

THE FORGOTTEN CHILDREN IN INDIAN SLUMS: DEPRIVATION FACED BY THEM

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Abstract

According to census, 2001, the slum dwelling population of India has risen from 27.9 million in 1981 to 61.8 million in 2001. Total population of 6-18 years children in India is 472 million which is equal to 39% of total population of India (Census, 2011). Out of 472 million children a total of 128.5million children live in urban areas which is 34% of urban population. It is common belief that the urban children are more advantageous than their rural counterparts but it is not true with the all children living in urban areas, too many children are denied such essentials like clean water, health care, electricity and educational facilities .Many children are forced to do hazardous and exploitative works instead of enjoying the beauty of city life. And a large number of children are facing regular threat of eviction, child trafficking, abuse, prostitution and live under the most challenging conditions. The adversities endured by the children in poor communities are often unrevealed. The purpose of this article is to explore the reality of life of children residing in slums. The number of children living in urban areas is growing up. They must have access to facilities and opportunities available for them and they need to realize their rights and potentials.

Keywords: Slum, Poverty, Urbanization, Children, Education

Introduction

India is the world's biggest and youngest democracy. It is the world's second most populous country with 1.34 billion people. More than 50% of India's current population is below the age of 25 and over 65% below the age of 35 (indiaonlinepages.com). The urban population of India is increasing with faster rate than the rural population which has risen five times since 1961; the net population increase is now more in urban areas than in the rural areas and is projected to grow to 600 million by 2030 as compared to the 377 million in 2011. For the first time since independence, the total increase in population was elevated in urban areas (91 million) as compared to rural areas (90.9million) (census, 2011). According to the report of World Bank, India accounts for around 11% of the global urban population.

Table 1: India's total, rural and urban population and urbanization (1951-2011)

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Year	Total population (in millions)	Rural population (in millions)	Percentage Rural population	Urban population (in millions)	Percentage urban population
1951	361.1	298.7	82.7	62.4	17.3
1961	439.2	360.3	82.0	78.9	18.0
1971	548.2	439.1	80.1	109.1	19.9
1981	683.3	523.8	76.7	159.5	23.3
1991	846.3	628.7	74.3	217.6	25.7
2001	1028.6	742.5	72.2	286.1	27.8
2011	1210.5	833.4	68.84	377.1	31.2

Source: compiled by the author from the different census reports

Trend of urbanization

The percentage share of the urban population (urbanization) is progressively increasing. In 1951 about 17.3% of population lived in urban areas the number steadily increased to 23.3% in 1981, 25.7% in 1991, 27.8% in 2001 and finally reached to 31.2 % in year 2011. Rapid urbanization has resulted into boom of slum and squatter settlements in cities. Slums are basically viewed as the products of urban poverty. In India 26% of the urban population lives below the poverty line (Planning Commission, 2007). According to the survey report of National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3) conducted in eight cities of India, poverty is more prevalent in slum areas than in non-slum areas in all the eight cities surveyed except Indore (NFHS-3, 2005-06, p.p. 19). The number of slums in India is growing fast. The phenomena of mushrooming of slums have come to be regarded as a major trouble of urbanization. While the number of people living in urban India is getting higher, equally shocking is the rise in number of the urban poor presently 76 million out of 377.1 millions urban population (census, 2011). Total population of 6-18 years children in India is 472 million which is equal to 39% of total population of India (Census, 2011). Out of 472 million children, total 128.5 children live in urban area which is 34 % of urban population.

As per census 2011, there are 13.92 million slum households in India and 65.49 million people reside in slums which is 17.4% of the urban population and 5.4% of the entire

population of the country .Out of the 13.92 millions slum households, 8.1 million (12.3% of total slum population) are 0-6 year children which is matter of concern .UNICEF's, state of the world children 2012 report, states, "the children living in around 49,000 slums in India are invisible."(As cited in Forgotten Voices: The World of Urban Children in India)

Children living in urban areas are often better off than their rural counter parts and availing all the amenities available in the cities. But it is not true in sense of millions of children in marginalized urban areas. They face daily challenges and deprivation of their rights. When we minutely analyze the available data on this marginalized children wide disparities can be easily observed in children's survival rate, dietary status, educational access and other accessible facilities.

A shallow inspection of the city life reveals that city life is very sparkling and exciting but deep observation exhibits that many people in cities especially, people living in the fringe of the city, lead a very insecure and unsteady life. Children growing up in the slums live a dejected life due to poverty, illiteracy, ignorance and subhuman conditions. They are deprived of the many opportunities in life and become victim of violence, abuse and exploitation.

Slum: The concept and statistics

Slums are the ever neglected and overlooked part of the city and are the result of "Industrialization" and "urbanization". Slums develop inside and outside of every city due to unavailability of reasonable lodging for all urban dwellers. The concept of slums and its definitions vary from region to region and country to country as the socio economic and socio cultural setting vary in different societies. Therefore, one of the main challenges that hinder improving slums is the significant variation between definition of slums across countries and regions. Different agencies and scholars try to define slums in different ways from time to time.

UN-HABITAT expert group's define slums as "A contiguous settlement where the inhabitants are characterized as having inadequate housing and basic services .A slum is often not recognized and addressed by the public authorities as an integral or equal part of the city" (As cited in State of slum in India: A Statistical compendium, 2013, p.p. 16).

The Encyclopedia Britannica defines slums as "...residential areas that are physically and socially deteriorated and in which satisfactory family life is impossible. Bad housing is a major index of slum conditions. By bad housing is meant dwelling that have inadequate light,

air, toilet and bathing facilities; that are in bad repair, dump and improperly heated; that do not afford opportunity for family privacy; that are subject to fire hazard and that overcrowd the land, leaving no space for recreational use". (As cited in Slum in India: A Statistical Compendium, 2011, p.p. 6)

It can be concluded that the slums are characterized by the over crowded and high density areas with lack of basic services like safe drinking water, sanitation facilities , solid waste management , electricity , street lighting, basic educational and health facilities. Slums have illegal and inadequate building structures, insecure tenure, irregular or informal settlement with unhealthy living conditions and hazardous locations resulting in social exclusion of its dwellers.

Life of children in slums:

Slum children are most vulnerable of all children who lead a dejected life for one reason or the other. Childhood in slums is characterized by the tough work, absence of leisure time and lack of many opportunities. They are children who live along with economic severity, social insecurity, psychological stresses, tension, unhealthy and hazardous environment and cultural fission. They are more at risk compared to children of other section of society. The real life of slum children is just beyond the sphere of imagination of a common man. Slums are insecure from the environmental and social perspectives too, problems like drug addiction, child labour, juvenile delinquency, prostitution, rape, crime, unemployment and social tension are very frequent and interplay their roles in lives of slum people including their children.

Children in the slums, live a depressed life due to poverty, illiteracy, ignorance and subhuman condition. They are deprived of the many opportunities in life and became victim of violence, abuse and exploitation. The pitiable condition of slum children is aptly portrayed by De La Barra –

‘Being poor is hazard, worse however is being urban and poor. But much worst is being poor, urban and child. Worst of all is being a slum/ street child in an urban environment’. (De La Barra, 1998: 46 as cited in Das, Nibedita).

The aspects of life in which slum children are deprived are as follows –

Homelessness-

As per 2011 census , India has 1.77 million homeless people out of which 0.27 million (15.3%) are children of 0-6 years age group. 0.94 million (52.9%) people are homeless in urban areas out of which 0.11 million(41.7% of total homeless children and 12% of total urban homeless population) are 0-6 years children .

Homelessness in the cities straightforward means more exposure to health risk, crime, lack of security, physical and sexual abuse, agony and extremities of climate. A study conducted by Save the Children ,“Surviving the Street” (2011) on street children in all nine districts in Delhi from July to August 2010 , estimated that Delhi has approximately 51,000 homeless children of which 20 per cent are girls and the large percentage (61%) were in the 7-14 year age group. While 23% were in 15-18 years age group. The study reveals that 70% homeless children were those who have their home in Delhi but still they wander here and there. Only 20% of destitute children had any official document for their identity such as aadhar card, birth certificate etc. which is necessary to use the government schemes or benefits.

A study conducted by Tata Institutes of Social Science (TISS) and Action Aid in Mumbai between September ,2012 to December 2012 , estimated that 905 children (2.5%) were living on railways premises, 65% (24120) of the children lived with their families in which 61% were boys and 39% were girls in Mumbai city.

Unsafe housing

Poor housing and living conditions in the cities of developing countries, predominantly in slums, is a matter of huge concern. Dilapidated and unwell housing and lack of such basic services as safe drinking water, better toilet facilities, and waste disposal facilities expose slum inhabitants to a variety of infections.

NFHS-3 (2005-06) report housing condition of slum is much poorer than non-slum areas..The condition of housing in which children live has an vast impact not only on their physical wellbeing but on over all development .Census 2011, data on slum present a harsh picture of the condition of housing in slum areas in Indian cities. 15.99 million Urban households (17.4%) live in slums in Indian cities. Out of these 12.61million (78.9%) lives in permanent houses, 2.42 million (15.1%) lives in semi permanent houses and 0.79 million (4.9%) live in temporary houses. Goa has the maximum percentage of slum households

(90.7%) with housing in good condition and, Arunachal Pradesh has minimum percentage (17.9%) (As cited in Slum in India: A Statistical Compendium, 2015).

Home for the slum children comprise mostly of one small room which is used multi purposely for cooking, eating, resting, sleeping, working, meeting etc. Total 6.17 million (44.8%) slum dwellers have single room and 0.6 million (4.4 %) have no room to live. As most of the houses in slums are undersized and are located close to other buildings, they often lack proper ventilation .There is of course no separate space for the children. Besides home the veranda, street close to the home are the areas where small children and girls spend most of their spare time. The adjacent areas near the betel shop and tea stalls are important space for communication of the grown-up male children. Total 0.07 million (0.05%) households have no arrangement of light and 2.60million (18.9%) households do not have latrine facilities so people defecate in the open places. Open defecation is highest among the poor in every city. About one-third to one-half of poor households in Delhi, Meerut, Indore, and Nagpur practice open defecation. (IFHS -3, 2005-06 p.p. 20).The worst is that 2.58 million (18.8%) slum households have no drainage connectivity for waste water pipe. The condition of houses in slums is mostly dilapidated, unhygienic devoid basic facilities and needs. Adult members of the house gossip or watch TV in the same single room even when the children reading or sleeping, sleep is one of the most basic need of human.

Crime, violence and deviant behavior –

According to the report “Crime in India 2009” published by National crime Record Bureau, crime against children become increased by 18.57% between 2007 and 2009.As per the report Crime in India-2013 released by the National Crime Record Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, during 2013 a total of 58,224 criminal cases were reported against children in the country as compared to the 34,172 cases during 2012, showing an increase of 52.5 %. NFHS -3 shows high frequency of violence among the families of urban slums.

Use of alcohol / drug is very common in slums. Gambling and the stealing are the most prominent behavior forms visible among children in slum areas. Slum children are mostly involved in drug use, alcohol use and pick- pocketing. They also show interest in playing cards and lottery. Usually boys spend time in playing cards, gossiping and roaming around the street. The boys have the habit of staying out of the home even at late night and

engaged in various criminal activities without any parental reprimand. Girls in slum are victim of rape, sexual violence and prostitution.

Child abuse and neglect is the common feature of slum life. Sometime slum children become subject to cruel treatment, torture and punishment by their employers, parents and teachers'. One can easily see that drunkard parents beat and abuse their children for no reason in the slums.

Educational deprivation

Census, 2011 data shows that 22.72 million (23%) children of 5-18 age groups are out of school in urban areas. Out of this 8.97 million (9.1% of urban children) between 5 -18 age group used to attend school but eventually dropped out, and 13.75 million (13.93%) children have never attended school. The survey indicates the poverty and economic constraints are the main reasons of exclusion from school. The proportion of out of school children due to poverty is higher in urban areas (28.67%) than the rural areas (22.33%). Total 2.14 % children are out of school from all the children living in urban slums. Slums from states such as Uttarakhand, Punjab, Bihar, Assam, Madhya Pradesh ,Andaman and Nicobar Island , NCT of Delhi, Odisha and West Bengal report a higher proportion of children to be out of school than the National average of 28.67 percent. The proportion of out of school female children (2.70%) is higher than the male children (2.14%).

Slum children face major educational deprivation in terms of accessibility and quality as well .Therefore even basic education is still a privilege enjoyed by a segment of the population. Thus, from very early childhood the fundamental right of education is lacking among the slum children. Educational status of slum children is very poor in respect of percentage of out-of-school children. Among the slum children absenteeism is the common incident. So these children who nominally get enrolled they remain absent for long time due to various reasons.

An estimated 1.12 crore children from urban India live in slum areas. This is 36.01% of the total urban population. Out of the total children living in slum in the urban areas, 2.14% are out of school by SRI-IMBR2009 (Social and Rural Research Institute –India Market Research Bureau, 2009) survey report.

Child labour

In every big city thousands of children are found wandering in the streets and working in tea stalls road side dhabas and hotels, garage and shops and are demoralized and abused too. In spite of legal control, child labour in India remains a National challenge .The work contribution rate of poor children is much higher than the rate of non poor children in every city .Children in the slums are engaged in the work rather than the studies. Child work interferes with schooling and usually they withdraw from school if he/she have been enrolled. Poor children are also more likely to be engaged in paid work (NFHS-3, 2005-06 p.p.31). A study conducted by Save the Children, “Surviving the Street” (2011) on street children in Delhi reported 51,000 homeless children of which 87% were engaged in work like rag picking (20%), street vendor (15.8%) and begging (15%). The estimates of child labour in India by different bodies not show the clear picture, even the census of India comprise only those children in class of child labour who are engaged in an economic activity, a large number of children who engaged in household works (fetching water, sibling care, cooking, and cleaning etc) and spend several hours in this activities are not classified as child workers. (Bose, 2003 as cited in Das, Nibedita).

The children from age of about ten become an supplementary assets for the household, if it is a girl child, she helps the mother in support as domestic help in the rich households., and if it's a male child he starts assisting the father in petty trade works and in the traditional caste related occupations such as carpentry, barber, cobbler and washer man. And in certain cases it is also found that during after school hours they go for the rag picking and earn some money out of it.

The children in slum face economic adversity right from their birth. Under the compulsion of total survival many sample children are bound to work in order to avoid the economic crisis in their families. Children from a very early age start to work either inside or outside their homes.

Health

Poverty and illiteracy in slums leads to the ignorance which combines with unhygienic condition of houses may cause of poor health of slum children. The impact of lack of basic amenities and poor accessibility of health facilities makes the slum children vulnerable to health shocks.

The problem of malnutrition is the grave issues in urban India especially those living in urban slums. The national Family Health Survey -3 (NFHS-3), finds poor nutritional status in slums. Lack of safe drinking water is a major concern in slums which may cause several water born diseases in children. In India, the occurrence of diarrhoea is high among the slum dwellers. Anemia is widespread among children in all eight cities surveyed by NFHS-3 survey. Both malnutrition and unhygienic condition are major causes of poor health of slum children, which ultimately threaten their survival and development. Beside malnutrition the prevalence and the severity of disease among slum children are influenced by the factors like unhygienic living conditions and unsanitary practices. Illiteracy, ignorance and apathetic attitude of the parents along with nutritional deficiency and unhygienic living condition make the children more susceptible to numerous health disorders like AIDS, Tuberculosis, asthma, vector born diseases etc.

Conclusion

Poverty and illiteracy is the reality of slums due to that slum people experience a differential treatment, i.e. a treatment of avoidance, and inferiority complex. Social stigmatization plays its role in full sway in institutions like school and other places which mutes their voices, prevents their visibility, restricts their upward mobility, denies their access and as a whole suppresses their moral to be passionate and to have positive attitude towards better life and living all this cause pain, dissatisfaction and unhappiness among them and make them annoyed, nuisance, truant, delinquent and violent.

Different surveys on marginalized children indicate the millions of urban children are deprived and experience deficiency and segregation. The adequate data on the slum children, homeless children is not available so the troubles faced by these children are lost in the world of statistical averages that masks the inequalities existing within the urban settings. The lack of information about these children leads to omission of these children and they have not been mainstreamed. Growing slum population and the lack of basic amenities will defectively impact on India's overall target attainment of MDG. So, it is important to know the major constraints in life of slum children so that appropriate measure can be taken. It is very clear that slum children are one of the chief potential human resources but beyond that they are a human being who have right to flourish their potential up to their maximum and enjoy the life. So, it's very essential to give attention on large group of marginalized and deprived section of the society.

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