Socio-Economic Implications of Urban Spatial Transformation: A Access of Mulund, Mumbai

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Abstract: As the world is getting more and more urban, the impacts of the forces of urbanization are growing more and more prolific day by day. The urban age has brought about a significant amount of transformations to spatial entities across the world. Gone are the days when cities and suburbs stood as distinctly separate entities. Today, it is difficult to say where the city ends and the suburbs begin. Both cities and suburbs today stand as a part of the ‘urban continuum’ that sprawl across many miles covering areas that were once deemed as rural. Under the impact of the forces of urbanization, the global south is transforming like never before. The Indian city of Mumbai presents a conspicuous demonstration of urban transformation where following the saturation of the city’s core the suburbs have emerged as the drivers of growth. Needless to say, Suburban Mumbai is transforming at a drastic pace. At present a particular suburb, namely, Mulund has surfaced at the forefront of this spatial transformation. Thus, an attempt is being made in this paper to analyze the urban spatial transformation of Mulund and to comprehend the socio-economic implications of this transformation. The main purpose of this study is to contribute towards achieving a greater understanding of the changing character of urban space in the suburban arena of Mumbai. The methodology of the study is based on a mixed-method approach wherein both qualitative and quantitative data of primary and secondary nature are used to draw the analysis. The findings of the study reveal the manner in which urban spatial transformation has rendered the suburb a renewed socio-economic identity. It dwells on both positive as well as negative implications of the emerging socio-economic characteristics of the suburb.

Keywords: Socio-economic, Spatial, Suburb, Transformation, Urban.

I. INTRODUCTION

The world we inhabit today is transforming at a pace faster than ever before. In fact, tremendous spatial transformation forms an inherent character of the urban spaces of today. Urban spaces in present times have become extremely complex (Amin and Thrift, 2008). The prior existing distinction between cities and suburbs has been blurred today. The core of the metropolises have come to be decentered and much of the economic, cultural, and political growth can be seen to be taking place in the peripheral (suburban) areas (Knox, 2008). In fact, the historically suburban spaces have evolved to form a part of the urban spaces of today. This can be clearly seen in case of the Indian city of Mumbai, where following the saturation of the city’s core the suburbs have emerged as drivers of growth. As a matter of fact, the growth rate of population in the eastern and western suburbs of Mumbai combined together is recorded to be 8.29 percent for the decade 2001 to 2011; while in terms of the core of Mumbai a negative growth of 7.57 percent is recorded for the same decade (Census of India, 2011). Thus, the suburbs of Mumbai are at the forefront of spatial transformation in present times.

Dixit (2011) terms the rise of suburbs as an inescapable phase in the history of urban growth. In spite of the evolution of the suburbs to become an integral part of the urban spaces of present times, it is unfortunate that much of the studies on ‘urban’ do not focus on the suburbs. This is especially the case for the countries of the global south, such as India, where the forces of urbanization are making drastic changes, yet the literature addressing aspects of urban change at the suburban level are extremely limited. Shrivastava (1987) pointed out to the lack of studies on suburbs in India about three decades back. Even after these many years, this scenario, unfortunately, cannot be said to have changed. This calls for the attention of the urban scholars on various aspects of suburban transformation. Keeping this mind, an attempt has been made in this paper to study the urban spatial transformation of Mulund, an eastern suburb of Mumbai, and to comprehend the socio-economic implications of this transformation.

II. OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

A. Objectives

To understand the nature of urban spatial transformation taking place in Mulund; and

To explore the socio-economic implications of this urban spatial transformation.

B. Research Questions

(a) How has Mulund undergone its urban spatial transformation?

(b) What are the major socio-economic implications of this urban spatial transformation on the suburb?

(c) Has it been positive or negative for the suburb?

III. METHODOLOGY

This The methodology of the study is based on a mixed methods approach – ‘where qualitative data or statistical trends are combined with qualitative data such as stories and personal experiences to derive a better understanding of the research problem than it is most likely to be obtained from either form of the data alone’ (Creswell, 2014). This type of research involves combining at the least, one quantitative and one qualitative component in the research (Bergman, 2008). Accordingly, the data collected for the study is of
both qualitative and quantitative types. The data is collected from sources that are both primary and secondary. Primary data is collected directly from the field, using the methods of field observation, questionnaire survey, and interview, whereas, the collection of secondary data is done by means of an extensive review of relevant books, reports, journals, news articles, and property web portals. The data thus collected is analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively to prepare the research paper.

IV. ‘MULUND’ – WHERE AND WHY?

Having said that the present study is based at the suburb of Mulund in Mumbai, it becomes necessary to specify the whereabouts of the study area and justify its choice. The study area, Mulund, lies in the T ward of Mumbai Suburban District and forms a part of the Kurla Taluka. It geographically extends from 19°08’N to 19°13’N latitudes and 72°53’E to 72°58’E longitudes (Fig. 1). The names Mulund and T-ward are commonly used to refer to the one and same area. It lies to the south of the Thane city, east of the Sanjay Gandhi National Park, west of the Thane creek, northeast of Bhandup, and north of Kanjurmarg. Topographically, Mulund is a plain region and it has a gentle slope from west to east. It is divided into two parts – Mulund East and Mulund West – by the suburban railway line passing through it. Although Mulund also includes some portion of the Sanjay Gandhi National Park and Salt Pan land adjacent to the suburb area, considering the nature of the study, the main focus has been laid on the area of the suburban neighborhood.

The choice of Mulund for the study is based on the fact that the suburb has undergone a tremendous spatial transformation in recent times, which has not only redefined its characteristics but also rendered the suburb a unique urban persona. This transformation has impacted drastically on the socio-economic scenario of the suburb, thus, calling for exploration into the socio-economic implications of urban spatial transformation in the study area.

V. RESULTS

The results of the study are given below:

1. Mulund has undergone a tremendous urban spatial transformation that has redefined its characteristics from a lesser known industrial suburb to an area that is no longer different from the urban core of Mumbai.

2. Deindustrialization and the consequent gentrification of the industrial belt in the western half of Mulund have been the main catalyst to the change.

3. This urban spatial transformation has had many socio-economic implications such as the influx of migrants, a shift in the economic base, rise in urban inequality, gradual decrease in housing affordability, and change in nature of employment.

4. As a result of these implications, the suburb has gained its present socio-economic characteristics which are a mix of both positive and negative aspects.

VI. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

A. The Urban Spatial Transformation of Mulund

Around 30 years back Mulund was a lesser-known suburb of Mumbai. It was a typical suburb that mostly housed the resident population involved in service sector along its eastern half while its western half had some industries and ‘chawls’ (housing the worker population) along with a colony of refugees who were settled in the area during the phase of India’s independences.

As narrated by Mansukh, a senior citizen of 76, who has been a resident of the suburb for most of his life, “Around thirty to forty years back, Mulund was like a village. There were very few buildings here and that too were not more than three or four stories high. The streets were also not concretized.” (Source: Residents’ Interview, 2018).

Another resident Pramila, a 60 years old long term resident of the suburb stated, “I came to live in Mulund 33 years back after I got married. At that time the suburb was full of greenery. There were very fewer people and the number of people that could be seen on the roads was even lesser. So, sometimes while taking walks in the evening, it used to get too solitary.” (Source: Residents’ Interview, 2018)

Fast forward today, Mulund is a densely populated area that has shed off its suburban character and emerged as an urban entity. The western half of Mulund no longer bears its past industrial character, since following the deindustrialization phase of the late 80s and early 90s, the industries moved out of the suburb. These vacated industrial sites served as spaces for residential and commercial development in the face of the congestion of Mumbai’s core (Kulshreshtha, 2018). The western half of Mulund has undergone gentrification –“the process by which working-class residential neighborhoods are rehabilitated by middle-class homebuyers, landlords and professional developers’ (Smith, 1982). It has thus, come to be marked by the presence of gated neighborhoods, office spaces, malls, supermarkets, and hypermarkets. The eastern half has remained mostly residential with remarkable growth in the number of residences due to the coming up of high rises. The suburb has also witnessed growth in basic and social infrastructure along with improved transport connectivity (Ramamirtham, 2014).

B. Socio-Economic Implications of Urban Spatial Transformation

Influx of Migrants: The spatial transformation of Mulund has led to the influx of migrants to the suburb. From the...
analysis of the sample data, it is revealed that the suburb currently consists of 70 percent migrants and 30 percent local residents. Migration is not a new phenomenon in Mulund if we consider the episodes of refugees moving into the suburb following the partition of India. In fact, the surviving number of the then refugees, along with their descendants residing in Mulund colony, account for about 35,000 people at present (Home Times, 2018). Similarly, it also attracted migrants from different parts of the state and beyond to relocate to the suburb seeking employment in the industries that were once operational here. At present people are moving into the suburb mainly due to the real-estate growth.

The main reasons cited by the migrant population for moving into the suburb as per the period of migration are given below (Fig. 2).

It can be seen from the above figure that the majority of the migrations that have happened prior to 30 years were mostly occupational in nature. This can be associated with the existence of factories in the western half of the suburb. These factories not only employed the migrant workers but also housed them in the nearby chawls (low-cost tenements). In the last 20 to 30 years, the majority of the migrations to the suburb have been related to purchasing of property. This was the phase when post de-industrial real-estate growth started taking place in the suburb. Within last 10 to 20 years, most of the migrations to the suburb have happened due to marriage and expansion of family size. This type of migration is basically a product of the apartment living, where in most cases when a new member is added to the family the shortage of space leads to the division of the family and separation of households. Within the last 10 years, occupation and accessibility related migration have gained prominence in the suburb. With the growth of the retail and service sector, job opportunities have increased in the suburb. Besides, with increased transport linkages, the suburb’s accessibility has drastically improved which has naturally made it suitable for residents to commute to other areas of Mumbai, Thane and Navi Mumbai.

The sample data reveals that most of the migrations in Mulund from1991 to 2017 have taken place from other suburbs of Mumbai (48 percent), followed by from Mumbai City District (29 percent), other states of India (14 percent) and other areas of Mumbai Metropolitan Region (9 percent) respectively (Fig. 3).

The migrant population of Mulund depicts a vibrant mix of Marathi (35 percent), Gujarati (15 percent), Hindi (11 percent), Malayali (10 percent), Sindi (9 percent), Punjabi (5 percent), Marwari (4 percent), Tamil (3 percent) and other linguistic groups (8 percent) (Fig. 4).

The migrant population of the suburb also has been religiously diverse. Although most migrants belong to the Hindu religion (86 percent), the migrant population as of 2018 are also represented by Muslims (2 percent), Christians (5 percent), Sikhs (4 percent), Jains (2 percent) and Buddhists (1 percent) (Fig. 5).
Urban inequality: The urban spatial transformation of Mulund has led to the growth of urban inequalities. The gentrification of the industrial belt displaced the then factory workers residing in the chawls adjacent to the industries. While on the one hand, the earlier industrial belt turned into a middle and upper-class neighborhood, on the other hand, the families of the workers (who chose to stay in Mulund) were ultimately pushed into the slums following their displacement from the chawls.

Even in those cases where the families of the worker were provided low budget flats in exchange of their chawl rooms, many of the families could not adjust with the lifestyle change and high maintenance cost compelling them to look towards the slums for their accommodation.

Ramesh, a 62 years old former factory worker of Mulund, who used to reside in one of such chawls narrates,

"Post-closure of our factory, the company allowed us to continue our stay in the Chawl, where many of us stayed, while many others left for their native places. Thereafter, the builders who wished to build residential high rises in the location of our Chawl approached and in exchange for the Chawl, they accommodated us in low budget flats nearby. Some people stayed in the flats while others sold them at good prices and with the money, they left for other areas. Presently, on the land where our Chawl stood earlier, stands lavishly build residential high rises accommodating the affluent class."

Mohan, a 35 years auto-rickshaw driver and the son of a former factory worker of Mulund narrates the experience of his family in this context as,

“We were unable to adjust ourselves in the new lifestyle. Firstly, we were not accustomed to the closed-door culture of flats, and secondly, the maintenance cost incurred in the flat was too high for us. So, we decided to sell it off and relocated to a chawl room in a nearby slum.” (Source: Residents’ Interview, 2018)

Thus, the urban spatial transformation of Mulund created a scenario of urban inequality in the suburb.

Shift in the economic base: After moving out of the earlier existing industries out of Mulund, there was a major shift in Mulund’s economy. The economy of the suburb came to be driven by the real estate sector and ‘retail and business sector’. In fact, after deindustrialization, Mulund resurfaced into becoming a retail hub within a period of less than a decade (Nair, 2005). The coming up of the Nirmal Lifestyle and the R-Mall in the early 2000s marked the beginning of mall culture in the suburb. Although the Nirmal lifestyle has been shut down and is being redeveloped into a residential project, the R-Mall is fully functional, offering a high profile shopping experience. The R-Mall houses more than 50 brands, including Raymond’s, Westside, Planet M, Ruff Kids, Tanishq, Pizza Hut, and Subway. The mall also has a 1,300-seat 4-screen multiplex (“R MALL DEVELOPERS - Move ahead of the competition”, n.d.). Many other supermarkets and hypermarkets too have come up in various areas of the suburb.

There has been significant retail and commercial development in the region fostering its development. Various organizations like ‘BFSI-India’ and ‘ValueAdd’ have relocated their offices to Mulund considering the advantages that it offers as a business hub. Nonetheless, Mulund has also become a preferred location for the startups venturing into the business world. The coming up of a number of business parks such as the 360 Degree Business Park, O2 Business Commercial Park, and Ecstacy Business Park have accommodated the emerging office spaces in the area.

Decree in housing affordability: Mulund has emerged as one of the well-recognized housing micro markets of Mumbai and a preferred housing destination. The affordability of housing has been a major factor attracting home buyers to the suburb in the last few decades. The housing market of Mulund at present is increasingly addressing the middle and higher income groups of the population, mostly comprising of the NRIs, the business class and the service sector professionals (Sethi, 2018).

The tremendous growth of real estate in Mulund has led to a skyrocketing growth in the housing prices. In the year 2009 (Jan to Mar) the average price of apartments in Mulund was merely Rs. 5355/sq-ft, which grew to 11050/sq-ft, by 2013, and by 2019 (Jan to Mar) it increased to Rs. 15130/sq-ft (“99acres.com”, n.d.) (Fig. 6).

Thus, housing in Mulund has not remained as affordable as it used to be and under the prevailing scenario of growth in housing prices, the aspect of housing affordability in the suburb has become questionable.

Change in the nature of employment: The urban spatial transformation of Mulund has had an impact on the nature of employment opportunities in the suburb. With the closure of factories, growth of real estate, the rise in civic infrastructure and the growth of retail and business, the nature of employment in the suburbs has changed significantly. Among the residents of Mulund, who acknowledge the change in the nature of employment in the suburb, a vast majority of 47 percent consider that certain employment opportunities have decreased while certain others have increased. This is followed by 27 percent who consider employment opportunities to have increased in the suburb, 25 percent who believe that employment opportunities have decreased in the suburb, and remaining 1
percent who are not sure about the nature of the change. This is shown in Fig. 7.

Thus, from the above analysis, it becomes clear that the urban spatial transformation of Mulund has led to a change in the nature of employment opportunities in the suburb.

**VII. CONCLUSION**

The socio-economic implications of the urban spatial transformation of the suburb of Mulund in recent times are evident from the above discussion. The study reveals that there have been many positive implications of the transformation in the socio-economic front, which includes the following:

The influx of migrants to the suburb has contributed to a vibrant social mix of residents forming a multi-lingual, multi-religious, and multi-cultural suburb.

Retail and service sector growth has taken place in Mulund.

The suburb has witnessed the growth of many modern businesses in recent times. For example, boutiques, tattoo parlors, and gyms, etc.

The growth of retail and business has reduced Mulund’s dependency on other areas of Mumbai.

Mulund has evolved from a mere suburb to an urban entity.

Nonetheless, the study also reveals that the socio-economic implications of the urban spatial transformation of Mulund are not free from negative aspects. The negative implications are as follows:

- The affordability of housing in Mulund has decreased with rising prices.
- The growth of high rises has contributed to an increase in population density and made the suburb congested.
- Gentrification has created a scenario of urban inequality, where the new middle and upper-class residents lie at one end, and the slum dwellers lie on the other end of the spectrum.
- Thus, the need of the hour is to ensure boosting of the positive aspects and making efforts for ameliorating the negative aspects for the greater benefit of the suburb. This calls for the concerted efforts of all the stakeholders, including residents and local bodies.

**VIII. DECLARATION**

In order to maintain the anonymity of the residents interviewed, the names of the respondents have been changed while quoting from the interviews.

**IX. REFERENCES**


IX. AUTHOR PROFILE

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