



Urban Welfare Reforms in Asia: A Sociological Appraisal

Mohammad Taghi Sheykhi

Professor Emeritus of Sociology, Alzabara University, Tehran, Iran.

Email: mtszykhi@alzabara.ac.ir & mtszykhi@yaboo.com

Abstract: Asia comprising of different cultures, norms and values is rapidly changing due to adoption of new welfare reforms. Such a change is highly seen in urban settings. Larger cities are more involved with new welfare patterns. Many cities are exploding with the appearance of new lifestyles. Urbanisation, modernisation and industrialisation, the main three factors causing urban welfare reforms in Asia are on the increase. Many large urban centers are receiving an increasing number of migrants simply to access more welfare in the new areas. Many cities including Bombay, Delhi, Calcutta, Tehran, Tokyo, Istanbul, Bangkok and many more are the apparent examples of the issue. Such a flow of migrants to cities creates an increasing number of vulnerabilities in the congested cities. The overcrowded cities need to put into practice new urban reforms to be able to respond to the needs of the newly-arrived migrants. It is worth noting the social satisfaction of the rural people reaching the new places.

Keywords: Welfare in Asia, Social welfare in China, Norms and values, Sociology

Received : 11 October 2022

Revised : 10 November 2022

Accepted : 15 November 2022

Published : 23 December 2022

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Sheykhi, M.T. (2022). Urban Welfare Reforms in Asia: A Sociological Appraisal, *Society and Culture Development in India*, 2: 2, pp. 319-328. <https://doi.org/10.47509/SCDI.2022.v02i02.06>

Introduction

Sociologically speaking, cities are the hubs of change and transitions of all kinds. Such a frame of change was there in the Western countries as well before. As industrialisation first happened in cities, that caused changes and welfare in such places. Similarly, talents and progressive thoughts first flourished in the new centers. Urban hubs created hospitals, various clubs, schools, food-serving centers/restaurants and many more, which were symbols of welfare, or leading to welfare. Cities are known to be attracting many rural people who come simply for more income, more amenities and more secure future for the whole family. In Asia, many

cities have been growing fast in the countries of the continent since 1950s. Currently 52 per cent of the Asian nations are registered as urban (WPDS, 2022). As the rate of rural-urban is not balanced, that is why more urban residents are observed in some parts. The reverse of the phenomenon is seldom seen in Asia; only in case of Japan it is somehow reported, in which some aging people migrate to villages for work in their old age. In 1914, the Chinese Communist Party announced reforms aimed at rural citizens access to historically urban social programs (Chan, 2015). As of 2020, the Indian expenditure on social security and welfare was approximately USD 180 billion, which was 7.3 per cent of the GDP (PIB, 2019).

As the world's largest continent, Asia, with more than 56 countries, also has the world's largest population. The Asian continent has undergone many changes in the various economic, social, industrial, and other sectors since the 1950s with the goal of achieving greater prosperity and inclusive social reform. The Asian continent has also achieved significant results following its efforts. Countries such as China, India, Indonesia and many other Asian countries have been very successful in this movement. Eradicating urban poverty is one of the themes that has emerged in East Asia in recent decades. Economic growth, civilising the population, industrial development, correcting food shortages, improving the status of women, increasing literacy, improving incomes, and so on, have all helped to improve this. East Asian countries, including China in the East and India in the South, and many other countries in the region, have been very successful in this movement, and have made significant progress. In other words, following the achievement of the mentioned indicators, they have also developed urban welfare in their communities. This movement itself will and will lead to further improvements in terms of population health, population longevity, population enjoyment, and so on. Therefore, the sociology of urban welfare reform in Asia should always put these areas on its agenda in order to achieve greater social welfare. One of the goals of countries today is to achieve greater prosperity, and this has led to competition between different countries.

Method of Research

Methodology used in the present article is of qualitative type. In that, various paradigms have been used to find out about the facts regarding pandemics during the history. Qualitative research usually studies people, events or areas in their natural settings. In finding facts for the research, the researcher engaged in careful data collection and thoughtful analysis of what was relevant. In the documentary

research applied for the present research, printed and written materials were widely regarded. The research was performed as a qualitative library-type in which the researcher had to refer to the relevant and related sources. In the current research, various documents were thoroughly investigated, and the needful inferences were made. The data fed by the investigator in the present article is hopefully reliable. Though literature on pandemics is very limited, yet the author tried to investigate many different resources in order to elicit the necessary information to build up the text.

How Welfare is Needed in Asia

Welfare needs in Asia are more concentrated in urban areas; that is, poor urban areas. As the Asian region is subject to vast social, demographic and economic changes, and in this movement more urban areas are referred to, therefore, the evaluation of urban areas in Asia in terms of how their social welfare is a priority for many countries in the region. Many Asian cities are in poor social welfare. This means that these areas, which have generally encountered large numbers of immigrants, have not been able to easily meet the growing needs of the new population. This is despite the fact that such citizens did not feel very poor in their former settlements earlier; simply because rural areas were generally lower and weaker. While new places (inhabited cities) are always exposed to more competition. Therefore, providing welfare in its urban areas is considered as one of the duties of the governments. Despite economic growth and significant reduction in urban poverty among various East Asian nations, there are still many concerns. Although many Asian nations have experienced significant economic growth in the years since 1950, at the same time, given what has been covered more, that is to say, large-scale migration to urban areas has disrupted the relationship between supply and demand in the welfare sector, and as a result, citizenship poverty is still present in many urban areas of Asia. The emergence of the phenomenon of poverty has led to many social ills. Cases such as social corruption, the spread of illegal / unconventional interactions, and the like are among the consequences of urban poverty. This phenomenon can be seen today in many different parts of Asia. Four of these notable cases are:

- 1) Although there has been a significant reduction in urban poverty, poverty figures may be largely misleading. This means that in some cities the cost of living has risen rapidly, and poverty estimates do not take this into account. Many urban communities, with an emphasis on developing countries, have alleviated many cases of poverty in recent years, but at the

- same time, the rise of inflation and rising prices has reduced the economic power of individuals, leaving many citizens in food poverty. Therefore, urban welfare in the form of economic, social, environmental and the like should always be on the agenda of governments. In such circumstances, income levels have not been adequate to provide food, housing, basic services and transportation (Arndt, 2015). The reality of urban poverty is explained by the fact that studies have shown that the educational status of children of urban immigrants is lower than their rural status (Banks, 2015a). In this way, urban poverty manifests itself in various forms, overtly and covertly, in various fields, or in other words, leaves undesirable effects.
- 2) While income inequalities have historically been negligible in Asian cities, there are indications that these inequalities are increasing (Banks, 2015b). The figures show growing economic and social differences in Asian cities. As can be seen from Chinese cities, the Gini coefficient has risen from 24 per cent to 32 per cent over the 10 years 2001-1990 (Beal, 2010). Because urban areas are centers of propaganda and commerce, and more and more goods and services are constantly appearing in these areas, many citizens are not easily able to adapt to the conditions that have arisen, which in turn leads to the emergence of poverty in them to a large extent.
 - 3) The growth of urban inequality indicates the fact that the dimensions of inequality have made many urban residents slums and deprived of basic services (Byceson, 2010). As cities are constantly expanding, with more families moving to urban areas, urban inequality is increasing, especially in developing countries; That is, a phenomenon that has turned many people into marginalised and deprived sections of society. This situation is more prevalent today in African societies and to a lesser extent in Asia. Therefore, city planners and officials must always put urban inequalities on their agenda, and minimise it as much as possible. In such circumstances, public welfare must always be strengthened and expanded so that new citizens can use such services and welfare facilities. The percentage of people living in insecure and inadequate services in Asia is estimated at around 28 per cent (Burgess, 2010). That is, about a third of Asia's population lives in non-standard areas. Hence, the Asian continent needs a lot of investment and large-scale housing construction over the coming decades.
 - 4) As examined in four Asian countries: Indonesia, Malaysia, South Korea, and Thailand, in the late 1990s, households in those communities

experienced significant financial crises and income insecurity (Burgess, 2005). That is, the flow that negatively affects the quality of life itself. Likewise, these conditions led to a significant proportion of households in these communities migrating to urban areas, solely for the purpose of gaining greater security and well-being. The crisis posed many challenges for the four countries. This has led to many cities in the above four countries having overpopulated populations.

Consequences of the Crisis

Following this situation (above), many households have faced employment and wage crises that have had a profound effect on their well-being. This situation made the vulnerability of the urban poor even more, and as a result deprived them of many of their basic needs. Subsequently, urban and social planners gradually laid the groundwork for reform, and made reforms in the form of medium- and long-term plans. For example, the introduction of demographic and family planning programs in China, India, and many other East Asian societies prevented the spread of poverty further, and thus the normalisation of life gradually expanded. The result of such reforms is the current societies of China, South Korea, and India, have experienced many social and economic developments over the past three decades. Cities such as Mumbai and Delhi have faced spatial, environmental, and needs problems, and the needs of the emerging middle class have emerged as a problem (Burgess, 2010). Meeting the infrastructure needs for such cities also requires investment. The challenge of advancing low-income and disadvantaged households can only be met by pursuing urban development plans. At the same time, there is no single and effective strategy to achieve this goal (poverty alleviation and lack of income), and different experiences in terms of society should be used (Dewitde, 2013). Thus, the tendency towards cities and the increase of urban population have brought various challenges for this type of communities. Depending on their type and cultural conditions, different countries have implemented initiatives to reduce or eliminate these disorders.

Department of Support

As a result of the efforts made and the projects implemented, incomes have increased and the level of poverty has decreased in many cases, but at the same time the cost of living has been increasing. In recent decades, Asian countries have generally implemented schemes to gain access to more production and income; In a way that

promotes social welfare in general. At the same time, because economic indicators do not work well in these societies, in many cases these countries have faced rising prices and low incomes; That is, a phenomenon that has negatively affected social welfare itself. Asian societies have generally and always experienced population growth in recent years, and in contrast, economic resources in these societies have not developed in proportion to population growth. The gap created in this field needs to be corrected and treated in order to eliminate the poverty that has arisen. Urban resources are also increasingly seeking to meet the needs of the middle-income class (Honwana, 2012). Urban areas in Asia have seen a steady increase in immigrant population in recent decades. Despite the efforts of urban planners, a significant proportion of urban dwellers face economic and welfare constraints. The result of such a phenomenon is generally the emergence of marginalisation in urban areas in such communities. This phenomenon is easily seen in countries such as India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and the like in Asia. This phenomenon needs to be corrected and treated in order to prevent the dimensions of poverty and social and economic disorders. But at the same time, the cost of living has been rising. Urban areas are also increasingly seeking to meet the needs of the middle-income class. At the same time, strategy and the use of local budgets or investments bring immediate benefits to low-income households. Many households, especially immigrant households, generally look for occasional investments to improve their livelihoods. For example, by increasing the number of schools and removing the cost of enrolling children, these types of households can easily access the education system. However, in the presence of registration fees in the context of low incomes of citizens and immigrants, it is not possible for many children of this population to enter the education system easily. By using the urban poor themselves as legal and effective factors, urban development can be promoted. Since urban development itself requires comprehensive cooperation and optimal use of human resources, effective measures can be taken in cities to evaluate the existing force within cities, and to pursue urban development by using the existing forces. Otherwise, the urban poor pursue their lives in the form of marginalization. This situation generally puts the living conditions of the citizens in a state of regression. Hence, new immigrants and citizens need comprehensive and timely investments. Such people in terms of health, education, livelihood and the like, should always be covered and invested.

Also, due to the large number of poor people in urban areas, the development of such projects itself takes a long time. As many parts of Asia are subject to widespread and continuous migration, urban areas became vulnerable in various ways. For example, a significant proportion of such immigrants have become slum

dwellers; That is, a population that is deprived of many living facilities. In contrast, many personal and social harms such as illness, addiction, and the like increase between them. The emergence of deviant patterns among this type of population will not be easily controlled.

Social Welfare in China

China's social welfare system has undergone various changes throughout history, and at the same time the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security has taken over the responsibility of the social security system. Improving social security in every society, including China, has led to social welfare. Providing social security requires adequate investment, well-planned planning, and the creation of the necessary infrastructure in a given community. China has provided many areas of social security in recent decades following its economic development; in such a way that it can generalise more social welfare in the society as much as possible between different strata. Prior to the reforms of the 1980s, the Chinese socialist government met the needs of society within its capabilities from infancy to death. For example, child care, education, housing, livelihood, health care, and care for the elderly were the responsibilities of the government. By pursuing such programs, China has been able to provide the infrastructure for industrial and technological development in that society, and has always sought to protect it. The transfer of many of these fields to far and near places in that country has ultimately contributed greatly to China's industrial and economic development. Such support was implemented by the government in urban, industrial, and rural areas. For example, the establishment of the barefoot doctors' project in that country itself contributed greatly to the health and social well-being of the rural community in that country. Barefoot physicians were meant to train physicians who were shorter and more intensive, and consequently their primary mission was to provide medical care to those living in rural areas. This has led to high levels of prosperity for more than half of China's population.

Since the 1990s, new and progressive reforms have taken place in various sectors of social welfare in that country (China). Factors such as education, income growth and the like have contributed to this growth of social culture. Following its economic development, China has always considered many prerequisites for economic development, and has invested in these areas. Thus social welfare has developed in various forms in that country. The result of such changes is a known increase in life expectancy in that country. Article 14 of the Chinese Constitution

stipulates that the government must establish and reform the social welfare system in accordance with the level of economic development of that country. Therefore, in relation to the economic development in that country, the development of social welfare, the increase of services, medical facilities, the increase of incomes and the like have also taken place. These criteria can be used as an effective model in other countries. It is noteworthy that the provision of these items has greatly accelerated and strengthened economic growth in Chinese society. In China, the government has also encouraged and coordinated the private sector to provide more social support to low-income families. Adopting such policies has greatly helped to eliminate social and economic conflicts. This process, in turn, has led to the development of culture. Hence, less developed societies should also use the above experienced patterns in countries like China; In a way that further develops social welfare. In 2004, China experienced the largest decline in its population since 1999. By using private sector methods and mechanisms, various economic sectors have been activated to a large extent, and thus the proportion of the poor population in the mentioned society has decreased. Under the plan, people with a per capita income of less than \$ 80 a month fell 10 per cent, and those with a per capita income of less than \$ 11 a month fell more than 11 per cent. Thus, in the form of steps, general and objective poverty in the mentioned society has gradually taken a decreasing trend, and in contrast, social welfare has appeared more than ever in the past between different strata.

Social welfare reforms in China since the late 1990s have included unemployment insurance, medical insurance, workers' compensation insurance, maternity and childbirth benefits, pension and health benefits, and public care. In recent decades, China has made many such welfare reforms in its industrialised society, both in terms of public satisfaction and in terms of increasing its social welfare scale. This has greatly enhanced the general quality of life in that community. It is noteworthy that in the absence of reforms in a society, there will be no significant improvement in industry and production. Therefore, countries should always establish various reforms in their societies. From 1979 to 2015, China pursued a one-child policy. It greatly reduced the pressure on government and economic resources, and in turn provided greater access to development in that community. Therefore, in order to achieve urban welfare, welfare policies must be implemented in different communities. In this way, more development in societies can be achieved. While the one-child policy in China has changed since 2015, families can have a second child as long as they pay taxes (Retrieved, 2016). Based on what has been said, governments should always have a comprehensive oversight of the various sectors, including how their births are conducted. It is noteworthy that the increase in birth defects at a

certain point in time, itself leads to an increase in aging in subsequent decades. Likewise, this process or increase in fertility itself requires more employment in the coming years than the number of births in previous years, and if employment opportunities are not provided, various social, economic and cultural challenges will arise in a given society.

Conclusion

Asian countries have experienced a lot of change towards more welfare and higher quality of life because of more connections, more communication, more industrialisation, and more urbanisation, extension of education among all classes and castes, etc., caused more welfare reforms in Asia. In this way, increasing welfare patterns were adopted. Modern social media accelerated the change in all patterns of life. As cities provide more amenities, many people accepted/preferred cities which give them treatments/hospital services—receiving longer life expectancy and many more. Cities provided the new entrants with more options, the right of choice, the right of education, the right of economic independence and many more rights. Such a change gave especially the women the right to choose how many children they want during their marital life. However, urban welfare reforms created a revolution within the life of the citizens not only in Asia, but in all other parts of the world as well.

References

- Arndt, C.L. Demery, A. McKay., & Tarp, F. (2015). 'Growth and poverty reduction in Tanzania'. *UNU-WIDER Working Paper 2015/51*.
- Banks, N. (2015a). 'Understanding youth: Towards a psychology of youth poverty and development in sub-Saharan African cities'. *Brooks World Poverty Institute Working Paper Series No 216*, University of Manchester, Manchester.
- Banks, N. (2015b). 'Education and the political economy of development: The 'learning crisis' in the developing world?'. In C. Death, D. Hulme, N. Banks, H. Underhill, D. Arubayi & P. Skidmore (Eds.). 'Is there a 'learning crisis' in Africa? Education and development post-2015'. *The Davies Papers: Africa Series No 8*, pages 8–9.
- Beall, J., Guha-Khasnobil, B., & Kanbur, R. (2010). 'Introduction: African development in an urban world: Beyond the tipping point'. *Urban Forum Vol 21*, No 3, pages 187–204.
- Bryceson, D.F. (2010). 'Africa at work: Transforming occupational identity and morality'. In Bryceson, (Ed.). *Africa at work: Occupational change, identity and morality*. Practical Action Publishing, Rugby, pages 3–26.

- Burgess, G.T., & Burton, T. (2010). 'Introduction'. In A. Burton, & H. Charton-Bigot, (Eds.). *Generations past: History of youth in East Africa*. Ohio University Press, pages 1–24.
- Burgess, T. (2005). 'Introduction to youth and citizenship in East Africa' *Africa Today Vol 51*, No 3, pages vii–xxiv.
- Burgess, T. (2010). 'Raw youth, school leavers and the emergence of structural unemployment in late colonial urban Tanganyika'. In A. Burgess & H. Charton-Bigot, (Eds.). *Generations past: A history of youth in East Africa*. Ohio University Press, pages 108–134.
- Chan, K.W. (2015). 'Five decades of the Chinese Hukou system'. In *Handbook of Chinese migration: Identity and well-being*. (pp.23-47), Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, Inc.
- Dewilde, C. (2003). 'A life-course perspective on social exclusion and poverty'. *British Journal of Sociology Vol 54*, No 1, pages 109–128.
- Honwana, A. (2012). *The time of youth: Work, social change and politics in Africa*. Kumarian Press, Stirling, VA.
- PIB. (2019). India. *World Population Data Sheet, 2022*, Population Reference Bureau: Washington DC. Retrieved, 2016.
- World Population Data Sheet. (2022) *Population Reference Bureau*, Washington DC.