



CHANGING SOCIO CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT ALONG WITH URBAN SPRAWL IN ADDED AREAS OF KOLKATA

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Abstract

Kolkata is an ever growing urban region, situated on the left bank of river Hugli in West Bengal. This most important urban region which is the capital of West Bengal extends towards south and south western part of the main urban area. After 1984 three suburban municipalities were added to main Kolkata i.e Jadavpur, South suburban and Garden Reach. The settlements started especially after the partition of India when West Bengal recorded an enormous population influx from East Bengal. To accommodate the sudden population increase, a large number of colonies emerged within Kolkata Corporation area. Along with the growing urban population and urbanization the change in social and cultural environment has been noticed. The present paper focuses on the various sides of change in socio cultural environment of the study area.

Key Words: *Social change, urban sprawl, social structure, increasing heterogeneity*



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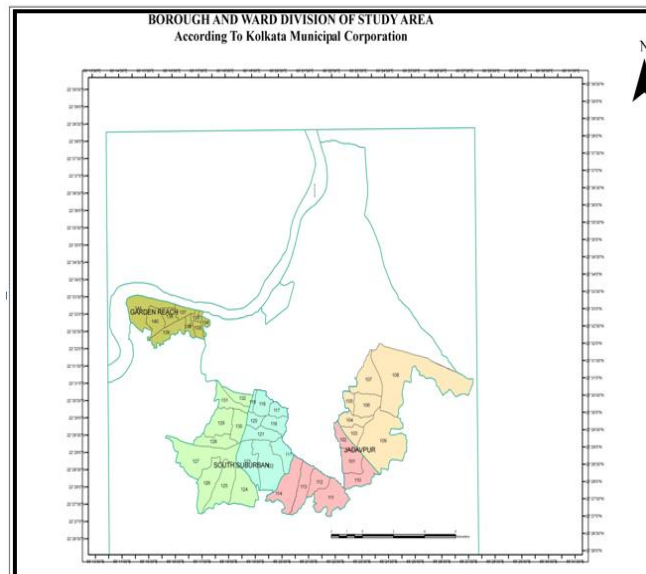
Introduction

Social change deals with meaningful significance alteration over a period in behavioural patterns of people, their habit and customs. The traditional structure of the society also may be transformed. Kolkata is a city which carries a long history. The urbanization has done in sequential manner. Along with the changing physical structure in urban area, this metropolitan area also experiences social and cultural change in the population. The suburban

areas which were added to Kolkata had the rural society in a few years ago. But along with the urban sprawl the social as well as cultural environment has been changed.

Study Area

The selected study area is located at the southern part of Kolkata, West Bengal, which includes borough 11 to 15 of Kolkata, consisting of a few municipalities Jadavpur, Garden Reach and South suburban Unit. These three municipalities were added into Kolkata Muniipal Corporation in the year 1984. Within the total 141 wards of Kolkata the study area covers 41wards (101- 141). The area is bound



between $22^{\circ}27'11''\text{N}$ to $22^{\circ}33' 21.96''\text{N}$ and $88^{\circ}14'28.03''\text{E}$ to $88^{\circ}22'21.72''\text{E}$. The study area, under consideration, is 83.33 sq km, including 40 sq km of Jadavpur Unit, 30.38 sq km of South Suburban Unit, 12.95 sq km of Garden Reach unit.

Objectives

The objectives of the present work can be summarised as follows:

- To study the changing settlement system of the study area.
- To delve into the changing social pattern among the inhabitants.
- To study the improvement in economic condition of the people under the study area.
- To study the diversification within the socio cultural condition among the people.

Methodology and Data Base

Present research is based on primary statistics and secondary information. Primary information has been collected through field observation and direct interview with the respondent of sampled individual household. Total 300 households were selected at stratified random sampling from study area. Raw data has been computed for lucid presentation and easy understanding of the facts lies in the study area.

Result and Discussions

With the spread of education, the society has learnt the basic value of all dimensions like environment, their own society and others, above all their mortal responsibilities. The people of today have made technologically advanced tools and harness natural resources to make life

comfortable. With advancement and change in understanding and thinking pattern, people has abandoned their orthodox family and religious ideas and adopted more liberal theory.

In present world, secularism has been deeply embedded in young's mind generation. They have realised one fact that theism can make person religious blind while theism turn a man inhuman. So, secularism which can guide people in right course in term of assists them in evaluation of each matter in a realistic way. Justification stands before blind belief or superstition. Earlier every inanimate or a living object used to be personalised as God. But slowly this practice has waned. This peregrination has taken considerable time. People realise it is only their view point from where they decide where they have to bow their head own and where to rise. The researcher has noticed various sides of socio cultural changes in the study region along with urban sprawl which have been analysed in following paragraphs.

- **Transmogrification in Standard of Living**

There is also increase in standard of living and average family income, which means that people have the ability to pay more to travel and commute larger distances to work and back home. Expansion of urban area has brought in quality infrastructure for the urbanites to raise their standard of living. Though their household pattern can be classified into low, middle and higher class category, but each class of people have considerably benefited from this sprawling urbanization in the form of better and salubrious living standard.

Standard of living is such a standard which is lived by the people on basis of their income. In the study area, according to the income class the three types of living standard are prominent in terms of food habit, savings attitude, preferable market, influence of modernized methods etc. The people of high class generally take nutrition rich food which sometimes become over nutritious, gourmet and unhealthy while people of low class is compelled to survive on nutrition deficient foods. The level of income helps higher class to take food as per their needs while middle class compromise on this food intake and try to balance their diet whenever they afford to buy health building foods. Unfortunately, this lower class keep themselves alive on food which hardly meets their nutritional requirement. Even they consume unhygienic, stale and stinking foods for existence. Off late departmental stores, branded retail shop (Reliance-fresh, Spencer's, MORE) and shopping malls (Westside, South City, Quest, Pantaloon) have become a fashion for high class people as the like convenient ambience and display of processed food product for which they don't hesitate to pay premium price. But this trend is slowly trickling into middle class society. Major share of this class go to nearest vegetable market like Thakur pukur bazaar, Silpara, Behala market,

Chowrasta, Karunamoyee, Bansdroni bazaar etc. While lower class visits local market at late hours to buy poor quality foods materials at lower price.

The rising level in the living standard of middle class people has aroused their passion for having four wheeler to traverse the long distance from their home place mainly belonging to the study area to their work places basically centring around central Kolkata and Salt Lake. In lying with equal pace of development in the living standard of lower class people it has been observed that they have also had the purchasing power to afford two wheelers to their work place.

Although this rising development year mark rapid urban progression but the burgeoning regular traffic have added to the existing unresolved traffic mayhem.

Additionally financial development in accompanist of this urbanization has equipped the lower and middle class of people with modern technology like smart phone, modern household amenities along with the rich people according to their own purchasing power parity.

- **Transformation of Joint family to nuclear family**

With pacing modernization as well as urbanization people have got into preferring nuclear family to joint family as they think they would have more time in their hand to dedicate it in their professional field rather than spending time with their family. The urbanites prefers to run after earning professional recognition, money and lies to lead an wanton life style to adapt themselves to the changing surroundings which centres around the economic development. The formation of nuclear family has also earned freedom for domestic women. In every steps of life they match the footsteps of all follows the trail of their successful professional counterpart to prove this fact that they are not lagging behind them provided opportunity go to them. The hustle and bustle life style draws a sharp contrast with their earlier domestic pattern where they use to be confined to four walls and over burden with domestic chores. In support of this life style trend this nuclear family encourage matrimonial bond with a nuclear family so that their off spring enjoy much freedom rather than being moored to heap of domestic responsibilities mostly typical of joint families. Alongside this also there is invisible presence of nuclear families under the shadow of joint families where family members live under one roof but have their own area, partition from others.

- **Changing scenario of social structure**

After an elaborate discussion with local aged people who have witnessed the changes in society, and also from the previous writings and comparing the previous circumstance with

present situation the researcher got a fully fledged idea regarding the changing domain of the social structure. Before 1980s, rurality prevails over this area where caste system used to dominate the society. But along with the dissemination of education and urban sprawl, the urbanites give up the superstitions of caste. But in the modern stage the urban society is dependent on three hierarchies based on economic condition, i.e. higher class, middle class and lower class.

Though we have high income, middle class and low income group exist one below another in the social structure with elite group at the top and lower class at the bottom, but there also widespread disparity in income flow. The upper class people most occupy high paying jobs and thus enjoying all other benefits. The middle class people earn lower amount, serving higher class. Their benefit entitlement is also meager in comparison to upper class. In line of subordination exists lower class who earns so paltry amount of money serving other two classes. But it is observed they mostly do manual jobs which only earn subsistence income for them. Ironically upper class expends low labor earn high, while middle class expends considerable higher energy but income sometimes does not match it. While lower class drains all their energy, in returns for low income. Philosophically, it is told fortune lies in hard work. Sarcastically it follows reverse trend in society mainly in urban area of the study region.

- **Improvement in Status of Women**

Though in Indian society the women always stay a few step backward than the male members of society. The urban areas are better than that. But ignorance for women is very common even in urban developed society. In the study area too, the women are exploited, their social significance is low than male. But along with the transformation of this place from rural to urban the status of women has been changed. The reasons are as follows-

- i. In the modern society people have single or two children for which they got full benefit, adorable, pampered and even girl children are also well accepted to their parents. Modern parents give hem equal rights. When they grow up with dignity, in future too they became dignified.
- ii. In the modern day Government also take initiative for the women rights and impose people to maintain their strategy. This affects the urban life much. There are many schemes and benefits for the girl children, facilities for their education as that the parents don't think their baby girls as their burden. So this type of moral support helps women to increase their status in society.

iii. Women now days are well educated and they are also engaged in various types of professions. As they are also the earning members in their family, so they are also decision makers of the family members. Their economic independence provides them dignity in the society.

- **Increasing Heterogeneity in community life**

Along with the urban sprawl the urban life became more heterogeneous than previous. The heterogeneity exists in terms of settlement type, occupational pattern, ethnic diversity, behavioural pattern, rituals, customs, taboos etc. People from different districts, states and neighbouring nations migrated over here and stay permanently which makes the society pluralistic. The trading community like marwars, gujratis and also the people from Bihar, Jharkhand, and Orissa permanently have migrated here to have the job opportunity as well as to get the well expanded market for their business. Besides many students came here for higher education, temporarily settle in some hostels or accommodated in paying guest system, but after completing the studies they took the job and permanently became the residents of this area, which are the reason behind the increasing cultural heterogeneity.

Presently this is the era of real estate. The building of urban high rise and skyscrapers are common phenomena in the study area. The land value becomes high day after day. The price of flats is not affordable for the middle class and lower class people. The higher class is a few in numbers. But the maximum equity is in the hand of traders who are mostly non Bengali people. They easily purchase those lands and residential plots. In my stratified random sampled respondents, 48 % are belonging from different cultural community.

- **Change in working structure**

With urbanization and industrialization, job field has become a wide spread platform to utilize budding talent as well as experience. As profanity has become present day ideology of young generation, people justify each and every matter in a more logical way, thus we see a pluralistic work place in every country. Religion, superstition, racism have faded gradually making a way to cultural, religious and qualification heterogeneity.

Alongside social disparity there co- exist income inequality. It is apocryphal term in urban area that meritocracy is the backbone of resource utilization and income allocation. In reality, an irreversible trend has set in. Upper class people mostly dominate the income market. While middle class claims low market percentage leaving a minuscule portion for lowers class. While cream professional designation like Chairman, Executive President, CEO and COO etc adorn higher class, the middle class mostly get the job at managerial and assistant

designation. The lower class is left with profession like driving, security guard and assist in other household chores.

The State and Central government announce people friendly schemes for lower and deprive people but benefits don't percolate down to the designated class and thus unutilized fund lying at the hand of authority representing higher class. Apparently it looks the required initiative have been taken to remove disparity but it patronizes this inequality as there is dereliction of responsibility on the part of appropriate authority also blame goes to government as they don't cross check the fact.

Financial Globalization is another elusive concept in terms of economic development in the study area. Here Corporate bodies and Governments sign MOU and business deals with other foreign countries to bring industry and create job opportunities. But these kind of corporate deals benefit only handful of people, belonging to higher class as they are at centre of implementing all this plans in such a way which churns out profit for them only and exploitation in accompaniment of misutilization physical effort in exchange for lower wage for lower and middle class people.

Conclusion

Eventually it can be said that though urbanization has ushered society to a new dimension but this changes have come with beneficial effects alongside insidious consequence on the people living in the society. The benefit includes changes in life style pattern, cultural assimilation, confluence of diverse religions, moderation of staunch believe in castism, racism, religious extremism and chaunavism etc. The unseen bad effect are break up of joint family, rise in condescending attitude, loss of humanity, loss of values, emotions, feelings, mutual believes as people consider each other as a competitor in their quest of becoming a everyday winner.

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