

## SPACE FOR THE URBAN HOMELESS AND MARGINALIZED

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A vast number of the marginalized and the poor live in the urban centres, particularly in the metropolitan cities, without shelter, facilities and amenities for bare existence, deprived of basic needs and means of livelihood. Out of nearly 285 million people who inhabit in these urban settlements (5161 in 2001 census), nearly 100 million (35%) are said to be living in slums and destitution, mostly below the poverty line. Such marginalized people could be found either in slums or in other illegal and unauthorized habitations with no semblance of civic amenities. They could be unorganized daily wage earners, construction workers, vendors and hawkers, rickshaw and cart-pullers, porters and loaders, street and working children or simply the vagrants and homeless. Most of these people, including the homeless, are our active economic agents turning our urban centres into 'engines of growth', while creating goods and services.

When it comes to analyze the factors behind the sub-human existence of the urban poor, some blatant myths are propagated and quickly lapped up by those who seem to believe that the cities belong to them. The popular theory that the rural is always idyllic and urbanization driven by migration is a dirty process goes against the very essence of history, the socio-economic changes and development. While admitting the 'low level of urbanization' in India, 27.7% of the total population as against nearing 50% in the developing and developed world, the Planning Commission has obviously appreciated the need for the planned urban growth. The poor decadal urban to total population (%) growth of India, (1981-23.34, 1991-25.72, 2001-27.78%), i.e. nearly 2% decadal increase, is also an indicator of our slow development process. The other myth about the much-maligned wild growth of slums may be dispelled with the percentage of space vis-à-vis population occupied by them in the cities of India.

In Delhi, out of 70,000 hectares of landmass available under the Master Plan only 4,000 hectares accommodates nearly 35 lacs out of 137.82 lacs (census 2001) population. The capital city with its highest per-capita income in the country may not be the most telling example of the deprived and marginalized urban poor, yet, certain facts and figures officially accepted by the city planners, Delhi Development Authority and the local Urban Bodies are quite shocking. In the last reckoning, nearly 6 lacs Jhuggi-Jhopadi units (30 lacs population) in 1600 slum clusters and 1100 unauthorized colonies inhabited by another 35 lacs population, constituted 52% population of the NCT Delhi. In case we decide to add 15-20 lacs of the re-settlement colony dwellers, we are left with just about 30% of the population who may claim to live with the law and civic services behind them.

Today, when Delhi's Master Plan 2001-2021 is being formulated there is a need to pause and think where do we stand in our planning process in terms of the people whom we are supposed to serve. The situation that obtains today is primarily on account of the obvious flaws in planning and its implementation. The inadequacy is not in the theory, but in practice and in the lack of intention and politico-administrative will to serve the poor.

In the context of the marginalized and homeless, the Delhi Master Plan defines 'Shelter' as an essential need of a family, including components like water, electricity, waste disposal, education, health, recreational and other facilities'. It further mentions about 'tenure and socio-economic compatibility to development'. This wishful document correlates 'housing and shelter needs' with livelihood options of the poor and appreciates the need for employment opportunities for the economic functioning of the city. It also mentions about vendors and hawkers, reported to be 200,000 in Delhi (250,000 in Mumbai, 150,000 in Kolkata and 100,000 in Ahmedabad) in the Government's 'National Policy for Street Vendors' as providing employment and necessary affordable services to

the urban population, their fundamental rights under article 19(1)(G) and 39 (A) and (B) now recognized by the Hon'ble Supreme Court.

Whether in the context of Delhi or on the larger national canvas, the land, tenure or the right to space utilization is crucial. We cannot live with a planning process that overlooks the rightful claims of the majority. Whereas, practically all local, national and international policies recognize such rights, on the ground they rarely translate into action. Besides the cities' Master Plans, National Housing and Habitat Policy, National Agenda for Governance providing 'Housing for All', National Slum Development Program, HUDCO's Scheme for Shelter and Sanitation, 10<sup>th</sup> Plan approach paper, and the myriad schemes that provide for the Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) and Low Income Group (LIG), proposing 90% allocation in the housing shortage, one needs to find out the present status. Very little has been done to satisfy the housing rights and shelter needs of the homeless urban population. In Delhi, for city's estimated 1 lac homeless, the Raen Baseras provide space for only about 2000. In the planning process there has been no count for the city's Unidentified Dead Bodies, 3040 in 2002 alone, who also happened to be such homeless people.

In fact, the space for the marginalized, specially the slum dwellers, the shelterless and the working people in the unorganized informal sector who form nearly 93% of the labour force deserve space everywhere. '*Teh-bazari*' and such practices alone which do not give any legal right and embroils them in endless disputes with the authorities can not be a way of life for the vendors and hawkers. Similarly, the shelterless have to be provided affordable habitation considering their livelihood requirements. Under the Master Plan of Delhi, same as in various plans of the cities, provisions have to be made for the shelterless and marginalized responding to the commitments made in various policies. Micro level plan of action needs to be drawn up in consultation with the local bodies, NGOs and the representatives from the marginalized groups of people, while organizing requisite resources from the government, corporate sectors and the community.