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Overcoming Exclusion in Urban Governance: A Critical Assessment of India's Smart Cities Mission

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Abstract: In this paper, the Smart Cities mission in India is critically evaluated, with an emphasis on how it will affect urban governance and inclusive development. It highlights the consequences of rapid urbanisation, including inadequate infrastructure and unequal access to services, particularly affecting marginalised groups. The study underlines how effective administrative management and ICT-driven institutional changes can improve service delivery and raise urban dwellers' quality of life. It also points out some built-in difficulties, such as a technocratic and pro-market stance that gives the market sector precedence over the social sector. The study highlights issues with evictions, weakened social accountability, and forced land acquisition as a result of private sector organisations' involvement in urban planning. Using these findings as a foundation, the paper advocates for an enhanced inclusive and participatory strategy for urban governance that addresses the interests and rights of marginalised populations while promoting sustainable urban development.

Keywords: Smart City, Urban governance, Infrastructure, Service Delivery, Planning, Financing, Management

Introduction

Urban governance is a multi-stakeholder collaborative process in which the private sector, government and civil society organisations play an essential role in planning, financing, and managing urban regions, with a focus on the efficient delivery of services and infrastructure to residents (Avis, 2016). Effective service accessibility is a key component of inclusive governance in urban areas, which attempts to better serve the interests of all socioeconomic groups, especially the most marginalised (Rao, 2016; Avis, 2016).

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Rapid urbanisation in India has brought about several problems, including a lack of adequate basic infrastructure, unequal access to services, and ineffective and inclusive governance (Rao, 2016). As a result, social life in the city is severely impacted, especially for the socially marginalised. In light of this, India's Smart Cities project makes a crucial advancement towards improving the inhabitants of the 100 cities' overall quality of life by successfully acquiring sustainable basic urban infrastructure with the aid of ICT technology, human resource development, and efficient administrative management (Roy, 2016). In its plan, the Smart Cities mission thus aims to stop the exclusion and inefficiencies that were once caused by a lack of infrastructure and poor government management. The proper formulation of ICT-driven institutional changes in the process of urban planning and development, as well as the construction of social and physical service infrastructure, such as electricity, water supply, sanitation, which comprises the management of solid waste, travel transportation, habitat for the poor, health, education, and good governance, were key components of this project that made the delivery of public services inclusive and responsible in the city.

Despite all of these efforts, the most marginalised people are excluded due to inherent technocracy, a top-down, bureaucratically controlled approach to development, and the pro-market execution of the Smart Cities project (ZJ & Majumdar, 2020). In fact, in this Smart project, the social sector is given less importance than the market sector. The problem of forcible land acquisition and eviction is also evident in this project (Housing and Land Rights Network, 2020). As a result of this forcible eviction, social exclusion in governance once again takes on extreme proportions when the marginalised suffer massive losses that hamper their productivity in life. Moreover, the involvement of a private organisation (a Special Purpose Vehicle) in the urban development and planning process considerably reduces the ULB's functions and raises serious questions about social accountability (ZJ & Majumdar, 2020).

Research Objectives

1. To investigate the conceptually intricate connection between urban governance and smart cities.
2. To examine how, between 2015 and 2023, India's local urban areas have benefited from the Smart Cities Mission's promotion of efficient and inclusive governance.

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3. To examine how the Smart Cities Mission (2015–2023) encourages accountability in local urban governance in India.

Research Methodology

Exploratory approaches and content analysis tools were used to conduct this study. The goals of the research have been achieved through the review of numerous peer-reviewed journals, books, published PhD thesis and newspaper articles. The nature of operating this study is essentially qualitative.

Literature Review

The academic community has focused a lot of attention on concepts like urban governance and smart cities, which are diverse and complex. In this survey of the literature, it will look at the most significant ideas and developments related to urban governance and smart city.

There is no widespread consensus on issues like urban governance and smart cities since they are inadequately defined and conceptualised (Meijer, 2015; Anthopoulos, 2015). The academic community has proposed a variety of definitions and frameworks for the concept, all of which have a unique focus and breadth. Some scholars see smart cities as technological utopias (Maurya, 2020), whereas others emphasise the importance of social inclusion (Sugandha, 2022) and engaged citizens (Paskaleva et al., 2015) in smart cities.

The foundational ideas of the concept of "smart cities" are innovation and technology (United Nations Economic and Social Council, 2016; Hayat, 2016). Researchers have studied how technology and innovation would improve urban governance and execution of services, reduce the consumption of resources, and promote sustainability (González & Daz, 2015). Concerns exist over the likely negative effects of innovation and technology, including a digital divide and issues accompanying privacy (Novotn et al., 2014). Further corporate-compelled high technology and gentrification exacerbate the positions of polarisation, inequality, social justice, and inclusion (Roy, 2016).

Smart cities aim to improve sustainability and resilience by employing technology and innovation (Hayat, 2016; Murugaiah, 2018). Academics have looked into the potential of smart cities to

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improve urban resilience to natural disasters and climate change, conserve resources, advance renewable energy sources, and do all of these things simultaneously (Hayat, 2016).

The purpose of smart cities is to increase residents' access to amenities and their standard of living. Researchers have looked at the delivery of services in industries including transportation, healthcare, and waste management as potential areas where smart cities may improve (OECD, 2020).

Urban governance is crucial to the development of smart cities (OECD, 2020). Numerous challenges face urban government, such as fragmentation of resources, capability limitations, and insufficient citizen involvement (OECD, 2020; Sugandha, 2022). It is evident that collaborative governance and institutional frameworks that promote citizen involvement and cooperation between many stakeholders are becoming more and more crucial (Meijer, 2015; Paskaleva et al., 2015).

In the scientific literature regarding smart cities along with urban governance, the intricacy and depth of these notions are frequently underlined. The development of smart cities depends on interdisciplinary research to close the perceived gaps among technology, social inclusion, and governance. The literature also underlines the importance of collaboration between numerous stakeholders, including local governments, individual citizens, and private sector players, to create inclusive and sustainable urban governance.

Urban governance through smart cities

Smart cities and urban governance have a close relationship since effective urban governance is a necessary component for the execution of initiatives pertaining to smart cities. Urban governance and smart city initiatives are related in the subsequent modes.

A policy framework that supports smart city initiatives is necessary for effective urban governance. To achieve this, a legislative and regulatory environment must be created that promotes investment in and innovation within smart city technologies. The governance of smart city projects, which uphold the spirit of competition and collaboration in federal governance, continues to be largely dependent on policy developed and implemented through cooperation between the national government and the country's state governments (Kulshrestha, 2018). The

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smart city project's implementation best utilises the nation's social and financial resources in a way that is actually advantageous to a larger portion of the city's inhabitants.

Delivering essential services like water supply, sanitation, and healthcare requires an integrated approach where several ministries and agencies collaborate. Urban governance can help with this integration by dismantling organisational silos and fostering cooperation across various departments and agencies.

Smart city development requires participation from all stakeholders, including citizens, businesses, governmental bodies, and community groupings. Urban governance is critical for encouraging this cooperative stakeholder involvement through participation in decision-making processes and planning.

The effective execution of smart city programmes depends on public-private partnerships (PPPs). By establishing a regulatory and legal framework that promotes private sector investment and competence, urban governance can enable the setup of PPPs.

Data-driven decision-making helps identify areas of need and more efficiently direct resources in smart cities. Urban governance can make it easier to gather and analyse data, as well as make sure that decisions are transparent and supported by facts.

As a result, there is a direct connection between urban governance and smart cities, as smart city programmes cannot be implemented successfully without effective and good urban governance. Cities can make urban areas more livable, sustainable, and inclusive by developing a policy framework that promotes innovation and investment in smart city technologies, facilitates stakeholder engagement, promotes integrated service delivery, facilitates data-driven decision-making, and encourages public-private partnerships.

In light of this, the Government of India introduced the Smart Cities Mission in 2015 with the goal of enhancing the standard of living in 100 chosen cities through the implementation of "Smart Solutions" regarding the provision of basic infrastructure, a healthy and sustainable environment, and the overall standard of life (Praharaj, 2018; Prasad & Alizadeh, 2020). By encouraging local development and employing technology to produce smart solutions for citizens, the programme hopes to carry out citywide infrastructure development and promote economic growth (Praharaj,

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2018). The effective execution of smart city policies requires coordination between the public and corporate sectors as well as the civil society (Prasad &Alizadeh, 2020). In India, smart city governance involves public-private actors and requires funds, particularly through public-private partnerships (Prasad, 2021). In India, the creation of special purpose vehicles (SPVs) is being considered for the implementation of smart city projects (Prasad, 2021). In smart cities, the use of technology and data can enhance urban planning and delivery of services, creating chances for strengthening urban governance (Prasad &Alizadeh, 2020). The Smart Cities Mission provides further opportunities for urban governance in India by promoting citizen participation and sustainable development (Prasad & Alizadeh, 2020). However, there are obstacles to completing the realisation of smart city plans in India, including a shortage of trained labour and insufficient financial resources (Prasad &Alizadeh, 2020). The Smart Cities Mission in India offers a structure of governance that unfolds at three spatial scales: national, state, and local. Because these scales' intersections vary by city, this poses difficulties for cooperative governance on a local scale (Prasad & Alizadeh, 2020). Additionally, a major obstacle to the development of smart cities in India is the lack of cooperative governance and dwindling capability in municipal governments (Prasad & Alizadeh, 2020). Understanding the emergence of smart cities in India requires ongoing revision of national urban policies, given that earlier infrastructure-centric initiatives have failed to produce the desired results due to financial and managerial shortcomings (Prasad & Alizadeh, 2020).

Planning of Smart City

India is quickly urbanising, and it is anticipated that this trend will continue in the years to come. The demand for smart cities has become an urgent issue as the nation gets more urbanised. Smart cities are those that manage their infrastructure and enhance the quality of life for their residents using cutting-edge technology. Urban mobility, public services, housing, energy, water, and waste management are the six main sectors that the Smart Cities Mission focuses on (Kulshrestha, 2018). A variety of tactics and technologies are used in India's strategy for smart cities to make urban areas more hospitable, sustainable, and effective.

Key components of the plan include a strong digital infrastructure necessary for the delivery of services to inhabitants in smart cities. High-speed connectivity to the internet, mobile applications for using government services, and electronic payment methods are all examples of this.

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Smart cities seek to improve the efficiency and transparency of public services via the use of technology. Initiatives for open data, the development of e-governance platforms, and online citizen interaction portals are examples of this.

The creation of effective and sustainable transport systems that lessen traffic congestion, enhance air quality, and promote accessibility is a goal of smart cities. This calls for the application of modern technology, including integrated public transportation networks, electric automobiles, and sophisticated traffic management systems.

In smart cities, emphasis is placed on the development of renewable energy sources and the application of energy-saving technologies. This includes the use of smart grids, renewable sources of energy, including wind and solar power, and energy-efficient construction methods.

Smart cities place a high priority on creating sustainable infrastructure, such as open spaces, parks, bike lanes, water supply, sanitation, waste management, housing for the underprivileged, and other areas. This raises its citizens' standard of living while reducing the city's carbon footprint.

Smart cities are planned and run with citizen participation. This entails the use of participatory planning processes, public consultation, and feedback mechanisms to ensure that the interests and priorities of citizens are taken into consideration.

To produce livable, sustainable, and inclusive communities, the Smart City mission combines technology and creative urban planning. With the mission known as Smart Cities, there is a significant chance to change urban life in India and make cities more efficient, sustainable, and citizen-centric.

Smart City Management

To carry out the Smart Cities Mission, the Indian government has developed special-purpose vehicles (SPVs) for each city.The organising, execution, and upkeep of the smart city initiatives in each of these cities fall within the purview of these SPVs. The SPVs collaborate with a range of stakeholders, including individual citizens, regional government agencies, commercial businesses, and academic institutions.

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One of the core elements of smart cities is the use of technology to improve governance. The Smart Cities Mission aims to make cities more receptive to the needs of their citizens by harnessing technology to improve the delivery of public services. This covers using mobile applications to report problems (grievance redressal), online utility payment options, and the fusion of several government services onto a single platform.

Smart cities seek to enhance governance while simultaneously enhancing the standard of living for residents. This involves the construction of sustainable transit networks, the creation of public areas, and the provision of affordable housing. Along with fostering innovation and entrepreneurship, smart cities also emphasise generating employment opportunities and fostering economic expansion.

In general, India's Smart Cities Mission constitutes a systematic approach to transform urban governance. It aims to use technology to improve public service delivery, boost sustainable development, and enhancing the standard of living for people. This mission represents one big step towards building livable and sustainable cities in India, despite its many obstacles, including funding and implementation problems.

Financing of Smart City

The objective of the budget search out enact individual hundred smart cities occurring in 2022, yet the expenditure of these endeavours presents a difficult hurdle, as the assigned earnings are lacking to cover the wholeness of the country with its government. The Smart Cities Mission is generally supported by grants from federal, state, and local governments in addition to economic funding from for-profit businesses. Each preferred city endures 500 crore rupees from the national government over a five-year from 2015 (Pratap, 2021). The state and local governments again wanted to grant evenly to the project. These cash reserves are used to carry out a range of smart city actions, containing the construction of public spaces, reconstructing the conveyance network, and contributing essential aids like water supply and appliances for grinding garbage, smart meter, and sensor. India's smart towns are expecting contemporary fiscal methods like green bonds and crowdfunding apart from management outlay to raise money for their programs. Private sector management is while main as administration services for the benefit of smart city programs. India is advancing public-private partnerships (PPPs) to fund and implement smart city initiatives. PPPs

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contain all and private sector cooperation to give duties and foundation. The for-profit businesses create financial expenses, while the government monitors and organizes regulatory legal frameworks (Pratap, 2021). To advance for-profit businesses date, the government has forged a difference of monetary lures, to a degree tax breaks and endowments for smart city actions. In addition, the management settled the Smart City Participation Fund (SCIF) to stimulate allied subdivision partnerships in smart city programs and to support new capital resolutions. India must join government finances, private sector expenditures, and creative capital plans to finance smart metropolises (Pratap, 2021). Even though finances are still a question, the Neo-liberal Smart Cities Mission specifies a huge opportunity for for-profit businesses to take part in contemporary city growth pushes and support the general advance of Indian cities.

A Critical Assessment of India's Smart Cities Mission

It is undeniable that India requires places that are ecologically sound, livable, competent, and able to provide citizens with a greater level of living. But to select the projects that established inclusivity and efficiency, the selecting parameters must be just stated in the policy document of smart city India. The SCM guidelines demonstrate the Mission's aim and result. "There is no widely recognised description of a smart city," it announces. To differing community, it has different interpretations. Thus, a variety of "Smart Cities" beliefs are prevalent. A smart city cannot be explained in isolation; it relies on the pace of development, the residents' desire to adapt and make corrections, and their aspirations (Maurya, 2020).

The majority of the projects approved by the SCM Centre on infrastructure and beautification use an area-based development strategy. However, the cities have already used 60% of the funds as of 2023. Area-based development (ABD), pan-city development, and greenfield development are the three fundamental spatial development mechanisms described in the Mission. However, ABD is where it mainly focuses. In doing so, it ultimately encourages cities to concentrate the majority of their investments in a small area of the city. Around 7% of the 99 cities' total areas are covered by area-based development on average, but 80% of the budget is allotted to such projects, leaving only a small 20% of the available funds for pan-city and greenfield development, which covers the remaining 90% of cities' land. The inequality is made more obvious by the focus of 80% of funds on a small area (i.e. Area-based development), which has 40% of holdings by private investors and no influence from local municipal institutions (Maurya, 2020).

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Entrenched classism The bequest of the smart city project raises severe scepticism about development being captured in all parts of society when, really, it is only in consideration of governments and great for-profit business enterprises (ZJ & Majumdar, 2020).

Digital solutions can increase the chances of create the risk of e-waste, developing in a hazard to settlers (Maurya, 2020).

The current need is to expand opportunities outside of city fields. A smart city cannot support an excessively dense population. Cities then demand that intelligent co-villages exist. The mission must understand the socio-economic circumstances in India and support the holistic intelligence of the two cities and villages, alternatively trying to replicate the Western idea of "smartness" (Maurya, 2020).

Outside of taking into account the slum tenants and low-earnings community, the notion that metropolises are the "instruments of growth" would not correctly imitate those who help the growth and recognise the community (Maurya, 2020).

This objective repeatedly portrays a classic characteristic of top-down governance. In spite of the mission's necessity for participatory planning, it makes no mention of appeal level, purview, guidelines, or methodology. According to the project, ecological renovations, including land and water bulks, are some of the Smart Cities Mission's primary objectives. Often, these cities repeatedly wrongly view adornment as an element of environmental renovation, which has incited a few cities to budget for slum destruction and strained eviction as contained in this project (ZJ & Majumdar, 2023). Therefore, the notion of non-participation in planning poses severe consequences for marginalised people's lives (Maurya, 2020).

The Mission's aim search out promote decentralised government management, but it can wind up re-centralizing the process, increasing exclusion, and growing course unaccountability all of that would hurt most public's lives while consistency them gleefully ignorant of "the new Smart City" (Maurya, 2020).

Almost 31% of India's current people lives in city fields, which give reason for 63% of India's GDP, in accordance with the Smart Cities Mission's leading principle. The evidence that agrarian-to-urban migration is a important contributor to this progress, nevertheless, has gone ignored. For

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the first time because the last Census, the migration policy institute reports that India's urban public has expanded more quickly than allure agrarian population (Maurya, 2020).

In middle of this, the "Housing Stock, Amenities and Assets in Slum" report from the 2011 Census of India found that 70% of slum tenants use smartphones and televisions, almost matching city rates. Still, only 64% of houses were currently affiliated to sewage schemes. The Mission only determines more capital for the operating cities outside fact-finding the inceptions and reasons for program failures in the underperforming municipalities, that is senseless and discouraging shared high-tech innovations in differing Indian metropolises (Maurya, 2020).

Concluding Remarks

In order to create smart cities in India, an enhanced bottom-up participatory planning approach that takes into account the needs and objectives of locals must be established. It is substantial to avoid an excessive top-down approach that ignores the concerns and voices of local communities. The government needs to evolve a tenable expenditure model to produce more indigenous income; it will be in consideration of reducing the tremendous expenditure break. The government must take prudence as it increases the amount of indigenous revenue collected because the results might end up in greater living costs for marginalised populations.

The design and construction of smart cities can be made inclusive, effective, and accountable by implementing authentic decentralisation and enhancing the role of urban local bodies (ULBs) in planning and development. This can be achieved by including residents and local stakeholders in the collaborative institutional decision-making process and by providing convenient information and data technology to help citizens believe in and take part in the process of planning and development. It is also crucial to address issues such as forced eviction and displacement of vulnerable populations and to ensure that the development of smart cities benefits all sections of society. This can be achieved by ensuring that social and environmental sustainability are given due consideration in the planning and development processes.

Overall, the creation of smart cities in India requires a people-centric, active participatory planning strategy within the context of institutional collaboration that prioritises inclusive, effective, and accountable governance.

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