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EVOLUTION OF SLUM POLICIES IN CHENNAI: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Malavika J

Acharya's NRV School of Architecture

Abstract

This paper posits that policy intervention in slums remains a problem for the fast-growing urban zones in the Global South despite intervention for several decades. This paper evaluates the properties and direction of slum policy in Chennai starting from the mid-1970s and through 4 enumeration reports with additional consideration to the political environment that shaped it. The study shows that there has been a constant type of slum management involving relocation since the early 1990s as there have been changes from the politics of paternalistic socialism, affordability, and cost recovery politics early 1990s politics of beautification of global cities politics of technology friendly, slum-free 'smart city' politics of the early twenty-first century.

Keywords: Enumeration, Policy Discourses, Politics, Practices, Slums Of Chennai.

Introduction

Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, by far accommodate over one billion people in slums; they are described by worst shelter deprivations (UN Habitat, 2014). Currently, India is the largest economy in South Asia and its slum to urban population ratio compares to its neighbors reveals relatively lesser decline from 23.1% to 17. From the last census decade, the percent to this age group has only decreased to 3%. The improved housing quality and access noted in the survey does not seem to have translated into the levels of shelter security that have been observed in the past due to exclusionary policies of the Indian state and large-scale evictions rather than successful implementation of government schemes. The research also shows that the absolute number of slum dwellers has risen significantly to total 22. The increasing trend of population has also been recorded by the government and as of 2013, the population was estimated 8 million. Nonetheless, due to the difference in the enumeration area of the previous two slum censuses, comparisons have been problematic. In 2001, it was only defined in the towns that housed population more than 20,000 while in 2011 it was defined in all statutory towns. The 2011 census data however excludes settlements with less than sixty households and misses out the ground realities skewed in favor of those larger settlements (Bhan & Jana, 2013).

Literature Review

Early Policies: Paternalistic Socialism (1970s-1980s)

Establishment and Initial Strategies

The organized attempt to find a solution to the inevitable growth and sustenance of slums in Chennai city can be traced to 1970 with the formation of Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board (TNSCB) under the then DMK government. The primary mode of practice of TNSCB for the construction of tenements for the dwelling of the slum inhabitants focused on the concept of 'clearing' the inhabited slums from Madras which is now known as Chennai (TNSCB, 1975). During this period the interventionist attitude was at its peak where Government came in picture as a disciplining, caterer type reflecting the typical socialist pattern developed in India during seventies. It was not just an aim of giving shelter to the immigrants living in the slum areas, but it was to make them productive members of the society.

Policy Implementation and Impact

In Tamil Nadu state there was passed the Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Areas Act of 1971, which prohibited the eviction of slum people in the area without having been provided another place to live in (de Wit, 1993). This legislation provided a sense of confidence in TNSCB as an institution with the mandate to serve the interest of the urban poor house solicitors. TNSCB has identified as many as 1202 slums accommodating a population of about 737531 people by the year 1975. The



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survey of socio-economic condition initiated by the TNSCB was one of the basic prerequisites adopted to mark the beginning of the most ambitious drive of clearing the city of slums named Madras. Yet as much as potential drawbacks, fewer tenements were constructed due to the high costs and slow construction process. In order to cater for these basic requirements, TNSCB also started infrastructural development following the central govt's Environment Improvement Scheme (EIS) as mentioned by de Wit (1993). These were the short-term relief measures designed to enhance the quality of life of the communities in the process of waiting for the sustainable plans in place.

Shift to Affordability and Cost Recovery (1980s-1990s)

World Bank Intervention

Therefore, the economic liberalization of the 1980s has engendered major shifts in the governance of Chennai as an urban territory. The subsequent changes in the market-oriented policies indicated a rotational shift from state-funded tenement construction to more liberal service delivery. While the Emergency period (1975-77), Aruljothi Manimekalai was given the project of Madras Urban Development Project (MUDP) in collaboration with the World Bank when the newly formed All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) government was headed by M. G. Ramachandran. This intervention entailed a differential view and campaign for individualism and free market and user pay policies that stood in sharp difference to the previous self-employment nurturing program.

Slum Rehabilitation Scheme (SRS)

It was out of the framings of the SRA that the Slum Rehabilitation Scheme (SRS) was formulated to encourage private players to come forward and rehabilitate the slums through remodeling. This policy allocated extra FSI to developers and for covering the cost of building free accommodation for the dwellers. While there were some notable successes in working to improve living conditions with inhabitants of slum structures, the SRS came under criticism for 'regeneration ghettoization' and the displacement of other socially fragile groups (Bhide, 2018). The Madras Urban Agglomeration comprised 1413 such 'slums' in 1987 according to a report by the Economist Group of which they suggested interventions in only 996, terms them 'objectionable or unobjectionable' depending on whether or not the inhabitants held secure tenure (EG, 1987). This classification added vagueness to the definition, and it interfered with the real essence of the slums and the problems they pose, probably due to the more technical and less empathetic approach.

World-Class City Aspirations (1990s-2000s)

Political Dynamics and Mega-Projects

The wheels of competitive politics between the DMK and the AIADMK gained momentum in the 1990s with attention on the growth of Chennai as an international city. It was in this period that several new big-ticket programmes of infrastructure modernization including Mass Rapid Transit System (MRTS) & Chennai Metro etc. started being implemented. These were among the many projects, which in an overall scheme to entice direct foreign investment and to market the city, aimed at improving its image on the world stage. Such a singular emphasis on icon mega-projects endangered the removals of slum people even when it was masked by discursive claims of beautification and development (Kennedy et al. , 2014).

Central Government Programs

Among the central government's schemes, the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) were very instrumental in determining slum policies in the city of Chennai. JNNURM was announced in 2005 with an objective of enhancing capacities in urban infrastructure and deliver essential services to the urban vulnerable group. Nevertheless, the extent and nature of the program in Chennai unveiled a different pattern, with most projects implementing the program through costly relocations instead of in-situ upgrading. About 85 percentile of incurred cost was spent for relocation which led to creation of massive integrated housing complexes outside the city perimeters (Coelho & Raman, 2010; GOI,



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2014). This focus on relocation simply impacted negatively on the rights of slum dwellers and made them even more vulnerable through relocation to areas that are too distant and least connected to job opportunities in the city.

Technology-Driven Slum-Free Agenda (2010s-Present)

Rural Housing Scheme or Rajiv Awas Yojana and Housing for All Mission or Smart Cities Mission

The Rajiv Awas Yojana (RAY), enlisted in 2009, sought to establish ‘Slum-free’ Cities through integral and effective implementation and provision of property rights. This was part of a new policy direction that sought to highlight the rights of the inhabitant and their place in the urban structure. But, while trying to work as a remedy for housing woes in India, RAY encountered its own set of problems like administrative hitches and inadequate funding as pointed out by Bhan in the year 2013. The Smart Cities Mission began in 2015 by the new government under the Prime Minister Narendra Modi introduced a new way of overcoming such issues through technology. The implementation of the Smart Cities Mission was extended to the cities including Chennai which in turn led to the development of solutions that address the upgrade of the infrastructure and the delivery of services across the city as well as the promotion of sustainable development. Nevertheless, these milieus remain rather ambiguous and continue to spur debates regarding digital divides and the slum dwellers exclusion (2015).

Recent Enumeration and Future Directions

According to a prejudice index prepared under the RAY scheme’s Darashaw report 2014, slums are defined as tenable or untenable depending on planning standards to precede and environmental norms. Generally, this classification sought to direct the efforts towards finding a solution that placed emphasis on the degree of suitability of the particular piece of land for residential purposes. The enumeration employed various technologies for instance Geographic Information Systems (GIS) as well as Management Information Systems (MIS) to identify slum areas and evaluate their standard (Darashaw, 2014). The technological developments described above made it possible to achieve a higher degree of accuracy in managing the slums compared to the traditional approaches used before. However, some stakeholders have raised issues regarding the housing of these technological solutions in regard to the various inhabitants of the buildings with specific focus on those who are in the lower end of the social scale.

Discussion and Conclusions

From paternalistic socialism, through marketisation and more recent technological amplifications, relevance of Chennai’s evolving slum policies may be contextualised within these epistemic paradigm shifts of urban governance. The fact remains that slum populations still exist even with these several interventions implemented, which showcasing the issues and difficulties of combating poverty in urban areas. Therefore, future policies should embrace: Outcome 5: Participation/democracy this another important outcome in governance of future polices because slum dwellers’ views are not only relevant but should also be central for implementation as well.

Thus, through an evaluation of the historical and current slum policies in Chennai, this paper argued that there is a need to come up with a comprehensive and responsive urban management system in India that will address the problems associated with slums that are inhabited by the poor population. By studying the dynamics of the slum management policies in Chennai, it can be concluded that there is a set of policies drawn on a continual line, and by the 1990s, the course of policies shifted towards relocation. This continuity is important, as it marks the state as both developmental and displacing – or, in the context of late liberalism, developmental/displacing.

Based on the examination of tactics and strategies adopted by political coalitions in relation to slum policies, it can be stated that these mandates are in a constant process of change. Local actors most particularly the DMK in the 1970s targeted their activities on tenement construction through state funded schemes. The global capitalist system and the World Bank in the 1980s drew more attention to cheap delivery of services and demand-side remedies. From the 1990s, the China central government and private players stepped up their role and activities, which has resulted in some large-



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scale relocations. The current utterance towards the technological and smart city solutions concerns neoliberal perspective that seem to benefit middle-to-upper middle-class populaces and hence can, further deepen socio-spatial inequality.

Finally, examining the process of the emergence of slum policies in Chennai, I would like to stress the importance of the critical investigation of urban governance paradigms. The future research agenda should illuminate how the use of digital technologies is changing the ways in which slum discourses are being produced, questioned, and negotiated, as well as the ways how actor coalitions are emerging and the efficiency of the inclusive development. The central argument of this paper is that comprehending relationships between political coalitions, policy discourses and slum practices holds the key to tackling the issues of urban poverty and informal settlements in the backdrop of fast-emerging cities such as Chennai.

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