THE RURAL-URBAN MIGRATION PATTERN IN GUWAHATI’S ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract –

Guwahati is the largest urban centre in Assam accounting for almost 24 percent of the urban population of the state. It is also the most important nodal centre of the entire Northeast India and one of the fastest growing urban centres of the country. With increasing population and growth and development of industries, trade and commerce and transportation network, the importance of the city is increasing sharply as a result of which immigration to the city from the backward neighboring areas is also increasing at an alarming rate. This unplanned and unchecked flow of rural immigrants has created immense problems in both the source region as well as in the receiving area. In the present work an attempt has been made to delimit the zone of migration and study the immigration pattern in Guwahati’s environment. The study will also focus on the problems of both the areas and will suggest for a planned process of urbanization in the region.
Introduction –

The Indian cities are growing at a very rapid rate today. As a result of this, not only are the cities changing markedly both in population and area, but their influence on the neighboring area is also becoming more and more pronounced. The influence of the city is spreading in the rural areas in a variety of ways. People in the adjacent rural areas are using employment opportunities in the city and are taking up different kinds of non-agricultural occupations which apparently pay more. As a result, people from the surrounding rural areas are migrating to the city and suburbs for greater scope of employment and income, attraction of urban facilities, and the urban way of life. Since such migration is usually age and sex selective, it not only creates several problems, but also changes the socio-economic and demographic structure of the city. Therefore, a study on the pattern of rural urban migration in Guwahati region is considered as very significant for the planned development of the city and its neighborhood.

The study area –

Guwahati, the capital city of Assam is located at the southern bank of the mighty river Brahmaputra covering an area of 257.09 sq. km. So far the physiography is concerned, neither the city nor its surrounding area presents a smooth terrain. The whole region is an undulating plain interspersed with a number of hills here and there. The mighty river Brahmaputra flows through the alluvial tract dividing the region into two distinct parts that is north and south. The flatness of the region is more broken in the south bank especially along the margins of the Meghalaya plateau. Even the city area which is primarily a flat land is encroached upon by seventeen hillocks of varying heights of 200 to 300 metres. A narrow strip of plain land is
located by the side of these hills and this virtually makes the southern boundary of the study region, for the hills of the Meghalaya plateaus rise abruptly from here. These hills act as barriers to the spread of city’s influence and as such Guwahati’s influence zone in the south is limited here. The eastern side of the city is also uneven and at some places even highly rugged. Only two narrow patches of plain land exist here, one in the north side of the river and the other in the middle part along which the railway line and the National Highway pass. The interstitial portion of these two narrow plains is highly uneven, covered with extensive highlands. Therefore, this part has poor accessibility, low population, density and low agricultural output which may have some bearings on the spread of urban influence in this region.

Compared to the eastern side, the western side of the city is less disturbed by the highlands. Thus for the physiographic advantages this part has extensive agricultural lands and thickly populated villages and market centres. The transport network is also better here. All these physical and cultural features are likely to be associated with the rural urban migration pattern in this part.

The northern side of the city is comparatively a level plain broken only by a few hillocks. Besides these low hills, the entire northern part of the city is a dead plain supporting mainly an agrarian economy.
Zone of Migration:

The method used for delimiting the zone of migration is primarily an empirical one, although the help of theoretical approach is also taken for this purpose. The application of both these methods not only helps in cross verification of the boundaries found out by the two, but also adds precision to them.

Empirical Approach:

The empirical approach is based on primary data collected in the field regarding the flow of rural immigrant population from the city’s environment. On the basis of this information, different criterias like bus service, flow of commuters, retail trade service, are taken and maps and flow diagrams have been prepared to show the zone of migration in the city. Among these, the bus service has been found as the most significant one, as in the study area the private buses and government bus services are mainly used by the commuters for transportation as well as for retail trade services. The retail traders from the peripheral service centres also use bus services to travel to the city and collect consumer goods for selling in their centres. At present the areas like Rani, Rajapara (west), Chandrapur, Sonapur (east) Byrnihat (south) and Hajo, Nalbari, Rangia (north), which were remote till a few years back, are now connected to the city through the regular bus services. Under the circumstances, bus service as criteria for defining the zone of migration of Guwahati city proves to be not only significant, but very much meaningful.
The role of retail service for defining the zone of migration is also an important one as it shows the economic linkage between the city and its rural environment. The field observations show that the limit of the retail service zone is marked by Nalbari and Rangia in the north, Chaygaon in the west and Jagiroad in the east. These limits coincide fairly well with the bus service zone defined earlier.
Theoretical Approach:

Besides the above, help of some objective models have also been taken for defining the zone of migration of the city. Although such models do have limitations, they can be used for defining the boundaries as complementary methods of empirical observations.

For this purpose the Gravity Potential Model\(^1\) and the Breaking Point concept\(^2\) are used to delimit the zone of influence of Guwahati City from where the flow of rural immigrant population is maximum. Interestingly enough, the Breaking point concept, when used to find out the breaking points of interactions between Guwahati and the nearby important urban centres namely Nowgaon, Tezpur, Barpeta, Bongaigaon and Goalpara, lead to the same breaks in the case of the outer limits of the city’s influence zone as shown by both empirical observations and the Gravity Potential Model. And this boundary represent the outer margin of the zone from where the maximum number of rural population migrate to the city.

1. \( P_i \frac{P_j}{d_{ij}} = A_j \); where \( A_j \) = pull of the main city
   
   \[ \sum \left( \frac{P_i}{d_{ij}} \right) = \text{population potential at a centre} \]

   \( P_i \) = population of the main city

   \( P_j \) = population of the \( j \text{th} \) town

   \( D_{ij} \) = distance between the main city and \( j \text{th} \) town

2. Distance from A to B, where A = main urban centre

   \( B = \) next important urban centre

   \[ 1 + \sqrt{\frac{\text{Population of A}}{\text{Population of B}}} \]
Causes of migration:

It has already been mentioned that increasing urbanization is adding a new dimension to the present pattern of rural urban relationships leading to the influx of rural immigrants to the city. This problem is going to be more pronounced in the near future. In case of Guwahati, the rural migration is mainly pulled rather than pushed. Poverty, unemployment, lack of essential services, food shortage, floods, crop failure, etc. force the rural poor to move to the city. They believe that the city would provide them with an alternative to earn their livelihood rather than to sit idle and starve in their native place. Better job opportunities, education and health services, scope for earning more, regular income, social security are some of the factors which attract the rural society to the city.

In Guwahati’s environment, generally better economic opportunities motivate and force rural people to move to the city. There is another group i.e. the small and marginal farmers along with the agricultural labourers who also immigrate to the city as the small size of their landholdings are unable to provide them with adequate sustenance. Moreover, due to lack of different services and amenities like higher education, proper medical facilities, means of communication, etc., the youth are compelled to move from the immediate rural areas to the city.

The various push factors attributed to the migration of the rural people to the city can be stated as lack of good employment opportunities, food shortage, etc, which generally lead to voluntary migration. At times, there is also forced migration caused by flood, bank erosion, etc. which lead to crop failure, and loss of property and ultimately to rural urban migration.
Findings –

- The extension of Guwahati’s zone of migration is more towards the west and northern side.
- The southern side is almost terminated at the city’s periphery as it merges with the highlands of Meghalaya plateau.
- Two distinct zones are found - the inner and the outer. The inner zone can be marked as the commuters’ zone which extends up to Rangia and Nalbari in the north, Palasbari in the west, Byrnihat in the south and Sonapur in the east.
- The outer zone is much more extensive, covering large parts of the state, from where people regularly visit the city for various purposes.
- These people mainly use the local train and bus services which are convenient, less expensive and regular.
- Poor economic condition, lack of avenues in the secondary and tertiary sector and decreasing agricultural productivity are the main causes of increasing flow of villagers to the city.
- The number of service centres is less for which the villagers have to move frequently to the city for various services like marketing, health services, higher education, selling of agricultural produce, etc.
- The high rural urban difference mainly leads to a high migration rate in Guwahati’s environment.
Suggestions & Conclusions –

Guwahati city and its rural neighboring areas, both are mutually interdependent. Unplanned spatial expansion, high rate of rural urban migration, absence of land use plan, poor infrastructure in the service centres, increasing pressure on land in the nearby rural areas, lesser number of service centres, absence of job opportunities in the non agricultural sectors, etc. are some of the problems which negatively affects the balanced regional development of this area.

The increasing volume of rural immigrants who pour blindly into the city poses problems for both the urban citizens and the planners. They have caused additional pressure on the already overstressed urban amenities. The population structure of the city is totally changed. These rural immigrants who come in search of jobs usually settle down in the vacant land including the hillocks, wet lands, sides of the railway tracks and riversides. These people are found to change their houses frequently making it impossible for the law enforcing agencies to keep a tab on them. The unchecked encroachment of the hills is a major problem as antisocial elements can easily take shelter in the hills taking advantage of the lack of motor able roads in those areas. Moreover the encroachment of hill sides and wet land has led to landslides and artificial floods at an alarming rate. The increasing number of slums and bastee areas has also become the breeding grounds of anti social elements and the source of air, water and land pollution. Thus to study such a grave problem in recent times, a thorough investigation and observation is very much necessary. This will be of enormous help to analyse the pattern of rural urban migration in the city’s environment and its impact on the city.
Urban planning is also concerned with the proper growth and development of its rural neighborhood which is directly dependent on the urban node. In Guwahati region also the zone of migration is socio-economically linked with the city. Therefore a suitable planning strategy is required to be taken to bring out a balanced regional development. This involves decentralization of industrial and other socio-economic activities and development of transport network and other infrastructure facilities in the rural neighborhood. In addition to this, the proper growth and development of service centres and market places with all the services and facilities will also help in regulating the flow of rural youth to the nearby city. Planned growth of satellite towns and expansion of commercial activities will also help in development of nearby villages of the city.

Reference –

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