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## **Pasighat: The Oldest Town of Arunachal Pradesh**

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### **Abstract**

Pasighat is the most well known town of Arunachal Pradesh. Words fall short to define the beauty and the generosity of this town. It is on this place that the British first set foot to conquer Arunachal Pradesh and established administrative centre one hundred year back. Over times, it has sheltered people from different walks of life from outside the state to different tribes of this border state. At present it is the second biggest town of Arunachal Pradesh next to Itanagar. The town celebrated its centenary year in 2011. Besides, on June 2017 it also gets selected for smart city mission after a hearty competition under the Ministry of Urban Development, Government of India. In this paper an attempt is made to understand the empirical reality of urbanization and related socio-economic changes in the town.

**Keywords :** Pasighat, East Siang, Township, Smart City, Adi.

### **Introduction**

Pasighat is the most well known town of Arunachal Pradesh. It is on this place that the British first set foot to conquer Arunachal Pradesh and established administrative centre one hundred year back. Over times, it has sheltered people from different walks of life from outside the state to different tribes of this border state. At present it is the second biggest town of Arunachal Pradesh next to Itanagar. The town celebrated its centenary year in 2011. Besides, on June 2017 it also gets selected for smart city mission after a hearty competition under the Ministry of Urban Development, Government of India. In this paper an attempt is made to understand the empirical reality of urbanization and related socio-economic changes in the town.

### **A brief history of Pasighat**

People tended to portray Pasighat as a home of Pasi group of Adi, but in reality it

is a home of all groups of Adis. Infact, it is said that the oldest settlers to Pasighat were some Padam. Later on Minyong and Pasi group of Adi join. It was definitely a slow process of settlement that took place. According to Onyok Pertin (2011) “Earlier Pasighat was a place of Dibu-Marang people before the advent of Adis. Dibu-Marang was present day Galo Dabi and Mara people. Thereafter Adis from different hilly areas of upper belt settled at Sikel, Romkang, Balek, Roing, Tikra, Rasam, Mongku, Kelek and so on”.

The previous name of the present Pasighat was known as ‘Paklek’ meaning “garden of Banana”. Even, in Adi rhapsody it is addressed as ‘Ane Paklege Didume’. Besides, one of the versions of the local people is that the town named was given by Noel Williamson. It is said that on Williamson arrival in 1890s, he met one Komli Regon who was rafting Suppi (a country boat) on Siang River (present Komlighat) while interacting, he informed his name was Komli Regon and belonged to ‘Pasi tribe’ lived near the Ghat (River yard) and later ‘Komli’ was named as Komlighat and the place as Pasighat.

Historically, it was in the winter month of 1911, a military base was established at Pasighat to carry out military expeditions to Adi areas. Till then the present day Pasighat was a forest land-thick and dense never heard before the outside world. Then, in 1912, the office of the political officer for Abor hill district was also set up. In the subsequent years small shops were set up by Marwari and Bihari businessmen brought in by the Britishers from the town of Sadiya to serve the needs of the administrators. Some of the Nepali population of Pasighat came as a porter along with Britishers in the 1930s. Till 1950, Pasighat was completely dominated by traders from different parts of India (Onyok 2011).

However, in 1954, old township was totally washed away by the river Siang flood. This old market was in area where present Siang River is situated. After the washing away of old market by the flood, present market area was established in year 1955. As a town, it was only after 1962, starting with 1963 remarkable infrastructural like government office, education institutional, road connectivity and other training institutions come into existence. Road construction from Pasighat to Jonai, Pasighat to Mebo, Pasighat to Oriamghat, Pasighat to Along (present day Aalo) started from 1963. Electricity came about in 1975. Beside, the establishment of Airfield in 1946, General Hospital in 1954, Jawaharlal Nehru College in 1964, All India Radio in 1966 and Doordarshan in 1968 works towards progressive development of the town. The establishment of State and central institutes in the area also work towards development of the town. At present there are central institutes like Agriculture institute established in 1950, Horticulture and Forestry College established in 2001 and more recently Institute of Folk Medicine is established in 2012 in the town.

Within the township, the Gandhi market area is said to be the oldest and developed in the early years of the town. These areas are in the lower regions of the Pasighat Township. In recent years number of new hotels and lodges has established in this area. The High region area houses most of the government buildings that include Dept. of Food & Civil Supplies, Dept. of Agriculture, Dept. of Animal Husbandry & Veterinary, Dept. of Health and Family Welfare, Dept. of Forest (Wildlife & Territorial) etc. There are as many as 31 (thirty one) numbers of Departments present in the town. These Departments run for the total development of the area and function with the complete control of state governments. The other significant regions of Pasighat Township are Bascota, Gumin Nagar, Jawaharlal Nehru College campus, Gramsevak Training Centre areas.

As per as population is concerned, according to 2011 Census, Pasighat has a population of 24,000 with 5000 households. The majority of the town's populations are from outside the state, there present can be seen everywhere in the government departments as well as in trade and business. Besides Adi, there are also Galo, Mishing, Mishmi tribe etc inhabiting the town. Subsequently, there is a Mishing area, Galo areas in the township. The Banskota and Muri lines are known for Nepali and Bihari area.

### **Economy of the Pasighat**

As a town, it is basically a commercial and administrative town. It is industrially deficit, only a few sugar mills, a few saw mills etc are established. Majority of the population workforce in the town are engaged in trade activities, and majority of them are outsider, yet all the shops are owned by Adis. Local people only sublet their trading licences, shop buildings, etc. to outsiders. Half of the town populations are employed in the Government services and a good proportion of people are employed in the construction sector because of developmental activities mainly in construction works including roads, buildings for Government offices, quarters for the Government employees as well as private houses, water supply, electrification, etc.

Though, not many local people are seen in the market selling different commodities. Interestingly, they seem to have engaged mostly in vegetable business popularly known as Zaaryon (vegetable sellers). These Zaaryons buy vegetables from the women who come to the market to sell their products or sometimes they even themselves go the places of those villagers and collect the products themselves before those villagers come to the market. These Zaaryon rush to the market in the morning as early as 5 to 6 and wait for the buses from adjoining areas so that they could buy different products brought by the villagers. After they bought those items from the villagers they divide those items

as for example, if they buy a bundle of Tulang (Mustard) they would divide the single bundle into two (2) or three to get more profit. Not only vegetables, these Zaaryon also engaged in fruit selling especially during Orange season and bead selling.

Meat selling is another popular business among the local people. At present meat market is located in Gumin Nagar in a quite distance from the main town. All kind of meats can be found in the market. Typically, Adi women can be mostly seen selling Beef, Pork and Chicken. Most of the meat such as Buffalo, Beef, Pork sold in the market comes from Jonai, Assam. Interestingly there are no local people who sell fish in the market. All varieties of shops are available in the town. According to Aleyamma (2014) “Over the time, Pasighat has grown into a township with a large bazaar offering a choice of goods hardly inferior to that found in any average Indian town”.

No doubt, agriculture remains the main occupation of nearby village. Infact, Pasighat and neighboring villages is popularly known as Rice-bowl of Arunachal Pradesh. Every variety of rice is grown and sold in the market. Apart from paddy cultivation, cultivation of maize, ginger, mustard etc. is also done in and around Pasighat. Every year, tonnes of ginger loaded in trucks get exported outside Pasighat to other states. Maize is also cultivated in and around Pasighat. It is cultivated for consumption and its surplus is sold in the market. Mustard is also cultivated largely for commercial purpose. Its cultivation serves enormous supply to market and earnings for the people of Pasighat. Pasighat is also home to several artisans involved in handicrafts activities like bamboo and cane furniture, weaving and knitting and jewelry items.

### **Socio-cultural mosaic of Pasighat**

Pasighat has a long history of in-migration from nearby villages and outside the state. While studying the growth of Pasighat township in 1971, J. B. Ganguly, the then Principal of Jawaharlal Nehru College Pasighat observed:

“The population of the town has been rising fastly mainly on account of immigration...there has been considerable rise in the number of people coming into the town from outside the state. Many have come to works as workers on the construction projects, and also work on farms of the local people as hired farm-labour. The Nepalis constitute a sizeable portion of the total population. They, first of all, came here as coolies and porters of the government officials and ultimately settled down on land given by the government” (cited in Gurudas Das 1995:140).

As mentioned earlier, the majority of the town's populations are from outside the state, there present can be seen everywhere in the government departments as well as in trade and business. Besides Adi, almost all tribes of the state also found inhabiting the town. In a way Pasighat represents the identity of the people of the state outside. At the same time, it also displays the characteristics of mini India. These can be explain from the fact that there are many colony, places and names taken from outside the state such as Baskota, Muri Line, William Nagar, Gandhi Market, Gandhi Secondary school, Shastri Middle School etc. Obviously, the names are given by non-Arunachalees, but its acceptance stands testimony to people's tradition of the coexistence.

The tradition of co-existence is further reflected in the existence of religious shrines and celebration of festivals of all India character. Durgapuja and Vishwakarma puja is famous in the town and irrespective of caste and tribe people take part in it. What's more, Dangoriya Baba Mandir, a Hindu temple near Ranaghat is known across the region. Near Gandhi Market, at the heart of the town, there stands the Balaji Mandir. A few meters away from it, there are Gurudwara and Assamese Mandhir. In fact, temples of Lord Shiva are dotted in almost every colony and by the side of the road. A Kali temple stands magnificently at High Region and one Buddhist temple stands near Airfield. Any visitor from any part of the country will not feel strange to the place because of the names and temples.

### **Urbanization Problems in Pasighat**

No doubt, Pasighat Township had limited population with abundant plain area than any towns of Arunachal but today, the problem of population congestion and growing demand for land is a major concerned. As a result, the periphery area of the town which was earlier covered by agricultural land and villages is totally changes into either for settlement or for other purposes. The remarkable examples are the settlement area of the Mirku, Mirsam and Tebo area. These elongated newly settlement area was once agricultural field in 2001. But it has completely changes to settlement place. The other example is the new settlement in between Paglek and Horticulture College area, between Mirmir to Yapgo village. There are many more examples in and around the town areas. In the past twenty years there has been a great deal of expansion of settlement in the surrounding villages due to ever increasing population of Pasighat.

The other consequence of growing population in the town is the encroachment of road and government land. This encroachment of road reduces the broadness of road. Especially, in the near Tata Sumo stand, the shops and houses are so closed to the road side where there is always traffic congestion. The problems of congestion is very much



high in day time when bus and sumos leave for their destination. In the main market area, there is no proper parking lot and it is common to see vehicles being parked covering the road. The illegal encroachment of Government lands is another big problem in the town. Padung (2006) felt that encroachment of Government lands of township and establishment of commercial areas and residential buildings resulted to unplanned morphological development of the township (cited in Aleyamma 2014).

There is also uneven distribution of parks and green spaces in the town. Present Park in the town is not good enough as it has many problems such as no maintenance. There is an amusement park which is under progress near Solung Ground. Also for the purpose of keeping the market place clean and green, few sweepers have been appointed by the District Administration. They clean up the market every morning and the garbage are deposited nearby road side, this garbage are then lifted by urban development truck and carried outside market area. There is also a Bazar Chowkidar appointed by the administration, who make sure that the sweeper does their duties well and also make sure that the traders does not charge excess money from the buyers. Despite such governmental efforts people are unhesitantly dumped garbage on the backside of their shop. Main market area, Banskota and Jarkong area are the worst. There is also no proper shelter arrangement for vegetable vendor in the main market. It badly affects their business during rainy season. Recently government has constructed a shelter call Shabji Mandi (vegetables market) near district library but it appears that nobody willing to go there.

The town, as it has grown out of proportion in recent years, lacks many basic amenities that a modern town should have. One such area is sanitation. Insanitary conditions prevail due to lack of knowledge and proper training along with lack of a sense of social responsibility of the town-dwellers. The number of public toilets is very few and that has resulted in creating a very unhygienic condition even in the busiest areas of the town. Most importantly, till now there are no electricity sources of its own. The present power supply from the grid has frequent electricity failures as it comes from distant sources which on any disturbance, get disrupted, especially during rainy seasons.

## **Conclusion**

Over the years, Pasighat has developed into a main centre of higher education, quality health care facilities, entertainment, fashion, tourism and hotel facilities etc. It has become the main centre of political, economic and cultural activities of entire Siang belts. Though, the town is continuously growing and developing and has also won the smart city race, however, effort to built Pasighat as Smart city will go in vain if there is

no community participation. Yet, the process by which urbanization is shaped increase pressure on the state governments to keep up with the population's infrastructure needs. These needs include access to amenities such as quality housing, roads, schools, hospitals and fire services and so on. Urbanizations also demands more emphasis be placed on social infrastructure, such as community centers, youth centers, parks and sporting fields.

With all development going on, its pristine environment is bound to change. This stands to endanger the ecologically sensitive zone that Pasighat is, polluting Siang and its streams. Till now, in Pasighat, all 12 wards are covered under door to door garbage collection facility with some efficiency. Waste collected from ward bins within the city is dumped at the landfill site. There are 6 trucks that carry the waste to the landfill site twice a day. By and large, the waste problem is more or less manageable and it can be prevent from getting worse if people and administration act on time.

Urbanization has also brought many changes in the cultural mosaic. The town is cosmopolitan in character, a sort of mini-India where people from all the regions of India and also Arunachal Pradesh peacefully dwell. However, it would be a mistake to overlook the increasing population of illegal migrants in the town. Over the years, the town has been experiencing large scale immigration of illegal Bangladeshi, which is a matter of concern for the local native. Hence, it is very important to give a serious thought on it.

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