

Essay on Cities on the Verge of Collapse

"After more than 56 years of independence, with launching and implementing many five years plans, the cities of modern are on the verge of collapse. The cities epitomes an area wherein the habitats, whether rich or poor, are bound to face the scourges of exploding population, air pollution contaminated water sources, bums solid wastes, intolerable noise pollution, inadequate transport system, creaked road unable to cope with the proliferation of private and public vehicles, shortage of water, breakdown of electricity, choked sanitary, drainage and sewage system, increasing crime against fair sex and unsafe senior citizens, with the criminally indifferent attitude of government officials to every kind of problems."

One more peculiar thing about cities is the scant regard for keeping the cities clean and tidy. The indifferent attitude and deliberate neglect by the civic authorities have caused the cities a bump of solid and other wastes choking and overflowing sewage and drains, resulted in mud, water storage, and dirt everywhere, giving rise to epidemics like malaria, typhoid, dengue every alternate year.

Various reasons and factors are responsible for the sordid state of cities. Unplanned growth of colonies, ill management of resources, lack of prudence in planning, sidelining the issues like pollution, education, slums, cleanliness, are to a great extent responsible to make the cities a nightmare.

We can find temples, mosques, or shrines at every nook and corner, even in the middle of a road while the basic amenities like water tab or electric pillar are not made available. Resources are not properly managed, corruption in institutions responsible for providing basic amenities are of the highest order. Public funds are being misutilised for the aggrandizement of personal or political benefits.

Any positive developmental action for replacing or removing the slum or removing the illegal encroachments has immediately become a political issue and vehemently opposed and sabotaged by the politicians.

There are approximately 350 cities, having a population of more than one lac, proper sanitary, drainage health care seems to be the privileges of a handful of people, living in the posh colonies.

New Delhi, the capital of India, a metropolitan is passing through the worst crisis of inadequate mass transportation and pollution caused by vehicular traffic. It is noteworthy that the Supreme Court has to issue very strict directives to keep the city free from vehicular pollution as the earlier advice of the apex court, were not acted upon by the Delhi Govt. More than forty lacs vehicles run daily on the roads of Delhi, more than the total number of vehicles in Mumbai, Kolkata, and Chennai*, all together. Delhi is growing day by day with more people streaming in search of another livelihood. The city is on the verge of bursting with a population explosion and authorities are the least concerned to make provisions for the eventuality. The plight of Mumbai is no better than other metropolitan cities. The Suburban rail network of Mumbai, which carries over six million commuters daily, is not perfect and whenever it failed a violent reaction as taken place in 1994, is always feared. The unplanned and unchecked growth of distant suburbs depends mainly on the suburban railway network, for their daily traveling, has caused intolerable pressure on the railways. The existing Railway machinery is unable to maintain the system properly and efficiently. The haphazard growth of suburbs with or without the basic amenities provided by the builders has rendered the peace and tranquillity of the city to ransom. A daily commuter comments, *"The policymakers should take a ride during the morning or evening hours to find the problems and hardships faced by us every day"*.

India's commercialized Mumbai is an open Mafia territory with more than two murders on an average daily. Open gang wars, extortion, kidnapping, sexual blackmail are the daily local news, that is becoming too common to raise any protest. Mumbai police had a name of repute in yesteryears, but now many philanthropists, planners, bureaucrats demanded a need of total revamp of the police administration to make it free from Mafia links.

Frequent power breakdown, shortage of drinking water, overcrowded transportation are some of the problems faced by most of the cities nowadays. The inhabitants of metro Chennai has accepted their fait accompli, to live with chronic water shortage, spending not less than Rs. 500/- per month for water requirement. Over in Kerala, having 42 small rivers and lakes even most of the cities are facing irregular water supply. The same is the problem in many newly built colonies of Mumbai.

Yet another problem in most of the cities, particularly the metros is the proliferation of slum localities. Recently, the DDA authorities refused to take any action on the complaints of residents of West Delhi posh colony against the slum dwellers using a pavement for defecation. In his report, the Comptroller and Auditor General of India disclosed in 1994-95, that over 40000 new Huggies proliferate in the capital every year. The court in had advised the Delhi Government to check slum _growth and to take immediate steps to improve the conditions of the urban poor. It is a fact that millions of people from countryside rural areas migrate to Metros and other nearby cities to earn their livelihood. There are no employment opportunities available in rural areas. Cities provide job opportunities for all, the professionals, the traders, the skilled or unskilled laborers, and anyone ready to work into his body and soul. Slums are the result of migration at no cost. Despite all the sufferings and hardships, these poor jobless people would prefer to

slog in the city fringes, sleep under flyovers, or on pavements, for want of bread to starve their family. The slum dwellers is a harsh reality, no government has taken any resultant step to solve the problem in a planned and positive manner. The government is duty-bound to provide basic amenities to these poor? Are these people not contributing or serving the needs of the rich or economically affluent society of the cities in the form of a press wall, a rickshaw puller, daily wage labor, or the others?

The complex socio-economic growth of cities has given rise to small or big crimes like rape, dacoity, theft, kidnapping even murder. The lack of impersonal relations, indifferent attitude of the co-passengers, neglect, and corrupt police officials had made cities the dens of crime. A lone youth with an open knife in a crowded bus may after pickpocketing an innocent passenger, could alight from a bus nonchalantly and none dare to stop him. Crime thrives because of the apathy of the citizens and the collusion and irresponsibility on the part of law enforcing machinery.

Are the cities on the verge of collapse? Are we heading towards a doomsday? Can the peculiar problems of cities be tackled? Can the cities be places for peaceful and pollution-free living? Though a lot of clamoring has been there to improve the lives in the Metros and cities, yet little can be done in the immediate future to halt the process of urbanization. A national urban policy needs to be reformed keeping in view the entire spectrum of urban problems and peculiarities to tackle the problems. To check the exodus from rural areas to urban areas, a lot is required to be done to make available the job opportunities in the rural area itself. Developing satellite towns, with all necessary infrastructure and proper transportation may prove to be a good measure to check the overcrowdedness in the cities. Nothing can be done without the cooperation of the general mass to ameliorate the conditions of the cities. Proper prudent

planning, sincere strategies, with the involvement of society, check on corruption can make our cities worth living. If all concerned join hand sincerely with determination, our cities may be turned from the present day 'Hell' to the 'Heaven' of the future.