

Collective Mobilisation for Shelter: Politics of Informal Housing in Chandigarh Slums

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Abstract

The Major aim of the paper is to examine the patterns of collective mobilisation taking place in urban slums through a case study of grassroots mobilization around evictions and unavailability of security of tenure in selected slums of Chandigarh city. The biggest problem being faced by informal settlers in urban cities in the present times is the lack of adequate shelter and security of land tenure. Demolition drives and rehabilitation process started at large scale for the so called 'city beautiful' during the year 2013-2014 have compelled the slum dwellers to have more collective efforts. The paper uses an analytical narrative approach to account for patterns in collective behaviour, drawing on both quantitative and qualitative data gathered through interviews with 200 slum dwellers residing in Chandigarh city. Inferences drawn from the study reflect that dissent over demolition act and rehabilitation process for shelter gave significant rise to the collective mobilisation in the slums. Slum colonies are enjoying more exposure to outer world and support of local leaders or various grassroots organisations provide more potential for collective mobilisation.

Key Words: Collective Mobilisation, Eviction, Demolition, Urban Poor, Informal Settlements, Rehabilitation, Adequate

1. Introduction

Across the globe, there is growing evidence of frequent espousal of collective efforts by relatively powerless groups, specifically informal settlers in defending particular urban spaces and influencing urban development. Collective community efforts in contemporary period became an inevitable aspect of socio-political and economic life of marginalized section in the urban societies. The groups associated with poverty reduction recognised collective mobilisation as a meaningful political instrument to fulfil the basic demands of poor people. Among the various approaches to define, assess and solve the problems of informal settlements, collective mobilisation is considered as the most effective way to solve the day to day problems. Within the literature of urban studies an important sub-discipline, concerning the role of urban movements or collective efforts as initiators of social change, holds the central place.

One popular viewpoint in existing studies on this aspect reflects that poor people living at the margins of socio-economic structures do not share similar norms and values of mainstream society. Edelman (1964), Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995), Krishna (2002), Klesner (2007) and Perlman (1976, 2004) in their studies mentioned that socio-economic marginality leads to lesser participation in political activities and sometimes encourages use of improper means. Poor people share a very low level of social capital. This viewpoint suggests that government

assistance serves as a lifeline for many poor citizens and thus, suppresses any anger or resentment that might inspire any collective social and political efforts and participation. Brady, Verba and Schlozman (1995:275) in their study has mentioned that low-income citizens often do not possess the financial resources, free time, civic skills, to participate effectively in the political actions and the socio-political activities. Activities, such as contacting a public official or working on a campaign, require certain “civic skills” that can be acquired in various nonpolitical settings. But, because poor citizens are so poorly endowed with these participatory factors, over time they have become a very inactive group.ⁱ Along with this perspective there are two more theories ‘The Culture of Poverty’ and ‘Concept of Marginality’. These theories also provide explanations for less participation of slum residents in the collective and political activities. These theories shows that the slum dwellers have little interest and awareness of political events and they lack an internal political organization. Oscar Lewis in his thesis of ‘Culture of Poverty’ also puts forth the idea that poor people are characterized by low aspirations, political apathy, helplessness and disorganization.ⁱⁱ Theory of Marginality claims that disorientation of poor people towards collective efforts and political activities are due to their baggage of traditional (rural) norms and values which prevents their successful adaptation to the urban style of life.ⁱⁱⁱ

After going through the above given theories, it becomes clear that in these studies slums are seen as places which are socially and politically disintegrated and unorganised. These theories propose that poor people residing in squatters’ lack internal organisational qualities and have little interest in collective actions. The theories claiming lesser participation and disorientation of slum residents in collective actions may not be pertinent in many poor urban set-ups in contemporary period. Street people in urban set-up now seek more visibility in associational and political activities as it help informal settlers in urban areas to acquire many governmental benefits. Their visibility can enable them to associate with allocation of funds, infrastructure and facilities.^{iv} Therefore, another set of literature on participation of urban poor in collective efforts and political activities offers the contrary perspective regarding participation. This viewpoint sees urban poor as active participant like any other group in the society. Lawless & Fox (2001:365) and Low (1999:15) in their studies saw that urban poor shows large extent of involvement in political activities and collective actions for adequate shelter and security of tenure which involve the conflict among government institutions, planning experts and local communities. Similar kind of views are provided by Castells (2012:15) in his theory on collective consumption that some issues, such as housing and environment have great impact on collective actions of all the groups in the society. The shared experiences of living in an illegal colony and common interests for security of tenure lead to the formation of collective identity. Fear, emotions and vulnerable position of slum residents play a really important role in creating collective actions /efforts in the informal settlements.^v

Investigation of literature in detail reflects that the notion of the urban poor including the ones living without shelter or in slums has changed and they are now recognized as a vital section of the contemporary society. Literature also reveals that consciousness of collective identity stems from the common grievances of the families, largely regarding inaccessibility of adequate shelter, demolition and eviction process in the informal settlements. Fear, emotions and vulnerable position of slum residents insist them to take collective actions against authorities in the informal settlements. Modern cities in the world remain a mystery to the poor migrants, as they accept migrants only as workers to get services for middle classes and upper classes, but do not consider them full citizens by denying them housing rights. Residents of informal settlements attempt to make city inclusive for them by showing their collective strength against the exclusionary nature of the city authority.

In the above given context this research paper analyzes the nature of collective mobilization taking place in urban spaces through a case study of grassroots mobilization happening around evictions in selected slums of Chandigarh city. In order to explain the nature of collective mobilization, this paper focuses on the nature of protests, demonstrations and campaigns made by slum residents against authority, role of local leaders in these collective efforts, exclusionary process occurring in the slums, various attempts made by authority to provide basic amenities. The present study helps in finding out about those circumstances which mobilize people around urban issues and factors that either restrain or encourage potential urban protects. This study helps to find out what motivates the slum dwellers to take participation in urban social movement activities.

In the present study data is generated by using a mix of quantitative and qualitative method. Semi-structured questionnaire is used to collect relevant information. To get views from the slums residents, the personal in-depth interviews and focus groups discussion were followed. For the field study, four slum informal settlements Labour Colony Number-4, Janta & Labour Colony Sector 25, Nehru Colony and Madrasi Colony were selected. All the four slums are geographically scattered (the sample scattered in different direction of city) and among the largest slums (most populated slums of the city) of Chandigarh city. From these 4 colonies; 200 slum residents (50 from each) of different ages, works, gender and different places on the basis of random sampling were interviewed. Most questions asked were kept open-ended for the residents. Along with primary sources information has been gathered from CRRID reports, Chandigarh Housing Board, Planning Commission Reports, City Planning Development Department, Ministry of Housing and Poverty Alleviation Reports and Chandigarh Administration. This research paper has been divided in mainly two sections, the first part attempts to explain the problems for shelter and politics of dissent in slums, second part of the paper deals with the collective efforts made by informal settlers against demolition and for providing adequate housing facilities in slums.

2. Politics of Dissent in Informal Settlements: An Evaluation

The frequent choice for collective action or mobilisation by relatively powerless groups in recent period suggests that protest and demonstration represents an important aspect of low income group politics in the society. Alternative of protest has been recognized as a meaningful political instrument for the fulfilment of basic amenities in the low income group politics. For most of the urban poor, mobilization means fighting for and defending a place to live in the city and more broadly, the right to maintain and maybe to enhance their livelihoods. When the urban poor come across a problem at community level, specifically regarding public services or basic amenities, they attempt to solve it collectively. Collective mobilization can be defined most simply as any broad social alliance of people who are associated in seeking to influence authority for change. Community efforts of low income groups are essentially the products of discontent of residents against unavailability of basic services. Through their collective actions/efforts low income groups attempt to transform the public authorities to become more humane and responsive to the sufferings of slum residents. Collective actions in slums are mainly exhibited in the forms of protests, direct confrontation, demonstration, agitations, rallies and participating in self-help programmes of neighbourhood communities. Mobilisation process in slums expressed through wide range of practices is strongly connected with ground level organizations to contest the dominant forces (governmental institutions and administrative authorities) in urban spaces. Socio-economic and political conflicts and expectations of the people are reflected through these collective efforts/movements.

In their collective efforts, slum residents either make demands for basic services or show dissatisfaction against administration and government authority. Field visits demonstrated that slum dwellers were involved in protests and demonstrations against authority while demanding the shelter and other civic amenities (water, electricity, public distribution system, health facilities, educational services, sanitation facility, street lights and roads etc.) in slums. In order to make the Chandigarh administration hear their voices, they came and protested on the roads multiple times. While analysing the participation of slum residents from selected colonies in demonstration against authority, it was found that around 60% had participated in demonstration/protest once and more than once in last five years.

Table 1: Participation of Respondents in Protests and Demonstration

Name of Colony	Number of Respondents Participated in any Demonstration/Protest in last five years
Labour Colony No. 4	41
Slum Colony at Sector 25	29
Madrasi Colony	39
Nehru Colony	21

Total -200 (50 from each slum)	130
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Source: Field Visit of Four Slum Colonies (January to April 2013)

Out of 60% slum residents around 45% respondents answered that they had participated in protests more than five times. While providing more information on collective efforts 54 % of respondents mentioned that they participated against demolition/eviction process, water and electricity supply, and delay/un-availability of ration through public distribution system. Very few (15%) respondents participated in protests against better roads, sanitation, street lights, health facilities and educational facilities.

Analyzing the nature of collective mobilization in urban slums of Chandigarh by researching various protests and demonstrations reveals that collective mobilization is a very effective method in slums to fulfil the demands of basic services. The type of demonstration, agitation and protests occurred at the slum colonies were economic in nature as they were prominently for the fundamental civic amenities (water, electricity, shelter) and security of tenure. Social issues such as women security and protection of social rights are taken up rarely for protests in the selected slums. Informal settlements in city do not show equal aptitude to put demands effectively and make protests against authority. A bigger number of slum residents at Labour Colony and Madrasi Colony have participated in protest and demonstration in comparison to the residents of Nehru colony. A large number of residents of Nehru colony did not remember any demonstration that may have taken place in the last few years. Labour Colony -4 has shown immense orientation for protest and agitation against authorities as residents are quite assertive when it comes to their demands. A huge chunk of slum dwelling population in the Madrasi and Labour Colony-4 are factory and industry workers and they get more exposure to the outside world. They get experience for participation in associational activities through trade unions and labour unions. Slum colony at Sector-25 and Nehru colony have less number of industrial/factory workers and more domestic workers. Therefore, they lack the experience and inclination needed for collective actions.

Conversation with slum respondents further revealed that collective actions in slums often depend on local leaders, neighbourhood associations, influential persons and political parties for the initiation and development. Local leaders of bastis take the credit for mobilising slum residents for making demands for water tanker, constructing pavements in arranging street lights, proper electricity and water facilities. Field visits demonstrated that pradhans in all the four slums play important roles in mobilizing low income rural migrants for collective actions. Community leaders are the persons who gather slum residents and decide the day and place for demonstration and protest for any issue.

Table 2: Mobilisation of Slum Residents by Local Leaders for Various Activities

Mobilisation of Slum Residents by local leaders	Rallies	49%
	Demonstration /protest	51%
	Meetings	34%

Source: Field Visit in four Slum Colonies of City (January to April 2013)

Local leaders are always ready to invest their efforts in these activities as it helps them in gaining popularity among slum dwellers and political parties. Slum dwellers vote en bloc and act as vote bank (easy target) for political parties therefore, political parties and leaders attempt to patronise them by providing them help to find secured tenure. This section reflects that collective actions in slums often depend upon local leaders, neighbourhood associations, influential persons and political parties for the initiation and development. Factory and industry workers who get more exposure to the outside world and experience in associational activities through trade unions and labour unions take active participation in protests and collective efforts.

3. Collective Mobilisations for Shelter: A Critical Perspective

Idea of informal sector and manifestation of informality in the domain of housing and settlement in India has gained attention in the present period. In the process of urban regeneration, informal settlement residents are often evicted. The government sometimes justifies the displacement of informal settlers with the rhetoric for the collective good. Process of demolition and denial of housing rights of slum residents has become an issue of concern for all in the present period. Demolition and rehabilitation process affects the politics in Chandigarh slums with full force as administration is committed to make the city slum free. Most of the slum colonies in the planned city are built at those places which were meant for the construction of buildings for developmental purposes. Therefore, the demolitions of the huts of such squatter are expected actions to be taken by the city administration. Fear of eviction and non-permanency (insecure land tenure) led many residents to take part in protests. Threat of eviction in Chandigarh slums gained momentum with the demolition of Labour colony-5 (17,000 structures have been demolished) in November, 2013 to make city slum free. Demolition drive of informal settlements took widespread form in city after this. In the second phase of demolition drive 37 acres of land was reclaimed in sector-52 and 51 on May 10, 2014. The demolition in four colonies namely Pandit Colony, Kuldeep Colony, Mazdoor Colony and Nehru Colony has been undertaken where 3,700 structures were demolished. In the third phase of demolition drive around 3,000 structures have been pulled down from Madrasi Colony. Not only demolition drives but failure of proper rehabilitation process also encourages protests in slums. The act of Chandigarh administration to demolish unauthorized colonies without rehabilitating all the slum residents invited protests from the residents

along with leaders, social activists and Non-Governmental Organisation workers. Various social groups, NGOs are making demands for a new scheme which covers citizens who have been residing in Chandigarh until 2014, without the insistence on one single biometric survey (biometric survey of 2006) as is being currently done. *Ghar Adhikar Sangharsh Samiti* and some other social activists are asking administration to grant property rights to poor people and in-situ settlement in central locations of cities. Demands for in-situ rehabilitation have been neglected by the city authority and all the colonies are built in the periphery of the city. All the rehabilitated places except rehabilitated colonies at sector-49 and *Vikas Nagar* fall in the outskirts of the city. This type of rehabilitation make slum dwellers realise that they are being socially and economically excluded from the parlance of planned city. Eviction and failure of proper rehabilitation compels slum residents to opt for violent methods and protests. Around 69% of interviewed respondents from four sampled slum colonies mentioned that they come out on the road shouting slogans against ruling party, authorities and administration on several occasions in recent years. It has been found during the interviews that in the collective efforts for shelter in slums were accompanied by the local community leaders. Slum dwellers need to get some initiative from outside for collective efforts which are performed by local leaders or any influential person /social worker. There is a growing and influential lobby against eviction.^{vi}

The role played by local leaders in slums gets ambiguous from time to time as sometimes they act on the behalf of slum residents and ask authorities to fulfil the demands and sometimes they try to manipulate the things and keep the residents away from the reality. For instance, local Pradhans are the persons who inform slum residents about the demonstration and notices regarding evacuation. Slum dwellers assemble for a meeting along with local leaders and social activists where structure of protest is discussed. Local leaders support residents to secure stay orders from courts and to organize protests, demonstration and other visible newsworthy events to derail any plans for displacement. Slum dwellers from informal settlements at sector-25 and Labour colony no-4 in their interview stated that famous political and local leaders have supported them in protest against demolition. But some of the incidents narrated by slum residents from Nehru and Madrasi colony reflected that sometimes leaders manipulate local residents to make compromises in demonstration and protest. They misguide the residents for their own interest and support state and its agencies for their benefit. Residents from Nehru and *Madrasi* colony confirmed the occurrence of such incidents. They recollect the episode when notice has been issued for demolition local leader assured them for sustenance of *Jhuggis* as they have confirmed it from city officials; but demolitions took place and many of slum residents lost *jhuggis*. Interviews with residents reflect that leaders get various incentives in the form of house at rehabilitated colony, money and employment opportunity for their dear ones for supporting state agencies/city authorities. These leaders create a wide communication gap between residents and political leaders/ concerned authority.

Studies further reveal that all the slum colonies do not show equal propensity to make collective efforts against eviction and rehabilitation. More number of slum residents at labour colony-4 and Madrasi Colony has shown large orientation towards protest and agitation than the Nehru colony. People are very assertive about their rights and demands. One reason for the large participation of residents of Colony-4 and Madrasi colony is that they get more exposure than the residents of Nehru colony. Residents in these two colonies are factory and industrial workers they get more exposure as trade unions and labour unions keep making protest and demonstration to fulfil their demands. On the other hand, Slum Colony at sector-25 and Nehru colony has fewer industrial and domestic workers resulting in very few persons who participated in protests and demonstration for housing facilities. Nehru Colony is the area with the least respondents who took participation in protest and demonstration places itself at the last among four slum colonies.

Various grassroots or civil society organisation like *Gharadhikar Sangharsh Morcha*, Students for society, *Lokaawaz* and others are working to protect the interests of slum colonies. Only strong protest and agitation can stop the demolition of slum colonies before providing enough and adequate housing facilities to the slum residents. This can be exemplifying with the incidents of Labour colony no-5 and Sector 25 colonies. Slum people in these colonies came together and made *gherao* of the administrative officials and stopped the demolition machines. Some people showed up with weapons and rods as well. This protest was so effective and strong that the administration stopped demolition drive at that time. All the residents come up on streets/roads and started raising slogans against demolition. Slum colony-5 could not get removed in 2003 as the city authority had to face a strong agitation from the residents. But this slum was demolished in 2013. The major reason for this failure was lesser participation in protest. Many slum residents got rehabilitated in authorized colonies under small flat schemes. Another reason for the less participation was many went to *jail* under *Jail Bharo Andolan* and nobody left to make a strong protest against the administration. This made the work of administration easier and the slum got demolished without facing any strong demonstrations in 2013. The demolitions drive in 2013 demolished the colony completely and around 7000 houses were destroyed leaving many slum residents without any other option/place to live. The protests fell weak over time and not just in Labour colony number-5; but this trend has been seen in other slums like Nehru, Kujheri and Madrasi. Slums which put strong opposition (eg. labour colony-4 and Sector-25 colony) against city authority along with the social activist and political leaders protected their colonies but slums with weak strategy and support get demolished. While analysing the nature of collective mobilisation for shelter it has been found that large number of women residents (79%) take all these protests, rallies and strikes for accessibility of secure tenure quite seriously. This is because lack of adequate housing facilities is more problematic for the women than the men. Women living

in the slums without proper water facilities and bathroom face more challenges than men. Among interviewed women around 79% of women accepted that they had participated in one or other protest against eviction and adequate shelter facilities. Mahila Mandal Pradhans of the selected slums put great efforts to gather women in slums and mobilize them for protest. Women along with the male members of slums raised slogans against authority. Whereas, woman's participation in demonstration against unavailability of health facilities, better educational facilities and better streets were quite less in number.

During the protests not only the residents of notice served slums came together but residents of all the slum colonies along with authorised colonies came together and demonstrated against demolition activity. Slum dwellers demanded alternative accommodation and right for housing before the colonies get demolished. Most of the protests and *Morchaas* appeared recently are a result of the combined efforts of the slum residents along with intellectuals, lawyers, professors, students and some opposition political parties. Several groups and political parties including the CPI and CPI (Marxist) as well as the representatives from the Aam Aadmi Party also participated in the protests. Residents from other colonies also come to support the protest. In these protests various slogans like '*Bastiyo Ko Ujadana Band Karo, Ujdo Ke Liye Ghar Ka Prabhand Karo*' and "*Har Zor-Zulm Ki Takkar Mai; Sangharsh Hamara Naara Hai*" has been raised against the administration. Though all the protests and demonstrations do not achieve success to stop the demolitions of colonies but remaining slum colonies and residents have become active and aware. Members of many organisations like the SFS and *Ghar Adhikar Sangharsh Morcha* distribute pamphlets, show street plays and provide information by visiting the slum colonies to make slum dwellers more informed. Protests groups also demand for more transit colonies (established in the peripheries of the city) to accommodate those who became shelter less after demolition drive.

Even the potential beneficiaries in their interview have shown disappointment that they are getting rehabilitated in those areas which are far away from their working places. In these rehabilitated colonies even the basic amenities are not present. The strategy of city authorities to rehabilitate slum dwellers at peripheries reflects that in order to accommodate the accelerated urban growth, cities are thus expanding into peripheral agricultural areas around planned city. In this peripheral growth, the land is being appropriated from farmers or former land owners for public purpose.

4. Conclusion

Inferences drawn from the study reflects that dissent over the acts of demolition and inadequate rehabilitation process has given significant mount to the collective mobilisation in the slums. Mobilizations occurring at grassroots level primarily focus on the problems of basic amenities and specifically to eviction. In these

protest most of the ordinary working-class persons, labourers and domestic workers come together under the leadership of any organisation, leader or social activists. Study reveals that slum dwellers enjoying more exposure to outer world (as factory and industrial workers) are more inclined for collective mobilisation as they have more experience of protests and demonstrations as labour union members. Unconventionally, large number of women residents has participated in the protests/strikes for accessibility of secure tenure. Local Pradhans and grassroots organisations show great influence over collective actions of slum dwellers. But the role played by local leaders in slums is quite ambiguous as sometimes they act on the behalf of slum residents and sometimes they try to manipulate the things for their own interest. Demands for adequate shelter and in-situ rehabilitation are coming from various social groups, leaders of NGOs along with residents. Though rehabilitation processes proved successful up-to some extent as many slum residents have been rehabilitated but it had not met with complete success as rehabilitated colonies are again excluded from main city and located in the peripheries of the city with limited facilities. It became very difficult for slum households to get rehabilitated at different places and continue with their earlier work and adjust with the old routine (schools for kids, aanganwadi, old neighbourhood and acquaintance with the place) in the new place. The rehabilitation process needs to provide a sense of citizenship to them as they contribute in the political and economic sphere of the society.

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End notes

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- ⁱ For details see Henry E. Brady, Sidney Verba and Kay Lehman Schlozman (1995). Beyond SES: A Resource Model of Political Participation. *American Political Science Review*, 89. 2. pp 271-294
- ⁱⁱ According to Lewis There is a lack of participation and integration of the poor in the major institution of the larger society. He declares poverty as a way of life, which is remarkably stable and persistent, passed down from generation to generation along family lines. For details see Oscar Lewis, "The Culture of Poverty", *Scientific American*, 215 (October 1966), pp. 19-25.

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- iii Theory of Marginality predicts that slum dwellers rarely participate in electoral politics, avoid direct action politics, and frequently attempt to pursue individual goals through administrative channels. Slums have no internal political organisation. The theory of marginality is defined by the concept of disintegration. Dominant in these areas are isolationism and dispersion; these make them appear as disorganized groups, without internal links or coherent social expression to define them positively in front of the society as a whole. For more details see See Alejandro Portes, "Rationality in the Slum: An Essay on Interpretive Sociology," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 14 (1972), pp. 268-286 and Janice E. Perlman, *The Myth of Marginality Revisited: The Case of Favelas in Rio De Janeiro*, *Perspectives from the Middle East, South Asia, and Latin America* (Lexington Press, 2005), pp. 105–146.
- iv According to Anna Zimmer the visibility, from residents' perspective, is associated with allocation of funds, infrastructure and facilities. Furthermore, knowledge of the population totals might help residents establish claims for more meaningful political participation as citizens. For details See Anna Zimmer, "Enumerating the Semi-Visible: The Politics of Regularizing Delhi's Unauthorized Colonies", *Economic & Political Weekly* 47 (30) (2012: 90).
- v For more details see Castells (2012:15), In his study of power structure relationship mentioned that there is an innate state of conflict for urban spaces, as government and landowners do not want squatters on prime land; while informal communities perceive these places as their homes and sources of livelihood. The origins of collective efforts/movements are to be found in the emotions of individuals and in their networking on the basis of cognitive empathy. Castells, M. (2012) *Networks of outrage and hope: Social movements in the Internet age*. Cambridge. UK: Polity Press.
- vi Bipasha Baruah in her study of 'Women and Property in Urban India' argued that slum dwellers or poor seek out the support of local political leader who can act on their behalf to secure stay orders from courts and to organize protests, demonstration and other visible newsworthy events to derail any plans for displacement. According to her in addition to support from local politicians there is a growing and influential lobby against eviction as well as media and judiciary support for the right of squatters as citizens. Bipasha Baruah, *Women and Property in Urban India* (The University of British Columbia: UBC Press: 2010), p. 114