

LATIN AMERICAN DREAM

SHEELA BASKAR

Abstract: This paper deals with a comprehensive account of life in “Subhuman Squalor” in Latin America which is christened and remembered by many names like ‘barridas’ villas miserables’, ‘favelas’, ‘callampas’, ‘squattertown’, etc...It meditates on the main query: ‘why are they moved to urban places with such a mad rush?’ A focus on their lifestyle in the neighborhood is also presented here.

American Dream’ is the term coined by James Truslow Adams in his book “Epic of America” where he wrote: “The American dream is that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability and achievement”. But when we look at the rivalry theory of how sachems (Indian chiefs) agreed to bury their hatchets in a ritualistic way that turned to be meaningless over a period of time, it is definitely incongruous to ask the question: “Is it possible for Latinos to attain their American Dream?” Apart from entertaining our mind with the images of Che Guevara and the Brazilian mulatta carnival queens, Latin American society covers the very picture of contradictions itself – between the rich hacienda and the humble peasants, between the wealthy entrepreneurs and the miserable urchins. This whole region has been plundered for its natural resources. The famous aphorism goes with Latin America: ‘Latin America is a beggar atop a mountain of gold.’

“Lined houses, lined houses,

Lined houses.

Squares, Squares, Squares

Lined houses.

People already have a squared soul,

Lined ideas.

And their back in an angle

Yesterday I myself spilled a tear

My God, it is square”

-Alfonsina Storni.

Adlai E. Stevenson called the favelas (in Rio) “Subhuman Squalor.” Great cities are surrounded by these shanty town; they are not only ‘pest holes’ but they have no political protection, water supply, sewage communication, public health. For many North Americans extreme poverty is very difficult to imagine. They haven’t experienced its hopelessness. In Haiti City Street, for example, people both men and women stand through the day in the scorching sun in order to sell shoelaces, chewing gum or pencils to the passersby. If they are fortunate, they will earn a few cents but many earn nothing at all almost everyday of the year. When Urbanization commenced, the squatters like Whites, Negroes, and Mulattos swarmed to the cliffs, cleared the jungle, and built their miserable huts made of cans, stone

and cardboard on the sharpest slopes. They are also blessed with the best views in the city. They never get postal service and water here. They are accompanied by filth and flies everywhere. One can notice the worst scenario of children dripping with slime and innumerable stray dogs which cannot be seen even in Pre-war China and even in Johannesburg. Why do these poor peasants move to Rio or Urban places with a mad rush? They lived this horrendous life with the expectation of their condition to improve better later on or to educate their children by sending them to schools or to partake other social benefits provided by the State sometimes. In 1966, January, Rio De Janeiro witnessed a storm that smothered and washed out thousands of shanty houses on the hillsides. Mud and rubble cascaded into the town almost directly on the heads of residents living in glamorous apartments and hotels. About five thousand people were killed; some drowned in fetid mud. Visitors go anywhere except La Paz and two-thirds of the total population live on this lofty plateau called altiplano. Steady brutal winds sweep the land almost bare and even the llamas and alpacas look skinny and forlorn. Life expectancy on the altiplano is thirty-two years and women in their mid-twenties appear seventy due to their ravaged and lined faces. The shanty towns are called ‘callampas’ in Chile meaning ‘mushrooming settlements’. The squatters live here in huts built up of tin cans and cardboards and have newspapers as curtains. Rents are paid by the squatters. Children here too run with running nose and naked bellies, squat on the pools of slime, collect materials out of garbage heaps. From this patriarchal society, the head of the family makes an exploration trip on foot for hundreds of miles and takes his family or the village sometimes. At the end of this pilgrimage, they enter into slums to get jobs, see movies, read newspapers (only literates). In Colombia, these shanty town children are called ‘siloe’ who die before they complete the age of five. This is also called as the ‘hotel slum’ as 30% of its residents migrates each year and are replaced by new flocks from the country side. Not only woman from urban areas but also women from shanty towns also voted the leader of their choice, even though their husbands voted for different parties. Population

explosion is deeply annoying in Latin America. According to Roman Catholicism, birth control is considered to be a traditional taboo. But the churchmen, mostly Jesuits actively worked on population studies and recommended for the birth control. They believe that population explosion, by promoting poverty encourage communism. Another shocking aspect of these shanty people is illegal abortions. The catholic liberals strongly feel that large family is an economic drag. Though the use of uterine coil is common, the churches opposed this idea as it is mechanized. Machismo, the cult of virility makes the man to believe that a man of too many children considered supreme. Ranchos in Venezuela maintain higher standard of living when they are compared to favelas in Brazil. There are many Caracas huts that have TV aerials, houses that have roofs not like other shanty places. The American Peace Corps Volunteers by living among shanty dwellers, tried to educate them. These volunteers work all over the world. They live on very meagre income and try to give counsel to the shanty dwellers so that they can also lead a decent living inspite of their poverty. Pollina (2003) stated, "The growth and success of the U.S.economy would not have occurred had it not been for the mass migration by people seeking the American Dream." While the dream of America differs from Latinos, these people from Latin American countries living in poverty dream to 'have a better future for their children than the one that awaits them.' Latinos from South America Mexico, Central America, and the islands of Caribbean have migrated legally or illegally to the U.S.A.in recent years. There are

umpteen numbers of reasons for this. Mainly they migrate due to poverty, thirst for education, lack of resources and opportunities, exploitation of their Government and also search for adventure. Charmed by television, friends, news and even church, they land in an unfamiliar land called the United States of America. Critics are of the opinion that Latinos are painted to be often lured into by the benefits of public welfare though there exists innumerable research studies supporting immigration. It is a routine affair for the well-settled people to blame Latinos for

"Everything from unemployment in the Great Depression, to disease and criminality in the 1950s, to an overtaxed welfare state in the 1980s and 1990, to terror threats before and after 9/11."

The U.S.A. often welcomes immigrants from advanced, well-educated nations and discourages the immigrants from the poverty-ridden countries. How do these people attain their American Dream? Though there are a number of rival theories, the simplified account what I attempt to make is probably not far from truth. It is interesting to note that few people see their dreams come true while others are not. Whatever it is, according to Charles Darwin's 'survival of the fittest' or 'survival of the stable', the citizens of America are more confident than the Latinos in this Utopia because "At the same time, one should never forget what John F.Kennedy once quoted:

"If we cannot help the many who are poor
We cannot save the few who are rich."

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Associate Professor of English
Govt. R. C. College of Commerce, Palace Road
Bangalore.