

Messy and Hidden Urbanization

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Recent research studies on urbanization in Pakistan particularly the Social Policy Development Centre Annual Review and the World Bank Opportunities and Challenges of Pakistan's Urbanization in its 2016 development update are noteworthy. The latter report has termed Urbanization as Messy and Hidden. Messy urbanization 'refers to the proliferation of urban sprawl and slums while hidden urbanization, a related concept refers to urbanization that is not captured in official statistics, often on the peripheries of major cities'. Urbanization improves overall productivity of the economy which is the main driver of economic growth by reallocation of labor from low productive sectors such as agriculture to high productive manufacturing and formal services sectors. High density of populations reduces the cost of provision of infrastructure and services. Agglomeration economies allow scaling up of production, spill over of skills, and transfer of know how, availability of intermediate inputs and reduced length of supply chain. However, in Pakistan diseconomies take place because of congestion and scarcity premium that are paid by the migrants for land, housing, water, transport (due to dysfunctional institutions of governance) to exploitative mafias backed by political parties. Half of the urban population lives in subhuman slums. Productivity gains of urbanization have therefore eluded us. This is what messy and ugly urbanization is in actual practice.

What about hidden urbanization? SPDC report has estimated, by extrapolating 1998 census and inter censal growth rates derived from surveys, that Pakistan's urban population in 2015 would be 72.5 million or 38.6 percent in 2015. Casual empiricism and serious studies have challenged the definition of 'Urban' areas used in the 1998 census as it covers only those living in the municipalities and cantonments. Raza Ali using a more broad based definition of urban and urbanizing areas has shown in his studies that Lahore public sector sub urban development (Johar Town, e.g.), most private sector suburbs and the Defense Housing Authority are not included in the count for urban Lahore. 'Similarly settlements peripheral to the city, capitalising upon their proximity, transport links, employment opportunities and access to services have grown substantially and even acquired urban characteristics' are not included in the census. He argues that the attributes of administrative areas do not adequately reflect the process of urbanization and agglomeration. Using density, urban core and distance to city his re-estimation of 1998 census shows that the urban population would increase by at least 20 percent to 48 million i.e. 36 percent of the total population. Assuming 4 percent average growth rate between 1998 and 2015 the current urban population would be 87 million or 46 percent of the total population today.

This mixture of high urban population containing a growing middle class, demographics favoring younger population --- better educated, more self-confident, a vibrant social media and an active vocal civil society can have serious transformational consequences for the country's politics, governance and delivery of basic services. The 2016 census results should lead to fresh delimitation of constituencies for the national and provincial assemblies shifting the balance of power from the dominance of rural electorate (70 percent) to an even handed division of the population (55:45). The rural constituencies are by and large, driven by politics of **biradri**, kinship, familial ties, tribal affinity, obligations to feudals and are characterized largely by patron-client relationship. On the other

hand, the expectations of urban electorate are related to delivery of tangible results and promised parameters of performance. Those who are unable to meet these expectations are usually shown doors as the threshold of the urbanites for tolerating incompetent, self-serving and corrupt individuals is relatively low. Even the MQM has exhibited a high turnover rate at successive elections. A comparison between the candidates contesting the elections over five decades shows persistence of dynastic element and family orientation as significant determinants in the rural constituencies with low turn over. In the urban constituencies the fatality rate is relatively high and new faces are more common. Party affiliations do matter relatively more in the rural and chasing the 'electables' and bringing them in their fold is the major endeavour of leading political parties. The same families dominating the scene in the rural Pakistan for long are found to be more prone to changing party loyalties than their urban counterparts. However, this tendency has been curbed since the constitutional amendment that forces a person to resign from his seat if he crosses the floor. The complexion of the parliament and the provincial assemblies and the electoral outcomes in 2018 is therefore likely to be quite different from those of the 2008 and 2013 if the elections are held under freshly delimited constituencies..

The induction of large number of urban elected representatives would also help in changing the governance structure. Accountability for results, Transparency, Right to Information, Financial Disclosure and audit would be in greater demand by the urban electorate. They would be more interested in getting access to public services such as education, health, water supply, sanitation, transport, land for housing and security. These services are delivered largely by the local governments. The MNA's and MPA's would therefore per force have to work with the Municipal Corporations, Municipal Committees, Town Committees and cantonments to satisfy their voters. The impetus for reforms of institutions delivering these services would therefore be shared by all three tiers of the government. The present tension and in-built conflict that is the main hurdle in adopting reforms would thus be eased and give way to a harmonious and synergetic relationship thus affecting the quality of governance.

The sequence of events that can minimize the current mess associated with urbanization and unshackle its hidden potential is clear. Hold a fair census in 2016, delimit the constituencies on the basis of the census results and empower and resource the local governments. Once the new elected representatives come to office their survival instinct would force them to reform the institutions that deliver basic public services for the fear of being thrown out of office by an informed and demanding electorate. These changes would not happen during one five year period but at least a beginning ought to be made now in all sincerity and earnestness by holding the census and delimiting the constituencies.

Those who are anxious for qualitative change in our national politics and democratic governance should work for this sequence to reach its logical conclusion. Then only will our fractious politics move away from a delight in conflict and confrontation to regard and care for the ordinary citizens and the abrasive texture of our governance will give way to a more responsive, performance oriented culture. The prayers for a Messiah will then come to a halt.