

Problems of Urbanisation On Governance: A Review Of Silchar Town

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Abstract : *The fast rate of urbanization due to the massive inflow of people from rural to urban areas which makes the cities as large centers for investment has come around with a number of social and economic as well as civic problems. With the massive growth of population as well the growing role of urban centers, the role administration has become utmost important to regulate the life of the common masses. The present paper is concentrated on understanding the challenges faced by urban governance due to rapid and unplanned urbanization of Silchar town. A field survey was conducted amongst 280 numbers of residents from different occupational backgrounds who are being selected from 14 numbers of wards under Silchar municipality as well as 20 members of the Municipal Board i.e. both elected and employed for obtaining their views towards mitigating the effect of rapid urbanization of the town. The study reveals that ever growing problems on urban governance can be resolved by efficient leadership of the Board and coordination between the district administration and the Municipal Board in general and active participation of the common people in all affairs of the town in particular.*

Keywords: urbanization, migration, municipal board, governance

Introduction: With the advent of economic liberalization and globalization, the urban centers of almost all the cities in general have emerged as the hubs around which India's economy would gravitate (Sharma, 2014). As a consequence of industrialization, people

have started moving towards the industrial areas in search of employment which has led to the growth of towns and cities. It, thus, induces migration from countryside to cities. With the onset of the process of urbanization, villages near the urban units and even the remote villages tend to enter the orbit of a town or a city (Thompson, 1935).

The word 'urbanization' literally refers to a process of absorption of people in densely populated habitats and making the spatial units to lose the rural character with a rapid shift of occupations from primary to non-primary sectors (Maheshwari, 2006). The density of population in urban areas increases due to inflow of people from less industrialized regions to more industrialized areas. Hence, urbanization, simply defined as the shift from a rural to an urban society, is an essential outcome of migration that goes hand in hand with the industrial and technological development of urban settlements. Furthermore, urbanization is also the result of socio - political and cultural development of an urban area.

Due to the rapid growth of urban centers which are the fetching centers for large investment, specialized services, amenities and their effective and efficient functioning assumes added importance. The concepts of urbanisation as well as urban governance accordingly become more pertinent and critical in this context as the ability of a nation to pursue its economic goals depends upon its competence to govern towns and cities effectively and efficiently. Thus, urban planning and management of urban affairs are essential parameters of urban development. The aim of all planning is the creation of suitable environment for the common masses by providing them all the basic amenities of life (Mondal, 1998).

However, due to the rapid pace of urbanization, there has been a growing disparity between people's aspirations and their civic needs on one hand, and actual performance as rendered by the civic administration on the other. The main objective of all the civic administration is to provide assurance that the basic infrastructure and civic amenities are available to the town dwellers. But the rapid population growth or urbanization results in worsening of the civic services and amenities which has given rise to multifarious problems and degradation of the quality of life of the urban dwellers in most of the cities (Singh, 1998).

Therefore, it is utmost essential that appropriate environment for the dwellers of the town as well as villages are created by the local govt. which would facilitate to exert a pull on investment, provide employment and ensure a better quality of life for all the dwellers irrespective of town or rural areas (Guha, 2009). However, the success and efficiency of an administration depends both upon the efficiency of its personnel and also upon its proper organizational set up and effective governance. Thus, it becomes clear that in all sectors of public interventions and service delivery, until and unless

the state of governance is 'good', service or product delivery will not be proper. If urban centers have been termed as engines of economic growth, urban governance can rightly be called wheels of such engines (HSMI, 2001). In this present era of democratic politics, the urban government in the country has been passing through major series of crises resulting from unplanned urbanization of the cities such as crisis of leadership, crisis of administration and civic management, crisis of finances and above all crisis of public confidence (Shrivastawa, 1980). Under such circumstances, an effort to study the challenges faced by urban governance in civic management of the town will certainly help in identifying the remedies to the problems suffered by the town dwellers.

Silchar, the head-quarter of Cachar district is located in the southern part of state Assam. The state of Assam is experiencing population inflow, both internal and external since decades. Better livelihood opportunity was the main reason behind migration of population in Assam. Silchar, the second largest city of the state of Assam, has emerged as a center for education opportunity, medical facility, employment and business prospect and hence attracting people from other areas to Silchar. The decadal growth of population in Silchar town which was 27% and 55% respectively between 1991-2001 and 2001-2011 was higher than the respective national growth rate of 21.54% and 17.64% respectively. In other words, Silchar town has experienced rapid urbanization during the last two decades.

As a result of rapid urbanization, there emerged the problems of high density of population due to inflow of rural population, inadequacy of the facilities of roads, traffic management, housing, sewerage and drainage, drinking water, health, hygiene and good environment. The issues of urbanization, if, thus, not being given proper attention in time, may give rise to multifarious civic problems and hence, there is a growing need for better urban governance. The objective of this research paper is to analyze the major problems suffered by the town dwellers as well as the challenges faced by the Board members in the governance of Municipal Board to mitigate the problems developed due to rapid urbanization of Silchar town.

Review of Related Studies: Review of literature reveals that substantial research has been carried out on urbanization and migration related issues. Suhartini and Jones (2019) presented a study on theoretical and contextual framework of urbanization, the complexity of urban development and the importance of urban governance in addressing urban issues and challenges. Impacts and consequences of rapid urbanization such as informal settlements was explored with a focus on developing countries and mid-sized cities, especially in Asia. The chapter argues that the role of urban governance in providing basic urban services in developing countries is complex

and multidimensional, cutting across key planning and management constructs such as formal, informal and hybrid governance arrangements.

World Cities Report 2016 demonstrated that the current urbanization model is unsustainable in many respects. It conveys a clear message that the pattern of urbanization needs to change in order to better respond to the challenges of our time, to address issues such as inequality, climate change, informality, insecurity, and the unsustainable forms of urban expansion.

Venkatesham (2015) reported that urbanization is the result of rural migration and is the result of modernization, industrialization, and the sociological process of rationalization. It was reported that urban migration is rapidly encroaching the precious agricultural land. Further, lack of employment, education among the rural immigrants resulted in the increase in beggary, thefts, burglaries and other social evils.

Rituraj Neog (2014) reported that larger towns in Assam has experienced higher rate of migration compared to smaller towns resulting from both rural to urban and urban to urban migration. Jiboye (2011) studied the issues and challenges for effective urban governance in Nigeria and reported that urban population explosion has been necessitated by the features of globalization and industrialization. Uncontrolled growth of cities led to a degraded environment and poor living standard of the people.

Newman (2002) reported that urban growth should contribute towards sustainable development of environment sustainable in order to take care of the present needs without compromising the ability of future generation to meet its own needs.

According to William (2002) sustainable development could be achieved through forms of governing that are empowering and also sensitive to the needs of future generations. Gille 2011 presented that requirements for achieving sustainable development require stakeholders' participation and collaborative approach to policy-making and implementation.

Methodology: To achieve the objective of the present study, a survey was conducted amongst the selected 300 numbers of respondents through a structured questionnaire. There are total number of 28 wards comprising of 19,652 (nineteen thousand six hundred fifty two) households under Silchar Municipality (collected from office of Silchar Municipal Board). For the purpose identifying the problems of urbanization in Silchar town, 14 (fourteen) wards were selected keeping in view the size of the population of the wards. From each of the fourteen wards, twenty respondents were selected on the basis of purposive sampling keeping in view their age, education, administrative position and organizational activities. Apart from this, 20 members of Silchar Municipal Board, both elected and appointed are also being interviewed

in order to understand the major challenges being faced urban local governance for mitigating the problems of the town dwellers.

Data Analysis and Interpretation: The scenario of the urban life of Silchar town began to be affected by different dimensions of urbanization which is the result of perpetual growth in population and continuous process of shifting of rural population towards the urban centre. There has been growing imbalance between people's aspirations and their civic needs on the one hand and actual performance rendered by the Municipal administration of the town on the other. Consequently, the residents of the town are facing enormous civic problems which have deteriorated the standard of living of the town dwellers as a whole.

Problems of Urbanisation on Town Dwellers: The problems which become evident from the survey of the present research work are enumerated in the following sections with the help of some tables.

a. Roads, and Traffic Management:

The road condition in Silchar is causing great concern to all. Except a few, most of the roads of the town are worn-out, narrow which creates the problem of traffic congestion having no space for free movement of the vehicles. The quantity of different kinds of vehicles which are running through the narrow roads in the town has increased several folds during the last 100 years. But the conditions of road have not improved substantially. An entire generation has now grown up in the town which has not seen decent roads and proper traffic regulatory mechanism in Silchar town. Besides, the lack of any road repair works over the years has created big potholes and pits in the roads. There are footpaths in some roads but the unevenly set slabs having wide gap in between serve as death traps for the pedestrians. The perceptions of the respondents in the present study about the conditions of roads and traffic regulation in Silchar town are being shown with the help of the Table 1.

Table 1: Respondents' opinion about road and traffic condition of Silchar town

Particulars	Yes (%)	No (%)	Not aware (%)
Construction of new road in your locality	46.67%	48.15%	5.18%
Repair of old roads in your locality	61.85%	32.96%	5.19%

Particulars	Yes (%)	No (%)	Not aware (%)
Do you face traffic congestion while going to your work place	95.37%	4.63%	-
Poor condition and inadequate width of road is the main reason behind traffic congestion	96.67%	3.33%	-
Lack of traffic awareness, and absence of adequate traffic police is responsible for traffic congestion	94.44%	5.56%	-

b. Drainage and Water Logging Problem

Water logging is another serious civic problem being regularly faced by the urban dwellers in the town. Silchar is a town of heavy rainfall with annual average rainfall of about 3400 mm(DDMAC, 2012). During the monsoon season, most of the areas of the town remain waterlogged. It was found in the present study that the area of Silchar town is approximately 15.75 sq. km. whereas the lengths of existing lined and unlined drains are about 8.79 km(DDMAC, 2012).

Due to urbanization population of Silchar town has increased drastically. However, the drainage and sewerage facility did not develop at the same pace which can be capable to drain increased discharge of the town. The opinion of the respondents with respect to the problems of drainage and water logging obstacle are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Water logging and damaging of road

Particulars	Yes (%)	No (%)
Water logging and deterioration of roads during heavy rain	87.41%	12.59%

In the present study, the respondents have also been asked about the consequences which they used to face as a result of problem of blockage in the drains and water logging in their area. This is illustrated in the Table 3.

Table 3: Effects of water logging and drainage problem

Particulars of the consequence of Water Logging	% of respondent
Cannot go to work	8.52%
Children cannot go to school	11.11%
Do not get proper foodstuffs	1.11%

Do not get medical treatment	0.00%
All of the above problems are faced	74.07%
Does not affect life	5.19%

c. Waste Removal and Sanitation:

There is insufficient conservancy and garbage disposal system in Silchar town causing serious unhygienic condition throughout the town. Due to unplanned growth of the town, both commercial and residential units co-exist. However, the collection system of waste is not designed to collect presorted waste and as a result commercial and residential waste gets mixed up. Improper methods of solid and liquid waste management pose a great threat to urban ecology and environment in the town. The perception of the respondents with respect to the problems of sanitation and waste removal facility as being provided by Silchar Municipality is outlined in Table 4.

Table 4: Respondents' opinion about effect of urbanization on sanitation and sewerage

Particulars	Yes (%)	No (%)
Rapid rate of urbanisation results in poor sanitation facilities in town	83.70%	16.30%
Is there any waste collection facility available in your locality	29.63%	70.37%
Household face problems concerning the sewerage systems	43.70%	56.30%

From the field survey, it is being found that 42% respondents have access to garbage collection facility on daily basis by means of garbage cart and only 8% of the respondents argued that they have garbage dumpster near home. At present, most of the sewer of the town is drained untreated into the adjacent nullahs or khads. There is no provision for the treatment of sewer produced by the town. The collection and transportation of solid waste needs to be made more effective as every crude dump is an environmental disaster causing health risks from flies, rats and air pollution from deliberate or accidental burning. The disposal should be swift to avoid pollution of surface and ground water. Urbanization replaces the vegetations with impervious services which reduce the infiltration area where ground water can occur and thus resulting in a greater flow of water in streams which in turn raises the chances of more severe flooding. Moreover, as storm water flows over surfaces of the town, it picks up potential pollutants like pesticides, bacteria from human and animal waste which is detrimental to animals, plants as well as human beings.

Major ecological consequences of rapid urban explosion are air and water pollution as well as destruction of natural habitats. The depletion of urban environment causes disastrous effects on health and standard of living of urban dwellers. The large number of motor vehicles and industrial pollution, however, makes the quality of air extremely poor. According to World Health Organization, the concentration of suspended particles should be less than 90 micrograms per cubic meter. In fact, such high concentration of particles damages human health directly which in turn causes various diseases.

It is known that the core aspect of democracy is general public and hence encouragement of mass participation in local affairs of governance is the key to successful implementation of grass-root democracy. In this regard, the ward committee system is said to play a vital role in participatory governance which implies that “the people shall govern” and thus signifies the notion of grass- root democracy. In fact, local government is regarded as the level of government closest to the people and hence, development of ward committees is the appropriate way to ensure that citizens could give their input to the functioning of municipal administration. The committees are meant to be an institutionalized channel of communication and interaction between residents of the ward and the municipality. Indeed, ward committees provide opportunity to the community members to express their needs, their opinions on issues of service delivery that affect their lives and thus draw attention of the Chairman of the Board via commissioner of the respective ward.

Thus, the service delivery mechanism of every municipality can run successfully only when the residents are well aware of their civic duties and perform accordingly as responsible residents of the municipal area. The residents of the town should take care of their respective area in terms of cleaning, maintenance and overall improvement. In order to assess the extent of their participation, the respondents are asked about some particular facts which are shown in the following table.

Table 5: Respondents’ awareness, opinion and participation in Swachh Bharat Abhiyan

Particulars	Yes (%)	No (%)
Aware of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan	100%	0%
Swachh Bharat Abhiyan is a good initiative by Central Govt.	94.44%	5.56%
Respondents’ participation in Swachh Bharat Abhiyan	19.26%	80.74%

From the above table it appears that 100% of the town dwellers are aware of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan. Besides, 94.44% of the respondents considered it as a good initiative of the Central Government towards maintaining a clean and suitable administration

for the town dwellers. However, only 19.26% of the respondents are being found in the present research work who have participated in the campaign on Swachhata Abhiyan being organized in this town. Apart from this, the respondents are also being asked about their modes of participation in the regular affairs of municipal administration in Silchar town which is recorded below.

Table 6: Modes of participation in the regular affairs of municipal administration in Silchar town

Particulars	% respondents
By forming committees or clubs in respective localities	24.81%
Regular visit to ward Commissioner's office for catering the demand of locality	28.89%
Protesting the mismanagement and discrepancies of Board	9.26%
Not interested in this affair	37.04%

From the above table it appears that 24.81% of the respondents participate in the affair of urban governance by forming committees in respective localities of their area. 28.89% of the residents participate in the affair of urban governance through regular visit to the office of the ward commissioner for catering the demand or complaints of particular locality concerned, whereas 9.26% of the respondents argued that they participate in the affair of urban governance through effectively protesting against the mismanagement of the Board through newspaper, meetings and strikes. However, it is evident from the table that majority of respondents (37.04%) is not interested to participate in the affairs of Silchar Municipal Board.

Dilemmas on Urban Governance: The management of civic administration as well as the complexities faced by the municipality in service delivery mechanism is understood on the basis of the experienced views of those municipal functionaries who participate regularly in the decision-making process of urban local governments, namely the elected members and the appointed authorities, i.e., the executive officer, and other staff. Hence, in order to ascertain what are the major crises being faced by the urban governance towards mitigating the urban problems, the present paper also examines the opinions of the members of Board collected through analytical discussions from the field visits and tries to find out the remedial measures of the phenomenon of urbanization.

From the discussions with the Board members it is being found that due to rapid growth of population, spatial planning of the town for managing its unplanned growth

is a major challenge being faced by the Board. The board members have pointed the issue of migration due to rapid development of the town, as an important challenge before the Board with respect to the governance of service delivery approach to the residents of the town. With regard to the governance of waste collection services, it is being commented by the officials of the Board that the absence of adequate number of vehicles and garbage collectors poses severe crises to the service delivery of the town by SMB. Therefore, the waste generated by the households is not being made possible to collect directly from the households on a regular basis due to this scarcity of adequate numbers of infrastructure.

From the analytical discussions with the members of the Board, it is being found that there is a general feeling of discontent amongst some elected members on their participation in municipal matters. The members had argued that they have contested in municipal elections with the intention that to contribute actively insofar as the development of their ward is concerned. But, throughout carrying their work activities, they feel that the work practices are too complex and not easy to comprehend. Unfortunately, the influential members prefer to ignore their grievances in this regard. Therefore, the other members lose their interest in municipal matters because of the lack of incentives offered by the State government. In this situation, it becomes difficult for them to be accountable to the citizens who have elected them and vested their faith in them.

However, all the Board members have specified the main obstacle for service delivery of the Board is the poor financial condition of SMB. Overall expenditure of the Board is increasing at a higher rate and unfortunately a major portion of total expenditure is incurred on salary and other administrative expenses. There is continuous rise in liabilities of the municipality due to the widening gap between revenue and expenditure. Besides, revision of taxes, through the self-assessment that is the Unit Area Method, was also not being implemented by Silchar Municipal Board. From the study of office records of the Municipality, it is evident that there were maximum instances of short deposit and non-deposit of receipts by the collectors on time which implies lack of internal controls in revenue collection. Allegations have been made by the Deputy Director of TACP cell of the Board that the assessments made by the municipality were not fair and even. This on the other hand, results in non-provision of adequate civic amenities to the residents of the town since the Board is utilising lesser proportions of their own resources on obligatory functions. Moreover, the management of own funds by the SMB was also found to be mostly unsatisfactory. Indeed, except preparing for annual budgets, financial planning and management is almost lacking in Silchar municipality. As a result, for carrying out their allocated functions, the Board is mostly constrained to rely on Government grants. From the study it is also

being found that more than 80% of the revenues collected by the municipality are spent on the establishment. As a result, the tax payers are not provided with their minimum needs of amenities. It is, therefore, suggested that the civic services should be maintained by local taxes as well as establishment should be downsized as far as possible. Government grants should not only be utilized for the maintenance of establishment sections of the town.

It has also been found that lack of funds has paralyzed the different schemes of development like sewerage expansion, laying of new pipe lines, management of toxic wastes and disposal of garbage and the urban development agencies have failed to cater to the basic needs of the town dwellers in a satisfied manner. In the present study, it is further being observed that the different branches of S.M.B do not give a helping hand to each other for providing speedy service to public. Normally it has been seen that various agencies or department shrugs off its shoulders and put the blame or responsibility upon the other. The officials of one department hardly feel that their coordination and help will result in the smooth and speedy functioning of the other department. Sometimes these agencies unduly interfere in each other jurisdiction thereby hampering pace of development and adding to the hassles of the public.

Besides, due to lack of man power, there were procedural lapses in the Board in maintenance of records as well as insufficient collection of taxes/fees resulting in huge arrears of receipts which adversely affected the generation of revenues. Silchar Municipal Board has failed to maximize the local revenue potential due to their chronic deficiencies. Furthermore, the expenditure is also growing at a faster rate than the revenue resulting in municipal fiscal gaps. This situation of financial constraints has led to increased dependence on the state governments for aid.

It is also being observed throughout the field visits being made in the Board that there exists inefficiency amongst the officials of the accounts branch in the management of their finances as the records of financial gadgets such as Balance Sheets, Income and Expenditure Statements, Statements of Cash flows and Receipt and Payment Accounts are not systematically maintained on accrual basis, which affects adversely the delivery of basic civic services to the residents of the town. As the Asset registers were not maintained, the assets of the Board could not be monitored in proper manner and thereby leading to the mismanagement of assets. Moreover, as some of the assets were revenue generating, the Board in this context could not also be able to keep track of the revenue generated by such assets, which would also lead to misappropriation of revenue generated by such assets. Some of the important observations noted in this regard include: deficiencies in the procedure for determining the cost of services; low cost recovery from taxes, non-taxes; high outstanding dues of previous years and high

dependence on external sources of finance. The Municipal Board derives its income mainly from taxes and fees. At present most of the householders pay taxes at the rate as being assessed 20-25 years ago. The rate of tax is also minimum which can also be considered as a vital constraint in revenue generation of SMB.

The remedy to this present situation lies in augmenting the local revenues. On the whole, the states may assign any of the taxes on the State List either in whole or in part to local bodies which enables the state government to exercise degree of supervision and control over the affairs of the local bodies. From the survey of office gadgets of S.M.B., it appears that there were no development plans of short-term, mid-term or long-term during the last few years of municipal activities. They were interested only in day-to-day activities rather than restructuring the town into a modern town by undertaking various constructive developmental works which are of permanent in nature and the utility of which could be made available for social and economic development of the inhabitants of Silchar town.

From an overall observation of the office gadgets of SMB, it is being found that for the last five years together; the management of finances of the municipal government was in a depressed condition. An important reason for this would be that the municipal body in Silchar town is not found to follow the best principle of public finance, i.e., assessment of revenue based on the expenditure needs of citizens by spending more on civic amenities and facilities which is based on the chance of getting more revenue that creates a paradoxical situation for the Board. Indeed, the only alternative left to this problem is that the municipal body by leaving aside petty politics must exploit fully the existing sources of revenue through showing strong will power and at the same time the government should expedite finalization of the recommendations of the State Finance Commission. The practice of estimating the amount of revenue to be mobilized based on expenditure need is almost lacking and only haphazard and arbitrary techniques are normally being employed for the purpose. Within this, there is no relationship between revenues and expenditures of the municipalities. This situation is to be corrected at the earliest by making them to follow effective budgetary principles.

Concluding Observation: Development is one of those phenomena that may bring about major changes in the way of life of people in the country. Rapid growth of population, migration vis a vis urbanization may also bring about changes. With modern economic development getting accelerated, the pace of urbanization, too, is becoming rapid. It is quite natural when people in a locality begin to live together, certain civic problems arise which needs to be governed efficiently. The unplanned urbanization, if not given

due attention in time, is bound to give rise to multifarious problems, even injustice and disorderliness. Hence, there is the need for a proper assessment of existing facilities and planning and drawing up of schemes based on present and future demand. In this context, perspective urban planning is an important remedy to the problems of urban local governments in which the municipal authorities will have to plan allocation of land for various uses, particularly for housing the population, and to ensure that the basic infrastructure services such as roads, drainage and sanitation, hygiene and waste disposal are well planned and provided to all the residents of the town.

Besides this, it may also be remarked that the efficient functioning of the municipal Board depends to a large extent on the conscious and effective participation of the dwellers of the town in maintaining a clean and pollution free town. In this context, development of inclusive mechanism by urban municipal administration has important intrinsic value that is rooted in enabling people to exercise voice and influence in the processes that concern them. In fact, the mechanism for inclusive governance requires a great deal of strategic vision, leadership and efficacy of the municipal employees so as to motivate the confidence of general masses towards the affairs of urban municipal management.

Furthermore, residents of the town must also come forward altogether and volunteer their services for cleaning the roads of the locality. Indeed, the dwellers of the town should be first of all conscious of living a hygienic life not only in their own personal homes but also in community perspective. In this regard, the members of various ward development committee should spread awareness among the other inhabitants of the locality on proper upholding of the area of their locality in particular and overall maintenance of the municipal roads in general by not throwing garbage in the main sides of the road. This, in turn, could help the Board in speedy and early recovery of the problems relating to unplanned urbanization of Silchar town.

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