CHAPTER VI
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

6.1 Summary:

The increasing movement of people from villages to towns and cities continue to increase, as countries place emphasis on development. Rapid urban development has brought in its wake an alarming inevitable and persistent growth of slums where living condition is pathetic. For a planned healthy growth of small towns, it is essential to check the problem of slums at their primary stage. This study on the dynamics of slum formation is not limited to the physical aspects, but to understand the process through the experience and interactions with the dwellers and using the same for evaluation.

An attempt has been made to study all the slum pockets of seven towns in old Goalpara and Kamrup district. The pockets have been specified by local Government and have recognized as ‘Slums’. The criteria that constitute a slum is broadly considered a compact area of at least 60 to 70 households of poorly congested tenements, in unhygienic environment usually with inadequate infrastructure and lacking in proper sanitary and drinking water facilities.

The seven towns are Dhubri, Kokrajhar, Goalpara, Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Barpeta Road and Nalbari. There is high population but low level of development. But with the formation of new districts, establishments increased and so did services and people which created housing and infrastructure problems.

The data collection for the present work has been both primary and secondary. The primary data had been collected through a well designed questionnaire covering the socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents. The sampled population from the slums has been divided into four broad categories (i) within the district (ii) from a different district (iii) from a different state (iv) outside the country.

The whole work has been divided into six chapters covering all the aspects that were taken up for the research.
The First chapter includes the statement, study area, objective, methodology and review of literature. The Geographical background of the study area is dwelt upon in the second chapter. It touches upon the physical, social and economic aspects of the study area. The third chapter deals with the spatial pattern and process of slum formation in Western Assam, which incorporates identification distribution and factors contributing to the growth of slums.

In Assam the slum population increased from 4.5 lakhs in 1991 to 9.36 lakhs in 2001. The total number of identified slums under 81 urban local bodies distributed across the state are 829 out of which 64 pockets are distributed in seven towns of Western Assam, covering 6353 households. For a detailed study 645 households were covered.

All these slum pockets are socially isolated from the rest, partly by choice and partly by location. Their link with the rest of the community is their identification with the labour market, but an additional link is through politics. In Dhubri 51 percent of the people living in the slums hail from other parts of the district itself, who moved to the town in search of better opportunities and partly due to the conflict situation caused by the Bodoland movement. So we do find both voluntary and forced migration. Kokrajhar slums, unlike the rest, are relatively homogenous in terms of language and religion. Bongaigaon, known more as a railway junction, have large slum pockets distributed in eleven wards of the town. The two large ones are along the railway track. The people comprise of Bangladeshes, Nepalees, Biharies and Bengalies. The influx of people was primarily during the establishment of railway workshop in 1970 and Bongaigaon Refinery and Petrochemical Ltd. in 1972 and the Naranarayan Setu (bridge) connecting Jogighopa and Goalpara town in 1998. In Goalpara town the ten slums are unevenly distributed. The population constituting the slums comprised of people from Bangladesh of Mymensingh and Sylhet district particularly. Most of the people have been displaced due to floods or conflict in their countries.

The National highway 31 that passes through the fringe of Barpeta Road and the railway line through it, has four slum pockets with 80 percent Muslims and the language spoken is Bengali.
Barpeta town located in a low lying area, is intercepted by two tributaries of the Brahmaputra flowing from north east to south west. It has six slum pockets.

Nalbari, which is 70 km from the city of Guwahati, has lot of economic activities and importance from the business point of view. Moreover the transport network and communication is good that helps in mobility. There are eight slum pockets of which five are located near railway lines.

The distribution of slums in these towns cannot be attributed to a single factor, although there are common factors that do determine flow of people and affect distribution of slums such as rural poverty, unemployment, better amenities and opportunities. The other factors are easy availability of land weather waste land, marshy land or forest and low rents, relatives and river erosion. So it has been both the push as well as the pull factor in all the slums. But what is clear is that the process leading to slum formation is based both in the demand and supply chain of services rendered by the people. So what sustains the people is the income, which though meagre could not be generated in their places of origin.

The socio economic characteristics of the slum areas have been dwelt in chapter four for each of the towns separately: Besides the population distribution and density, the other aspects like education, income and expenditure, work force structure of the households, occupation and breakup of the activities they are engaged in, house types, amenities like drinking water, toilet, hospital- all have been shown through tables and graphs which are being analysed in the fifth chapter.

A comparative spatial analysis of the units of observation clearly indicate that the towns of Western Assam show diversity in population and socioeconomic profiles. During 1991 to 2001 Bongaigaon, Barpeta Road and Nalbari experienced higher population growth rate as compared to the average decadal growth of their respective districts. However, Dhubri, Kokrajhar, Goalpara and Barpeta experienced declining growth rates during the same decade, with Dhubri showing the higher decline. But interestingly Dhubri's percentage of slum population is as high as 41.41 percent.
The slum pockets of Goalpara, Barpeta Road and Dhubri town are located on government unauthorised land, because with minimum expenditure one can erect a shelter for themselves. But in the other four towns they own the land or they live as tenants.

When we look at the sex ratio, it has been found that slum pockets in Kokrajhar, Goalpara, Barpeta Road and Nalbari has a much higher sex ratio. When related to their income, it shows that they have higher savings and low expenditure. This was a situation where there were women headed households.

The other finding was that the female literacy below 15 year is higher than male of the same age group.

As far as language is concerned, it has been found that Assamese is spoken only in Barpeta, Nalbari and Goalpara where the percentage is 100, 83 and 43 respectively. In the remaining towns, the slum people speak Bengali and Bhatiali. The people who speak Bhatiali language are originally from the western and northern part of Bangladesh. They are basically vegetable cultivators, sellers and traders.

Out of all the seven towns, Barpeta is an exception in terms of religious composition. There are people belonging to Hindu religion only. There are caste and sub caste, but in the slums what binds them is poverty. Their houses are on an average one to two feet apart only with low heights, plastic sheets for a roof or tin sheets pressed with stones. People seem to suffer from tuberculosis as the environment is damp with no sunshine falling inside the houses.

Majority of the slum people moved in as labourers (27.62 percent) out of which 80 percent came from other states. Whereas people who moved into the towns more than 20 percent were from within the state. People who moved because of the pull from relatives was highest from other countries followed by within the district and state. The latter is mostly due to seeking shelter during calamities like floods and conflicts. People who moved from other states or countries specially Nepal, come for specific activities like washerman, cobbler, milkvendor, barber. This is because there is a void for these activities as the local people don’t engage themselves in it. They are only users. Thus the supply chain is met by the slum dwellers who render the services and the demand is there outside the pockets.
The analysis shows a positive correlation between migration and flood. Besides migration due to flooding and river erosion, people do migrate for their livelihood also, which accounts for 51.63 percent. A large chunk of 35.47 percent of scheduled caste and scheduled tribe slum population establish that sociocultural marginality of the disadvantaged social segments caused by caste discrimination contributed to the growth of slums.

The push and pull factor consequent upon increasing rural poverty and unemployment, better opportunities and amenities in towns has set in motion the constant influx of population from rural areas to urban areas. Due to inadequate source of income 69.92 percent left their native places, 7.13 percent were pushed because of floods and 22.95 percent for various other reasons cited earlier.

Another strong pull factor has been the relatives or friends of same caste, community religion and culture. It was the support system that pulled people to slums. Community wise 26.51 percent migrated because of social links particularly Bhatiali speaking people. Bengali accounted for 19.38 percent, Hindi speaking 22.95 percent and only 4.19 percent for Assamese.

Besides the above mentioned facts we also see that due to establishment of new administrative units, development of new and better communication influenced the flow of people to the towns, that gave them opportunities to earn more if not to live in a better condition. Their hope is to move out of despair with increase in income to pockets of hope and light.

The work concludes with summary and policy suggestions in the sixth and final chapter.

6.2 Policy suggestion:

For the first time in 2001 census data was collected for slum having 50,000 population or more. According to this population of slums all over India is 40,297,341 (40 million) from the 607 cities/towns reporting slums. More than 5 million of this population are young children (0-6 age group).
Interestingly, in India, about 29 percent of GDP was contributed by urban sector in 1950-51 and since then it has increased to 55 percent in 1990-91 and has crossed the 60 percent mark in 2001. A little more than quarter of the population generates more than half of the country's total GDP. But there is a large inequality of distribution of resources especially income in the urban centres. This is one of the reasons for origin of slums.

The rapid expansion in urban centres and towns is the rapid emergence and expansion of slums, which brings with it a number of problems in terms of infrastructure, health problem especially sanitation and amplifying the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS due to the congestion and therefore lack of personal or private space. There is also increased crime rate as most of those who go to urban areas to look for jobs end up disappointed and the next thing to do in order to survive is turn to crime. The other important challenge that lies ahead for policy makers and planners is that the current infrastructure is not able to cater for the present increased demand and not enough resources to do so. This is likely to be the situation even in the future unless the urban planners design to cater to the increasing needs and demands.

As per the Indian constitution housing, urban land policies are in the functional domain of the state governments. So center can only issue directives, guiding principles, but actual legislature has to be drafted and passed by the state governments. The center can influence policy through conditions on resource allocations for these policies. As per the 74th amendment of the constitution of India most of the housing/slum improvement related policies fall under the domain of the municipality. Due to these reasons policies towards slums vary across states and sometimes across cities.

The state of Assam also follows the National Slum Development Policy. The main objective is to create awareness amongst the public and government of the underlying principles that guide the process of slum development and integrate these settlements and communities residing within them into the urban areas as a whole. Secondly to strengthen the legal and policy framework to facilitate the process of sustainable slum development. And finally to involve all stakeholders for implementation of policy objectives.

But when we look at the governing principles the task ahead is herculean, unless
all stakeholders are committed to the cause and hold a common vision. Policies should not
remain as a mere prescription but should be practically implementable.

As a policy, the master plan and land use plan of all cities/towns should allow high
density and mixed use for micro enterprises in all informal settlements and slums. There
should be sufficient space for the poor to live and work.

Secondly, as we find that the poor do some type of income generating activity and
save if possible hence, micro credit and micro insurance can be introduced in these pockets.

And integrated municipal development plan will help in bridging service gaps.

The physical infrastructure components such as water supply, drainage, sanitation,
improved access should support the ultimate objective of improving the quality of life of the
poor. Improved physical environment greatly facilitates the integration of the settlement
into the wider urban area and at the same time contribute to improved livelihoods and health
and well being of the community.

6.3. Conclusion:

With the growth of towns and cities, impact on the surrounding villages are
bound to happen. Extension of urban areas into rural areas leads to semi urbanization resulting
in the development of slums, devoid of civic amenities. These pockets become dormitory
settlements without adequate services and amenities, especially along railway tracks. As this
work itself reveals that with the creation of new districts, without adequate infrastructure has
led to influx of people because of opportunities, in the process creating slums.

It is time, before it is too late, to focus on the human dimension. The cities and
urban centres have wealth but the poor who live in them do not share. The urban poor, as
revealed in this study, have become an inevitable part, who not only contribute to the economy,
but also help city governments make services economical because the poor offer their labour
at low wages. Economically speaking, the urban poor in the slums makes living affordable
and less costly then it would be. What are we doing for them? Planning system has no place
for them because the master plans aim at the creation of regulated and zone settlements of an unaffordable nature. From time to time, political solutions are attempted such as granting patta or land document to people who have already helped themselves with land.

Instead, we must demonstrate true development. We need not view slums as problem areas requiring corrective action. The legal framework with its origin in preindependence socio-economic context requires modifications and progressive change. There is a need for a greater commitment to institutional re-orientation by adopting a more enabling approach to the delivery of basic services assessable to the poor. Major areas that need attention are - Town planning, land management, poverty alleviation, basic service delivery and capacity building.

To start with, planning should begin at the micro level with each urban poor area listing their existing services and identifying gaps and deficiencies. This should be undertaken through participatory planning techniques and each plan should include a clear prioritization of needs and an indication of different stake holders contribution towards costs.

On the basis of this horizontal and partially vertical study made to the extent possible, I would conclude with the following suggestions.

1. To ameliorate the living conditions of the urban slum families, a Board could be constituted in the lines of Tamil Nadu with a chairperson and other directors representing various departments of the government and members from the community who could be entrusted with full responsibility for the planning and implementation of development.

2. Urban management systems need to be improved in three critical areas.

   - Governance got to be democratic, efficient, transparent and gender sensitive
   - service delivery
   - resource allocation and use.

3. People migrate to urban areas, but not because of bright city lights, they face problems in the rural areas. So it is push migration for survival and livelihood and pull migration for betterment.
Government can encourage volunteerism amongst the youth and support social workers to work in the rural areas towards an improvement of the living environment, because if the rural out migration decreases, urbanization and slum growth will slow down.

4. Revenue from vacant land tax could be used for slum improvement and tax concession for those who contribute towards the cause.

To be able to help structure policy for changes to happen for the better, scope for further research could be explored, mention can be made for few-

(i) Alternative sources and enhancement of livelihood in rural areas to mitigate push migration.

(ii) Systemic changes for socio-economic development of the urban poor.

(iii) Potentials for small and micro enterprise development.

(iv) Micro credit and Micro insurance for the poor.

(v) Role of civil society in slum development.

(vi) Social work and prevention of slum growth.

Lastly, it is suggested that overall development of slum pockets should be taken up in right earnest if we want to mitigate conflicts and slums of despair. As mentioned earlier, this will require consorted effort of all - the government, local people and the slum dwellers. They should not be looked and used as political vote banks only. Unless we develop these slums, for their well being, anti national force and other anti social elements will continue to take advantage of such situations to divide people, create tension and ultimately disturb the social fabric of our state.
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