat on the pavements less used public parks, playgrounds & other places. During the last twenty years, two numbers of slums & the population living in slums are increasing at a fast rate. In 1961 Madras City had 558 slums & by 1971 it had 1200 slums. Now the number of slums in Madras has crossed the 2000 mark. Madurai city which had 48 slums areas in 1961 had 92 slums in 1971 & by 1980 had increased to 250. The four big metros alone account for over 4.4 million slum & squatter settlements. Well established slum dwelling are always on a lookout for potential plots for encroachment. They start on a caution note but soon with political official influence make permanent encroachment.

Some suggestions for improving this situation have been suggested. They are: that the policy planners, house building agencies & social scientists should make basic studies on the existing functional use of space in slum households to find out the barest physical needs without imposing - middle class value into the existing cultural orientation of the lower strata

of society. So long, the facilities provided are not in keeping with the cultural orientation of the group the chances of misuse & abuse are great facilities which are the immediate felt needs of cultural groups are readily accepted & put to optimum use. The curative aspect of slum improvement should concentrate on arresting the mentality of "slumline" as a character among lower strata of society on the one hand & in providing some of the basic felt needs on the group in keeping with the cultural conditions of the groups on the other.

The preventive aspect of slum improvement or clearance as it is called requires a multi-dimensional approach. To prevent the recent trend among the lower middle class to move to slum areas for residence in big cities, rental housing schemes for the lower strata of society should be started immediately on a large scale. To some extent even ownership housing scheme an easy installments could be started. A realistic rent control scheme taking into account the present cost of construction & return for the money invested in private rental housing will go a long way in promoting private rental housing also.

In the case of industrial areas when there are chances for the migrant unskilled casual laborers to become regular & skilled works over a period of time, the administration should work out a phased programme of rehousing in consultation with the industrialists & workers organization. The initial squatter settlements can be treated as a temporary phenomenon while planning industrial sites. In any urban neighborhood provision can be made for the temporary accommodation of casual laborers. Even at the planning stage some reservation for industrial housing near the industrial plot should be provided.

In the case of residential areas, integrated residential development should be attempted taking into account the functional needs of the population, anticipated service facilities add the socio-economic & cultural variations & needs of the population to be housed. In different stages to implementation, phased use of common space can be made such as space allotted for common service facilities like a park a play ground in the 2nd stage of the development can be used in the first stage as space for the temporary accommodation of construction workers & a few hawkers & petty traders who serve the needs of the residents who occupy housing in the 1st stage. Subsequently when pucca shopping centers develop, the petty traders may move into shopping space & construction workers may have the area when most of house building is completed.

In the case of the central city areas the govt. has to acquire & construct housing facilities & provide these to poor workers at reasonable rent.

Slum clearance however is a difficult proposition to implement it billions & billions of money would be required of which the state is incapable. Almost driven to the wall, the state now thinks of 'slum improvement' as a complementary line to slum clearance. There is no other way 'slum improvement' consists of providing basic amenities like water, light & toilet facilities. Earlier such things were not even thought of as a temporary measure because first all slums were anyway 'waiting to be cleared & replaced with 'decent' housing & secondly if basic amenities were offered it would have amounted to an indirect legal recognition of the rights of the occupant. The 2nd objection has now been overlooked in many cases because partly it is impractical & politically unprofitable hence slum improvement slogan has become popular.