A Geographical Analysis of Slums in the Kolkata Municipal Corporation Area, West Bengal

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Abstract

Kolkata is the largest urban agglomeration of eastern India and Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) is one of the oldest Municipal Corporations of India. About a-third of the total population of KMC live in slums that dates back to pre-independence period. The present article is an attempt to assess the origin, growth and spatial pattern of slums in Kolkata. Slum population along with density and frequency varies from one ward to another. During the period 2001 2011, the mean centre of slum population shifted significantly in SW direction while that of the urban population shifted in SSE direction.

Introduction

Kolkata is the largest urban agglomeration of eastern India and Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) is one of the oldest Municipal Corporations of India. It has a long history of industrialization and urbanization. It acted as the growth pole in the whole of eastern and northeastern India. The population of Kolkata was about 4,580,544 in 2001. Its area is 185 km^2 with a crude density of about 24,759 persons/km^2. The total population living in the slums of the KMC was 1,490,811, i.e. about 30.72% of the total. In 2011, the total population was 4,496,694 of which about 32.11% lived in slums. 'There are 141 Wards of which Ward No. 66 is the most populous and Ward No. 45 is the least populous one.

The Calcutta Municipal Act, 1899 defined a *"bustee"* as "the area containing land not less than '10 *cottahs*' or 700m^2 in area occupied by a collection of hutments or other structures intended to be used for human habitation. The entire slum population live in about 2011 registered and 3500 unregistered slums in the KMC, containing about 13 million hutments or 338,000 rooms (Kundu, 2003). Thus a huge population live below poverty line as the 'urban poor' are concentrated in the slums (Bose and Ghosh, 2015).

Objectives

The major objective is to assess the origin, growth and pattern of slums in the city of Kolkata.

Methodology

A variety of literatures related to the origin of slums in Kolkata has been consulted and at the same time, a number of Govt. and Non-Govt reports have been considered. Slum related data of Kolkata have been acquired from Census of India report of Government of India. Besides, to recognize the pattern of slum concentration over different Wards of Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC), simple percentage technique has been adopted. The shifting of urban and slum population over time has been shown applying 'locational shift of mean center' method. Finally, information has been presented using Arc GIS software.

Origin of Slums in Kolkata

Slum is the product of the snowballing effect of a set of selected functions like failed policies, lack of proper regulation, corruption, lack of optimum landuse policy, mismanagement of financial asset, low people participation rate and bad

governance. The emergence of the slum in Kolkata dates back to the colonial period when the city was the financial hub of the East India Company (Bose and Ghosh, 2015). Urban inequality is the main cause of the origin of slums even in the Third World cities. It is visible from space too: the Nairobi satellite inspection disclosed that more than half of the population lives on just 18% of the city area (Davis, 2006). In the early age, migrants of Kolkata searched for low-cost shelters in a quick pace and a group of middle man called *Thika* (lease) tenants took land from the landlords and built low-cost standard housing for the migrants (KMDA, 2006), which later turned into slums. Kundu (2007) considers inequality of resource distribution for the deterioration of standard of living of a section of the urban dwellers. Of the various factors, the following contributed mostly for the emergence of slums especially in Kolkata:

i.   *Urbanisation*: Urbanisation is considered as the most important cause of slum emergence (GoI, 2013). Basically, it provides a different kind of employment facilities to the dwellers of the neighbouring rural area (Sinha, 1985). Both skilled and unskilled people are attracted to the employment opportunity available in the city. High-wage group can manage to shelter themselves but the low-wage group failed and used to stay in the temporary shelters along with roadways, railways or on other vacant public property and turned these into permanent ones, called slums. Kolkata experienced nothing exceptional in this process.

ii.   *Industrialisation:* Industrialisation indirectly influences the influx of rural migrant to the city which results slum in the city (Ranhwala and Dalal, 2015). During the late 19th and early 20th century, industrialisation rapidly took place in and around Kolkata which attracted a huge influx of migrants from different parts of West Bengal as well as from neighbouring states like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh (KMDA, 2006). Rapid industrialisation during the 1930s and 1940s witnessed a maximum growth of slums in Kolkata (Kundu, 2003).

iii.   *De-industrialisation*: Sometimes de-industrialisation plays an important role in the slum cohort. In most cities of the south, slum is not the result of industrialisation rather the result of de-industrialisation (Devis, 2006). Recently Kolkata experienced de-industrialisation in rapid scale (basically Jute industry and Cotton industry are common in this process) with the decline of the Hooghly Industrial belt, which generated unemployment among the industrial workers. Finding no other way, they settled in make-shift hutments along roads, railways, around water body and so on.

iv.   *Influx of Refugee*: The influx of refugee is one of the important factors of the emergence of the slum in the city. Cities of developing and underdeveloped countries are hosting an innumerable number of displaced people (Guterres, 2010; Albuja & Ceballos, 2010). The partition of India in 1947 uprooted and displaced millions of people from their homeland and in 1950, millions of displaced peasants and agricultural labourers from East Pakistan (present Bangladesh) entered into West Bengal, who possessed almost nothing and engaged as labourers for their livelihood. From 1953 to 1956 in each successive year an estimated number of 60647, 103800, 209573, and 179410

refugees entered into West Bengal respectively (Raychaudhury, 2004) and most of them decided to reside in places / colonies in Kolkata. The continuous influx of refugee was continuously acting as the engine of slum growth.

v.   *Rural Urban Migration*: Like other developing countries, India is passing through the phase of rural to urban migration due to stagnant and volatile nature of Indian agricultural system and lack of sectoral diversification in rural India (Kundu, 2007). The migrant people sometimes fail to find any desirable job in the city and chose any petty job like rag picking, street vending, household works etc. Low wage does not permit them to choose any comfortable shelter and they are forced to settle primarily on footpath, rail station, bus terminus and so on. Later, through the broker/ thikadar, they settled in the make-shift quarters that turned into slums. Now a day's rural-urban migration is considered as one of the important factors of slum growth in city (Kundu, 2007). Census of India 1901 noted that half of the population of the Kolkata have come from Jharkhand, Bihar, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh (Roy, 1994).

vi.   *Higher Productivity in the Secondary/Tertiary Sector*: A city mainly depends on the secondary and tertiary sector of the economy, that experienced higher productivity in relation to the primary sector (GoI, 2013) of the rural area. This attracts people to the city which indirectly helps slum growth. West Bengal is one of the important agrarian states which experiences similar kind of situation and people from rural area used to migrate to the city. Kolkata as the principal city of the state had to suffer most from this.

vii.   *Greater Opportunity in the City*: Higher standard of living, greater job opportunities, or the city lifestyle have been triggering rural urban migration in particular. In Kolkata when tram track was being laid, it needed huge number of labourers from rural Bengal, who established their huts that later emerged into slums (Roy, 1994).

viii. *Political Factors*: Sometimes political factors play an important role in slum formation or slum eviction. Many politicians view slums as their vote bank and sometimes as their manpower. Though Kolkata Municipal Corporation initiated different programmes for slums but lack of political will hinders to achieve success (Niyogi, 2014). Naturally, the primarily squatter settlements get permanent shape with the active participation of political leaders.

The underlying causes of slum formation in Kolkata is shown in fig.1. In this way slums spread like disease (Sinha, 1985) in Kolkata and can be called as the cancer of the city.

Categories of Slums in Kolkata
An estimated 3.82 million people live in registered and 3500 unregistered slums in Kolkata (KMDA, 2012). Over 40% of KMA's slum dwellers have been recorded to stay since their two generations or more; however, more than half of them actually originated in the hinterlands of Kolkata (KMDA, 2012). Two types of slum are mainly observed in Kolkata. The officially authorised slums are called *bustees* (local name of slum) and there is a huge number of unauthorised huts or squatter settlements along canals, large drains, garbage dumping

grounds, railway tracks and roadways (Kundu, 2003).

Authorised Slums

In authorised slums the quality of life of its dwellers is relatively better than the unauthorised ones. These can further be categorised into four sub groups (Kundu, 2003) as:

i. *Old Slum*: These emerged during the British period when a group of middle man after taking land from landlord built low-quality huts to let in rent to the migrants and the migrants finding no other accommodations accepted these low-quality shelters.

ii. *Thika Tenant Slums*: In these, slum dwellers got rights of possession with fixed rents to build their houses.

iii. *Bustee:* These were constructed by the Zaminders (landlords) themselves and let out to the slum dwellers.

iv. *Udbastu Colonies*: These are occupied by the refugees from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) after the Partition of Bengal, where land has been leased out for 99 years by the government at nominal rents.

Unauthorised Slums

Unauthorised slums are those which are built along the roadside, canal and drain through encroachment of public or private land by the poor people who are evicted from a particular part of the city itself. Displacement may also take place due to an excessive increase in family size. People live in worse conditions without having any access to basic services like water supply, sanitation, drainage, etc from the urban local government. They are mainly engaged in rag picking. They may be classified on the basis of their location as: jhupri (encroachments on the roadside), khaldhar (encroachments along the canal side), udbastu (encroachments into a vacant public place) and rail colony (encroachment along the railway lines). In the Kolkata Metropolitan Area (KMA) slum is categorised into two different categories as: *registered slums* (recognised by municipal authority within KMA boundary) and *unregistered slums* (not recognised by the municipal authority, thereby don't have record to the local authority).

Spatial Pattern of Slum Households and Population

In 2001, about 32.11% of the total population of Kolkata lived in slums. The spatial variation of slum population and households in KMC is shown in Fig2 and Fig.3 for 2001 and 2011. It is observed that there are 13 Wards in Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) which recorded more than 75% share of slum population in 2001 and 2011 respectively (Fig.2 and 3). Of these Wards, No. 58 (Tangra area) of KMC has the highest percentage of slum population and slum households (i.e. 99.85 %). The maximum concentration of slum population is observed in the eastern, north-eastern and northern part of the city in 2001 but in 2011 the concentration shows spatial changes. These are mainly concentrated over the eastern, north-eastern, south-central and some part of western part of KMC. There are 34 Wards of KMC that didn't have any slum population in 2001 and in 2011 this figure increased to about 60 (Fig.2 and 3). This reduction in Wards with slum population during the period, 2001-11 may be attributed to the implementation of different slum-centric policies undertaken by the government and urban planners. During this period, there has taken place a rapid spatial

shift of urban population to the southeast as indicated by the shift of the spatial mean center (Fig.4). This can be well-associated with the emergence of Salt Lake and Rajarhat Newtown urban center that have a better facility and good living environment attracting people from others parts of the city. The spatial distribution of slum population reveals a clustered pattern. Map 4 illustrates the trend of slum population growth of Kolkata toward the southwestern part of the city. Rise of informal activity, presence of Kolkata port, and industrial activity in the western portion especially in the Garden Reach and Metiabruz area act as the potential source to provide low-wage unskilled employment which may be held responsible for this trend. The decline in slum concentration in the eastern part of the city can be attributed to the relocation of the tannery industry which was acting as an important source of low-paid easily available source of employment. Besides, a number of development plans of the government also acted as pushing force for the slum dwellers of this part.

Conclusion

The foregoing analysis shows that Kolkata can rightly termed as a 'city of slums'. The slums are diverse in character with varying size, locations, causes of origin and morphology. Easily available employment opportunity has been the major pull factor of migrant population as also the social and political history of India. Currently, there has been a shift of the areas with better job opportunities and accordingly the spatial pattern of the slum population shifted in a SSE direction in a significant way (Fig.5). They need adequate facilities for education, vocational training and employment and efficient planning and execution of slum development programmes relating to health and sanitation, clean drinking water, provision of electricity and gas as domestic fuel. These should be immediately addressed to bring them at par and convert the population into human resource.

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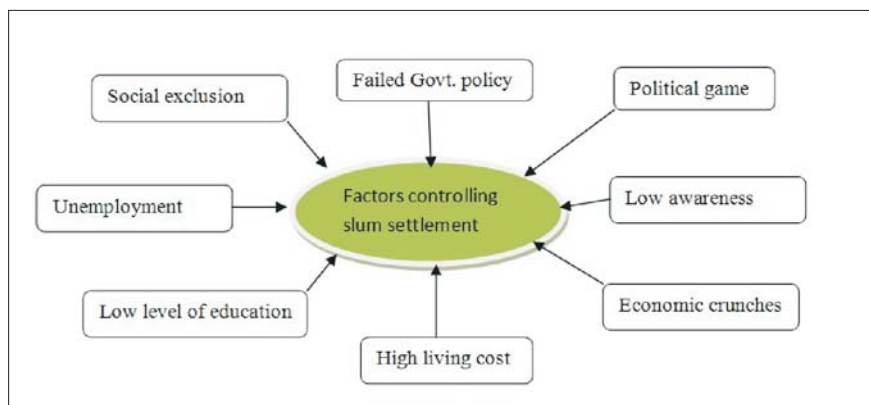
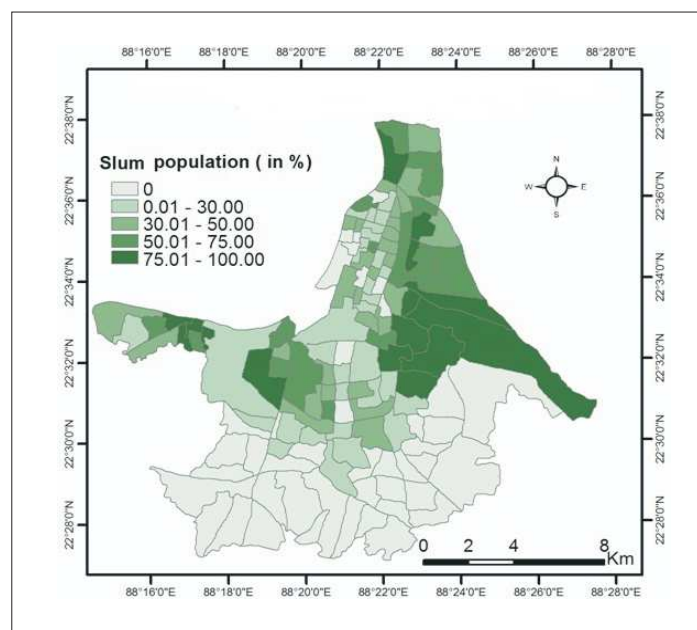Fig. 1; Flowchart showing Factors influencing of Slum Growth

Fig. 2. Wardwise Distribution of Proportion of Slum Population, 2001
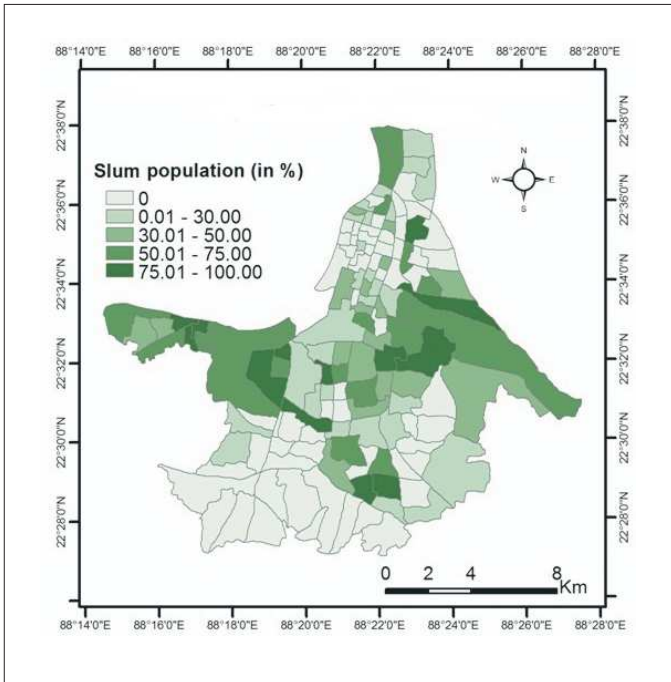
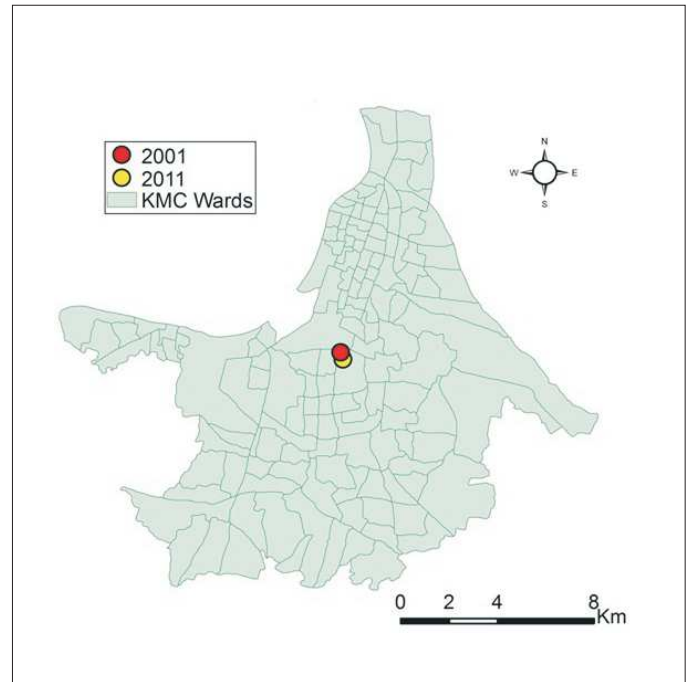Fig. 3. Wardwise Distribution of Proportion of Slum Population, 2011

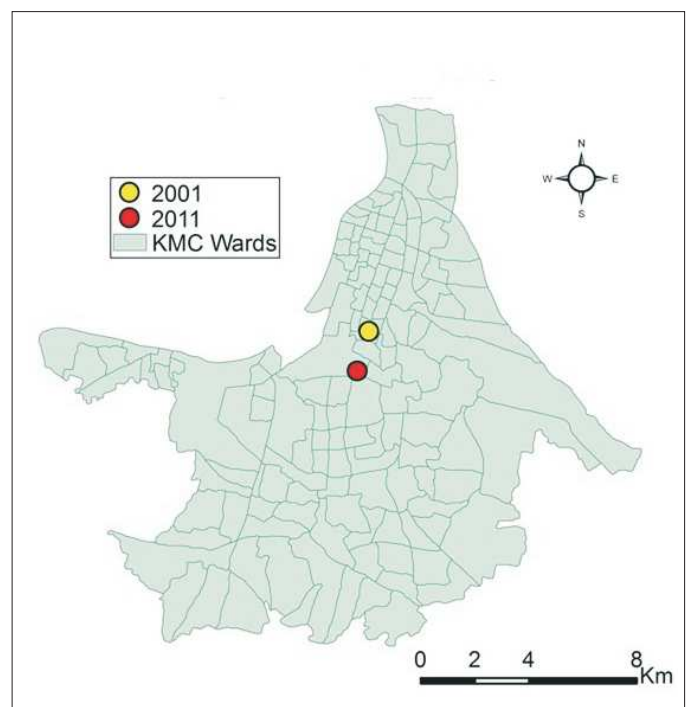Fig. 4. Shift of Mean Centre of Urban Population, 2001 - 11

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Fig. 5. Shift of Mean Centre of Slum Population, 2001 - 11