



Urbanization and Slum Dwelling Biharis: A Sociological Study of Slum Life in Siliguri City, West Bengal

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Abstract

Siliguri city has been witnessed unplanned urbanization since independence. It has resulted fast population growth and formation of slum areas in the city. The city has 154 notified slums and slum dwellers are basically migrated from every corner of the country, especially from Bihar. The Biharis are the second largest community residing in the city and slum areas as well. Siliguri city has 35134 slum households and total slum population is 161876. The study has attempted to explore the socio-economic impact of urbanization of the Bihari slum dwellers. The study followed a mixed method approach to assess the objectives. The present study was conducted using both primary and secondary data, in a ward in Siliguri city, West Bengal. The variables covered in the study are economic conditions, occupational diversity, educational profile, house building type, source of drinking water, access to the latrine, electricity, use of mobile phone and newspaper reading. By analysing both qualitative and quantitative data, it was found that basic amenities exist there are like typical character of slum.

Key words: unplanned urbanization, fast population growth, notified slums, socio-economic conditions, substandard living condition

1. Introduction

Millions of slums have been established and billions of dwellers are compelled to live in the slum areas since long back as a result of urbanization, industrialization and agricultural changes across the world. Social scientists all over the world gave emphasis on the physical condition of the slums. The physical condition of slums is considered as substandard, over crowded, deteriorated, neglected, unhygienic and absence of basic amenities. Slum is a known urban problem found in towns, cities and metropolitan cities in countries. Even the social scientists' interest in the study of slum, focused mainly from the cityward migration and the conditions of the people (1). Urbanization always attracted people to move in large numbers from rural to urban areas for many reasons (2). Cities offer opportunities for less privileged groups from the villages to take such occupations which are more varied than the occupations they availed at their native birth place (3). In India, among the states, West Bengal has an urbanization level of 31.87 per cent as per the 2011 Census. The fast-growing population of a city and the resulting housing problem faced particularly by those, who does not have resources for a decent living, always forced a large number of people compel to live in the slum areas. According to 2011 census, without any existed room 4.4 percent people lived in slums,

44.8 percent people lived in a single room household, in two room household 29.5 percent people lived in slums. Considering the ownership of a household lived in the slums 70.2 percent people had their own, 26.3 percent lived on rent and 3.5 percent lived without any specific household (4). It was found that, 56.7 percent slum dweller access drinking water within the premises, where 43.3 percent from outside the premises. To access latrine 66 percent slum dweller used latrine of poor conditioned situated within the premises (5). Among the dwellers, each and every household does not have own bathrooms and toilet, lack of drainage system, proper housing, lack of drinking water, and problem of garbage disposal make slum population vulnerable to infections (6).

1.1 Urbanization, Population Growth and Slum in Siliguri City

Across the world, it has been considered that, there is an interlink between slum formation and urbanization. Slums are the part and parcel of urban area. It is not only in metropolitan cities that experience the growth of slums but even cities of medium size have been facing problems of slum (7). Metropolis and cities can't deny the existence of slum because of the city nature. In Indian context, one of the most important consequences of urbanization is continuous growth in the number of slum dwellers and this can largely be explained by the fact that most of the migrants are concentrated in the slums (8). According to the Census 1901, Siliguri was a small village and had a population 784. Then, gradually Siliguri city faced population growth because of many factors. The highest number of population growth observed in 1951 when India got independence in 1947 with 209.71 percent and decadal growth was in peak. And surprisingly during the census 2011, population growth rate decreased to 8.66 percent from 35.56 percent showed in 2001 census. Rapid population growth has been observed since independence and continued till 2001. Again from 2011 to 2021 population growth was high with 105.93 percent. Highest population growth was more than doubled in 1991 from 1981. After 1991, city area expanded from 15.54 sq.km to 41.90 sq.km and its population density slightly decreased to 11, 274 persons/sq.km in 2001. However, during the last ten years population density in the city has again increased to 12,249 persons/Sq.km in 2011 and the degree of its variation has remained almost the same as that of 1991. As per census 2011, the city had 47 wards under the local authority (SMC) where slum areas found in thirty-six wards. The number of urban poor of the city has been resulting an increase in slum growth, the rise of land prices and living cost forced urban poor to live in slums with substandard conditions, especially with lack of basic amenities (9). According to NSSO Report 2008-9, 30.5 percent slum households having pucca houses in 1993, which increased to 47.6 percent in 2002 and 56.9 percent in 2009.

Table no 1: Growth of city population, Siliguri (1901-2011)

Sl no	Population	Growth Rate (Decadal)	City Area Sq.km	Population density
1	784	NA	NA	NA
2	NA	NA	NA	NA

3	6067	NA	NA	NA
4	10448	72.85 (1931-41)	NA	NA
5	32480	209.71 (1941-51)	15.54	2090
6	65471	101.57 (1951-61)	15.54	4213
7	97486	48.89 (1961-71)	15.54	6273
8	153835	57.80 (1971-81)	15.54	9934
9	348461	126.51 (1981-91)	15.54	13960
10	472374	35.56 (1991-2001)	41.9	11274
11	513264	8.66 (2001-2011)	41.9	12249
12	10,57,000	105.93 (2011-2021)	-	-

Source: SMC Report (DPR) - 2018, *World population 2024, United Nations

Slums in the city are categorized into two types like Notified and Non-notified slums and are divided into three different zones as core zone, intermediary zone and periphery Zone. Under the core zone, there are 24 notified slums, under the intermediary zone there are 39 slums and under the periphery zone there are 91 slums (10). On the basis of physical location slums are divided into three categories like river bank, railway land, and state governmentland. The rivers within the city are Mahananda, Fuleswari, Panchanoi, Jorapani and Mahismari. Siliguri city is the city of different communities where Bengali population is the highest in number and Bihari community is the second largest community living in city and slums as well. The other communities are Marwari, Punjabi, Muslim, Nepali, Oriya and Tribes. According to a sample survey conducted in 1990, 60 percent of the migrants are from East Pakistan/Bangladesh, 17 percent from Bihar and 8 percent from Marwari, which mainly controls the wholesale trade (11). Bihari population is found in all of the wards having slums, though the number may widely vary (12).

Table no 2: Slum profile of Siliguri Municipal Corporation (2011)

SI No	Description	Number
1	Total slum	186
2	Notified slum	154
3	Non-notified slum	32
4	Slum household (Notified slums)	35134
5	Slum dwellers	161876
6	Male dwellers	83714
7	Female dwellers	78162
8	Scheduled Caste population	63973
9	Scheduled Tribe population	16188

Source: Detail Project Report 2017-18

The total city population was 531264 and total slum population was 161876 (32%) in 35134 slum households (13). The local authority of the city (SMC) identified 154 slums as notified slums and 32 slums as non-notified slums in 1994. Among the slum dwellers 80% are migrants from Bihar, Assam, West Bengal, Bangladesh and Nepal (14).

2. Study area

Siliguri city is a sub-divisional town of Darjeeling district, West Bengal, India. It is located in the plains of Darjeeling district and foothills of the Himalaya. The Siliguri Municipal Corporation lies between latitude 26041/N to 26046/N and longitude 88023/E to 88028/E. Siliguri is located on the banks of the Mahananda river and total area of the city is 48.3 square kilometers. The study area was ward no 28 under the local authority Siliguri Municipal Corporation.

3. Objectives

- i. To explore the economic conditions of the Bihari slum dwellers
- ii. To examine the occupational diversity of the Bihari slum dwellers
- iii. To understand the educational profile of the Bihari slum dwellers
- iv. To know the house building conditions of Bihari households
- v. To assess basic amenities accessed by the Bihari dwellers

4. Methodology

The present study followed a mixed method approach. Primary data collected through sample survey from the 176 households of the study area. Simple random sampling used to collect data through interview schedule from the respondents. Some aged persons were studied through case study method about the slum area. Observation method also used to verify some information physically. For, secondary data, census reports, official of the city authority, and published books and articles were used. Published data has also been collected from digital platform.

5. Results

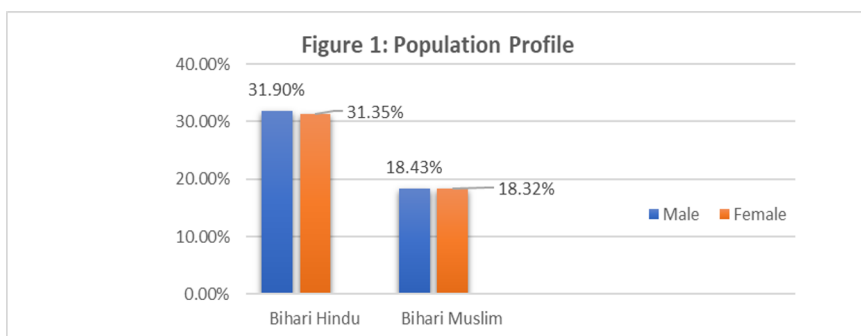
5.1 Demographic Profile

Mazdur colony is a slum, under the ward no 28 of Siliguri Municipal Corporation (SMC) where both the Bihari Hindu with 63.63 percent households and Bihari Muslim 36.36 percent households have been residing unitedly for more than fifty years. Population of the area comprising Bihari Hindu and Bihari Muslim are 906 out of which 63.35 percent is Bihari Hindu and 36.75 percent is Bihari Muslim. Though the Bihari Hindu households are almost doubled compare to Bihari Hindu, but they enjoy a healthy social relationship. Table no 3 showed that, male and female population among both the community is almost same with 50.3 percent is male and 49.7 percent is female

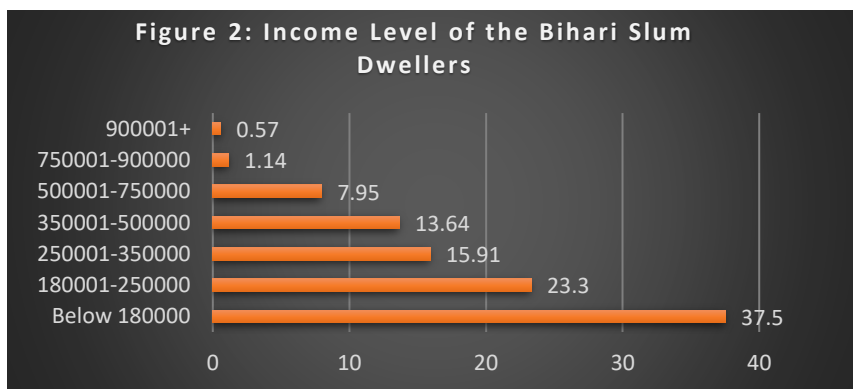
Table no 3: Population Profile of the Mazdur Colony Slum

COMMUNITY	HOUSEHOLD	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	Sex Ratio
BIHARI (Hindu)	112 (63.63%)	289 (31.9%)	284 (31.35%)	573 (63.25%)	982.7
BIHARI (Muslim)	064 (36.36%)	167 (18.43%)	166 (18.32%)	333 (36.75%)	986.84
TOTAL	176 (100%)	456 (50.3%)	450 (49.7 %)	906 (100%)	986.84

Source: Field Work, April 2025, Sex Ratio: Female / Male X 1000



5.2 Income Level of the Bihari Households



Income level is one of the most vital components of social life and for the Bihari slum dwellers living in Mazdoor colony also indicating different income categories. Income of the Biharis found between below Rs.15000 to above Rs. 75000 per month in the slum. As a whole 37.5 percent of the households earned below Rs. 1,80,000 each year on average and 23.3 percent earns Rs.180001 to 250000. It indicates that height majority number of households are in the category of below Rs. 15,000 earning per month which means Rs. 500 per day income group households are there in the colony. The individuals, who are either working as labor or works in the unorganized sectors earns the money per month on average in the category of below Rs. 15000 group. The second highest income group with 23.3 percent who earns Rs. 15000 to Rs. 20000 per month on average. The Bihari Hindu households with 1.14 percent earns Rs. 62500 to Rs. 75,000 per month on average and above Rs. 75,000 earns more than Rs. 75,000 per month.

5.3 Access of Bank Account of the Bihari Slum Household Dwellers

Among the slum dwellers 82.77 percent Biharis have own bank accounts in different banks and 17.29 percent dwellers do not have a bank account. Among the dwellers who gets benefits from the different schemes from the government specially the women who received benefits, have bank accounts. Among the dwellers who earns average thirty thousand and conscious about their future have bank accounts for savings in nationalized banks.

Table no 4: Access of bank account of the Bihari slum dwellers

COMMUNITY	YES	NO	TOTAL
BIHARI (Hindu)	122 (45.7%)	17 (6.37%)	139 (52.06%)
BIHARI (Muslim)	99 (37.08%)	29 (10.86%)	128 (47.94%)
TOTAL	221 (82.77%)	46 (17.29%)	267 (100%)

Source: Field Work, April 2025

5.4 Savings Habit of the Slum Dwellers of Mazdur Colony

The slum dwellers have the practice of saving in banks and cash at home. In the area 82.77 percent people do savings not every month but regular interval where 17.29 percent people do not have habit of savings. In the matter of savings and compare to Bihari Muslims, little better condition found among the Bihari Hindus with 45.7 percent. The

COMMUNITY	Do Savings	Does not Savings	TOTAL
BIHARI (Hindu)	91 (35.55%)	42 (16.41%)	133 (51.96)
MUSLIM (Muslim)	47 (18.36%)	76 (29.69%)	123 (48.04%)
TOTAL	138 (53.91%)	118 (46.09%)	256 (100%)

Muslims have the habit of savings found 18.36 percent who do savings. To them savings depends on the income of a particular month of the family members.

Table no 5: Access of bank account of the Bihari slum dwellers

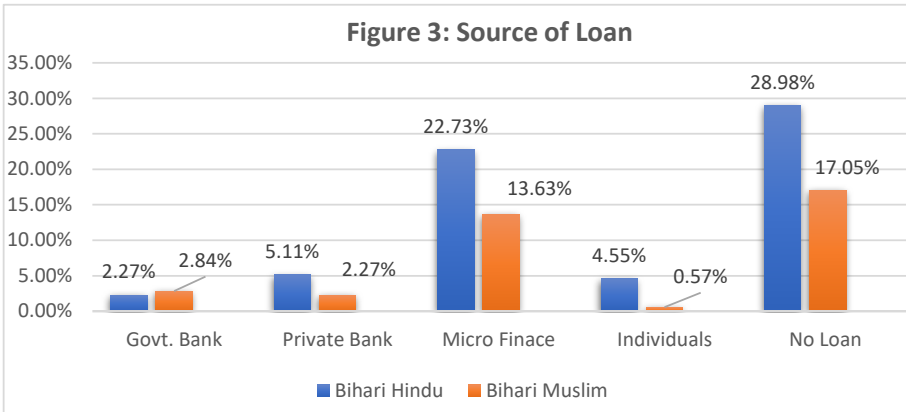
Source: Field Work, April 2025

5.5 Access of Loan

Slum dwellers of Mazdur colony, took loan for various reasons. For purchasing of household appliances, education purpose, health problems of the family members, to purchase electronic gadgets senior members received loan for various sources. Among the dwellers 5.11 percent took loan from nationalized banks, 7.39 from private banks. The notable thing is that, 36.36 percent Biharis received loans from the privatized micro finance companies. But 46.02 percent Bihari community both Hind and Muslim did not take any loan.

Table no 6: Access of bank account of the Bihari slum dwellers

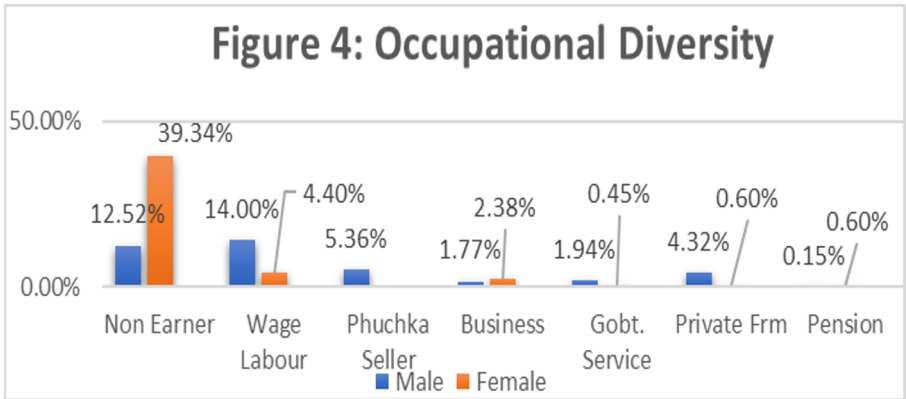
COMMUNITY	BANK		MICRO FINANCE	INDIVIDUALS	NO LOAN	TOTAL
	GOVT.	PVT.				
BIHARI (Hindu)	4 (2.27%)	9 (5.11%)	40 (22.73%)	8 (4.55%)	51 (28.98%)	112 (63.63%)
BIHARI (Muslim)	5 (2.84%)	4 (2.27%)	24 (13.63%)	1 (0.57%)	30 (17.05%)	64 (36.36%)
TOTAL	9 (5.11%)	13 (7.39%)	64 (36.36%)	09 (5.11%)	81 (46.02%)	176 (100%)



Source: Field Work, April 2025

5.6 Occupational Diversity of the Bihari Slum Dwellers

Occupational diversity of the Biharis in Mazdoor colony is like any other slums by character where 51.48 percent dwellers don't have any earnings. In the non-earner category both aged men and women, school-college going girls and boys, some little educated are included. In the category of labor there is 20.57 percent workers who are engaged in the unorganized sectors. The very special character is that 5.36 percent Bihari Hindu dwellers are involved in selling phuchka or panipuri only since long back on van or popularly called thelagari in the different parts of the city. Where phuchka sellers resided in the slum area is known as phuchka gali. Each and every day the male members of the family started preparing the elements of phuchka at home. They use LPG as fuel and some traditional utensils. With phuchka, some other street food items



items like papri chat, aalu kabli, dohi bora, choumin, ghogni etc. are sold every day. These phuchka vendors got order to supply these food items in different occasions like marriage, baby rice ceremony and different joyful occasions. The phuchka vendors have been selling these food items for three generations and they happy with the job. Among the dwellers 14.16 percent engaged in small business in Siliguri city. Few dwellers are in government jobs with 2.38 percent and their parents settled here more than sixty years back and in the department of Food and Supply, Railway and State Govt. Offices. The younger generation with educational degrees and some middle-aged persons working in the private firms of the city with 4.91 percent and only 0.75 percent is pension holder.

5.7 Educational profile of the dwellers of Mazdur colony

Literacy rate of the Bihari dwellers is 70.12 percent. On the other side 29.88 percent is illiterate. Among the male dwellers of the slum 21.25 percent is little educated who completed their class VI standard and 15.68 percent is female who completed their VI standard. The dwellers

Level	Bihari Hindu		Bihari Muslim		Total		Grand Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Illit-erate	41 (5.06%)	58 (7.16%)	103 (12.725)	103 (12.72%)	103 (12.72%)	139 (17.16%)	242 (29.88%)
Up to VII	122 (15.06%)	89 (10.99%)	55 (6.79%)	38 (4.69%)	177 (21.85%)	127 (15.68%)	304 (37.53%)
VIII to Be-low X	32 (3.95%)	39 (4.81%)	25 (3.09%)	21 (2.59%)	57 (7.04%)	60 (7.40%)	117 (14.44%)
X Passed	21 (2.59%)	25 (3.09%)	9 (1.11%)	9 (1.11%)	30 (3.70%)	34 (4.18%)	64 (7.90%)

X+II Passed	15 (1.85%)	13 (1.60%)	7 (0.86%)	14 (1.73%)	22 (2.73%)	27 (3.33%)	49 (6.05%)
UG	14 (1.73%)	13 (1.60%)	2 (0.25%)	2 (0.25%)	16 (1.97%)	15 (1.85%)	31 (3.83%)
PG	-	-	-	3 (0.37%)	-	3 (0.37%)	3 (0.37%)
Grand Total	266 (32.84%)	260 (32.09%)	139 (17.16%)	145 (17.90%)	405 (50%)	405 (50%)	810 (100%)

Table no 7: Level of Education of the Dwellers of Mazdur Colony

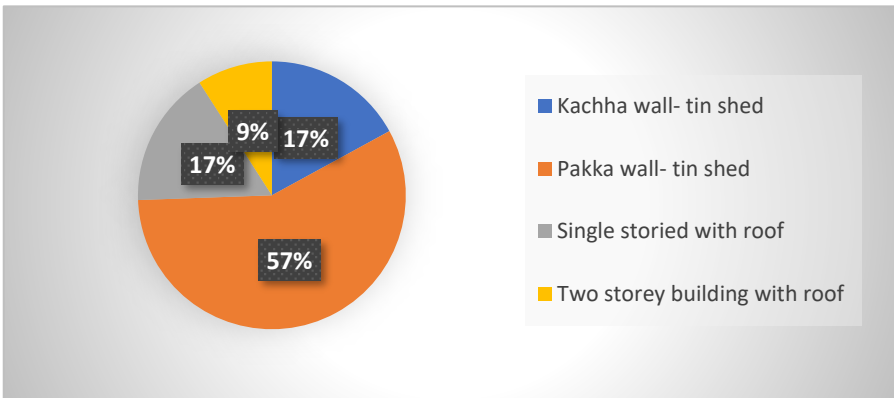
Source: Field Work, April 2025

who completed VIII standard but not completed their Madhyamik Pariksha or X standard examination was 14.44 percent. Among the dwellers 7.90 percent completed class X standard or Madhyamik Pariksha and 6.05 percent completed class X+II standard or Higher Secondary examination. Graduation was completed by 3.83 percent slum dwellers and 0.37 percent completed their post-graduation.

5.8 House Building Condition

In Mazdur colony, Biharis have four types of house building found such as kachha wall and tin shed with 17.05 percent, pukka wall and tin roof with 57.39 percent single storied with roof with 16.48 percent and two storeys building with 9.09 percent were there. And the area of living space in the house building found four categories.

Figure 5: Housebuilding type of Mazdur colony



5.9 Water sources of the household of Mazdur colony slum

Among the Biharis in Mazdur colony, 6.82 percent has own well for taking shower, washing cloths and other day to day activities. But for drinking water they depend on

COMMUNITY	OWN WELL	Own TUBE WELL	COMMON SUPPLY WATER	TOTAL
BIHARI (Hindu)	11 (6.25)	10 (5.68%)	91 (51.70%)	112 (63.64%)
BIHARI (Muslim)	1 (0.57%)	2 (1.14%)	61 (34.66%)	64 (36.36%)
TOTAL	12 (6.82%)	12 (6.82%)	152 (86.36%)	176 (100%)

common supply water of the local city authority the Siliguri Municipal Corporation. Another source of water is hand pump or tube well owned by 6.82 percent belong to Bihari community. The highest number of households with 86.36 percent use common supply water for drinking. They collect drinking water three times a day and store it at home. Apart from these sources in the area there were seven community well for daily activities like taking shower, washingcloths and other daily activities. This indicated that the Bihari households are still suffering from sufficient water. The problems faced by the women and girls are maintaining privacy at the time of taking shower and other activities. The problems faced by the women and girls not to maintain their privacy at the time of taking shower and other activities. The community wells are not covered with fencing and shed.

Table no 8: Water source of the Bihari slum dwellers in Mazdur Colony

Source: Field Work, April, 2025

5.10 Access of Latrine

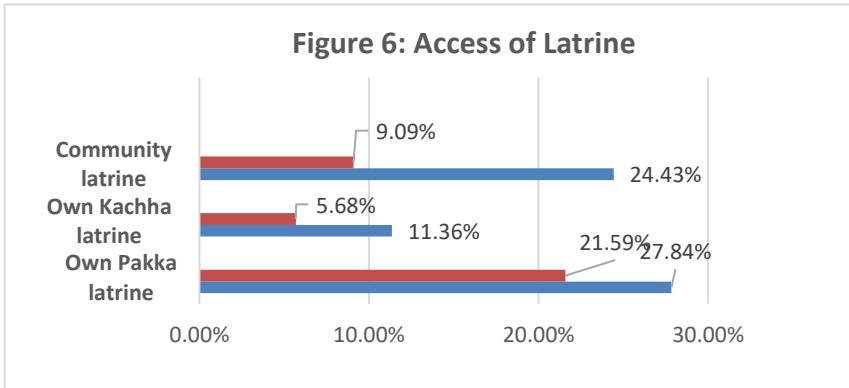
For a healthy and hygienic social life, a safe latrine is very much essential. But the Biharis don't have one own latrine for their family members. In the area 33.52 percent Biharis do not have their own latrine. In the area 17.05 percent use kachha (not concreted and safe) latrine of their own. In Mazdoor colony 49.43 percent has own pucca (concreted) latrine. During the rainy seasons and at night use of community latrine is much tormenting. The Bihari Hindus are residing in little better condition regarding

COMMUNITY	OWN CONNECTION	DOES NOT USE	RENTED	TOTAL
BIHARI (Hindu)	71 (40.34%)	6 (3.41%)	35 (19.87%)	112 (63.63%)
BIHARI (Muslim)	45 (25.57%)	1 (0.57%)	18 (10.23%)	64 (36.36%)
TOTAL	116 (65.91%)	7 (3.98%)	53 (30.11%)	176 (100%)

own pukka and kachha latrine compare to Bihari Muslims.

5.11 Access of Electricity

Electricity access among the slum dwellers is not good. Among the dwellers 3.98 percent does not have own electric connection and 30.11 percent access electricity connection on rent. Those who has a rented connection they are rented dwellers and access



a small room. Every day they go out for work and late evening come back. The owner of the rented house, provides power connections. In the slums 63.63 percent Bihari Hindu dwellers have the power connections and 36.36 percent Bihari Muslim has their own power connections.

Table no 9: Access of electricity of the Bihari dwellers of Mazdoor colony

Source: Field Work, April 2025

6. Conclusion

Socio-economic conditions of the Bihari slum dwellers have been changed compare to their place of origin. As Siliguri city provides the slum dwellers diversities in occupation and scope of earn more, the Bihari slum dwellers received the opportunities and gradually their life stated to change. Their educational profile changing towards positive directions. Present generation studying in school and colleges. The house building condition is not so worst. Except kaccha wall tin shaded rooms, others are pucca buildings and two storied buildings. Basic amenities and services also available except access to latrine. As a whole their slum life is hopefully developing.

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