

Urban Problems and Contrasting Values with Special Reference to Tehran – A Sociological Appraisal

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ABSTRACT Cities in the twentieth century have widely changed due to various reasons including population growth, industrialization and so forth; all leaving behind problems of various qualities and characteristics. Likewise, such phenomenon has changed the value and normative system of the city-dwellers. This process has caused the quality of life also to undergo changes in two directions, i.e. positively and negatively. Concentration of industries in cities, and the rise of business activities in urban areas has transformed the city life, affecting cultural integration, cultural change, behaviour patterns of the citizens etc. Many sociologists are of the opinion that the demographic revolution has made the city conditions so. With the growth of urbanization, the Third World has already faced and will face different challenges, and thereby the physical and social problems in cities such as violence, crimes, gangsterism etc., all affecting peace of life. Big cities are known to be problematic due to overconsumption, congestion and pollution. Housing, health and transport as indicators of quality of life are also some of the concerns of the big cities of the present time. So far as the provision and supply of food, energy, safe water and shelter are concerned, urbanization is also problematic. Unprecedented changes in different socio-economic aspects have brought about generation gap. Tehran too, as a fast growing Asian city has been analysed with its own contrasting values, which cyclically must tolerate new social problems.

In this research various key concepts and theories have been referred to, so as to prove the contrasting relationship between the value system/social norms and the exploding cities. These aspects are generally explored to enunciate the meaning of a good quality of life, and the ways to measure and monitor changes and strategies to improve it. Likewise the development of urbanization and appearance of large cities have great impact on the quality of life, and at the same time, quality of life itself deeply affects the mentality of the people and their way of life. Family life, health, crime and justice system, ageing, employment, education, environmental degradation and the like are some of the grounds which

somehow or the other affect quality of life and are affected by it.

In this paper, the method of research has mainly been the latest resources of sociological literature which have been referred to. At the same time, observation and interviews with experts and specialists, and content analysis of the proceedings of relevant conferences have been used.

The paper has been elaborated on the basis of the hypothesis that population pressure and more emphasis on the expansion of urban investments, and modernization plans create large cities which result in socio-cultural controversies in urban areas.

As fast as the world population has grown in the twentieth century, the proportion of people living in cities has increased even more rapidly. Urbanization or an increase in the percentage of a population living in urban settlements and a resulting extension of the influence of urban culture and life-style, is a worldwide phenomenon. As a matter of fact, it was during the Industrial Revolution in the nineteenth century that cities grew rapidly, and thereby a major influence was found on social life. The many technological changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution affected both the rural and urban populations. Such a movement brought about various changes in the behaviour, social norms, cultural patterns of the people as so on.

The process of mechanization of agriculture itself increased productivity; creating a surplus of farm workers. The decline in agricultural jobs pushed workers of the farm; and the growing number of factory jobs pulled them to the city, to a new culture and environment. Technological innovations in transportation and communication reduced constraints on the size and density of cities. That is, they helped solve difficulties in moving people and goods.

Urbanization and Sociology

From the beginning, urbanization fascinated sociologists, and cities played a central role in the transformation of the feudal, agricultural societies of the western Europe into modern, industrial capitalist societies. The founding fathers of modern sociology such as Giddens (1981) has much tried to elaborate this transformation. Functionalist sociologists have judged on industrialization and urbanization as destroying traditional communities and primary groups, thus setting the individual free and floating. Ferdinand Tonnies (1855-1936) contrasted the social order of small, traditional communities with that of large, industrialized cities (1887-1957). In peasant village, he argued, shared norms and values, frequent social contacts, and warm personal relationships create a sense of belonging and community or *gemeinschaft*. People are intimately involved with their neighbours and kin; there seems little changes from one generation to the next. In modern industrial cities, by contrast, change is constant. There is little consensus on values and norms. Individualism replaces group loyalty; anonymity replaces familiarity. People do not feel they belong to a city; they merely use its resources. Tonnies called this cool, impersonal social order *gesellschaft* (association).

Contrasting values may be discussed in terms of cultural inconsistencies and diversities. Growth of cities gradually loses cultural integration. On the other hand, in small, homogeneous societies that have few contacts with outsiders, cultural integration may be near perfect. In small, traditional societies different elements of culture are synchronized; that is, for many purposes, people act and think as one. So far as the religious rituals are concerned, in traditional societies people are woven into the fabric of every day life, and virtually everyone complies, whereas in complex modern societies/cities, social and technological changes may occur too rapidly; in such a speed that the norms can hardly keep pace. Under such conditions contrasting values appear in the society.

Cities in Developing World

Speedy urbanization is transforming the developing world; creating cities which are full of

new opportunities for economic and social advance, but also involved with physical, financial, environmental and management shortcomings that endanger the hopes, and even the health of their swelling populations. Such a process has a negative impact on the quality of life, and cyclically is followed by various problems.

Some sociologists are of the opinion that although the demographic revolution has produced such conditions, dire consequences need not result if new and determined efforts are made, to ensure environmental protection, adequate infrastructure and fiscal reforms. If affordable policies and programmes of change are formulated properly and in a timely fashion, with their primary emphasis on bettering the lives and tapping the talents of the people, specially the urban poor whose poverty may be reduced, followed by improvement in the urban environment, in this way, by redirecting the growth, sustainable development will genuinely be encouraged.

The growth of cities, urbanization of poverty and invalidating of norms and traditions now go hand in hand, but a parallel trend in the developing world towards widening participation in the global economy opens an avenue of hope. Economically-speaking, it offers city-dwellers the chance to produce goods and services for distant markets, and to tap connection abroad for supplies and other inputs, thereby, easing the existing economic constraints on small developing countries with special reference to big cities. This movement has led to low quality of life for majority of big city-dwellers in the developing world.

To broaden their participation in the socio-economic atmosphere at international level, however, cities must ensure that their domestic structures are in proper working order. If connection; that is roads, public transportation, communications etc. within the new growth centres are defective, their efforts to increase socio-economic interaction with the rest of the world will suffer. If urban workers not only lose excessive amounts of time getting to and from their jobs, because of shortage of means, poverty and congestion, but also sacrifice their health, and that of their families to unsafe air, impure water, and inadequate housing, neither they nor their countries will achieve their full potential. These are some of

the symptoms of contrasting values among those dwelling in unbridled big cities. Under such conditions, safe environment and social stability also will be at risk.

Just as urban centres cannot afford to isolate themselves from the global economy, so they cannot afford to isolate their poorest neighbourhoods from wider urban societies and economies. The handicap imposed on the poor by the lack of clean water, effective sanitation, sufficient drainage, and descent roads, impedes the growth of entire cities, therefore, through certain planning, such constraints should be removed.

Urbanization and the Next Century

There are a lot of challenges and difficulties awaiting the 21st century in so far as over-urbanization of the Third World is concerned. More people will live in cities by the year 2025 than occupied the whole planet ten years ago. A new report of World Resources Institute 1996-97, finds that urbanization is reshaping the physical and social environment as it fuels economic growth and spurs environmental degradation.

Urban environmental conditions are important to the health and quality of life of a city's inhabitants and can impose significant costs on economic and social development. The impact of urban areas on the surrounding environment is an issue of growing concern. More than half of mankind will live in urban areas by the end of the century, and 60 per cent by the year 2020. In most nations, cities generate a majority of the economic activity, ultimately consume most of the natural resources, and produce most of the pollution and waste. Thus, urban environmental issues, although often overlooked, are important both locally and on national and global scales. Neglect of these issues could expose to risk larger economic, social and environmental goals in both developed and developing societies.

The developed world is already largely urbanized, the society is fully transformed, new values are well-shaped and not a lot of contrasts are seen. But, in the developing world, the rapid urbanization now under way, will increasingly concentrate both population and economic growth in cities, that is as much as 90 per cent of future population growth and a major share of

future economic growth, all will intensify the problems of the urban environment. Although in recent decades urban areas in developing countries have made major progress in cleaning up local environmental problems, but, still there remains a lot of social problems and contrasting values, specially in big cities. Due to these contrasts in the developing countries, urban areas often have huge populations living in poverty. Their problems are such as lack of access to clean water, sanitation and adequate housing; compounded by overcrowding and exposure to industrial wastes and urban air pollution.

Parallel to environmental problems, there will be growing social problems such as violence, crimes, juvenile delinquency, health, employment, ageing, family life, justice system, drug addiction, AIDS etc. for big cities in developing countries in the next century. In one sense almost all social problems are "urban," and they happen in big cities; that is the kind of problems which will be repeated and affect the younger generations too. For example, poverty, unemployment, divorce and so forth are more likely to be found in larger cities and in higher rates (Henslin, 1983). In all, greater frequency of social problems regardless of social class is attributed to big cities.

Urban Living

Cities are increasingly perceived as problematic, meaning by which over-consuming, congested and polluted. Such conditions are widely seen in many developing countries. If necessary and adequate know-how is exploited, they could be made functional sustainably through budgeting resources, conserving energy, developing renewable energy technology, developing efficient public transport services and reducing waste through recycling it.

To save and protect the big cities, and achieve the goals, urban dwellers and planners need to pursue new and well-thought integrated urban development model based on ecological principles (Girardet, 1992). Implementing the new urban model implies management and policy changes on urban housing, parks, health, employment, transport, the environment, electricity, gas, waste disposal, sewage disposal etc. Such developments will protect the quality of life and even will insure to raise it.

According to Hamis Main (1994), cities now accommodate about two-thirds of the total population increase in developing world which will amount to an additional 600 million people during the last decade of the 20th century. On the basis of such estimates, by the year 2000, 1.9 billion people will be living in towns and cities in developing countries, and the figure could approach 3.5 by the year 2020. Yet, the housing problems of the rapidly growing cities, and megacities of Africa, Asia, and the Latin America have hardly begun to be studied. This must be noted that it is not only problems of poverty, overcrowding and homelessness that the people of such societies are facing, but in addition to the natural, human and environmental hazards, such as floods, earthquakes, industrial hazards and pollution they often face, they have to tolerate socio-economic stress. Therefore, to lower the effects of such problems, low-cost housing planning and priority in improvements are recommended.

The number of people living in cities of over 1 million has also grown rapidly, from 1 in 100 in 1940 to 1 in 10 by 1980. In highly urbanized Latin America that ratio is currently one in four. If the "million cities" continue to grow at current rates, in addition to other ill-effects, mental health, social and political systems will also be threatened. According to the World Commission on Environment and Development, such estimates and projections create the urban challenge firmly in the developing countries. Therefore, during the 1990s, the developing countries should have increased by 65 per cent their capacity to produce and manage its urban infrastructure, services and shelter -- merely to maintain present conditions.

Since the process of urbanization concentrates people, it also puts a heavy demand on the supply of basic necessities like food, energy, potable water and shelter. These demands can exact a heavy toll on the surrounding country side.

Based on a "global average," it has been estimated very roughly that a city of 1 million inhabitants consumes every day about 625000 metric tons of water, 2000 metric tons of food, and 9500 metric tons of fuel, while at the same time generating 500000 metric tons of waste water, 2000 metric tons of solid wastes, and 950 metric tons of air pollutants. But, there are great

differences between cities in different parts of the world. For example, New York produces three times as much waste per person per day as Calcutta.

The urban challenge is more than mere numbers. Mega-cities eat up arable lands (as in Egypt, where only 4 per cent of the country is cultivable). Another example is about the United States, where the country lost some 2.5 million hectares of farmland to urban sprawl. Such a phenomenon is occurring now in many parts of the developing world. Big metropolitan areas can also generate high levels of air pollutants -- as in Mexico City and Tehran (central part), where air was recently declared unfit to breathe. Big cities export their pollution by air, water and land to surrounding areas. Therefore, quality of life is threatened in this cycle.

Cities also consume national development budgets. With few sources of hard currency, many governments in developing countries concentrate their limited development efforts in cities and towns, rather than countryside where many of the destitute people live.

Urban Quality of Life

Enhancement of the quality of life of the people is a fundamental objective of all development activities with special reference to urban areas. There may be disagreement about how to define and measure quality of life, but there is a general consensus concerning the primacy of the objective.

The conventional method of measuring the quality of life has traditionally been and continues to be through economic indicators such as per capita income, per capita calorie intake, etc. This is understandable, since economics tends to play a dominant role in development theory and planning. Therefore, a frequent disposition to evaluate the social aspects of development through a framework of economic measurement and analysis.

Migration to urban areas by the rural people creates new tendencies, expectations and new life-styles. To respond to such expectations and keep the quality of life up to the standard is not quite an easy job. In such conditions more exact planning and further mobilization of resources must be maintained.

A closer look at the traditional approach reveals, however, that such measurement and analysis bears a rather tenuous relationship to the human conditions associated with the quality of life is often used in modern sociological studies with special reference to city-dwelling and social modernization.

Quality of life is about whether children live or die; whether people eat well, are malnourished or starved; whether women lead healthy and fulfilling lives or are afflicted with annual childbearing, the high risk of maternal mortality, and the burden of lifelong drudgery; whether other vulnerable social groups such as youth, disabled persons and the elderly are given the chance to realize their aspirations and share equitably in the fruits of development; whether people have access to work at all and, if they do, whether it is of a fulfilling nature; whether people have access to appropriate shelter, infrastructure and services, and whether such access is equitably distributed; whether their education is sufficient to permit them to maximize their productive potential, and participate constructively in the life of their communities; and whether they are living in an ecological balanced world.

Urban sociology should respond to all the above, study them, measure them and find adequate solutions to the shortcomings. The above list can always be expanded, and reliable statistics be made so as to reach a welfare state. Such measures and statistics must be provided by the sociologists and the social planners. But the reality is that the Third World cities have a low state of quality of life in terms of the above indicators.

Sociologically speaking, an objective and reliable analysis of the quantitative as well as qualitative components of social progress is needed. Such an analysis would clarify whether the people in the urban regions of the developing countries are actually experiencing improved conditions in the various fields that ultimately constitute development. It would also indicate whether the existing national development policies, plans and programmes, are improving the general welfare of the people? If not so, reorientations and new strategies should be put into practice so as to raise the quality of life.

Focus on Urban Children and the Youth

The urban children and youth as studied by UNICEF in 21 cities in five countries (Brazil, India, Italy, Kenya and the Philippines) are in distress because of socio-cultural and economic contrasting values. To gain a greater understanding of the children and the youth in difficult circumstances, we can develop ways to better diagnose their problems. In the urban areas, specially in large cities, physical, psychological, social and economic threats are waiting for these vulnerable young strata. Therefore, they need accurate plans, programmes and investments.

The number and proportion of urban adolescents in low-income countries have increased as a result of continued rapid urbanization in Africa and Asia, declines in the mean age of migration to cities, feminization of migration to cities and so forth, all have increased distress among the young generation. Conditions such as servitude, child labour, prostitution, crimes and actions like these are all obvious to many visitors to the cities specially in developing countries. So far as the social and health issues of the children and youth are concerned, wise, logical and applicable strategies must be found specially among social scientists for the coming century.

Youth crimes and distress are inevitably products of social circumstances. They can be generated by a multiplicity of causes. In the developing countries they have traditionally been ascribed to the prevailing conditions of mass poverty, ignorance and social disorganization. However, it must be mentioned that improved standard of living does not necessarily reduce youth crimes. The social disruption that typically accompanies economic growth, in fact creates the circumstances for increased youth crimes and deviant behaviour. It is claimed, and even have been established that economic deprivation is not as serious a cause of youth crimes as is social dislocation.

Therefore, constant movement to urban areas by the youth, and facing new standards, values and norms by them, often brings maladjustment, deviant behaviour and distress to the children and specially the youth, who in fact need particular attention and planning.

Urbanization and Quality of Life in Tehran

Tehran as a growing metropolitan is facing with various problems. The city has grown from 150 thousand inhabitants one-and-a-half century ago to over 6.7 million people in 1997. The city has absorbed lots of investments in different sectors. The city, being an open society for decades, while other urban centres were highly traditional and almost closed. Such qualities caused the city to grow qualitatively and quantitatively, absorbing capitals, expertise, intellects, modern norms, values, etc. The main problems of the city is due to its enormous expansion because of increasing urbanization of the population, and the lack of adequate infrastructure. The growth of Tehran's population is uninterrupted and in each decennial census a million more people is added to the city's population. Economic prosperity, abundance of employments as compared with other cities, speed of reconstruction and modernization, progress in medical and health sectors and so forth, have been important incentives to pull the people to the city. As estimated, about one-third of the country's industries are concentrated in Tehran province and specially in Tehran city.

Along with the problem of numbers, there are also the problems caused by the fact that a considerable segment of the urban population of Tehran live in accommodations which are unlicensed, and no planning permits have been issued for. These slum-dwellers who have their sub-culture live marginally. The city is idiomatically divided into north and south. The way of life of the northern part symbolizes facilities, prosperity, high class people, higher education, and richer people, whereas the southern part symbolizes the opposite less prosperous, more congestion, more pollution, lower literacy rate, higher population growth rate, etc. On the whole, the standard of living in the two different parts of Tehran is different.

Tehran as a determining centre of the country has an important and vital role to play politically, economically, socially, commercially, culturally and so forth. The present infrastructures in the region are totally inadequate to protect the environment from the impact of increase in population and industrial activities. Given the serious

inadequacy of the sewers, and the lack of facilities for the treatment of the sewerage and industrial waste, the problem of water pollution has now become quite serious. More than 2 million cars and buses in addition to about half a million of motorbikes and scooters have created the air pollution problem very acute specially in the pick hours of the day.

Sociologically speaking, the most important functions of cities today is to provide the best possible environment and quality of life for everyone living and working there. In the other words, cities must be people-oriented. Also it must be noted that people in cities have very complex individual demands, and all these must be noted and considered by the governments.

So far as the municipal department of the greater Tehran is concerned, it has quite well acted in the past few years to raise the quality of the environment, greenery, parks etc. But, as there is an influx of migrants to the city, housing shortage and increasing costs have become quite acute.

The large cities of Iran, specially Tehran have witnessed rapid expansion in recent years. The hasty and irregular development of Tehran, in addition to over-rate density and congestion, has endangered the continuity of a healthy urban quality of life.

To prevent such hazards, establishment of satellite towns has started around Tehran, among which Parand has been set up towards the south of Tehran to accommodate 200 to 250 thousand people in lands extending to approximately 3000 hectares. Many of the daily work force of the greater Tehran reside in Parand. That is to say, they daily commute between Parand and Tehran. The establishment of such townships will more or less help solve the population density and Tehran's quality of life.

CONCLUSION

The new phenomenon called urban centres and mega-cities has brought about contradictions and contrasting values, and a changeover in the behaviour of the city dwellers. This phenomenon mainly caused through industrialization, migration and urbanization has also much affected the quality of life so far as the environment,

health and family life are concerned. Impact of the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century is currently emerging specially in the Third World cities; traditions are fading out and new norms and ways of life are appearing--extensively causing "contrasting values" in cities. In spite of the socio-economic advances in cities, physical, financial, environmental and management shortcomings are endangering the hopes and health of the swelling population of cities, causing negative impact on quality of life. Social problems are emerging in cities more than ever before, whose solution must be found through thorough social engineering and management. Facts and figures on Tehran too, prove it to be a "problem city". Housing, environment and density of population have gradually deteriorated the quality of life in the city. So far as the standard of living is concerned, there is a sharp difference between quality of life in the northern parts of the city.

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