

UPSC Syllabus Topic : GS Paper 1 Indian Society – Urbanization – problems and remedies.

On the Changing Concept of a Slum – Transforming narratives

Over time, the understanding of what constitutes a slum has undergone significant evolution, which in turn has influenced how policies and legislatures address these areas.

The discourse on slums can be divided into distinct eras spanning the five decades post-independence, each reflecting a shift in perception:

First Era (1950s-1960s): Conceptualization:

Viewed slums as a consequence of post-partition migration, causing congestion in rundown residential spaces. Considered slums as a problem needing eradication rather than understanding the social and economic disparities leading to their formation.

Steps:

The Slum Areas Act of 1956 enabled government intervention in officially recognized slum zones.

Second Era (Early 1970s-Mid-1980s): Conceptualization:

Transitioned to viewing slums as areas requiring development rather than demolition. Focused on providing basic amenities to these areas rather than eliminating them.

Steps:

Town planning initiatives often pushed slums to the outskirts of cities.

Third Era (Mid-1980s-Late 1990s): Conceptualization:

Cities and urban spaces, including slums, were seen as assets for economic growth rather than just social areas. Policies were more economically driven, emphasizing city development over purely social concerns.

Steps:

National Housing Policies and the National Slum Development Programme were introduced to address broader issues like land, finance, and infrastructure.

Fourth Era (2000s-2014): Conceptualization:

Shifted to a data-driven understanding based on the 2001 Census, highlighting reasons for slum formation like urbanization, land pressures, and housing affordability. Focused on giving property rights to slum dwellers rather than eradicating these settlements entirely.

Steps:

Housing policies prioritized tackling urban housing deficits, leading to targeted schemes based on the broader definitions of slums from census data. This evolution showcases a transformation in the understanding of slums, from a socio-political subject to a technical, economic matter that can be addressed through technocratic solutions.