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INCLUSIVE URBAN Infrastructure

A COMMUNITY PROFILE OF SAMMANTHRANAPURA

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The CMRD Community Profiles display information about a broad range of factors from a specific location. The baseline information helps in researching, planning and analyzing material for studies that are in progress or development. The community data and illustrations are from both primary and secondary sources. Authorship is usually collective, but the principal writers are named. The papers are generally available in the English language, with some in the Sinhala and Tamil languages.

Front cover photograph: *Sammanthranapura street view by Henry Mitchel (2021)*

A Community Profile of Sammanthranapura

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Table of Content

Contents

1

LOCATION AND PHYSICAL LAYOUT CHARACTERISTICS

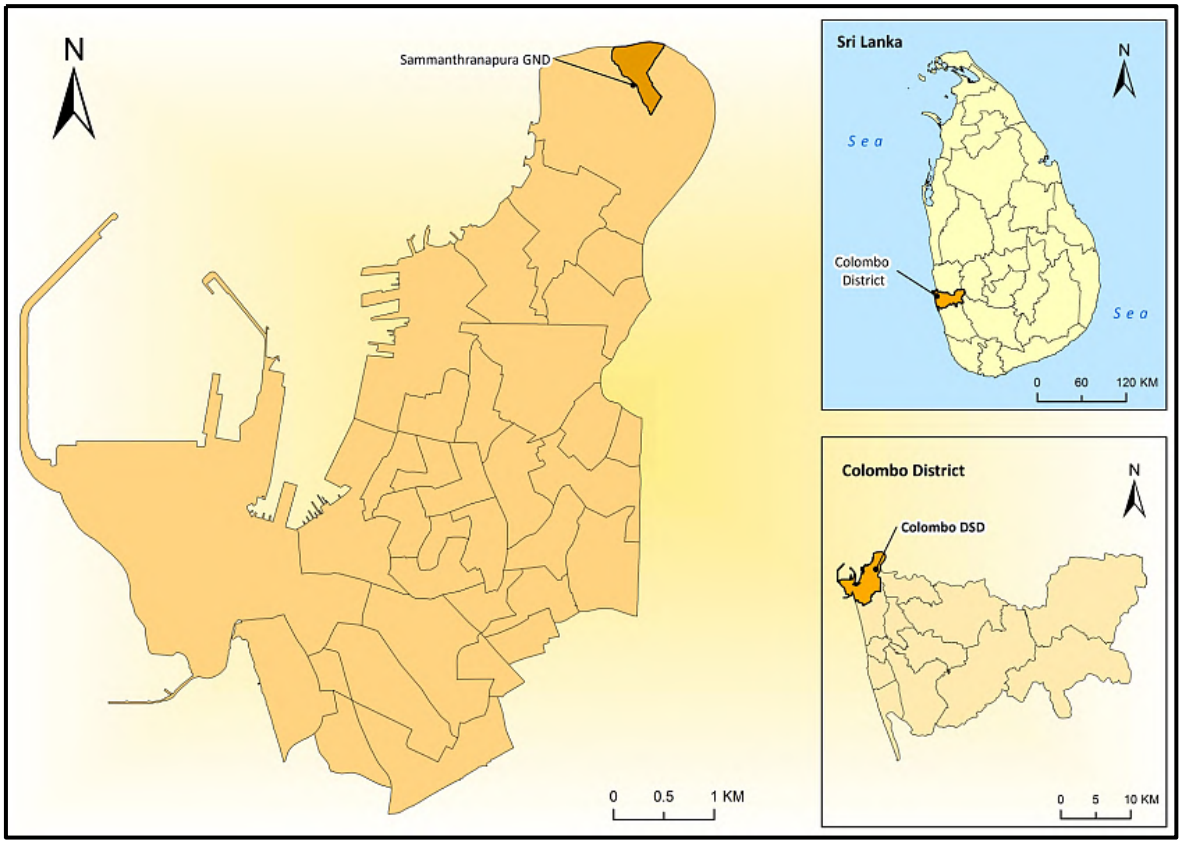

Figure 1 Sammantharanapura GND

Sammanthranapura is located at 6°58'40.66" North Latitude and 79°52'40.61" East Longitude. The Sammanthranapura Grama Niladhari Division (GND) is an administrative unit of the Colombo Divisional Secretariats Division (DSD) of the Colombo District, Sri Lanka (see figure 1). The settlement is located in Mattakkuliya, adjoining the Kelani River (see figures 2 & 3)

Figure 2 Google Image

1.1 Physical Layout

The Sammanthranapura GND is shaped like a corn; the northern part of the settlement is wide, while the southern part is narrow. It covers an area of about 16 hectares. About 97% of the land is used for housing, while the remaining 3% is used for amenities such as a playground, Montessori school, day care centre, and police station, as well as grocery stores and religious sites (Buddhists temple, Hindu kovil and mosque). The residential dwellings are primarily dispersed throughout the neighbourhood, which is divided into four clusters: Gemunupura, Pichchamalwatta, Sri Wickramapura and Samithpura. The neighbourhood is surrounded on three sides by natural landscapes. The northern side is secluded by the Kelani River, the west side is separated by a deteriorated canal, a part of the east side is wetland, and just a small piece of land (the southern part) is exposed to the main city (see figures 2 & 3).

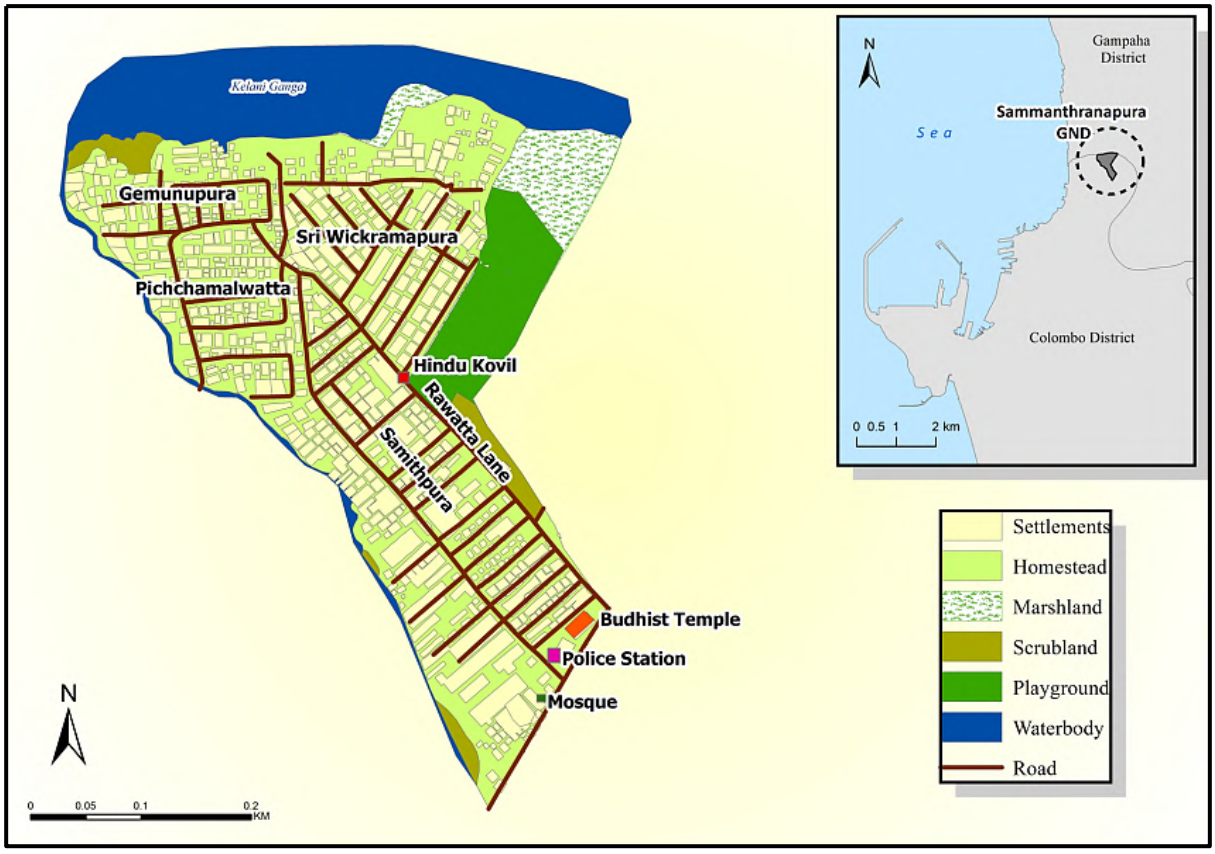

Figure 3 Sammanthranapura GND

1.2 Housing structure

The structure of the housing varies from well-organized to chaotic. People initially built their homes with clay walls and cadjan roofs, then gradually upgraded them. There was no proper overall housing layout plan for the community. As a result, the majority of house structures vary depending on the cluster. For example, well-planned housing structures can be observed in the Sri Wickramapura cluster since it was a planned sub-settlement, but the buildings in Gemunupura are built largely of semi-permanent materials and in an unorganized manner. The Gemunupura houses are also located on the banks of the Kelani River and on marshlands (see figure 4).

Figure 4 Houses in Gemunupura Google image

There were two possible causes behind the informal housing arrangement in the neighbourhood. People who live near the river bank, which is filled marshland, first built additional constructions, which were eventually transformed into houses. Initially, they filled the Kelani River's swampy terrain with concrete or sand (see figure 5), then they constructed one room out of wood or brick and rented it to someone looking to stay or work in the area. In some cases, house owners rented their homes and moved into these illegally and poorly constructed houses. In addition, with the assistance of local politicians or powerful ministers, some influential locals and party followers encroached on these public reservations. Politicians justified the encroachments by claiming that “they are impoverished people who cannot go elsewhere”. Therefore, state officers are unable to take legal action to stop the informal housing and encroachments.

Figure 5 Informal constructions

However, through the Grama Niladhari, the government has assigned identification numbers to these illegal settlements as well. Those are “T” numbers, which stand for “Temporary”. If residents can receive this number, they will be eligible for power and water supply to their homes. They receive invoices in their names, which they use to prove their ownership of the land, once they get electricity and water. The T number system can allow people to transform from encroached illegal settlers into legal residents with tenure, or be eligible for compensation should there be resettlement. Despite the fact that the people remain in wooden houses and claim legal ownership through T numbers, the government is responsible for giving them an alternative residence before removing them from the location.

2

HISTORY OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

2.1 Evolution of the area

The Sammanthranapura settlement was established in 1976 as a result of evictions due to infrastructure development activities for the 5th Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement. The name Sammanthranapura comes from the Sinhala word Sammanthrana, which means "summit", and Pura means "town". The location was a marshy area with coconut trees that belonged to a private landowner and was known as the Raa Watta (Toddy Garden) (Lakshman, Alikhan and Azam, 2020). The area was filled with debris/garbage and given to evicted people from various parts of Colombo.

The aerial photographs (see figure 6) depict the evolution of the Sammanthranapura area from 1965 to 2000 and reveal the emergence of four clusters.

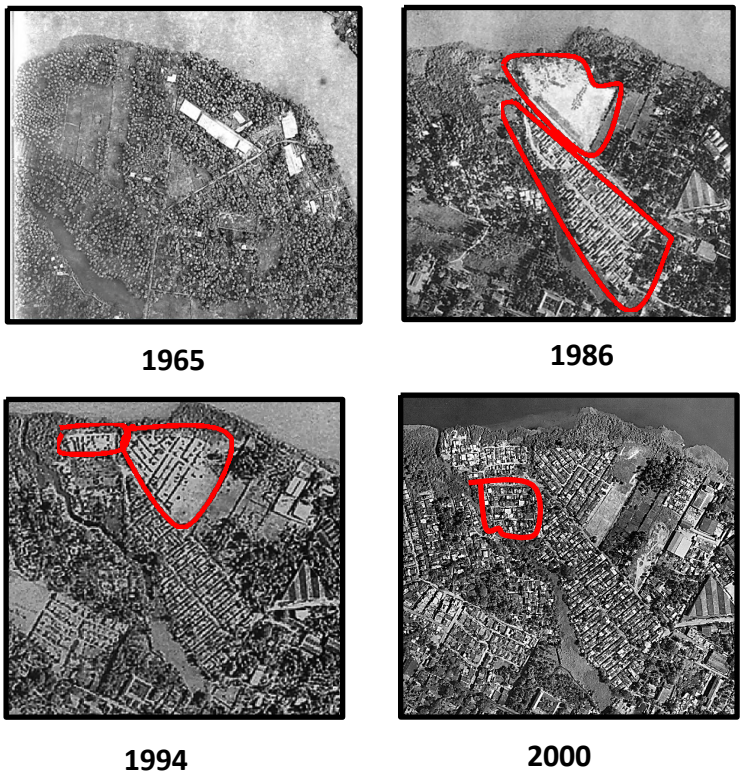

Figure 6 The aerial photographs of the Sammanthranapura area from 1965 to 2000

> ***"When we first arrived, no people lived here. There was only a warehouse belonging to a private company".***
>
> (Interview – Sammanthranapura)

Below are some important features in Sammanthranapura's evolution:

- There were no settlements in the area in 1965, save for a warehouse and private landowners' stores. The entire area was covered in coconut trees and other plant life.
- A 1982 aerial photo shows that a portion of the land had been cleared and settlements built. Samithpura is the name given to this section of the neighbourhood. Another plot of land had been cleared and was ready for construction.
- After Samithpura, Sri Wickramapura was established in 1994. Initiated by President Premadasa, Sri Wickramapura was constructed based on a design plan, as opposed to the other three clusters. The houses in this cluster are attractive and well-built, occupying two perches of land.
- In the western part of the neighbourhood, informal settlements grew in encroached fields; one of these settlements is Gemunupura.
- By the year 2000, entire neighbourhoods, including Pichchamalwatte, between Gemunupura and Samithpura, were crowded with settlements.

2.2 Origin of the allottees

Samithpura was the first government-sponsored settlement among the four clusters mentioned above. The landlord sold Pichchamalwatta, since it was a private property. In the location, there were a lot of Pichchamal (jasmine trees). That's why the area is known as Pichchamalwatta. Gemunupura was a marshland with some coconut trees.

In the 1980s, settler families arrived from various areas of Colombo including Maradana, Slave Island, Central Road, D.R.Wijewardena Mawatha, Borella, Dehiwala and Mt. Lavinia. They were granted Rs. 15,000 cash and two perches of land. The loan was issued in several instalments after the completion of certain stages of the house-building process

3

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

3.1 Demographic profile

According to the Ministry of Home Affairs, Sammanthranapura's total population in 2021 was 8269 (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2021). Male and female representation is 51% and 49%, respectively. Sinhalese people make up the majority of the population, accounting for 41.0% of the population. Sri Lankan Tamils represent 35% of Sammanthranapura, while Sri Lankan Moors occupy 22% (WFP and UNOCHA, 2016). The area is made up of 1743 households. Young dependents (0-14 years) account for 30% of the total, youth and adults (15-59 years) for 62.3 %, and senior dependents (age 60 and above) for 7.7%. The majority of the population aged five and above (47.7%) received a secondary education. While 32.9% of people acquired primary education, 8.7% fell into the "no schooling" category (Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka, 2012). The community's key income source is the informal sector. According to the census and statistics report (2012), 75% of Sammanthranapura residents work in low-wage employment on a daily basis (Athukorala and Wijesundara, 2017).

4

SERVICE DELIVERY

4.1 Water

According to the Census of Population and Housing (2012), the primary source of water of the Sammanthranapura community is the tap line within residents' premises (about 1422 households). A number of other households (about 224 households) use the public tap to meet their water needs (Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka, 2012). The service is provided by the National Water Supply and Drainage Board (NWSDB). Separately, eight households of Sammanthranapura use water from a protected well.

4.2 Sanitation: Toilet

The majority of toilets (about 1408 households) are water sealed and connected to septic tanks. Approximately 258 households are connected to a piped sewer system (Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka, 2012).

4.3 Hygienic conditions

The drainage system's poor functioning is exacerbated by the numerous illegal encroachments. In the settlement, flash floods occur on a regular basis. Insufficient drainage systems in the neighbourhood cause the flash flooding during the rainy season, especially in the western half of the neighbourhood. Furthermore, the increasing numbers of illegally erected dwellings along the riverbank (in the northern section) has constantly increased. As a result, seawater enters the northern areas of the community, making it vulnerable to flash floods.

4.4 Energy

The primary source of lighting is electricity. 83.13% households use electricity supply from the national electricity networks, and 16.75% use kerosene lamps for light (Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka, 2012). About 60% of households use kerosene as the primary source of cooking fuel. Also, 27.59% have gas while some households use both gas and kerosene to limit their gas usage. However, 12.16% of households use firewood for cooking (ibid).

4.5 Transportation

The residents can easily and conveniently use public transportation. Community members access public amenities such as schools, markets, hospitals and administrative offices without any barriers.

4.6 Communication

Most of the people in the community use the mobile phone as their primary communication mode. Because of Sammanthranapura’s location, the neighbourhood has no cellular network coverage issues.

5

SOCIAL AND INSTITUTIONAL NETWORKS

5.1 Community Development Council

There is no Community Development Council (CDC) in Sammanthranapura because the community is separated into clusters. Local unions do exist within the clusters to satisfy their specific demands. For example, at funerals, the Maranathara Samurthi is utilized to collect money to fund funeral expenses. However, the unions become inactive from time to time, depending on the community members that make up the unions and their memberships.

6

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