

UNCOVERING THE MYTH OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN MUMBAI

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Mumbai has evolved from being a fishing hamlet to a colonial node, subsequently to being the cradle of textile civilisation, and in contemporary times it has become the hub of India's commerce and finance. The most widely held popular perception about Mumbai is that of a city of opportunity for people from across South Asia, and now even beyond. These opportunities have of course been distributed unevenly, with Mumbai's rich and poor co-existing, and not always peacefully, with fundamentally differing entitlements to basic services – water and sanitation, health care and nutrition. In some of its large slums – the suppliers of cheap labour – children from poorer homes die because these slums exhibit malnutrition, morbidity and mortality levels closer to those current in the states of Bihar or Orissa. About 60 per cent of Mumbai's population lives in such slum areas, occupying a mere 8 per cent of land, and their lives are characterised by degraded housing, poor hygiene, congestion, inadequate civic services and yet expanding peripheries of its slumming suburbs – with Dharavi as its epicentre.

Population change in a megapolis like Mumbai occurs both due to natural increase and migration. While migration has in the past played a significant role in changing the demographic profile of Mumbai, the contribution of migration to population growth has declined consistently. This decline has happened in tandem with an unprecedented natural increase in the population.

Migration from northern Indian states increased substantially between 1961 and 2001 and is higher than migration to the city from within the state, and continues to remain male dominated. Much of this migrant population is being absorbed by Mumbai's peripheral urban agglomerations like Navi Mumbai, Thane, Kalyan and Mira-Bhayander, thus, contrary to what is generally perceived, not congesting the main

city districts. There is a significant dispersal of population from Greater Mumbai to these nearby cities. This is also evident from the population growth differential between Greater Mumbai and other units of the Greater Mumbai Urban Agglomeration – showing that the rate of migration is much faster in these Urban Agglomerations than in Greater Mumbai itself. Secondly, it is the migrants from within the state settling down, coupled with the birth rate within the city that contributes to its population growth.

Migration from the southern states of India has declined between 1961 and 2001. This change took place over a period of time and was fuelled by a number of natural evolutionary factors, such as changing employment patterns from manufacturing to commercial and service sectors, especially IT, banking, media and communications. People from the south also found other destinations such as Bangalore and Hyderabad. This trend gives important clues on how policy interventions can be induced to decelerate migration into already unwieldy cities like Mumbai.

It is worthwhile to understand the initial development of suburban areas of Mumbai from a historical perspective. Upon the circular issued to the Bombay Chamber of Commerce and the Municipal Corporation in 1908, inviting suggestions for addressing the problem of acute shortage of housing for the poor, Arthur Crawford, the then Municipal Commissioner, emphasised the importance of comprehensive urban planning in his 'The Development of New Bombay: A pamphlet'. This was the beginning of the city's urban sprawl. In the 1960s the distribution of the population presented an interesting scenario with the island and suburbs having a more or less equal share. The suburbs have grown at a much faster rate over the past three decades contributing to increased density. Effective planned development of suburbs has not taken off as envisaged due to the lack of supporting

infrastructure and a sound policy environment for development of residential and commercial nodes.

The availability of physical space for people living in the city can be understood as a key factor in the quality of life of the city's residents. The population density defined as number of persons living within an area of 1 km² presents the most striking feature about Mumbai. In 2001, the average population density for Mumbai city was 27,000 people per km². Ward C is one of the most densely populated areas with a density of 114,001 people per km².

Mumbai's economy has witnessed a significant transition in the pattern of employment during the last four decades. Today a majority of the employment is in the tertiary sector, which accounts for almost 81 per cent of the total employment. The growth of the financial sector fostered the growth of other sectors such as telecommunications, construction and real estate. Employment in the informal sector (wage labourers, hawkers) has grown at a faster rate than that in the formal sector, resulting in its share of total employment increasing over time. The growth of formal-sector employment in the services sector has not been adequate to fill the gap and thus former mill and other manufacturing workers were absorbed by the informal sector.

A large majority of the male migrants (49.1 per cent) coming to Mumbai are employed in 'production related' jobs. In terms of inter-industry distribution, a majority of them work in industries requiring semi-skilled and unskilled workers with minimal educational qualifications. In contrast, the non-migrants have dominated white-collared professional, technical, executive and managerial jobs, including clerical and sales jobs in various service-based industries that outnumber jobs taken by migrants. The current rapid growth of the Indian economy is fuelled by these various movements of labour. But, the current forms of migration are not only a sign of dynamism – they also reflect and come with increasing inequalities, agrarian crises and inadequate employment generation in many parts of rural and urban India.

Large construction activities and other major public works in Greater Mumbai depend upon labour drawn from villages within and outside Maharashtra. While the migrants are indispensable to the city's economy

as they fulfil the demand for low-paid and unskilled jobs, their residential patterns are being altered fundamentally. In the recent past the residential pattern of Mumbai showed slums co-existing with better-off residential complexes locating the poor close to their workspaces. The accelerated slum clearance programme may be creating opportunity for the poor to 'own' their houses, but a side effect is that it severely compromises their ability to access viable livelihoods as they are forced to relocate to the far peripheral areas of the suburbs.

The notion of lack of space within the city is a contested one when as areas of prime land are locked up in dead mills in the heart of the city. In addition, there are huge stretches of dock land on the eastern waterfront that are lying redundant. Finally there are the salt pan lands that cannot be used because of obsolete land ceiling legislations applicable in the city. Migration and the resulting slums are inevitable as the cities will always be magnets attracting people for better economic opportunities. What is important is a multi-pronged approach to slow down migration and to also manage and troubleshoot it properly through strategies such as alternate urban centres, the creation of sustainable rural business hubs and the provision of affordable housing within the city.

Given the ever-expanding volume of traffic between the city and suburbs it is important to develop efficient and sustainable transport networks that facilitate faster movements at lower social, environmental and economic costs. The option of the metrorail coupled with monorail and underground parking lots is seen as the best option. It is however of great significance that out of 135 metro corporations in the world, only 4 are making operational profits. These include the metrorail transports in Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Delhi. The Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC), is said to also be falling into the trap of loss-making corporations, with losses amounting to 76.33 crore (US\$19.3 million) annually, as reported by a leading daily newspaper. Some transport experts are suggesting that the total project costs of the metro, presently estimated at 19,525 crore (US\$4.9 billion), may have been gravely under-projected and will in actuality be three times higher. Considering Mumbai's topography, land constraints and the massive disruption and displacement and relocation of people and other infrastructure involved, the costs

in Mumbai are likely to be astronomical. However decision makers seem unimpressed by the availability of safe, indigenous and relatively low cost, high load bearing, sustainable, and scalable commercially ready technologies like Skybus or Rapid Bus Transit Systems.

[1] K. Gupta and P. Yesudian, 'Is Mumbai Losing Its Attraction for Migrants?', *The Indian Journal of Social Work*, Volume 67, Issue 3, July 2006.

[2] B. Viju, 'Migration to city from south falling', 5 August 2007, *Times News Network*.

[3] Occupational distribution of workers age 15 years and above in Mumbai by Migration status and sex: 1983, 1987-88, 1993 and 1999-2000. 'NSS 55th Round, 1999-2000', in D. P. Singh, 'Migration in Mumbai: A review of 50 years', *Demography India*, 2007.

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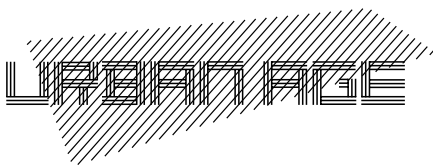
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