Analysing the Great Urban Divide: Turning the Lens to Rural to Understand Slums

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Abstract: Instead of looking at slums as strictly 'urban problems' requiring 'urban solutions', this paper attempts to build a structural link between growth of slums in urban areas and, what can be called, the 'decay' of the rural in India. It contends that uneven development of Indian cities with great spatial disparities – made evident by increasing number of slums – is related to uneven development between rural and urban areas. Thus, in order to grapple with the 'enigma' of slums, the political economy of rural areas – from where the migrants living in slums 'originally' belong – becomes the essential site to engage with. The paper foregrounds the need to study transformations in the rural domain in order to make sense of the growth of slums in cities. In a nutshell, the argument is that the 'decay' of the rural and the 'swelling' of the city are to be visualised in hyphenated terms since the rural-urban divide is at the heart of the 'great urban divide'.

Keywords: city-centrism, development discourse, slums, structural transformation, urbanisation.

'The all-pervading disease of the modern world is the total imbalance between city and countryside, an imbalance in terms of wealth, power, culture, attraction, and hope. The former has become over-extended and the latter has atrophied. To restore a proper balance between city and rural life is perhaps the greatest task in front of modern man' (Schumacher 1973: 189-190).

1. Introduction

By critically reassessing the city-centric development discourse this paper seeks to look at the phenomenon of slums in the broader context of the 'decay' of the rural[a]. It is contended that the phenomenon of spatial disparities in Indian cities made evident by increasing slums is interlinked with the imbalanced development between India's rural and urban areas. Thus this paper argues for a shift in perspective – a shift from the centricity of city in development discourse to seeing the 'great urban divide'[b] and the rural-urban divide as structurally linked.

The argument is advanced by dividing the paper in three parts. First part seeks to present a quick snapshot of the politics of development which, owing to its euro-centric and urban bias moorings, attempts to set a grand principle towards which every society's future course is supposed to unfold - the absolute and essential importance of urbanisation with a replica of (Western) City as the terminus of development. It has been argued that the planning and policy discourse in 'urban studies' in India, intendedly or unintendedly, shares the above outlined 'principle' and hence the proliferation of 'slums' is seen to be a result of lack of implementation of the master plans. Thus in the dominant discourse the 'problem' of slums are understood through a city-centric perspective – devoid of any link with the rural.

The implicit assumption here is of a 'structural transformation' where people are supposed to move from farm to factory and from the country to the town. However this assumption has been problematised throughout the paper. Second part walks into the domain of the rural and agrarian in India to capture a glimpse of the distress in this realm. The argument arrived in this section that, due to the 'decay' of the rural and agrarian economy, people working in this domain are witnessing a crisis resulting into an outflow. Third part, by building upon the second, attempts to develop a prima facie case for a suspicion for the axiomatic feature of the development discourse, i.e., the assumption of a successful 'structural transformation'. If this argument is true then it necessarily calls for a turning of the lens to the rural to understand urban slums.

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2. Politics of Development and Centricity

2.1 The 'Catch Up' Paradigm: City as Terminus

The 'derivative' discourse of development creates an imagery in which the agrarian and rural 'developing' countries are supposed to 'catch-up' with the industrialized and urban West. This calls for the 'imperative' of structural transformation – where willy-nilly every society has to move from agriculture to industry and from the country to the town. It has often been argued that the term 'development' carries distinct connotations. It may include, as put by Gasper, 'long-term economic growth and change; societal progress; planned intervention; what happens in the world's South; and what agencies in or from the world's North do to, with, and in the South' (Gasper, 2004). However, 'development', as put by Mira Kamdar, 'is traditionally understood as industrialisation and urbanisation' (Kamdar, 2012). Merriam-Webster dictionary informs that a 'developed' country and society is one 'having a relatively high level of industrialisation and standard of living'. Petit Robert dictionary notes that a 'developing country or region' is one 'whose economy has not yet reached the level of North America, Western Europe, etc.' (Rist, 2002). Thus in the mainstream idea, often the end point is to measure up to the modern West. The dominant conception of development which holds sway is inextricably interwoven within the templates of industrialisation and urbanisation. Whatever conception one may subscribe to development, it generally concurs within the rubric or domain which includes the dynamics associated with the conundrums of the countries or societies seeking to 'industrialise' and 'urbanise' – as this is viewed as the answer to the enigma called poverty. Thus 'development' is often used to refer to the narrative or the process of transition/ transformation towards a modern industrial urban economy. There is a set linearity towards a 'fixed' future – of urbanised and industrialised society.

The mainstream development discourse, however, is increasingly seen as euro-centric. Critics have advanced their arguments from various directions (Nandy, 1996; Mehmet, 1995; Tucker, 1999; Escobar, 1992; Sardar, 1999). Owing to this, one of the marked features of euro-centrism is the centricity of city and industry. The pedigree of this thought goes back to the idea of 'evolutionism' shared by theorists of social change ranging from Jean-Baptiste Say, Lewis Morgan to Karl Marx (Rist, 2002). In fact, in the nineteenth century in particular, the social science in the West was profoundly preoccupied with conceptualising Europe's great transition towards industrialisation, urbanisation and capitalism. Here an inextricable link was made between natural history and social history and biological evolutionism with the social evolutionism. Of particular interest here is not only the 'uni-linearity' but in addition the contempt for those who are not 'civilized', i.e. those who are agrarian or rural. Also here one notices a clear link between industrialisation/ urbanisation and the 'civilisation'. Orthodox notions of development, firmly rooted in the philosophy of social evolutionism, with a presupposed superiority of West over other societies, informed the core of the subsequent theories of development (Rist, 2002).

Thus the templates of urbanisation/ industrialisation as 'development' has become the axiomatic feature of mainstream development discourse. This is so basic and obvious that it often goes as an unarticulated postulate and this notion floats as common sense in much of the third world. For instance, for Jawaharlal Nehru, India's regeneration after the long colonial rule 'consisted in modernising itself along the lines of modern European societies, which too had for centuries remained degenerate and turned the corner in the nineteenth century by comprehensively reorganising themselves along the lines required by the modern industrial civilisation' (Parekh, 1991). Further, 'industrialisation', or for that matter development for Nehru, 'was not just a means of solving the problems of poverty and unemployment as Gandhi and others had thought, but necessary in order to keep pace with the rest of the world… Its logic', as Parekh puts it, is 'inherently comparative' (Parkeh, 1991). 'Comparison' and 'sentiment' of 'pride' is throughout weaved in the very fabric of Nehruvian discourse. This mesmerisation however was entangled with a disdain for the rural and agrarian. 'For Nehru, agriculture was a primitive and culturally inferior activity' and 'he did not therefore think much of agriculture as an activity and peasantry as a social class' (Parekh, 1991). In a nutshell, Jawaharlal Nehru wanted to build India from the top downwards; through industries, managers and technicians. City, in such a universe, naturally assumes a pivotal role. This dominant notion of development, and its association with the city and industry, is not unique to Nehru. In fact this fascination for the city cuts across time, space and ideological orientations. P. Chidambaram, former Home and Finance Minister of India, for instance, adhering to the similar line, also puts his faith in this 'iron-fisted rule'. His 'vision of a poverty-free India' is 'where a vast majority, something like 85 percent, will eventually live in cities' (Chidambaram, 2008). Li Yongping, a Chinese official responsible for directing the urbanisation blueprint of the government of China, asserts that 'an objective rule in the process of modernisation is [that] we have to complete the process of urbanisation and

industrialisation' (Johnson, 2013). At home, the sentiment of the 'objective' rule has echoed over and over again, for instance, in the projects like Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and smart cities – singularly chasing the vision of summarily attaining an 'industrialised' and 'urbanised' (= affluent and powerful!) India. If the terminus of development is the city, which is an 'objective' rule in the development discourse, then logically it follows from this postulate that 'rural' is a temporary and 'transitory' phase. If the future belongs to the city, the slum and its 'solution' has to be located in the city. Owing to these convictions seldom the slums and its 'solution' are located in the wider milieu.[c]

2.2 Understanding Slums: City-Centric Perspective

The 'problem' of 'slums' in postcolonial Indian cities has predominantly been attributed to the scarcity of housing for the poor by the policy, activist and academic discourses (Roy, 2004; Bhan, 2009; Ramanathan, 2006; Verma, 2002). They argue that 'slums' are primarily a result of lack of implementation of the master plans. Gita Diwan Verma (2002) in her book 'Slumming India' points out that the first Master Plan of Delhi had clear provisions for low-income housing which have not materialized and this is the main reason for the growth of slums in Delhi. Further it is pointed out that 90% of the shortfall in public housing units to be built under Delhi Master Plan falls under the low-income category (Bhan, 2009). Occasionally, other parts of the state machinery such as the Supreme Court of India have also echoed similar views about slums. We can observe this in the case of pavement dwellers in Bombay in which the court acknowledged that pavements became shelters primarily because states have not implemented master plans (Dupont and Ramanathan, 2005). While these narratives attribute slums to a lack of urban housing, they are all usually silent on linking their proliferation to economic conditions in the rural areas.`

The 'solutions' to end the proliferation of new slums and clear the existing ones therefore have been largely limited to making resettlement and housing policies for the urban poor. Thus we see that the first central government legislation in India, The Slum Areas (Improvement and Clearance) Act, 1956 called for either improvement of dilapidated settlements or the provision of alternative accommodation in case of clearance of slums. Subsequent policies have only debated about whether the squatters should be provided a plot of land or housing in the form of flats and whether the state or the market should be responsible for the provision of resettlement (Kundu 2004). The policy and planning discourse rarely correlates the creation of urban slums with en masse migration of people from the rural areas. This neglect of the countryside in the imagination of policy apparatus continues to be reflected in the newer policies that are designed in the neo-liberal era for making the cities 'slum-free'. These policies such as Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission 2005 (JNNURM) (GOI, n.d.a), Rajiv Awas Yojana 2011 (RAY) (GOI n.d.b), Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana 2015 (PMAY) (GOI, 2015) make a strong case for the construction of affordable housing by the private actors in order to reach the goal of inclusive slum-free cities.

The city-centrism of the development and policy discourse has not just continued but has intensified in the neo-liberal era. The contemporary planning and policy discourse in India is replete with documents and references which show that the future of our country lies in cities or urban spaces.[d] There seems to be considerable 'investment' in the creation of an image of urbanizing India[e] which in turn shall act as a panacea for all the ills that have afflicted the development trajectory of the nation. This can be seen in a report by McKinsey Global Institute (MGI, 2010) titled 'India's Urban Awakening: Building Inclusive Cities, Sustaining Economic Growth' which claims that, 'cities will be central to India's economic future… Urban India will drive a near fourfold increase in average national income… Over the next 20 years, urban India will create 70 % of all new jobs in India and these urban jobs will be twice as productive as jobs equivalent in the rural sector'. Additionally, '91 million urban households will be middle class, up from 22 million today.'

It is reminded time and again that cities are the engines of growth that already contribute 52% to our GDP and their contribution would continue to increase to 75% by 2030. Urban land was arguably one of the most important 'resource' to be tapped on in order to bring about this increase in the contribution to GDP.[f] A number of changes were brought by the policy apparatus to convert urban land into 'real estate' thereby leading to financialization of cities[g] (Searle 2008). The policy imperative of creation of affordable housing for the poor by private developers has to be seen in the context of these larger transformations in urban land. In fact it is being used as one of the instruments to make land which has hitherto been owned in 'faulty' forms to become more amenable to be brought under formal capital markets. The release of central government funds for the creation of affordable housing via policies such as JNNURM, RAY, PMAY are tied to bringing about mandatory reforms in Indian cities which enable land to be easily transferred to

developers. These policies have been largely influenced by the arguments of Peruvian economist de Soto (2000) who argues that the poor in the developing world are potentially rich because they own large swathes of land albeit in faulty forms as 'dead assets'. He believes that the problems of squatters can be solved by giving them title to the land they squat on so that they can mortgage it in the formal markets to obtain credit to start various kinds of entrepreneurial activities. His argument has been used to argue for giving affordable flats to the poor thereby providing property rights to slum dwellers. These arguments of the policy discourse should be appreciated in the larger milieu of the political economy of 'interests' involved. Nevertheless the link between the creation of 'slum-free' cities and 'affordable' housing has become undisputable in policy and planning circles (Planning Commission, 2011).

2.3 Swelling City: Burgeoning Slums

Despite making numerous policies for resettlement and rehabilitation the number of slums has continued to increase in Indian cities as has been proven by the slum censuses conducted in 2001 and 2011. The census data clearly shows that the population living in slums increased from 42.6 million in 2001 to 65 million in 2011. In fact if we look at the data on settlements by Government of Delhi (2009) in the Economic Survey of Delhi 2008-2009, we find that roughly 75% of population in Delhi lives in unplanned colonies out of which 33.9% consist of slum areas.[h] Dupont (2008) has compared the growth in the number of slums and its population to the rest of the urban population in Delhi. She has shown that there has been a constant increase in the population of slums as a percentage of the total urban population from being 5% in 1951 to 18% in 1991 to 27% in 1998.[i] Thus slum population is growing at a faster rate than the rest of the urban population in Delhi. The rate of growth of slums is even starker in Mumbai. The population of slums increased by 50% from 60 to 90 lakhs in a decade that is from 2001 to 2011 (Jain, 2010). 60% of the population in Mumbai can be said to be living in slum-like conditions. A similar argument claiming the swelling of cities in the developing countries has been made by Mike Davis and the challenge of slums report by UN Habitat that came out in 2003. In his Planet of Slums, Davis portrays how a vast humanity in the Global South – more than a billion – is warehoused in shantytowns, exiled from the formal world economy. 'In South Asia ... in the late 1980s ... 90 percent of urban household growth took place in slums ... Indian slums continue to grow 250 percent faster than overall population... Of 5,00,000 people who migrate to Delhi each year, it is estimated that fully 4,00,000 end up in slums... "If such a trend continues unabated"', Davis quotes, "we will have only slums and no cities"' (Davis, 2006). This trend, to him, is an original development unanticipated by either classical Marxism or theories like that of Weber. Indeed at the heart of this exodus from the countryside is that the whole rural economy has been pushed on the brink of collapse which in turn leads to push migration. In fact owing to agrarian and rural distress in India the exodus out of village continues unabated. This is the subject matter of next section. However given the magnitude of the subject at hand one cannot do more than touching upon some important trends in this context. All these point to the ongoing crisis of the livelihood in rural India. And thus, the rural-urban divide, to be sure, does not function in isolation; it leads to the 'great urban divide' itself.

3. Mapping Agrarian and Rural Distress in India

Agriculture in India, rather in most developing countries, has been relatively neglected. This has been explained by various scholars with the help of urban bias theory (Lipton, 1977; Schultz, 1968; Bates, 1981; Rola-Rubzen, et al. 2001; Byerlee et al., 2005). Lipton (1977) has famously argued that as a result of complex socio-political forces, agriculture relatively receives little attention in world development. From a sample of eighteen developing countries, Schiff and Valdes (1998) have found that had the governments of these nations not forced the policies having an adverse impact on the interests of the countryside (i.e. supportive of the urban interests) the price of agricultural produce measured against the urban goods would have been 43 percent higher, particularly during 1960 to 1985. The study also demonstrated that the countries with low bias against the fields have a less distressed (push factor) migration from rural areas into urban areas.

In the development discourse in India agriculture was seen as a 'bargain basement' (Corbridge and Harris, 2000). Largely because of this approach, India is witnessing multiple forms of distresses in its agrarian and rural spheres. Farming as a source of livelihood and lifestyle is in deep and multiple existential crises. In this milieu, the most pronounced traumatic saga is that every thirty minutes a farmer commits suicide in India and more than three lakh have succumbed since 1995. Various agitations in 2017 and 2018 by farmers in the state of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Rajasthan clearly indicate that the state of agrarian economy in the country is in doldrums. With these protests, agrarian communities are agitating for reservations as farming has been rendered non-remunerative and the condition of non-agricultural sources of livelihood in rural areas is also grim. The

significance of agriculture in the socio-economic fabric of India can be marked by a simple fact that livelihood of almost half of Indians depends on it.

One of the greatest paradoxes of economy in India is the imbalance in agriculture's contribution in gross national product vis-à-vis its share in employment. In India, the decrease in the share of agriculture in gross domestic product (GDP) has not been accompanied by a proportional decline in terms of employment. The share of agriculture and allied sector in GDP has come down sharply from 52 per cent in 1951-52 to 13.9 per cent in 2001-12. However, its share in workforce remained high at 54.6 percent, declining by merely 15 percentage points during the same period (GoI, 2015-16). It has been noted that 'the slow pace of structural transformation in agriculture can be attributed to lack of non-farm employment opportunities in rural areas to absorb a larger proportion of the workforce from agriculture' (GoI, 2015-16). Thus the movement of people from the primary to secondary and tertiary sector is sluggish. This is largely because the contribution of industry and services in terms of GDP has not been accompanied by a parallel growth in employment, formal or informal, in these sectors. This simple fact highlights the magnitude of sectoral inequality in economic terms. In India thus, almost half the people engaged in agriculture for their livelihoods generate only 13.94 percent of national income whereas other half, those in manufacturing and services, generates 86.06 percent of total national income. This is indicative of the large disparity between the per capita income in the agricultural sector and the non-agricultural sector.

Further, a cursory perusal of the relevant data about the structure of land holdings indicates another disturbing trend. One of the most important factors of income for agriculturists is the availability of land per worker.[j] Land holdings are increasingly getting smaller and the number of small and marginal farmers is constantly increasing. This fact has largely gone unnoticed. The average size of family farm was more than 3 hectares in 1947; it fell to 1.1 hectare in 2003. The share of marginal and uneconomic holding has more than doubled in last five decades (Sen and Bhatia 2004; Ready and Mishra 2009). The small holding character of agriculture in India is much more prominent today than ever before. The pressure on land, which is supposed to decrease progressively over the time, in absolute sense, has instead increased. According to the current (2018) Agriculture Minister of India, Radha Mohan Singh, '91 per cent of the total farm holding would belong to small and marginal farmers by 2030'. Thus the unburdening of the land has not taken place, and instead more and more people are now dependent on agriculture in absolute sense. In other words, pressure on the land is not diminishing as expected – as the classic linearity argument assumes – in fact, it is mounting day by day. Modernisation theory particularly that of Rostow variant (Rostow, 1960) has prophesied that agricultural sector should move forward rapidly with the dissolution [read ending of small scale family farms] and consolidation [read the emergence large scale capitalist farming] of traditional and backward agriculture. Thus 'inefficient' small scale farming is phased out with the structural transformation. Small scale farmers, as it happened in industrialised societies, en masse, are supposed to migrate to the cities for industrial and service sector. Nevertheless, this structural transformation has not taken place as envisaged, particularly in countries like India and this is one of the prime fallacies of the mainstream theories embedded in 'linearity'. Rather large number of agrarian population has clung tenaciously to the land. In fact among the low income countries, though only 21.5 percent of total Gross Domestic Product came from agriculture, despite the fact that 70 percent of population was rural - most of which remain engaged in agriculture (UNDP, 2006; World Bank, 2007). The unburdening of the land has not taken place, and instead more and more people are now dependent on agriculture [in absolute sense]. This constant increase of small farms indicate at-least two things; (1) crisis of livelihood in the agricultural sector and (2) indication of the lopsided structural transformation, an argument dealt at greater detail in the next section of this paper.

The cumulative effect of these trends indicates a crisis of livelihood in agriculture sector. The situation is that today the average Indian farm family operates less than one hectare of land, unviable even in good years to sustain a family. The share of economically unviable marginal holdings has doubled from what it used to be fifty years ago. This trend is again different from the trajectory of the Western industrialised nations where there was a progressive increase in landholding size with the 'structural transformation' of the economy. G. S. Bhalla, citing National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) data, has argued that 'at all-India level, farmer households below 2 hectares accounted for above 80.5 [%] of total farmer households' (Bhalla, 2007a). That means above 80 percent of farmers in India are either small or marginal. However 'at the all-India level, a farmer household had to possess 4.01 hectares or more to be able to make both ends meet' (Bhalla, 2007a:). This trend has rendered the small and marginal farming as unviable particularly in absence of supportive and conducive milieu. Where on the one hand the landholdings are becoming smaller and smaller another worrisome trend is also visible in case of

agricultural labourers. 2001 population census showed that the proportion of agricultural labourer to agricultural workers increased from 37.8 percent in 1971 to 45.6 percent by 2001. In the same period (1971-2001) the number of agricultural labourers, in absolute sense, increased from 47.5 million to 106.8 million (Bhalla, 2007b).

Given above conditions, the share of non-farm sector in rural employment has been on increase. However in this domain also a troubling pattern is observable. Amit Basole has shown a sort of 'deindustrialization' trend in India's rural sphere. He argues that 32% of the rural workforce was engaged in some form of manufacturing in 1994. This declined to 22% in 2010 and now it stands at 17% (Basole, 2017). He further observes that while manufacturing has declined the gainers have been construction (whose share increased from 11% in 1994 to 28% in 2015) and trade (Basole, 2017). This phenomenon can be seen as an extension of the situation resulting due the process of deindustrialization during colonial times. This situation has arisen because of the very nature of industrialisation in which the exodus out of the land is not likely to be absorbed in the modern sectors of economy.

Thus both the farm and non-farm sources of livelihoods are becoming non-remunerative in rural areas. In such a scenario it is quite obvious that average income of the 'households in the largest cities are three to six times better endowed with consumer assets compared to households in the farthest-distance band of villages' (Krishna, 2017). Similarly 74.52% of rural household's monthly income of highest earning member is less than 5,000 rupees (Government of India, 2011). So the livelihoods of the rural people progressively moved away from the little local manufacturing that they were engaged in. What did these villagers, displaced from rural manufacturing do? As Krishna observes, 'unlike the industrial revolutions of the West, which converted farm labourers into factory workers, the transformation in India is of a different nature: the grandsons of peasant farmers have become *mazdoors* in the millions' (Krishna, 2017).

According to the census of India 2011 more than two thirds of Indians (68.84%) live in villages. According to socio-economic census data (Government of India, 2011) almost 73% of households were in rural areas. This means that India is overwhelmingly a rural society. To make the situation worse, there is huge disparity in the quality of life, which determines the life chances of an individual, in the rural and urban India. Anirudh Krishna notes that in terms of average incomes the big cities again fair much better than the smallest in the last distance band of villages. No matter what one's level of education is, earnings are higher if one lives within a large town rather than a small town and in a small town rather than a remote village. The 'more rustic one's existence', says Krishna, 'the greater are the odds of disease, malnourishment and morbidity' (Krishna, 2017).

The pre-existing disparities between rural and urban areas have accentuated in the past few decades. Major cities have emerged as highly concentrated command points and the 'spatial nervous system' of the globalised economy. In fact 'the main consequence of globalisation has been that Indian cities, far from acknowledging their links with the rural hinterland on whose sufferance they are running, have been benchmarked against other "world cities"' (Shrivastava and Kothari, 2012). 'Throughout the world, globalization has suddenly heightened the role of cities and pushed villages further into oblivion' (Shrivastava and Kothari, 2012).

In this context of 'decay' of the rural the lure of the city is obvious. In a study based on primary survey across 18 states of India by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), Delhi, conducted between December 2013 and January 2014, suggests that 'the dissatisfaction with economic condition lies at the heart of why majority of farmers (69%) think that city life is much better than village life' (CSDS, n.d.). Further, 'on being asked whether they would leave farming if they get an employment opportunity in the city, 61% of the farmers answered in the affirmative' (CSDS, n.d.). 'The survey reveals that most farmers do not see a future for their children in farming and would like to see them settle in the city… Better education was cited as one of the most important reasons for why farmers want their children to settle in cities, followed by better facilities, and employment opportunities' (CSDS, n.d.). Thus the 'decay' of the rural is manifested in many ways.

4. 'Lopsided Transition': Underbelly of Structural Transformation

Noting the 'lopsided transition', or the 'problem of the failure of structural transformation in India, Corbridge et. al. (2014) argue that 'the limited movement of labour out of marginal smallholding agriculture as the economy grew over the first five decades from independence, has continued through the more recent years of very high rates of growth'. This raises a question on the possibility of classical structural transformation – leading to the wishful hope that surplus labour in agriculture would be absorbed gainfully in the burgeoning industrial and tertiary sectors with the higher rate of growth - in Indian scenario. This assumes more significance in wake of India's well

documented employment creation crisis. The scholars who argue that India is witnessing jobless growth (Unni and Raveendran, 2007; Dev, 2008; Himanshu, 2007) are not entirely unfounded. Keeping an eye on the post-independence trajectory of the process of structural transformation in India, it would be a potent question to ask that whether people coming out of agriculture owing to distressed situation, given their sheer numbers, can find suitable means of livelihood in the 'modern' 'dynamic' sectors of economy.[k]

In the current scenario, along with the overburdening of land, even those who are 'coming out of agriculture' are not absorbable elsewhere in the economy. They will, more or less, remain "excluded" from the 'dynamic' sectors of the economy, and engaged in activities of such low productivity as barely allow for survival' (Corbridge et al., 2014). In his recent and now often quoted work, Kalyan Sanyal has put forward that the narrative of transition - according to which an underdeveloped economy transforms into modern, and where it is assumed that capitalism is the eventual destiny of the whole globe - particularly in post-colonial conditions, is not true (Sanyal, 2007). Sanyal's framework rules out the possibility of capital superseding 'pre-capital'. Second part of his argument suggests that, due to governmental interventions, a reversal of the primitive accumulation is also taking place. However, here, one is interested only in the first and main part of the argument. Here the assertion of Sanyal is that modern capital systematically reproduces primitive accumulation and impoverishment on the margins. This, according to him, is a perennial systemic feature which is not limited to the prehistory of capital. Further in the postcolonial contexts the vast population which gets uprooted in the process cannot be absorbed within the domain of capitalist economy and thus a wasteland of the capitalism's 'rejects' is continuously produced. It must be noted that, this particular analysis is a radical departure from the orthodox Marxist position where capitalism brings the transition to a universal modernity. Chatterjee (2008), who develops his argument in conversation with Sanyal, has also argued that the pervasive transition narrative is a false one. In other words the surplus population which has migrated from rural areas but does not find a job in the manufacturing or the industrial sector is surviving in the 'unorganised' or the 'informal sector'. However, presenting an even darker scenario, Jan Breman argues that even the informal sector does not have an endless capacity to absorb this surplus population. His fieldwork shows that the informal sector is getting saturated, thereby forcing the rural population to remain unemployed in villages. He further argues that those who find a space to live in slums are the more fortunate ones among the rural migrants to the city. A large number of urban poor do not have any 'fixed' shelter and sleep on construction sites or form a part of the homeless population in the city (Breman, 2009). According to the Lewis model of development, the informal sector in urban areas was supposed to be a temporary phenomenon that would disappear with the completion of industrialisation and structural transformation. It is important to note that almost all the low-income population in the informal sector lived in informal settlements or slums as these were the only accommodations that they could afford. We have already seen in section I that slums or informal settlements were thought to be a 'temporary problem' that could be solved with improvement of dilapidated houses and resettlement of squatters in plots or flats. The official policy discourse still talks about creating slum-free cities which means that slums are still assumed to be a temporary feature of our cities.

5. Conclusion: Turning the Lens Towards the Rural

Given the facts enumerated above, one seemingly candid and lucrative solution needs to be rebutted. It is not likely, at least for a long time to come, that the rural people will be absorbed by India's rapidly growing urban agglomerations. More than 800 million currently live in rural areas in India - which is more than the combined population of United States, Canada, Western Europe and Australia. Waiting for urbanisation to suck up this population, given its sheer size, is an impractical proposition, particularly in light of the hitherto trajectory of urbanisation in India. The rate of urbanisation in India is sluggish even when compared to other countries like South Korea, China and Indonesia. It is a fact that a substantial number of population will continue to live in the countryside in India, even if 10-20 percent of population moves to cities in the next couple of decades. Clearly, the village is not going to die soon.

The slums are in fact the 'dumping ground' for the 'surplus' populace from the countryside resulting into - owing to absence of possibilities to be absorbed in the 'modern' domains of economy - production of an unequal explosive and, of course, exploitative terrain within towns. Thus, the rotting of villages and the swelling of cities are to be visualised in hyphenated terms. This shift in the perspective about slums and the slum-dwellers has radical entailments, foremost being that the slum question cannot be imagined in the policy discourse, and otherwise, in the absence of the rural. So the clear solution, at least in long term is, to give a massive thrust to economic activities in the countryside and small towns. This can happen only with revitalisation of the village,

which is on the brink of collapse. Along with measures to raise agricultural productivity and ensuring fair and remunerative prices for the farm produce, the focus should be on generating robust non-farm employment in the countryside. 'Check dams' need to be built at the source itself to control the unabated flow. This necessarily calls for a rectification of 'urban bias' in policy discourse.

Owing to globalisation the Atlantic world and the East Asia has become the reference point of urban cognition and imagination. However it must be noted that the urban India cannot function, as argued above, as an island. The urban and the rural cannot be seen as autonomous and disjoined categories and have to be understood as structurally related. The paper also raises larger questions about the trajectory of development undertaken by India so far and alludes to possibilities that are more in sync with India's unique socio-economic history. While economic chasm between the city and the countryside has expanded dramatically, the cultural penetration of 'the city' in the countryside, through urban dominated media like television, has further intensified the lure of the town in the rural folk. When life - rather a hope of that - is in the city, village becomes a place to flee. Slums are an inevitable product of this development logic.

6. Endnotes

[a] Needless to say that the rural areas in India are not homogenous and they are huge and diverse. Substantial number of rural people depend on off farm employment and this number is increasing as the share of agriculture in rural incomes has diminished. Despite this, agriculture remains the mainstay and the source of livelihoods, particularly given its important externalities and multiplier effects. Agriculture-led development as a pro-poor, bottom-up viable approach has been increasingly stressed, in recent years, by both professional academics and international organisations. This paper does not present a case for return to rural arcadia. It is well recognised that the present villages are cesspools of patriarchy, casteism and communalism. An analogy may help to clarify. Gender is, for instance, fractured by caste, class, region etc. But for heuristic purposes or strategic generalisations - which often illuminate some stark realities and fault-lines in our society - talk about women issues or gender as an important analytical category. Similarly and obviously rural is also stratified by caste, gender and class. Despite this, like gender, it is a useful category for heuristic purposes.

[b] This expression has been borrowed from Shrivastava and Kothari (2012).

[c] Because the terminus of development is to be the prototype of Western city, the slums are also supposed to, one day, graduate to the formal city. In is interesting to note that the planners often see slums as extension of the 'rural' as they lack 'urban psyche'. The broad outlook of the post-colonial elite towards slums becomes particularly clear in one of the booklets released by Town Planning Organisation of the Delhi Master Plan in order to educate the citizens regarding the imperatives of the Master Plan. Culling out reasons for the existence of slums, it points to the 'pre-urban' ways of living of the slum dweller which is not compatible with life in a city: 'the obnoxious trades carried out by the slum families in their dwellings and the keeping of cattle and other animals have aggravated the problem of insanitation and congestion in the city. The strong solidarity among slum dwellers ("brotherhood ties") produced further "congestion" as migrants were drawn to their own and increased pressure on areas' (Sundaram, 2009, p. 53).

[d] 11th Five Year Plan, 12th Five Year Plan, High Powered Expect Committee 2011, National Council of Applied Economic Research Report 2005, World Urbanisation Prospects 2014, McKinsey Global Institute: India's Urban Awakening: Building inclusive cities, sustaining economic growth 2010. Although there was an urban bias in our development discourse since independence, the emphasis on the urban has gained renewed importance in the aftermath of liberalization scenario.

[e] A number of scholars (Ghertner, 2010; Searle, 2008) reflect on the 'politics' and 'economics' behind the necessity of creation of this image of urbanising India. They argue that an image of a prosperous urban India is essential to attract speculative foreign capital to be invested in urban land. Thus a discourse has to be created that lends some credibility to the fact that India is going to have a big urban middle class that would have the ability to purchase the huge housing stock built by the private developers in India.

[f] McKinsey report illustrated that India's GDP was low as compared to countries like China and Indonesia because it had low rates of investment. 'Increasing investment and foreign direct investment in particular was the strategy to increase GDP, and privatization of the land market was one of the most important strategies to bring this about' (Ghertner, 2010). World Bank's India Urban Strategy Paper (2007) argued that the agenda of transforming urban land into capital required urban land reform. This was extremely important to maintain the growth rate of 8% for the coming decades. Similarly a report by McKinsey Global Institute called 'India: The Growth Imperative' (MGI, 2001) claimed that 'product and land market barriers were the greatest hindrance to India's growth.' It calculated that 'land market distortions account for close to 1.3% of lost [GDP] growth a year.

These distortions included unclear ownership, counterproductive taxation, and inflexible zoning, rent and tenancy laws.' Inferring from this report it can be argued that slums caused a distortion in the land market due to having unclear ownership or remaining outside the formal circuit of capital.

[g] If we look at policies of Indian Government, we see a concerted effort towards commodification of urban land. In 2002, FDI for investment in townships was made legal. This policy was liberalized further in 2005 when the minimum size required for the townships was reduced and FDI was allowed in other construction related projects. Also FDI in real estate could now proceed through the automatic route that is without requiring prior approval from the government or the RBI. Secondly, as part of a change in financial policy, venture capital funds were allowed to invest in real estate in 2004 by SEBI. This gave a boost to domestic real estate. Also SEZ policy in 2005 also made large tracts of land available at extremely cheap prices for the construction of infrastructure and townships. For a comprehensive view on different phases of policies regarding urban development in post-independence India (Shaw, 1996). For a more recent account on policy changes during the neo-liberal era see Batra (2009).

[h] We can safely say that a number of areas in other categories in the survey such as urban villages (6.4%), resettlement colonies (12.7%) and unauthorised colonies (5.3%) would also exhibit slum-like living conditions.

[i] In absolute numbers the slums in Delhi have increased from 199 in 1951 to 1,100 in 1998.

[j] Others factors are price of inputs, productivity and agricultural produce. Prices of inputs are rising. On the growth side, it is well known that the single largest employer of the Indian economy, the agriculture sector, has performed worse than the other sectors particularly during the past decade and a half. Further, the price of agricultural produce has been merge. For instance, the Minimum Support Price (MSP) for Paddy increased just over 10 times, from Rs. 137 per quintal in 1984-85 to Rs. 1,470 per quintal in 2016-17. MSP of Wheat was Rs. 157 per quintal in 1984-85, Rs. 640 per quintal in 2004-05 and Rs. 1,625 per quintal in 2016-17. During the same period, the Government of India's tax revenue increased by over 50 times (Dubbudu, 2017).

[k] See also Li (2009), Chatterjee (2008) and Sanyal (2007) on this point.

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