

The development of Slum-dominated Mega Cities in India

-

A Threat to Democracy and Social Peace in India?

Dr. Hans-Georg Wieck

November 9/10, 2012 University of Hamburg

I.

Urban Development in India at the Crossroads

In 2010, the report on urban development in India, officially initiated by the government and published by McKinsey in 2010, received a great deal of public attention (http://www.mckinsey.com/mgi/publications/india_urbanization/indec.asp).

The report submitted recommendations for an urban development program to be implemented until 2030 that would bring about an increase of the urban population from 340 million inhabitants in 2008 to 590 million in 2030, that means about 50 percent of the overall population as compared with 30 percent in 2010. By 2030 there will be about 70 cities with more than one million inhabitants and middle class families in urban settlements up from 22 million households in 2008 to 91 million families in 2030.

70 percent of the GDP will be generated in urban settlements.

However such developments would only turn into reality if sufficient financial support will be generated to realize the manifold plans and projects. The McKinsey report speaks of financial means needed until 2030 at the overall amount of 2.2 trillion US\$, including capital investments of up to 1.2 trillion US \$.

In case of failure to deliver such financial investments a very pessimistic outlook is offered by McKinsey, the current situation of insufficient supply of public services in Indian cities would further deteriorate drastically, among others with declining supply of water and with a very large part of the population with no access to drinkable water at all. 70 to 80 percent of sewage will be untreated. That of course means new hazards to health and sanitation. While private car ownership would increase, shortcomings in the transportation infrastructure would have the potential of creating urban gridlock – similar to the acute congestion that cripples some Latin American cities now.

The Indian government has reacted positively to the recommendations of the McKinsey-report on funding, governance, planning, sectorial policies, public transportation affordable housing and climate-change mitigation (http://en.wikipediia.org/wilki/Jawaharlal_Nehru_National_Urban-Renowal_Mission.).

On October 5, 2012, the Central Government in New Delhi initiated a new series of regional Urban Renewal Missions, for instance for Pune, Madurai, Kochi, Allahabad, Guwahati, Gangtok, Mysore, and Madhya Pradesh etc. as well as on a number of nation-wide projects such as Water supply and sanitation.

By this way the government plans to implement the recommendations of the McKinsey Report and avoid the collapse of decent life in mega cities of the country.

In contrast to the first series of projects under the National Development Program adopted in 2005, this series is more focused on urban developments than the first series of ten projects in 2005.

The Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission, adopted in 2005 constitutes a massive city-modernization scheme launched by the New Delhi Government that envisaged in its first stage a total investment of over 20 billion US\$ during the period of 2005-2012. Under the scheme ten projects were implemented related to roads network, storm water drains, bus transit systems, water supply, solid waste management, sewage treatment, river and lake improvement, slum improvement and rehabilitation. It is much too early to pass any judgment on the impact these regional projects will have over time. However, a process has been set into motion: A review of the accomplishments of these projects will take place by the end of 2012.

II.

The Emergence of Slum Cultures

The three Indian Mega cities of India - Mumbai, New Delhi and Kolkata - grow faster than any other mega city in the world. Mega-Cities are urban conglomerations with a population larger than 10 million. In the case of India, the fast rate of growth of megacities in India has been caused by the ongoing migration of people from the backward rural areas of the country to the major urban settlement areas in India.

The urban development in India has also been influenced to a fairly large degree by the British Colonial government of the subcontinent. Major administrative centers, concentration of trade and commerce as well as industry was concentrated in key port cities such as Dacca, Kolkata, Chennai, Mumbai and Karachi. Consequently rural cities declined in importance for the development of the regions.

Today – and already since some time, slums generate their own social systems and sub-cultures. They are also the breeding grounds for radical political developments such as Shivsena in Mumbai. A political language of its own establishes itself gradually with impact over time on the political culture of the region and in the end of the country at large. This dimension of contemporary India needs to be looked at more intensely. An interesting collection of essay on these aspects of contemporary India was published by **Draupadi-Verlag in 2006 with the title of “Mumbai-Delhi-Kolkata – Annäherungen an die Mega-Städte Indiens”, by Ravi Ahuja and Christiana Brosius.**

Let me present to you some highlights of these very revealing essays:

1. Lapierre’s famous novel “City of Joy” and the more recent British film ”Slumdog Millionaire” introduced the living conditions and social structures of Indian slums – as developed in Kolkata and Mumbai - into the literature and the awareness of the world. It

requires more in depth studies to develop a structured theory about these phenomena of social development in our times. This diverse subculture will continue be with us.

2. In economic terms liberalization of the Indian economy in 1991 initiated a period of heavy foreign and domestic investment in the region comprising Pune-Raigad-Bombay-Vasdodara-Ahmedabad with Bombay expanding particularly its financial service industries. A second center of massive industrially relevant investment was installed itself in the region of Madras-Bangalore and Hyderabad. – And a third one in the upcoming industrial and service center of New Delhi. These regions and the transport corridors in between kick started into the dimension of globalization, while Kolkata and the rest fell back. Globalization accentuated the differences between these centers of development and the stagnating rest of the country.

3. Traditional industries such as textile industries are in decline, trade unions lose their clientele, while outsourcing gives rise to the informal sector of home based industries and home industries and child labor expand tremendously. Beyond slum population with more than 1.200 slums of Mumbai alone, there is a new layer of city dwellers – more than 700 000 people live in town without a roof over their heads. The percentage of those living below the Indian + standards of poverty grows steady – from 10 percent in 1966 to 70 percent today. Simultaneously the informal sector of trade and commerce has skyrocketed – probably also up to seventy percent of the population, are engaged in the various stages of recycling. Their daily life is dominated by undernourishment, poor sanitation conditions, hence poor health conditions, drugs, corruption, violence prostitution and a police that acts arbitrarily. Slum conditions: that means arbitrary actions by state and non-state-power structures, by business interests as well as religious or political fanatics. On the other hand, traditional city quarters of middle and upper class population are intertwined with slum quarters. It would be wrong to ignore counteracting forces established on the basis of citizen initiatives – such as Mahila Mahan (Women solidarity), National Slum Dwellers Foundation (NSDF), and the “Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centers (SPARC)

4. The radical political wing of BJP in Maharashtra, Shiv Sena, constitutes the manifestation of the existing political tension and contradiction within the Mumbai conglomeration – Established in the seventies Shiv Sena has contributed greatly to the political confrontation and political polarization of the body politics of the mega city Mumbai.

These phenomena are not limited to Mumbai. The author Dittrich (states – with regard to Bangalore – formerly called the garden city of India – “The inclusion of Bangalore into the global economy did not set into motion a broad spectrum development initiatives within the boundaries of the city, but caused far reaching changes in the social fabric of the area, visible socio-economic polarization and a sharp increase in poverty.”

5. Apart from the Kolkata based slum “**City of Joy**”, it is probably the Slum “**Dharavi**” in Mumbai that is best known all over the world. It has been object of social and other academic studies. Thanks to the endeavors of generations of social workers, it has improved the living standards of the slum district in a number of fields – notably with regard to water, sewage, electricity and job situation, s that is has moved up on the ladder of social prestige in town – giving ground o new slums for the poorest of the poor. Dharavi used to be a deposit for waste from the city. It developed into the most famous slum of Bombay if not of India with about 900 000 inhabitants in 2001, living on a territory of not more than 1,7 by 2,2 square kilometers. 25percent of the inhabitants claim to be Muslims, the rest are mostly Dalits and nomads. The slum can be called an industrialized area with home based

workshops, a great deal of women labor and child labor. It is known in all of India for the leather ware, bags, etc. Caste, religion and regional background play a very important role in the social fabric and the capacity and capability of men and women – of the individual as such - to preserve their identity. Caste structures serve as social fabric including some business activities such as banking, self-government education, and arbitration, conflict settlement with the assistance of social worker trained and brought up within the slum region.

Thus, you can define four areas of slum based structures:

- the economic activities within the slum,
- the conditions of production and work, political structures and local self-government
- conflict management and settlement of legal conflicts, and eventually
- intra-cultural and intra-communal coexistence.

Violence is related to gangs, occasionally also to religion, political extremism (Shiv Sena) and to state police.

Given these insights it is plausible to say that slums are viable, although not preferred areas of urban living. In contrast to refugee camps that are transitional in character, slums are permanent settlements.

6. Slum culture served as a fertile grounds for political extremism – such as Shiv Sena, and a new political language was created under the impact of slum language:

Bal Thackeray, the spokesman of Shiv Sena produced a “Political language” that breaks by intent with the traditional symbols and language of Hinduism. He strives to establish a new Hindi social order using the slum culture as a reference piece not the established bourgeois Hindu culture of the country side or the city gentry that had become influential under British rule. Who is the enemy now? – The illegal Muslim migrant, the Indian from the South – as well as Communists and the Hindus preaching nonviolence–like Mahatma Gandhi did. Shiv Sena turned into an alliance with the Hindutva movement initiated by top caste members. Climax of Anti-Muslim campaign erupted after the storm and destruction of the Mosque in Ajodhya in December 1992 and the ensuing Anti-Muslim campaign – led by more than 2.000 Muslim believers and 200 000 Muslim believers fleeing from the city.

Its political ambition makes Shiv Sena a deadly threat for the principle of tolerance needed in particular for life in Slums.

7. There is no lack of literature on Bombay, on Mumbai There is no lack of intellectuals and writers, authors of all sorts in Bombay – as a byproduct of Bollywood – this enterprise that is the largest film industry on the global scale. However, what does Slum life mean to the contemporary writers?

As Saadar Hasan Manto (1912-1955) put it” You can do in Bombay what you like to do. Nobody will take issue with what you do. Nobody tries to teach you anything. You have to master whatever situation you come across on y with our own. You are left alone with the decision on issues of life and death regarding yourself. It does not mean anything to me if you live in the street or in a palace. It makes no difference to me if you stay on or leave the city.”

In the thirties it was en vogue for the intellectual and artists to seek and maintain contacts with left wing labor movements. Left wing writers associations and left wing film maker associations were established. Another major trend among Bombay intellectuals was their contact with London, with European intellectuals and authors, in the first instance with the

British – in the upper classes of Bombay and in association with Indian bourgeois living in the middle classes of the town.

In the end it is the fascination about the city as such that characterizes Bombay based or Bombay orientated Indian and international writing about these phenomena. Slums and Palaces –keep the city together and keep the city going. In other words – the conglomeration circulates around finances, film production and civilizational pluralism in its extreme manifestation and density.

Indian as well as international literature is about this unique center or volcano of mankind. Is it the New York of the 21st century?

8. The capital of India, New Delhi experiences its seventh incarnation with the Union of India. The authors of the book I mentioned already – Ravi Ahuja and Christiane Brosius quite rightly present first of all, New Delhi in its metamorphoses from its role as Moghul residential location to the boredom of an Indian provincial town neglected in almost every respect in the second half of the 19th century, and its rebirth as the site of British raj after 1911 to be followed in its role as capital of democratic and independent India from 1947 onwards.

Almost inadvertently it has turned into one of the Indian Megacities – due to the influx of refugee population of neighboring countries – from the times of partition in 1947 onwards with a growing slum population - a development that the Government tried and continues to try to channelize into new satellite settlements – leading over time to the development of a huge urban conglomeration called with my words “Greater New Delhi Area” with more than 15 million inhabitants and a slum population share of one third – in slums that were destroyed partly (Pushpa-settlements in 2004), however to day they are recognized as urban settlement and living conditions are officially improved by linking the slums to the electricity grid, with water, sewage and waste management.

8. In 1947, the Ministry for Relief and Rehabilitation was created. Due to the huge influx of refugees you find in New Delhi Street names presented in English, Hindi, Urdu and Panjabi. The implications of a New Delhi Mega City weigh heavily on an urban administration, elected into office and not only occasionally confronted with un-surmountable obstacles. So, the Central Government's Administrator has to save the situation.

9. **Kolkata - Calcutta was founded by the British in 1690. It became home for the colonial officers, for the emerging rich Bengal families and for the British Indians - the off-springs of mixed marriages.** Here the Asian Society was established – to encourage Asian Studies.

In 1911 the British divided Bengal into West Bengal – dominated by Hindus and East Bengal – later on Bangladesh - with a Muslim majority. Even worse was the decision to organize elections for provincial parliaments in separate election lists for Hindus and for Muslims. In 1875, the British Queen was crowned in Calcutta Emperor of India. As a consequence of the 1856 mutiny the Moghul crown of India was dissolved – an imperial crown for the India raj was available for the Brits.

Poverty in its most extreme form stigmatizes Calcutta as far as the perception of the West about the Bengali capital is concerned. Günter Grass demonstrated this assessment by way of his publication “Gesicht zeigen” (Face showing), so did Lapierre with his novel “City of Joy”. The decline of the city as a city of industry and commerce took place under the communist

rule of West Bengal. This downward trend continues to be the dominant trend of this Mega City.

III.

Conclusions

Slums - A threat to democracy and social peace in India or, breeding ground for a new Indian subculture of tolerance and multi-cultured society?

Studies on Mega Cities in India and on other urban conglomerations of the Subcontinent lead me to the following conclusions:

1. Slums – the denomination for habitation in down-graded housing complexes or any other form of roof covered structures - seem to be centers of poverty and hopelessness. More thoroughly studied, it emerges that there are structures of all sorts to keep alive families and other groups moving and surviving. **An amazing mixture of cultures, castes, believes and religious sectarians do co-exist.**

A great deal of economic processing is taking place – from waste processing to workshops for all sorts of business activities. In case of ethnic or religiously motivated hatred slums will be in jeopardy, as Shiv Sena radicalism has shown in January. 1993. Such outbreaks are the real threat to multi-ethnic, multi-caste and multi-religious coexistence under Slum conditions. This coexistence is a great achievement – brought about under severe conditions of life.

2. Rural development planning seeks to replace slums – however as long as the influx of surplus population from backward rural areas continues such campaigns are bound to fail. So it is likely that the McKinsey worst case prognosis will become a reality.

3. City administration reality in these days is that they can the cope with the most serious issues of current times, but can hardly afford to cure the evils at his source: sanitation, health, schooling and professional training, transport and traffic, but cannot bring about structural improvements. The threat of implosion as a result of the breakdown of heath care and general sanitation is the most serious threat to survival of Slum based urban life on the subcontinent

Berlin, October 2012

