



ASSESSING THE GRADUAL URBAN GROWTH OF MIRIK TOWN WITH REFERENCE TO ITS URBAN AMENITIES AND HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS

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Abstract

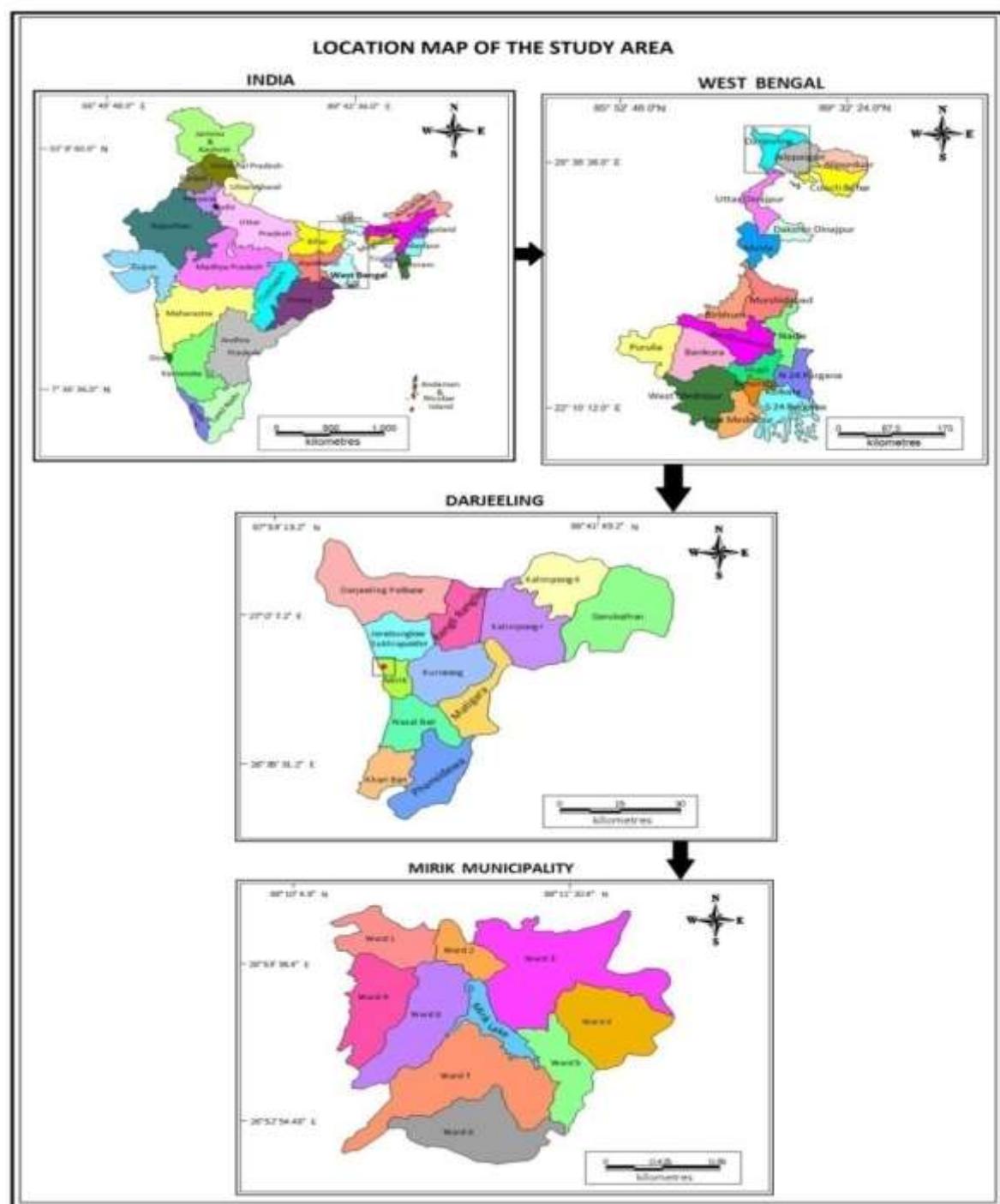
Urbanisation is an indispensable feature of any settlement. Villages used to be the essence of the country which has now changed into newer urban settlements. Mirik is a small town that owes its development to not very far times but shows very slow but gradual nature of urban transformation. Having potentiality of being the natural resort for the visitors with its exotic beauty and clean, pleasant atmosphere, this little town has come across many political, demographic and administrative changes. Along with it, the amenities provided to its dwellers have also come a long way. This paper tries to discuss and display the urban growth and associated changes that Mirik has come through over the decades. The study is based on reliable Primary data through field observations and experiences along with secondary data through published and unpublished literature. The study is both exploratory and descriptive in nature.

Keywords: Urbanisation, feature, transformation, amenities, development.

Introduction

Urbanisation refers to the transformation from traditional rural societies to a modern urban society. It is a worldwide phenomenon. It is regarded not only as an index of economic development, but an important component of social change. Ever since 2500 B.C. Urbanisation has played a major role in the evolution of India's cultural, political, economic and social life. Throughout its this long period, the proportion of the country's total population living in urban areas have fluctuated between 5-20 percent. Different interdependent and inter-related processes have taken a toll in this process of change.

Mirik is a town and a subdivision in the district of Darjeeling. It is a newly emerging town nestled in the Eastern Himalayas and is a beaming place for tourists. Other than its scenic setting, the pride and its glory lies in its 1.25km long Samendu Lake which is surrounded by high forested hills. Mirik is also quite famous for its pleasant weather, conical shaped tea gardens, orange orchards, cardamom plantations and peaceful surroundings. Mirik lies between 26°53'08"N latitude and 88°11'14"E longitudes. It has an average elevation of 1495 m (4905 ft). The highest point is the Bokar Monastery at about 1,768 m (5,801 ft.) Mirik lake is at about 1,494 m (4,904 ft) and is the lowest point. The climate is pleasant with a maximum temperature of 30°C in summer and a minimum of 5°C in winter.



Objectives of the study

1. To study the demographic, economic and administrative changes in Mirik
2. To analyse the level of urban amenities available to the urban dwellers of Mirik.
3. To study the living standard of the people through its housing characteristics and provide suggestive measures for the improvement of their living.

Research Methodology

The study is based on both Primary and Secondary data collection. Primary data includes the data collected from the field and Secondary data includes the data that has been collected from the Government offices, Journals and magazines, Reports, Books and Newspapers. Both Qualitative and Quantitative methods are used to analyse the data for tabulation, processing and representation of different aspects.

EVOLUTION OF MIRIK TOWN

The name *Mirik* comes from a Lepcha word 'Mir-Yok' which means a place burnt with fire. Mirik started as a very small rural market center for the surrounding tea gardens and villages and a place for hosting annual

agricultural fairs and meals. In year 1969, Tourism Department of West Bengal of West Bengal Government started acquiring 335 acres of land from surrounding Thurbo Tea Garden and in 1979, **Samendu Lake and Day Center** was inaugurated. From 1980s onwards with the steady growth of tourism, a new chapter in Urbanisation in Mirik started. Krishnanagar which falls under ward no. 5 and lies around the lake developed due to rapid inflow of tourism with the construction of hotels, restaurants and financial centres like banks. Historical records tell us that Mirik was ruled by the kingdom of Sikkim and kingdom of Nepal in the 16th and 17th centuries for some time before it was taken over by the British until the Indian Independence of 1947.

As the tea plantation were already started and present at that time. The scenic beauty of conical shaped tea gardens, the orange orchards, the horse rides around the lake and the famous orchid “cymbidium” added to the growth of tourism, thus generating maximum employment, encouraging entrepreneurship, offering exposures and also preserving art, craft and culture. This led to the change in the faces of the development, leading to the rise of tertiary sector or service sector. Many factors have helped in the growth process of urbanisation in Mirik Town. Amongst all the factors, Tourism is one such, which is of sole importance. The physical set up of the place started to change when in 1969, Tourism Department of West Bengal started acquiring 335 acres of land from surrounding Thurbo Tea Garden.

Administrative growth of Mirik Town

Mirik was declared a Notified Town Area Committee in 1984 (as according to census of India) and until 1991 it was under the jurisdiction of Block Development Center. From 1991 onwards, it started functioning as a Notified Town Area Committee, however the West Bengal Municipal Act of 1993, states that the Notified Town Area Authority will be called as Nagar Panchayat (an area in transition from rural to urban as defined in Article 234 Q of the Constitution of India), henceforth Notified Town Area Committee of Mirik should have been called as Nagar Panchayat but in many official documents like Census of India Report, it continued to be termed as Notified Town Area and moreover, confusion prevailed even among the members of the Committee that they vouched Mirik to be a Municipality and collected taxes in the name of the Mirik Municipality, whereas in reality, it was still a Notified Town Area Committee and Mirik Municipality status was still not granted till date. It was functioning under Kurseong Subdivision until 2017, thereafter Mirik was declared a Subdivision and functions as one under Darjeeling district.

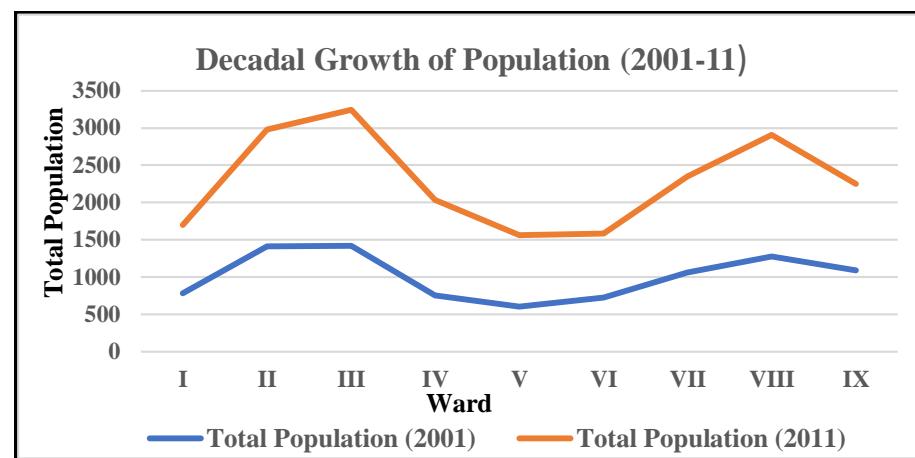
Demographic Growth of Mirik Town

As per 2001 census, Mirik block had a total population of 42230, out of which 21095 were males and 21135 were females. However, Mirik block registered a negative population growth of -1.35 % during the decade 1991-2001. The decadal growth of Darjeeling district at that time was 16.94 % while the decadal growth of population in West Bengal was 17.84 %.

Table no. 1 : Growth of population in different wards of Mirik (2001-11)

Sl. No.	Ward No.	Total Population (2001)	Total Population (2011)	Population Growth
1.	I	784	913	+16.45
2.	II	1409	1567	+11.21
3.	III	1420	1823	+28.38
4.	IV	752	1280	+70.21
5.	V	600	962	+60.33
6.	VI	723	859	+18.81
7.	VII	1062	1285	+20.99
8.	VIII	1272	1639	+28.85
9.	IX	1091	1159	+6.23
10.	Total	9112	11487	+26.06

Source: Mirik Municipality

Figure no. 1 showing decadal growth of Population

The above table shows the decadal population growth of different wards of Mirik. The table shows a very high differential rate of population growth within the different wards of the Mirik Town during the decade 2001-11. The population growth rate among the different wards of the town varies from +6.23 to +70.21 during the decade. The lowest growth rate of population has been observed in ward no. IX and highest in IV. The growth rates of population in different wards have been calculated and has been classified into three different classes i.e. wards having low population growth rate (6.23 % to 16.45%); wards having moderate population growth rate (16.45 % to 28.5 %) and wards having high population growth rates (28.5 % to 70.20 %). From the table it is seen that ward no. IV and V have recorded high rates of population growth during the decade 2001-11, while moderate growth of population has been observed in ward no. III, VI, VII and VIII during the same period and the three remaining wards i.e. I, II and IX have registered low increase in their population.

Table no. 2: Male-Female population of wards of Mirik Town (2011)

Sl. No.	Ward No.	Males	Females	Total Population
1.	I	444	469	913
2.	II	750	817	1567
3.	III	903	920	1823
4.	IV	709	571	1280
5.	V	439	523	969
6.	VI	423	436	859
7.	VII	640	645	1285
8.	VIII	802	837	1639
9.	IX	565	594	1159

Source: Mirik Municipality

Sex Ratio in Mirik Town

Sex ratio indicates the number of females per thousand males. In 2001 census the highest sex ratio of Mirik Municipality found in ward number 1 was 1088 (377 were male and 410 were female) and the lowest sex ratio was found in ward number 6 which was 861 (388 were males and 334 were females). It shows that the difference between highest and lowest sex ratio of Mirik Municipality in 2001 is 227. The overall sex ratio of Mirik Municipality in 2001 was 989 but in 2011 it is 1024 (1024-989) = 35 with a good increase of 3.4% growth rate. So, it is good to see that the female population of Mirik Municipality is increasing and the overall sex-ratio shows good prospect for future.

This changes in the demography and the administrative aspects shows the gradual growth in Mirik's Urbanisation also. The urban growth rate of Mirik, West Bengal, between 2001 and 2011 was 20.85%. The total urban population of Mirik in 2001 was 8112 which is 17.80 % of urban. This growth is observed across most wards of

the Mirik Municipality, with ward 2 being the exception, showing a negative growth rate. The municipality's population increased from 9,112 in 2001 to 11,513 in 2011.

HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS OF MIRIK TOWN

Shelter is considered as an important necessity for sustaining life. It provides protection from weather, natural disasters, and environmental hazards. It is a safe space that fosters emotional comfort and allows individuals to feel at ease. The well-being of the urban dwellers highly depends on the While good housing is linked to the maintenance of proper living conditions of the people, on the other hand poor housing is linked to respiratory issues, stress, and other chronic conditions.

Urban Amenities in Mirik Town

Mirik Municipality provides a favourable availability of urban amenities to its dwellers that includes all those facilities that are necessary for everyday lives and is helpful to determine the quality of life of the urban dwellers.

CBD Area: The CBD or Central Business District is concentrated in and around the bazaar and Krishnagar Area where all the administrative buildings lie. The Municipality Office, B.D.O. office, land & Land Reforms Office, The Police Station lie on the way to Krishnanagar from Bazaar and highly accessible. Many restaurants, hotels and homestays have also come up around the area providing easy accommodation for tourists and visitors.

Educational Institutions: Mirik has very good number of schools that provides education to the students from Mirik and surrounding areas. It has schools affiliated to both West Bengal Board and New Delhi Board. It has 1(one) Degree College providing Arts Education and 1(one) engineering College, newly built providing newer fields of education for the students. A Town Library is also present in Mirik for the readers and book lovers.

Electricity Office: There are approximately 12000 connections or domestic consumers and 8 industrial lines. There are 87 transformers and each transformer and each transformer depend upon the amount of load it takes up. There are 7 call centres along with the staff to look after the maintenance of the supply. A mobile emergency Van is also available for the prompt restoration of the connection lines for the public service.

Postal and Telecommunication: Postal and Telecommunications are also well developed over the town. Telephone Exchange Office sits opposite to the Police Station while the Post Office is located in the Krishnagar area in the lane opposite to SBI. Limitations have come up due to the development of modern technology and through the use of handy Mobile Phones due to which the number of Landlines connections have completely come down heavily.

Solid Waste Management: Garbage Disposal is a great problem and its management remains a challenging task in any urban area. Mirik is no exception in this case but still Mirik being smaller in size and population than other larger urban areas, it is systematically managed and maintained. The municipality takes up this ardent task of collecting and management wastes. Garbage disposal is collected on a truck every morning from the households of different wards by the sanitation workers. Then the collected wastes are segregated and disposal according to its category.

Public Health and Sanitation: The Block Primary Health Centre (BPHC) here caters to an enormous population residing in the urban area of Mirik as well as the rural areas of Community Blocks surrounding it. The people from surrounding Tea Gardens also visits this centre even though the health facilities are provided by the Garden.

As per the survey, the number of patients attending the OPD is around 200 – 230 per day which is projected to be the highest among all the other blocks in the districts. As monsoon sets in, a pandemic breaks out which sometimes reaches epidemic levels and the rush becomes very high. All educational institutions, tourists, the officials, the local resorts to this centre during prompt emergencies. As of now newer development has taken place in Mirik after being a Subdivision which has brought in the newer and accessible health facilities.

Financial Institutions: Mirik has 6 banks and 7 ATMs. Other institutes like Postal Savings, NABARD, Bandhan Finance and Customer Service points of private financial institutes are also available.

Entertainment: Entertainment is a part of the life and is an important aspect for maintaining the quality of life. Mirik has no such sporting facility. Yet, despite all these, Mirik hosts the 15th August Parade with students from over schools each year followed by different and beautiful cultural programmes. Apart from this, the winter festival has now become a part of Mirik's tourist attractions as well as for the locals.

The "Allay" ground which is the only large field that happens to the resort for large football, cricket tournaments. Apart from this, this ground has also become a hub for organising cultural programmes.

Tourism in Mirik – Tourism is one great sector that can generate maximum employment, encourage entrepreneurship, offer exposure, bring in external investments in the sector, raise local real estate values and also preserve local art, craft and culture. Mirik has large potential for Eco-tourism as the place bears natural beauty, opportunities for tea tourism, hiking and other adventure sports along with the homestays development. With all its potential, Mirik is a much-favoured weekend getaway. Gorkha Raithaney Haat has become attraction and a venture for newer business.

There are several tea gardens around Mirik including Tharbo tea estate, Gopaldhara, Sourenee, Tingling Phuguri and so on. The majority of the hotels and restaurants are in the Krishnanagar area of Mirik. DGHC, (a government agency), operates a motel at a hilltop near the helipad at Allay and a tourist lodge located very near the lake. There are other good hotels in Krishnanagar such as Jagjeet, Sadbhavna, Ratnagiri, Mhelung, The Park Hotel, Viraz, Parijat and Blue Lagoon. There are some hotels in Mirik Bazar such as Boudi Hotel and Hotel Payal. There are many lodges and private guest houses such as Nigha, Ashirvad and Buddha. There is a beautiful Forest Rest House in Mirik that can be booked from the District Forest Office, Kurseong. There is also a PWD (Public Works Department) Inspection Bungalow near the lake that can be booked from Siliguri PWD office.¹

Transportation: Transportation is a factor of activity location, and is therefore associated intimately with land use. The expansion of urban land uses take place over various circumstances such as infilling (near the city center) or sprawl (far from the city center) and where transportation plays a different role in each case. Urban transportation helps in supporting transport demands generated by the diversity of urban activities in a diversity of urban contexts. The Draft Development Plan (DDP: 2008-2013) of Mirik Municipality shows that up to 2005 every ward had less sufficient and well connectivity and accessibility but after 2009 all wards were well connected to each other and as a result the residential and commercial parts were growing all over the town. A very easy and smooth transportation within the urban area is available in the form of share taxis or reserved ones.

Water supply- The people of Mirik mostly obtain the water supply from jhora, springs and wells. Most of the households have made their private connections as they have their own dug wells and pipelines for getting water. There are many new schemes under progress under Mirik block by GTA and it is executed by the public Health Engineering Department, GTA. They provide 1 hydrant (tap) for 5 houses. The "Rai Dhaap" project is also an excellent source of portable water with a huge watershed area. The project has been commissioned but the completion is still a way beyond.

A 200-crore project has been started by the State and Central Government under the AMRUT 2.0 (Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation) to provide drinking water to the residents of Mirik. The foundation stone was laid by Shri Anit Thapa, GTA Chief. The Project would benefit over 4200 families in the civic area. Tasks like laying pipes and constructing reservoirs have been started. The water will be drawn from Rangbang river located 5kms below the town. The water will be drawn, treated and then provided to the households. (Telegraph Online, 20th July 2025)

Socio-economic condition of the surveyed households.

According to the field survey, most of the family believed in small sized family while number ranges from 4-5. In Mirik Town, 50.67 % of the surveyed families have members ranging from 4-5. But there are other families where the number ranged from 2-3 or more than 6 as well. Out of 100 % of the surveyed households 55% of the

¹ <https://en.wikivoyage.org/wiki/Mirik>

houses were Pucca in Nature while 45 % of the houses were partly Pucca. The nature of the nature, plastering condition were heavily dependent on the income of the households. Out of 75 surveyed households, 98% of the households were whitewashed. The higher income groups have completely whitewashed their houses while some of the low-income group houses are left un-whitewashed.

It is noticed according to the survey that the region being a hilly area, the number of stories entirely depends on the nature of the slope. The houses located on the steep slope has less stories than compared to the ones present on the gentle slope.

Fig. 2 Ownership of house

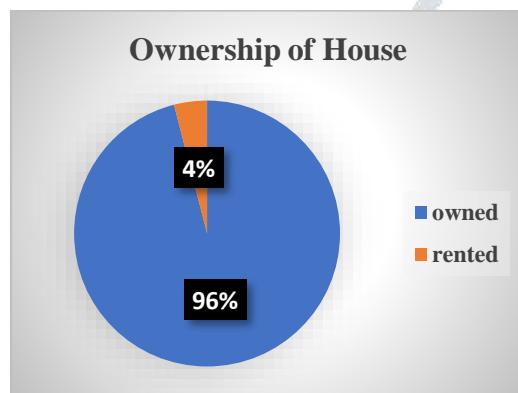
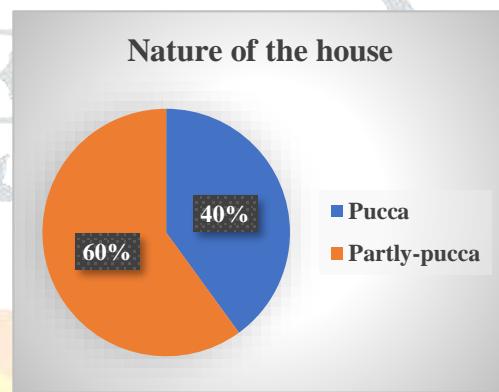


Fig. 3 Nature of the house



Source: Field Survey

As per the survey, out of 75 surveyed households, 96 % of the households were owned in nature while 4 % were rented. On the other hand, 60 % of the households were partly pucca in character which had tin roofs with walls made of brick and cement while 40% of the households were pucca.

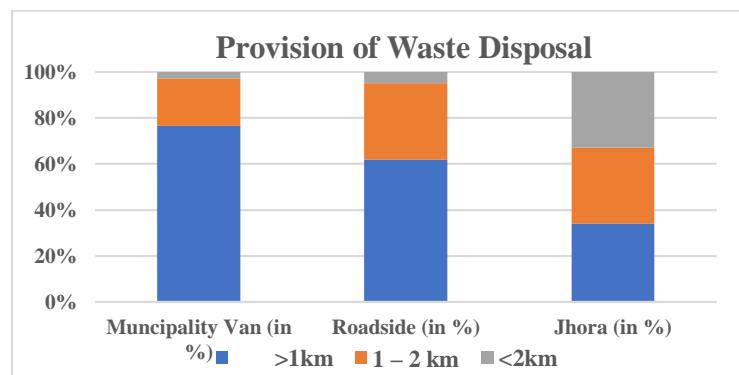
Neighbourhood Condition

Table no. 3 Provision of Garbage Disposal

Nearness to Main Road	Municipality Van (in %)	Roadside (in %)	Jhora (in %)	Total (in %)
>1km	37 (77.09)	13 (61.91)	2 (33.33)	52 (69.33)
1 – 2 km	10 (20.83)	7 (33.33)	2 (33.33)	19 (25.33)
<2km	1 (2.08)	1 (4.71)	2 (33.33)	4 (5.33)
Total	48 (64%)	21 (28 %)	6 (8 %)	75 (100)

Source- Field Survey

Figure no. 4



The above table shows the provision to garbage disposal. Out of 75 households, 69.33 % i.e. 52 of the surveyed households live within 1 km of the main road and out of 52, 37 households dispose garbage in Municipality van, 2 households in Jhora and 2 household on the roadside. Similarly, 19 households live within 1-2 km from the Main Road, whereby 10 households dispose the waste in the Municipality van, 7 on the roadside and 2 in the

jhora. Out of 4 houses located far from the main road (<2km), 1 household dispose the waste in the Municipality van, 1 on the roadside and 2 in the Jhora.

Table no. 4 Nearness to Water Sources

Near to water sources	Jhora	Springs	P.H.E	Total
>1km	31 (67.39)	18 (75)	3 (60)	52 (69.33)
1-2 km	14 (30.43)	6 (25)	2 (40)	22 (29.33)
<2km	1 (2.19)	-----	-----	1 (1.33)
Total	46 (61%)	24 (32%)	5 (6.67%)	75 (100)

Source: Field Survey

The above table shows the preferences to water sources. 61.33 % of the households derive water from Jhora, 32 % derive from Springs and 6.67 % of the surveyed households derive from P.H.E. thus showing a clear variation in water sources.

The figures below show the provision to Playground and Provision to Tap Water. According to the figure, 72% of the surveyed households have the presence of playground in the neighbourhood while 28% do not have a playground. 73.33% of the surveyed households does not have the provision of Tap Water while 26.67% of the households have the provision of Tap Water.

Fig no. 5 Provision of Playground

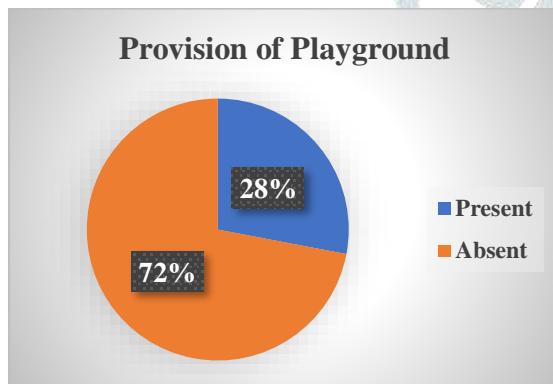


Fig. no. 6 Provision of Tap water

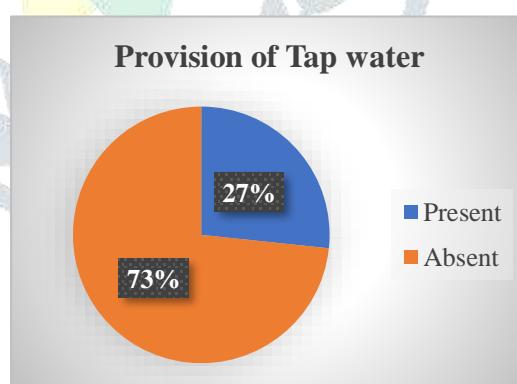
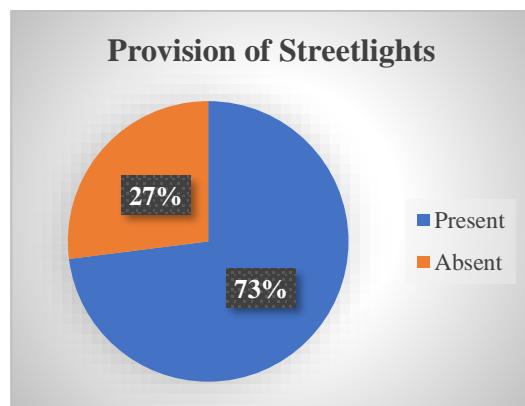


Fig. no. 7 Provision of Streetlight



The above figure shows the provision of streetlights. 73% of the surveyed households have the provision of streetlights while 27% of the households do not have the provision of streetlights.

Suggestions and Conclusion

Urbanisation has played an important role in the evolution of Mirik Town. Though Mirik is a new found town not more than 150 years but still the development of the town has taken a long time. There have been many factors that have led to the urbanisation process in Mirik Town. As, Urbanisation is a gradual and continuous process, it is still going on opening up new horizons of development and modernization. It has led to positive as well as

negative imbalances. Positively, it has led to the improved locations of the area, improved transport and communication, employment opportunities, overall development. While on the negative side, it has led to huge distinction in the income levels. Problems like unemployment, poverty, housing problems have come up leading to the formation of Slums with unfavourable conditions for the people. Besides all these, Urbanisation has led to increase in public utilities, services and many more.

Mirik has come a long way in its way of development. It has seen tremendous changes in itself and still holds the prospects for future development. Though there are numerous problems that have may have come up due to Urbanisation process there are many other opportunities also that have come up for the people. Although the problems cannot be solved or ignored totally but at least these could be checked in order to reduce the degree of the problems. The problem of over population and migration has to be checked on time to time. One important thing that is advantageous at Mirik is itself being surrounded by pure and natural environment making it eco-friendly while also reducing the environmental pollution.

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