



Taming the Untamed: The Recalcitrant Indian Cities

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Abstract

India along with the developing nations is urbanizing fast. Presently almost 33 per cent of the Indian population lives in urban India. It is expected that by the year 2030 half of the world's population will be urban. India for the first time registered a higher decadal urban growth rate in comparison to the rural population growth rate during the census period of 2001- 2011. The lopsided and top-heavy pattern of urbanisation in India has wreaked havoc in the form of excessive pressure on the basic urban infrastructure resulting in the crumbling of civic amenities and retardation of the service delivery system. The present endeavour is to look into the emergent issues under which our cities are reeling with. These issues are being handled in a myopic manner having a piecemeal approach. Control over the city is only possible by solving the pertinent issues related to traffic, lack of space, congestion, sewerage and drainage issues, water and electricity supply etc. The present paper shatters one by one the efficacy of many of the approaches being used by the governments of the land to manage our cities, including the much-hyped 'Smart-City' concept. Some other solutions are also suggested herein.

INTRODUCTION

With every third Indian living in the urban area, India is both over and under-urbanized at the same time, when an absolute number is considered. Every third city dweller in India is a resident of a slum. The excessive proliferation of slums is another grim reality the Indian urban system is undergoing. more than 65 per cent (census, 2011) of the Indian urban population is confined to category one and metropolitan cities of the nation. The middle category towns along with lower category towns with a population of less than 50 thousand are neither growing in total number nor are gaining in population. The share of urban dwellers staying in these

towns is paltry. The top-heavy and severe lopsided balance of the urban system in India is the mother of a plethora of urban problems being encountered today.

Table No.

Urban Population by Size Class of Cities and Towns, India, 1901-2011

Census Year	Million Cities and above	Cities(I lakh – 1 M)	Large Towns(50-100 thousands)	Medium Towns (20-50 Thousand)	Small Towns (less than 20 Thousand)
1901	5.86	20.11	11.29	15.64	47.10
1911	10.89	16.74	10.51	16.40	45.46
1921	11.30	18.40	10.39	15.92	43.99
1931	10.34	20.86	11.65	16.80	40.35
1941	12.19	26.04	11.42	16.35	34.00
1951	19.07	25.57	9.96	15.72	29.69
1961	23.34	28.08	11.23	16.94	20.41
1971	26.02	31.22	10.92	16.01	15.83
1981	26.93	33.49	11.63	14.33	13.62
1991	33.18	32.01	10.95	13.19	10.66
2001	37.80	30.78	9.73	12.29	9.36
2011	42.62	23.09	9.33	12.78	11.75

Source: Various Census Reports, Govt. of India (www.censusindia.gov.in)

The rural-urban migration which was at its peak during the census year of 1971 – 1981 (census, 2011), continues to occupy a cardinal position among the reasons for skewed urban growth. The migration pattern too, particularly in India plays a significant role. Instead of step-by-step migration, the rural-urban migration pattern in India is akin to the concept of ‘Leap- frogging’. The prospective migrants from the rural or the small and rural areas, tend to have the tendency to move to the metropolitan and the bigger cities, owing to the massive pull factor. Category II, III, IV and other lesser towns fail to provide any allurements or prospects in terms of providing opportunities for employment or livelihood and hence are not the choice of destination for the rural migrants.

The lower and the middle category towns fail to act as the buffer between the rural areas and the big (category I having a population of more than 1 lakhs) and metropolitan (Population of more than 10 lakhs) cities, resulting in an excessive pressure on bigger cities creating a highly imbalanced and skewed distribution of urban population. Lack of adequate development and infrastructural development in agriculture and allied activities

like agro-processing, livestock farming, food-processing units, and development of cottage, small scale and village industries, are quite a few valid factors due to which the exodus of the surplus labour towards the bigger cities, till date, couldn't be checked.

PERIOD OF URBAN ANTHROPOCENE:

There is a growing acceptance across the wide range of publics that the 'Modern Society' is currently facing historically unprecedented challenges at precisely the moment when the majority of world's population is living in cities. (Swilling, 2017). The world is fast becoming urban and the geological time we reckon is 'Anthropocene'. Urbanisation in anthropocene is important paradigm shift in human settlement pattern.

The impact of human beings on the planet earth is so profoundly significant and has a clear bearing. The bearing is so profound that the present Epoch is being termed Anthropocene.

The Anthropocene is a new, present-day epoch, in which scientists say we have significantly altered the Earth through human activity. These changes include global warming, habitat loss, changes in the chemical composition of the atmosphere, oceans and soil, and animal extinctions. However, neither the international commission for Stratigraphy (ICS) nor the International Union of Geological Sciences has recognised the term as a geological epoch. The use of the term 'Anthropocene' suggests that the homo sapiens have become so important for their influence in this geological age that they can now determine the fate of the planet earth. Among the wide impact, the homo sapiens are having today that the current period starting from the 1950s, urbanisation has a seminal contribution. The urban Anthropocene is about urbanisation in Anthropocene. The need for managing our cities assumes paramount importance in the present day. The expanding ecological footprint encroaching into and devouring up the natural resources by the expanding urban forces is not good for the regional economy also. The economic prosperity gets agglomerated into the cities while leaving the rural areas left languishing, not desirable for sustainable national economic growth.

NEED FOR TAMING OUR CITIES :

All over the world, there is an emerging need to manage our cities. The larger the population more is the need to have a better-managed city. Managing our cities mean that the relationship between the citizen and the city remains congenial and sustainable, where the services delivery system work in perfect cohesion and complete tandem with each other. The socio-spatial and ecological milieu of the urban landscape remains balanced and in cohesion. However, the utopian situation for many particularly the Indian cities is still a mirage. Indian Planners

consistently underestimate infrastructure and services needs, that they fail to future-proof by planning for unforeseen growth (Roy, 2009)

Managing our cities is an attempt to *tame the untamed*. Taming, because the city needs to be under control be it physical expansion or vertical rise. Presently if a city is taken as a living organism it behaves in a wild manner, unpredictable and rash. The berserk and unleashed expansion of territories in form of urban sprawl and slums, signifies the urgent need to tame it. Sustainable urban growth along with desirable urbanism remains elusive and a distant dream. Successfully addressing the pervading issues of the urban system in India is essential to manage our cities more sustainably. Following are a few significant issues faced by our cities which need to be addressed

Problems faced by the Indian Cities

Expanding Ecological footprint.

Traffic Snarls

Vehicular pollution

Solid Waste Management

Slum Proliferation

Inequality among the Service Delivery Mechanism

Urban Sprawl

Floating and squatter population

Uninterrupted Water and electricity supply

Finance and Resource Crunch faced by the Municipalities

Lack of Co-ordination among the various wings

Above mentioned issues along with many more issues pertaining not only to the field of urbanisation but also related to the fields of economics and regional planning also. These must be handled comprehensively and holistically. Piecemeal approaches may result in short gains which may further snowball into bigger challenges.

The present endeavour is an attempt to look for the answer to urban problems.

Among the many approaches adopted by the National, State, and Municipal corporation levels, the concept of a Smart City seems to have caught the curiosity the most. The assimilation of the smart city concept in the Indian urban system is being considered the panacea of all the ills.

Smart City:

India cities are expected to be the home of 40 per cent of the total population and would contribute 75 per cent of the national GDP by the year 2030. With increased population urban problems too expected to rise manifolds. The coming future requires new vigorous efforts to develop physical, institutional, social and economic infrastructure.

Smart City is an initiative to bring a qualitative positive change in the citizens' life.

A smart city is a technologically advanced municipal area with highly developed infrastructure, designed to bring smart solutions based upon Information Communication Technology (ICT) and things of the internet. It believes in data generation which is further used in providing better services to its citizen. It relies on area-based development including Retrofitting, Redevelopment and Greenfields. The objectives of a smart city include providing a quality life to its citizen, infrastructure building, and improving Hassel's free-governance-based service delivery with the help of IC&T. the basic infrastructure includes; Assured Water and Electricity Supply, Sanitation and Solid Waste Management, Efficient urban mobility and public transport, Affordable Housing, Robust IT Connectivity, e-governance and citizen Partnership. Safety and Security of Citizens, Health and Education, Economic Activities and Livelihood opportunities. (Ref...)

The smart city provides smart solutions through IC&T and things of the internet. the information. The strategy of the Smart City mission in India is to have a pan-city initiative in which at least one smart solution is applied across the city. The mission also incorporates area-based development strategies which include Retrofitting, Redevelopment and Greenfields. the

Retrofitting means

Development of an existing area having less than 500 acres, making it more liveable, and efficient at the same time offering smart solutions to its inhabitants. The Ahmedabad Local Area Development is a good example.

Redevelopment in the strategies to achieve the objectives of a smart city means

Replacing the existing built environment in less than 50 acres and enable co-creation of a new layout, especially enhanced infrastructure, mixed land use and increased density, e.g. Bhendi Bazar, Mumbai (Ref...)

Greenfield mode of area development, on the other hand, plans to develop a vacant area of not more than 250 acres, using innovative planning, plan financing and plan implementation tools with provisions for affordable housing, especially for the poor. For example, New Town, Kolkata, Naya Raipur, GIFT city etc.

The focus of the smart city is to make a self-sustaining city which includes green buildings. Green buildings are external energy independent. The solar panels installed on the rooftop, similarly, the building is least dependent upon external sources to meet its requirements, thus cutting its carbon emission drastically and it helps reduce the ecological footprint considerably. The smart city has also incorporated a walkable neighbourhood concept, where the citizen is provided all the essential services at a distance of roughly ten minutes' walk from his house. The advent of smart cities in the Indian urban landscape is being touted as the panacea of all the evils of our urban system. However, on a closer look, it can be safely argued that the smart city falls way back in delivering the desired outcome.

The idea of the smart city is not ideally suited for a country like India where the whole urban system is heavily lopsided and skewed towards the bigger cities.

The area-based strategy of the smart city focuses on the parts of the city. Be it retrofitting, redevelopment or the greenfield, every strategy is designed to bring transformation in the

selected pockets of the city. The larger portion of the urban landscape remains untouched hence, deprived of the benefits whatsoever are accrued due to the inception of the smart city. The 100 cities which are taken up to be converted into smart cities, 2014 as a mission, by the government of India, since 2014. Interestingly, those boasted as smart cities are in actuality have some portion of it developed or are being developed as smart. The rest part of the city remains aloof and untouched. However, as per the strategic mission of the smart city, at least one smart solution to the problems of the city is to be provided. Smart solutions involve the use of IT &C technologies. E-governance outreach techniques are already being used. E-billing and the use of various governmental portals to access services and make payments are already in practice in India.

The mission smart city is not intended to address the age-old problems of urban dwellings comprehensively. Instead, it is designed to provide smart solutions to their problems in a small area of the city, transforming it into an island of prosperity and an example of ideal urban conditions for its citizens.

Conclusion and suggestions

The piecemeal approach might never bring long-term and sustainable solutions to the cities' woes. The biggest challenge a city faces is increasing population pressure. The increase in the mass of the city is both due to natural as well as incoming migration from the rural and other smaller towns. Checking the unbridled flow towards the bigger cities will stem a plethora of urban challenges. However, the problem is deeply rooted and reflects a sorrowful state of imbalanced growth of the Indian economy. Since, independence rural development has been kept on the back burner, notwithstanding the programmes and policies like IRDP (Integrated Rural Development Plan) constituted the five-year plan policies, regularly. The desired uplift of the agrarian economy remained elusive. The smaller and middle categories towns in India are

bereft of any economic opportunity for the prospective migrants. These middle and small category towns (populations varying from 5000 to 50000) have nothing to offer in terms of employment and livelihood opportunities, for the general lack of industries and alternative sources of employment. Agriculture is no longer been an attractive source of livelihood for not only the small and marginal farm holders who in a debt trap fast turning into landless labourers. The surplus labour from the farm sector moved towards the cities in search of better lives, and are dismayed and disappointed. The flight of the abled-bodied and the talented ones not only depletes rural India but also adds to the woes of already aggravated situations in the bigger cities.

Economic empowerment coupled with constant incentives to the farm sectors from the government can go a long way in applying brakes on the incessant flow of migrants towards the big and large cities. We need to develop our middle-category towns to act as a buffer and the pressure from the large metropolitan cities is reduced significantly.

The different government agencies along with the municipal corporation nowhere seem to be working in tandem for the convenience of its citizens. The lack of coordination and cooperation invariably results in chaos and causes severe inconveniences. A well-tuned municipal corporation working in complete coordination and tandem with all developing agencies is not a difficult proposition, which will not only save lots of money, man-hours and convenience.

The master plans made by the big consultancy service providers, generally lack ground surveys. There is also a dearth of subject experts at the helm of affairs or in the centre of decision-making situations. The lack of a meticulous ground survey, Non-inclusion of subject experts ranging from geologists to soil scientists along with demographers and other social scientists, reflects in ill-prepared, inadequate and myopic master plans. The execution of such plans

becomes extremely tardy and incongruous with the grass root realities. Most of the Master Plans made without proper survey and consultation and improper execution, punctuated by legal issues and subsequent inordinate delay often fail to yield the proper and desired outcome. Empowering our Urban Local bodies(ULBs), Better Municipal Financing, improved taxation, sustained effort for better compliance, citizen awareness, Resource mapping, focus on green building, Radical and path-breaking policy implementation required to usher in economic uplift of the agrarian sector of the country, denouncing the parochial politics of putting development on the back seat, Slum renewal with a thrust of providing alternative livelihood to the slum dwellers etc. are some of the probable steps if taken in right earnest and genuine intent, the urban problems may be at a manageable level.

When it comes to managing the cities there cannot be any fixed solution. The notion of untameable suggests that politics is about making difficult choices, often after lengthy public consultations processes (Barber 1984; Hajer2009). However, the bigger Indian cities though burgeoning, are not without hope. A sustained urban development along with rural development-oriented economic policies and programmes may prove to be a harbinger of balanced and productive urban growth. All the economists and the policymakers today in the country point towards the shift of epicentre of economic development towards the rural sector and the fulcrum of the new resurgent India in all probability would be the eastern part of the country.

Putting a leash on the unbridled haphazard and chaotic urban growth is no longer a distant dream, managing and taming our wild cities, will be a reality in the coming future.

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