LIVING ROUGH
Surviving City Streets

A Study of Homeless Populations in Delhi, Chennai, Patna and Madurai

Harsh Mander[1]

'This is my hall, on that side is my kitchen, across there is my bedroom, and in that corner is my bathroom', Bhavani said to us. 'This is my bungalow'. The hall that she pointed to was a grimy portion of pavement on which we sat together, adjoining a busy highway in Chennai, as the street lights pierced the smoggy sky overhead, and traffic never ceased to ply through the long night. The kitchen that she spoke of was a corner of the same pavement, on which some rice was cooking on a kerosene stove. The bedroom was a parking lot across the busy street, where her children were sleeping on mats in the spaces on the ground vacated by parked vehicles at that late hour. The bathroom was a community pay toilet against the walls of which I rested as I sat on the pavement. 'At least we do not have to suffer electric power cuts like all of you do', she added ironically.

It is remarkable that so little is known about the lived experience of homelessness in town and cities in India: of how urban homeless men, women and children survive and cope; how they sleep, bathe and eat; why do they live on the streets and the work they do; their denials and access to public services and food schemes; and how they organise and plan their personal and social lives and their relationships. This neglect is not just of official studies, but even by economists, sociologists, anthropologists, nutritionists and development students[2].

This paper records the findings of a small investigation into a fragment of this lived experience, and into the social, economic, nutritional situation of urban homeless men, women, boys and girls in four cities: the metropolises of Delhi and Chennai, and the cities of

[1] The study was supported by grants from the Planning Commission of India, and Dan Church India. Archana Rai, Arpan Tulsyan, R.Kumaran and V.Manikandan were the principal researchers for the study who also wrote the individual city reports. In each city, the research team included a coordinator and field researchers in the initial stage and an additional data analyst in the ending phase. In Delhi the field work was done by the team of Aman Biradari, which included volunteers from Kashmir University and Aligarh Muslim University. In Patna, the field study was coordinated by Dorothy Fernandes and Rupesh (Bihar State Adviser, Commissioners to Supreme Court) with four field researchers to assist them. For Chennai and Madurai, R.Kumaran, Lecturer in Gandhigram University, was the coordinator with a team of four field researchers.

[2] In the literature about urban homeless persons in India, we were able to find significantly, Murlidhar. S. (1991). *Adequate Housing: From a Basic Need to a Fundamental Right*. Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the degree of Master of Law, University of Nagpur. Dupont V., Tarlo e., Vidal d., (éds), (2000). *Delhi. Urban Space and Human Destinies,* Delhi, Manohar (Coll. Manohar-CSH). Hardoy, Jorge E. and David Satterthwaite (1989). *Squatter Citizens: Life in the Urban Third World*. Earthscan, London. Adenwalla, Maharukh (1998). *Evicting the Right to Shelter*. The Lawyer's Collective, September, 1998. N.C. Saxena (2007). *National Strategy for Urban Poor*. GOI and UNDP.

Madurai and Patna. The study finds that the lived experience of urban poverty, and even more so of urban homelessness, differs in many significant ways from that of rural poverty: it may ensure better prospects of livelihoods and earnings (although our study indicates that for urban homeless people work still tends to remain casual, exploited and without dignity and security). Life on the streets usually involves surviving in a physically brutalised and challenging environment, with denial of even elementary public services and assured healthy food; and illegalisation and even criminalisation by a hostile State of all self help efforts for shelter and livelihoods by urban poor residents. There are both grave ruptures - but also continuities - of bonds with their families and communities. These together pose important and mostly unmet challenges for public policy and academic research, in measuring and estimating urban poverty, and in acknowledging and realizing a vast range of social, economic and cultural rights of urban poor residents.

The Census of India defines 'houseless people' as the persons who are not living in 'census houses'. The latter refers to 'a structure with roof', hence the enumerators are instructed by Census officials 'to take note of the possible places where the houseless population is likely to live, such as on the roadside, pavements, drainage pipes, under staircases, or in the open, temple-mandaps, platforms and the like' (Census of India, 1991: 64). This part of the population includes those sleeping without shelter, in constructions not meant for habitation and in welfare institutions (United Nations 1999). We have relied on these definitions in identifying homeless respondents in the four cities.

The methodology followed in this study and detailed questionnaire administered to the homeless respondents and are attached in the appendices. The questionnaire was developed after wide consultation with activists and academics who were familiar with homeless populations, and this was further refined after a pilot run. A total of 340 respondents were interviewed in the four cities between October 2007 and October 2008, supplemented by in-depth life histories of 30 of these respondents, as well as focus group discussions.

Urban homeless populations are almost intractably difficult to identify, reach and research for many reasons. First, the homeless population is extremely heterogeneous, in terms of age group, gender, livelihoods, place of origin, livelihoods and reasons for living on the streets. It is a group that we can meet only in the evenings and late into the nights, because in the day what serves after dark as their dwellings become with sunrise pavements, streets, road dividers and shopping corridors. It is as though there is not one but two cities layered one over the other: at night in places where the homeless congregate, you can peal off the

familiar city of relative privilege, predictability and mainstream, and a whole new unsuspected phantom city reveals itself. The homeless population is wary both of government and middle class residents of the city, particularly because both perceive homeless people of any age and gender to be vaguely dangerous and intractably on the wrong side of the law; therefore the researchers have to persevere in visiting them over long periods to develop with them bonds of trust and communication. They are also sometimes of unstable location, and may move from day to day to different parts of the city, or even to other cities. They therefore lack a formal address, and also are rendered anonymous because they usually lack even the elementary markers of citizenship of poor people in India like ration cards and voters' identity cards.

All of these created formidable challenges in executing this research. Further, there is no enumerated list of this highly invisible and unstable group, which makes scientific random sampling difficult. In this study, we were also bound by the ethical rules that we set for ourselves. These were that because the research relates to such extremely vulnerable people, no research would be engaged in locations where there was no long-term commitment to address the issues of injustice and deprivation. Researchers explained the purpose of the research, and proceeded only with the informed consent of the respondents. We therefore tried to work with activist groups (and in Madurai with students and faculty of Gandhigram University) who, we hoped, would continue to engage and work with the homeless populations, and partner them in their efforts for a better life. We resorted therefore to purposive sampling, reaching out to populations of homeless people where we were assured there would be follow up by local groups, trying at the same time to cover collectively in the four cities a wide diversity of homeless people overall in terms of gender, age and livelihoods. A detailed note on the methodology of the study is given in Chapter 3.

Counting the Urban Homeless

Table 1

Homeless population in India

S.No	Homeless Population	India	Delhi		Bihar		Tamilnadu	
			Total Population	% in National level	Total Population	% in National level	Total Population	% in National level
1	Urban	7,78,599	23,903 (96%)	3.1%	12,730 (30%)	1.6%	57,128 (66%)	7.3%
2	Rural	11,64,877	1,063 (4%)	0.1%	29,768 (70%)	2.6%	29,344 (34%)	2.5%

3	Total	19,43,476	24,966 (100%)	1.3%	42,498 (100%)	2.2%	86,472 (100%)	4.4%

Source: Census 2001

The Census in 2001 enumerated 1.94 million homeless people in India, of whom 1.16 million lived in villages, and only 0.77 million lived in cities and towns. The numbers of homeless individuals counted in Delhi were 21,895, in Chennai 67,676 and in Patna 5,624. However, these numbers are likely to be gross underestimates, because this tends to be a highly invisible group especially to officials for the reasons outlined earlier. In Delhi, for instance, the 'census silence' that shrouds the existence of homeless people was broken by NGO surveys such as the headcount conducted by Ashray Adhikar Abhiyan in the year 2000, which found 52,765 homeless people in Delhi, and it estimated that for every one they could count there were 1 or 2 that escaped their enumerators. Another study conducted by Lokayan in 2002 came up with the finding that 22 per cent of rickshaw pullers in Delhi are homeless[3]. The DDA in 1985 estimated that the houseless population of Delhi in 1995 was 1 per cent of the total population. The 2001 Census estimated that the population of Delhi was 13.85 million, which would suggest that the homeless population is at least 1.5 lakh people, but probably more.

The 1991 Census disaggregated the homeless populations by gender. It found just 1 woman for almost 9 homeless men, suggesting that Delhi has mostly single boys, male youth and adult men among its homeless population. That Delhi's streets are home mostly to young single men was confirmed further by the survey of Ashray Adikar Abhiyan in 2000, which found 75 per cent homeless persons in the age group 29 to 38 years, and only 14 per cent younger, and 9 per cent older. The proportion of women found by census enumerators is significantly higher in Chennai (44.4), Madurai (41.5) and Patna (31.6) per cent respectively. The interviews and life histories of our research suggest that larger female homeless population is associated with a much larger proportion of family units in Chennai and Patna, and single women in begging in the temple town of Madurai.

However, the purposive sample chosen by the researchers tends to have a higher ratio of homeless children, women and old people, to able bodied men (see Table 2). This is because of 3 factors: the NGOs though whom the researchers approached the homeless groups tended to be more from these groups; they were more willing to spend time talking to the researchers; and the researchers themselves assumed that they were more vulnerable. This limitation of the sample - that it covered less working male homeless people than their

[3] (www.naredco.org)

proportion in the population - needs to be borne in mind while interpreting the findings of the study.

Table 2 - Age and Gender Profile of the Homeless Respondents Included in Study

Age/Sex		Delhi	Chennai	Madurai	Patna	Total
Male	Below 16 years	**24** (25.8%)	**9** (11.2%)	**2** (2.4%)	**9** (10.6%)	**44** (12.9%)
	16 – 60 years	**26** (28.0%)	**7** (8.8%)	**24** (29.3%)	**47** (55.3%)	**104** (30.6%)
	Above 60 years	-	-	**29** (35.4%)	**10** (11.8%)	**39** (11.5%)
Female	Below 16 years	**17** (18.3%)	**19** (23.8%)	-	-	**36** (10.6%)
	16 – 60 years	**21** (22.6%)	**41** (51.3%)	**14** (17.1%)	**15** (17.7%)	**91** (26.8%)
	Above 60 years	**5** (5.4%)	**3** (3.8%)	**13** (15.6%)	**4** (4.7%)	**25** (7.4%)
Eunuch	16- 60 years	-	**1** (1.2%)	-	-	**1** (0.3%)
	Total	**93** **100%**	**80** **100%**	**82** **100%**	**85** **100%**	**340** **100%**

The main findings that emerged from the surveys and life histories about the lived experience of urban homelessness is summarised below.

The Journey to the Streets

The dreams that drove Vijay to abandon his home in a village near Gwalior for the streets of Delhi were modest ones: to earn money, to establish a business, and to provide for his impoverished family back home, so that his widowed mother should not have to toil, his sister should marry well, his brother should have the chance to study that Vijay himself had missed. He saved money in his first 3 years in Delhi, about five thousand rupees, and decided to visit for the first time after he ran away his family in Gwalior. His mother was overjoyed to see him again, and the entire village gathered to meet him. His mother begged him to stay back, but he reasoned with her: what would they eat? how would they live? He was earning enough now to regularly send money home. She would have money to bring up his brother and sister. He did not want her to struggle any more. His mother let him go.

It is on the harsh pavements of Delhi near the Old Delhi Station, therefore, that Vijay has grown from a runaway teenager to a middle-aged man. Like Vijay, innumerable young men choose the streets of the city so as to save as much money as they can to send to their homes. If he hired a room to live in, he would have to spend money on rent and travel to work. There would be nothing left for him to send to his village.

Occasionally women come to the streets for the same reason. 65 year old Budhan bai spends 8 months a year, begging and sleeping in the courtyard of Kalkaji Mandir in Delhi, to support her ailing husband in their village in Uttar Pradesh, who is too proud to beg. She does not blame her grown sons for abandoning them, saying they have to take care of their own families. A destitute elderly widow in Madurai who begs from temple to temple, likewise frees her children of any blame. She tells us unconvincingly that it is she who is restless and likes drifting, and not her sons who refuse to feed her.

Table 3 - Reasons for Homelessness

S.No	Reasons for Homelessness	Delhi	Chennai	Madurai	Patna	Total
1	Extreme poverty	**33** (35.5%)	**59** (73.75%)	**20** (24.39%)	**43** (50.59%)	**155** (45.59%)
2	Need to send money home	**4** (4.3%)	**1** (1.25%)	-	**1** (1.18%)	**6** (1.76%)
3	Mental illness	**5** (5.4%)	**-**	-	-	**5** (1.47%)
4	Substance Abuse	-	**-**	**1** (1.22%)	-	**1** (0.29%)
5	Abandonment by family	**5** (5.4%)	**2** (2.5%)	**14** (17.07%)	**12** (14.12%)	**33** (9.71%)
6	Absence of family	**7** (7.5%)	**2** (2.5%)	**19** (23.17%)	**8** (9.41%)	**36** (10.59%)
7	Family abuse	**13** (14.0%)	**-**	**5** (6.1%)	**1** (1.18%)	**19** (5.59%)
8	Social persecution	**1** (1.1%)	**-**	**-**	**-**	**1** (0.29%)
9	Mentally challenged	**2** (2.2%)	**-**	**-**	**-**	**2** (0.59%)
10	Attraction to glamour of city	**3**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**3**

		(3.2%)				(0.88%)
11	Cannot afford to rent house	**1** (1.1%)	**11** (13.75%)	**-**	**1** (1.18%)	**13** (3.82%)
12	Stigmatizing illness	-	**-**	**2** (2.44%)	**9** (10.59%)	**11** (3.24%)
13	Natural calamity	-	**-**	**-**	**3** (3.53%)	**3** (0.88%)
14	Unemployment	**4** (4.3%)	**2** (2.5%)	**4** (4.88%)	**3** (3.53%)	**13** (3.82%)
15	No demand for traditional skills	-	**-**	**-**	-	-
16	Any other	**8** (8.6%)	**3** (3.75%)	**17** (20.73%)	**4** (4.71%)	**32** (9.41%)
17	No response	**7** (7.5%)	**-**	**-**	**-**	**7** (2.06%)
	Total	**93** **100%**	**80** **100%**	**82** **100%**	**85** **100%**	**340** **100%**

Table 3 confirms that dead-end hopeless poverty drives many people to the streets of the cities. 51.1 percent of the respondents in the study reported poverty, unemployment and the need to send money home, as the reason that they chose the streets. It is not surprising, therefore, that a significant proportion of homeless people retain active links with their families in their places of origin. 37 per cent reported that they had a permanent address in their place of origin. Therefore, whereas they may be alone on the streets of cities, they are not homeless in the sense of not having a family, but rather they are 'houseless' in the cities, often as a matter of conscious choice, of personal sacrifice and denial so that their families can feed themselves in their homes[4].

Sometimes, however, the dreams that drive them to the city sour. 17 year old Hashim sleeps among the multitudes of homeless in the open grounds near Jama Masjid in the medieval

[4] Some researchers such as anthropologist Dupont avoid using the term 'homeless' since it implies not only a situation of deprivation in terms of shelter but also a loss of familial moorings. She states that this term is commonly used in the North American context where it may correspond to social reality there, but as we shall see, it is inappropriate in the context of Indian cities where houselessness does not necessarily mean homelessness. The concept of family stretches beyond the limits of a simple 'household' or 'home' in the Indian context where familial segments may be spatially scattered, but tightly linked through economic and emotional ties. Thus, she prefers the terms 'shelterlessness' to refer to a concrete situation (the lack of physical shelter) in a specific place at a given time; but she stresses that it must be borne in mind that the situation currently observed does not necessarily represent a permanent state and it may be compatible with the existence of a house and/or a home somewhere else (especially in the native village) (Dupont, Veronique, Mobility Pattern and Economic Strategies of Houseless People in Delhi, chapter presented to the International Seminar: DELHI GAMES: Use and Control of the Urban Space- Power Games and Actors' Strategies._Delhi,3-4 April 1998,CSDS.)

walled city of Delhi. He recalls, 'In our village in Uttar Pradesh, my father's income was not sufficient to make both ends meet. Many times we all had no food for days on end. My mother used to scold my little brothers and sisters who cried only because they were hungry. I could not bear this painful scene played out in our home everyday. I also used to be without food for many days together'. He goes on, 'Then my elder sister's marriage was fixed. I was very worried. I knew that in such a household where every next meal for the family is a challenge, how can a marriage be organised? This thought haunted me, and one day before the *nikaah*, I ran away from home. I thought I will make lots of money after reaching a city. First I arrived at Lucknow, but could not find much work; then I reached Delhi which I hoped would give me better prospects. I did not know that life was so difficult here. I worked at rag picking, pulled a rickshaw, went to jail also. Even then I did not attain anything in life. Hunger was still an inseparable part of my existence. At times I even thought of committing suicide. I ran away from home only because I wanted to do something for my family. But I did not know that I was foolish to come here with these dreams. I took this step without thinking, and I repent till this day. I believe that parents who can't feed their children should not have children at all…'

Family breakdown caused homelessness in only around 15 per cent of the people we interviewed (and more of these were women); and the absence of any family – they are either dead or lost- in around 10 per cent of the cases. Abuse often drives from their homes street boys like Ratul Das, 12 years old, who stays with other homeless children around the water tank in New Delhi railway station, interspersed with confinement in juvenile detention centres. Like many children who flee their families to escape intolerable abuse, Ratul is unwilling to talk about precisely what drove him from his home in Shantipur, a small town in Kamrup district of Assam. But one night at the age of seven, he walked away decisively from his truck-driving father, mother and two younger brothers, never to return. It was an act of incredible courage for a child so young, echoed and repeated in the lives of tens of thousands of street children who decide at very young ages to bravely escape violence and abuse in their homes — alcoholic fathers, physical and sexual violence — by fending for themselves, at whatever cost. But we also have children who were lost or abandoned by their families at such a young age that they do not recall their origins. The streets are the only home that they remember. 40 year old destitute Phelena Devi also lives alone on the streets in Patna, because she was abandoned a decade earlier by her husband, an alcoholic. She belonged to a nomadic family that wandered from village to village, put up their tents, or lived on the bed of drains. Her daughter passed away soon after her father abandoned her mother. Likewise, Shabir made Nizammuddin Railway Station his home for

a large part of his life, after his brothers refused to take care of him when he fell from a tree and became paraplegic.

But in more unusual cases, it can be the strength of family ties that can also render one homeless. In Patna, we met Deepak, the 10 year son of a rickshaw-puller, who lived with his father on the pavement, studying under a street light. His father wanted him to become a 'sahib', and therefore sent him to a school in the city, instead of leaving him in his village with his mother.

Sometimes, people are rendered homeless because of the demolition of their slums. There are many homeless people we encountered on the streets of the walled city in Delhi, like 14 year old Lakshmi. As the researcher[5] records: 'She remembers happier times, when she was still living in the JJ colony at Yamuna Pushta. They had a home then, her father was a rickshaw puller, she and her sister went to school in the slum, they had friends who they played with and her mother stayed home with her younger siblings. Her whole world was shattered when one day they received a notice setting a date for the demolition of the slum she was living in. Hers was one of the slums demolished a few years back as part of the slum demolition campaign of the Government of Delhi. Once the slum was demolished her family was "rehabilitated" in Bawana, where they were given a small piece of land. However, the area was so inhabitable that Lakshmi's father decided to sell it, with no option remaining moved to living on the street'. Lakshmi, her mother and her siblings now survive by begging and rag-picking.

Likewise, widowed Saroja readily placed all her life savings, a few thousand rupees, to buy a shanty in a slum not far from Hanuman Mandir in central Delhi. She moved into her slum home with her children, but only months later one day, government bulldozers arrived suddenly and razed the entire slum settlement to the ground. It was government land, she was told. They were illegal squatters with no rights. The woman who had sold her the shanty disappeared. She took with her the life savings of many dispossessed people. So Saroja Devi returned once again to the temple courtyard, where she has lived homeless since then for 17 years. Again in Patna we found a cluster of homeless families camping for months in the parking lot of the District Collector's Office. For generations they had lived in an impoverished Musahar settlement and claim papers of title, but this is now prime land in the heart of Patna, and they were suddenly evicted by a nexus of politicians, officials and the land mafia.

[5] Dipa Sinha

Some are also simply born to the streets. In Chennai, in particular, we encountered several families which had lived for several generations on the same piece of pavement. Their great grandparents came to the city sometimes 80 years earlier, or longer, and the patriarchs colonised gradually 'their' part of the pavement. New generations were born, one following the next, and they all grew up in the same stretch of pavement. This was the only home that the large extended family now knew. Mohan a street boy in Chennai said, 'Homelessness is not a new thing for me. I was born into streets, and it was here that I was brought up. I have a lot of friends who still live on the streets. Our parents got a house very recently and I am not sure how long they can manage to be there'. He is convinced that they will be forced to return to the streets. Likewise, Mythili is another of what the researcher describes as of 'homeless lineage'[6]. When she was a child, her father was irresponsible, 'a drunkard, he never cared for us', she recounts, and her mother fed them by selling food cooked by her on the pavements to other homeless people.

There seem many roads that lead men and women, boys and girls to make the city streets their home, but few that lead away from the streets to settled homes. Homelessness is therefore a stubborn form of denial, and it does not seem easy for people to escape it once they slip into it. Homeless people have lived in the city for long periods. Table 4 shows that more than 60 per cent of the homeless people surveyed by us have been homeless for more than 10 years, and27 per cent between 1 and 10 years. Only 10.5 per cent were found to be new newly homeless. Therefore they find ways of coping and, in a way of speaking, are only a little more settled than may be otherwise imagined. In Chennai we found that only 7.5 per cent of the respondents are in their present location for less than a year and nearly 60 per cent of them are in the present location for more than 20 years. This includes the children who have born into streets and lived their whole lives on them. In Madurai, 46 per cent were in the present location for the last 1 to 5 years and 34 per cent were in their present location for more than 5 years. Still, nearly one-fifth of them are occupying the present spots for less than a year. In Patna also, most (54%) of the respondents have been sleeping in the same location for many years**.** In Delhi nearly one third of (33.3%) of the respondents reported to be in the present location for the last 1 to 5 years and a nearly same proportion (31.2%) reported of being in the present location for more than 10 years. However there are also 13% of respondents of Delhi who occupy the present location for less than an year.

Table 4 - Years of Homelessness

[6] R.Kumaran

S.No	Years of Homelessness	Delhi	Chennai	Madurai	Patna	Total
1	Less than one year	**11** (12.0%)	**5** (6.25%)	**12** (14.6%)	**8** (9.41%)	**36** (10.59%)
2	1 to 5 years	**24** (25.8%)	**7** (8.75%)	**22** (26.8%)	**6** (7.06%)	**59** (17.35%)
3	5 to 10 years	**18** (19.4%)	-	**12** (14.6%)	**5** (5.88%)	**35** (10.29%)
4	More than 10 Years	**38** (40.9%)	**68** (85.0%)	**36** (43.9%)	**64** (75.29%)	**206** (60.59%)
5	No response	**2** (2.2%)	**-**	**-**	**2** (2.4%)	**4** (1.18%)
	Total	**93** **100%**	**80** **100%**	**82** **100%**	**85** **100%**	**340** **100%**

Sleeping Rough

Homeless respondents in all cities agreed that the most trying and disagreeable season for homeless people were the monsoons, closely followed by the winters. 60 year old Ranjeet sleeps alone in Gandhi Maidan in Patna under the open sky in summers. When it rains, he shifts to the corridors of a shopping complex, but if these are too crowded with the homeless city, then he spends the night simply sitting in rain. In Chennai, we were told that many homeless people try to wait out each downpour by crowding into cinema halls buying the cheapest tickets, and watching film after film. If the shower persists beyond midnight, they are left with no option except to stand or squat on their haunches miserably under the shutters of the shops through the rest of the night, all their most precious belongings wrapped in plastic: their ration cards, school books and voter identity cards. Leprosy patients in Patna carry a plastic sheet in their carts, and cover themselves and their cart when it rains.

Many single wandering homeless people carry their entire belongings in a bundle, including a thin blanket, and they wrap themselves in winter. Manikandan in Madurai, has a single blanket, and this he wraps around his wife and children. He lies down on the floor without having anything to spread over himself. He says he is not very much bothered by mosquito bites and noisy vehicles, as he is weary after a day's hard toil. During winters, Ranjeet depends on some friend on street to share their quilt with him. Many homeless people from all cities reported sharing quilts. Nand Kishore sleeps on a *gamcha* that he spreads as both mattress and sheet, and uses his folded shirt and vest as pillow. Phelena Devi also sleeps

alone in the Railway Station every season, as she feels safest in its bustle. In winters, she covers herself with old clothes to battle the plunging temperatures and in summers, she sleeps on a sheet of old newspaper.

In Delhi, for over a hundred thousand homeless people, the Delhi government runs over 14 night shelters, with a maximum capacity of 2,937 people. In other words, night shelters provide a roof for not more than 3 per cent of all homeless people in the city. There are none for women, or migrant families. The Table 5 below confirms from our respondents that only 3 per cent sleep in government night shelters and that too only in Delhi, and NGOs extend night shelters to the homeless mainly in Patna. Of the government shelters, the largest in the capital is the one near the Old Delhi Railway Station. It was the first night shelter opened by the government in 1964, and in winter and the rains, its four large halls are crowded well beyond its official capacity of 514 persons. The facilities are elementary. For a fee of 6 rupees a night, bare mats are spread out on the floors in each of the shelters on which men sleep, body against body. Ragged blankets are provided for the winter, and there are common toilets and bathing places, erratically cleaned but always in demand. Outside in the walled city, private contractors called *thijawalahs* rent out quilts and plastic sheets for five rupees a night. Iron cots are lined up in the corridors outside shops, for a rent of 15 rupees per night.

Table 5 - Place of sleep

S.No	Place of Sleep	Delhi	Chennai	Madurai	Patna	Total
1	Under staircase	**2** (2.2%)	**2** (2.5%)	**-**	-	**4** (1.18%)
2	Under ledge of shops or homes	**3** (3.3%)	**31** (38.75%)	**15** (18.29%)	-	**49** (14.41%)
3	In Market Corridors	**8** (8.6%)	**1** (1.25%)	**4** (4.88%)	**2** (2.35%)	**15** (4.41%)
4	Railways Platform	**14** (15.0%)	**-**	**10** (12.2%)	**13** (15.29%)	**37** (10.88%)
5	Bus Stand	**2** (2.2%)	**3** (3.75%)	**16** (19.51%)	**2** (2.35%)	**23** (6.76%)
6	Courtyard or places of worship	**20** (21.5%)	**-**	**10** (12.2%)	**1** (1.18%)	**31** (9.12%)
7	Drainage Pipes	-	**-**	**-**	-	-
8	Government night shelters	**3** (3.3%)	**-**	**-**	-	**3** (0.88%)
9	Deserted / Abandoned buildings	**1** (1.1%)	**-**	**-**	-	**1** (0.29%)
10	NGO Night shelters	**1** (1.1%)	**-**	**-**	**15** (17.65%)	**16** (4.71%)
11	Pavement / road –sides	**19** (20.4%)	**42** (52.5%)	**21** (25.61%)	**50** (58.82%)	**132** (38.82%)
12	Road dividers (centre of the road)	-	**-**	**-**	**1** (1.18%)	**1** (0.29%)

13	Parks	**8** (8.6%)	**-**	**-**	-	**8** (2.35%)
14	On bridges	-	**-**	**-**	-	-
15	On flyovers	**1** (1.1%)	**-**	**-**	-	**1** (0.29%)
16	Under bridges	-	**-**	**3** (3.66%)	-	**3** (0.88%)
17	Under Flyovers	**3** (3.3%)	**-**	**-**	-	**3** (0.88%)
18	At your workplace	-	**1** (1.25%)	**1** (1.22%)	-	**2** (0.59%)
19	Any Other	**2** (2.2%)	**-**	**2** (2.44%)	**1** (1.18%)	**5** (1.49%)
18	Not reported	**6** (6.5%)	**-**	**-**	-	**6** (1.76%)
	Total	**93 100%**	**80 100%**	**82 100%**	**85 100%**	**340 100%**

The largest majority of homeless people in the four cities are found to sleep on pavements and sidewalks, often in daily danger to their lives from rash and drunken drivers, under ledges of shops and homes and in market corridors. Next come bus stands and railway stations, and then courtyards of places of worship. Disaggregated data from some cities show broadly that single women prefer shrines, children bus stands and railway stations and families pavements (This is probably linked to preferred occupational choices and considerations only of safety). The researcher[7] in Patna describes the picture of sleeping rough on the streets of the city eloquently: 'There are sights of men narrowing themselves and sleeping on congested lanes, women cooking next to an overflowing drainage pipe, with darkened and de -shaped, overused aluminium utensils, and half clad children with running nose, untidy hair, crying, fighting or playing amidst thick smoke generated by burning wood in brick *chullha*. They sleep on newspaper or rags or on nothing at all. Houses comprise of pieces of clothes, lots of plastic and some bamboo'.

A woman in Patna describes the fear of every night of her life that she sleeps on the streets: 'There are lots of dangers, lots of thieves are around who just pick up our stuff and run away. Or goons come to threaten us. One person from the group stays up at night. When it is 5 in the morning, we relax in our hearts, for every night is to us like a penance. Yesterday night I was awake throughout.' Buddham Bai, says philosophically, 'I am old, I am a woman and I am alone in the city. Where is place for a person like me? Nowhere! Then what good will come out of being scared?'

[7] Arpan Tulsyan

Saroja Devi slept after 17 years on the streets in the first shelter for homeless women in Delhi run briefly by an NGO, and said that what she valued most in the months she stayed at the shelter was that for the first time she had the assurance of an uninterrupted night's sleep. '*Beizzati*. Dishonour'. This was the overriding feature of her life, as Saroja recounted it. 'To live on the streets – *beizzatti*. The policeman beats you with his baton – *beizzatti*. Any ruffian sits next to you and runs his hands on your body – *beizzatti*'. The respondents to our survey said what disturbed their sleep most were the police (17 per cent), mosquitoes (16 per cent), the noise (12 per cent), the weather and health problems (9 per cent each). In Delhi, police brutality figured highest at 32 per cent for disturbing homeless people at night.

Working Rough

Ranjit, a homeless old man on the streets of Patna remarks bitterly, 'If your look for a beauty parlour or a call girl here, you will find them. But you will never find a good job, however hard you look for it. This is a weird place. I don't want to live in it. But I don't have a choice'. Young Hashim adds despondently, 'I live on pavement in the old Delhi area. And I know how people survive on pavements. If one meal is available, then another time one has to sleep without food. No one sleeps on an empty stomach willingly and happily. But what can one do? We go to find some work; we are asked a series of questions like: "From where have you come? What do you do? Do you thieve? Since when have you left your home? For all these days, where were you and what were you doing? Since when are you here? During that period, what were you doing? Is there anyone who knows you? Who can stand guarantee for you?" How can you get work like this? Now you tell me, what will one do to fill one's stomach? What are the options except resorting to theft and extortion?'

The majority of homeless people survive, as revealed by Table 6, through casual, unprotected, uncertain and hard labour, through a range of occupations like daily wage work, construction labour, pulling rickshaws, carrying and pushing loads, domestic work and street vending (around 40 per cent of our sample). A small number admit to living by professional blood donation and sex work, although the actual numbers in these and other professions that are in conflict with law or are stigmatised, is likely to be larger than what the respondents admit. Das in Chennai alone spoke of looking 'for new ways out (to earn like)… stealing and other petty crimes. I joined a gang of "rowdies" with just one aim: to earn money'.

Table 6 - Primary Occupation

S.No	Primary Occupation	Delhi	Chennai	Madurai	Patna	Total

1	Street vendor	**4** (4.3%)	**20** (25.0%)	**1** (1.22%)	**9** (10.59%)	**34** (10.0%)
2	Casual daily wage labor	**11** (11.8%)	**4** (5.0%)	**1** (1.22%)	**5** (5.88%)	**21** (6.18%)
3	Construction worker	-	**10** (12.5%)	-	**1** (1.18%)	**11** (3.24%)
4	Passenger rickshaw puller	**6** (6.5%)	-	-	**16** (18.82%)	**22** (6.47%)
5	Rickshaw load puller	**2** (2.2%)	-	-	**4** (4.71%)	**6** (1.76%)
6	Handcart puller	-	-	-	**1** (1.18%)	**1** (0.29%)
7	Hammal	**1** (1.1%)	-	-	-	**1** (0.29%)
8	Commercial sex worker	-	-	**3** (3.66%)	-	**3** (0.88%)
9	Live by alms/receive charity	**18** (19.4%)	**1** (1.25%)	**52** (63.41%)	**24** (28.24%)	**95** (27.94%)
10	Rag picking	**9** (9.7%)	-	**2** (2.44%)	**1** (1.18%)	**12** (3.53%)
11	Shoe Polisher	**2** (2.2%)	-	**5** (6.1%)	-	**7** (2.06%)
12	Street Performers	-	-	**10** (12.2%)	-	**10** (2.94%)
13	Professional blood donor	-	-	-	**11** (12.94%)	**11** (3.24%)
14	Domestic Worker	**4** (4.3%)	**8** (10.0%)	**1** (1.22%)	**3** (3.53%)	**16** (4.71%)
15	Garage worker or cycle repair mechanic	**1** (1.1%)	-	**2** (2.44%)	-	**3** (0.88%)
16	Home maker	-	**5** (6.25%)	-	-	**5** (1.47%)
17	Student	**5** (5.4%)	**24** (30.0%)	-	-	**29** (8.53%)
18	Any Other	**15** (16.1%)	**2** (2.5%)	**3** (3.66%)	**9** (10.59%)	**29** (8.53%)

19	No Response/No work	**15** (16.1%)	**6** (7.5%)	**2** (2.44%)	**1** (1.18%)	**24** (7.06%)
	Total	**93** **100%**	**80** **100%**	**82** **100%**	**85** **100%**	**340** **100%**

The numbers who live by charity and alms is almost 28 per cent, but this finding must be interpreted first in the light of the specific nature of our sample, which greatly under-represents able bodied men on the streets, and second the particularly high proportion of people who live by begging in the temple town of Madurai, where large numbers of the abandoned aged flock traditionally for alms. We have observed that it is small children, single women who head households, and aged and disabled people who mainly live by begging. And begging itself is an arduous vocation. Since they were expelled from their communities, because they suffered from leprosy, Bhagniman and Janak have begged on the streets for Patna for more than 15 years, to feed themselves and their children in their village in Gaya. Each day, they take turns to push each other for several hours on a wooden cart that contains all their belongings: a few vessels, clothes, plastic sheets for the rains and thin blankets for the cold, and salt to add to their food. Buddham Bai is not allowed to sit in the main temple premises at Hanuman Mandir and solicit for money and food, because she cannot pay the daily fee of 5 rupees to Rakhi, the manager of all the beggars in the temple complex who is informally recognised even by the temple authorities. After all, Buddham earns only about 10-20 rupees a day. She cannot run after or even walk behind devotees to cajole them for alms and loses out in competition with other beggars in the temple. Most of the devotees give only a 50 paise coin. Buddham Bai saves all the coins carefully; 'The 50 paise coins are not accepted here in Delhi, but I will use them in Punjab'.

At the same temple, Lakshmi divides her time between begging and rag-picking. Her father is addicted to smack, and her mother begs and tends the smaller children. Street boys like Ratul at the railway station earn money by selling water to passengers in plastic bottles, which they fill at the public taps in the station. The bottles sell at 5 rupees each, and he easily earned around 50 rupees a day. They earn more by rag-picking, starting out in the early hours of the morning, with a huge sack often bigger than their own small frames, with separate pockets for bits of paper, cloth, plastic pieces, scraps of iron and other trash. At the end of the day, they hawk their daily foraging to wholesale waste traders, who in turn market these to recycling units. Others also take up other seasonal occupations like working with caterers in the wedding season, reserving places in trains during vacations, selling cinema tickets at higher rates, cleaning cars or taxis, buses or lorries, even trains, as vendors

for tea and food stalls, apprentices in roadside automobile repair garages, carrying loads and shoe polishing. Contrary to common prejudice, only one in ten street children begs for a living, and most of these are very young. Even fewer beg as part of organised gangs. Phelena Devi, a middle aged single woman in Patna also is a ragpicker. She scours the waste heaps and littler throughout the city, particularly the area near station, and collects all kinds of waste bottles, and bits of paper, metal, cloth and plastic.

Sudhir lives and works as a barber on a pavement near the Doordarshan building in Patna. He left his village 15 years earlier, as the traditional *jajmani* system excluded him from many clients. He starts each day early by hanging a mirror on the wall of the Doordarshan building, and setting out a chair to seat his clients, as he cuts their hair and shaves their stubble. Homeless workers like Vijay in the congested medieval walled city of Delhi, find work as *hammaals* –porters. This work is available mainly at night, when the thick daytime traffic and crowds abate, and trucks and hand-carts load and unload merchandise narrow lanes of the large wholesale markets. Ranjeet works as a daily wage labourer, helping to load or unload bricks, sand, cement or soil, but he has many skills. Sometimes he also works as a plumber, as he is currently employed in a new building construction. Women in the displaced Musahar slum community in Patna earlier reared pigs, but after they were evicted, men look daily for casual labour and women domestic work. Employment is not available everyday. They earn barely enough to fill their stomachs with some food.

Indeed, more than half the people reported that work was not available on a regular basis. In Delhi, 70 per cent reported that work was not assured through the month, in Chennai 61 and in Patna 59. Only in Madurai, where the dominant occupation is begging, did 90 per cent homeless people report regular earnings. For daily wage workers in Patna, availability of work also depends on the season. In summers the availability of work is more than in winters. Monsoons are by far the worst months. However, the festive months of October and November are good for the city's labouring poor. But, as would be apparent from Table 7, earnings for more than half are less than 50 rupees a day, and only about 11 per cent earn more than 100 rupees a day. Not surprisingly, Delhi and Chennai score better for levels of earning than Patna, with Madurai way behind. Mendicancy is clearly not a lucrative vocation.

Table 7 - Daily Income

S.No	Daily Income	Delhi	Chennai	Madurai	Patna	Total
1	< 50	**33**	**19**	**66**	**56**	**174**

		(35.5%)	(23.75%)	(80.5%)	(65.88%)	(51.18%)
2	50-100	**28** (30.1%)	**29** (36.25%)	**13** (15.8%)	**15** (17.65%)	**85** (25.0%)
3	> 100	**17** (18.3%)	**12** (15.0%)	**1** (1.2%)	**9** (10.59%)	**39** (11.47%)
4	NA/No income	-	**20** (25.0%)	**2** (2.4%)	-	**22** (6.47%)
5	No response	**15** (16.1%)	**-**	**-**	**5** (5.88%)	**20** (5.88%)
	Total	**93** **100%**	**80** **100%**	**82** **100%**	**85** **100%**	**340** **100%**

The homeless casual wage earners sleeping in Gandhi Maidan in Patna said the labour market wage rates range from 70 to 90 rupees a day, well below statutory minimum wages. But work is scarce, and therefore there is a competition even among labourers. The needy agree to work on a lower rate: as one of them, Nand Kishore Chaurasiya laments, 'What can we do with an empty stomach? We go to work at whatever price is offered'. There are some aggressive labourers who threaten those who agree to work at a lower daily wage. There are also some petty criminals who extort 5 to 10 rupees from any labourer who enters the Patna labour market, and haplessly few resist.

When the data is disaggregated, it is found that more children than adults are able to get regular work (probably reflecting the self employed and independent character of their professions like rag-picking), and more men than women. Expenditure patterns show that some manage even modest savings in these situations of deprivation, especially migrant workers who constantly need to send money home. In Delhi, out of a sample of 86 people, 8 respondents told us that they send money home regularly and 12 send money on irregular basis. In Chennai, only 6 respondents (7.5%) send money to their homes. As many of them are living with their families there arises no need to send money to home. 13.4 per cent homeless people in Madurai send money regularly or irregularly to their family. In the category of homeless people who do not send money home, the majority were children, many of whom severed their bonds with their families.

The weak bargaining power of the working urban homeless also derives from their poor education. More than 60 per cent were found to be completely non-literate, and less than 1

per cent had studied beyond Class 10. It is only in Chennai that we found a large number of school students, who live with their families on the streets.

Table 8 - Educational status

S.No	Literacy	Delhi	Chennai	Madurai	Patna	Total
1	Illiterate	**50** (53.8%)	**34** (42.5%)	**53** (64.6%)	**69** (81.2%)	**206** (60.6%)
2	Primary	**19** (20.4%)	**15** (18.8%)	**14** (17.1%)	**4** (4.7%)	**52** (15.3%)
3	Secondary	**9** (9.7%)	**7** (8.8%)	**14** (17.1%)	**7** (8.2%)	**37** (10.9%)
4	Above 10th	-	-	**1** (1.2%)	**1** (1.2%)	**2** (0.6%)
5	NA (Students)	-	**24** (30.0%)	-	-	**24** (7.1%)
6	No response	**15** (16.1%)	-	-	**4** (4.7%)	**19** (5.6%)
	Total	**93** **100%**	**80** **100%**	**82** **100%**	**85** **100%**	**340** **100%**

Public Services: Rudimentary and Monetized

The research confirms that urban homeless people have little and troubled access to even the most elementary public services, and everything that they can use has to be paid for. Much of what people who are privileged to live on homes take for granted - every visit to the toilet, every bath, for instance -must be paid for, in cash, immediately. As Subbiah, an aged homeless man in Madurai puts it, 'I am afraid that even the mirror may not reflect your image if you happened to stand before it without any money!'

Our survey (Table 9) shows that 45 percent homeless respondents pay for to relieve themselves in public toilets. Almost 30 per cent bathe to go the toilet. Drinking water, often not potable and erratic in supply, is however available free at roadside taps for 67 per cent of the people we spoke to in the 4 cities. But 13 per cent buy water from tankers, and 12 per cent get it from shops (in Madurai, many shopkeepers offer water free of charge to the homeless, as an act of charity and piety). In Chennai women complained that they have to wait at public taps for long, until other more authorised citizens including even slum

dwellers, fill their needs before the homeless get their turn. Many buy water at 5 rupees for a small plastic pitcher. Even blankets and cots are hired out, but only in the walled city of Delhi.

Table 9 - Paying service charge

S.No	Paying service charge	Delhi	Chennai	Madurai	Patna	Total
1	Drinking water	**5** (5.4%)	**8** (10.0%)	**1** (1.2%)	**4** (4.7%)	**18** (5.29%)
2	Defecation	**31** (33.3%)	**58** (72.5%)	**49** (59.8%)	**15** (17.7%)	**153** (45.0%)
3	Bathing	**21** (22.6%)	**32** (40.0%)	**38** (46.3%)	**8** (9.4%)	**99** (29.12%)
4	Sleeping space	**1** (1.1%)	**2** (2.5%)	**1** (1.2%)	**1** (1.2%)	**5** (1.47%)
5	Bedding	**2** (2.2%)	**-**	**-**	**-**	**2** (0.59%)
6	Others	**5** (5.4%)	**-**	**-**	**-**	**5** (1.47%)

Pay bathing facilities are still a boon to women. Mythili in Chennai remembers growing up at a time when 'there were no public toilets or bathrooms at that time in our area. Taking a bath in the early mornings, and that too behind temporary plastic covers was not a happy experience'. The 10 year old son of a homeless Patna rickshaw puller Deepak spends 2 rupees every morning at the Sulabh complex (for toilets and bathing). So does the barber Sudhir when he can afford it, but at other times he just uses the bed of the open drain that flows nearby.

But paying for every bath for a destitute person may mean that they choose simply not to bathe. In Madurai, Karuppayi complains of a body itch but she asks, 'Eating food itself is such a difficult challenge in this life of ours. Then who will part with 2 rupees each time to take bath? Will you?' Buddham Bai in Delhi agrees, 'Life in city is not easy'. She does not use Sulabh facilities as they cost 2 rupees everyday, and she anyway cannot walk that far with her old broken leg. She uses a tap on the roadside for all her needs, bathing only rarely. She goes to defecate in the bushes that surround the temple. 'It is risky, because they found the dead body of a girl who was murdered there last week. But then I have nothing that anyone would kill me for'. Nand Kishore is thrifty, saving for his old age, therefore he uses the

Ganga river for his daily defecation and bathing. Only on rare occasions, does he allow himself to enjoy the relative luxury of public toilets. Ranjit Ram on the other hand sets aside one rupee a day for the public toilet, and another 50 paise to buy a *babool* stick to clean his teeth.

55 percent of homeless people use community toilets, but over 20 per cent still relieve themselves in open spaces (Table 10). A similar proportion bathes in community pay facilities, whereas around 24 per cent bathe at public toilets (Table 11). Cost is a disincentive, as only 35 per cent reported bathing daily.

Table 10 - Place of Defecation

S.No	Place of Defecation	Delhi	Chennai	Madurai	Patna	Total
1	Open Space	**15** (16.13%)	**3** (3.75%)	**26** (31.7%)	**25** (29.41%)	**69** (20.29%)
2	Pavement	**8** (8.6%)	**1** (1.25%)	**1** (1.2%)	**6** (7.06%)	**16** (4.71%)
3	Public toilet	**49** (52.7%)	**65** (81.25%)	**21** (25.6%)	**51** (60.0%)	**186** (54.71%)
4	Night Shelter	**3** (3.2%)	**-**	-	-	**3** (0.88%)
5	Private Toilet	**9** (9.7%)	**9** (11.25%)	**33** (40.2%)	**1** (1.18%)	**52** (15.29%)
6	Any other	**9** (9.7%)	**2** (2.5%)	**1** (1.2%)	**2** (2.35%)	**14** (4.12%)
	Total	**93** **100%**	**80** **100%**	**82** **100%**	**85** **100%**	**340** **100%**

Table 11 - Place of taking bath

S.No	Place of taking bath	Delhi	Chennai	Madurai	Patna	Total
1	Public taps	**13** (14.0%)	**29** (36.25%)	**23** (28.0%)	**17** (20.0%)	**82** (24.12%)
2	Community bathing places	**37** (39.8%)	**27** (33.75%)	**35** (42.7%)	**51** (60.0%)	**150** (54.12%)
3	Night shelter	**10** (10.6%)	-	-	**14** (16.5%)	**24** (7.06%)

4	Any other	**26** (28.0%)	**24** (30.0%)	**19** (23.2%)	**3** (3.5%)	**72** (21.18%)
5	NA / No response	**7** (7.5%)	**-**	**5** (6.1%)	**-**	**12** (3.53%)
	Total	**93** **100%**	**80** **100%**	**82** **100.0%**	**85** **100%**	**340** **100%**

Eating Rough

Our findings regarding the availability of food to urban homeless people were mixed. The quantities may – but are not always – sufficient, however, the quality tends to be monotonous, very elementary, often of poor nutritional value, and - in the nature of their existence - unhygienic. In Delhi, for instance, 22.5 per cent people ate nothing but cereals in the 2 days prior to the interview, and another 25 ate vegetables or protein only once. Except those with families in the streets, they rarely get home cooked food. Yet they spend the greatest part of their earnings in the daily struggle to feed themselves and their dependents.

Budhan Bai eats only what she gets out from the charity of temple worshippers, and saves all the cash she is given as alms to send back to her village. Many times, she has to be content with only one meal, but usually she is able to manage two half meals a day. Most of the food Ratul and other street children buy are at food stalls. On bad days, some eat at *dargahs*, *gurudwaras* or temples, and the younger ones even forage for food in rubbish heaps. P Devi in Patna earns 20 to 30 rupees per day from picking rags. Every morning, she spends 2 rupees on tea. Only after she completes her work by late afternoon does she buys her first meal of the day from a stall. The day she has enough money, she eats from hotel on the station. For 8 rupees she eats rice, *dal* and vegetables, and at night, she gets herself 3 *rotis* that cost her 6 rupees. Later she forages in the bins for bits of biscuits and samosas, and sometimes begs at temples.

Many buy cooked food, sometimes from humble eateries on the pavements themselves. Mythili's mother in Chennai runs a small shop on the pavement itself to serve food to other homeless people. Her overheads are so low and the fare so elementary, as to make it affordable to homeless people. The mendicant homeless population of Madurai is fed often by charitable organisations.

The leprosy patients Bhagniman and Janak depend on stale leftovers that they are given as they beg in the day. But at night, they try to set up a makeshift stove between two bricks,

and boil some hot rice. In Chennai, we saw women setting out their stoves only close to midnight after the streets were emptied of pedestrians, and they woke their sleeping children to groggily eat their only self-cooked meal for the day. This is how more than half the homeless people we spoke to in that city enjoyed at least one 'home'-cooked meal. But cooking food is even more trying during the rainy seasons, as they cannot keep their fires burning under the pouring rain, and the wet surface hinders them even after the rain stops. But in Delhi, only 7 out of 93 homeless respondents reported cooking their own meals (and that too when the sample of the study has under-represented the dominant group of single men living on the streets). 41 purchased their dinner, 8 ate at shrines, 2 begged and another 2 foraged in the railway station. Lakshmi says, 'I have been living on the streets for such a long time. We eat what we get as alms, from the temple and what we buy from around here. How will I know how to cook and run a house, when I don't even live in a house?'

The evidence is that homeless people are forced to depend extensively on external sources for their food – through purchase, foraging, or receiving food in charity. This is because the condition of being homeless in the city also typically means in most cities lacking a place to cook, or to store rations and one's utensils (except where families are able to colonise segments of pavement for long periods like in Chennai). Purchasing food may involve greater expense; and that too on less healthy food. Researchers in Patna observed that none of the homeless people store any food due to its perishable nature and their deprivation of their own secured space to store anything. Besides, fuel is something that is beyond their means. Often the can be seen cooking on fires burning between bricks with bits of branches and dry twigs that homeless people have collected, or with cakes of cow dung.

63 per cent of the homeless people interviewed reported spending 50 to 90 per cent of their income on food, with nearly 12 per cent spending almost the whole of their income to get their daily food. In Chennai, half of the respondents spend 50 rupees or less per day on their food expenditures. The rest needs 50 to 100 rupees for this, which consumes most of their daily earnings. In Madurai, homeless people earn less, and 7 out of 10 spend 50 to 75 per cent of their earnings to cover their food expenditures. Around 20 per cent of the respondents report spending 80 to 90 per cent and 2 persons the whole of their earnings to meet their food expenses. Where most of the respondents in Patna earn less than rupees 50 per day, the majority spend anywhere between 20 to 40 rupees on their daily food. On an average they too report spending 80 to 85 per cent of their income on food. 13 per cent of the respondents report that all their income they spend on food. But even this is often not enough. A woman who looks after her homeless family in Patna complained, 'Our daily

income is 70 rupees, so how can we get enough food from that? On top of that, we have 5 children to look after'.

If they still eat nutritious food, it is to the sacrifice of almost everything else. Deepak is relatively fortunate. He has a caring father, a rickshaw puller in Patna who spends a great deal of what he earns to feed his son well. He buys for him every night a packet of biscuits for 3 rupees. This is his breakfast the next morning. Later the boy eats *roti* with vegetables bought from a roadside hotel, and a small cup of milk. Ganesh, Deepak's father says, 'Even if I don't eat, I buy a cup of milk for Deepak everyday'. In school, there is *khichri* or gruel in the State financed midday meal. He eats dinner with his father after he returns from work. It usually consists again of *roti* and vegetables. Again, Ganesh buys an egg for Deepak once in few days. He even treats him to chicken or fish at least one every month.

Nand Kishore's breakfast consists of 2 to 3 *rotis* and vegetables that he buys for 8 rupees from a roadside *dhaba*. In the afternoon he spends 15 rupees on a more substantial meal, and the same at night. For festivals, he eats one or two pieces of sweets or *mithai*. It is at least 5 years since he ate a mango. Ranjeet Ram spends 4 rupees on a cup of tea and biscuits. Later if he gets daily wage work and has money in his pocket, then from his money else he borrows to get 200 gm of *sattu* and 3 *litti* (local eatable) worth 6 rupees, and a full dinner at night. He spends 30 rupees each day on his food, and the rest he saves to send to his children.

And on days when there was no food, in Delhi 51 per cent of the homeless seek free food from religious places, another 20.5 per cent depend on friends for food (many of these street children). It is interesting that 21 per cent of the people said that they prefer to stay hungry than depend on charity from religious places, relatives and community members. In Chennai, one-fourth of the respondents borrow money from other homeless people during such lean days, and 12.5 per cent are helped by their neighbours who share their food. A small portion kills their appetite by drinking tea. Nearly two-fifths are assisted by their family, since it is a city of many homeless families. In Madurai, on the other hand, they suppress their hunger with *beedis*, drugs, tea or just water, or else they beg or get food on credit. In Patna, 35 per cent stay hungry, 14. per cent solicit food from others, and 11 per cent eat on credit. In all cities, people reported using drugs to kill hunger.

A homeless person remarked bitterly in Patna, 'Allah has two ways of looking at His people. For one set, He leaves the strings loose, but for the poor He keeps a tight hold on the strings.

He gives us so much pain: they get so much to eat, whereas we crave for good food, for fruits, meat and fish'.

We also asked our respondents what they eat on occasions when they had more money. In Delhi, children replied that they eat ice creams, toffees and different kind of sweets. Older respondents replied that when they have money they eat especially non- vegetarian food. In Patna, the choice was for eating meat and sweets. In Chennai, they would eat different dishes from their daily routine in better eateries. These are the only days when they can also afford to eat non-vegetarian food and fruit. 40 per cent of people in Madurai responded similarly, whereas the rest said they would try to save money for difficult days. 19 per cent also said they would indulge in alcohol or some other intoxicants while having more money. Indeed, in all cities, homeless people of all ages and both genders reported that they use drugs to cope with hunger, sickness, aching limbs and loneliness.

Embattled With the State

The relationship between urban homeless people and the State was one of extreme mutual acrimony and distrust, an unending undeclared cold war. State authorities are distrustful of the homeless residents of cities as parasitical, lazy, unhygienic, illegal and largely criminal. Homeless people return the compliment by regarding the government as implacably uncaring, hostile, corrupt and neglectful.

Police and civil officials in Delhi were concerned a lot about how homeless street squatters 'give the city a bad name', which is even more of a concern at a time when the metropolis is gearing itself to be showcased to the world when the Commonwealth Games are played in 2010. A Government of India official in the Ministry of Urban Development told us that 'we have to keep up with the image of India on the march… We cannot afford to let them (the city's homeless) spoil and mar the Commonwealth Games. We *must* shift them out before the Games start'. Homeless people who have no permanent place to sleep are considered as nuisance and hurdle in maintenance of New Delhi and the challenges of beautifying it. One official in New Delhi Municipal Corporation asked, 'How can we even think of making the city beautiful, when in the night the whole place turns into a squatter zone? They also put tremendous pressure on the infrastructure of Delhi- like water and electricity… almost all of them use illegal electricity connection and we are incapable of checking them It would be best to send them off, but we cannot do so due to political pressure'. He adds that 'if there is political motivation, then we can weed them out in a day'.

They are widely seen as people with no rights to be where they live. In a news item[8], a senior railway official at Patna Railway complained (the word used by the reporter is 'admitted') that the Patna railway station had become a shelter for the homeless people. 'They use the station everyday to sleep during night and defecate in the morning. It is not possible for the railways to keep the station clean all the time.

However, the railways have deployed more sanitary staff at the Patna Junction to keep it clean round-the-clock,' he said. The news item adds that the railways are supplying about 12 lakh gallon water per day to Patna Junction to cater to the needs of passengers. As many as 207 taps, one chiller plant and two water coolers are installed on the platforms of Patna Junction. About 700 benches are also provided to Patna Junction platforms as part of passenger amenities. The reporter notes that 'Unfortunately, facilities meant for bonafide passengers are being used by these homeless people.'

In the rest of the Patna administration as well, the same stereotypes – of the 'undeserving' poor - prevail. Some police officials said, 'The homeless people are responsible for their own poverty. There is no scarcity of work opportunities. If there is a scarcity, it is of people who are willing to work. These people are just plain lazy'. Another agrees: 'In today's world anyone can earn enough to run the family smoothly. But the people you are talking about are the ones who consume *ganja* and liquor. They steal our watches to drink and eat without honest toil'. Some devalue them completely, 'They do no concern us. We haven't enough time to even think about them'.

A Joint commissioner of Police (Traffic) in Delhi says: 'The city is plagued by the presence of beggars.' Homeless people are indeed widely perceived in official circles to be beggars if they are not criminals, ignoring the fact confirmed by this study that the large majority of them work hard at low wages. They also tend to be the softest, most powerless targets of the police. A police official in Delhi maintained that petty crime in the metropolis is to a vast extent attributable to homeless people, and since they are a mobile population it is very difficult to catch them. 'Even in serious cases, often it is the moving and invisible homeless population that commits such crimes and due to their anonymity it is difficult to track them'. When we spoke to police officers of the perennial fear of police harassment of homeless people, the response was, 'The ones who have fear in their hearts are those ones who have a criminal nature'. When we enquired about the plight of street children, the approach was entirely negative. 'These are the children who later become pickpockets, petty criminals and

[8] Times of India, July 2005

gradually take to hard core crimes'. Children on streets and railway stations are routinely battered by the police, which led to a public interest petition in the Delhi High Court filed by some activists[9].

Homeless men, women and children in all cities reported that they were beaten by the police at night, and driven away from their homes under plastic sheets or the open sky. A woman on the streets of Patna describes the experience graphically, 'We are displaced by the *Halla Gardi*.' This is an interesting local coinage: it literally means 'commotion', but they use it to refer to bulldozers. 'When the bulldozers arrive, the administration breaks down houses, it also throws away our food. It destroys all our belongings. They kick at our *chullha* and destroy them. The bamboo roofings are torn. Our suitcases are thrown away. Also, they abuse and curse us. What can we do? We have to stay here due to our helplessness, so we keep silent. We don't have a house. We have nowhere else to go'. In the courtyard of Hanuman Mandir in Cannaught Circle in Delhi, I will always remember the distraught faces of a clutch of these women late one night, because two policemen had confiscated and set fire to the tiny grubby bundles of their entire life's belongings.

If there is one thing that women, children, old and disabled people of the streets of Delhi are most frightened of, it is of a van named ironically after Gandhiji's ashram Seva Kuteer. The van carries raiding squads that round up people who live by begging and incarcerate them in beggars' jails for up to three years. They have to be alert and nimble on their feet to escape these periodic raids. These are regular occurrences at railway stations as well. The children call days when such raids take place '*chhapa din*', literally days of raids, and they try to escape the station as quickly as they can whenever these occur. Homeless people in Chennai report that such raids evict them just 4 or 5 times a year, usually when the Chief Minister or other senior people are due to pass by the streets where the homeless have lived for generations. Madurai has a culture tolerant to people who live by begging, therefore they are not often harassed. In Patna, they say they are evicted on occasions when political meetings are held in the large grounds of Gandhi Maidan, which is home for hundreds of homeless people. At such times, as Ranjeet says, 'the police can pick you up even when you are looking for a place to relieve yourself at night'. In all cities, ironically the worst periods for homeless people being evicted are Republic Day and Independence Day, because the pavements have to be swept clean, as 'dignitaries' will pass the streets, and they should not be offended by the unseemly presence of the city's unclean mass of homeless people.

[9] Abdul Shakeel Vs National Capital Territory, 2005 (A petition (24006/2005) was filed by Abdul Shakeel Basha on behalf of Aman Biradari in the High Court of Delhi to protest the police abuse of street child Mohd Assadur and others. The case was fought pro bono by HRLN)

But what is remarkable is that homeless people neither actively resist nor do they move away: they just silently wait out these periodic calamities, just in the way that they resiliently handle the cycle of nature's heat, rain, cold, floods and droughts. Within days of their eviction, they quietly return to where they lived in the past, and set themselves to the tasks of rebuilding their homeless lives one more time, until their next inevitable eviction, a bit like grass that bends low in a storm and then stands upright again when it passes.

It is for this reason that many have lived on the same pavement or temple courtyard once again. It is the same at railway stations. 'Amidst the medley of transit passengers who stretch out on streets or their bed-rolls in the platform awaiting their trains, are the regulars, mostly men and boys but also some women, who have made the Hazrat Nizamudin Railway Station their home. There is no sign of them during the rush of travellers through the day. But once darkness falls, even though trains continue to come and go, the platforms and all the open spaces around the station gradually and silently fill up with people who are cut away one way or the other from their roots. There are street children, beggars, street sex workers, leprosy patients, drug addicts, abandoned old people – a whole separate world of persons without a roof and people to take care of them, a microcosm of the unseen underbelly of the city. They have an uneasy relationship with the police and railway officials who on occasion evict them, sometimes brutally. They do not resist, but wait patiently for a few days, and then slowly, almost imperceptibly, they are back again. They have no other home'[10].

Therefore, another face of the brutality of the police to the homeless in cities is also what can be interpreted as a kind of passive tolerance by default, especially in cities like Chennai where homeless families have occupied the same stretch of pavement sometimes for generations. Some homeless people see a kind of implied kindness in the police, because simply they let them stay where they are. Sudhir, a barber who has lived and worked on the same pavement in Patna for 17 years affirms that there are good people in the world and that is why he can still think of living. He asks, 'If the police had caused me trouble, then would I have been able to live on same pavement for 17 long years?' He has benefited from no government schemes, and has no ration card. He just wants a house to live, where he faces no insecurity of eviction and it has a roof that does not drip in the rains, like so many other homeless people we spoke to of their dreams and aspirations.

[10] From 'Paying For His Tea' in Mander's Unheard Voices, Penguin, 2000.

But most homeless people are bitterly critical of the police, suspecting them even of allegiance to and complicity with sex work, drug peddling and the petty crime of the streets. The laws that criminalise the urban homeless include laws against vagrancy (such as the preventive Sections 109 and 151 in the Criminal Procedure Code), begging (such as the Bombay prevention of Begging Act, 1959 and Tamil Nadu Prevention of Begging Act, 1945) and juvenile justice (The Juvenile Justice act, 2006), which provide for arrest, incarceration and custodialisation for sleeping or loitering on the streets, for merely having 'no ostensible means of livelihood' or even for simply being a child 'in care of need and protection).

Given that our study confirmed that being beaten or evicted by the police was such a widely encountered experience of homeless living, it is remarkable that the numbers who admitted being arrested is not high. In Delhi, for instance, 15 per cent respondents said they were arrested for living on the streets, 14 per cent for begging, and 5.5 per cent for other crimes. The numbers are much lower in Chennai, where only 5 per cent reported being arrested for living on the streets or begging, and 6 for other crimes, whereas even in Madurai, only 7 per cent reported arrest for begging, and 8.5 per cent for sex work and other reasons. In Patna, 5 males and 3 females, i.e. 7 per cent of the respondents have been arrested for living on streets, and 2 men for begging. This is likely to be a significant underestimate, because of the stigma of arrest, both for crimes and for begging that homeless people themselves carry. In our work with homeless youth, we have found that although initially very few admit to arrest, we discover with time that in fact almost all street youth had spent many years in brutalised detention centres, and many had run away from these loveless facilities. The livelihoods of many homeless people like street vending and rickshaw pulling are also subject to continuous harassment and extortion by police and municipal authorities. But is still the *threat* of using these intensely anti-poor legal provisions more than their actual deployment, which holds the homeless populations in cities the throes of habitual fear and submission to public authority.

The record of positive services received by the homeless populations from government is much more dismal. There is one scheme central government for shelters for homeless people, with a budget of just 50 crore rupees for the entire country, enough to build and equip at best 20 night shelters[11]. But even these funds are not fully utilised, as also HUDCO funds for community toilets. Ration cards and voter identity cards are deeply valued as markers of citizenship, and in Delhi although 90 per cent of homeless people we spoke to wanted these, only 6.5 per cent had ration cards and 2 per cent voter IDs. This is despite our

[11] A comprehensive study of public policy neglect of the urban poor is found in N.C. Saxena's 'National Strategy for Urban Poor', the second chapter of this report.

finding that the homeless are not a transient population, but the majority have made this their home for even more than 10 years. The situation was a little better in Patna, where the percentages were 9 and 21 respectively. The administration has done much better in Tamil Nadu, where in Chennai around half had both cards, whereas in Madurai the ratios were 23 and 30 respectively. It was only in Chennai that we found some young homeless children enrolled in ICDS centres and schools, but even here very few destitute old people had pensions. 100 per cent of respondents in every city reported major health problems in the past year, and 56 per cent were advised hospitalisation but did not go to hospital. They found the government hospitals unwelcoming, discriminating because of their unclean unwashed bodies, and expensive (because of the costs of medicines and sometimes illegal charges by the public health practitioners).

The picture that emerges in the relationship with the State is of great official hostility to some of the most dispossessed residents of cities, homeless men and women, boys and girls. They survive without resistance their periodic onslaughts, as they feel profoundly powerless and have nowhere else to go. The State feels absolved of any responsibilities except *against* the urban poor. There is an unstated *de facto* hierarchy of citizenship. The legitimate citizens of the city who are deemed to deserve both protection and services from the State are those who live in homes and settled orderly colonies. Those who are too impoverished to afford these, are lesser citizens, with a downward hierarchy of legitimacy, from residents of authorised slums, to those that are unauthorised, to those finally who are at the bottom of the heap, the wretched mass of the cities' homeless. To them, the State owes nothing, except to drive them away from the city to which they are seen to have no rights whatsoever.

Surviving Loneliness on the Streets

Loneliness and social isolation persist as dominant motifs of street life. Around half the homeless respondents in our study said they never celebrated festivals, 71 per cent said they had no friends whom they could trust and 62 per cent felt that they belonged to no community, even of the homeless. Bhavani, an articulate and educated homemaker on Chennai's streets spoke of the shame she felt when she saw passers-by look at their exposed lives with disgust[12]. Lakshmi, married at 14, is wounded when her mother-in-law, remarks, 'How can she be of good character? She lives on the streets'. In Patna, a homeless person says, 'What will I get by going to where I am not treated with respect? Even if I am in need I will not go to ask for help, I will eat *roti* with salt and survive.' 62 out of 85 homeless

[12] Recounted by Manikandan

respondents in Patna felt they had never been helped by anyone during their lives on the streets.

The majority of homeless people, in all cities, of all ages and gender, find solace in their loneliness in some kind of drugs or intoxication. Vijay admitted that he was intoxicated with *ganja* most of his waking hours. 'I have smoked *ganja* for so many years, the time has come when I do not know whether I am sober or high' – he says. 'I need the *ganja* because it alone brings me solitude. There is no place I can go to, in order to escape the din, the hordes, where I can be by myself. Where I can think, be at peace, be at rest. Only when I smoke my *ganja*, I can be alone even in a crowd'. In Hanuman Mandir at night, we found many women who are almost always utterly in a daze, drunk or drugged. Some talk compulsively, but the conversation typically is disjointed and inarticulate.

Most street children like Ratul are introduced to the easy but deadly escape from pain and loneliness offered by soft drugs early in their days on the streets. Thinners are readily available at any stationery shop for 25 rupees a bottle. Shopkeepers know that the children who buy these are not using them for painting, but they do not hesitate to sell to the street urchins who flock to their stores. Two bottles are enough for a day for one child. They soak a rag and inhale the fumes of the solution, and it transports them to a world free from hurt and violence. But it also destroys their lungs, rendering them vulnerable to TB. Many children graduate to hard drugs like smack, but Ratul has steered himself away. He knows that for those who succumb to smack, it is virtually the end of the road. Qasim also sniffs the intoxicant. He recognises that sniffing is very dangerous and that why he has a constant pain in his chest. He tries repeatedly to kick the habit but still he cannot do it. Qasim earns about 100 to 150 rupees a day, and he spends about 50 rupees of this on the sniffing fluid, like most other children on the streets. Most of Lakshmis's friends are also addicted to 'solution' (thinner). She thinks it is not good to be addicted, and her friends also tell her to keep away from substances and that she is lucky to not have got into it. Sometimes, boys in the area trouble her by forcing her to sniff 'solution'; but she has still managed to keep away from getting addicted.

However, mostly we found that urban homeless people survive these extraordinarily difficult daily conditions of life on the harsh streets of cities, of not just State indifference and hostility, but also of stigma and frequent social isolation. At an emotional level, we found 3 main ways that they psychologically cope. If they live with their families on the streets, the bonds between members of these families are often mutually very protective and

supportive. If they did not have their families with them, many maintain close communication with their loved ones at home, for whose survival they accept the lonely rigours of street life. And finally, for those with neither – no family in the village and none on the streets - new bonds often grow on the streets between strangers, which may prove closer and more loyal than many ties of blood.

14 year old Lakshmi's mother is fiercely protective of her children and ensures that they are not harmed in any way. The researcher[13] observes that 'she has a very strong influence on her (daughter). She tells her all the time to be careful not to get into bad habits. She shares her despair with her and at the same time tells her that she is a child and needs to be happy and play. She gives all the children time to play (when they do not have to beg in the temple) and tries to work very hard so that they don't have work. She dreams that her children will have a future that is different from hers. Lakshmi on the other hand is a pillar of strength for her mother. She argues with father when he beats her mother. She says that many a times he is so ashamed that his daughter scolds him that he doesn't come back for many days. She feels that as the eldest daughter this is the least she can do for her mother'. In Chennai, two thirds of the respondents confirmed that they lived with their blood relations, in family units on the streets. Likewise, Deepak's rickshaw puller father in Patna denies himself routinely to ensure that his son eats well and is able to study.

Many live alone in the city to support their families in their villages, but emotionally they live on in their village homes. Despite her age and the fact that she can barely walk, Budhan Bai uncomplainingly begs eight months in a year alone in the city for the sake feeding her incapacitated husband in the village. Vijay has supported his family in Gwalior for years through his work as a night porter and his life on the streets. He brought his younger brother Raju to Delhi and arranged for him to learn work at a garage. Vijay hopes to set up a garage for him. His sister was married a few years ago mainly with the money he sent home over years. They found decent people, who agreed to take no dowry. For his ageing mother, he is still able to send money home regularly. But he is uncompromising that he will never marry nor raise a family. 'I cannot let my child have a life like the one that I have led', he says firmly. 'I am content instead to see my brother have a family, and a home. This is enough for me'. Jai's mother worked as a vendor of small items in a village in Nepal, carrying these in a huge *tokri* (basket) on her head, traversing the mountainous path, going home to home to sell her wares[14]. The family fell on hard times, and Jai ran away to Delhi, hoping to send money home. But work was scarce, and he fell into drugs, sleeping on the

[13] Dipa Sinha
[14] Related by Archana Rai

streets. He still sends money home when he can, but it is never often nor enough. He feels he has failed his family. He came to know that his old mother has again started selling knickknacks in a *tokri* … Jai worries, 'Now she is not young: its brings tears in my eyes to think of her traversing the mountainous path and going from house to house selling …' He has not told his family where he lives or what he does, Jai says, 'What do I tell them, that I live on the platforms, so that my parents will be more unhappy?' Instead he lies to them that he is doing fine and working in a electronic repair shop, at least it will bring some moments of peace to his parents, that one of the boys is doing well… But Chennai being a city of homeless families over generations, three-fourths said they had no bonds left with anyone in their villages of origin. Even half the Madurai homeless, the majority aged, abandoned and in begging, reported visiting their homes sometimes.

Others build new – and to an onlooker, sometimes surprising- bonds on the streets. 24 per cent of our respondents said they shared their life on the streets with adopted relatives. A lonely homeless widow Saroja met Rampyari, a crabby eccentric older widow who shared the community spaces of the temple compound. They cannot say who was initially drawn to whom, but Rampyari was kind to her, and Saroja in turn began to take care of the older woman. These two profoundly lonely women, each without family or home, decided to adopt each other as mother and daughter. It is a sturdy unwavering bond that has survived nearly two decades of the vicissitudes of life on the streets. It is typical of many such alliances that are formed between despised people in the world of the cities' pavements, sturdier in loyalities, more tolerant of idiosyncrasies, and more tender in giving, than most biological relationships. I recall a street boy who adopted a disabled old man as his grandfather: he would carry him long distance on his back, and for years save from his own earnings in rag-picking for food, medicines and even the older man's addictions. A mentally ill woman occupied the same space on pavement outside New Delhi railway station for years, but would eat only if one particular street boy would bring her food, and the boy, himself less than 10 years old, made it a point to share his earnings buying food for her everyday.

Street boys, cut off from their families in their village and alone in the city, tend to live in gangs, sharing everything - food, clothes, intoxicants, sleeping under the same sheet - teaching each other trades like rag-picking and recycling drinking water bottles, protecting each other from street violence and the police, and feeding each other in sickness. When we asked Ratul Das who was the finest adult he knew, he did not hesitate. It was Obhra *bhai*, a pickpocket in the New Delhi station. Ratul explained: "He protects us from older bullies,

buys medicines for us when we are sick, and discourages us when we inhale solution and other drugs. “I was on this platform since I was younger than you,” he tells us. “I know this world. If you take to drugs, you will never escape to a better life. You will die here. I will not let this happen to you”.’

They find other ways of enjoying life as well, some healthy, some less so. Ratul and his other street friends always find ways of having fun. Street entrepreneurs have set up makeshift video parlours, especially on lanes where they sell their rags and waste. These are nothing more than a space marked off by faded curtains with a television set. For 5 rupees, you can watch as many films as you like. The parlours are packed with the rejects of the city, street boys and lonely migrant workers, rickshaw-pullers, head loaders, construction workers, watching raptly Hindi cinema interspersed with pornographic films. Cinemas theatres still draw in the largest segment of homeless people: around a third find in its darkened halls a shelter not just against the rains but also their loneliness. 7 per cent watch television, often in shop windows or in the roadside eatery where they buy their food. But 30 per cent of the respondents (and nearly half those in Patna) say they have no source of recreation at all; they could not afford to enjoy for even brief moments the glitter of city lights.

Qasim likes to play cricket, but at the railway station, there is usually neither time nor the space to play. But they have found a small stretch outside the New Delhi Railway Station, basically a road, there are days when some street children play cricket there. Some employees of Railway Police Station Force, who otherwise thrash them wit their batons, also join them in play. And in this way, in the hardest of conditions, they still manage to grasp some of the joys that life offers.

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GLOSSARY OF INDIAN WORDS

Babool – Banyan tree

Beedis – Rolled Tobacco

Chhapa din - days of raids

Chullha - makeshift mud stoves

Dal – Cooked cereal

Dhaba - Hotel

Doordarshan – Indian television channel

Gamcha - Towel

Ganja - Cannabis

Gurudwara – Shrine of sikhs

Halla Gardi - Literally means 'commotion', which is also referred to bulldozers

Hammaals - Porters

Jajmani – Patron Client relationship

Maidan – Open place / Ground

Mandaps – Community hall

Mandir - Temple

Masjid / dargahs - Mosque

Mithai - Sweet

Musahar – A dalit community

Nikaah - Marriage

Rotis – Cooked wheat

Sahib – Person of respected position

Samosas, khichri, sattu, litti –Local eatables

Sulabh – Public toilets

Thijawalahs – Private Contractors

Tokri - Basket