



Pratidhwani the Echo

A Peer-Reviewed International Journal of Humanities & Social Science

ISSN: 2278-5264 (Online) 2321-9319 (Print)

Impact Factor: 6.28 (Index Copernicus International)

UGC Approved, Journal No: 48666

Volume-VII, Issue-IV, April 2019, Page No. 261-266

Published by Dept. of Bengali, Karimganj College, Karimganj, Assam, India

Website: <http://www.thecho.in>

Challenges of Urbanization- A Study of Silchar Town

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Abstract

The urbanization phenomenon is happening nonstop in the last two hundred years throughout the world. Most of the developed world is pretty well urbanized and the developing world is also catching up. Though the urbanization is happening unabatedly it is throwing many challenges to the government and the society. Different strategies have had India after independence is rapidly urbanizing and many cities, towns have come into existence and everyday new areas are coming under the grasp of urbanization. With this urbanization India is also facing different challenges which are of diverse nature. North Eastern Region of India is also urbanizing very fast. Silchar is a town of the state of Assam with inhabitants of more than one lakh fifty thousand people and the town is expanding at a rapid pace. The challenges that Silchar is facing are many and of different nature. This paper is an attempt to find out the challenges that this town is facing.

Keywords: Urbanization, Challenges, North Eastern Region, Silchar, Town.

Introduction: Urbanization in India has become an important and irreversible process, and an important determinant of national economic growth and poverty reduction. The process of urbanization is characterized by a most dramatic increase in the number of large cities, although India may be said to be in the midst of transition from a predominantly rural to a quasi urban society.

Urbanization has been the dominant demographic trend with its high pace of social and economic development. The study of urban growth by size class of town help us to understand the stages of urban development in a country and the differential growth rates shows the extent of rural to urban migration (Bhagat, 2005).

Today, urbanization is being accepted as a lifestyle, which has, become the essential part of growth and determines the material progress and social prosperity of human life. In general, urbanization is the process of population concentration and identifies two elements in the process: (i) The increase in size of individual concentration due to growth of urban population (ii) natural increase in urban areas (iii) net rural to urban migration (iv) relocation of rural settlement to urban areas due to the extension of municipal boundaries (v) the emergence of new points of concentration (Premi, 1981).

Urbanization in India has occurred more slowly than in other developing countries and the proportion of the population in urban areas has been only 28% based on the 2001 census. The pace of urbanization is now set to accelerate as the country sets to a more rapid growth. Economic reform has already unleashed investment and growth offering its citizens such opportunities. Surging growth and employment in cities will prove a powerful magnet. 300 million Indians currently live in towns and cities. Within 20-25 years, another 300 million people will get added to Indian towns & cities. This urban expansion will happen at a speed quite unlike anything that India has seen before. It took nearly forty years for India's urban population to rise by 230 million. It could take only half the time to add the next 250 million. If not well managed, this inevitable increase in India's urban population will place enormous stress on the system (Planning Commission, 12th Plan Approach).

Recent reports suggest that India spends 17 dollar per capita per year in urban infrastructure, whereas the most benchmarks suggest a requirement of 110 dollar. The investment required for building urban infrastructure in India, over the next 20 years, is estimated at approximately US 1 trillion dollar.

Urbanization and economic progress are concomitant processes as cities provide large economies of agglomeration. The urban sector contributes around 60% of GDP which is likely to increase to more than 70% by 2021. Over 70% of new jobs in future shall largely be created in cities. The link between economic performance of cities and the national economy is increasingly getting stronger. If India has to achieve a high growth rate, it must be its cities. However, in a globalized world, the cities are increasingly getting interlinked and shall have to compete globally for employment generation & investments (Kamal Nath, 2013).

Although India is one of the less urbanized countries with only 27.8% of her population living in urban agglomeration/towns, this country is facing a serious crisis of urban growth at the present time. Whereas urbanization has been an instrument of economic, social and political progress, it has led to serious socio-economic problems.

The sheer magnitude of the urban population, haphazard and unplanned growth of urban areas, and a desperate lack of infrastructure are the main causes of such a situation. The rapid growth of urban population both natural and through migration has put heavy pressure on public utilities like housing, sanitation, transport, water, electricity, health, education and so on.

Poverty, unemployment and underemployment among the rural immigrants, beggary, thefts, dacoities, burglaries and other social evils are on rampage. Urban sprawl is rapidly encroaching the precious agricultural land (Smriti Chand, 2015).

Urbanization in Assam: Assam is one of the states of India situated in North-Eastern Region is also urbanizing rapidly. The total number of Urban Agglomeration/Town has increased from 110 in Census 2001 to 189 in Census 2011. The urbanization of Assam in the last decade is encapsulated in the following table.

Table-1
Urban Population of Assam

Census Year	Total UAs/Towns	Total Population	Total Urban Population	Percentage of Population
2001	110	26655528	3439240	12.90
2011	189	31169272	4388756	14.08

Urbanization of Silchar: Silchar is the second populous town of Assam and has a history of around 200 years of urban agglomeration. Silchar was constituted a municipality under Act V (B.C) of 1876 in 1893. There were twelve commissioners, eight of whom were non-officials and were elected, while four were nominated, and two hold office, ex-officio (Cachar Gazette-1905).

The town Silchar is expanding rapidly in the last few decades. The following table shows the urbanization of Silchar.

Table-2
Population of Silchar

Census Year	Total town population
1901	9256
1951	34,059
1971	52,596
1991	115,483
2001	156,948
2011	178,865

At present Silchar municipality has 28 municipal wards and the town has expanded in areas in all sides crossing the river Barak even and is growing continuously. Because of this large scale urbanization the existing infrastructure is under stress and is crumbling. The town is facing so many challenges and problems that the authorities are not coping with to deal with these challenges and problems. A comprehensive study has been made below describing the challenges that the town is currently facing coming out from rapid urbanization.

- 1. Urban Sprawl:** The town is sprawling or real expansion of the town is taking place both in population and in geographical area. The town was spread only to Rangirkhari nearly 25 years ago and now is spreading towards Silchar Medical College to the south which is 4 kms away from Rangirkhari, to the east it is spreading beyond Rongpur which is situated in the other side of river Barak, towards north engulfing Ramnagar and towards west spreading towards Bhakatpur and Chirukandi capturing Malini Bil. The problem of this sprawling is that it is not happening in a systematic and planned way. The areas that are coming up under town are seeing the buildings and roads are being made without any concern of the future. The roads are without proper side drains, are kuccha roads, narrow and upheaval. Because of this the people find it very difficult to ply on the road throughout the year. The buildings, houses that

are constructed are also without greater plan for the future development. The unabated sprawling of the town is resulting in settlement of people in bils, near canals and earth filling is continuously going on.

2. **Slums and Squatter:** The town Silchar in its process of expansion has also sprawn the slums. Many areas in Silchar have slum like characteristics but all these places are not recognized as slums. By govt. notification we have a slum in Silchar namely Kalibari Cherr where around three hundred families are living in an unhygienic and unhealthy conditions. This slum is the result of urbanization taking place without the concern of the poor people. There are no basic amenities like drinking water, roads, sanitation and illiteracy; health related problems are rampant in this place. As the town is expanding many more slums have come up and many more may grow in future. When a great number of people living in slums it creates two cities, one city for the rich and another for the poor destitute people. This may be the future of Silchar also.
3. **Water Supply:** For any town the basic requirement for a good life is the availability of pure drinking water. Silchar town has a good source of water from the river Barak and the PHE together with municipality is using this water for supplying to the people. The problem is that a great number people are not getting adequate water for daily usage. The New Silchar area is particularly facing the problem of water shortage. The number of house connections of tape water is still very small and many people are to collect water from roadside tape where long lines are seen. As the number of people is increasing due to urbanization the existing facilities are coming under huge pressure and there is frequent disturbances and breakdown in the supply of water.
4. **Water logging:** Every year for many number of days a large part of the town remain waterlogged. This water logging is taking place because of the unplanned expansion of the town and unregulated way of construction activities. The places where now water logging is found were not surrounded by the human habitation earlier but now because of the expansion of town the surrounding areas are full of human habitations and the water cannot not run through these places and are blocked causing water logging. Moreover, because of indiscriminate use of canals like Rangirkhal and other khals the water is also not being carried by those khals. The economic cost of this water logging every year is huge and the sufferings of people is also substantial. Every year people agitate against govt. for not mitigating the problem without any kind of remedy. This water logging is a huge challenge to be met by the public authorities as every year new areas are being inundated and remain waterlogged.
5. **Transport:** Silchar is a town where the pace of transport is dismally slow. The main roads that were built earlier could not be expanded but the buildings and shops that were built on the sides of these roads are of huge numbers. The number of people that daily visit these shops have increased tremendously. The malls and huge buildings of business activities are taking away the spaces for walk. Now vehicles and pedestrians are using same spaces and congestion occurs. Everyday a great number of people and vehicles enter Silchar town and uses the space that were constructed earlier. Everything is increasing in the town only the main roads are not and there is no

possible way of expanding these roads. So everyday traffic jam takes place causing a amount of wastage of time and money. Though the traffic problem is a concern of every city but this problem is unique for Silchar in the sense that it has only one vital road. So it is a huge challenge for the authorities to build new roads or increase the facilities of the existing road so that transportation problems can be solved. The city buses are few in numbers and virtually the entire transportation system is built on auto rickshaws and pedal rickshaws. As the numbers of private cars are increasing putting pressure on the road something needs to be done on the ever increasing private vehicles.

6. **Garbage Disposal:** Like every other city the Silchar town is also facing the problem of waste and garbage disposal in a huge way. Earlier when the city expansion and the growth of urbanization was low the amount of waste and garbage generated was less but now with the increase in population and economic activities the waste generated everyday is also huge. The municipality takes away and dumps the garbage in the dumping ground but the effort is miniscule to the amount of garbage. Because of the lack of proper garbage disposal system people dispose them in the open spaces, khals, drains, open grounds. Virtually it is seen that garbage mainly plastic bags are dispensed in roads, canals, drains in all over the town. Moreover there is lack of proper market places and vegetable vendors, fish vendors, fruit vendors sit nearby the road and do their business activities and generating large amount of garbage every day. The authorities are facing a tough challenge to keep town clean and seldom face criticism from the public.
7. **Crime:** One of the grave challenges that every expanding city faces is the increase in criminal activities and number and variety of crimes. Silchar is also witnessing various kinds of crimes like theft, burglary, murders, drug peddling etc. Though Silchar is safe compared to other cities of the country yet as the town is expanding and with the increase in economic activities crimes are also increasing. The number of wine shops has increased and so the number of drunkards. The use of narcotic drugs is becoming a huge social menace.

Conclusion: The urbanization throws up challenges which are of varied nature and meet the challenges is also arduous task. But the challenges are to be faced and it depends upon the ability, skill and sincerity of the different administrative authorities to find the solution. The Govt. of India had taken many initiatives and schemes to deal with the challenges and problems but ratio of success has been low. The present Govt. of India has also brought out the initiatives to face the challenges. It is certain that the urbanization of Silchar town will take place at a greater pace and many challenges also will come up. It is to be seen how the town meet the challenges and overcome them.

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