

Slums of Silchar: An interpretation

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Abstract

This study is an endeavor to portray the picture of slums in Silchar town of Assam. The town of South Assam has 14 slum pockets as per the Town and Country Planning Office. Almost all the slum pockets have poor housing, except Biswanath Colony and Joy Durga Colony. Families are functioning either as joint or nuclear. Education of the people is low. People are earning their livelihood as driver, day labourer and the like. Most of the slum pockets have also civic problems and for this several programmes have been introduced but their problems are yet to be solved.

Key words: Slums; slum pockets; Silchar; slum dwellers, livelihood.

Introduction:

Human society has undergone tremendous social change over a period of time. Urbanisation as a social phenomenon is a by-product of social change in the society. As it is always said that there are two sides of the coin, the same can be said for the process of Urbanisation. People in today's world are having a better quality of life than the kings and queens of ancient times but along with the better quality of life there are plentiful of difficulties which human beings are experiencing. The mushrooming of slums or shanty towns is one such obscurity which the modern men are facing. Slums are regarded as an integral part of urban phenomenon in India. Even the most planned city of Chandigarh, India has slums. The number of slums dwelling population in India is escalating day by day but the quality of life in this blighted area is wretched and the populace of the area are deprived of the basic amenities of their life.

Slums of Silchar Town:

Silchar a town in the southern plains of Assam, India has almost everything that should be a part of urban town however the town has also experienced the growth of slums, so the study is an endeavor to portray the picture of slums in Silchar in terms of the indispensable necessities of their life. According to Town and Country Planning Office, Silchar has 14 slum pockets namely, Madhuraghat or Gandhighat Colony, Radharaman Colony, Adharnath Colony, Mokam

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Road or Manipuri Basti Road, Itkholaghat Colony, Idgah Ghat Colony or Swamiji Road, Kalibari Char (largest slum pocket) , Mahut Para Lane 1 & 2, Sib Colony, Joydurga Colony – Biswanath Colony, Sweeper’s Colony, Fishermans’ Colony, Gossaipara, and New Colony. Therefore, the primary materials forming the basis of the study have been gathered with the help of observation and interview from the said slum pockets.

Slums of Silchar are characterized by poor housing. Utmost number of houses is kutchra with C.I. Sheet and Kutchra with polythene and bamboo roofing, RCC (Reinforced Cement Concrete) houses are less in number. However Biswanath Colony and Joy Durga Colony present a very dissimilar picture, as all the houses are concrete. Family as a functional unit functions either as joint family or nuclear family in the slums of Silchar, but nuclear families have outnumbered the joint families. For the purpose of cooking the populace of the area use LPG (Liquified Petroleum Gas), Kerosene stove and firewood. Sanitation facility of the area is also very unhealthy as majority of the inhabitants use katcha latrine and a few of the families have sanitary latrines.

The social composition of different slum pockets shows that people of all caste viz, General, Schedule Caste, Schedule Tribe, Other Backward Caste (OBC) are part of the slum pocket. Majority of the people are Hindu by religion and belong to Bengali community only a small number of families in Itkhola Ghat and New Colony are Muslims.

Education of the people is low. Children of the area go to the neighbouring schools. Kalbari Char has a school within the locality, so children go there. People are earning their livelihood by engaging in activities like running business, earning as driver, day labourer, govt employee, private employee and so on. In Sweeper colony maximum of the men are employed as sweepers. Women folk of the slum pockets are also engaged in diverse economic activities as they worked as domestic help, Ananganwadi workers and the like. Women in Gossaipara clean the bottles of wine that are collected by the rag pickers. The women clean such bottles for which they get around Rs 30 (aprox) for cleaning 100 wine bottles. The detergent is provided to them by the person who deals with such wasted bottles. These bottles are cleaned and send back to the wine company again. Wines are again filled in those bottles and are supplied to the market thus in this way the bottles are recycled.

Migration has always been an imperative characteristic of slum area and slums in Silchar are no exception to it. People have migrated for better employment opportunities and some have migrated as their situation demands and women in the pockets have migrated after marriage.

Thus slums of Silchar constitute both the migrated populace and the original inhabitants of the area.

Participation of slum dwellers in voting is significantly higher than their urban counterparts. Most of the slums pockets have similar civic problems but the intensity of their problem varies. The principal predicament that confronts the slum pockets is that of drinking water, sanitation, water logging, improper roads, lack of proper electric connection and so on. In *Ikhola Ghat* people are unsatisfied because they don't have supply water facility at home. In some parts of Kalibari Char people have to buy water for consumption and some people use river water for drinking. People in some parts of Madhuraghat are however satisfied with the supply water facility as they were provided with the facility of supply water, but in some parts people continue to consume river water which is detrimental to their health. In Biswanath Colony people have opted for tube well, as there has been acute problem of supply water. In Joy Durga Colony, the diameter of supply water pipe is small. Some houses have supply water facilities and some don't have, those who don't have supply water facility at home are dependent on their neighbours or on the municipality tap in the road.

Another obstacle that surrounds the slum pockets is the improper roads. There is lack of all weather roads in the slum pockets. In rainy season it becomes difficult for the people to move freely. However Biswanath colony and Joy Durga Colony depicts a different picture as all the roads are concrete. Improper drainage is also a common trait of the slum area and slums in Silchar also have the same characteristics. There is absence of proper drainage system in all the slums of Silchar. For example in Joy Durga Colony drains are narrow and depth is also very less and thus area get submerged after heavy shower.

Slums in Silchar are confronted with several tribulations. To address their poor living condition, several improvement initiatives like National Slum Development Programme (NSDP), Backward Region Grant Fund (BRGF), Swarna Jayanti Shahari Rozgar Yojana (SJSRY) and many more have been introduced, but many of their problems are yet to be solved.

Conclusion:

Thus, the study portrayed a poor picture of the slums of Silchar in terms of the indispensable necessities of their life. Their housing condition is not up to the mark, as maximum number of the dwellers dwells in *Kutch*a house with tin roof and *kutch*a house with polythene and bamboo roofing. As regards the facility of drinking water, it is also not properly

available to all the inhabitants. The slum populace in the town use LPG gas, kerosene stove and firewood for cooking. The sanitation facility of the slum residents is not healthy as only a small proportion of them use sanitary latrine. Education of slum dwellers of Silchar town is low. Thus, government and NGOs must take adequate steps to ameliorate the pitiable condition of the slum dwellers.

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