

## **A Study of Slums in Mumbai with special reference to Dharavi**

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### ***Introduction***

Mumbai is one of the most diversified and vibrant Indian cities. It is a leading contributor to national income. It attracts the highest level of direct foreign investment and generates one third of the country's income taxes and 60 per cent of custom duties. It also houses the largest share of bank credits and deposit, and has the most active stock exchange. According to the United Nations World Urbanization Prospects Report 2013, Mumbai has become the fifth largest agglomeration in the world. But these distinctive facts and average educational and income statistics covert extreme inequality that prevails in the city. At least 30 per cent of the city's population remains below the poverty line (Vaquier, 2010). These urban poor are dwellers of slums, commonly referred to as jhopadpattis or squatter settlements in the local terminology. Slums have become an integral part of India's urban landscape. As per recent census done in 2011, about 65.4 million people living in Indian slums constituted 17.37 per cent of total urban population.

Slum is a widespread type of settlement in Mumbai and can be interpreted as an answer to the city's housing shortage that has been constantly increasing since the 1940s. According to the 2001 Census of India, Greater Mumbai encompassed 1959 slum pockets which housed 6.25 million citizens. Total slum population however decreased to 5.20 million citizens in 2011. A Slum as defined by Census of India is:

“A compact area of at least 300 people or about 60-70 households of poorly built congested tenements, in unhygienic environment usually with inadequate infrastructure and lacking in proper sanitary and drinking water facilities.”

This generic definition hides a great heterogeneity among slums in different parts of the country, based on their size, location, density, consolidation levels and economic structure. Large metropolitan cities have large sized slums in comparison to slums of small cities.

Review of the literature on slums reveals that it is an urban phenomenon where poverty gets clustered. It also reveals that slums of different countries may vary from each other, but the universal characteristics projected are overcrowding and congestion. Slum dwellers lack basic facilities and amenities such as safe drinking water, sanitation, ventilation and proper disposal of solid waste. Poor personal hygiene and unhygienic conditions are hall marks of urban slums in India. Work force of the slums mainly comprises of labor class who work as sweepers, carpenters, tailors, drivers, domestic help or own small shops etc.

The present research article is based on secondary data, collected from different research papers and research articles published in different journals, magazines and news papers. It discloses some most ugly and most inspiring facts about slum life in well-known Dharavi slum in Mumbai to provide a profound insight into this neglected slum life.

Slums in Mumbai are known by different names such as Chawls (permanent structures), Patra Chawls (semi-permanent structures), Zopadpattis (squatter housing), and pavement dwellings. Slums, here were born as a result of expulsion of noxious activities from the city to the periphery during British period (Nijman, 2009, Lewis, 2011). Although slums in Mumbai have grown through migration, they are also growing due to natural increase. Slums have sprung up on any available space along railway lines, near water bodies, wetlands, hills, forest land, and pavements. Slums are generally built on private lands earmarked for public facilities in the Development Plan. There are wide variances in densities ranging from 750 huts/ha to 200 huts/ha in isolated pockets. Generally 10 to 15 per cent of residents work in the settlements themselves.

*Dharavi*, one of the biggest slums of Asia, spreads over 432 acres. It is a part of G. North ward. It has an astounding population density of more than 1200 persons/acre (Nijman, 2009).

A survey by National Slum Dweller Federation in 1986 counted 530,225 people (106045 households) living in 80518 structures; the numbers have slowly grown since then. It lies on prime property right in the middle of India's financial capital. Dharavi was once the considered the largest slum of Asia, but it is now rivaled and dwarfed by four slum clusters in Mumbai itself. Some of the major slum dwellers pockets in Mumbai & suburbs are Kurla-Ghatkopar belt (70%-80% slum population), Dindoshi belt (80% slum population), Bhandup belt (70% slum population), Mankhurd-Govandi belt (95% slum population) (Deshmukh,2013).

### ***Site and situation***

Dharavi, located at the heart of the Mumbai, is a triangle of land served by railway lines on two sides and bounded by the Mahim Creek and its mangroves on the third. The areal dimensions are about 50 kilometers from north to south and an average of 10 kms, from west to east. It is just south of the important new business district, the Bandra-Kurla Complex (BKC), which is an emerging alternative to the old central business district (CBD) in South Mumbai (Patel, 2010). The land occupied by Dharavi belongs to different owners, such as state government agencies, the local authority and private individuals. After 1985, sewerage lines were laid and roads were widened. After the mid-1990s, high-rise buildings replaced shacks on the periphery and along the major roads that pass through Dharavi. Parts of this settlement, however, are still a picture of urban blight and neglect (Bapat and Agarwal, 2003).

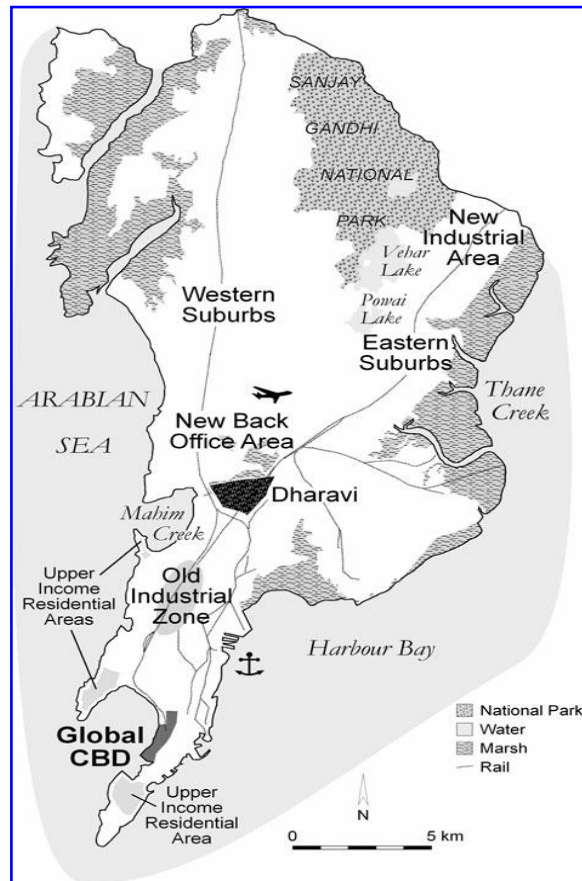
### ***History and identity***

Dharavi was originally a marshy terrain. It has grown at the same pace as the city of Mumbai. In the *Gazetteer of Bombay City and Island* (1909), Dharavi is mentioned as one of the “six great Koliwadadas of Bombay,” or the original fishing communities that inhabited the islands that made up the city. The original inhabitants of Dharavi were the Kolis who lived at the edge of the creek that came in from the Arabian Sea, though over time it became a settlement of the urban poor

(Ramanathan, 2007). Dharavi was born as a result of expulsion of noxious activities from the city to the periphery. The first tannery arrived here in 1887 and by the end of 1890, a number of Muslim tanners from Tamil had settled in this area (Nijman, 2009). Migrants from all over India began to settle in Dharavi in the 1930s when this swampy stretch was at the edge of the city limits. Kumhars (potters) came to this slum from Gujarat to establish a potter’s colony. Tamils

arrived from the south and opened tanneries. Thousands traveled from Uttar Pradesh to work in the booming textile business as embroidery workers and in leather accessories industries in Dharavi. Now it is home to more than a million people (Jacobson, 2007).

### Overview of Greater Mumbai



Source- Nijman (2008)

Many dwellers in Dharavi are second-generation residents, whose parents moved in years ago. In a city where house rents are among the highest in the world, Dharavi provides a cheap and affordable option to those who move to Mumbai to earn a better living. Rents here can be as low as 185 rupees (\$4/£2.20) per month. As Dharavi is located between Mumbai's two main suburban rail lines, most people find it convenient for going to work outside Dharavi. So it's not a home to urban poor but also to middle class professionals who are unable to find affordable living. Dharavi has 28 temples, 11 mosques, 24 Madarassas and 6 churches. The oldest mosque is Badi Masjid constructed in 1887 and oldest temple is Ganesh Mandir constructed in 1913,

very important one for Adi Dravidas. People of different caste and creed are living together representing the great unity and integration in the slum.

### ***Economy***

Dharavi is a place where a lot of the economic activity is taking place. Dharavi is an industrial giant compared with China's manufacturing heartland but the working conditions in the slum are almost certainly worse than those in major Chinese factories. Almost everything imaginable is made in Dharavi, much of it for sale in India and abroad. In Dharavi, there are a total of 4,902 production units bringing in an annual income of \$1 billion USD. Dharavi has many specialist industries because the people of this slum have come from different states of India, and they bring their skills with them. There are 1039 textiles units making children's clothes or women's dresses for the Indian market or to export abroad, 932 porters, 500 large garment workshops and about 3,000 smaller ones (about 100 doing embroidery and zardozi work), 722 recycling units, 111 restaurants, thousands of boutiques (Sharell, 2013) and 567 leather units. Leatherwork is now a major industry in Dharavi with around 5,000 leather shops. It is one of the largest leather producing regions in the world. It's not only the poor people who live in this slum but some financially sound residents also prefer to live in this slum because residential houses are inexpensive and closer to their workplaces (Indian Express, 2009). Residents of Dharavi are immensely talented and their forefathers have been staying there for hundreds of years (Times of India, 2014). There are 85 export oriented units (including WHO approved surgical sutures), 3 to 4 soap and detergent factories, 152 food units, such as papad, chana dal, khari biscuit etc. Today, Dharavi is as much a case study in industrial evolution as a slum. Small workshops in Dharavi make handbags for some of the priciest stores in India. Then there are the food processors that make snacks for the rest of India (Yardley, 2011). The modest estimate of annual turnover of these businesses crosses Rs 200 crore (Ruparel, 2013).

### ***Life in slum***

The students of TISB (The International School Bangalore) in their research project on Dharavi describing the overview of Dharavi wrote:

“All along the streets one can see hundreds of barefoot children can listen noises of human recycling machines, scurry back and forward. There are hauling bundles of waste plastic, cardboard or glass retrieved from Mumbai's vast municipal dumps. From every alley come the sounds of hammering, drilling and soldering. In every shack, dark figures sit waist-deep in piles of car batteries, computer parts, fluorescent lights, ballpoint pens, plastic bags, paper and cardboard boxes and wire hangers, sorting each item for recycling.”

A walk through Dharavi is a journey through a dank maze of ever-narrowing passages until the shanties press together so tightly that daylight barely reaches the footpaths below, as if the slum was a great urban rain forest, covered by a canopy of smoke and sheet metal. There is not enough space, toilets and water. Laborers sleep in sheds known as pongal houses. The density of an average room is six to eight persons packed into a single. A tiny room is further multiplied into many tiny rooms (The Economist, 2007). Ten families share a single water tap, with water flowing through the pipes for less than three hours every day. Toilets are communal, with a charge of 3 cents to defecate. Sewage flows through narrow, open channels in slow-moving streams of green water and garbage (Yardley, 2011). But people are well aware regarding the education in Dharavi. Around 80 percent of children are going to school. Parents are recognizing the importance of education and learning English language. There are 60 municipality schools, four secondary schools, and 13 private schools in Dharavi (Sharell, 2013). Students in Dharavi have started a new business of ‘Dharavi tourism’. They have evolved their own web-sites inviting people to visit Dharavi.

### **Rehabilitation of Dharavi**

Dharavi was officially recognized as a slum in 1976, when state slum policy shifted from demolition to up gradation. During the next decade, government took measures against crime and illicit liquor production and brought in basic amenities such as water taps, electricity, toilets and drains. During a visit to Dharavi in 1985, then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi announced a grant of 100 crores to Bombay. A substantial portion of which was allocated to infrastructure and housing under prime minister's grant project. The latest urban redevelopment plan proposed for the Dharavi area is managed by a trained architect Mukesh Mehta from America. The plan involves the construction of 2,800,000 square meters (30,000,000 sq ft) of housing, schools, parks and

roads to serve the 57,000 families residing in the area, along with 3,700,000 square meters (40,000,000 sq ft) of residential and commercial space for sale. There has been significant local opposition to the plans, largely because existing residents are due to receive only 25.0 square meters (269 sq ft) of land each. Furthermore, only those families who lived in the area before 2000 are slated for resettlement (Ruparel, 2013). Concerns have also been raised by residents who fear that some of their small businesses in the "informal" sector may not be relocated under the redevelopment plan. The major reason behind the development of Dharavi was that the work place and living places existed side by side now residents fear that if their work places were relocated, they shall have to travel to far-off, relocated work places. The project related with Rehabilitation of Dharavi, launched a decade ago, and has made progress despite hurdles. The housing board which is the special planning authority for Dharavi Sector 5 and is responsible for the redevelopment of the entire sector had started construction on a vacant plot in Dharavi. The redevelopment of the other four sectors is being implemented by the Dharavi Redevelopment Project authority (Phadke, 2014).

Dharavi is though labeled as a slum, but its area, population, schools, markets, factories, temples and business units make it a complete city in itself. It has its own identity. It is not just the shelter of marginalized section of society, but an affordable abode for the financially sound people also.

Patel, (2010) rightly called Dharavi is an “extraordinary conundrum.” It is a nightmare with unhealthy living conditions and poor infrastructure but a goldmine in its economic output. It exports goods around the world with an income of crores a day. It presents a picture of hope and despair. Its self supporting economic structure provides the impetus for its radical transformation. It can acquire a better status with a redevelopment plan which aims at the betterment of their dwellers retaining their identity and work and not the selfish motives of land mafias. One of the major hurdles in the development of Dharavi is believed to be the natives of the slum. They fear that it shall affect them and their business in one way or the other. The dwellers need to be convinced by the authorities that the project is not going to hamper their prospects in any way. The magnitude of the problem is immense, but if Maharashtra can pull this off, it can set an example by transforming Dharavi as a privileged gateway to Mumbai.

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