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**SUCH IS LIFE: AN OBSERVATIONAL CASE STUDY ON URBAN SLUM DWELLERS
IN KOLKATA**

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There is an accompanying 28-minute video case, for which please request the authors for access.

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ABSTRACT

As we strive for higher and higher economic growth, we also witness increasing extension of urban landscapes of various hues, including unintended ones. One of the features of most urban landscapes is the accompanying growth of slums all over the world. India is one of the fastest developing economies in the world, and also witnesses huge migration from villages and small towns to metropolitan areas in search of better economic opportunities and improved lifestyle. This demographic trend has led to the degradation of urban environmental quality and threatened the sustainable development in the metropolitan cities.

Our case study uses the context of Kolkata, India's third most populous metropolitan area with more than 14 million people living in it, including the suburbs. 10% of the population lives in around 300,000 slums that forms its underbelly. In our case study, we find that although slum dwellers live a challenging life with everyday hassles of sanitation, health, income volatility, transportation, safety as well as poor environmental quality, yet they strive for more, with hope and aspiration. Through this case study we try and explore the lives of three families living in three different slums in different localities in Kolkata. This case as well as the video case attempts to understand how their quality of lives though restricted by the rigid boundaries of frugal economic resources, yet is expanded through a wider reach of social networks, and communal belongingness, which consists of dreams, hopes, and aspirations.

Keywords: Slum, Urban, Well-being, Poor, Poverty, Kolkata, Bottom of Pyramid (BoP), India

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Introduction

“The slums are not a place of despair. Its inhabitants are all working towards a better life.”

The United Nations operationally defined slums as communities characterized by insecure residential status, poor structural quality of housing, overcrowding and inadequate access to safe water, sanitation and other infrastructure (United Nations Human Settlements Program, 2003). For the purpose of the case study, our research team visited different slums in the city of Kolkata. These are described below:

1. **KALIKAPUR SLUM : Kalikapur** is a locality in Kolkata City in West Bengal State, India. It belongs to Presidency Division. Kalikapur Pin code is 700099 and postal head office is Mukundapur . Haltu , Hussainpur , Santoshpur , Sahid Nagar , East Calcutta Township are the nearby Localities to Kalikapur. The population density of this slum area is very high and over the years many squatter colonies have developed into large slum type settlements. Kalikapur slum have kacha houses build-up of bamboos and not cement and bricks. The hygiene conditions are truly terrible as many of the slum houses are located right on the sides of an open air Khal or sewage drain, civic amenities are far from adequate to meet the growing population of the slum. The population of the slum area is predominantly Bengali. During discussion with the people in the slum it was brought to light most of the men work as daily wage earners or are involved small stalls business while most women work as domestic helps. Chronic unemployment and low income has reduced their standard of living and has also led many of the unemployed to turn to alcoholism making the environment of the slum. Water works and water supply, drainage and sewerage street lighting road and pathways, solid waste management facilities are not proper in this area. There is common toilets, tube well which is shared by all the people living there. However some people in this slum have realized the importance of studies and thus send their children's to Government schools. Staying in slum areas, their expenditure is very high towards the food items and healthcare and low on rental.
2. **JADAVPUR SLUM: Jadavpur** is a locality in Kolkata City in West Bengal State, India, **Kolkata-700032, West Bengal, No.1 Railway colony slum, Jadavpur.**No.1 Railway colony slum is smaller in size in compared to other slums. There are around 150-160 families approximate. This slum is located very near to the Jadavpur station beside the railway track line. Few houses in the slum were made with bricks and few were kachcha house. Water works and water supply, drainage and sewerage street lighting road and pathways, solid waste management facilities are not proper in this area. People staying in that slum use a common toilet and also use the municipality water service. For backup they have a common hand pump. Mostly they store water in large buckets for their daily use. The hygiene conditions are truly terrible as many of the slum houses are located right on the sides of an open rail line. Civic amenities are far from adequate to meet the

growing population of the slum. The economic condition of the entire slum is below the below poverty line. The sound of the trains travelling 24 hours a day not only create sleep disturbance but also lead to utter disturbance in concentrating on studies. They are tired of complaining about poor sewerage system, lack of sufficient toilets and poor availability of water and instead made it a challenge to carry on their life overcoming all these obstacles.

3. **CHINGRIGHATA:** Chingrighata, the area lies in 22° 33' 0" N latitude 88° 23' 0" E longitude and falls in the UTM grid of 45Q 642242 2494365. The area is surrounded by Debendra Chandra Dey Road in the North, Topsia road in South and Chingrighata Road and Maheswaritala Road in the west and eastern side respectively, shielded away from the posh society that the place signifies, there is an ambience of great dis-satisfaction and demand for better living conditions. The slum lies just under the Chingrighata flyover on the Eastern Metropolitan Bypass in Kolkata.

4. **CHOWBAGA :** Chowbaga is a Locality in Kolkata City in West Bengal State, India. It is belongs to Presidency Division. Chowbaga Pin code is 700105 and postal head office is Nowbhangra Paschim Chowbaga, Nazirabad, Vip Nagar, East Kolkata Township, Uttar Panchanna Gram are the nearby Localities to Chowbaga. People living in slum in this area usually makes use of locally available materials such as mud, clay, rocks, sticks and reeds. Therefore, the type of housing will reflect the local situation and materials that can be found. Mud houses are common and although susceptible to rain and flood damage, are cheap to build and maintain – with new layers of mud being added annually. In most cases, people living in here have to share a toilet with hundreds of their neighbours. Wood is used as the fuel and this can cause local competition for resources as fuel-wood gets depleted. . This type of cooking set up is simple and cheap, but really inefficient. Some families may keep small livestock such as chickens, geese and goats. Have less access to a wide variety of goods and so electronics, plastics and food stuff can usually be found at a long distance whereas, day- to- day materials are found within a short distance. Transport in rural areas can be less reliable and less frequent in this area. Many people get used to walking or cycling very long distances as part of their routine.

SAMPLE DESCRIPTION: CHINGRIGHATA, JADAVPUR AND NONADAGA

Before proceeding further, let us now first clarify the coverage of the term “slum” in technical sense. According to the NSSO (2010): “A slum is a compact settlement of at least 20 households with a collection of poorly built tenements, mostly of temporary nature, crowded together usually with inadequate sanitary and drinking water facilities in unhygienic condition”. The place used to be a field for harvesting crops and have slowly and steadily grown into a strong residence. The dingy place and narrow lanes are enough for the outside world to label it as a “Slum” but to the people resting away from the upscale lifestyle that signifies the place better, they call this shanty area their “Home”.

Just like any other regular families these people have also strived to create a better life for their children and themselves, one can understand the sense of pride and enthusiasm they have when they talk about how almost all the girls in the locality have access to a school life, how there is more than one college goer and how much disheartening it was to watch a girl getting married and hence giving up on her studies. They are of belief that a son is a son till he gets married, but a daughter is a daughter throughout the life. They have a tone of sadness layered with a sense of pride which can be seen when they said “ Don’t worry you will not get sick by eating that, we keep ourselves clean even if we live here”.

Before reporting and analysing the results of our survey, let us indicate first the nature of the sample, which is furnished in the following chart:

Table 1: Surveyed Area:

Name of the slum	Total Households
Chingrighata Slum	30
Jadavpur Slum	70
Nonadanga	11

Families Surveyed

Introduction to Sardar family

Padma Sardar is 55 years old. She lives in Jadavpur, in no. 1, Rail Colony, Kamarpara, Kolkata-32. She works as a cook in different houses for a living. Here she stay with her four sons and three daughter in laws'. She has three step sons and one own son. Her son is yet to get married. Her daughter got married and has a kid. **Anil Sardar** is the husband of Padma Sardar and is 62 years old. He is a rickshaw driver at Sukanta setu near Jadavpur railway station. Padma Sardar is his second wife. He is very lazy and hardly contributes anything towards the family. By profession he is a cook and loves travelling. **Pradyut Sardar** is the son of Padma Sardar and Anil Sardar who is 18 years old and a college drop out. He is the only educated member of the family. He is very determined to work hard and earn money. He spends around Rs.300 every month and purchases cloths only during the time of Durga Puja in sale. Initially he used to drink every day but now he drinks occasionally. He has a smart phone and also uses social media (facebook, WhatsApp).

Daily Routine

Padma Sardar wakes up in the morning around 5a.m . Then she sprinkles some water in front of the gate. After completing the bathroom work, she brushes her teeth and makes tea. After having tea, she washes the utensils that has been used last night. Sometimes she leaves them unwashed when she is running out of time and washes them after she comes back home. And for that reason she keeps the utensils aside, and completes other household works and then leaves for work. After returning she cooks and eventually arranges for the food ingredients. Her husband sometimes purchases fish and when he doesn't, then Padma arranges for the ingredients and goes to take a bath and sits for the prayer. After that she and she husband sits together to have lunch. After that she takes a nap. When there is no water at home she goes to fetch water from the nearby tube well. And again she leaves for work after completing the evening prayer. After returning from work, she prepares dinner. Then she wakes her husband up as he sleeps in the evening and then serves the dinner to her family after which they go to sleep. And the same routine continues to repeat.

Residence

They stay with their middle step son. At Padma's place there is a total of one room which has been partitioned and divided into two rooms. Each room is occupied by her two step sons. As Padma stays with her middle step son who has one room so they divided the room with a wooden plank horizontally. Padma, her husband and her son stays together in the upper part of the room which is divided by the wooden plank and her middle step son stays down in the same room with his family. They cook in the balcony and have their food there. As they do not have a separate kitchen, she and her daughter in law cooks in the same balcony, though separately. They have a covered drainage system. They bring drinking water from other side of the railway track. They get water for all other purpose from the hand pump as Padma does not get time to fill water from the "time tap" as she leaves for work early. They do not have a separate toilet for themselves so they use the common toilet as used by the other people in the slum.

Resources

Cooking

They cook in fire wood in order to save gas. Padma gets a sack full of wood from the garden and grinds them and use it for the next 10-15 days. Later after 15 days Padma goes again and get a sack full of wood. They have a LPG connection which is registered in the name of Padma. She and her second middle son both pays equally for the gas as they stay together and used the same gas though they cook separately. She said, " I am cooking rice with boiled taro (Kochu patabhate) and egg curry". Sometimes they cook fish. Every Saturday, they cook vegetables like moong dal with gourd (Lau), brinjal fry (Begun Bhaja), potato fry (Alu bhaja), a sabji containing cauliflower (Fulgobi), green peas (Motor shuti).

Electricity

They do not have electricity upstairs where Padma, her husband and her son stays. She said, " We don't need bulb upstairs. I just give the incense sticks upstairs and it is used at night for the sleeping purpose". They avoid using lights during the day time and only use fan.

Television

As she does not have a T.V of her own she uses her middle step son's T.V. to entertain herself. Only sometimes she goes to the other room to watch the television. She watches "Tu Hai Ashiqui" and "Tere Ishq Mey Mar Jawan". She only watches these two T.V shows. They prefer Hindi serials over Bengali serials. She says, "Bengali serials are very boring. They show the same thing every day over a week. There is no variety in the Bengali serial where as in the Hindi serials there is fight and love and everything".

Items purchased

Shampoo and oil is used only once a week. They prefer Bajaj Almond Drops hair oil and a 100 grams bottle goes for a month. They purchase a total of 30 satches for a month which cost Rs. 1.50 and the same is used by the entire family. They purchase grocery items from a nearby shop like sugar, salt, turmeric. The payment is done monthly.

Education

Padma feels that not being educated is a problem. She could not study as her parents could not afford. Now there is no use wishing for it. Her son has studied till college but later dropped out

as his focus was on working. Her husband knows how to sign his name apart from that he does not know how to read or write.

Impact of advertisements

Advertisement shown in the T. V hardly has any impact as they use the product first and then if they feel that it suits them, they use it. She says," It is shown in the advertisement that this particular shampoo will lead to less hair fall. But after using it I find it increases the hair fall. So, there is no use, using the shampoo. We don't know whether they lie or not. It varies from person to person. It might not suit well for everyone. Advertisements will do everything to satisfy us. But we cannot support them all the time". On the other hand it is not possible for them to buy everything that is shown in the T.V as they cannot afford due to the lack of money and poverty.

Trip

They have travelled to Haridwar, Gaya, Mathura, Vrindavan, Delhi." I have seen the Taj Mahal, then I have travelled to Sonar Kella" she says. It was Padma and her husband Anil who went for the trip. They paid for their travel and availed bus tour. It was a 22 days long trip in 2017.

Loan

She said," We have taken loan by saying that I am going to buy a rickshaw. But last year my son bought a mobile phone and we went for a trip during the pujas, so the money was used". She had taken a loan of Rs. 30,000 which she will repay by the month of June, 2018. "After the loan has been issued one can do whatever they want to with the money" she said. Any situation do not create any effect on the payment of the loan. No matter whatever problems one faces, one have to pay for the loan. They have to abide by their instructions. The bank that issued her the loan is known as Bandhan Bank. With the starting of this bank, people get to save certain amount of money. However Padma does not get to save money as she needs to pay loan .She said, "Next time I will take a loan for building a house. They take a very nominal amount as interest. In two years, as far as I have calculated, they are taking Rs.11, 000 extra. That is actually our loss though". The bank is not like any other bank. The madam comes and collects the money and deposits it to the office. A copy is maintained in which the basic details of the person who is taking the loan the loan, and the amount of loan is kept.

Neighbourhood

In this slum, people belonging to all the caste stay except for Muslims. More or less, suppose 1 or 2 families are Bengalis and there are many Hindu families who stay in the slum where they stays. Houses are basically build-up of bricks but they have used ply to make the houses. They have a kacha house. They are not allowed to build a 2 storied house as they either have to pay a fine to the GRPS or leave the place.

[Fight going on, in the neighbourhood] She said "The mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law are quarrelling with each other. That is why they have gone to the rail line for getting killed. Which is not going to happen. They just show it off". It not only happens in the neighbours' family but also in Padma's family. Everyone has fault. No one is innocent. The quarrel doesn't start on its own.

Whenever there is a problem in the neighbourhood everyone supports one another. They help each other to go to the doctor or protest or fight against the wrong thing that happens. She said," It is not like something bad has happened to my neighbour and I will just ignore it. We don't close the door on the face like the people in living in flats and complexes". They stay together and try to adjust with each other.

Her work place

Padma works in a boy's mess which is in Jadavpur colony. She cooks food in the mess for these boys. She cooks Bengali food for them which is finger licking. During summer she goes to the mess at around 7 a.m. and during winter at around 9 a.m. She is like a second mother for them. Her work in the mess is to sweep, cook food and also wash cloths. The boys purchase all the grocery items. When Padma is on leave the boys cook by themselves. For her salary, they give her Rs. 1700. They have a mess fund where all the boys contribute and pay her. The boys say, "In every home there is a mother, and mashi is just like our mother here".

Desires

They have a wish of rebuilding the entire house. They wish to build a separate room for her son as they have a dream of getting him married. Initially they had many dreams which has been shattered now. Like everybody she also have a dream of building a home and as she is a women she loves jewelleries. From her savings she was able to purchase a ring and an ear ring and now she has a desire of buying a gold chain for herself. She feels happy to see the actress who have lots of money, wearing rich good cloths and jewellery. If she had a job which paid her handsome salary then even she could afford to buy such expensive items and live in luxury.

Regrets

They do have regrets that due to the lack of education they could not find a standard job for themselves and have to struggle each day to earn their living. She says, "A lot of things come to my mind that how I had wished for going to a standard place in life or maybe I could have built a Pakka house like many others. I also regret that I don't have the opportunity of asking someone to stay in our house for the night or give a place for someone to sit when a guest comes. This is the regret that I face that I am unable to do anything and I have to stay here for the rest of my life".

She works hard but have not received the appropriate result. Almost all the people staying in the slum has to lead this kind of life. "But it is not necessary that everyone will have to lead the exact same life as mine. They have a different life altogether" she said. Her life is only full of hardships.

Introduction to Mondal Family

Sita Mondal is 27 years old, who currently stays in Nonadanga, 105 Natun gram, China Mandir with her family. Before marriage she used to stay in Sundarban with her parents. She said, "I have studied there and I stayed with my parents. I have spent my entire childhood over there". It has been 15 years of her married life now. Her in-laws are from Jaynagar. She initially lived with her in-laws after marriage. It has been almost 20 to 25 years that her in-laws have shifted to Kolkata. She works as the sweeper at The Heritage college girls hostel. She said, "Now I am married and I work for a living and help my son with his education, do household work as well. I take care of my sons education, his school and tuition classes". Ranajeet Mondal is the husband of Sita Mondal and is 35 years old. He says, "I do all types of work. No work is small for me. I stitch my own shoes and wear them if they get torn. I never ask for a cobbler. There is no such work that I don't know. I can do all type of work". He does not have a permanent job. He said that if he works for 10 days, then he can relax at home for the rest of the month. By profession he is a cook. He cooks in funerals, birthdays, weddings or weaning.

Reason for not staying with his parents

Initially, Ranajeet Mondal used to stay at Jagarani, in a rented house with his parents. After he realized that it was not easy for his parents to continue the cost of living for the entire family, he

decided to get separated and help them as per his capability. At the age of 20, he got married. He had occupied Dakhal, a place to build a home like others. Because of this reason, many times people even broke his house, but he did not give up and continued to stay there. His mother was scared to give Ranajeet money as he was alcoholic. Once a list came out and selective people would be able to stay in the new house which was listed by the Government. He was lucky enough to have his name in the list. But he did not take the house. He said, "There is no one to take care of my parents in their old age. I did not take the house, instead, I gave it to my parents". My mother is very good. If she hears that something is wrong with me or I am unwell, she comes running over here. Basically it is not possible to stay with everyone in the family. We are three siblings. My sister is married and I am married. My younger brother is left to get married. My father drives Rickshaw for a living. Truth is truth".

Educational qualification

Sita completed her education till class 7. She had a desire to study further and find a good job but her parents could not afford. On the other side Ramjet is not educated.

Daily routine

She wakes up at 6:30-6:45 in the morning. After which she fetches water. In the meantime, her son goes for tuition and she arranges the room. Then she washes the utensils and leave for work. She reaches The Heritage Girls Hostel at 9 am, completes her work by 12 pm and returns home at around 12.30 pm to 1 pm. After coming back she takes a bath and eats lunch with her son and then drops him to school. She then goes to work again and returns home by 7 pm. After returning home if her husband has not cooked food, then she cooks it and completes any household work left. After returning from the school, her son again goes for tuition. After he comes back they sit together for dinner and then go to sleep by 9.30 pm to 10 pm.

Ranajeet's daily routine starts from 12 pm. As soon as he wakes up, he drinks and then has his lunch, sleep for some time, go out for a walk and pluck some hibiscus (Joba) flowers for a family in the flat. He says, "That's my everyday job without fail". Then he comes back home at 9 pm and goes out in the field with three of his friends to drink for some time or else sit for dinner. His bed remains ready and thus, he goes off to sleep.

Residence

They stay in a temporary house under the supervision of the government. So, they can be asked to leave the place at any moment. If the government does so, they will be allocated a new home. "Even if they don't provide with a place to live, we have to agree to the terms and leave without any questions asked" Sita sadly remarked. In that case they will have no other option other than finding a home for themselves.

They have worked really hard to build this house. It is made up of canopy, vinyl and wooden planks from outside. It took one and a half days to complete. Her husband along with his friends have built this home as it is impossible for a single person to do it entirely. She said, "I did not pay them for helping us. But I gave them money for drinking alcohol and invited them for dinner. I even gave them Rs. 10 to 20 as a token".

They have only one room where they are staying currently. They have kept all of the necessary items such as utensils in that single room and also eat their meals and sleep in that very room. There is only one bed in the room. So whenever their elder son comes, he with his younger brother sleeps on the bed whereas Sita and Ranajeet sleeps on the floor. If any guest comes over, they have no other option than to sit in that room only. There is a kitchen which is placed outside.

They don't have a drainage system there. In fact they say that they do not require a drainage system. They store the water which is needed for cooking and in case if Sita needs to throw something, "I come outside and throw it away. I don't throw anything inside the kitchen" she said.

They do have a bathroom that is kept for the bathing purpose. Her husband and her children use it." I work at the hostel, I use the toilet over there" she said. Her husband uses the field for the toilet purpose. They have surrounded their bathroom area with a canopy, so that Sita can use it when needed.

They don't have a tap at home and thus, get the water from the Garden rich tap. The water comes there at a particular time. They get water for all purpose from there. Sita fetches water for her son and her husband and she herself goes to the pond (pukur) for bathing.

Resources

They do not have electricity at home. They use lamp (Lompho) which is lit with the help of kerosene. Sita says, "I use the lamp to cook and my son studies under that lamp only". They purchase the kerosene from the shop. They buy 1 to 2 liters of Kerosene from the market which lasts for a long time. They have one lamp at home. They have no other option than to manage even if they face great difficulties. It is available at the ration also, but they do have a ration card. The price of kerosene varies between Rs. 60 to Rs. 70 per liter and is expensive. She said, "If I had a ration card, I would have bought it from there only as it is bit cheaper there".

They use kerosene, plastic and wooden planks for cooking at home. They light the 'chula' with the help of plastic and cow dung cake which Sita brings from the field.

They do not own a fridge, a television or a radio. Even if they feel like listening to songs or watching movies they cannot as they do not like to go to others place to watch. Moreover, after returning from work, they get very tired.

Sita gifted a cycle to her husband. Other than that they don't have any other vehicles. She has also gifted him a mobile phone. Thus, they just have only a phone in the family. She has kept contact with her sisters. She says, "Whenever they call, my husband receives the call when I go out for work. My husband calls them again, when I return". Though she has insisted on buying one but Ranajeet feels that it will be useless to have unnecessary phones. He says, " Why buy 10 others and waste money when you have one and its working well? Nowadays people are only concerned about the mobile phones. She uses the phone when she needs it and I also do the same". Ranajeet goes to his mother's place or at the flat to get the phone charged. "I have proved myself in and a good way that no one ever refuses me" he remarks.

Ranajeet does not have a bank account but Sita has one. Sita had a policy made in LIC, but since she could not maintain it, she stopped using it. She has an account which was made by the warden of The Heritage girls hostel. If she is left with some amount from the salary she deposits it in the account.

When they go to her in-laws place, they take a bus or train and therefore, they spend some money on the transportation. Otherwise, going to Heritage College doesn't cost anything, as she walks to the hostel.

Cooking

They use cow dung cakes and branches for cooking as they cannot afford to buy a gas due to poverty. They cut the braches from the small trees that are available in the field and dry the branches and the cow dung cakes under the sun. Everyday Sita brings the food she gets from the

hostel." Sometimes I like to eat egg and fish that my husband cooks at home or else I eat the food that I get from the hostel. It contains dal, potato fry (Alu bhaja), Sabji, and something more. Every day the menu is different. I bring it home and have that as my lunch" she said. They buy fish once or twice a week. They spend Rs. 50 for the fishes. Vegetables, oil and spices are bought beforehand and stored for cooking. They purchase 2 to 3 kg of mustard oil and use it for the rest of the month. If by the end of the month it falls short, they buy around 50 to 100 g of mustard oil. They also purchases all the stuff as in salt, turmeric powder, and everything that they need in lesser quantity, after Sita gets her salary, They buy loose spices that are available in the market that are available at cheaper price.

They buy 10-15 kg of rice at Rs. 15 per kg from ration. They buy rice from the people who themselves buy rice from the ration. They give 6 to 7 kg of rice at Rs.15 per kg .She said," They take less money from me than sold in the market".

If they need to buy green leafy vegetables like spinach (Shag) then they buy it from the market on Saturdays and Sundays at Rs. 10 or 20.

Sita likes to do farming so she does farming every year outside her house. She has learned farming from her parents as they used to do it in Sunderbans. She says, "I have planted tomatoes, broad beans (Sheem) and brinjal. I pluck them from the trees. I have cooked my own planted vegetables today. I have only bought the potato".

Ranajeet cooks in the afternoon and she cooks at night. In case if he does not cook in the afternoon, then she does it. He does not cook at night as it is difficult to cook. Problem is that, at night there is too much air. So the light of the lamp blows off. After having dinner, they freshen up and arrange their bed and go to sleep. She keeps the used utensils and washes them in the morning.

Clothing

"I work in different houses so people gift me clothes. In the hostel, when the girls leave for holidays during pujas, they give me clothes. My mother-in-law gives me saris and my sons get their clothes during pujas. I don't buy clothes for myself and them" she said. So she avoid spending money on unnecessary things. Ranajeet also receives gifts but still he purchases clothes. He has his own choice and he buys accordingly. But as he cannot say no to the gifts so he takes it.

When Unwell

If Sita falls sick, she tries not to take leave from work if she can manage. There is a doctor nearby from whom she gets medicine when the kids get sick only if it is necessary. Mostly, they use home remedies like saline water. "We don't go to the doctor, until it's an emergency" she said.

Education expense

Sita and Ranajeet have two sons. One is Somenath Mondal and the other one is Meghnadh Mondal. Their elder son goes to a high school and stays with his grandmother. Their younger son studies in Primary school who stays with them. Somenath, the elder son visits them on Saturdays and Sundays. His grandmother drops him and picks him up from school.

Sita works hard and earns money to pay for her sons' education. Almost Rs 3000 to Rs 4000 is spent on her elder son for his books, uniform and school fees. Their younger son studies at a small school inside The Heritage College where she does not have to pay as it is for free apart from the regular tiffin expense. The younger son gets everything from the school itself, including books,

uniform, pencil and everything that he needs for his studies. Sita only has to pay for his tuitions. The tuition fees for the elder son is Rs 400 and that for the younger son is Rs 350.

Unlike other people, who save money for education facilities for their children, they cannot do so as they can only afford the present education. It is Sita who runs the whole family alone. Whatever money she earns, is all spent in some way or the other thus leaving her with hardly any opportunity to save. Her condition is such that if she does not get the monthly salary, she won't be able to feed her family.

She has to send her children to private tuition as they don't get to study at home because Sita is out for work most of the time and does not get time to help them with their studies. If they go to the tuition, they will be able to learn the lessons that they are being taught at school. She said, "The teachers have complained me that my son was not paying attention to his studies, so I have to take care of him". So that is the reason why she had to enrol them in private tuitions.

She said that she did not get the opportunity to study because of the shortage of the money. "Due to this we are out of jobs and we are working as maids at other peoples' houses and earning less money" she claims. She wish that her sons get the opportunity to study and grow up successfully and get a job. She said, "I want them to be independent, to earn money and do things on their own in a respectful manner".

Income and monthly expenses

Sita earns Rs. 5000 per month. From there she spends around Rs. 3000, this is her yearly expense for her elder son. Apart from that she needs to give Rs. 400 for the tuition and tiffin expense of Rs. 10 or Rs. 20. For the younger son she spends Rs. 450 for the tuition. The monthly expense for the grocery is Rs. 1000. After getting the salary, she pays the money to the shop. So almost around Rs. 3000 to 4000 is spent. Rs. 1000 remains with Sita from which she purchases fish and vegetable. For emergency purpose, she keeps Rs. 50-100 with herself, in case if anyone in the family falls sick or something. She needs to give pocket money to her husband as well which he calls "maintenance cost". In case if she don't have the required amount of money, she borrows money from others and settle the problem.

They don't buy any kind of snacks as in biscuits, namkeens or chips and so on, on a monthly basis. They buy it from the shop if and when needed. Her younger son eats biscuits and thus he buys it from the shop. They don't buy them from beforehand as they does not have the money to buy it. They use sunlight soap for washing clothes, which she use weekly and vim bar of Rs. 5-10 for washing utensils, lifebuoy soap for Rs 5 or 10 and Clinic Plus satches for shampoo. They don't use soap to bath everyday but weekly. Sita uses coconut oil for her hair and either Babool or Colgate as a toothpaste.

Sita says, "I don't choose brands, I just use things according to needs. I don't choose brands according to the one I like, but choose them according to need. I buy things depending upon the amount of money I have. I don't buy expensive stuff. I don't buy things in larger quantity as well".

Problems

Almost 70 to 72 families have left this place as they were given "pakka" houses by the government and around 10 families still stay here. They do face problems like they cannot make their own

bathroom as they do not know when they may be asked to leave this place. They cannot even put up a hand pump. And moreover the government has said that they are going to provide them with the needed things. So we are not taking any initiative to do anything. "We stay here together. So we are just managing things amongst ourselves" she said. Initially they used to fear that they can be removed from this place anytime. But now the government has asked them to wait and has given them the permission to stay here till they provide them with a place to stay. So they are looking forward to it.

Neighbourhood

They help each other when needed. In case someone needs something, they reach out for help to each other. For example, suppose someone needs Rs 50, they ask for help. Then they help them according to the availability. If they need any spices and condiments or some vegetables for cooking, they help each other.

Positive outlook

Despite of all the problems they always stay happy matter whatever happens. They explain to themselves that despite of so many problems they will stay happy, ignoring the sadness of life.

Introduction to Das family

Das family is a family of 2 members however they live in a joint family along with her daughter's family. They live in the Chingrighata area, under the Chingrighata Flyover on EM Bypass. Majority of the family is illiterate and works for their living hood. They live in the shanties of Chingrighata illegally for the past many years because they cannot afford to buy a decent house for themselves.

Residence

They do not live in a "pukka house" and there are 3 rooms. The big room is occupied by her son, daughter-in-law and grandson. In the other room her daughter, son-in-law and their family stays. Whereas Annapurna and her husband stays in the store room. They live near a canal. People live near the canals as they cannot afford flats in good areas. They are habituated staying there in bad conditions.

The house in which they stay recently is made of plastic, bamboos, nail, and wood. There were total of two people who constructed the house, two of them were her family members while the other two were labours. The labours charged Rs 400 per day and completed making this house within 3 days.

They do not have a separate roof for bathroom as well as kitchen. They cook in an open outside their home and use a clay stove. They face hardships due to cooking in an open area like her head gets heated but still they have to cook to feed her family but there is nothing much that can be done about it.

Annapurna says, " Like my family members are using this broken washroom, I cannot do anything about this as we do not have money. How will we do anything?" There is no roof on the bathroom. But now we are habituated to it." However, as the kids are small we take them to the wash room during night" she said. The place where they wash their utensils they take the kids

Due to the lack of space they keep the utensils and spices in the room. They keep her daily use items like soap, oil etc. on a shelf separately. Clothes and other stuff are kept in the same room.

Acquiring the recent residence

They used to give rent for this place previously, but it is not so now. With the help of her daughter Tumpa they have acquired the place. But they were not able to build a 'pukka house'. It was Lakshmi Sharma who gave them the room for rent. After living for 4 months the contract was over. So 'Lakshmi' told gave them the place to stay. The boys from the political party supported them, and now they do not have to pay rent and are staying almost for free. This land (slum) is forcefully taken and there is no card system. Since the land where they are staying is not registered they can be asked to leave the place.

Neighbourhood

Women are more active in slums especially their neighbourhood is much more active and advanced in everything, even if the husbands are drunk it is the women of the family who contributes in the family to maintain their living. "I am happy living in slum, in a building you don't get to see the neighbours and I love talking to people and mixing with them, everyone in their neighbourhood loves them and I am happy living here rather than a building want to stand and help others in need" Tumpa said.

Resources

For cooking they use firewood, kerosene, and LPG. But now due to monetary problems they are unable to book a gas cylinder. They largely use firewood for cooking. "Food cooks faster on firewood and not on gas" Annapurna remarks.

When the gas isn't available they use the kerosene oil to make tea, boil milk, make semolina and boil water for the kids. They purchase kerosene from the ration shop once a month. In the market kerosene is sold for Rs 70 a liter whereas in the ration shop it is sold for Rs 25 a litre. They also buys rice from ration card. . Tumpa says, "Market rate is too high like Rs 40 or 50. I won't be able to buy all that and eat". Everything else she purchases from the market. They eat ration rice only. Annapurna's daughter and son gives her Rs. 2000 for household chores. With this money they run the family. It is Annapurna who does the grocery shopping. The food for the kids are purchased by their mothers. Dilip buys the daily vegetables like potato. He also goes to the market in the evening and brings everything like oil, fish etc. In 25 days almost Rs 4000 gets over.

In a month they purchase around 4 litres of oil, spices like jeera powder (200gm), Turmeric (300 gm.). Every alternate day they cook meat and fish is cooked every day. Annapurna said, "My husband says that both fish and meat cost the same so eat meat but our kids say not to bring meat daily but to bring fish. Sometimes I say not to bring fish and to bring egg as I really like egg. So he brings eggs. When my husband goes out for work he brings meat or fish".

Previously they used to use soap for washing hair. But Tumpa advice to use shampoo. It is Tumpa who buys shampoo. They do not get effected by any advertisement as they cannot afford to buy the products shown. Tumpa uses Patanjali shampoo as she likes the product. They use coconut oil. Annapurna don't use powder. They use the same cream which is purchased by Tumpa in order to look fair. However for the kids Johnson products are used. "Since I cook on the clay oven I become dark, so my daughter tells me to apply this. In our village no one applies such things. Since my daughter tells I use" Annapurna says.

Water facilities used to be burdensome before, they had to fetch water from the other side, after submitting a letter to the counsellor, they have provided the people living in the slum with a water van but has no fixed timings. There are some houses with wells, but due to the lack of space they store waters in containers.

Initially they used take electricity from other people for Rs.15 per unit, which used to cost them Rs.2000 to Rs. 2500 monthly, so they decided to go to the electric office in Dharmatala and opted for meter. It has been a huge benefit as they have to pay around Rs. 700 to 800 now instead of 2000 and during summer it cost them Rs. 1000.

"We have no proper drainage system, we have only a wetland (khal) we have to throw all the waste in there only, and there is no permanent place as well as a septic tank .Not only us the same situation goes for everybody" Tumpa said. As a means of transport they use their legs. They walks every time they have to go somewhere, Tumpa had once travelled from Chingrighata to Ruby in bare feet due to poverty. She said," My son and son-in-law has a cycle. But we do not have any motor cycle or car". If they have to go to Jora Mandir then they takes an auto. If her daughter goes to visit her in-laws then they take the train. The kids go to school walking and they travel to nearby places on their feet. Annapurna has a bank account in Allahabad bank but zero balance. Annapurna do not have a phone as she does not know how to use it. It is Tumpa who has a mobile phone which is used by everyone in the family.

Education expenditure

Tumpa have to maintain a separate account for her daughter's education, her tuition fees which is Rs.550 along with her school fees need to be paid monthly, as well as Rs.10 for her tiffin every morning, these are her separate expenses and not shared with the family income.

Their opinion on migration

Villages do not have the opportunities that one can get in the cities, Kolkata offers employment and living security than compared to the villages. In the villages the people mainly lead their life making bidis out of tobacco leaves but in Kolkata you can shift from one job to another like Tumpa. Wherever she gets the opportunity she grabs it. She has her own in laws house in Sunderbans where by 9 'o' clock at night everybody goes to sleep, by 7 'o'clock everybody is done with their dinners. Whereas in Kolkata they eat their dinner from 11 to 11:45 at night. The people staying in villages have no option for electricity but they have it here. Transportation facilities are also available in the cities.

Entertainment

Tumpa had interest in music but now it is not so. Now she thinks it is better to utilise the time in working than listening to music. Recently there was an incident where Annapurna was suffering from stomach pain and Sanjay and Dilip were not aware of it. It was Tumpa who had to take her mother to the doctor and whatever savings she had was all spend on her mother's check-up .

However, they have two televisions but both the T.V's are currently out of order. They are planning to repair it with their month's salary.

Impact of advertisements shown in the television

There is no rule as such that whatever is advertised they purchases it. They have to maintain their lifestyle according to their earning. When they had standard earning they used to purchase Patanjali shampoo bottles instead of the pouch, but now prefer to buys Rs. 2 pouches shampoo for the entire family. Whatever the situation they try to adjust themselves according to it. They have to maintain her expenditure according to their earnings, they cannot buy a product of Rs. 100 as they need to save some money for emergency situation. Dilip stays drunk all the time, so they have to maintain everything in the house, be it Rs. 2 or Rs. 500 this is how they adjust. Tumpa says" I can't understand anything beyond work".

Education

Annapurna does not know how to read and write. However, "I did not face any problem due to the lack of education. Tumpa knows how to read and write. However, Sanjay is not educated. Annapurna had enrolled both of them to a school. But her son used to give excuses and hence left studies. She said," She used to be successful in whatever she did as she is educated". She wants her daughter to study and become a better person. She is always ready to help people out no matter what. She is smatter in the family as she is educated.

Dilip Das says that it was his uncles did not let him study because during those days people did not have much intelligence, as compared to the contemporary time where people give their first priority to studies. Previously people's mind were different than today's, they never led hands on the kids, but nowadays things are different." There is no use thinking about that if you would have studied then my life would have been much better now, the time has gone, at this age I won't be able to study, If my elders were strict about my studies then I would not have to carry sand, bricks in my head every day, I could have a job and a proper house, I did not have to live in here, I could have an experience, if I had a job then I could have earned at least Rs. 10000, but currently I have to go to the market place for work if there are any available or else have to return back home" he says with despair.

Loan

They don't take loans out of fear. Annapurna said," Like if they come and say that you owe us money return it immediately. If they say so? I will not eat that is fine but not live on credit". Nor her son and neither any of her family member. "Like we have taken a loan but we feel otherwise. But after two months we will clear the loan. But owing money is something we fear" she says.

Problems

The roads are narrow in this slum as people have built houses around it. Previously there weren't any boundaries, but now the roads have become even smaller. People here hardly leave any space even if there is a small space is they might build a house there. Annapurna said," Like if we get a small space we will convert it into a room. They are also like that. Though there are problems but there is no way out. We all have to live together. We have seen it, we live in the same colony

and we do not want to fight that is why". There are too many mosquitoes. It becomes difficult with so many mosquitoes.

Comparison of the families

LITERACY AND EDUCATION- DAS, SARDAR AND MONDAL FAMILY

As far as educational attainment is concerned, knowledge is considered to be a matter of pride and is encouraged profoundly among the slum dwellers, almost all the children have access to proper education, and there are certain households where the daughters are attending colleges for a better future. All the three families believe that the way they are struggling, they do not want their children to struggle. Thus, they want their kids to study and attain a better life for themselves. For example: Tumpa Sardar is the only member of the house who continued her studies till class 10, sadly could not pass the board exam successfully and had to leave halfway. Now the family proudly boasts about their little granddaughter Riya Sardar who appeared first in her class and has already made an impression upon her school teachers and peers. And Sita Mondal has too enrolled her two sons to school. Padma as she could not study due to poverty always wished her son to study more who dropped out of college as his focus then shifted toward earning and job.

INCOME DISTRIBUTION AND DAILY LIFE- DAS, SARDAR AND MONDAL FAMILY

The families gives us a general idea that the cooking space is dominated by the women in the family. They are Hindu by culture and it gives us an impression that they are truly religious looking at the various idols of god in their house. They have room constructed by bamboo. For Das family they have a bamboo room over a nullah that flows underneath.

However they believe in the philosophy of 'Living Life in the moment'.

Belonging to a "workers" family all these families strive hard to earn their livings. These families often have to go through the inadequate and uncertain payments as in the case of Das family. The salary received by Das, Mondal and Sardar family amounts to Rs.4,000- 10,000 respectively.

The families does not go to big shops to buy their daily needs but they rely a whole lot on the ration shops and the local small grocery shops available around them. In case of spices and other cooking ingredients they prefer getting them from local shops. They normally buy mustard oil with which they cook from small shops around them. They now get their rice for Rs 2 per kg in ration. But according to Das family this rice was not good but the Rs 13-15 per kg rice which they used to get before was better than this. Sita Mondal as she does not have her ration card buy loose rice from the people who purchases rice from the ration card in much higher rates. Whereas the Sardar family continues to purchase rice from the ration card.

As Das and Sardar family owns ration cards through which they have benefit to receive staple foods like rice, pulses, sugar and salt. And all the three families have chullas for cooking. Das and Sardar family owns a gas cylinder but due to their financial downpours they cannot use it frequently. The three family's common food includes fish, with vegetarian food in between and only has meat once in a while.

Das family and Sardar family normally shop for clothes from a wholesale market in Sealdah. During Durga Puja, Das family get new clothes for their grandchildren and rarely buy anything for themselves as it is costly to buy new clothes. Mondal family rarely buys cloths and manages from what they get from others. At home they were normal cotton clothes. However, all the three

families do not like to spend unnecessary money on clothing. And save a little amount of money for necessary thing or emergency situation.

LIVING CONDITIONS - DAS, SARDAR AND MONADAL FAMILY

Now let's focus upon the living conditions of the family. Quality of life and living condition depend upon the income of the said household, it determines their access to education and finance and a variety of other factors. We have discussed earlier on income, expenditure and consumption pattern.

Here we will discuss about their basic hygiene facilities, water and sanitation. Water and sanitation services, including garbage disposal service are mostly common or shared. Only Mondal family do not have a bathroom and thus, go in the field. Basically the income of a family denotes their accessibility to cleaner and concrete toilet and living conditions, other families have small or open area and common toilets which is shared by one or two families and sheds light upon their weak hygiene and lack of governmental support. Lack of governmental support is a subject of prime concern and protested by all the dwellers, the only support they get from the government is the water tank vehicle and time water supply which is provided by the areas councillor every morning, for free and cleaner living. If we take the sanitation under consideration, then the people living in slum have access to common toilet, Sardar, Das family are one of them. Mondal Family lacks a proper bathroom and thus uses field.

The Families leads their daily activities within one room. The rooms have a single bed, a clothes rack, one wardrobe, Sardar and Das family owns a second hand refrigerator, and both the family have a second hand Television set. All the three families have a place for worship. All the three families also owns a stove or chulla, gas cylinder and water buckets which is placed in the same room as their other belongings, all the families have accessibility to all the items. They have no other option than to adjust.

HOW THEY COPE UP IN THE MARKET AS THE CONSUMERS?

For all the three families, it is all about how to meet their daily needs. Their situation is hand to mouth, whatever they earn is all spend. Their husbands does not spare even a small amount to their wife to run the family but spend the entire money what they earn in drinking. In short, the husbands hardly contributes towards the expense of the family and it is the women of the families who have to look after the expenses of their husband. Nowadays this families cannot even afford a gas cylinder because it comes at Rs. 800 for one gas cylinder so they cook on the chulha. Coping in the expensive market for them is really difficult.

DAILY ROUTINE OF EACH FAMILY

Padma Sardar

Time	Task
05:00	Padma wakes up and makes tea
06:00	Padma gets ready to leave
06:30	Padma leaves for MESS work
07:00	Crew Breakfast

08:00	Padma returns home and drops grandkid at school
08:45	Padma goes to 2nd MESS after dropping grandkid
10:15	Padma finishes work and leaves
11:00	Padma goes to an old lady's house for maid work
	Padma returns home from work
	Collecting water
	Cooking
	Bathing
	Eating Lunch
	Grocery/fuel/clothes shopping
12:00	Going off for nap
14:30	Crew Lunch
15:30	GVs Shoot
18:00	Padma wakes up from nap
19:00	Padma leaves for work in MESS
20:30	Padma leaves work for home

Das

Time	Task
05:00	Wakes up
05:30	Goes to fetch water
06:00	Washes utensils
06:30	Gets granddaughter ready for school (Riya Sardar)
07:00	Breakfast and Tea made and served to family
07:30	Wakes up her grandson (Soumyadip Das) and feeds him
08:45	Washes clothes
10:00	Preparation for cooking
11:00	Regular bazaar brought by Dilip Das (Husband)
11:30-13:00	Cooking Lunch
13:00	Takes Bath
13:30	Has Lunch
14:00-15:00	Takes Rest

15:30-16:00	Finishes other remaining chores (though daily chores are shared by her daughter and daughter-in-law)
16:00	Makes evening Tea for the family
16:30-19:00	Spends time with family (as she is a housewife) like playing with grandchildren, watching television etc.
19:00	Starts preparing dinner
by 21:00	Finishes cooking dinner
22:00-22:30	Finishes with Dinner
23:00-23:30	Goes to sleep

Mondal

Time	Task
	Wakes up
	Gets fresh and makes tea
	Gets kids ready for school
08:45	Leaves home for heritage girls hostel for work
09:00	Enters hostels
	Cleans girls rooms
	Cleans dining room
	Tea break
13:30	Leaves work for home
	Takes bath
	Eats lunch
15:00	Child returns from school
15:15	Feeds the child
16:00	Leaves for work and drops child for tuition
21:30	After work returns home and picks up child from tuition
21:45	Prepares dinner
22:00	Eats dinner with family
22:30	Goes to sleep

Conclusion

The parts of the cities, where these slums are located, are quite congested, as they are over populated. The situation of the slum areas in metropolitan cities have deteriorated to such an extent due to the high density of population that the people there hardly get to avail the basic

amenities. The narrow lanes are narrow, the single room houses without the facilities of an open courtyard or an enclosure deprives the people of natural gifts like sunshine and air. People use common latrines and water taps. The concentration of people in areas where the provision of water, sanitation, garbage collection and health care is inadequate creates the conditions where infectious and parasitic diseases thrive and spread. Living conditions in urban slums are worse than those in the poorest rural areas of the country. This can be attributed partially to the slum's exceptionally unhealthy environment. Many of the most serious diseases in cities are 'environmental' because they are transmitted through air, water, soil and food or through insect or animal vectors. Despite the exterior appearance of chaos, slum life is highly structured, with many economic, religious, caste and political interests expressed in the daily activity. Living conditions are extremely difficult, and slum dwellers fear the constant threat of having their homes bulldozed in municipal 'slum clearance' efforts. Nonetheless, slum life is animated by a strong sense of joie de vivre.
