

Does the COVID -19 tell us the Right to House and Shelter to the people?

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In the past various national and international legal bodies emphasized the right of the house and shelter to humans. Now the Pandemic Covid-19 tells us, to our wonder, that the right to housing, to shelter and habitat is an urgent and essential one for human beings. Covid-19 the deadly virus can be controlled by strict maintenance public order namely 'lockdown' the people in their homes. All countries and their governments, except a few, asked their people to stay at home. Governments around the world assert the home as a place of safety and shelter. Here the greatest problem is with homeless population who has no houses particularly in developing countries like India.

HOUSE-MEANING

According to the Oxford English Dictionary house is a permanent abode. The United Nations Centre for Human Settlements says home signifies not only personal place but also an environment that includes family and friends. Census of India 1991 defines 'houseless, people as the persons who are not living in 'Census houses'. This refers to a structure with roof. Home gives protection and it is a space for family and symbolic functions of humans. Food, clothing and shelter are the basic human needs. The first two are barely managed by the majority of the people, but the third remains beyond the reach of vast segment of population in India. These homeless people can't safeguard themselves from pandemic crisis.

HOMELESSNESS

There are various problems related to homelessness. These include material conditions, privacy, space, personal warmth, comfort, safety and well-being. Women and children face many problems. Homelessness, a typical example of "social exclusion". Generally homeless people are beggars, vagabonds, etc. The most invisible section of society. Here the homeless people are not beggars, but many of them are laborers, in different degrees, both in rural and urban areas. In urban areas they are called City builders who live in slums or under any shadow nearby their worksite.

URBAN HOMELESSNESS

Fantastic citymakers, footloose workers or builders who are recently called as migrant workers who have no house or vote in those cities. Everybody knows that migrant laborers are the most exploited and disenfranchised invisible citizens of India who are estimated at 14 crores in India. In a rapidly urbanizing India, homelessness is a growing concern. The census in 2001 enumerated 1.94 million homeless people in India. Of them 1.16 million lived in villages and 0.77 million in urban areas. As per census 2011 homeless population in India was 1.82 million; might be underestimate. The percentage of migrants to population increased from 30 in 2001 to 37 in 2011. These people are builders of modern India.

The human costs of migration are high due to the faulty implementation of labor laws and not due to migration per se. The chaos and insensitivity are evident everywhere. The migrant workers are treated as irritants and not assumed as our demographic dividend. India is urbanizing. People/workers must migrate to cities. But urban India is accommodating only less than one-third of India's population, its contribution to GDP is far larger. As per Central Statistical Organization estimated the share of GDP of urban India was 38 percent in 1970-71 increased to 52 percent in 1999-00. Here lies the problem of accommodation of migrant workers, namely, housing, their inclusive growth, providing basic services and access to affordable shelter. The labor laws are not helpful to the workers. They are forced to live in slums. As per census 2011, the slum households in the country are 13.7 million.

RURAL HOMELESSNESS

Estimates on homelessness are contradictory. One study made an estimate for 12th Five Year Plan (2012-17) that 48.8 million houses shortage in rural India. 62 million houses shortage as per another estimate that was based on 2011 census and NSS 2009 round data (Arjun Kumar, Estimating Rural Housing Shortage, Economic and Political Weekly, vol.49, Nos.26-27). Another study put at 140 million (Shamsher Singh, et.al., Housing Shortages in Rural India, Review of Agrarian Studies, Vol.3, No.2). Here whichever is correct, the fact is there is large-scale shortage of housing in rural India.

HOUSING PROGRAMES

Primary prevention from homelessness could be affordable housing, social housing and creating employment opportunities. System-based responses can provide legal and political rights to homeless people. The rights of the homeless population are not only state's responsibility in

safeguarding but also saving from social exclusion. The major national programs launched by government of India towards inclusive development of urban areas, particularly, slums are Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) and its sub-missions Basic services to the Urban Poor (BSUP) and Integrated Housing & Slum Development Program (IHSHP) and Affordable Housing in partnership were launched in February 2009. Together, they address the “supply side “ issues of affordable housing. Again in June 2009 Rajiv Was Yojana (RAY) was launched to usher in a slum-free urban India in 5 years and this RAY would support State governments.

At the 75th anniversary of India’s independence, the prime minister ignited a mission of Housing for All, by 2022, under which the Ministry of Housing & Urban Poverty Alleviation launched PRADHAN MANTRI AWAS YOJANA-URBAN in 2015 and for rural areas the Ministry of Rural development restructured the earlier scheme INDIRA AWAS YOJANA as PRADHAN MANTRI AWAS YOJANA-GRAMIN in 2016. Both schemes will provide central assistance to implementing agencies through States and UTs for providing houses to homeless people by 2022. In this connection three-member panel constituted by the Supreme Court of India and in their final report exposed that about 90per cent of the urban homeless in India are still seeking for shelter. In rural areas there is vagueness in handling government funds and homeless population did not receive due consideration. In-spite of all these toothless programes large numbers of people is homeless in India.

Food, cloth and shelter are basic needs of humans. The first two are met by hook or crook, but the last one but not the least is not met by many. Hence the homeless residents of India are struggling hard to fight Coronavirus. A basic precautionary measure to safeguard from Coronavirus is to stay at home. But how do homeless stay at home? To face the COVID -19 crisis confine to the house is vital to everyone, otherwise, they can’t save themselves from Coronavirus attack.