

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

A Socio – Economic Study of the Slum Dwellers of Assam

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Abstract:

This study is an attempt to analyse the worse socio – economic conditions of the slum dwellers of Assam. The slum dwellers of Assam are deprived from the basic amenities of life. Majority of the slum dwellers are living in below poverty line. Though the slum dwellers make a substantial contribution to the economy of urban place and also their services are very essential for the rich people but on the other hand they are themselves living in darkness and dirt. Due to lack of education and regular source of income the slum dwellers are unable to improve their socio – economic conditions. It can be concluded from the study that the slum dwellers are a part of urban life and if we want sustainable development and inclusive growth then the socio – economic conditions of the slum dwellers must be improved.

Keywords: Slum dwellers, socio – economic conditions, poverty.

1. Introduction

The term slum came into vogue since the 18th century. It was used to describe squalid housing in densely populated districts of industrial cities. According to Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences (Vol-4, s-z) the term “slum” indeed is always relative. It connotes the worst structural and sanitary conditions and the most degraded occupancy, usually by the lowest income groups, of any given period. Under Section - 3 of the Slum Area Improvement and Clearance Act, 1956 slum have been defined as mainly those residential areas where dwellings are in any respect unfit for human habitation by reasons of dilapidation, overcrowding, faulty arrangements and designs of such buildings, narrowness or faulty arrangement of streets, lack of ventilation, light, sanitation facilities or any combination of these factors which are detrimental to safety, health and morals.

As per UN Habitat a slum is characterized by lack of durable housing, insufficient living area, lack of access to clean water, inadequate sanitation and insecure tenure.

Slums are a universal phenomenon of communal living. Assyrian, Babylonian, Grecian and Roman towns all had their districts where the poor were housed in insubstantial buildings of mud, brick and frame, whole families living in one room and the tenements rising storey upon storey to shut off light and air circulation from the streets and rooms below. Mediaeval walled cities were also characterized by excessive land coverage.

Modern slums date from the industrial revolution with its accompanying concentration of population. In England, particularly, the rapid growth of factory towns led to hasty building and shoddy construction.

The word slum is used in different countries of the world to convey the different meanings, such as ‘squatter settlement’ in India, ‘shanty town’ or ‘hutment colonies’ in western countries.

The developing countries of the world, including India which is committed to a policy of ‘growth with social justice’ face the problem of slum in all its intensity. As per 2001 census 42.6 million people of India live in slums which constitute 4% of the total population and 15% of the total urban population of India. According to the latest census 2011, slum population of India has increased and it is 65.5 million which constitute 5% of the total population and 17.4% of the total urban population of India. State wise and union territory wise distribution of the slum population of India according to 2011 census is shown in Table 1

Sl. No.	Name of the State/Ut.Of India	Slum Population	Pc of the Slum Population to the Total Slum Population of India
1	Andhra Pradesh	10186934	15.55%
2	Arunachal Pradesh	15562	0.02%
3	Assam	197266	0.30%
4	Bihar	1237682	1.89%
5	Chhattisgarh	1898931	2.89%
6	Delhi	1785390	2.73%
7	Goa	26247	0.04%
8	Gujarat	1680095	2.57%
9	Haryana	1662305	2.54%
10	Himachal Pradesh	61312	0.09%
11	Jammu & Kashmir	662062	1.01%
12	Jharkhand	372999	0.57%
13	Karnataka	3291434	5.03%
14	Kerala	202048	0.31%
15	Madhya Pradesh	5688993	8.69%
16	Maharashtra	11848423	18.09%
17	Meghalaya	57418	0.09%
18	Mizoram	78561	0.12%
19	Nagaland	82324	0.13%
20	Odisha	1560303	2.38%
21	Punjab	1460518	2.23%
22	Rajasthan	2068000	3.16%
23	Sikkim	31378	0.05%
24	Tamil Nadu	5798459	8.85%
25	Tripura	139780	0.21%
26	Uttar Pradesh	6239965	9.53%
27	Uttarakhand	487741	0.74%
28	West Bengal	6418594	9.80%
29	Andaman & Nicobar Islands	14172	0.02%
30	Chandigarh	95135	0.15%
31	Pondicherry	144573	0.22%
Total	India	65494604	100%

Table 1: State wise /Union territory wise distribution of the slum population of India

Source – Census of India, 2011

Note: In case of Manipur, Daman & Diu, Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Lakshadweep no slum population has been reported at the census of India.

Table 1 shows that slum population is the highest in Maharashtra constituting 18.09% of the total slum population of India. Assam also is not free from the slums and it is 0.30% of the total slum population of India.

The ever increasing number of slum dwellers causes tremendous pressure on urban basic services and infrastructure. The greater potential of employment and promises of better life have lured many migrants from the surroundings and far off regions to the city, significantly adding to the natural growth. As a consequence, there are overcrowded cities with problems of housing, urban infrastructure, civic amenities etc. on one hand and under developed and poor regions on the other hand, creating regional imbalances.

1.1. The Condition of the Slum Dwellers in India

Slum dwellers are the most substantial but overlooked section of the Indian society. The slum people of India are treated like third rate citizens in their own country. Jobs, food, water, housing, sanitation all the basic amenities are not enjoyed by this class of people.

1.2. The present Status of the slum Dwellers of Assam

As per census, 2011, thirty-one (31) towns in Assam were reporting slums against 2613 towns reporting slums in India as a whole. According to the census of India, 2011, the slum population of Assam stands at 197,266 of which 101,424 are males and 95842 females. The slum population accounts for 0.63% of the total population and 4.5% of the total urban population of the state. Table 2 shows the slum population profile of Assam as per census,2011.

Sl. No.	Name of the City or Town	Population	Pc of the Slum Population to the Total Slum Population of Assam
1	Guwahati	25739	13.05%
2	Dibrugarh	27089	13.73%
3	Tinsukia	748	0.38%
4	Jorhat	9665	4.90%
5	Tezpur	3692	1.87%
6	Silchar	22749	11.53%
7	Nagaon	18110	9.18%
8	Sivasagar	881	0.45%
9	Gauripur	7794	3.95%
10	Dhubri	18501	9.38%
11	Sapatgram	4944	2.51%
12	Bilasipara	7571	3.84%
13	Chapar	3904	1.98%
14	Sarthebari	308	0.16%
15	Hojai	168	0.09%
16	Lanka	809	0.41%
17	Rangapara	2645	1.34%
18	North Lakhimpur	842	0.43%
19	Margherita	2694	1.37%
20	Nazira	2352	1.19%
21	Moranhat	2109	1.07%
22	Bokakhat	327	0.17%
23	Golaghat	3979	2.02%
24	Lakhipur	3630	1.84%
25	Karimganj	4157	2.11%
26	Lala	1125	0.57%
27	Bongaigaon	6140	3.11%
28	Bijni	5728	2.90%
29	Nalbari	5360	2.72%
30	Kharupatia	3022	1.53%
31	udalguri	484	0.25%
	Assam	197266	100%

Table 2: Slum population in Assam, census 2011
Source: Statistical Hand Book, Assam, 2014

It is seen from Table 2 that the slum population is the highest in Dibrugarh i.e.13.73% of the total slum population of Assam. In Guwahati, Silchar, Dhubri and Nagaon the percentage of slum population to the total slum population of Assam are 13.05%, 11.53%, 9.38% and 9.18% respectively.

1.3. Significance of the Study

The present study is an attempt to analyse the socio- economic conditions of the slum dwellers of Assam. Slum dwellers are well known for their dirty, congested, dilapidated and overcrowding living conditions. If the nation fails to improve the socio – economic conditions of the slum dwellers, the inclusive growth will remain a far cry. To elevate the living conditions of the slum dwellers, several studies have been made in different parts of the country. But in Assam only a few studies, those too by the municipal Corporation/ Boards only have so far been made. Therefore, a comprehensive information on the slum population of Assam is essential for formulating an effective and coordinated policy for urban planning.

1.4. Objective of the Study

1. To study the socio – economic conditions of the slum dwellers of Assam.

1.5. Scope of the Study

Three urban centres of Assam where the slum dwellers are in highest amount are selected for intensive study. These three urban centres are Dibrugarh with 27089 slum dwellers, Guwahati with 25739 slum dwellers and Silchar with 22749 slum dwellers. The proportions of slum population in the three urban centres (Dibrugarh, Guwahati and Silchar) to the total slum population of Assam as per 2011 census are 13.73%, 13.05% and 11.53% respectively. Ten percent of the slum pockets (subject to a minimum of 2) of each sample urban centre having the highest number of slum households have been taken as sample slum pockets. Hence total 25 slum pockets were selected from the three sample urban centres (22 from Guwahati, 2 from Dibrugarh and 2 from Silchar). Five percent of

slum households of each sample slum pocket have been randomly selected for intensive study. Hence a total of 945 slum households were selected from 25 sample slum pockets.

2. Methodology

The study is primarily based on primary data; however secondary data also need wherever necessary. Primary data are collected from the 945 sample slum households. Primary data are collected from the slum dwellers by administering a set of questionnaire prepared for the purpose. Secondary data are collected from the records of Municipal Corporation/Boards, publications of the department of Economics and Statistics, Govt. of Assam, census reports, websites, books, journals, newspapers etc. The data have tabulated and analyzed as follows.

2.1. Housing Condition

Housing condition is an important determinant for knowing the socio – economic condition of a population. The modern concept of housing is not only a physical shelter. Besides the shelter, house is a place where family can develop physically, mentally and socially. A house is healthy if it provides physical protection and shelter, place of cooking and eating, washing and excretory functions, prevention the spread of communicable diseases, protection from noise, pollution, heat and cold, encourages personal development and mental health. Overcrowding housing condition may disturb couples' privacy which ultimately affects fertility levels. Similarly, high mortality and morbidity rates are observed in those houses where the housing condition is sub - standard. The respiratory infection like whooping cough, tuberculosis, influenza and skin diseases are common among the respondents living in an unhygienic condition. Housing condition among the slum dwellers are not satisfactory. They are living in a congested, dilapidated and in an unhygienic condition. Distribution of the sample households on the basis of housing type is shown in Table 3.

Housing Condition	No. of Households	% of Total Households
Pucca	81	8.6
Semi pucca	31	3.3
Kutchha	833	88.1
Total	945	100.0

Table 3: Distribution of sample households by type of house

Source: Compiled from field survey data.

It is observed from Table 3 that majority of the slum households i.e. 88.1 % (833) are kutchha houses while only 8.6%(81) houses are pucca houses. This is because due to their poverty and low income, majority of the slum dwellers are unable to live in a good house. Majority of the slum dwellers are not only living in kutchha houses besides they are living in one room houses where there is no ventilation facility, separate bedroom for married couples, separate kitchen and feel too much cold in winter and too much hot in summer. Table 4 shows the number of living rooms in the sample slum households.

No. of Living Rooms	No. of Households	% of Total Households
1	601	63.6
2	221	23.4
3	74	7.8
4	38	4.0
5	11	1.2
Total	945	100.0

Table 4: Distribution of sample slum households on the basis of living rooms

Source: compiled from field survey data.

Table 4 shows that out of the total sample slum households 63.6% (601) households have one room while only 4.0% (38) households have 4 rooms and 1.2% (11) households have 5 rooms. It is clearly reflected from the table that majority of the surveyed slum dwellers are living in a very worse and congested condition.

In Table 5 the sample slum households have been distributed in accordance with availability of certain facilities. It reflects from the table that housing condition of the surveyed slum dwellers is far from satisfactory as most of the households do not enjoy the basic amenities of life like pucca bathroom, pucca latrine, pure drinking water etc.

Type of Facility	No. of Households	Percentage
1. Bathroom		
i. pucca	101	10.7
ii. kutchra	266	28.1
iii. no bathroom	578	61.2
2. Latrine		
i. pucca	98	10.4
ii. semi pucca	27	2.9
iii. kutchra	391	41.4
iv. open space	429	45.4
3. Source of drinking water		
i. water tap (individual)	-	-
(common)	219	23.2
ii. Tube well (individual)	115	12.2
(common)	413	43.7
iii. well (individual)	1	0.1
(common)	80	8.5
iv. Purchasing from others	117	12.4
4. Source of lighting		
i. electricity	551	58.3
ii. kerosene	394	41.7
5. Fuel used for cooking		
i. fire wood	555	58.7
ii. kerosene	91	9.6
iii. gas	299	31.6
6. Drainage		
i. yes	177	18.7
ii. no	768	81.3
7. ventilation		
i. yes	81	8.6
ii. no	864	91.4
8. Separate kitchen		
i. Yes	119	12.6
ii. No	826	87.4

Table 5: Distribution of sample households by housing condition

Source: compiled from field survey data.

Table 5 shows that households having pucca bathroom is 10.7% (101) while 61.2%(578) households do not have any bathroom facility. It reflects that majority of the slum dwellers use open space for bathing purpose.

Regarding sanitary facility, it is found that 41.4%(391) of the households have kutchra latrine and 45.4%(429) use open space as latrine. Only 10.4 %(98) households have pucca latrine. From this it is clear that majority of the slum dwellers use open space for defecation purpose and which is responsible for causing many water-borne and other diseases

Water supply facility is not satisfactory in slum areas. In the sample slum areas only 12.2% (115)of the households use individual tube well while 43.7% (413) households have common tube well. Only 23.2% (219) households have common pipe water facility and no households have individual pipe water facility. Percentage of households use common well water facility is 8.5 % (80) while only 0.1% (1) household have individual well. Another important fact is that pure drinking water is very scarce in slum areas and 12.4% (117) respondents purchase water from others for drinking purpose. For purification of water the slum dwellers do not use any method (scientific or traditional methods) for filtration.

It is observed from the table that 58.3% (551) households use electricity as a source of lighting while 41.7% (394) use kerosene. In Assam as a whole 37.0% households have electricity (84.1% in urban areas and 28.0% in rural areas).*

Regarding the type of fuel used for cooking fire wood is the most common type. As many as 58.7% (555) of households use fire wood as a source of fuel and 31.6% (299) use L.P.G.

Drainage facility is not in sufficient amount in slum areas. It is observed from the table that only 18.7% (177) households have drainage facility while 81.3% (768) households do not have any drainage facility.

It is observed from the table that only 8.6% (81) households have ventilation facility while 91.4% (864) households do not have any ventilation facility. Moreover, it is also clear from the table that only 12.6% (119) households have separate kitchen and 87.4% (826) households do not have separate kitchen.

While analyzing the various facilities those are exists in the households of slum areas it is found that the slum dwellers are living in a house which is unfit and unhygienic for living. Poverty and illiteracy are the main causes of backwardness of slum dwellers.

2.2. Religion and Caste

Religion and caste are the important constituents of society. Therefore, for a better understanding of the slum life, caste and religious background becomes indispensable. Table 6 shows the religious composition of the sample slum households.

Name of Religion	No. of Respondents	Pc of Total Respondents
Hindu	759	80.3
Christian	1	0.1
Muslim	182	19.3
Sikh	3	0.3
Total	945	100.0

Table 6: Religious composition of respondents

Source: compiled from field survey data.

It is observed from the table that 80.3% (759) of the respondents are Hindus, 0.1% (1) Christian, 19.3% (182) Muslims and 0.3% (3) are Sikhs. Thus, the sample households have more number of the Hindus, followed by the Muslims, the Sikhs and the Christians.

Though there are different caste groups in the slum areas but the slums are mostly inhabited by scheduled castes. Table 7 shows the caste composition of the sample households.

Caste Groups	No. of Respondents	Pc of Total Respondents
General	304	32.2
SC	612	64.8
ST	5	0.5
OBC	24	2.5
Total	945	100.0

Table 7: Caste composition of respondents

Source: Compiled from field survey data.

Table 7 shows that 64.8% (612) respondents are from Scheduled Caste while only 32.2% (304) are from General Caste. The percentage of OBC and ST respondents are 2.5% (24) and 0.5% (5) respectively. It is clear from the table that majority of the slum dwellers are from scheduled caste, which is also an indicator of backwardness of this class of people.

2.3. Education

Educational attainment of the people is one of the three components of the Human Development Index (HDI) prepared by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Education is one of the important indirect variables affecting socio-economic and demographic (fertility, mortality, marriage, migration) behaviour as well as participation in the labour force of a population.

Educational institutions are important to every social living. It is through educational institutions that tradition, discipline and culture are transmitted from one generation to another through long and continued efforts of the human race. The ideals of education have not been realized in the life of the slum dwellers.

The slums are generally educationally backward. Due to their poverty, majority of the slum dwellers are unable to take the education facility. Since the level of education is an important determinant to know the socio-economic and demographic behaviour of a population therefore it is necessary to find out the present status of education of the sample households in general and of the respondents in particular. Table 8 shows the level of education of the sample respondents.

Level of Education	No. of Respondents	Pc of Total Respondents
1. Illiterate	432	45.7
2. Upto primary level	236	25.0
3 Upto M.E. level	116	12.3
4. Upto H.S.L.C. level	125	13.2
5. Upto Higher Secondary level	27	2.9
6. Graduate	7	0.7
7. Post Graduate	2	0.2
Total	945	100.0

Table 8: Distribution of the respondents on the basis of education

Source – compiled from field survey data.

Table 8 shows that out of the total respondents 45.7% (432) are illiterate and only 25.0% (236) are literate upto primary level. Percentage of respondents educated upto M.E. level, H.S.L.C. level, Higher secondary level, Graduate and Post Graduate are 12.3%, 13.2%, 2.9%, 0.7% and 0.2% respectively. It is observed from the table that majority of the slum dwellers are illiterate. Due to their poverty, the slum dwellers are unable to take education facility.

2.4. Occupation

The occupational structure of any population is the most important indicator of the level of development of that community. Moreover the occupational structure determines the income structure of the community.

The slum dwellers are poor and have inadequate income. It is because of their economic disability that the majority of them have become isolated from the main community. The economic backwardness of the slum dwellers is a common phenomenon throughout the world. Osker Lewis considers this as one of the characteristic features of the slums. He writes, "low wages and chronic unemployment and underemployment lead to low income, lack of property, absence of savings, absence of food reserves in the home and a chronic shortage of cash."**

Such economic feature of slum culture is not only a fact in the case of slums in the west but also a harder fact in the case of slums in India. The slum dwellers are unemployed and underemployed. Most of them are unskilled workers or casual workers in the informal sector of the economy. It is easy to enter into an informal sector because it requires less skill, minimum education and no capital. Table 9 shows the distribution of the surveyed slum respondents by the nature of occupation.

Occupation	No. of respondents	Pc of total respondents
1.Service holder	51	5.4
2.Hawker	20	2.1
3.Mason	31	3.3
4.Retail shop	32	3.4
5.Carpenter	51	5.4
6.Daily wage earner	262	27.7
7.Car driver	33	3.5
8.Housemaid	51	5.4
9.The lawala	45	4.8
10.Rickshaw puller	46	4.9
11.Technical assistant	24	2.5
12.Painter	62	6.6
13.Sweeper	106	11.2
14.Kabari	15	1.6
15.Tailor	7	0.7
16.Fish seller	50	5.3
17.Vegetable vendor	29	3.1
18.Salesman	23	2.4
19.Milk business	7	0.7
total	945	100.0

Table 9: Distribution of the respondents by the nature of occupation

Source: Compiled from field survey data.

It is observed from the table that the slum dwellers are following different types of occupations. Out of the total respondents 27.7% (262) are daily wage earners while only 5.4% (51) are service holders. This shows that most of the slum dwellers are dependent on daily earnings and very few have regular source of income. Therefore they remain unemployed for a considerable number of days in a month.

These occupations that are followed by the slum dwellers do not yield sufficient income. Therefore they cannot maintain a minimum standard of living, and are, infact, poverty stricken. As Hunter writes "The slum is the locus of poverty, and poverty is one of the forces that maintain the vicious circle and make it so difficult for people to break out."***

2.5. Income

Income is one of an important determinant to know the socio-economic and demographic behaviour of a population. Standard of living, consumption pattern, access to medical treatment as well as use of family planning devices depend on the income level of the family. It is generally said that higher income is related to lower fertility and lower mortality. In the low income families children are treated as an asset. So fertility in those families tends to be higher. On the other hand families with higher income can provide better and immediate medical facilities to the sick children which reduce infant and child mortality.

The income of the slum dwellers is very low as they are engaged in low income generating works and also due to the lack of security of jobs. Therefore the slum dwellers are generally treated as the pockets of poverty and are living in a congested, dilapidated and

unhygienic condition and fertility and mortality among these people are very high. Table 10 shows the distribution of the sample households by total family income (monthly).

Level of Family Income (per month)	No. of Households	Percentage
Upto Rs 5000	506	53.5
Rs 5001 – Rs 10000	339	35.9
Rs 10001- Rs 15000	57	6.0
Rs 15001 - Rs 20000	20	2.1
Rs 20001 – Rs 25000	17	1.8
Rs 25001 – Rs 30000	6	0.6
Total	945	100.0

Table 10: Distribution of the sample households by total family income (monthly)

Source: Field survey

Table 10 reveals that 53.5% (506) of the sample households have monthly income upto Rs.5000.00 which is not sufficient to meet the minimum basic needs of life specially in urban areas as the recent cost of living with two or three children is very high in these areas. Only 0.6 % (6) of the households have more than Rs.25000.00 income per month.

Generally, it is very difficult to measure the income and expenditure of the people of slum areas as they do not maintain the records of income and expenditure due to their illiteracy and ignorance and also they do not have any regular source of income except the salary earners. The income of the people varies from time to time. In the present study the money income earned through main and supplementary occupations by the members of a sample household have been added to calculate the average monthly income of the household. Table 11 shows the distribution of the sample households on the basis of per capita monthly income (computed by dividing the total monthly family income by the total number of members of the family).

Per Capita Family Income (Per month)	No. of Households	Percentage
Upto Rs.1000	470	49.7
Rs. 1001 –Rs.2000	331	35.0
Rs. 2001 -Rs.3000	82	8.7
Rs.3001-Rs.4000	33	3.5
Rs.4001-Rs.5000	18	1.9
Rs.5001 -Rs.6000	8	0.8
Rs.6001 -Rs.7000	2	0.2
Rs.7001 -Rs.8000	1	0.1
Total	945	100.0

Table 11: Distribution of the households by per capita family income (monthly)

Source: Field survey

Per capita income is the only basis with which the economic condition of a family can be studied. It is found from the table that 49.7% (470) of the households have per capita income of Rs.1000 per month. Only 0.1% (1) household has per capita monthly income of Rs.8000. According to the planning commission people living in the urban areas whose per capita monthly income is less than Rs.1359.75 are treated as poor. In the sample slum areas 67.5% households live below the poverty line which is much more than the state average of 31.98% (33.89% in rural areas and 20.49% in urban areas).

3. Findings of the Study

The finding of the study is that while analyzing the various parameters of socio-economic amenities, it is found that the socio-economic conditions of the slum dwellers of Assam are very worse. Majority of the slum dwellers are living in kutcha houses (88.1%) and in one room houses (63.6%). 61.2% households have no bathroom and 28.1% have kutcha bathroom. 45.4% respondents have used open space for defecation purpose and 41.4% respondents have kutcha latrines, which causes air, water and land pollution. The most interesting thing is that pure drinking water is very scarce in slum areas and 12.4% respondents have purchased water for drinking purpose. Majority of the slum dwellers (64.8%) belongs to scheduled caste group and are also illiterate (45.7%). Due to their illiteracy, less skill and no capital majority of the slum dwellers are engaged in low income generating works, mainly daily wage earners (27.7%). Therefore majority of them have lower amount of total monthly family income (53.5% respondents) upto Rs.5000 and per capita monthly family income (49.7% respondents) upto Rs.1000. This indicates that majority of the slum dwellers are living in below poverty line.

4. Suggestions

1. The local authorities should provide the basic amenities of life in the slum areas in sufficient amount, specially take steps to improve sanitation facility and supply of pure drinking water.

2. Employment generating schemes should be properly implemented in the slum areas, so that the slum dwellers get regular income.
3. Awareness about health, hygiene and education should be increased among the slum dwellers by the local authorities by taking the help of NGO'S.

5. Conclusion

India is a developing country and it is going on the path of development. For getting development not only capital is essential but also human development is an important element. But it is very sad for us that according to 2011 census India's 65.5 million people living in slum areas. Assam also is not free from the slums and it is 0.30% of the total slum population of India. Therefore, if we want sustainable development, inclusive growth and swaswa Bharat comprehensive information on the slum is very essential so that we can make India as a slum free India.

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