Social Background of North Zone Slums in Mysore: A Sociological Observation.

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Abstract

Slums are the abodes of India's poor. On account of inequality, people often face problems like poverty, social backwardness and unemployment, which have led to the birth of slums in cities. Slums are often referred to as housing estates where low-caste resident's dwell. The Census of India defines a slum as "A compact area of at least 300 people or about 60-70 families". Illegally emerged slums on government or private land have further exacerbated the problems of hygienic civic amenities. The number of slums is increasing year by year on account of unemployment problems in the mofussil areas. This study focuses on the background and the material conditions of slums. Seven slums of Mysore city were selected and analyzed through the mode of primary data collection.

Keywords: Slum, Citizen, Unemployment, Census.

Introduction

 Slums have become one of the hallmarks of a rapidly growing society. They have started playing many important roles in the modern society. Environmental, social, cultural and economic factors also play important roles in comprehending the lives of slum dwellers. The physical milieu of slums poses formidable challenges to slum dwellers.

Now- a-days, the social, economic, cultural and political aspects of slum dwellers are gradually undergoing drastic transformation. In other words, they are under evolution. The principal example is that the slums being converted into apartments with helping hands of the government. But the studies have shown that though this shift implies positive upward class mobility of the slum dwellers, there is an increase in widening gap of social inequality among them.

Therefore, there is a need for studies to show the ways to ameliorate the problems and improve the quality of life of slum dwellers.

Meaning of Slums:

A simple definition of a slum according to UN-HABITAT is "A densely populated urban area characterized by substandard housing and squalor."

Slums have the following features: inadequate access to potable water, inadequate hygienic sanitation, poor habitable housing infrastructure, overcrowding family members and unsafe housing conditions.

Study Area and Research Methodology:

The present study is a sociological study of slum dwellers in Mysore city. The study area covers a total of 07 slums out of 63 notified slums in Mysore city. The 34th Ward of Mysore City i.e. Medar Block includes Bambu Bazar, Janata Sawmill, Rajarajeshwari Saw Mill, Mysore Saw Mill and Yashwant Nagar slums. The study area consisted of 1161 households out of which 400 households as 20% were selected for the study using simple random sampling method. The information was analyzed based on the data collected from the primary study.

Objectives of the Study:

The present study is a sociological study of slum dwellers in Mysore city with the following objectives.

- To know the reasons for the emergence of slums.
- To know the structural development of slums.

Slums background:

Medar Block: The people living here belong to the Medar caste, hence the name Medar Block. People here also migrated from different parts of the district and lived in huts. It was also a public place. It is a small pit where waste water flows.

People displaced from Nanju Mallige shop settled in this place.

Yashwantha Nagar: It is located in the central part of Mysore, adjacent to Bambu Bazar slum. Adjacent to this is the office of the Slum Development Board. It was called a pig pit, because pig farmers used to raise pigs there and built huts there. Hence area is called pig pit. Initially, it was a burial ground donated by the erstwhile Maharaja of Mysore to the residents of this area. The poor people of Mysore urban area, who had no place to live, built coconut frond huts here.

Initially this area consisted of just 10 to 15 huts.

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But the Mysore City Corporation used to demolish the shack-huts saying that they should not build huts as this was a public space. Since they had no house to dwell in, they had to resort to build the huts again and again. When this conflict was going on repeatedly, the city council's subterfuge was becoming unstoppable, a villager advised them to seek the help a leader named Montelingaiah who was fighting for the people of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. A board was planted in this area to showcase their ownership rights. Since then this place became their permanent residence and they could live in peace.

In later days, when the people of this area formed an association and tried to give a name to their place of settlement, one Hanumappa suggested the name Ambedkar Nagar, but realizing that the people who live here are not all Scheduled Caste people and suggested that it should be called Vasant Nagar. But when all the people joined chanted in chorus Yeshavantha Nagar, it came to be called Yeshavantha Nagar. In later days, the Sewage Disposal Board of Mysore named it the Yeshwantha Nagar Sewage Area as it was adjacent to the culvert and the grave yard where waste water flowed. In later days, the state government constructed houses for them under the Vambe Scheme with the aim of creating a slum-free state in the state. Vacant plots were given to those who wanted to have elsewhere.

Bamboo Bazar: This slum is also populated by Mysore city dwellers and people from places adjacent to Mysore area.

The poor people from different districts and other states who also came to the city seeking jobs, were without a house to dwell in. so they built thatched coconut frond huts and started living here. This locality is adjacent to the railway station. Since it was a government vacant land, at first the residents used to make their living by selling bamboo products near the Nanju Malige. Accidently one day all the bamboos were caught fire and reduced to ashes. Then the Maharaja of Mysore allowed these residents to sell their wares on the side of the Jambu Savari Road. Since then these people started living in the land beside the road and next to the railway track. Since then this area is known as Bamboo Bazar.

Rajarajeshwari Saw Mill: This wooden saw mill has been functioning since prior to independence. Some of the people who came here looking for jobs started working in this saw mill and built huts and started living there.

Mysore Saw Mill: This was a public place. The local homeless people of Mysore built thatched coconut frond huts with the support of local leaders on the vacant land around the wooden saw mill and made a living by doing the petty jobs available nearby. It is known as Mysore Sawmill Slum because there was a saw mill in the place of their residence.

Janata Sawmill: Janata Sawmill slum area is also home to homeless, poor and homeless migrants. They build huts in that area and did works that were available to them nearby. Some still work in saw that mill; others work as laborers in the city. Since Janata Sawmill is in their residence, it is known as Janata Sawmill Slum Area.

R.M. C. Yard: It is a public market place in Mysore city. It is adjacent to Mysore railway station. Initially, the workers and sellers lived here by building very small plastic sheds. Gradually small thatched huts replaced them and later they started living in mud walled houses. It is called the RMC Yard Sewage Area as it is adjacent to the railway department.

Early Slum Life: Slum dwellers used to think like a frog in a well in the early 1970s and 80s. It looked like a real world to them. A portion of money earned from daily wages was spent on alcohol and the rest used for the family maintenance.

Quarrels and fights were very common among them and many of them were victims to many addictions. The environment where they lived in had a profound influence on them. Arguments, quarrels and fights between husband and wife and other people were common within the slums.

Then in the period of 1980s to 90s, the increase in adult population in the slums gave rise to all sorts of anti social and illegal activities. Cheating, stealing, beating, smuggling became a common phenomena amion the Childers. They were easily addicted to smoking beedi and cigarette, munching gutka, beeda, Hans, Manik Chand. Noisy quarrels were common every day. With the increase of grown-ups in the slums, rose the formation of gangs. Quarrels among the boys of different slums were common phenomena. They used to way lay the passersby to attack them either to loot or snatch away their belongings.

Children found the fight in the slums attractive. The strong person became an icon for children. Some people were sitting there waiting for a chance to start a fight. They also used to break their teeth and scratch their heads while fighting. Only the police intervention could bring the situation to normal.

 Between 1990-20 changes could be seen in the slums. The influence of modern western culture, globalization, T.V. mobiles, government programs, school education has caused changes in them. The riots that used to happen in the slums are no more. Gangs are gone and kids are getting good education. Nowadays one could see many IAS Officers, Doctors, Engineers, College Professors, Diploma holders, Ph.D. degree awardees born and brought up from the slums. Slum life instills courage in children and teaches the way to live.

"Slum shows the way to live", says a person who has experienced slum life. He explains that when they go hungry, they go to the shop and pay one rupee, get an envelope, keep it visible in the pocket of the shirt and go to the marriage halls to have food pretending that they were invited for the wedding ceremony. After the partaking meal they put the cover in our knickers pocket and move away as if nothing has happened. But the people in the wedding hall laugh at them saying that their slum was a good place for thieves.

They used to rent others vacant huts in their slum for 500 rupees to the strangers. One of the strangers used to get up in the early morning; offered prayers to god; got ready with his sack on his back; smeared sacred ashes on his forehead and go in silence. When he came back in the evening, he gave them snacks to eat. But one day the police came looking for him and

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narrated that he was stealing gold from the innocent people. He said that it was strange that we did not have our own place to stay, but succeeding in renting someone else's empty hut and get paid to have fun. But now some of even the backward castes living in the slum have grown up economically and live in their own houses or rented houses in other residential areas and have left the slum houses on rent. But even though it is in the heart of the city, people say that the rent here is less than 2500 per house.

When talking to another elderly grandmother of the slum, most of the grandmothers here have migrated from other states. They carry land while building a house, even if asked to fight over the locals. Some of them have gone to Bangalore to work. If we go to plaster work, tiles work, cement work and factory work, only we of age are here. There is a rich merchant in this Mather block of Mysore. When he was there, we had put up huts here because there was no space. Then he came and said, "I will not disturb you. For now, you can be there. Now they are gone. They have children. They did not disturb us. They should come and leave the space. Even though they said that this place is not in our name.

There is an illusion that a slum is only for Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes. But all the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes including Backward Castes such as Shepherds, Okkaliga, Lingayat, Uppara, Vishwakarma, Madiwala Shetty can be seen living here. Muslims live in separate slums.

Reasons for Emergence of Slums:

According to the information gathered from the preliminary Data Collection of the study area and through interviews it is easy to conclude that the main reason for the emergence of slums is poverty. It has been found that these slums are raised by people who are unable to pay the rent and the poor people migrated from nearby and faraway places.

The main reasons for emergence of slums are:

1. Migration
2. Lack of Housing facility
3. Poverty
4. Unemployment
5. Job attractiveness in the city

Structural nature of Slums areas:

Initially coconut frond huts were constructed in the government owned vacant areas. Next plastic roofs huts were constructed. Later they built a four feet wall around the hut. Many a time the city corporation destroys these illegal structures. Whenever they destroyed these huts, it becomes very difficult for them to rebuild them. In later days, they started building mud walls and put up tin roofs with the money he saved from their hard labour. The city council later identified these as slums and helped financially. Some are given financial help and some are

given loan facility for house construction. Thus the houses are built step by step. Now the slums have become sights are of mud houses, brick houses, shared houses, terraced houses.

Conclusion:

Slums represent poverty. Failure of city administration or short-sighted planning of the government along with negligence led to rapid growth of slums. Slums cannot be cleared just because the government has given schemes. Efforts are needed to implement them. There is a need to rehabilitate slums with decent facilities in a better environment.

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