

Periodic Research

Scenario of being apartment dwellers: A case study from Burdwan Town, West Bengal, India

Abstract

In post- independence India so many changes happened in social structures and activities but the majority of the population remained dependent on agriculture. The increase in Indian population has been both a national and global issue. Land mass remained constant but land available for agriculture gradually shrunk because some of it has to be utilized for other necessities of the growing population. This has affected the very bond of joint family in a rural economy. Shortage of food and amenities became chronic, which promoted selfish intentions and destroyed the attitude of co operations between members of families (Harold 2010).

Keyword: Occupational Structure, Urban Amenities

Introduction

While the less efficient members stuck to their roots, the more enterprising ones choose to migrate to places with promises of better life and opportunities. The type of business changed, activities got diversified, but these centers had sustained requirement and went on absorbing the rural as well as neighboring urban migration. The infrastructure once established remained and further got improved creating more possibilities and more opportunities. The process of shrinking of land assets continued in the rural areas, beckoning those who were affected by this crisis (Shova 2001). The immediate result has been splitting of families. Those who migrated needed to drastically change habits life style and also the ways of interaction with neighbors. At the same time they lost the emotional support which they used to get in a joint family located in a rural backdrop (Sil 2007).

In this context the present study was carried out to get a glimpse over the concurrent scenario of apartment dwellers residing in Burdwan town, West Bengal, India. Specifically the objectives were to assess their – occupational structure, causes for settling in Burdwan, available amenities and living pattern.

Methodology

Study Site

Burdwan town, the largest municipality of the district and also the district headquarter is located almost in the central portion of Burdwan Sadar subdivision. Burdwan covering an area of 26.30 sq Kms is divided in 35 wards and the administration of which is controlled by the Burdwan Municipality. Burdwan lies between the latitudinal and longitudinal extension of 23° 12' 30" N to 23° 15" N and 87° 49' E to 87° 53' 15" E. Burdwan ranks 5th among the towns of West Bengal, with a population of 3, 21, 937 in 2011.

Sample opinion surveys were carried out among 50 randomly selected families (resident of Apartment or Flat) during 2011-2012. Further information was collected based on a questionnaire survey prepared for household queries. Secondary data has been collected from district census handbook, gazetteer and official leaflet or project report of Burdwan Development Authority (A statutory Body). Similarly, promoters and owners of real estate companies were also interviewed. The observations were noted and the data thus collected was processed and compiled. Collation of data and analysis of information sources was done during the study period.

Papia Nandy Palit

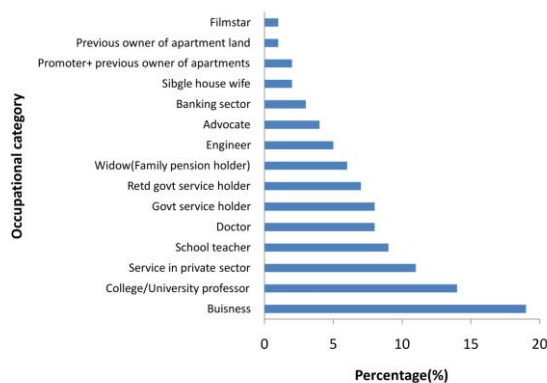
Assistant Professor,
Deptt. of Geography,
Barjora College
Bankura, West Bengal,
papianandypalit@gmail.com

Results and Discussion

Occupational structure

The measure of symbiosis comes along with occupation income and qualifications of the inhabitants. It is found that a stupendously large majority of persons staying in the flats are businessman (19%) Figure 1, followed by college and University professors (14%), those engaged in school teaching (9%). Next important proportion (8%) is Doctor servicing at government hospital, and same proportion (8%) is government service holder. Retired government service holder. Retired government servicemen constitute 7% of total residents. One remarkable feature is 6% residents are family pension holder, widow living singly (mainly in the oldest apartment Sanchayan). A small proportion (5%) is of engineer, advocate (4%) and bank employee (3%). The rest 6% constitute promoter plus previous owner of apartments land (1%), only engaged in real estate business (2%), previous land of old dilapidate home on which new apartment built(1%), single widow (1%), financial assistance by daughter (living in other states) and film star (1%). Thus there is an occupational diversity among the flat dwellers and most of the inhabitants seem to be in well paid jobs.

Fig 1: Occupational structure of the flat dwellers in Burdwan Town, W.B, India

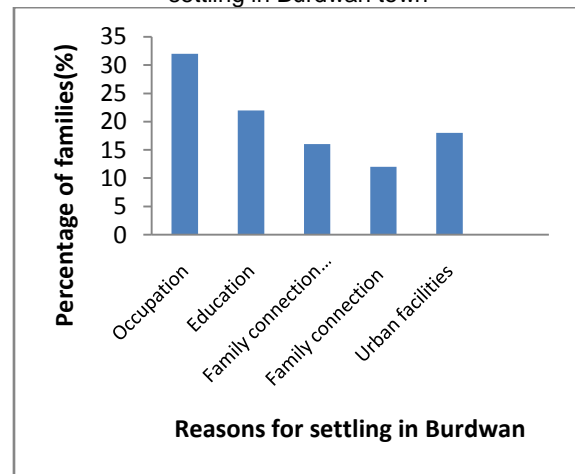


Reasons for coming to this town

Majority of the respondents (32%) said that due to occupational reasons they came to this town and after spending a lot of time in this town they decided to settle down here. According to them the cultural background of this town and the urban facilities of the town in addition to the sense of security arising out of familiarity with this place influenced their decision to stay here. About 22 % of the respondents come to this town for better education of their children (Figure 2). According to some of the respondents (16% and 12%) the family connection influenced them to come back to this town after their retirement. For many of them, who used to live in the interior villages which are less developed than this town, urban facilities of this municipal corporation like well connectivity, educational and

medical facilities etc inspired them (18%) to come here.

Fig 2: Graph showing the responses of families for settling in Burdwan town



Reasons for choosing a flat to live

When asked why they choose a flat instead of constructing their own individual house, responses were different. Increasing house rent and shelter change once a year is the fate of middle class service holder family. As their original home is far from their work place, they are compelled to adopt this system/tradition. The dominating nature and whims of landlord / land lady regarding inhabiting and leaving his/her house is the prime cause of tenant's tension. Packing of goods utensils, furniture each and every time, expenditure cost and last of all headaches.

In this critical situation the concept of flat or apartment house was introduced. If the monthly house rent would become the EMI (Equal Monthly Investment) and he/she would become the owner of the flat, there is no problem. There are so many banks interested to offer loans in terms of guarantee of service or business or by mortgage of gold, or saving certificates (N.S.C, LIC deed) etc. Only condition is repaid of EMI on a regular basis. Security 24 hour service plays an important role in choosing an apartment house. So it is safe to go out by locking the door of a flat. Beside this, after closing of the door, there is own world.

Trends towards purchasing a flat instead of old house (or constructing own individual house) are numerous. First of all land value is increasing vigorously which is out of reach of the middle class as there is no loan offerings by bank for purchasing land (Siddhartha 2009). A large sum is not cash in hand by this economic class (except the retired ones) only to purchase land. In most cases promoters himself / themselves make arrangements for bank loan within 48 hours.

Secondly for general customer 20% cash investment is necessary for booking (10%) and agreement (10%) and rent 80% offered by bank loan. In case of high profile customer (Husband wife both

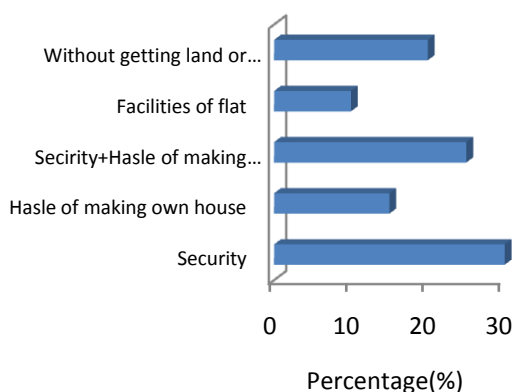
Periodic Research

are engaged in higher earning jobs) 90% is provided by bank loan. Third, due to price hike in Indian economy, the cost of building material has been accelerating / increasing several times. Fourthly present generation opined / perceived it is better to be a owner of flat by taking bank loan at the starting of service life than to be a owner of own individual home by savings of entire service life in late stage. Fifth point to note, our survey reveals that those who are interested to purchase flat they not only want a roof above their head, but also want all amenities needed for everyday life only by providing finance without going in any hassle.

One retired University professor couple opined that there are sharing facilities with other flat owners. They also express their feeling that presences of neighbors provide a sense of special security and togetherness. Seventhly, flat resident enjoy favorable location (as these areas are high connectivity zone) and all amenities with least / cheap expenditure and responsibility.

According to 30% of the surveyed families security is the main reason why they choose to stay in the flat (Figure 3). About 25% replied that they reside here not only for security but also to avail any hassle of building a house. The people who came here after retirement to their old houses faced space problem in their old houses and preferred to shift to a flat because in this old age they did not want to take any hassle of building a house. About 20% respondents opined that they did not get land or readymade house in favourable location. About 15% replied that when they came to the town with their appointment letter (all of them are single women) they needed immediate shelter within a budget which suited their pocket. So they opted for flat, because constructing their own house would have been more time taking and expensive. According to 10% of respondents the choice was for the multiple facilities like security, twenty four hour water supply, generator, lift etc available in the flat.

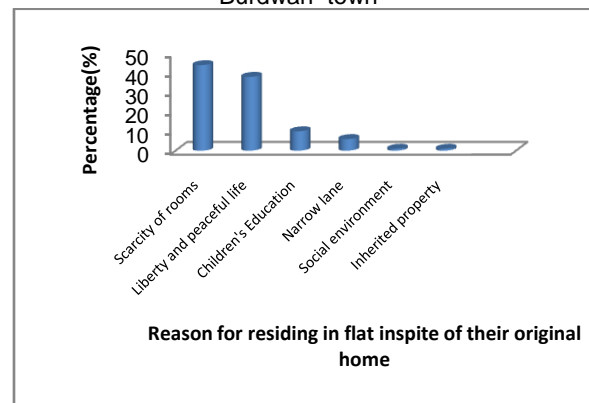
Fig 3 : Graph showing the responses of families for choosing a flat to live



Reason for residing in flat in spite of their original home at Burdwan town:

When asked why they choose a flat instead of having their original home at Burdwan Town, responses were different (Figure 4). According to 45 % of the families, scarcity is sufficient number of rooms is the prime reason why they chose to stay in the flat. This is the result of breaking up joint family system. Next important group comprises 38% wishing to enjoy liberty and peaceful life (as definitions of peace vary man to man) by residing at flat. Rest 10 percent of the original home respondents are staying here for their children’s education. Rest 7% came in these apartment houses for several reasons like narrow lanes in front of the original house and also lack of space for construction of garage compelled them to purchase flats. One retired respondents replied that in spite of constructing an individual house and residing there for 15 years, he was compelled to sell that house for surrounding social environment and decided to stay here. Another reason is in care of two children one boy and the other girl, economically affluent father is deciding to purchase a flat in addition to own house for their future asset. One grandpa offered/’gifted two flats along with his original house to his three grandsons. Majority of them keeping strong/ close attachment to their original home nearly by daily commuting.

Fig 4: Graph showing the responses of families for residing in flat in spite of their original home at Burdwan town



Conclusion

Regarding the choice of flat, instead of building own house main reason is security (Gibson 2000). Majority of the respondents, even that apartment which has no security guard and register copy for outcomes’. The residents also opined that they may go for out of station leaving the nest under lock and key without any tension. Sharing facilities with other flat owners help to reduce the maintenance cost per family per month (Sengupta 2009). Thus the flat owners enjoy all urban amenities at a minimum maintenance cost. The flat dwellers (specially aged retired couple, single woman, sometimes and mother without her kid/kids when her husband is that presence of neighbors in one complex provides a sense of special security and togetherness). In case of any emergency or any problem mutual help and cooperation between neighbors has been maintained

in most cases. Each and every family of flats wants unencumbered life so they prefer to reside at flat where common electricity, water supply, garbage clearance, security (Maintained mainly by Samiti) all regulated jointly not individually. Only responsibility is to repair flats, within four walls (with the help of cities mason, carpenter etc.) Outer portion of each and every flat is maintained by Samity. First and foremost advantage of flat residents is that they enjoy economic liberty as well as liberty in all respect.

Acknowledgement

The author wish to thank University Grants Commission, for providing financial assistance. The author also express deepest gratitude to Dr Debnath Palit, Head, Post Graduate Department of Conservation Biology, Durgapur Government College for his help during manuscript preparation.

References

- 1) Bardhaman Samachar (2012-2013): Bardhaman Sahayika.
- 2) Carter Harold (2010) The Study of Urban Geography, 4th Edition, Arnold: London and Rawat Publications: Jaipur, pp-240
- 3) De, Shoba 2001, The Middle Class: dreams do come true, The Week, Vol. 20, No.4.pp.20-24.
- 4) Gibson-Graham, J.K, Resnick, S.A , and Welff, R.D 2000, 'Class in a post-structuralist frame', in J.k Gobson-Graham, S.A. Resnick and R.D. World (eds.),class and its others, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.
- 5) Sengupta, S(2009)Changing Urban mosaic with special emphasis on restructuring and Interpersonal relationship A study from Chandernagore Municipal Corporation. *Landscape systems.*, Vol 32(1)pp 177-184.
- 6) Siddhartha, K and Mukherjee, S (2009), Cities Urbanization and Urban Systems. Kosalaya Publication: New Delhi.
- 7) Sil, Pallavi 2007, Involvement of Middle class Women in Informal Economic Activity and Resultant effects on their social space in Burdwan Town, West Bengal, unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, The University of Burdwan, West Bengal, India.