

The Bhaskar Colony Project

The Swampy Tale of Distorted Dreams

A report by Youth Forum



Alexis Society

“Arise, awake and stop not till the goal is achieved.”- Swami Vivekananda.

Executive Summary

The Chandigarh Team of Youth Forum Project conducted the field trips from August-December, 2015 to slums in Bhaskar Colony which is the unauthorized slum colony built on Panjab University land in Sector-25, Chandigarh. The purpose of the visit was to familiarise ourselves with the issues these communities face which could enable us to clearly understand the problems being faced in the area and how to best resolve them. This report aims to provide a better knowledge, from a social and unbiased point of view, of the afflictions faced by the people of the respective area in various sectors of health, education, electricity, water sanitation and other general amenities. Finally, it aims to document the main characteristics of the area, found out in the survey trips, according to their descriptive features.



Methodology

In order to have a detailed preview of the basic amenities available in the area, the survey was carried out by conducting the field trips in the slums of Bhaskar Colony, Sector-25, Chandigarh. The colony is divided into the series of *kacha* homes which circle around the *pacca* homes in the midst of the colony. The motive of our survey was to highlight the variegated range of problems faced by all the slum-dwellers in an unbiased and sincere manner. The survey was conducted by a team comprising of twelve members in series of six field trips by means of the questionnaire charted to gauge out the response of the people in the area.

The questionnaire used in the survey, comprising of fifteen questions in total, was laid out in three parts. Whereas the first part focused on the demographic information including name, house number, number of family members; the second part of the questionnaire dealt with antecedent, economic stability and the education status of the family. Finally, the last part of the questionnaire highlighted the sanitation, health, electricity and water facilities available in the area. The ultimate aim was, however, to collect as much information as we can without being too restrictive with questions and asking counter questions during the interactions when required.

The data was further collected from the Community centre, the health centre, the school, the AIDS Prevention centre in the area. A key issue with the survey is the “social distance” evident during the survey where it was difficult, at times, to implore people who do not respond well to the questionnaire. However, a great deal of effort was put in by the team of volunteers by maintaining a trustworthy relationship which is imperative to gather as much objective data and existing information that we can to arrive at the correct findings without being biased towards one section of the community thereby, maintaining the neutrality of the survey report.

Finally, the volunteers were made to interpret the questionnaires allotted to them during the survey, the collective information of which was then interpreted and analyzed on the whole. It was our forthright attempt to remain neutral, accurate and reliable while unleashing the details of our survey report.

Survey and Findings

The purpose of this report is to highlight the problems faced by the people living in the unauthorized slum of Bhaskar Colony so that the problems can be eradicated through proper measures and remedies.

Located in suburban area in the heart of Chandigarh, Bhaskar Colony is the unauthorized slum colony allegedly built on Panjab University land. The stereotyped image of the place can be gauged from the fact that we had to repeatedly convince the taxi-drivers while embarking on our slum trips by convincing them that we wanted to go to Bhaskar Colony and we had our address right.



Bhaskar Colony, Chandigarh

The colony has a strip of *kacha* houses circled around the *pacca* houses. The people living in *kacha* and *pacca* houses are accorded the homes on the basis of what one can call a "matter of chance". Initially, the place was called Janta colony and all the houses built were *kacha* houses. In 2008 (on the basis of people's version), people were allotted pieces of land to build *pacca* homes on the Panjab University land by the government authorities. However, there was no legal division for allotting lands.

The pieces of land were allotted only to those who were able to produce their birth documents along with certain amount of money. The concrete houses were then built by the people without any financial aid or subsidy provided by the government.

Today, many people are dwelling in these houses as residents and many have leased them to tenants. Out of the people who could not get the lands allotted, 49 families have filed a case against the inequality meted out to them which is still in the court.



Kacha homes in the colony

The problems faced by people dwelling in *kacha* homes are innumerable. Firstly, they cannot build a *pacca* home on the land because of the authorization issue due to which they have to suffer greatly during the rains. There is no proper drainage system because of which the people dwelling in the strip of *kacha* homes continue to be afflicted with diseases like malaria, typhoid, dengue, viral sickness during rainy season. Not only the water seeps inside the home, but so do mosquitoes, frogs and even, snakes making it such an affliction for the people dwelling in such houses. Further, there is no proper sanitation arrangement around *kacha* homes. People have to walk far away to use toilets for which they pay Rs. 2 every time they use it. The condition of toilets is filthy and dirty. Some people have dug holes in their houses for sanitation purposes, which again becomes breeding ground for variegated diseases. The water facilitation, though not appalling, is still worrisome.

There are certain numbers of taps where water comes once in a day and people have to store water for everyday usage, by waiting in queues. However, the stored water is prone to become breeding ground for the mosquitoes. People live in unity and harmony with each other irrespective of their caste and religion.

This is the sole reason that they are able to confront the government officials whenever they force them to vacate the unauthorized lands.



A resident washing clothes with stored water outside her home due to lack of proper washrooms.

One grave problem, faced by the dwellers of *kacha* and *pacca* homes equally, is that of hefty electricity bills. People with only one electric fan and a bulb are handed over the electric charges of Rs. 4,000- Rs. 7,500 per month because of which people are disconnecting their electricity connections as they are unable to pay such high amount of bills. Initially the electric connections were private and have recently been a curious thing to notice here is that people complain the electricity bills were low initially and have exponentially risen ever since the connections have been.

Not all the people in the slums have electricity connections because of this reason. When asked how they manage without electricity, they reply very boldly "*ham to kundi maar lete hain*". These people instead of getting electricity connections steal electricity, which sum up for another reason for such hefty electricity bills.



The jumbled wires on the pole further can fatally injure anyone, especially during rains

People have flocked here from places like Muzaffarnagar, Lucknow, Azamgarh, Khushinagar, Baghpath, Saharanpur, Haridwar, Bhiwani to find work. Most of these people earn their living on daily basis as labourers or auto drivers. People, on an average earn 3000-20,000 per month. All the households have a bank account but because of lack of birth certificates or a reliable job, they are unable to lend money from government. Rather they prefer lending it from their employers or money lenders at an interest of 10%. In case of being unable to pay the hefty interest rate, people usually lean on friends or relatives for loans. However, there is also a group in the place called '*Ujjevan*' which helps women by providing them loans.



A worker making pottery in the *Kumar Mohalla* of Bhaskar Colony

It is commendable to see that even though these people do not earn much, yet most of them send their children to school and make sure that they receive proper education. They consider education as a bright aspect to get rid of the dirt and darkness of the slums. Mostly, the students are studying in nearby Model Schools or in Bal Niketan, sector 37. Apart from that, many children are studying in the private schools on scholarships where selection is done through a draw-basis. Though children of SC/ST/OBC castes studying in Government schools are provided Rs.2500 yearly to meet their expenses, the ones belonging to upper caste but economically backward have no such privilege.



Volunteers in conversation with the children

Students, mainly, girl students face a lot of problem in realm of education in the colony as they are forced to give up studies, sometimes, due to various factors like family pressure, eve teasing and marriage at a young age. Apart from that many boys are forced to leave studies due to the pressure of earning for the household. Also, there is lot of hassle to get admission to the schools as most of the people do not have proper birth certificates. Sometimes, they have to leave studies for the same reason. For an instance, we met a girl who had migrated from a village in Azamgarh six-seven years ago. She was in fifth class at that time. No transfer certificate was provided from that school. So when she came to this place and went to a nearby school to take admission, she was not given admission. According to a 2012 survey conducted by an NGO named Ambedkar Survey in the area, the education policies and schemes are passed but there is gigantic disparity in the efficiency of their implementation. Such problems continue to affect the people who remain deprived of education even today.



The domestic cattle adds to the unhygienic conditions

Inspite of the hype of “Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, the ground reality evidently visible in the colony is outrightly different. The houses are surrounded with pathetic bulk of house waste and garbage with flies swamping over them.

The open sewage drains not only pose a threat to the widespread of epidemics but the open holes pose a danger to the lives of people. Waterlogging and poor road conditions are some other cleanliness issues. The major problem faced by the most of the families are the blocking of gutter. The gutters are not regularly cleaned by the appointed employees and people have to hire private employees to get them cleaned. "Cleanliness issue will remain till there are local and private contractors as there is no fear of sacking among the sweepers who clean the area and therefore they hardly come once in a month or so", said a local sweeper.



One of the shops in the area

There is a community centre in the locality which is doing commendable work in the realm of health by providing free medication and check-up. However, most of the people do not know about it. Further, the centre is not open 24*7 due to which people go to nearby hospitals in Sector-24 or Sector-16 or to PGI in the hour of emergency.

Park, built for children to play, is usually full of two-three dozen men gambling and playing cards. The colony is said to be gripped largely by drugs which further intensifies the problem of unemployment in the area. There is a growing need in the area to open a rehabilitation centre to guide the youngsters and the affected towards a brighter future. Another issue that people were hesitating to speak openly was prostitution.

Only few people, mostly women, talked indirectly about it suggesting that these practices are being done in the area and has become main source of income of few people. People also told that the local police is aware about these practices but they have not taken any proper action against it yet. In the light of such activities, it is necessary for government to implement the schemes to employ such people so that do not lean onto such practices to make a respectful living and essentially important for police to shed its reckless attitude by being more liable against the criminal activities in the area.



Community Health Centre, Bhaskar Colony

To sum up in general, it would not be wrong to state that the problems prevalent in the colony cannot be resolved unless the government works in tandem with making people aware about the problems and their definite remedies. It is not easy to reach any definite conclusions from the data drawn out of the survey but it is clear that education and awareness campaigns can play a vital role in extending substantial remedies to the issues stated.

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About Us

Alexis Society

Alexis Society is an international not-for-profit and non-political organisation with passion for excellence which aims to promote creativity, innovation, peace, harmony and inclusive development focusing on providing a platform for dialogue, development, innovation, leadership and research.

Youth Forum

Youth Forum was envisaged during the 1st International Youth Forum organised from 24th to 28th June, 2012 in New Delhi aiming to create a community of vibrant people by providing them a platform to engage with issues that the society faces, henceforth going beyond the academic orientation and decisively arming them with a conviction to complement their incumbent skill-set so they can be eventually utile to the society. Our tagline is Keep true to the dreams of your youth.

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