

The Sangam Vihar Project

A report by Youth Forum



Alexis Society

Executive Summary

This report is based on a study conducted on the basis of three visits to Sangam Vihar in Saket district in the months of August and October, 2015. Sangam Vihar is a slum colony and is known to be one of the biggest ones in Delhi. It is located in the major part of South Delhi and has large areas of forest and unused land connected on the other side bordering Haryana. However, government interaction in this area is very limited. The aim of this survey was to find out the living standards of the residents and help them in the best possible way to have better social amenities.

The research methodology was qualitative; a broad questionnaire was framed, interviews were conducted with shopkeepers, residents, and visitors of the area. The conclusions of the same have been consolidated and presented in the following report.

Introduction

"*Aap kuch kar sakte hai hamare liye?*" (Can you do something for us?), said almost every participant of the survey by means of a greeting. This was the kind of pervasive discontentment among the residents of Sangam Vihar, the largest unauthorized colony in Asia⁽¹⁾. Sangam Vihar is an archetypal example of why our country doesn't feature among the high ranked nations in the Human Development Index. It shows you the other side of development; a steep inequality in the standard of living. The Saket district greets you with an irony as you see, on one side, people moving inside the air conditioned mall, well dressed in their branded outfits, sipping a Starbucks coffee. While on the other side, you could see destitutes trying hard to travel in the flooded narrow roads, with not even clean water to drink, water that is supposed to be freely available to the residents is sold at profit.



Photo source: Youth Forum team

Findings

Inside the area, we found the roads to be severely waterlogged, nowhere in proportion to the measly rain in the recent days. The survey gave us an insight into the major predicaments that the urban residents are facing, including that of waterlogged roads. One reason for this is the lack of a proper sewage system; the other as told by the local people is because of the overflow of water from Sonia Vihar and blockage of drains due to empty liquor bottles. Whereas Sonia Vihar is the cause for one of their problems, it is also the place from where they have started getting drinking water. The road was also full of potholes which made travel difficult. We noted that there is no proper transport facility within the area. Outdated auto, rickshaws ply between the Badarpur, Mehrauli road carrying 6-10 people in them⁽²⁾. Open sewage has over flown into those congested roads, creating traffic jams.



Photo source: Youth Forum team

Huge lumps of waste have been dumped on the sides which later become infested by mosquitoes and flies. The residents have not been spared of any diseases, they said. No mosquito, killing sprayer comes to this area where the water is logged mostly throughout the year. We observed the lack of underground pipes or conduits for carrying off drainage water; there is a high rate of occurrence of diseases like cholera, dengue and other water borne diseases because of this. There are no government hospitals or dispensaries functioning in the area and people have to depend on private clinics outside the colony to avail these services. Another problem is garbage disposal. In some places, a body of residents themselves makes the arrangement of carrying the garbage to a dumping place away from the residential area without the participation of any public body.



Photo source: Youth Forum team

Water can be fetched only if you travel a few kilometres to collect it in that specific one hour in a day. Another irony that we witnessed was the sight of the beautiful well maintained BJP office in contrast to the surrounding stagnated sewage water. While the common people of the area struggle to commute, which has led in many occasions to their fractured legs and arms, their representatives who are supposed to take care of their welfare give a cold shoulder to their torments.

Buildings were found to be of substandard quality; there was debris on the corners of the road. The drainage system in the area is of poor quality and a short spell of rain would drench the entire area with sewage water. The solid waste management of the people is causing accumulation of more garbage and often the drainage gets blocked with the thrown away plastic. Some BSNL/MTNL workers were forced to make their hands dirty for laying the wires under roads. There seems to be no coordination among various stakeholders particularly for the infrastructural development of the area, sanitary workers were reportedly not regular in their work.



Photo source: Youth Forum team

One of the most distressing problems was that of increasing crime rates and reckless attitude of police in the area. Residents complained about the burgeoning disturbance of the bullies who drink and brawl. The police seem to take up the issue only when someone dies. Latest crime recorded was on September 7th - an attempt of murder by fifteen men.

Six persons were detained. Sources said the assailants were local goons from neighbouring Tigri village who created trouble in the area on the night of Janmashtami. "*Police toh do ghante baad aati hai aur le de kar sab case band kara deti hai*" (the police arrives after hours and closes the case without proper investigation). Residents and shopkeepers reported regular instances of mobs demanding cash or picking fights in streets. People frequently indulge in violent disputes over petty issues.

The area was reportedly highly unsafe after dusk. One is sure to be looted if they are out in the night. Shopkeepers and vendors are scared to come from work late at night for the fear of being ransacked by these petty thieves. This makes it more vulnerable for girls to step out even in the daylight with constant threat of being molested by roadside drunk hooligans.



Photo source: Youth Forum team

As far as education is concerned, it depends upon the affordability of people. Those who can afford good education send their kids to Jagriti Public School, considering the poor condition of the government school. Those who can't, have no choice but to send their children to government schools where there is no RO water, clean toilets or proper infrastructure (as told by a class 10 student).

Only a few people own land and property, while all others are poor migrants from various parts of north India. People here are denied loans by the banks because they live in an unauthorised colony and hence do not have proper IDs. Consequently, they depend on their own savings, or borrowings from unauthorised sources which often charge high interest rates. Most people are not aware of financial welfare programs like Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojna.

The survey also exposed us to observations about how the elected representatives never bother to visit the area after elections. Many of the residents do not have any valid document as address proof, hence they do not get voter cards, ration cards and aadhar cards, which leads to problems at the time of getting rations from government PDS shops, water connection, electricity connection, driving license, in opening bank accounts, and other such activities. The dependence of the residents on borrowings from unauthorised sources leads to the thriving existence of a parallel economy and localized power structures.⁽³⁾

Conclusion

Since the 1980s, the neoliberal model of development is being propelled upon postcolonial 'third world' countries with a view of ushering 'good governance'.⁽⁴⁾ This project shows the flaws in the worldwide contemporary discourse on neoliberal development. The narrow conception of development as material gains and gross national product and other income related variables seems to have gripped the country.

'The current trend of development', as put by BM Sharma and Abhishek Sharma, *'has led to healthy balance sheets and unhealthy populations'*.⁽⁵⁾ The neoliberal development model under the Washington Consensus has much to offer, but has failed to take into consideration the indigenous concerns of people, poverty and social cleavages being the case in India. A program of development suited to the needs of the indigenous population is the need of the hour.

References

1. Sangam Vihar (Delhi Assembly Constituency). Wikipedia. Web.
2. Devli/Sangam Vihar. *Chetanalaya*.
3. Bhardwaj, Ashutosh. "All Parties Love This Illegal Colony: Its People Don't Count, Their Votes Do *The Indian Express*, 24 January, 2015.
4. Joseph, 1996: "Structural Adjustment in India: A Survey of Recent Studies & Issues for Further Research", Centre for Development Studies: Thiruvananthapuram.
5. Sharma, B.M. and Sharma, Abhishek "Development, Good Governance and Human Rights", *Indian Journal of Public Administration*. Vol. LX, no.2. April-June 2014.

Contributors

Sambhavi Ganesh (*Delhi Project Co-ordinator, Youth Forum*)

Kirti Kler (*Director, Delhi Operations, Alexis Society*)

Milan Rachel Joji

Ishita Rathi

Shivani Singh

Kavya

Manish Wankhede

Siddharth Bansal

Anuj Verma

Sagar Diwan

Mayank Jain

Acknowledgements

Aditya Singh (*Founder and Chairman, Alexis Group*)

Mradul Yadav (*Chief Executive Officer, Alexis Group*)

Arpit Gaharwar (*Secretary, Alexis Society*)