In-between metropolitan cities and urban theories: a case of small town Dharamshala

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Abstract The scholarship and discussion on urbanization and urbanism are restricted to the exploration of a few metropolitans and global cities. In this way, especially in India, several cities and towns do not fit into the understanding of knowledge produced from metropolitan or large cities. Taking the case of Dharamshala a small town in the Western Himalayas, this paper discusses how debate and conceptualization of urban processes, level of urbanization and scale of economies bypass thousands of small towns not only in India but across the global South. The paper draws attention to the categorization of the urban into small and big, metropolitan and non-metropolitan, unable to provide a comprehensive theory or concept to conceptualize activities and processes that coexist in binaries. Employing an ethnographic approach it discusses the ambiguous statistical criteria, infrastructural facilities, social and cultural dynamics, informality and illegality of Dharamshala. Building on this, the paper asserts that small towns and big cities have a lot of similarities in processes and activities, they may be different from each other at the level of size and scale. Drawing any kind of hierarchy among cities and towns that have the foundation in size (population and geographical) and scale (economies) and positioning them in 'subaltern' positions does not produce a comprehensive framework nor contribute to Southern urban theory but position small towns in between position of metropolitan's cities and urban theories. Noting such debates and discussions, the contribution opens a fresh perspective to study small towns beyond their *size* and scale and focuses on the processes and activities that contribute to an understanding of Indian urban transition, thereby expanding Southern urban theories.

Keywords Small Town · Dharamshala · Urban Theory · Population Size · Illegality

Introduction

Cities worldwide are different in terms of population size, the flow of businesses, scale of economies, linkages with global network of capital, nature of inequalities and poverty. In such a diversified condition of the twenty-first century, scholars in India have predominantly focused on a few million plus[1] cities in India.

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[1] As per the census of India 2011 and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affair (MoHUA) of Government of India mention there are a total of 53 cities that have more than ten lakh population. See https://mohua.gov.in/cms/number-of-cities--towns-by-city-size-class.php and census of India 2011 https://censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/paper2/data_files/india2/Million_Plus_UAs_Cities_2011.pdf

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At the same time, non-metropolitan cities and towns are overlooked[2] in the discussion of urban scholarship. This limited focus on small cities and towns fails to answer the question: What drives the growth of small cities and towns in India? How exploration of activities and processes of small towns can contribute to the conceptualization of urbanization and urbanism from below. Such a scarcity of work on small cities and towns, discussion and theoretical universalization[3] of metropolitan cities do not provide a picture of what kind of urban(ism) is emerging across India and southern cities. The ongoing discussion aims to propose a southern perspective from global South cities. The southern urban theory/southern urbanism is firmly rooted in the urban imaginaries of the North. It fails to overcome disabilities posed by 'western prototypes' (Ong, 2011:13) of seeing the world through the lens of modern/western binaries. Roy (2014) argues that South has been an empirical ground for testing northern theories (2014:16), and exploration of southern urban theory largely revolves around how the global political economy is shaping the urban world in the global South. Unfortunately, the epistemologies of southern cities (such as splintered, speculative, planetary, enclaved and worlding) are incessantly weaved through and around global capitalism. Such an approach to understanding southern urbanism through its 'significant other,' i.e., industrialization and capitalism, restricts exploration of a wide variety of urban centres that may not necessarily emanate from global capitalism.

Another dimension that runs through southern urban theory is the exploration of slums, informal/illegal settlements, dispossession, and gentrification. It again heavily relies on the processes and outcomes

of the expansion of global capitalism that comes from metropolitan cities. The recent initiations under the rubric of subaltern urbanization (Denis & Zérah, 2017; Denis et al., 2012; Mukhopadhyay et al., 2020) have been showing interest in the study of settlements that are not part of the "hegemonic power structure of globalization" and "metro-centric urbanization" (Kundu, 2017:v). The focus of subaltern urbanization is comprehensibly grasping the historical and market forces, land relations, seasonal migration, Census criteria of urban, location of towns, proximity, economic specialties, level of governance, funding opportunities, the financial position of Urban Local Bodies (ULBs), and local entrepreneurship. Subaltern urbanization suggests that various postulates and binaries are inappropriate for understanding the urban dynamics of small towns where a large population lives (Denis & Zérah, 2017. In so doing, subaltern urbanization explores a variety of urban settlements, called small towns, and elaborates the ambit of urban studies by shifting away from the dominant paradigm of metropolitan urbanization.

In contesting the idea of subaltern urbanization, in this paper concern is the use of the term subaltern that denotes "autonomous" (Mukhopadhyay et al., 2020:2). Spivak (2006) read "subalternity is a position without identity" (2005:476). Guha and Spivak (1988:v) used subaltern in the Gramsci scene to denote the opposite in the course of "dominant" or "elite". Thus, using the term subaltern automatically denotes the hierarchical order that is not horizontal and steps forward to accept the global order of the urban system. Engaging with subaltern urbanization, Mukhopadhyay et al., (2020) clears the theoretical points such as "postcolonial theory" emphasis given on "ordinary city", "subaltern urbanism" and "planetary urbanization" that firmly rooted in discussion subaltern urbanization. Planetary urbanization put a condition where urban (formerly identified as urban) versus everything (rest of geographic space) can no longer be distinguished conceptually and empirically (Brenner & Schmid, 2014). Planetary urbanization talks about urbanization processes beyond large urban settlements. However, it is unclear where to draw a line between cities and the rest of the geographic space. The understanding of planetary urbanization extends beyond cities' territorial boundaries and correlates it with "extended urbanization" (Monte-Mor, 2015:109—120). Planetary urbanization raises many

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[2] The paper does not claim that nonmetropolitan cities are absent from the academic discourse of urban studies in India. In comparison to million-plus cities, a few studies have been conducted in small cities and towns. Even in an edited volume, Patel (2012:1—38) acknowledged in the footnote that there is '*very*' little work on small and medium towns of India. See also Sharma (2013a, 2013b:2) mentions that small cities and towns are not only neglected by the government, but academicians are also biased towards the big cities.

[3] Here universalization means generalization of urban theories and concepts that originated from the experiences of metropolitan cities (million plus cities) and are generalized on the rest of the towns and cities despite ignoring the variation in geographical, population, socio-economic, political, and historical reasons.
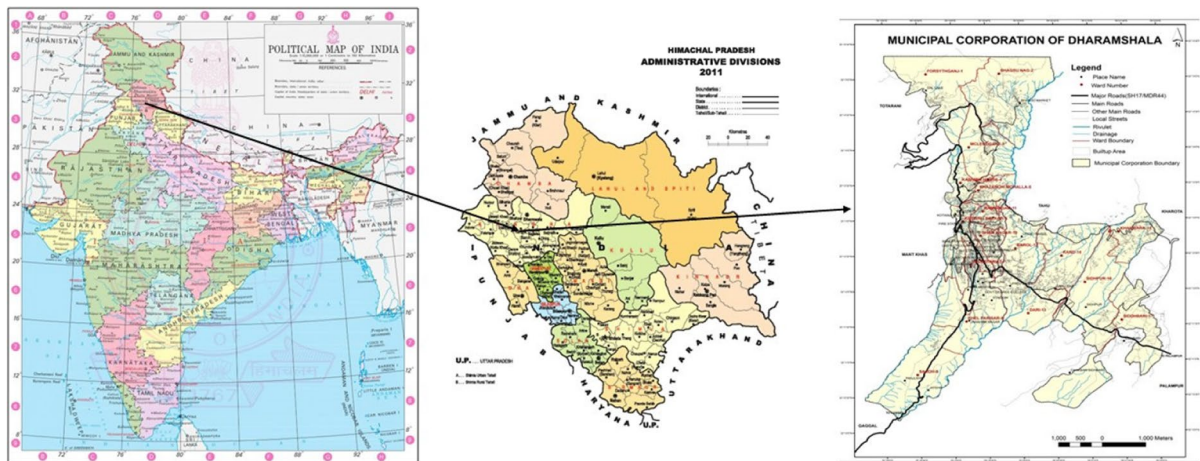
Fig. 1 Location of Dharamshala. Source: Compiled from survey of India, Census of India, 2011, MC Dharamshala

theoretical and empirical questions in general to the global level and particular to India, such as: How to decide the boundaries between rural and urban? Ghosh (2017) rightly questions on suitability of planetary urbanization and argues that "it dismantles the traditional dialectic of the urban and the rural". The planetary urbanization and its various troops of morphological description, settlement patterns, and economies of scale may talk about the built environments and city expansion to the countryside, and development around the periphery, fringe, and suburban area. However, planetary urbanization does not tell what kind of urban is emerging outside and within the city. Outside the city, the modern planning regime is not applicable. Then how do the structures, sites and infrastructure that are not the result of planning become integral parts of the city? How are unplanned growth, illegal structures, and informal activities integrated into the city? Such gaps in literature do not engage with what is happening in small towns beyond their population and geographical size. How does the urban landscape expand in small towns and become a melting pot of urban experiences?

The paper contributes by exploring a small town Dharamshala located in Himachal Pradesh, India, (see the Fig. 1) beyond the "size-based inferiority" (Cook, 2018:3). It uncovered some aspects of small town urbanism, infrastructural facilities, cultural experiences of consumption and informality and illegality. Building on the exploration of activities and processes from Dharamshala, paper argues that

small towns and big cities have many similarities if compare on the types of businesses operating within smaller pockets of major cities, supply system, management of infrastructure, movement of people in a way, and transition methods that form the city's placental life. The processes of illegality, encroachment, informal market, caste networks, and religious affinities in businesses are allied features in both spaces. The exploration of such activities and processes shed light on the hierarchy or hegemony among cities and towns that has foundation in size (population and geographical) and scale (economies). Such division is not producing a comprehensive framework nor contributing to southern urban theory. Instead, it is more fitting to position small towns in-between metropolitan's cities and urban theories. Moreover, the categorization of urban spaces on the bases of size and flow of business bypass processes and activities of small towns that may have similarity with metropolitans' cities.

This paper is at least one way to fill the divide and explore the urban practices of small cities and towns in India. However, the question of categorization of cities and towns remained unresolved but offer a perspective to urban scholars to approach the processes and activities of such settlement that possibly contribute in the knowledge production. The paper' use ethnography as a methodology method and methodology (Brewer, 2000:54) to documents everyday practices and processes based on the seven-month fieldwork in Dharamshala Municipal Corporation (DMC), divided into 17 wards. It allows interaction

with various stakeholders, actors, people, agencies and members of civil organization, business groups (Hammersley, 2006). The paper utilizes primary data, collected using ethnographic tools such as interviews, observation, discussion, and visual documentation. It also uses the secondary data from Census of India, court cases, newspaper reports and other government reports and documents. The data is analyzed through the ethnographic technique of description, interpretation and thematic method to draw the larger trajectory. The paper begins with a brief discussion about how small towns are neglected in urban studies and urban theories. It also provides a critical analysis of some recent effort to conceptualize the ongoing urban transformation in global South. Further, it discusses the historical, cultural, social and economic significance of Dharamshala. In addition, the paper critically intervein in statistical criteria of categorization and argues that small towns cannot be defined by a singular criterion. In the next two sections the paper explores the processes and activities that aligns with the dynamics of India's urban transition. In conclusion, the paper asserts that conceptualization of urban is not limited to the administrative and statistical criteria, and exploration of a few metropolitan cities. The development of small towns in India and particular in Dharamshala are driven by diverse forces such as administrative, political, local investment, location, cultural diversity and internal logic of citizens. By exploring these processes and activities it can provide a framework to understand the small towns urbanization.

Dharamshala: A combination of triad

Dharamshala is known worldwide for its serene location in the Dhauladhar mountain ranges. However, Dharamshala does not have a historical account of emerging as a Bazar and township as other towns have their history in pre-colonial and colonial periods (see work of Bayly, 1998; Haynes, 1999). In a historical account, Cunningham (1871) traces the history of the hill state of Punjab. Cunningham (1871) noted that Kangra was known by "*Jalandhara*", "*Trigartta*", and "*Nagarkot*" before the Muhammadan conquest. Until 1809, Dharamshala was under the control of the Royal Family Kangra as Singh (1993) mentions that Maharaja Sansar Chand Katoch signed the Treaty of

Jwalamukhi with Sikh Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1809 (Singh, 1993:1). However, in these accounts, the history of Dharamshala does not emerge. Dharamshala was built on a wasteland plot and derived from a rest house called *Dharamsala* (retreat). According to the narratives of locals (Gaddi), '*Dharamsala*' comes from the two words Dharam (religion and pilgrims) *sala* (adobe). The King resides in Dharamkot, and people who come to meet him stay for a night in the house known as *Dharamsala*.[4] According to the Oxford dictionary, the literary meaning of Dharamshala is 'a building devoted to religious or charitable purposes, especially a rest house for travellers'.[5]

In 1849 British army required a new station to accommodate the troops of 1st Battalion of the 1st Gurkha and Dharamshala formed as subsidiary cantonment of Kangra (The Imperial Gazetteer of India, 1908:301; Singh et al., 2022). At a specific vantage point for their Army, Dharamshala was later made a cantonment known for stationing the Gorkha Rifles. After 1849, several houses and villas were constructed for military officers and personnel serving in the British Army (The Imperial Gazetteer of India, 1908:301). In 1855, Dharamshala had only two significant areas where civilians settled: McLeodganj (named after Lieutenant Governor of Punjab, David McLeod), and Forsyth Ganj, named after a Divisional Commissioner. From 1849 till 1959, Dharamshala functioned as both summer tourist destination and cantonment for the British, especially Gurkha rifles and subsequently the Indian Army. Its prominence

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[4] Personal communical, Prem Sagar, 28 December 2019. He narrates the story of *Dharamsala* and how it became Dharamshala. Before the British arrival in Dharamsala, the place was an open greenfield. In the summer Gaddis use this route to reach their native place and cross the Dhauladhar. Before the winter starts, they follow the same route to go in plain areas. Gaddis has identified some places to take the rest such as '*talu*' which means an open space that has three diversions and goes in different directions. Currently, the place is known as McleodGanj Chowk. The Bhagsunag temple was the main attraction for people who wanted to seek the blessing of '*Devta'* (God). The second major religious place is Dal Lake at Naddi, where Gaddis who reside in this place take a bath on the occasion of a local fair organized in the month of September. The people from far-flung areas come to visit Dal Lake, Bhagsunag. After a long track, people spent some time in the huts (made with stone and wood) and some time spent at night's halt also, these huts known as *Dharamsala* made for the purpose of taking some rest.

[5] https://www.lexico.com/definition/dharmashala

Fig. 2 Population growth of Dharamshala. Source: Compiled for Census of India, 1961,1971,1981,1991, 2001, 2011 and MC Dharamshala
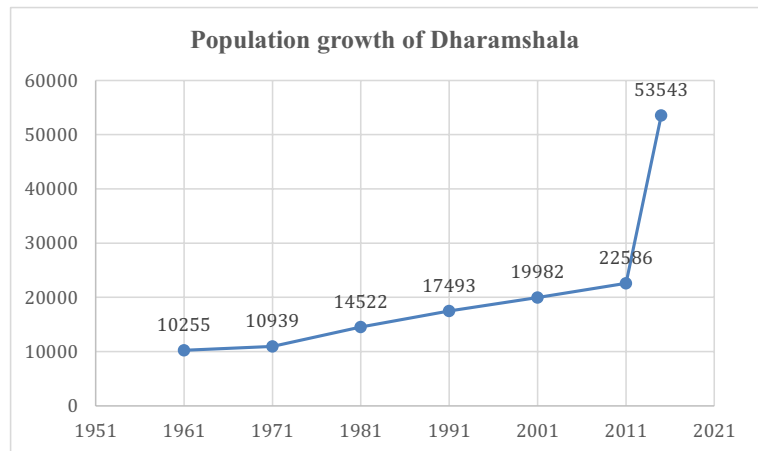
rose in May 1960 when the 14th Dalai Lama (Tenzin Gyatso) along with his followers fled from Tibet and the Indian government allowed him and his followers to settle down in McLeodganj (Avedon, 2015:147). As a result, the Dalai Lama and his Tibetan compatriots established the Government-in-exile in 1960. Dharamshala currently serves as the Headquarters of the Central Tibetan Administration. After establishing the Tibetan government in Dharamshala, it is known as Little Lhasa locally. In addition, the Tibetan population has set up its cultural and religious centres in Dharamshala, becoming the focal point of appreciation to foreigners worldwide.

Dharamshala has become a popular tourist place for Tibetan refugees, Buddhist meditation centres, monasteries, temples, and Tibetans' cultural practices. For the last ten years or so, Dharamshala came to the limelight at national and regional levels: it was selected as Smart City under Smart City Mission (SCM). Second, the Himachal Pradesh Cricket Association Stadium, Dharamshala, started hosting international cricket matches. These simultaneous developments highlights Dharamshala at regional and national levels, primarily focusing on the urban sprawl that is taking shape beyond the established hegemonic power structure of cities and global capital. However, scholars argue that new cities and towns have emerged as a new hub of capital flow and restructuring the economic and cultural fabric of the location in a wave of globalization and liberalization (Sharma, 2013a, 2013b:12—13). It is interesting to know how it has contributed to changing the geography of towns in terms of economic, social, and political. Dharamshala, similar to other towns, lacks in production facilities, the presence of global capital networks, and interconnected economies associated with international corporations. It flourishes with its local specialties, local capital, and vernacular practices of locals (Singh et al., 2022). It may have a similar form experienced in metropolitan cities but rely on the practices of locals. Through its transformation from a Gaddis grassland, religious and charitable purpose, cantonment place, the second home of Dalai Lama, second MC and capital of the state, tourist hub, and smart city, remain unexplored. Like any metropolitan city in India, the transformation of Dharamshala is also associated with its location-based specialties, mixed urban landscape, and organic urban area expansion.

Looking at the demographic growth of Dharamshala in 1961, the urban population of Dharamshala was 10,255. The population growth rate in Dharamshala has been low in the last few decades: 10,939 in 1971, 14,522 in 1981, 17,493 in 1991, and 19,982 in 2001. According to the Census 2011, the population of Dharamshala Municipal Council was 22,586 (Census of India 1961, 1971, 1981, 1991, 2001 and 2011). By virtue of the upgradation and expansion of the municipality's few adjoining villages, Dharamshala's population increased to 53,543 (See Fig. 2).

Similarly, the area under MCI was 10.63 sq. km, which increased to 27.60 sq. km. As notified in the year 2005, the planning area of Dharamshala was 18.33 sq. km which increased to 41.63 sq. km. in 2015 (TCP, 2018). Dharamshala was periodically sized and resized by different administrative decisions

changing its urban landscape and socio-cultural composition. Within academic discourse, such an processes remains unexplored, with a predominated focus on big cities. The peculiarity of urban studies scholarship is reflected at the manifest level due to the lack of discussions on small hill towns that are rendered invisible and placed 'off the map' (Robinson, 2002). As mentioned earlier in the discussion of urban scholarship, small towns never be an agenda of investigation to explore socio-economic, political and spatial development, and hill towns are absent.[6] Against this grain of thought, an urban form exists in small towns despite their population size. Dharamshala is an apt case to trace the transformation to utilize its historical significance, local specialties entangled with administrative decisions and tourism driven economy (Singh et al., 2022).

Statistical artefact and theoretical imperative

Before returning to the theoretical inadequacy of urban theory to incorporate small towns, some major statistical troops that rotate around to define urban and small towns require critical attention. Researchers in urban studies have used different population sizes to categorize small cities and towns. Friedman (2018:3) considering population size not exceeding 100,000, Hardoy and Satterthwaite (1986:6) classified 5,000 to 20,000 population size. The United Nations (2012:4) defines small cities with less than 5,00000 population. The population threshold remains problematic in defining small cities and towns as it differs significantly worldwide. The question remained unanswered— when and how to designate town and city as *small*?

In India, small towns have similar trends regarding population size. First, the administration does not designate any settlement as a small town—one way to

Table 1 The Census of India criteria for town and city classification. Source: Census of India, 2011

Class	Population Size
Class-I	1,00,000 and above
Class-II	50,000 to 99,999
Class-III	20,000 to 49.999
Class-IV	10,000 to19,999
Class-V	5,000 to 9,999
Class-VI	Less than 5000

Table 2 Numbers of towns and cities in India. Source: Census of India, 2011

Type of towns/UA/Ogs	Year	
	2011	2001
Statutory towns	4041	3799
Census towns	3894	1362
Urban Agglomerations	475	384
Out growths	981	962
Total	9391	6507

categorize cities in India is based on their population size. Census of India ranks cities based on population size into Class I to Class VI (See Table 1 and 2). Second, the statutory status of settlements depends on the state government's rules and regulations, and it differs from state to state. It is unclear how a settlement will be designated small and medium on the population threshold. Even theoretically it is also unclear which framework categorize cities *small*. Interestingly, there is no uniformity in defining a small town in India, even demographically. Scholars such as Dhaliwal (2004:ix) regard small towns as less than 50,000 inhabitants. Bhagat (2005:3) the last three categories (i.e., class VI, V, IV) are termed as small towns. Kundu (2007) mentions the below than 50,000 have in small and medium towns. Bhagat (2013) quoted to NFHS 3 (National Family Health Survey 3, 2005—06) that considered small towns less than 50,000 population (2013:29). The population does not seem to convince scholars as a criterion to determine small towns. There is no consensus among the researchers on the population's threshold designated to a small town. This lack of clarity on the population size to determine the precise categorization of small

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[6] The works of King (1976); Kennedy (1996) and Pradhan (2017) are the few works that explored the genealogy of Hill Station. None of the works explores hill stations with the perspective of urban development that can enhance the understanding of urban processes and contribute to urban theories. The work of McDuie-Ra et al. (2018) also explores small hill towns and associated its development with the developmental perspectives of how the spatial and socio-cultural intermix contributed to urban sprawl.

towns positions them in-between metropolitan cities and urban theories.

Nevertheless, Bell & Jayne (2009:690) argues that "absolute size is less important" and does not provide an understanding of the urban form in small cities and towns. Further, Bell & Jayne (2006) highlight the problematic inception of defining small cities only by population size because criteria and hierarchies differ worldwide. It opens a critical debate on the statistical criteria. However, the statistical artefact helps analyze the level of urbanization. However, it remains silent on what kind of settlements, investment linkages, and state of art is taking place.

Methodologically, sociological research is not bound to 'size' and focuses on the processes, structures, sites, and questions that give a perspective to understanding towns and cities. However, population criteria are critical because it is closely linked with funding that the ULBs receive from the governments (Centre and State) under various schemes. Bhagat (2013) rightly explores that cities and towns matter in the hierarchy, and most government programs such as Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission are targeted for big cities. The importance of city size cannot ignore but it is more important to explore the processes and activities of cities and towns despite dividing them into binaries of big and small. Though the size is not precise, the administration does not designate any status for small, medium, and large settlements. Urban theories also remain silent about what constitutes 'small', so at this point in this paper it is not possible to offer a theoretical framework or any criteria to categorize the cities and towns. However, it does not mean scholars bypass the local forces and aspirations of citizens behind the urbanization process in many small cities and towns.

On the argument of size, taking the categorization criteria of the census of India, Dharamshala is categorized as class II town and statutory town as per the state municipal act. Dharamshala may not qualify as a city from any existing scales or parameters used in the city's description— demographic, economic, educational, or political. The urban parts of Dharamshala are administered by Municipal Corporation, but it has recently been upgraded from Municipal Council. It is the district headquarters and Headquarters of the Tibetan government in exile. In the comparative adjective, Dharamshala is smaller than Ludhiana, Dehradun, and Arni. but has its own importance

at regional and national level. It is the second largest town in Himachal Pradesh (population-wise), and in the list of International Cricket Council (Cricket ground), the centre of international media and political personality (Centre of Tibetan government), and the airport at Gagal, educational institutes, and known for its scenic beauty in the world. Like other towns and cities of India, Dharamshala has a rich history of its development as a place, administrative unit, cultural site, political seat, ethnic, and caste composition. So, it can be argued that with a vibrant range of activities, practices and processes, small towns cannot be defined by a singular criterion that does not come to any conclusion. Urban theories also did not provide any theoretical guideposts on size and often revolve around the urban transformation, inequalities, informalities, and economic growth of cities. The growth and development of towns and cities depend on historical and market forces, land relations, seasonal migration and local entrepreneurship that interplay with the political economy of capital.

Infrastructure and transformation of urban landscape

Dharamshala urban expansion is not based on the industrial production, agrarian linkages, special economic zone, and natural resource extraction. The development projects in small towns are based on localized economic specialties and locational advantages, as de Bercegol & Gowda (2017:473—495) explores in the context of Kirtpur. Similarly, Dharamshala's location in Dhauladhar mountain range makes it a vibrant tourist station, and tourism emerged as the main economic activity. The state also projected Dharamshala as 'a global tourist destination for all reasons and all seasons' (SCP, 2016:13). The shift toward tourism as an economic drivers drag Dharamshala into the discussion of destination branding strategies. As destination branding strategies are used by large and metropolitan cities to diversify economies in the global south (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021:10). The promotion of tourism in small towns may shares similarities in strategies with other large cities (Qian et al., 2012). Such an branding strategies reinforced cities in neoliberal trajectory, speculative movements of capital, where governments engage in short term regulatory undercutting to attract investments

Fig. 3 Dharamshala Cricket Stadium and newly constructed infrastructure. Source: Cricket stadium, Arora (2017); Author

(Peck et al., 2009). The debates of neoliberalism also revolve around the exploration of big cities, where large urban transformation projects are introduced to improve the infrastructure status and boost the economies and urban elites influencing policymakers. However, in small towns, infrastructure projects and financial support to strengthen Municipal governance largely come from the government to revive and strengthen the economic base. In this way local businesspeople and political actors are the main drivers of urban transformation. The investment on the periphery of small towns is not a usual process and has a connection with politics of accumulation and connected in a singular thread of 'land capital'. Land surrounds the cities and towns become valuable assets for establishing new businesses and real estates. With the upgradation of Municipal Council to Municipal Corporation that incorporated the 18 villages into the boundary of the city. The land in new periphery becomes a new site of investment. As a result, the local businesspeople, politicians and bureaucrats started investing in land, and unplanned and unscientific construction on the periphery sped up. Gururani (2020); Sood (2021) explores such practices of in the context of metropolitan cities.

Dharamshala has no big infrastructure projects that fellow the structure of neo-liberalization but has a cricket ground, ropeway, education institutes, and yoga centres. The scenic location of Dharamshala provides a significant advantage in attracting tourists and new businesses such as hotels and restaurants.

Dharamshala's urban sprawl may be similar to the urbanization observed in other cities of India with the expansion of economic activities, change in land use, and haphazard development on the periphery. In 2011, its cricket ground was included in the International Cricket Council (ICC) venues for one-day international and T-20 games. The international cricket matches invited a vast floating population (Dharamshala cricket ground has a 22,000-seating capacity), cricket teams, and staff. New hotels (five stars) come in the periphery. The cricket ground in the abode of the hills becomes a centre of attraction in lower Dharamshala. Around 1500 to 2000 people visit the ground daily.[7] A substantial floating population has come to Dharamshala, and as a result, the new hotel comes in the surrounding rural area of Kheneria, Sidhbari and Sakoh. In these rural areas, rule and regulation of TCP (Town and Country Planning) is not implemented, so people are not bound to design their building as per the norms and rules (See Fig. 3 the photo of cricket ground and newly built infrastructure). The local politicians and businesspeople indulge in these practices of construction of buildings and acquiring huge land. Later in the merger process, all these areas come under the MC, and authorities initiate proper planning for land use and implement the construction rules. In this way, most of the structures and activities come in the illegal/unplanned/

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[7] Personal communication, Minash, 18 June, 2019.

informal discussion (Puri, 2018). Similar processes again repeated on the periphery and remained out of the reach of urban planners.

In Dharamshala, the small infrastructure projects are intended to attract tourists, such as ropeway that connects lower Dharamshala to upper Dharamshala, new parking spaces, a Tulip Garden and Budha Park. The government initiative to organize the winter session of Vidhan Sabha in Dharamshala, a huge infrastructure is developed at its periphery to accommodate the session. The adjacent village area around Vidhan Sabha experienced a huge rise in land prices and new individual residential complexes. The houses were constructed in this area in colonies or residential complexes. The sub-urban area and new residential complexes have adopted the governance mechanism of the urban residential welfare association to manage amenities. The temporary campus of the Central University of Himachal Pradesh was established in Dharamshala, and most education institutes and training centres are in lower Dharamshala. Lower Dharamshala caters to the administrative institute, small business farms, education institutes, and new business ventures as it has space, the scope for infrastructure expansion and connectivity facilities. It is hard to mark the boundaries on the periphery that is continuously expanding toward the countryside. Looking at the facade of buildings, built structure and density, it is hard to identify or draw a line between the urban part and rest of spaces. In 2016 Dharamshala was selected under the SCM through the fast-track selection process (MoHA, 2016). The aim of SCM is "to promote cities across India that provide core infrastructure and give a decent quality of life to [their] citizens, a clean and sustainable environment and application of 'Smart' solutions". To fulfil this objective Government of India (GoI) will provide Rs. 500 crores to each city, and state/ULBs will also contribute their matching share, i.e. Rs. 500 crores (Ministry of Urban Development, 2015:2—13). The awarding of Smart City to Dharamshala is a welcome move by GoI to include small towns and cities despite their small size. As noted, the shift in urban development policy 'beyond the size-based criteria' may further boost urbanization in India and fill the gap between metropolitans and small cities. It further led to the empirical question of how smart cities will change small cities at structural and functional levels. Dharamshala being a *small* size in demographic and

geographical terms may have advantages as compared to other smart cities as it covers only nine prime locations with 775 acres and 27,053 total area and population (the official record of smart city Dharamshala) that is equal to half the total population. From the selection of Dharamshala in SCM, it has been completed only five projects such as Augmentation & Automation at Sources & Plants (29.73 crore), GIS Web portal (1.29 core), E-Nagarpalika (1.17 corer), Dharamshala Smart City website (0.35 crore) and Root zone Treatment-Phase 1 (1.40 core) and seven other projects of the smart city are under execution and rest of projects tender floated.[8] Apart from the government schemes, as mentioned at the starting of the paper, the infrastructure development and growth of Dharamshala and many other towns are motivated by locals and their internal logic and endless negotiation with state and market. The investment in hotels, malls, retails, and other service businesses are locally motivated to provide a decent environment to tourists and cater to the floating population. The contribution of cultural heritage to tourism development is also one factor. With the influx of Tibetans in town, it became a centre for yoga and meditation. With the increasing number of foreign tourists, some part of Dharamshala, especially Dharamkot, known as mini-Israel, has a Jewish community centre, Chabad house. Norbulingka, Namgyal monastery, Gyuto monastery, Nam art gallery, Rakkar village known for the social and technological venture, Cricket stadium, Indru Nag for paragliding become the new space for tourist attractions. The way people of Dharamshala have integrated themself into the new economy. In December 2019, the state government organized an investment meet in attracting International and national investors in Dharamshala. It is unclear how many new infrastructure projects have come to Dharamshala, but it has become the centre for investors and different development infrastructures.

The socio-ethnic imperative of the town

Dharamshala's has highly heterogeneous community those has different history of mobility in colonial and postcolonial period. The communities are organized

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[8] Progress report of Dharamshala Smart City Ltd 2019.

Fig. 4 Advertisements of yoga and healing practices. Source: Author

into two group; one, international and domestic migrants, refugees from Tibet, Nepal and other countries; two who originated from various Indian state such as Jammu and Kashmir, Rajasthan, Bihar, Punjab. Many of them are seasonal migrants attracted by the economic opportunities. Bloch (2018) call it cross cultural town due to its cultural and ethnic composition. The local communities utilize its cultural assets to strengthen the economic bases. Jayne et al., (2010) argues that cultural significance of small towns remained unexplored and urban theories neglected the density and diversity of cultural and social production and consumption. The new emerging economic landscape of Dharamshala is imbricated with caste and ethnic relations. The traditional landowners such as Gaddi remained dominant in the political and economic sphere. Gaddi community dominated the political arena from 1990 to the present in state legislative and local politics (Jha & Singh, 2022). The upper caste in Gaddi community is primarily involved in the business of hotels, and restaurants, tracking, tour and travels. Some of the Gaddis are actively involved in yoga teaching and self-care practices (See Fig. 4).

Gaddis become the main beneficiary of the change in consumption practices. Along with Gaddis, another major group that dominates the economy of Dharamshala is the migrants from Tibet. The Tibetan population majorly reside in the Mcleodganj and is involved in promoting religious cultural practices. Tibetan opened yoga centres, eateries selling Tibetan dishes and cultural artefacts. The presence of Tibetans in Dharamshala provides a distinctive form to its tourism driven economy. Tourism in Dharamshala creates opportunities for other ethnic groups who have settled here since colonial times. One such group is the Gorkha community. The Gorkha community is divided into two groups: one with Indian citizenship and the second who migrated from Nepal for employment and other opportunities. Most Indian Gorkha served in the Indian Army, and others are involved in formal and informal economic activities and contribute to space production.

Meanwhile, lower caste groups are still inactive in business and politics. Even lower-caste groups have seen intergenerational mobility by taking advantage of government reservation policy in education and employment. There are numerous other castes and ethnic groups in towns that remains an important part of everyday urban life. The socio-culture composition of Dharamshala shows tourism and culture shape urban form beyond its size. The social dynamics of

cities and towns do not abound the population's size; it is more connected with what form they produce.

Informality and illegality discussion beyond the size

One of the national newspapers in the local edition of Dharamshala reported issues related to land encroachment and illegal construction in the planning area (Dainik Bhaskar, 17 November 2018). The local correspondent narrated these stories multiple times, highlighting the people involved in these activities and their linkages with local business actors and politicians. These stories often circulate to particular people and their association based on caste and ethnic linkages. Such a small geographical area and population have the same form of activities and practices usually found in large urban centres. The local newspaper is full of stories of encroachment, illegal construction, land mafia, traffic issues, sanitation and other conflicts. However, such stories of urban practices are more familiar with larger urban centres, and similar stories also become a part of small towns.

> The Municipal Corporation of Dharamshala has not identified a vendor zone in the last three years. Beyond this, the officer of MCD has continued taking action against the street vendors and throwing our vegetables and artefacts. Even though we are punctual, we pay Rs.50 as a fee (*parchi*) daily to set up a stall. The vendors claim that MCD officers take action without any prior information. (Danik Bhaskar, 16 November 2018 and translated from original news published in Hindi).

In another case same Hindi newspaper published the story of illegal construction in MCD land:

> The local people of McLeodganj have complained to MCD authorities on the way to the Tibetan central library, a multistory building under construction on MCD-owned land. Some people have blocked the public road by putting an iron gate and are utilising open public space to park their vehicles. People have complained to due authority to come on the spot and stop the work (Danik Bhaskar, 17 November 2018

and translated from original news published in Hindi).

There are many stories of such unauthorized construction, illegal activities, and the status of civil amenities published in local newspapers. These issues and debates on urban activities in Indian cities draw attention to informal settlements, informal economy, illegal vs legal, contestation between various groups (urban poor and elite, slum and residential, government and civil society) and claim of natives on city resources.

Coincidently informal and illegal activities of small towns have not explored to contribute to the larger discussion of space production. As said, such discussions often come from large cities and complicate the understanding of urbanization below. Scholarship from Indian cities such as Mehra (2012) highlights the protest of trader groups' against the sealing drive of the government; illegal slums have been removed by city institutions in Delhi (Bhan, 2009); forceful eviction of street vendors (Bhowmik, 2003). Such discussion on illegal activities and unauthorized construction is an integral part of larger cities in India. However, small towns have not gotten much attention in such discussion and are often neglected due to their size, scale and vibrancy. One reason for their neglect is their small population size and scale of activities. As mentioned, that absolute size does not matter, but what are the questions and approach to find the answer is more important. The ethnographic explorations of Dharamshala have the informal market, i.e., the *Manzi* market's heart of the Dharamshala economic, political, and cultural sphere. The *manzi* market is typical in other geographical settings, not only in small towns but also in big cities. The location of *manzi* market is very similar to other markets in large cities, which encroach the roadside spaces. The *manzi* market vendor built a semi *pucca* (concrete and wooden) structure on government land despite the rule and regulations of city institutions that prohibited any type of construction work on government land. Gaddis, Tibetan and Gorkha are the ethnic groups who have domination over the *manzi* market. The way *manzi* market has presence in Mcleodganj along with the formal organization of businesses it raises many questions regarding their establishments and functioning. Who allows the construction of a semi *pucca* structure on government land? How do

Photo 1 Slum delimitation. Source: Goswami (2016)

Photo 2 Encroachment. Source: Author

business organizations allow establishing *manzi* in front of their shops? The *manzi* market has a union to raise their voice and establish linkages with political groups and civic organizations. This association is based on social and cultural heritage and political interests. Chatterji and Roy (2016) also explore association of street vendors with local politicians in the context of Calcutta. Their local political networks help them to ensure protection from administration and civil societies. In this process, the informal market becomes a captive vote bank to local political leaders. Such explorations of establishment of street vendors and *manzi* market are contradict with establish arguments where state itself create informality through a system of deregulation, unmapping, and exceptionalism (Roy, 2009). Dharamshala, along with potentially other cities and towns, grows on similar lines, showcasing how the planning system functioning in-between binaries of formal and informal.

The slum eviction in big cities has a significant perspective on understanding the city and debates of informalities, encroachment, forceful evictions and 'right to the city. In small towns, the slum area has a very minimal presence, and sometimes it is not notified and identified by authorities. The Dharamshala Charan *Khad* (small stream) area is occupied by a labourer who primarily works as street vendors, daily wage earners, and rag-pickers. These huts' locations were near the new Municipal office at Charan *Khad.* See Photo 1 of slum demolish and Photo 2 encroachment over drainage system and toward road.

According to the DMC, the Charan *Khad* settlement is not an officially declared slum area under

Himachal Pradesh Slum Act 1979. The people have established an illegal settlement on government land that violates the act. The eviction was associated with Dharamshala Municipal Council's upgraded status to Corporation and selection in Smart City Mission. The eviction started as per the court order dated 25–05-2016. The city authority evicted the settlement of Charan *Khad* without providing any rehabilitation plan for effective families. It has the same expression as experienced in Delhi and other cities during slum eviction (Bhan, 2013). The migrant worker declared 'illegal encroacher' on government land and polluting the environment. Civil organizations have the same demands, such as a proper rehabilitation plan; they are also part of the city and have the right to it. The arguments presented on the experiences of urban activities of big cities have similarities with Dharamshala. Such as on the normative vision of "global city", "Millennium city" and "city beautiful" slums have been evicted in big cities. The questions that remained absent in all studies: how do people have the right to occupy government property? Can a state not have the right to protect its property? The scholar of urban studies must think about these questions. The aspect of slum dwellers and street vendors explores through the right to the city perspective. The framework provides a platform to raise the voice of urban poor, civil societies, and academicians to question the planning regime that victimized the poor and encroachers. The slum eviction and illegalities

cannot be interpreted solely through the dominant conceptual frameworks of right to the city and neo liberalization. Beyond these perspectives, it has many questions that remain unanswered and unexplored. The paper tried to establish similarities between urban activities and processes in big cities and small towns and confronted many questions that must be addressed to provide a realistic picture of the city.

Geographically Dharamshala is equal to a ward of big cities such as Delhi and Mumbai. Still, it has similarities with social dynamics, economic opportunities, political structure, caste and ethnic relations, way of informalities and process of encroachment and illegalities. On the issue of governance, small towns and big cities have similar governance structures and political institutions. Both are governed by the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act and further amended by respective states. Urban life in small and big cities are rotated around the economic and political institutions that affect the built form, cultural, social norms and relations. Like other cities of India's, small towns also have similar issues, such as a shortage of clean piped water that ensures 24X7 supply to households. Traffic and solid waste management issues are more prominent in small towns. In small towns scope to widen the road is very low and lacks public transportation. Small towns lack specialized use of places, and all activities (public gathering, celebration of festivals, political rallies, and common agitation) happen on the roadside. As a result, it created uneven traffic congestion. In contrast, big cities have designated or identified places for public gatherings, and traffic congestion has been linked with increased vehicles and population on city roads.

Sanitation and management of solid waste in a scientific way remain a challenge to the city planners and administrators. This problem is more precarious in small towns where towns do not have any plants to dispose of waste. Dharamshala and many more towns in India do not have waste disposal plants. The waste collected in these towns is disposed of manually and causes severe health hazards. At the level of infrastructure facilities like in other cities of India, Dharamshala is also on the way to adopting a public–private partnership. So, infrastructure needs can be fulfilled to cater for the growing population. The only difference is the size and volume of activities (compared with big cities) which cannot become a

core argument to bypass or neglect the small towns. On the population size and scale of activities, one cannot neglect small towns' economic processes, social dynamics, cultural diversity, infrastructure facilities and level of informalities, encroachment. The urban theorist must go beyond the size-based categorization and consider these settlements part of urban India and their contribution to understanding urbanization and urbanism from the below.

Conclusion

The growth in metro cities in term of population and economies shows India's urban story is driven by metro cities (Haque & Patel, 2018). The metro cities growth is supported by the "central scheme" (Khan, 2013) and "political-business deals" (Heller et al., 2019:151—182). The academic underpinning in the urban studies' field gives much significance to big cities' processes that shape economies of cities. The scholars working in urban studies have followed the frameworks developed on exploration of large cities and focusing on how urban processes intertwine and interconnect in global economies and networks. The approaches of the "political economy", "cultural analysis", "planetary urbanization", "ordinary cities and "assemblage" emerge from different cities in times of globalization, economic connectivity and rapid urbanization. However, the common thread among all these conceptual gazes lies in the realm of exploration of urbanization and urbanism of metropolitan cities.

The way small towns are explored in academic comparison of metropolitan cities fails to provide an accurate picture of urban India. The academic biases with small towns not only fail to incorporate processes and activities but also explored with an inferior perspective. Sharma (2013a, 2013b:66—67) quotes Ashish Bose "God made the city in heaven, while the devil made the town" and "children of lesser God" these interpretations show how the researchers have taken academic persistence toward small towns. The punchline "small towns do not provide quality of life", "non-presence of growth opportunities" and "small cities and towns do not have a future in India" comes from the comparative analysis exploring the process and way of life. Small towns are projected as "urban divide" and "dual cities" for their inequalities (opportunities, amenities, and way of life) and fighting with

traditional social problems (Gill, 2013:96). Despite these arguments and biases toward big cities and their theoretical exploration bypass the hundreds of small towns in India and the world. In fact, the context provided in this paper asks size may not be a parameter for understanding and conceptualizing the urbanism and urbanity of small towns and cities. The question of size remained unresolved as Ocejo et al. (2020) argues that it does not require a standard measure but more important is the localized processes and activities that shape urbanization. What is more interested in small cities towns as Bell & Jayne (2009) argues that researchers uncover the process and practices of small cities and towns to contribute in urban theory. As paper explores the conceptualization of urban is not limited to the administrative and statistical criteria and exploration of a few metropolitan cities. The development of small towns and Dharamshala are driven by functional urban characteristics such as administrative, political, economic, local investment, location, cultural diversity and internal logic of citizens. The paper expands the horizons of urban studies beyond the size and focuses on the relationship of its process, form of interdependence and number of interactions that happens in small towns and cities. It allows to think that difference is not about the size and scale; it is all about how discussion come out from the activities and processes and contribute in knowledge production. By exploring small towns allows to see cities from below and traces common urban processes in Indian cities and may be in other part of world. Hopefully, urban scholars must consider the small towns as a research agenda, and their exploration can contribute to the urban theory.

Declarations

Conflicts of interests The author has no conflict of Interests.

Ethical approval "All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards." While ethnographic method has been deployed for data collection (interview) based on unstructured interview and discussion of many rounds with individuals. In ethnographic study formal consent is not required.

Statement on the welfare of animals This paper does not contain any study with animals.

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