



## Siddhartha Colony

Abusive words... .. Quite annoying... a peculiar smell... Unbreathable pathways... These are the narrow lanes of the Siddhartha colony, is actually one of the slums in Mumbai, which has the past of around 60 years.

Got an opportunity to visit the Siddhartha colony during the BMC elections of 2017 with an intention of community survey along with student-teachers doing D.El.Ed.

Situated at a prime spot in Chembur adjacent to the eastern expressway which joins Mumbai to Thane, Siddharth Colony as the name suggests is a home to followers of Buddhism.

“My grandfathers’ father came here from the district Raigad (of maharashtra) and settled here. My grandfather was not so active but my father was active and dynamic even though from a mali community he survived and flourished and created wealth through selling liquor (unauthorised) and doing other business in this colony.” revealed a young college goer from Siddhartha colony. Being a mali (a sub caste in Hindu) to survive

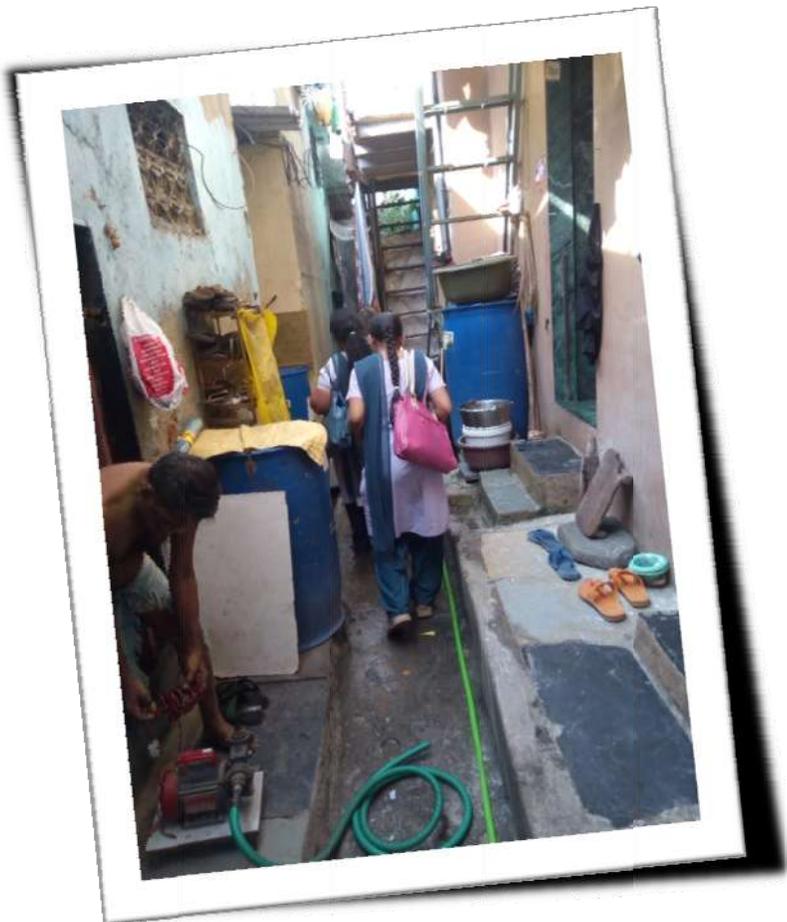


amidst the Buddhist is a big achievement for him. In the recent years his father's business of liquor got closed by the so called leaders of community. [Depicts the communal discord among the OBCs and SCs]

Siddhartha colony has a majority population believing in the preaching of lord Buddha, their forefathers got converted to Buddhist on the call of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar (The man behind Indian constitution). Basically most of the tenants are belonging to different parts of Maharashtra like Kolhapur, Satara, Raigad and so with an odd population which stays on rentals in this region from other states of India, the Biharis, Bhaiyas of U.P. and Muslims of lower caste.

The ancestors of locals in Siddhartha colony were mostly low caste Hindus of Maharashtra. They were landless workers doing fourth class jobs like sweeping roads, carrying night soil, removing hide from the carcass preparing leather, unwanted at many places, treated badly by the

upper caste Hindus, trodden by poverty, humiliation and all evils a 'Shudra' needs to face, at that time. They realized the acceptance of Buddhism and sacrifice of their original caste and religion was the only solution to come out of the slavery and poverty of generations. They stopped doing the works they used to do earlier. Unacceptance, poverty no source of income, no land (or very less of fertile land) no education brought these people to metros. Cities like Mumbai, Pune, Solapur, Nagpur etc. where these poor people started living in shanties, doing odd jobs, unaware of a, b & c (education) survived at the mercy of



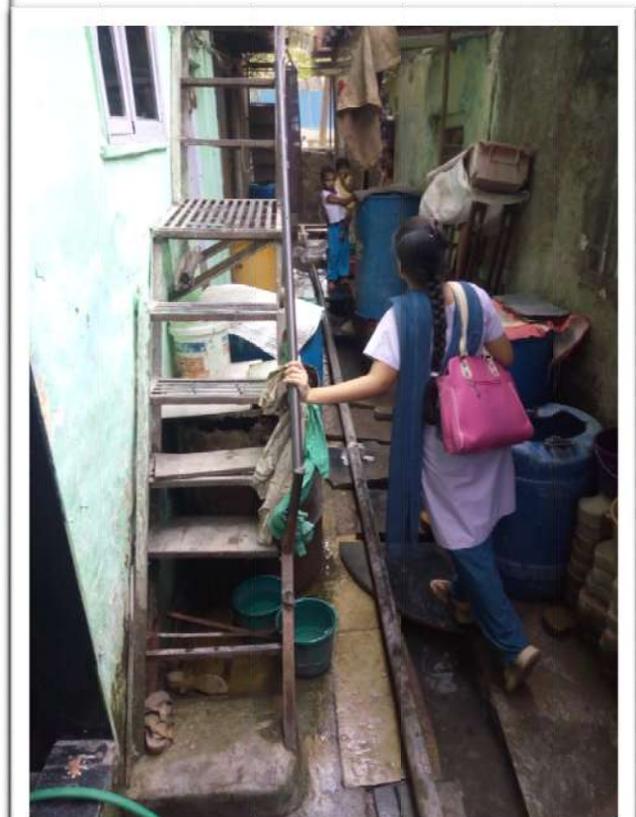
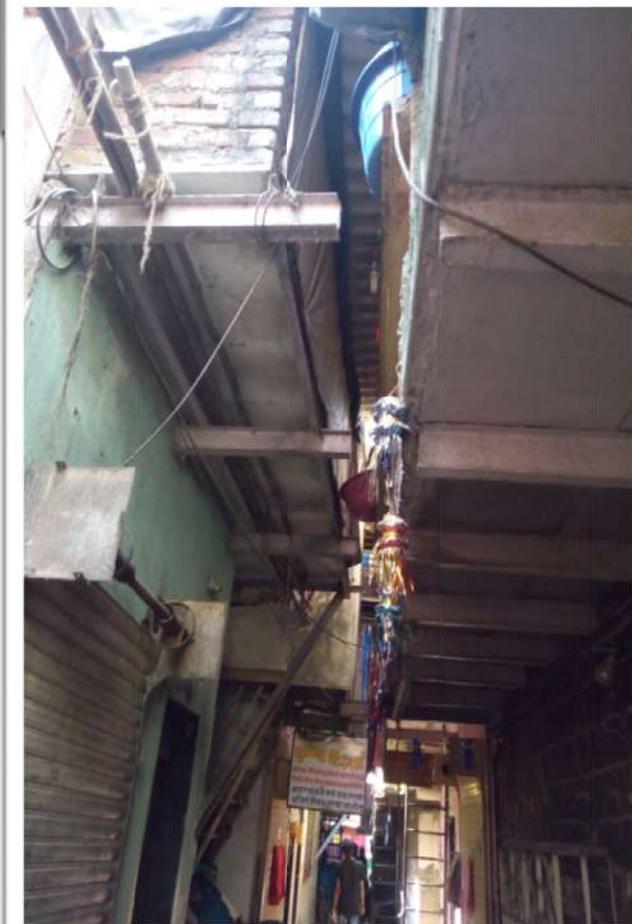
rich, managed to proliferate (reproduce) as it is only an unpaid entertainment and with the hope



only hope that one of the boys will take us out of the state of poverty, continued to contribute generously to the population of India.

The first generations encroached the land, build temporary sheds, as the number of family numbers increased wooden loafs were created. Some places in laws occupy the ground while the married ones stay on the first floor, where iron ladders are used to reach the floor, climbing on them needs special balancing skills.

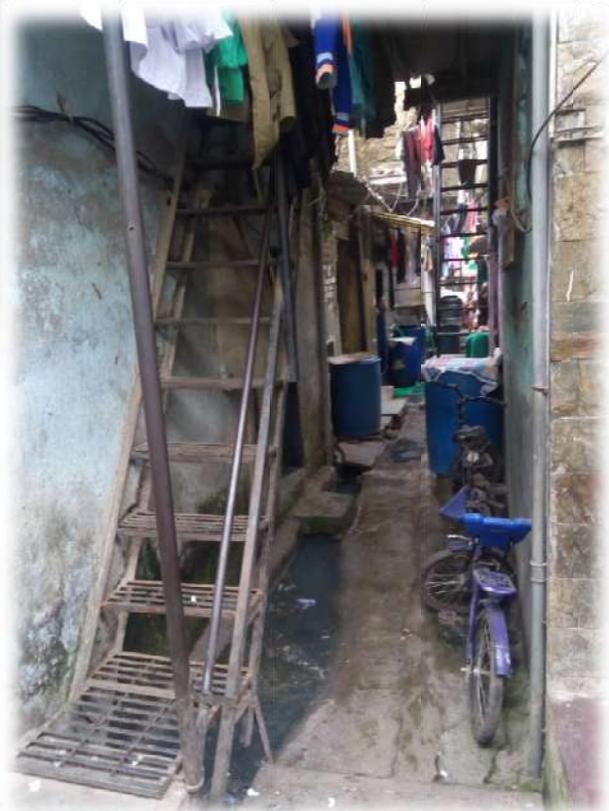
Adjacent houses almost touch each other leaving a very small gap. Gallies are so



narrow that one's shoulders touches the walls of the adjacent rooms. To add to this existing problems many water pipes are laid in this narrow galleys, open gutters are also there which makes life of old ones difficult in fact many people fall and fracture their limbs.



Unique houses have more area on the first floor than the ground. Due to which sunlight cannot reach the floor, moist conditions, become a good breeding ground for the germs. Less intake of nutritious food by the poor weaken their immune system making their bodies susceptible to communicable diseases like



tuberculosis. Epidemics such as cholera are very common as the drinking water is contaminated. Malaria, dengue, chicken pox spread like a storm affecting infants to olds all ages.

As revealed during the conversation with the police constable of the region, crime cases registered in the police station nearby are mostly like drunk husband beating wife, money/jewelry stolen by known people, false atrocity cases to earn money from the upper caste rich, goons and eve teasing. It proves the lack of education and poverty prevalent in the colony exactly opposite is expected in other parts of Mumbai where the cases are related to money and the property.



All political parties are interested in this colony because it a big vote bank where votes can be purchased. The higher the candidate pays more are the chances that he will win. Each house has followers of these political parties. Sometimes in one home many political parties followers are seen.

Elections are time of celebrations as tasty biryanis and liquor are served along with daily allowances for election campaign by the political parties. The mobs behind the politicians mostly come from such colonies.

A scanty health care facility provided by the BMC makes life of these poor difficult. Doctors (trained/ untrained) treat people as guinea pigs wherein higher antibiotics, steroids are used unnecessarily. Again people are exploited due to lack of education making their bodies more weak, susceptible and prone

to infections.

‘Hamare idhar koi BMC me nahi jata’, answered many women when asked, ‘koi BMC me jata hai kya?’ Sending children to private schools is preferred by the residents. The poor ones among the poor’s send their children to BMC School at Chembur Naka. Reaching the school is difficult

as children have to cross a busy road, so when adults are at their work place the smaller ones cannot go to the school.

The other school which students mostly go is Chembur High School; it is a private aided Marathi school. The English medium schools nearby are private schools like B.D Shukla, Mumbai Assemblies of God day School, Chembur Vidyaniketan and Chembur English high school.

Many students going to the BMC and Marathi medium school dropout before 10<sup>th</sup> only few reaches the Jr. College and a small number goes to complete graduation, post graduates are rare in this locality. Many surveyed residents don't pay any taxes/ do not have taxable income.

Mid day meal is served in Chembur Naka BMC school is not so luring for students hence many of them carry tiffin from home. Parents prefer giving home food as there were complaints like presence of dead rats in the rice, stones and mosquitoes in the ladoos served.

Uneducated hence can be easily cheated, do not know to read documents and understand even if they are in their mother tongue. If the documents are in English then its very big problem. When D.El.Ed students were surveying a man brought some bank dicuments and asked 'Tum padta hai toh yeh padke batao'

Uneducated youngsters pass time teasing; passing comments on pedestrians become so called gundas, can be easily agitated and used anti social elements for the morchas and bandhs.

It is reported that nobody in the Siddhartha colony pays for the electricity bill and still the concerned authorities are not dared to cut their electricity connection.

When I walked along with the students a drunken man was beating his wife and his daughter was standing near the door. She shouted 'Police aale'. He came out to see me this must be the scene of every day in many homes in this colony.

'Lack of education results in focusing on real-time goals/perks rather than long term benefits'