

## Mobility Patterns and Economic Strategies of Houseless People in Old Delhi

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The sight of people sleeping at night on the pavements in large Indian cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Calcutta and Chennai conjures up an image of extreme poverty. More than any other category of the population, pavement dwellers appear to be living in conditions of acute deprivation from shelter and basic services; and it is no surprise to hear them being described as 'the unfortunate victims of diverse kinds of physical and social crisis among our rural and urban societies'.<sup>1</sup> At the macro-level the presence and increase of the shelterless population in big cities has been analysed as 'an inevitable outcome of the urbanization process',<sup>2</sup> a consequence of industrialization and economic development which induces the migration of the rural poor to major cities leading to a pressure on both land and housing.<sup>3</sup>

While it is not my purpose to deny this side of the reality, I would like to propose a more qualified appraisal of the practice of pavement dwelling and to show how the study of houseless people can also highlight other dimensions of the process of metropolization. In the same way that 'rural to urban' migrants should not be considered merely as pawns pushed and pulled by macro-economic forces but also as actors in a position to shape the urbanization process, so pavement dwellers in big cities should not be considered merely as the victims of dire poverty, but also as dynamic agents capable of implementing their own economic strategies and of finding appropriate responses to specific urban environments. Furthermore, the houseless migrants surveyed in Old Delhi exemplify how population mobility contributes to the restructuring of geographical space by transcending the rural/urban dichotomy. As observed in many developing cities, there is a process of functional integration between the metropolis and the settlements of its catchment area as the result of circular migration and the attendant flows of money, goods, information and ideas.<sup>4</sup> Admittedly, the shelterless migrants are not the only ones to practise this form of mobility between their native villages and the city of their in-migration: such a type of circular mobility is also observed among migrants settled in slums or among those belonging to the higher socio-economic strata.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, the residential

practices of the houseless population, perhaps more than those of any other category of city dweller, highlight a vision of the city as a space reshaped by migrants: 'a space of movement that envisages the city not as a place of sedentariness, but as a cross-roads of mobility'.<sup>6</sup>

In line with this perspective, this essay aims to investigate the mobility patterns and economic strategies of shelterless people who sleep in the streets of Old Delhi at night through a detailed micro-level analysis of their situation. At the same time, the specific focus on the shelterless people of the Walled City of Delhi—the historical core of the capital—allows us to illustrate the relationship between the transformation of urban space, population movements and social recomposition, and to show how urban space is subject to competing interests. The findings of this essay are based on primary data from my own socio-economic surveys: these are outlined in the paragraphs that follow along with a brief review of other available data, which suggests the need for reflection on the concept of houselessness.

## CONCEPT OF HOUSELESSNESS AND SOURCES OF DATA

### *Secondary Data Available*

Although the pavement dwellers are generally perceived as 'the poorest of the urban poor'<sup>7</sup> the issue of houselessness is often overlooked<sup>8</sup> in the abundant literature dealing with the urban poor and the urbanization problems.<sup>9</sup> Primary survey data is relatively scarce<sup>10</sup> as compared to the numerous studies of the inhabitants of slums and squatter settlements. In particular, there is a striking absence of research which deals specifically with the pavement dwellers of the capital city of Delhi.<sup>11</sup> A direct consequence of this paucity is a lack of accurate information about this segment of the population. Even its number remains in doubt: 22,516 according to the 1981 Census and about 50,000 according to the 1991 Census.<sup>12</sup> These figures are obviously underestimates, due in part to the problems of identifying and enumerating this specific segment of the population during census operations, which devote little time to this category of people.<sup>13</sup> According to a more realistic estimate provided by the Slum and Jhuggi-Jhonpri Department of the Delhi Development Authority in 1985, the number of houseless people in Delhi is approximately 1 per cent of its total population. This would mean about 1,00,000 persons in the mid-1990s.

The heaviest and most conspicuous concentrations of pavement dwellers are found in the Old city and its extensions, where the Municipality has—logically—opened 10 of its 18 night shelters (6 in the Walled City proper). These represent three quarters of the total sleeping capacity of about 4,500 spaces provided for shelterless people in the entire urban agglomeration. As expounded in the next section, the morphological and economic characteristics of the historical core of the capital city contribute to its specific attraction to a floating population without shelter. The decision to focus this investigation on pavement dwellers in Old Delhi was influenced by these factors.

### *The Concept of Houselessness*

Apart from the problem of widely diverging numerical estimates, another difficulty with the secondary data on the houseless population of Delhi—and indeed of other cities—is the absence of consensus regarding terminology. Various terms are used: ‘homeless’, ‘houseless’, ‘roofless’, ‘shelterless’ people or ‘pavement dwellers’, but these do not always cover the same group of population. Furthermore, the same term may be defined quite differently in different studies. For instance, in studies on pavement dwelling, while some focus specifically on ‘truly shelterless persons’,<sup>14</sup> others also include pavement dwellers with some kind of temporary shelter,<sup>15</sup> and in certain studies on Delhi, the inmates of municipal night shelters are also included.<sup>16</sup> The Census of India uses the notion of ‘houseless population’, defined as persons who are not living in ‘census houses’, the latter referring to ‘a structure with roof’; hence the enumerators are instructed ‘to take note of the possible places where the houseless population is likely to live such as on the roadside, pavements, in hume pipes, under staircases, or in the open, temples, mandaps, platforms and the like’.<sup>17</sup> It is worth pointing out that similar problems of reliable estimation and clear definition of the houseless population are also encountered in surveys conducted in American and European cities.<sup>18</sup> As rightly noted by Bienveniste, ‘Homelessness is not a characteristic that defines a sub-group, but rather a situation common to heterogeneous populations at some time in their lives.’<sup>19</sup> This also points to two major characteristics of this segment of the urban population: its heterogeneity and mobility (as this essay will highlight), not to mention the invisibility of certain sections of it.

### *Specific Survey of Houseless People Conducted in Old Delhi*

In this study of houseless people in Old Delhi, the population under focus consists of persons without any form of shelter of their own, in other words those who sleep at night on the pavements (entirely in the open or partly protected by verandas), in other open spaces or in night shelters run by the municipality and who do not have any personal fixed abode in the city. Persons who squat on the pavements by erecting temporary constructions or structures are hence outside the scope of this study; in any case, such situations are usually not found within the Walled City on which my surveys have been focused. While presenting the findings of this case study, I shall refer to the population surveyed by using the terms ‘houseless’ people, ‘shelterless’ people or ‘pavement dwellers’ interchangeably.<sup>20</sup> I deliberately 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. This term is commonly used in the North American context where it may correspond to social reality,<sup>21</sup> 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, I use here the terms 'shelterlessness' or 'houselessness' to refer to a concrete situation (the lack of physical shelter) in a specific place at a given time (in Delhi during the period of observation); but it must be borne in mind that the situation currently observed in Delhi 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).

The research on which this study is based was composed of two types of surveys: a statistical survey carried out in January-March 1996, covering a total sample of 248 individuals selected by area sampling from the main concentrations of pavement dwellers in the Walled City and the six night shelters run by the municipality in the same area; and in-depth interviews conducted simultaneously with a sub-sample of 36 individuals that were randomly selected.<sup>22</sup>

### THE WALLED CITY OF OLD DELHI: THE TRANSFORMATION OF URBAN SPACE AND POPULATION MOVEMENT

The Walled City of Old Delhi, otherwise known as Shahjahanabad—the historic core built by the Mughals in the seventeenth century—exhibits features typical of traditional Indian cities, with a mixed land-use pattern combining a high concentration of residential units with an important aggregation of commercial and small-scale manufacturing establishments. However, what is remarkable in the case of Old Delhi are the extremely high residential densities (on average 616 persons per hectare in the Walled City in 1991, with a maximum of 1596 in one of the census divisions) combined with an equally impressive congestion of economic activities.

#### *Population Deconcentration and the Intensification of Economic Activities*

This situation is in fact the result of a two-pronged process which has affected the dynamics and urban morphology of the old city core. On the one hand, there has been a decline in the resident population, first noticeable in certain areas during the decade 1961-71,<sup>23</sup> and which has since continued to spread. Hence, although the present residential densities are still excessively high in the Walled City, they were significantly higher in 1961, with an average of about 740 persons per hectare. But at the same time, the Walled City has recorded a dramatic increase in the number of its commercial establishments (shops, workshops, warehouses and wholesale markets) as well as manufacturing workshops, including noxious industries and hazardous trades. For example, the number of registered commercial establishments increased by 700 per cent in two decades, from 22,000 units in 1961 to 1,55,000 units in 1981.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, as Mehra has rightly underlined,<sup>25</sup> the official statistics underestimate the extent of this growth in economic activities, since they do not include the informal sector of employment.

While the decongestion of the population from the urban core is in line with one of the objectives of the Delhi Master Plan—although the actual extent of the population decrease remains far below that initially proposed<sup>26</sup>—the proliferation of commercial and industrial activities is in direct contradiction with the objectives of urban planners. Thus, in the 1990 Master Plan, we read: 'in case of the Walled City, the objective is to clean the area from noxious and hazardous industries and trades to check further commercialization and industrialization of this area and to revitalize the same to its glory of the past'.<sup>27</sup> In fact, these recommendations of the Master Plan, perspective 2001 (published in 1990) provide ample evidence of the failure of the earlier 1962 Plan, and highlight instead the significant role of private actors, whose economic rationale goes against institutional intentions.

*The Transformation of Urban Morphology  
and Social Recomposition*

The overuse of the physical space and building infrastructure in the Walled City—both in terms of residential and economic use—has contributed to the degradation of its housing stock. However, the 'cycle of deterioration' was at the outset a perverse outcome of rent control policies which led to inadequate income generation, thereby discouraging landlords from incurring expenses in maintaining their buildings.<sup>28</sup> As time went on, practically all areas of the Walled City became classified as 'slums' under the Slum Areas (Improvement and Clearance) Act of 1956.

The transformation of the urban morphology of the Walled City and its decaying housing conditions must also be understood in relation to the social recomposition of the residing population. The better off sections of the population have tended to move out of the old city, in search of better housing conditions in less congested residential areas, leaving behind mainly people from low-income groups, in particular tenants who would not be able to afford alternative accommodation elsewhere in the urban agglomeration.<sup>29</sup> Besides, the proliferation of commercial and manufacturing activities, along with the related services which provide a large number of informal job opportunities, has attracted a floating population of male migrant workers whose residential integration remains extremely precarious.<sup>30</sup> Thus, at night many of them are found sleeping under the verandas in bazaars, on pavements and other open grounds, or in night shelters run by the municipality for houseless people. The fact that the two main railway stations and the main inter-state bus terminal are located within the Walled City or in its immediate vicinity has also played a role in contributing not only to the general economic buoyancy of the old city and increased employment opportunities in the area, but also to the movement patterns of shelterless migrants. Upon their arrival in the city, they are in immediate proximity to (or easily directed to) locations where opportunities for unskilled labour are high, and where sleeping space can be found in pavement dwelling areas or in night shelters.

*The Economic Functions of the Old City and Occupational Opportunities for the Houseless*

The different types of occupations performed by the houseless people surveyed show how the economic functions of Old Delhi are directly reflected in the major occupational groups of this population (Table 6.1). There is first of all the large category of handcart pullers and pushers transporting goods in and out of the wholesale markets of the old city (24 per cent of the respondents were engaged in this work as their principle occupation). Loading and unloading activities in the markets, and the carriage of luggage to and from the two main railway stations also provide considerable employment opportunities for the pavement dwellers. The transport of passengers by cycle rickshaw in this densely populated and very buoyant market area, with two adjoining railway stations and the inter-state bus terminal, is another activity attracting a significant number of houseless workers (20 per cent of respondents cited it as their main activity). Altogether, the sector of transport seems to absorb the majority of the houseless workers based in the Walled City (52 per cent of respondents cited it as their main activity). This would appear to be a major distinctive characteristic of the occupational structure of this shelterless population, as compared to the male population of urban Delhi as a whole, but also as compared to the

TABLE 6.1. OCCUPATIONAL PATTERN OF THE HOUSELESS POPULATION OF OLD DELHI, 1996

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Main occupation</i>		<i>Other occupations</i>		<i>All occupations</i>	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Clerical workers	2	0.8	–	–	2	0.6
Sales workers (vendors, shop assistants)	10	4.1	1	1.2	11	3.4
Cooks, waiters and related workers	54	22.2	46	56.1	100	30.8
Other service workers (domestic servants, barbers, etc.)	2	0.8	2	2.4	4	1.2
Production workers including mechanics and repairmen	16	6.6	2	2.4	18	5.5
Construction workers including painters	22	9.1	7	8.5	29	8.9
Loaders, unloaders and porters	21	8.6	10	12.2	31	9.5
Handcart pushers or pullers	58	23.9	7	8.5	65	20.0
Cycle rickshaw drivers	48	19.8	6	7.3	54	16.6
Other drivers (motor vehicle)	1	0.4	1	1.2	2	0.6
Rag pickers	5	2.1	–	–	5	1.5
Beggars	3	1.2	–	–	3	0.9
Other workers	1	0.4	–	–	1	0.3
Total	243	100.0	82	100.0	325	100.0

Non-workers = 5.

The occupations taken into account include all types of work carried out in Delhi during the 12 months preceding the survey. Hence those occupations carried out outside Delhi during the reference period have been excluded.

Source: Own sample survey—1996.

TABLE 6.2. PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF THE HOUSELESS POPULATION OF OLD DELHI BY INDUSTRIAL CATEGORY

<i>Industrial category</i>	<i>Houseless population of Old Delhi 1996*</i>	<i>Male population of Old Delhi 1991**</i>	<i>Male population of the whole of urban Delhi 1991**</i>
Agriculture, livestock, mining, quarrying	0.0	0.6	1.3
Manufacturing, processing, repairs	6.2	32.0	26.4
Construction	9.0	2.8	7.9
Trade, commerce, restaurants, hotels	28.4	38.3	26.4
Transport, communication	51.9	7.9	8.8
Community, social and personal services	4.5	18.3	29.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

*Source:* \* Own sample survey—1996.

Sample of 243 workers classified by their main occupation (non-workers = 5)

\*\* *Census of India 1991, Delhi, Primary Census Abstract.*

male population residing in the Walled City: the sector of transport and communication employed only 8 to 9 per cent of the corresponding workers in 1991 (Table 6.2).

Another specificity of Old Delhi lies in the many labour markets (in the strict neo-classical sense of the term) which take place in different locations of the Walled City. Some of them are specialized in recruiting particular types of workers, such as waiters, cooks and related service workers for marriage parties and other functions which require catering services and the setting up of temporary tent structures to host large numbers of guests. The demand for these types of workers is subject to seasonal fluctuation, with peaks corresponding to the most auspicious periods for marriage ceremonies. Such employment opportunities draw many houseless workers, many of whom do such work as a supplementary seasonal or temporary activity. While the occupational category of waiters, cooks and related service workers accounts for 22 per cent of the main occupations reported by the respondents, it accounts for 56 per cent of the supplementary occupations reported (Table 6.1). On the other hand, marginal activities such as rag picking and begging which are often associated with the plight of the urban poor, absorb very few of the houseless surveyed in Old Delhi (2 and 1 per cent respectively in the sample). Rag picking is more specifically carried out by children and teenagers.

#### *Services Developed for the Houseless*

A range of services specifically oriented towards the needs of the houseless population have also developed in the Old City. The government itself, taking cognizance of the plight of the houseless, started constructing night shelters

in the early 1960s, 6 out of the 18 functioning today being located within the Walled City. In the night shelters run by the municipality, for a nominal rate of Rs. 3 per night,<sup>31</sup> each inmate is provided with a blanket and a floor carpet, and has free access to the toilets and bathrooms usually available in the same building.

Some small private entrepreneurs, perceiving the shelterless situation of so many as a good business opportunity, rent out sleeping place and bedding facilities to pavement dwellers. Quilts are available on hire for an average rate of Rs. 5 per night, and cots with bedding for an average rate of Rs. 15 per night. Most of the entrepreneurs involved in this business also provide sleeping space to their customers: at night they encroach on some sections of the pavements, in particular those covered by verandas, as well as pedestrian over-bridges and precincts, or other open grounds, on which they spread plastic ground sheets or place their cots. In the sleeping areas which are entirely exposed, overhead plastic sheets are also arranged on rainy nights to protect the sleepers. The bedding facilities are particularly in demand in the winter, when the temperature at night can go down to as low as 3° C. However, the offer of a relatively protected sleeping place, and of cots for those who can afford it, is also taken up during other seasons. Since the renting out of quilts and cots in public spaces is carried out without authorization, it inevitably leads to police interference, which at worst results in the eviction of both quilt owners and pavement dwellers; and, in order to minimize this risk, bribes are paid to the police by the informal entrepreneurs. However, a substantial proportion of the pavement dwellers do not rent bedding facilities; rather they have their own blankets and sleep on pavements covered by verandas or in open spaces where access is free<sup>32</sup>—though not necessarily free from police harassment.

Another type of service developed for pavement dwellers is the provision of hot meals from roadside food stalls directly set up on the pavements, on a temporary basis usually for just a few hours every night at dinner time. Roadside tea stalls are also a common sight in and around the pavement dwelling areas and are sometimes operated by the same entrepreneurs who rent out quilts.

#### THE LIFE SPACE OF HOUSELESS PEOPLE: THE CITY PAVEMENT AND THE VILLAGE

In this section I shall attempt to reconstitute the life space of pavement dwellers and to identify its structuring poles through an examination of their conditions of integration in the city, the relations they maintain with their native places and their future plans. At a micro level, this will allow us to assess the significance of moorings in the native village or town for the majority of houseless people in Old Delhi, and to highlight the relevance of the basic unit of social organization, the family. This, in turn, will help us better understand the trajectory and present living practices of pavement



dwellers. At a macro level, it will provide important indications of the degree of integration between urban and rural spaces, the city pavement and the village. As a prelude, a brief outline of the socio-demographic profile and migration history of houseless people will help us better portray the characteristics of this population.

### *Socio-Demographic Profile*

The first salient feature of the houseless population in Old Delhi is that it is almost exclusively male, composed of single men or men living in a single state. Access to the night shelters run by the municipality is, in fact, restricted to males. Among the main pavement dwelling areas identified in various open spaces of the Walled City, very few women and families (less than ten) could be seen during the headcount, and their presence was moreover confined to one or two localities. Therefore, the sample surveyed comprised male individuals only. The predominance of single men (unmarried or not) among pavement dwellers is especially pronounced in the Walled City as compared to some other parts of Delhi such as Nizamuddin where pavement dwellers are also located but where familial units are more conspicuous. At the same time, it is also a distinctive characteristic of Delhi as a whole when compared to other Indian metropolitan cities. This is clearly shown by the sex ratio of the houseless population in the first four megalopolises as recorded in the 1981 Census.<sup>33</sup> Here we find 187 females to 1000 males in Delhi urban agglomeration, as against 453:1000 in Calcutta, 278:1000 in Bombay and 955:1000 in Madras. The average size of the shelterless households found elsewhere further confirms the specificity of the capital city: 1.9 in Delhi as a whole, as against 4.8 in Calcutta, 2.0 in Bombay and 4.1 in Madras.

The quasi absence of familial units on the pavements of the Walled City is reflected in the age composition of the shelterless population. Although the presence of street children living on their own is one of the most disquieting features of the city, in demographic terms they represent only a very minor group among all the pavement dwellers (less than 5 per cent of respondents were below 15). The majority of the pavement dwellers (54 per cent of respondents) are young people belonging to the age group 15-29 years.

More significant from the point of view of social integration is the marital status of this population. Of the respondents 78 per cent in the 15-29 age group and 43 per cent of those aged 30 and above had never married. To better appraise the specificity of the houseless population, these figures can be compared to the corresponding percentages found in the 1991 Census for the male population of the Delhi urban agglomeration as a whole. Here we find that while 62 per cent of those in the 15-29 age group were unmarried, only 3 per cent of those aged 30 and above remained unmarried. The remarkably high percentage of houseless persons who remained unmarried

at a relatively advanced age indicates a certain degree of social marginality among the houseless, and is a manifestation of the individualization process, whether chosen or endured. The circumstances of people's migration to Delhi and their life stories more generally will provide some explanation of this situation.

The percentage of houseless people in Old Delhi belonging to Scheduled Castes and Tribes is a good indicator of whether or not members of this population hail from the most underprivileged sections of society. In the sample population, 13 per cent of respondents reported belonging to a scheduled caste or tribe. Given the sampling errors, this represents a proportion very close to that recorded in the total male population of the Walled City at the 1991 Census, namely 11 per cent. Interestingly, it is also almost similar to the proportion of Scheduled Castes and Tribes recorded in the 1971 Census among the houseless population in the territory of the Delhi Municipal Corporation, namely, 12 per cent for males. On the other hand, the proportion of Scheduled Castes and Tribes among the pavement dwellers of Old Delhi is significantly lower than their share in the male population of the entire Delhi urban agglomeration, that is 19 per cent at the 1991 Census. Though no comparison can be drawn with census data, it is noteworthy that the majority of the houseless surveyed in Old Delhi (56 per cent) belong to upper castes or communities, the remaining share corresponding to Other Backward Classes (31 per cent).

The proportion of illiterates is an alternative indicator of socio-economic backwardness. In this respect the houseless population in the Walled City appears clearly disadvantaged, containing 38 per cent of illiterates, whereas, according to the 1991 Census, the proportion of illiterates in the total male population of the Walled City was 24 per cent, and in the total male population of urban Delhi only 18 per cent.<sup>34</sup>

### *Migration History*

Migration is a common experience shared by almost all houseless people in Old Delhi (96 per cent of the respondents are from outside Delhi) and the large majority of migrants (61 per cent of the sample) have come directly from their native place to the capital. Most of them (69 per cent) hail from rural areas with the largest single group coming from Uttar Pradesh (47 per cent), followed by Bihar. The large proportion of people from the neighbouring state of Uttar Pradesh conforms to the general pattern of migration to the capital city; what seems more remarkable is that the catchment area of the Old Delhi pavements extends farther to eastern and southern states such as West Bengal, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. These findings are consistent with the survey of pavement dwellers in Old Delhi conducted by the Delhi Development Authority in 1989, according to which 98 per cent of the respondents were migrants, most of them coming from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. For comparative purposes, it can be recalled here that, at the 1991 Census, migrants accounted for 40 per cent of the

total male urban population of Delhi, with 45 per cent of them coming from Uttar Pradesh.

Analysis of the reasons which motivated departure from the native place (or home) and migration to Delhi (or arrival on the pavements) reveals contrasting situations. One striking feature is the impact of familial tensions and quarrels: children beaten up by a drunken father or ill-treated by a stepmother, cases of disputes over family property after the death of the father, quarrels with a spouse, brother, parent or other relative, etc., are frequently quoted in the migration histories of respondents.<sup>35</sup> For those who migrated to Delhi under circumstances of familial crisis, the main concern was to escape an unbearable situation, and it is small wonder that their arrival in Delhi was often ill-prepared, and that their choice of destination was uncertain or even left to chance while catching the first departing train. In case where flight from home was followed by the severing of all familial links, it comes as no surprise that the young unmarried migrant will generally remain unmarried, since he is no longer in a position to benefit any more from the support of his family who under normal circumstances would arrange the marriage.

In greater conformity to the general pattern of migration expected for a large metropolis, the majority of respondents (66 per cent of the migrants) chose to come to Delhi for reasons related to better employment opportunities and economic prospects. This includes the many migrants from rural areas or small towns, whose incomes in the native place were not sufficient to sustain their families, as well as young people anxious to earn an income on their own outside familial agriculture. The decision to come to Delhi was sometimes made without specific information about the labour market there, and was based more on the general assumption that Delhi, being a big city, must provide opportunities. This attitude is exemplified in the sayings that in Delhi 'everybody can accommodate himself' or 'everybody can find a job if hardworking'. Some pavement dwellers, especially some children and young people, were initially attracted by the capital city as a place to visit but eventually stayed over, because they too found greater economic scope in Delhi.

#### *Conditions of Integration in the City*

In addition to the economic attraction exerted by the capital city, a migrant's choice to come to Delhi is often influenced by the presence of relatives, parents or co-villagers already working in the capital and conveying information about job opportunities. The importance of relatives and friends in transmitting information to prospective migrants has been highlighted in migration studies,<sup>36</sup> and the houseless migrants of Old Delhi, like other labour migrants, make use of familial and social networks whenever possible. Help related to finding a job or starting work as self-employed was most prominent in migrants' accounts, followed by help related to accommodation or a place to sleep.<sup>37</sup> In the majority of cases, it was the migrant who

approached the network of relatives or co-villagers, showing that the houseless condition does not necessarily mean that pavement dwellers operate in a familial and social vacuum. However, the economic and housing conditions of the relatives already settled in Delhi may put limits to the type and duration of help extended to new migrants, especially as far as accommodation is concerned. In a few examples, after an initial stay with his parents or relatives in a slum hut or one-room tenement, the migrant was compelled to leave due to lack of space and to stay in a night shelter or a pavement dwelling area. The persons working in the occupation or sector of activity in which the migrant eventually becomes absorbed also play an appreciable role in introducing him to new work, including sometimes training, and showing him cheap (or free) and convenient places to sleep.

In fact, the work place and the community of workers in the same type of occupation come to provide the main network of socialization for the houseless people during their stay in Delhi. In the wholesale market of Khari Baoli especially, many handcart pullers can be seen staying together in groups at night, sleeping on their carts or under the verandas of the market, and cooking food collectively on pavements. Another important network of socialization among houseless people in an urban setting is based on village or regional affiliation. The survey revealed several interesting examples of migration channels rooted in familial or village tradition. This was the case with some of the pavement dwellers working as cycle rickshaw drivers, handcart pullers or construction labourers in Delhi. Working on a seasonal basis during the lean agricultural months, some were perpetuating a practice initiated by their fathers, or by other villagers. They followed a migration channel already well established, going to the same labour markets, the same rickshaw garages, and sleeping on the same pavements. Such groups of villagers can be found in the wholesale spice and grain market of Khari Baoli or under the verandas of Asaf Ali Road. In the latter place, for example, there was one group of some 25-30 persons who came from the same village in Uttar Pradesh, lived together on the pavement despite belonging to different castes, and sometimes even cooked together. Moreover, they returned together to their village for the main festivals, and each month one member of the group went back to the village taking the remittances from all the other villagers working in Delhi in order to redistribute them to their respective families. Thus, a community life had been reconstituted among the pavement dwellers, based on belonging to the same place of origin, and this link transcended caste differences, at least during the temporary stay in Delhi, where earning money was the predominant preoccupation.

#### *Relations Maintained with the Place of Origin*

As revealed by the in-depth interviews, most of the houseless people surveyed still have family members staying in their native place and the majority of them visit their native place and family more or less regularly (at least once in the last two years according to the survey) or intend to do so in the case of

very recent migrants who have been in Delhi for less than one year.<sup>38</sup> A notable proportion of the houseless migrants also maintain contacts with their families through letters. Another revealing indication is the practice of remittances or support in kind provided to the family: about half of the respondents who still have family members in their native place provide financial support, often supplemented by gifts of clothes or household items at the time of visits. Reciprocal exchanges in favour of the migrant in Delhi are rare, which is only to be expected given the fact that it is precisely the unsatisfactory nature of economic conditions in the native place which pushed many migrants to leave in the first place.

However, contrary to what might be expected, the houseless migrants in Delhi do not necessarily hail from the poorest rural families, and apart from having familial houses in their native places, many of them come from families with agricultural land, though the size of properties is generally small. For those migrants who have not broken away from their families, familial assets in the place of origin represent a form of security, since they involve rights on land and a share of the family property. Conversely, the protection of their rights over familial properties provides an incentive for migrants to maintain relationships with their native places and send remittances to their families. As observed frequently in the process of rural-urban migration in developing countries, access to agricultural land can be used as a lever by the village community to control migrants from afar and to benefit from the economic returns of their work in the city.<sup>39</sup>

Attachment to the family is further revealed by future plans to return to the native place (in the near or distant future), a wish that was shared by the majority of houseless migrants interviewed. Those who wished to return to their native places, often made plans for future investments. In particular, many planned to open up a general store or some other type of shop in the village, to buy more agricultural land or to invest more generally in agriculture. To realize these projects, the individuals interviewed planned to raise funds from their own savings, supplemented, if necessary, by a familial contribution. Some of these investment projects may not be realized, yet some seem viable given the saving capacity of the workers concerned. This shows a definite degree of economic dynamism among certain houseless persons, and conveys an image not of abject poverty, but of economic calculation involving temporary sacrifice in terms of housing conditions in the city as a short-term measure geared towards improving economic conditions in the native place.

The above investigation makes it possible to draw up a typology of the houseless migrants living in Old Delhi as regards their degree of attachment to their family and native place. Concerning the significance of familial units for houseless individuals living alone in Old Delhi, two distinct—and opposite—patterns can be identified, with a whole range of intermediary possibilities. Corresponding to the highest degree of familial integration, one can find seasonal migrants coming to Delhi every year to work for a few months, usually during the lean season for agriculture, and directly supporting their families in the native place. Close to this group in terms of

their integration are married migrants whose wives and children (if any) remained with the extended families in their native place and to whom remittances are periodically sent. There are also unmarried migrants contributing to the familial income. Both such groups visit their families regularly. These remitter-migrants exemplify familial solidarity which transcends residential unity: this is a common feature of the migration process, especially rural-urban migration, both in India and in other developing countries.<sup>40</sup> What needs to be underlined here is that the houseless condition of the migrant in the city does not prevent him from exercising this solidarity; in fact, as I shall show in the next section, it is this very condition which allows him to support his family financially.

At the lowest end of the scale of familial attachment are those individuals who ran away from home following an acute familial crisis often involving violence (quarrel, dispute, etc.), and who eventually severed all links with their families and home. Whilst most of the children interviewed belonged to this category, there were also some young adults who had felt compelled to take this radical step, and even some older men who experienced familial crisis at a relatively advanced age. Given the circumstances of their departure from home, these migrants or escapees cannot rely on familial networks for their integration within the city. Among this section of houseless people, which nevertheless remains a minority, a process of individualization and anomie, more forced than chosen, may be at work as a consequence of the breaking away from the basic social institution of the family. Such traumatic experiences at the origin of the shelterless situation of those men should not be confused with the few examples of pavement dwellers who made a deliberate decision to withdraw from family life and material attachments in order to live a life of renunciation—or close to it.

In sum, living alone and without shelter does not necessarily imply social marginality. The majority of the houseless surveyed in Old Delhi maintain relationships and various links with their families in their native places which remain their basic contexts of reference. As a matter of fact, the importance of the native village as a structuring pole of the migrants' life space might be more marked for houseless migrants (barring those who have severed all links with their families) than for those migrants whose residential integration is less precarious: thus, this local reference which also contains a mythical dimension probably helps the pavement dwellers to better accept their present living conditions in Delhi and to justify the hardship and degrading aspects of their situation. 'City dwellers by compulsion, yet villagers by heart' is a phrase which summarizes the dual identity of the majority of houseless migrants.

## ECONOMIC AND RESIDENTIAL STRATEGIES

In this section, I shall further investigate the economic and residential strategies of the houseless people surveyed in Old Delhi, examining economic conditions, choice of sleeping places, and willingness to move and to pay for

a dwelling. I shall attempt to appraise the elements of choice and constraint, by asking the following question: to what extent is the shelterless situation the consequence of exclusion from access to the urban housing system and to what extent does it also correspond to a residential strategy aimed at improving individual or familial economic conditions? And is shelterlessness merely a transitory stage preceding a person's better integration into the urban housing system or does it correspond to a permanent way of life or at least a prolonged one lasting the duration of a person's stay in Delhi?

### *Economic Conditions*

One striking feature of the economic condition of this segment of population is the great variety of situations encountered. The different types of occupation performed by houseless people have been already described (see Tables 6.1 and 6.2), in relation to the economic characteristics of Old Delhi. The proportion of respondents who did not report any income generating activity in Delhi remained marginal (2 per cent of the sample).<sup>41</sup> These were essentially very recent in-migrants who had been in Delhi for less than one month and were still looking for jobs. From this point of view, the shelterless population of Old Delhi proves to be an integral part of the metropolitan labour force. This accords with the findings of previous studies on pavement dwellers and night shelter inmates in Delhi.<sup>42</sup>

In terms of money earned, the houseless workers appear to form a very heterogeneous section of the labour force: the average monthly earnings (for the twelve months preceding the 1996 survey) ranged from Rs. 300 (in the case of a child helper in a tea stall) to Rs. 4,500 (in the case of a pavement dweller involved in some illegal trade combined with other legal occupations),<sup>43</sup> with 60 per cent of respondents earning between Rs. 1,000 and Rs. 2,000 per month (for their main occupations only). Furthermore, intra-occupational income differentials are very large.

The incomes generated by the houseless workers place them in the low-income group, yet, with the exception of one case, all the respondents of the sample would be above the poverty line of Rs. 310 per capita per month, considered to be the expenditure required for a daily calorie intake of 2100 per person in urban areas at 1995-6 prices.<sup>44</sup> This would appear to apply even after taking into consideration the remittances sent to the family outside Delhi. In proportion to their income levels, the saving capacity of the majority of the houseless is also far from being marginal. Remittances to the family and future plans for investment following their return to their native place are other encouraging indicators of the economic potential of a good number of them. In this respect, the findings of this survey corroborate the conclusions of other studies on the urban poor, such as Kundu's assertion that 'the thesis regarding economic marginality of the people in urban informal sectors, slum dwellers, pavement dwellers and others is an exaggeration'.<sup>45</sup>

Yet, the insecurity of employment and the uncertainty of getting sufficient work constitute widespread concerns. Going daily or periodically to the labour market to get recruited by a contractor or to the wholesale markets and bazaars to find assignments, is the common fate of construction workers, service workers in the catering industry, loaders and unloaders, handcart pushers (who help the main pullers and are recruited by them), and other casual labourers. Among the houseless working as employees, only a very small minority have secured salaried jobs. As for self-employed workers such as handcart pullers and cycle rickshaw drivers, they have to hire their cart or rickshaw everyday without any guarantee of the number of trips—of goods or passengers—they will be able to obtain. The situation for street vendors, roadside mechanics, and others self-employed in the informal sector is similar in terms of general precariousness and corresponding irregularity of income.

As a response to this risk of unemployment and irregularity of work, houseless workers have developed the strategy of combining several occupations and being flexible about changing work. Thus, almost one-third of respondents reported having had more than one occupation in Delhi in the last year (most reported two). These occupations are often alternated according to the changing opportunities of the labour market, in particular according to seasonal patterns; sometimes different activities are also carried on simultaneously throughout the year (see also Table 6.1).

All of this means that, although most of the houseless surveyed in Old Delhi had not experienced unemployment during the preceding year (among those who had few reported significant unemployment periods), the insecurity of employment and the consequent lack of guaranteed regular income are some of the most significant features of the economic condition of these workers and a critical factor for understanding their shelterless condition.

### *Financial Constraints*

Given the economic condition of the pavement dwellers, financial constraints undoubtedly constitute a major obstacle in obtaining housing. However, the significance of this factor has to be appraised in relation to other factors and to be considered in a long-term perspective. Financial constraints are likely to be most stringent at the initial stages of pavement dwelling when the migrant first arrives in Delhi and is yet to be absorbed into the labour market. Later, the key constraint is not so much the average level of income as the lack of guarantee of a regular income. This element of uncertainty restrains many shelterless casual workers from contemplating accommodation on rent even if they have the financial potential to pay for it, for they do not wish to entail regular and fixed expenses which cannot be adjusted in relation to actual earnings. On the other hand, expenses for hiring a quilt or a cot outside or for entrance to a night shelter are incurred on a daily basis and are therefore easily adjustable to daily earnings.

Further elements for understanding the residential strategies of pavement dwellers are revealed in their frequent practice of changing



sleeping locations during the year. In particular, seasonal patterns can be observed, with various possible combinations. For example, in the summer, preference is given to sleeping on open grounds, non-covered pavements, road dividers, or in parks; during the rainy season, verandas, night shelters, cots or mattresses on hire in sleeping areas protected with ground and overhead plastic sheeting, are more in demand; and in winter preference is given to quilts on hire, night shelters and verandas. Some pavement dwellers have been repeating the same seasonal patterns with the same combination of locations for years. This flexibility in sleeping places also helps us understand how pavement dwellers who can afford to spend Rs. 3 per night for access to a night shelter, or Rs. 5 for hiring a quilt, or up to Rs. 15 for a cot and bedding, are not necessarily ready to spend the equivalent monthly amount to rent a room. Whereas taking a room on rent entails regular and fixed expenses throughout the year, resorting to a night shelter or bedding on hire involves daily expenses which can be reduced to zero during certain periods of the year when climatic conditions are favourable.

Even for those houseless persons with a sufficient and regular saving capacity to rent a room (alone or by sharing it with one or two other workers) priority may be given to remittances to the family or to long-term savings for future investment in the native place. In other words, preference may be given to the family's living conditions in the native place over the migrant's living conditions in Delhi, and to the future over the present. In such cases, it cannot be said that there are absolute financial constraints preventing the houseless migrant from renting a room, but rather relative ones resulting from his own choice and priorities.

### *Proximity to the Workplace*

Another major factor for understanding the shelterless situation of many workers in Old Delhi and their choice of sleeping place is the location of their workplace. Closer proximity to the place of work or source of employment opportunities is one of the reasons respondents gave for staying initially on the pavement or in a night shelter, and more frequently to explain their choice of a specific place to sleep. The actual 'residential' location of the houseless is more revealing than their explicit answers. Most of the respondents interviewed in Old Delhi work in the Walled City itself, or in the adjoining areas, within walking distance from their place of sleep. If we consider the statistics pertaining to the people's main occupations, 80 per cent of the houseless workers surveyed walk to their place of work, the average time of commuting being only 16 minutes each way, with 57 per cent of them taking 10 minutes or less. The cost of transportation to work is consequently reduced to nil. Even amongst those respondents who claimed to give priority to the quality of their sleeping environment, in terms of choosing areas which contained acquaintances and good facilities, most still remained within walking distance from their place of work or from the labour market.

The relative importance given to staying close to the source of employment opportunities depended to some extent on types of occupation. For casual workers who have to go daily to a labour market to get recruited, such as workers in the catering services and construction labourers, this proximity factor appears primordial. In order to get more job offers, and to be in a better position to bargain with contractors, it is necessary to reach the labour market early in the morning, and hence not have to waste time commuting. For handcart pullers or pushers and loaders working in market areas, transportation activities do not start very early in the morning (usually around 10 a.m.) but they often continue late into the night, which makes it more convenient to sleep in the market itself, and more profitable for getting assignments. Since the nature of the work requires intense physical strength, the transportation workers are usually exhausted after a day's work; sleeping in the same location (or nearby) enables them to avoid the additional tiredness of commuting. Furthermore, in the market they are able to sleep on their handcarts or under the verandas of the buildings, and usually do not face harassment by the police since they are known to work there. The position of the cycle rickshaw drivers (whose work is also physically demanding) is mixed. Those who keep their rickshaws at night can sleep on them and have more flexibility in their choice of location, providing they can park their rickshaws safely. But for the drivers having to hire their rickshaws every morning from their owners' garages, staying within close proximity to the garage is important. Even for those houseless workers whose occupations and modes of recruitment do not require them to stay near sources of employment opportunities, proximity between sleeping place and workplace is highly sought after in order to reduce—or eliminate entirely—the cost of commuting.

The residential mobility of houseless people in Delhi further highlights the significance of the strategies aimed at staying closer to the workplace. In addition to seasonal patterns of mobility governed by climatic conditions, we find people changing their 'residential' location in relation to occupational mobility.<sup>46</sup> The houseless people adjust their choice of sleeping place according to employment opportunities, to the location of a particular labour market, or to the possibilities of sleeping at the workplace itself.

The vital importance of proximity to the workplace was highlighted in another urban context by a famous Supreme Court ruling concerning the eviction of pavement dwellers in Mumbai.<sup>47</sup> The judgement delivered acknowledged that the pavement dwellers needed to live near their place of work, 'the time otherwise taken in commuting and its cost being forbidding for their slender means. To lose the pavement or the slum is to lose the job'.<sup>48</sup> Thus, for this population, squatting on the pavement proved to be a prerequisite to earning a livelihood.<sup>49</sup>

It is worth referring here to a report from the 1950s by the Bharat Sevak Samaj concerning the then slums of Old Delhi about which it was written: 'On the whole it is amply substantiated that nearness to the workplace is one of the most important factors forcing them to live where they are living

today, in the slums.<sup>50</sup> This conclusion continues to have relevance for the pavement dwellers who today inhabit the same part of the city.

*Perennial versus Transitory Shelterlessness in Delhi*

An investigation of the length of time people remain shelterless and of their future plans and willingness to pay for a dwelling throws some light on another important issue: the perennial versus transitory nature of the shelterless situation in Delhi. A notable proportion of houseless people have been living in this condition for ten or more than ten years (17 per cent of the sample) though this does not exclude regular visits to their native place. For this category of pavement dwellers, and especially for those staying in the same night shelter or sleeping place for several years, or repeating exactly the same seasonal movements sometimes for the past ten or even fifteen years, their houseless condition seems to have become a permanent way of life, or at least permanent enough to last the duration of their working lives before they retire to their native place.

Although many people express a desire to move to better accommodation, this is unlikely to be realized in many cases owing to constraints similar to those already underlined in the case of houselessness. The minority of houseless people who had attempted to move to proper dwellings gave the following reasons for their return to pavements and night shelters: difficulties adjusting to other persons with whom they shared the same room (a common way of reducing housing expenses) or the realization that their work and income were suffering owing to the distance from their place of work. Hence, the desire and even actual attempts to move off the streets cannot be taken as indicators that the shelterless situation is merely a transitory phase leading eventually to better integration into the urban housing system.

The arguments of those houseless persons who stated that they had no intention of moving to better accommodation, are also worth considering. Interestingly, those reporting their unwillingness to pay for a dwelling were not necessarily those with the least earning and saving capacity. They gave two reasons for their position. Some claimed they did not intend to stay in Delhi for a long period, and therefore found it irrelevant to take a room on rent. Others made it clear that their priority was to maximize savings, especially in order to send remittances to their families. Consequently, they tried to minimize expenses for housing and transportation in Delhi, sometimes even reducing them to zero. Being alone in the city without their families, some houseless migrants did not perceive proper accommodation as a need. As a matter of fact, most of the houseless interviewed did not plan to settle in Delhi permanently, but hoped eventually to return to their native place or to migrate to another city. Hence, they perceived their stay in Delhi as limited in time, even if this transitory situation may eventually last the entire duration of their working lives.<sup>51</sup>

Coming back to questions raised at the beginning of this section regarding the interpretation of the shelterless situation, we can sum up the main arguments which have emerged from the surveys of houseless people in Old Delhi. Employment conditions and financial constraints undoubtedly prevent or limit the possibilities of access to a dwelling. Nevertheless, this factor has to be considered in combination with other explanatory factors, forming a system in which choice is often present. The residential practices of the majority of the houseless reveal an economic rationale oriented towards maximizing savings and remittances to their families in their native place, by minimizing their housing and transportation expenses. Such economic behaviour also conforms to the explanatory framework propounded by the 'New Economics of Migration', in which 'migration decisions are not made by isolated individual actors, but by larger units of related people—typically families or households—in which people act collectively not only to maximize expected income, but also to minimize risks . . . to their economic well-being by diversifying the allocation of household resources, such as family labor', in particular by sending family members to work in urban labour markets.<sup>52</sup> When the logic of staying shelterless in Delhi is an integral part of familial strategies rooted in the native place, priority being given to the economic condition of the family in the village at the expense of the migrants' living conditions in Delhi, then, the shelterless situation is likely to last for the duration of their stay in the capital.

The role of rational choice in the residential practices of houseless people has been highlighted in other studies—although the exercise of choice for this segment of the urban poor is obviously restricted by strong economic and social constraints.<sup>53</sup> The importance of proximity to the source of livelihood is also emphasized. This factor is crucial not only for understanding the residential practices and location choices of the houseless, but more generally of the urban poor.<sup>54</sup> The failure of many attempts to relocate slum dwellers and squatters in settlement colonies outside city centres is often due to inadequate consideration of the importance of easy physical access to earning opportunities.

## CONCLUSION

In the use of urban space, Old Delhi is particularly subject to competing interests and strategies from different actors, both institutional (the planning authorities) and private (traders, entrepreneurs, pavement dwellers). Despite the attempts of town planners to regulate this process, the proliferation of commercial and industrial establishments in the old city core during the last decades accelerated the deterioration of old buildings, and has attracted a floating population of migrant workers whose residential integration is extremely precarious. This has further engendered the development of 'unauthorized' economic and residential practices: the nightly occupation of pavements and other public spaces by houseless migrants and by private entrepreneurs renting out bedding facilities. Yet, these small informal

enterprises, though without license, help compensate for inadequate civic services, namely the insufficient capacity of the night shelters run by the municipality.

Statistical and anthropological surveys conducted on a sample of shelterless persons in the old city permitted us to examine their mobility patterns and their economic and residential strategies. Only a minority have broken away from their families. Although they live alone in Delhi, the majority of the houseless migrants maintain regular links with their families in their native place, which remains their primary place of reference. Through their circular mobility, the houseless labour migrants contribute towards integrating rural family enterprises such as agriculture with the urban labour market, village with city, in such a way that they form part of a single economic system.

The houseless population of Old Delhi also forms an integral part of the metropolitan labour force, which in terms of income seems to be able to stay above the poverty line. Yet, the lack of guaranteed and regular income constitutes a general concern. At the same time, their saving capacity, remittances and plans for future investment, all represent encouraging indicators of the economic potential of a notable portion of the houseless. Finally, the large variety of individual situations encountered indicates that the houseless are not a single category of 'urban poor', nor are they necessarily 'the poorest of the urban poor'.

Although financial constraints provide the background to the shelterless situation, the residential practices of pavement dwellers and night shelter inmates should not be interpreted purely in terms of exclusion from access to a dwelling. Rather, it is important to recognize the economic rationales of individual migrants who try to maximize remittances to their families by cutting or eliminating housing and transport expenses. It is within this context that they give priority to sleeping locations near the workplace or labour market. It therefore stands to reason that the condition of the pavement dwellers has to be viewed in relation to their needs and priorities. This is a prerequisite for planning appropriate urban housing policies.

To conclude this analysis, a comprehensive explanatory framework for the mobility and residential patterns of houseless migrants can be formulated at three different levels. At the macro level, rural-urban labour migration, including that of the houseless workers surveyed in Old Delhi reflects and is induced by the unequal economic development between rural areas and the capital city. Furthermore, the economic characteristics of Old Delhi contribute to the specific pull exerted on a floating population of unskilled labourers. At the family level (which proved relevant in the majority of cases), the economic and residential strategies of houseless migrants is led by the principle of risk aversion, through the diversification of the allocation of family labour. This would appear to be the guiding logic of migration in developing countries more generally. Finally, at the individual level, the economic and residential practices of the houseless are geared towards maximizing savings by minimizing housing and commuting costs, as well as

ensuring better economic returns by staying near to the main locations for employment opportunities. This type of strategy is common amongst the urban poor—in the case of the pavement dwellers it is pushed to its logical extreme.

## NOTES

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1. R.K. Arora and A.K. Chhibber, 'Chilled nights on pavements in Delhi. A Socio-Economic Study of the Children Staying in Ran Baseras in Winter', New Delhi: Socio-economic division, Slum and Jhuggi-Jhonpri Department, Delhi Development Authority, mimeo, 1985, p. 1.
2. NUIA, *Dimension of Urban Poverty. A Situational Analysis*, New Delhi: National Institute of Urban Affairs, Research Study Series no. 25, 1986, p. 90.
3. D.B. Gupta, S. Kaul and R. Pandey, *Housing and India's Urban Poor*, New Delhi: Har Anand Publications, 1993, p. 29.
4. V. Dupont, F. Dureau, 'Rôle des mobilités circulaires dans les dynamiques urbaines. Illustrations à partir de l'Equateur et de l'Inde', Paris: *Revue Tiers Monde*, Tome XXXV, no. 140, Oct.-Dec. 1994, pp. 801-29.
5. For Delhi, see A. Basu, K. Basu and R. Ray, 'Migrants and the native bond. An analysis of micro-level data from Delhi', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. XXII, No. 19-20-21, Annual Number, May 1987, pp. AN-145-54; and B. Banerjee, *Rural to Urban Migration and the Urban Labour Market (A case study of Delhi)*, Delhi: Himalaya Publishing House, 1986, Chap. V.
6. A. Tarrus, 'Territoires circulatoires et espaces urbains', *Mobilités, Les Annales de la Recherche urbaine*, no. 59-60, June-September 1993, Paris: Plan Urbain, METT, pp. 51-60 (p. 51, *our translation*).
7. N.V. Jagannathan and A. Halder, 'Income-housing Linkages. A Case Study of Pavement Dwellers in Calcutta', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. XXIII, no. 23, 1988, 4 June 1988, pp. 1175-8.
8. For exceptions, see S. Manzoor Alam and F. Alikhan (eds.), *Poverty in Metropolitan Cities*, New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1987; A.M. Singh, A. de Souza, *The Urban Poor, Slum and Pavement Dwellers in Major Cities of India*, Delhi: Manohar, 1980; A. de Souza, (ed.), *The Indian City: Poverty, Ecology and Urban Development*, Delhi: Manohar, 1983.
9. To mention some of the more recent studies: H. Nagpaul, *Modernisation and Urbanisation in India: Problems and Issues*, Jaipur and New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 1996; D.B. Gupta, S. Kaul and R. Pandey, *Housing and India's Urban Poor*, New Delhi: Har Anand Publications,

1993; A.K. Jain, *The Indian Megacity and Economic Reform*, New Delhi: Management Publishing Co., 1996; A. Kundu, *In the Name of the Urban Poor. Access to Basic Amenities*, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1993; NIUA, *Dimension of Urban Poverty. A Situational Analysis*, New Delhi: National Institute of Urban Affairs, Research Study Series no. 25, 1986; NIUA, *Profile of the Urban Poor: An Investigation into their Demographic, Economic and Shelter Characteristics*, New Delhi: National Institute of Urban Affairs, Research Study Series no. 40, 1989; E.M. Pernia (ed.), *Urban Poverty in Asia. A Survey of Critical Issues*, Hong Kong: OUP, 1994; P. Suri, *Urban Poor. Their Housing Needs and Government Response*, Delhi: Har Anand Publications, 1994.

10. One can however mention:

- for Calcutta: P. Dhar, 'Pavement Dwellers in Calcutta. Strategies for rehabilitation and Urban Development', unpublished thesis, Delhi: School of Planning and Architecture, 1985; N.V. Jagannathan and A. Halder, 'A Case Study of Pavement Dwellers in Calcutta', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. XXIII, no. 23, 4 June 1988, pp. 1175-8; no. 49, 3 December 1988, pp. 2602-5 and vol. XXIV, no. 6, 11 February 1989, pp. 315-18; ISI, 'Calcutta 1976: A Socio-economic Survey of Pavement Dwellers', Calcutta: Indian Statistical Institute, 1977; S. Mukherjee, 'Under the Shadow of the Metropolis—They are Citizens too', Calcutta: Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority & Calcutta Metropolitan Planning Organization, 1975.

- for Mumbai: P. Ramachandran, 'Pavement Dwellers in Bombay City', Bombay: Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Series no. 26, 1972; SPARC; 'We the Invisible', *Report on Pavement Dwellers in Bombay*, Bombay: SPARC, 1985.

- for Delhi: R.K. Arora and A.K. Chhibber, 'Chilled Nights on Pavements in Delhi. A Socio-economic Study of the Children Staying in Ran Baseras in Winter', New Delhi: Socio-economic division, Slum and Jhuggi-Jhonpri Department, Delhi Development Authority, mimeo, 1985; Bharat Sevak Samaj, 'A Roof Over the Head', Delhi: Delhi School of Social Work, 1964; DDA, 'Survey of Pavement Dwellers in Old Delhi', unpublished study, New Delhi: Slum and Jhuggi-Jhonpri Department, Delhi Development Authority, 1989; J. Kuruvilla, 'Pavement Dwelling in Metropolitan Cities. Case Study Delhi', thesis, New Delhi: School of Planning and Architecture, Department of Housing, 1990-1.

This list is not exhaustive.

11. The main reference dates back to 1971: this is the special study on the houseless population carried out by the 1971 Census operations (S.R. Gangotra, *Houseless in Delhi*, Census of India 1971, Series 27, Delhi, Part X (a), Special Study, Delhi: Government of India, 1976). The other references are unpublished studies, poorly circulated: the pioneer report of the Bharat Sevak Samaj (op. cit.), a non-governmental organization dedicated to the cause of the poor; a special study conducted by the Slum Wing of the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) on the children staying in night shelters in winter (Arora and Chhibber, op. cit.); a sample survey of about 1069 pavement dwellers in Old Delhi, conducted in 1989 by the Slum Wing of the DDA (op. cit.), and whose report was unfortunately untraceable even in the concerned administration; a thesis completed at the School of Planning and Architecture based on a sample survey of 71 pavement dwellers and 30 inmates of government night shelters in different localities of Delhi (Kuruvilla, op. cit.).
12. A figure quoted in an unpublished report of the Slum and Jhuggi-Jhonpri Department of the DDA ('Programme of Night Shelters for the Homeless in Delhi', Slum and Jhuggi-Jhonpri Department, New Delhi: Delhi Development Authority, 1994), although the corresponding census table has not yet been published.
13. Census enumerators are instructed 'to take note of the possible places where houseless population is likely to live' in their enumeration block(s). This recognizance has to be done during the enumeration of all the households and persons living in 'census houses' (including all types of dwellings), and while this main census operation usually lasts 20 days (between 9 February and 28 February in 1991), the enumerators have only one night to survey the houseless population. Thus, for the 1991 Census, they were told 'On the night of February 28/March 1, 1991, but before sunrise of March 1, 1991, you will

have to quickly cover all such houseless households and enumerate them.' (Census of India 1991, *Instructions to Enumerators for Filling up the Household Schedule and Individual Slip*, New Delhi: Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner for India, Ministry of Home Affairs, 1991, p. 64.)

14. Jagannathan and Halder, 1988, op. cit., p. 1175.
  15. Ramachandran, op. cit.; Kuruvilla, op. cit.; SPARC, op. cit.
  16. Arora and Chhibber, op. cit.; Kuruvilla, op. cit.
  17. Census of India, op. cit., p. 64.
  18. See J.M. Firdion, M. Marpsat, 'La statistique des sans-domicile aux Etats-Unis', Paris: *Courrier des Statistiques*, nos. 71-2, December 1994, pp. 43-51; and J.M. Firdion, M. Marpsat, and M. Bozon, 'Est-il légitime de mener des enquêtes statistiques auprès des sans-domicile? Une question éthique et scientifique', Paris: *Revue Française des Affaires Sociales*, 49<sup>ème</sup> année, 1995, nos. 2-3, pp. 29-51.
- As these authors show, in the United States, where numerous pioneering statistical studies of homelessness have been conducted, estimates of the homeless population varied from 3,00,000 to 30,00,000 in 1982-3.
19. C. Bienvenuiste, 'Toward a Better Understanding of the Homeless and Exclusion from Housing', Paris, *Actualités du Conseil National de l'Information Statistique*, no. 17, May 1996, p. 1.
  20. Hence, when referring to the survey and unless otherwise stated, the term 'pavement dwellers' will be used to designate the houseless population sleeping either in various open spaces or in night shelters. In fact, as shown later in this essay, there is a significant level of circulation amongst houseless people who move between various open spaces and night shelters.
  21. J.D. Wright and B. Robin, 'Les sans-domicile aux Etats Unis', Paris: *Sociétés Contemporaines*, no. 30, 1998, pp. 35-66.
  22. For a detailed presentation of the methodology used, see V. Dupont, 'City History—Life Histories: Changing Equations. Migration Surveys and Biographical Data Collection in Delhi', New Delhi: Centre de Sciences Humaines, *Contributions CSH 97/7*, 1997.
  23. J. Brush, 'Recent changes in ecological patterns of metropolitan Bombay and Delhi', in V.K. Tewari, J.A. Weistein, V.L.S.P. Rao (eds.), *Indian Cities. Ecological Perspectives*, New Delhi: Concept, 1986, pp. 121-49.
  24. DDA, *Zonal Plan Walled City. Draft*, New Delhi: Delhi Development Authority, 1993.
  25. A.K. Mehra, *The Politics of Urban Redevelopment. A Study of Old Delhi*, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1991, p. 50.
  26. For example, at the time of the preparation of the Delhi Master Plan (1958-9), the planning division 'A', which includes the Walled City and its extension, contained a population of 6,07,000. The Master Plan predicted that its population would be reduced to 3,22,600 by 1981. However, 'the population of this division according to 1991 Census is 6,16,000 indicating that the dedensification proposals of Delhi Master Plan could not be realized' (Jain, op. cit., p. 85).
  27. DDA, *Master Plan for Delhi. Perspective 2001*, Prepared by Delhi Development Authority, New Delhi: Delhi Development Authority, 1990, p. 46.
  28. HSMI, *Renewal of Historical Housing Stock in Old Delhi*, New Delhi: Indian Human Settlement Programme, HSMI Studies 1, Human Settlement Management Institute, 1988, p. 4.
  29. See TCPO, *Seminar on Redevelopment of Shahjahanabad: the Walled City of Delhi (New Delhi, 31st Jan.- 1st Feb. 1995), Report and Selected Paper. Resume of the Seminar*, New Delhi: Town and Country Planning Organization, Government of India, Ministry of Works and Housing, 1975, p. 16.
  30. See Mehra, op. cit., p. 46.
  31. This rate—as well as others mentioned in this essay—refers to the situation at the time of the survey, that is January-March 1996. In 1997 the entry rate for night shelters was increased to Rs. 4.
  32. In the sample surveyed in winter, 40 per cent of the shelterless persons were sleeping in night shelters, 34 per cent in pavement dwelling areas with bedding facilities on rent, and 26 per cent in open spaces without renting any bedding facility.



33. The corresponding data for the 1991 Census were still not published when this essay was written.
34. In the 1991 Census, figures relating to literacy pertain to the population aged 7 and above.
35. Of the total sample of houseless migrants surveyed 24 per cent cited familial tensions of this type as their primary reasons for migrating to Delhi. Furthermore, about one-third of the 36 respondents selected for in-depth interviews mentioned similar tensions as significant to their migration trajectory.
36. Banerjee, *op. cit.*, p. 79.
37. The question of the degree and type of help received by the migrant at the time of his first arrival in Delhi is however ambiguous since the perception of help or support is highly subjective and varies from one respondent to the other. For example, information about possible night shelters or pavement dwelling areas, or about specific labour markets and employment opportunities was considered a form of help by some respondents, while others in a similar situation narrated their arrival in Delhi as an ordeal in which they had to manage entirely on their own without outside support. Such discrepancies should be borne in mind when interpreting the fact that about two-thirds of the 33 decision-making migrants surveyed for in-depth interviews stated that they received some kind of help at the time of their arrival.
38. Of the 36 respondents to in-depth interviews, only 3 did not have any family members left in their native place. The statistical survey further confirms the significance of the familial house and visits to the family for houseless people.
39. C.Z. Guilamoto and F. Sandron, 'Approche institutionnelle de la migration dans les pays en développement', Paper presented to the XXIII General Population Conference, IUSSP, Beijing (China), 11-17 October 1997.
40. A.M. Shah, *The Household Dimension of the Family in India*, Delhi: Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1973; R. Skeldon, *Population Mobility in Developing Countries: A Reinterpretation*, London-New York: Belhaven Press, 1990.
41. In this study, beggars are counted as workers, contrary to the conventions applied in official statistics like those of the census reports and National Sample Surveys. However, it should be remembered that less than 1 per cent of the houseless people surveyed in Old Delhi reported beggary as a source of livelihood.
42. See Arora and Chhibber, *op. cit.*, p. 5.
43. In fact the highest income reported was that of a transient pavement dweller—a ticket checker who had a permanent government job in the railways, with a monthly salary of Rs. 4820. He had been transferred to Delhi some three weeks earlier and whilst waiting to get government accommodation, he was sleeping on a hired cot on open ground located just opposite Old Delhi Railway Station, his place of work.
44. This figure is calculated on the basis of the last published official estimate, that is Rs. 209.50 per capita per month in urban areas at 1991-2 prices, converted to present value by applying the index numbers of consumer prices for industrial workers in Delhi for the corresponding period. For a discussion on the concept of poverty line in the context of the houseless population of Old Delhi, see Dupont and Tingal, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-6.
45. Kundu, *op. cit.*, p. 23, cited in M. Lee, 'The Mobilisation of Informal Sector Savings: the USAID Experience', paper presented at the International Workshop on Mobilisation of Informal Sector Savings, 8-12 December 1986, New Delhi: Society for Development Studies.
46. For example, among the houseless people surveyed who were previously staying in another place in Delhi (173 cases out of the total sample), 63 per cent reported 'better conditions of accommodation' (which included consideration of climatic factors) as the main reason for their last change of sleeping place, while 24 per cent gave 'employment related reasons'.
47. Namely a Public Interest Litigation case known as '*Olgas Tellis v. Bombay Municipal Corporation*' (*Supreme Court Cases*, 1985 (3), pp. 555-90); see also S. Ahuja, *People, Law and Justice. Casebook on Public Interest Litigation*, New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1997, Chap. 8.
48. *Supreme Court Cases*, 1985 (3), p. 575.
49. In this case, the recognition by the Court of the conditions of the pavement dwellers did not prevent the Court from placing 'the prevention of public nuisance on public streets

- higher on its list of priorities than poverty' and declaring that these pavement dwellers were illegal (Ahuja, op. cit., p. 341).
50. Bharat Sevak Samaj, *Slums of Old Delhi*, Delhi: Atma Ram & Sons, 1958, p. 197.
  51. Or may be even their entire remaining life, insofar as the future plan of returning to the native place may never get realized.
  52. D. Massey, J. Arango, G. Hugo, A. Kouaouci, A. Pellegrino and J.E. Taylor, 'Theories of International Migration: a Review and Appraisal', *Population and Development Review*, 19, no. 3, September 1993, pp. 431-66.
  53. For example, in the conclusion of his primary survey of pavement dwellers and night shelter inmates in Delhi, Kuruvilla states: 'The choice of the pavement is mainly for reduction of expenses on housing, proximity to employment opportunities, . . . availability of facilities, services, food and water and maximise savings to send back home. Thus it becomes a deliberate rational decision to live on the pavement' (Kuruvilla, op. cit., pp. 85-6). Jagannathan and Halder, in their study of the pavement dwellers in Calcutta, also infer: 'Pavement dwellers of the main stream vocations have chosen this lifestyle to protect their access to earning opportunities. In addition . . . a substantial proportion are temporary migrants, who remit savings home to the village.' Further: 'The majority of pavement dwellers live without shelter as a deliberate rational decision, by which the expenditure on housing is reduced to zero' (Jagannathan and Halder, 1988, op. cit., p. 1177).
  54. See for example: Bharat Sevak Samaj, 1958, op. cit., p. 107; Gupta, Kaul and Pandey, op. cit., p. 86; Suri, op. cit., p. 273; Kundu, op. cit., p. 65.



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