

We, the invisible

a census of pavement dwellers



ABOUT US

SPARC - Society for Promotion of Area Resource Centres was launched in December 1984 by a group of trained social workers, scientists and researchers concerned about the problems of poor migrants in the city of Bombay. Since pavement dwellers are the most isolated, and among these women bear the brunt of poverty, SPARC decided to focus on women pavement dwellers. The non-formal educational process is used to form women's groups in each community. The work has been initiated in E Ward (Byculla-Mazgaon Area in Central Bombay) covering approximately 3000 families.

PRIA - Society for Participatory Research in Asia is a non-governmental, non-profit organisation registered under the Indian Society's Act. In its three years of existence, PRIA has provided support to grass roots groups and organisations in India through research, training, evaluation and preparation of learning materials. The issues focussed upon are deforestation, land alienation, primary health care, non-formal education, occupational health and women's income generation.

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It is high time they understand that the very levels of financial investment, profitability, wealth and affluence in the city create the spin-off effect of a huge informal sector with its insatiable demand for cheap, unskilled labour. Take, for instance, the large number of small, medium and large units in the city using various metals in their production process. The greater the number of units, the greater the need for recycling metal scrap. Much of this recycling is done by metal scrap collectors at a paltry cost. They can perform this function at a low price **because** they live in slums or pavement dwellings.

Finally, the contribution of this segment of the city's population in providing cheap labour is unquestioningly accepted because of the resulting low cost of goods and services. But the city does not wish to see or hear them, or even recognise this contribution. The desire to "beautify" the city and promote "free flow of pedestrian and road traffic" by physically removing the poorest reflects a certain blindness to their vital economic contribution to the city.

Pavement dwellers are thus being made the scapegoats for urban ills of which they are the **symptom, not the cause**. They are blamed for dirtying the streets, but why is it that areas where no pavement dwellings exist are equally and sometimes more dirty? They are blamed for blocking traffic and causing hazards to pedestrians, but why is it never mentioned that the real cause of traffic congestion is the exploding number of vehicles on the road? Or that some of the worst traffic jams in the city occur at points where there are no pavement dwellers? Why is it that the time-worn suggestion of umpteen experts to move offices and wholesale markets out of the southern part of city - which is the real cause of traffic congestion - has been repeatedly shelved?

A society which permits and in fact depends on a large mass of unskilled and underpaid labour must also live with slums and pavement dwellers. Perhaps the time has come to question the middle class utopia that wants clean, beautiful, orderly cities, but also its maidservants, milkmen, vegetable vendors and cheap manual labour.

It is our contention that the crisis awaiting the pavement population in the city is the result of this kind of utopian thinking. The tragedy is that even this extreme step is not going to create that utopia. How can it, when the deeper dynamics which have created the problem cannot be changed or even marginally touched by the physical removal of its outward manifestation? How will it be ensured that these and others in search of survival will not return to the pavements? Will a police force be created to monitor every city street from now till eternity?

The suggestion of the Supreme Court that 1976 be taken as the cut-off year of providing alternate accommodation to those who now stand to be evicted is also puzzling. How valid is a 1976 census in 1985? And since we know that pavement dwellers were not covered in that census, what is to become of them?

We feel it is essential that Municipal authorities immediately undertake a comprehensive and detailed census of all pavement dwellers in Greater Bombay as a first step in evolving a permanent and long-term solution to this problem. Demolitions are not a solution, and should not be carried out.

No solution to such a major and multi-faceted problem can succeed unless it takes into consideration **the needs and aspirations of all those affected**. Today, the proposed eviction of 'illegal' slum and pavement dwellers reflects the aspirations of the better-off, but not of the poor. If the survival needs of these sections are not served by any proposed solution, how can it be effective or permanent, much less just?

This means that the only long-term permanent solution to the problem of urban congestion and the growth of slums and pavement dwellings is the rapid and equitable development of rural areas and small towns. The present states of rural employment schemes and agricultural development programmes have been critiqued by a number of objective experts. Therefore, to wish away current migration trends, or imagine that eviction of squatters will solve the problem, is to live in a fool's paradise.

It is a sobering thought, for instance, that rural Maharashtra, where the Employment Guarantee Scheme (a major anti-poverty programme) is said to be working relatively well, is itself a major source of out-migration. If poverty levels are so high that even such efforts to hold the poor back continue to fail, then the prospects for migration centres like Bombay are grim indeed. We have to face the reality that present trends are not going to change in the near future.

This brings us to the second major implication : urban planners and city authorities must stop living in their world of make-believe, and take cognizance of further in-migration in their planning exercises - particularly as regards housing development and land use. Land-use policies in most of India's cities have benefited private builders and the affluent. Whatever little investment has been made in low-income housing has developed to the lower-middle classes (including some sections of organised labour). The high cost of even slum housing for the poorest sections makes pavement dwelling inevitable. It is a paradox that the city generates demand for the cheap labour provided by the poor, but does not deem it necessary to house them or provide any space for their shelter.

But this argument is always countered with the plea that there is no land and no funds for such housing. But in the case of Bombay, at least, we know that there is land - some 20,000 acres (Gonsalves, 1982, Gonsalves & Panjwani, 1982). Finances are a different matter - but not insoluble. If World Bank aid can be obtained for flyovers and bus transportation, than why not for housing ? But housing development has to start with the **houseless**, on a priority basis.

At this point, of course, the question usually raised is: "Why us? Why should we take all the responsibility and the trouble of providing for people whom we did not invite here in the first place"

The answer to this is two-fold: First, it is true that this should not be the sole responsibility of urban development authorities. Urban migration is a national problem and both Central and State Governments have to take part (and pay for) its resolution.

But as long as the onus falls on city administrators, it is up to them to recognise the nature of the phenomenon and **demand** assistance. They must see that more poor people are going to keep coming to the city and the poor who are already here are not going to disappear, nor acquire better shelters in the open housing market. It is therefore essential that affordable housing is made available to them, and for this city planners must aggressively seek aid from central, state and even international funds. What is more, they must **themselves** take on the role of drawing attention to the factors contributing to urban migration and make demands on Central and State Governments to do something about it. This may sound absurd, but is in fact a very pragmatic approach: if city administrators feel ill-used at having to tackle the culmination of present economic trends, then they have as much stake in demanding change as the poorest landless labourer.

Second, urban authorities and the elite must understand that their petulance at having their 'fair' cities 'fouled' by slums and pavement dwellers is both illogical and ill-informed.

To look into the pavement dwellers' past is to see a history of hunger, impoverishment and marginalisation. As one writer eloquently puts it.

"A major factor for the flight to the city slums and pavements is the rapid extinction of the marginal farmer from the rural scene, who would with pride prefer to eke out even bare living from his soil the recent census figure (of landless agricultural labour) should reveal a more frightening picture, pointing to a steady pauperisation of the peasantry whose lands have been lost to usury at criminally high rates designed to destabilise the rural economy, driving the agricultural household and the (rural) artisans to desperation.

"The exodus is a pathetic march for survival goaded by hunger and the human instinct to keep body and soul together. Here in the city it is only that their ingenuity enables them to draw on the urban subsistence (economy) and the 'pickings' for those who struggle to go about it are plenty," (Urban Fernandes 1985, 29-30)

The fact that an overwhelming majority (over three-fourth) of census pavement households owned no assets in their place of origin and that the major pre-migration occupation was agricultural labour, is testimony to the validity of the above analysis.

Bombay being the industrial-commercial-financial centre of the country receiving the largest investment inputs in India, it is only natural that it becomes a focal point for those in search of a livelihood who can be absorbed in its burgeoning unorganised informal sector. What is more, even though Maharashtra is the most industrialised state, the discrepancy in development rates between Bombay and the rest of the state is so high that Maharashtra migrants themselves constitute the largest single group living on the pavements.

In summary, we feel that this census has achieved its main purpose.

First, it has shown that the trends indicated in earlier sample surveys (viz. those of the TISS and College of Social Work) were accurate and not seriously skewed by sampling deficiencies. It has also generated, for the first time, a valid universe within which further in-depth surveys can be undertaken with a high degree of choice and precision in sampling designs.

Second, a high level of community participation has been achieved through the census, and all its findings are being discussed with people, in addition to providing them copies of this report in their own language.

Third, we have demonstrated the feasibility of conducting a census of pavement dwellers in a matter of seven weeks, with limited human and material resources, and making its results available for planning and action **immediately**.

PART IV

IMPLICATIONS:

We have presented here the critical facts about some 27,000 people living on the pavements of one large part of Bombay city. This information has profound implications in these major areas, if the problem of pavement dwelling is to be resolved permanently.

First and foremost, the continuing and in fact increasing disparity in the development of rural vs. urban areas is clearly creating an influx of impoverished, unemployed and underemployed into the cities - especially the larger metropolises. As long as the bulk of development investment continues in urban areas (notwithstanding the "rural development" rhetoric) this process cannot be stopped, let alone reversed.

Another 12% of migration reasons were due to family quarrels, disputes, divorce, abandonment, death of parents or widowhood. The most often cited were remarriage of the father, seizure of land by relatives, quarrels between married siblings or parents and children.

About 7% of reasons given for migration stated that droughts, floods, cyclones, communal and caste riots had forced them to flee their homes. Some 8% arrived as children with their parents or elder siblings, while the remaining 8% gave other reasons - they came to Bombay to earn a living on advice or hearsay, for medical treatment, and other reasons.

CONCLUSIONS:

It is clear from the foregoing analysis that even in just one city ward and the major arterial roads of the island city, the number of people likely to be affected by large-scale evictions is staggering 27,000 - 6,000 families and presents an immense human problem.

What is more, as the wage-earner and occupation figures show, these people are mainly self-supporting with almost half the population being gainfully employed and supporting the other half. Virtually none are beggars. Far from being a burden to the city's economy, they are supplying it with a vast pool of cheap labour for the unpleasant jobs which organised labour does not like to do. They clean our homes and garbage dumps, lift loads, move goods from one place to the other and bring a myriad daily consumption items to our street corners and doorsteps at a low price which is the result of their own undervalued labour.

They can afford to do this and yet survive themselves **because they are living on pavements**, and incur no overheads on either shelter or transportation. This point cannot be overemphasised. Unlike any other segment of Bombay's working population, they are the only ones who do not even step on the city's already overloaded transport system.

With the vast majority earning less than the minimum wage (around Rs. 18/- per day in Bombay City), even slum or tenement housing is beyond their reach. It must also be remembered that access to slum housing (as opposed to pavements) is a function not only of **cost** (or **affordability**, so to speak) but also of **availability**. In Bombay today, even a 36 square feet hut in a slum colony costs between Rs. 5,000/- Rs. 10,000/-, if at all a vacant one can be found. Consequently, pavement dwelling becomes not only the economical option, **but the only option**. But it should not be imagined that pavement dwellers occupy their footpath shelters free of cost. Many of them have had to 'pay' as much as Rs. 2,500/- to local musclemen who "control" certain pavements in exchange for a 6 feet stretch. The cost of plastic sheets, cardboard, wood or canvas to construct the actual shelter, which could be another Rs. 500/- or so, have also to be borne by the hapless dweller. We also know of areas where the pavement families pay a "rent" of upto Rs. 50/- per month for the privilege of residing there. In addition, the vast majority of pavement dwellers pay either in cash or kind for basic amenities like water (generally obtained from nearby tenements, shops or factories) and toilets (50 p. per use, in most areas).

It needs to be stressed that people invariably take to pavement dwelling initially as a temporary measure, until they can locate and afford better housing. Unfortunately, most are never able to acquire better housing and live out their lives on the footpath. In over half the pavement clusters in 'E' Ward (around 1500 households) where SPARC has been working, almost all the families have been living on the pavement ever since their arrival in Bombay - which could be as much as 30 years ago.

Figure - 6
Pre - migration Assets owned

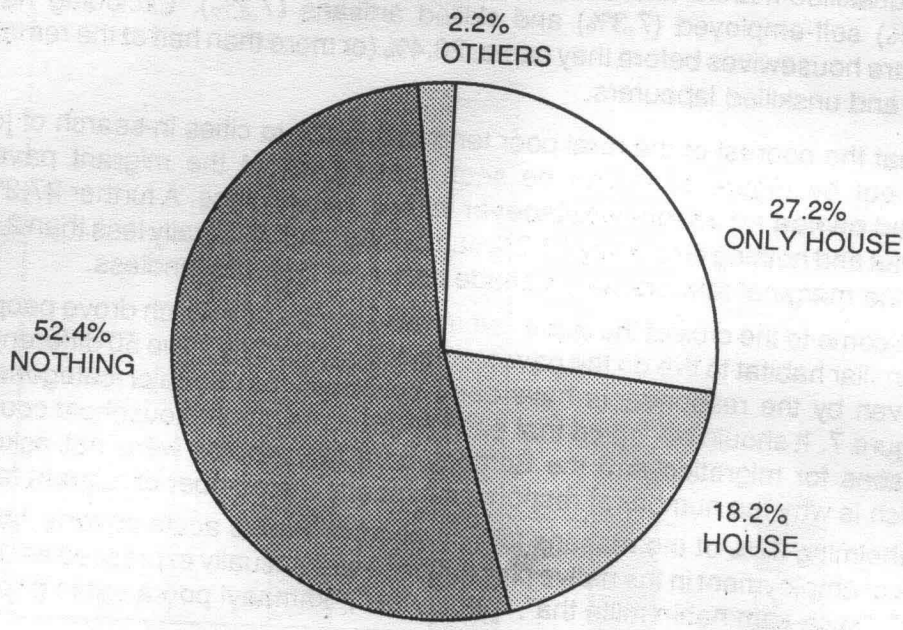
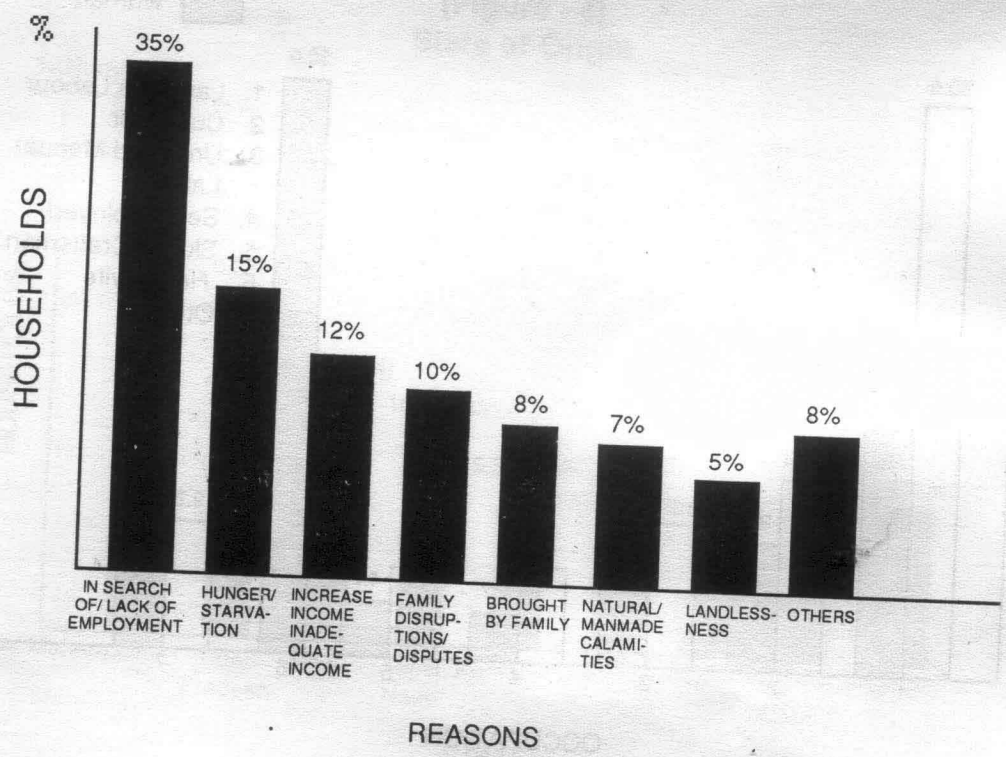


Figure - 7
Reasons for Migration



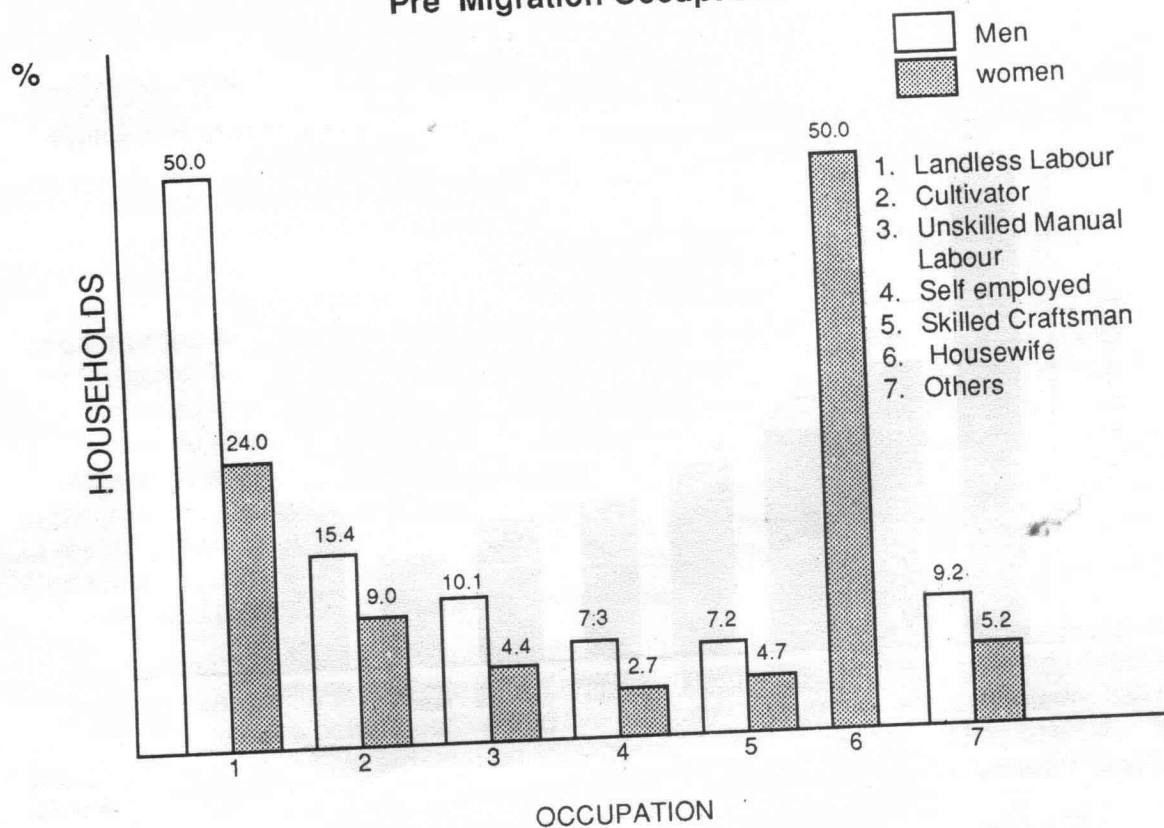
A look at the pre-migration occupations of men and women in migrant households (figure 5) shows that the vast majority were the rural poor. Among men, 61% were landless labourers and unskilled manual labourers, the remaining were mostly small and marginal farmers (15.4%) self-employed (7.3%) and skilled artisans (7.2%). Excluding half the women who were housewives before they came, 28.4% (or more than half of the remaining) were landless and unskilled labourers.

The fact that the poorest of the rural poor tend to migrate to cities in search of jobs is further borne out by Figure 6. It can be seen that 52.4% of the migrant pavement households **had owned no assets whatsoever** in their native place. A further 27.2% had owned only a hut and nothing else. Only 18.2% had owned land, generally less than 2 acres, making them the marginal farmers, only a shade better-off than the landless.

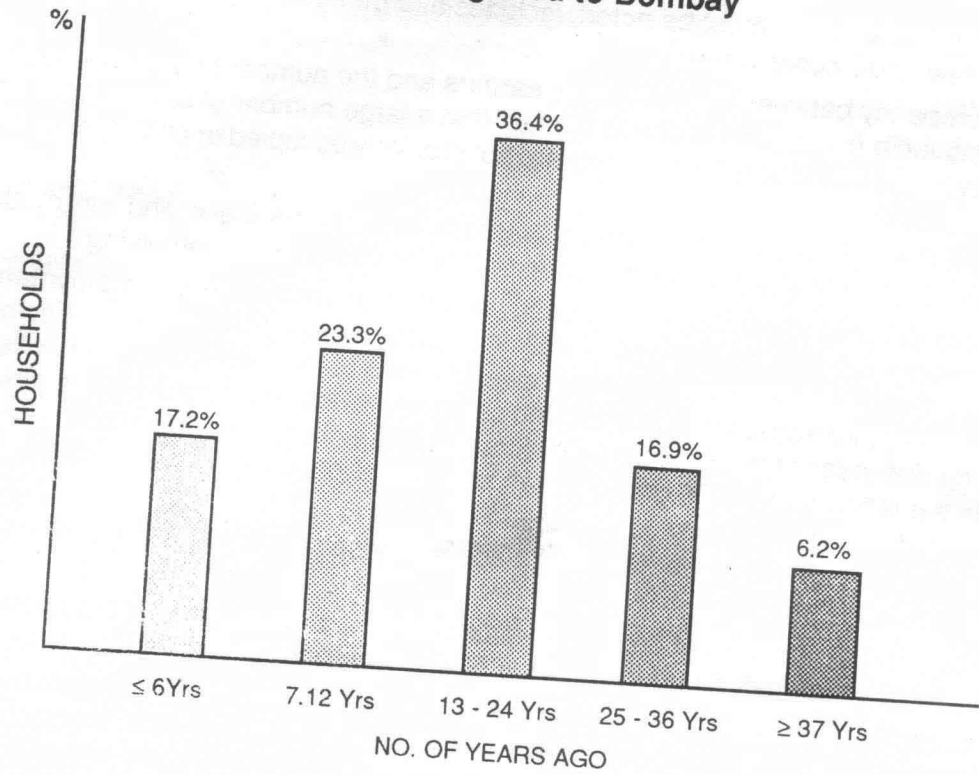
Finally, we come to the crux of the issue - what were the causes which drove people out of their own familiar habitat to live on the pavements of Bombay City? The 50 different types of reasons given by the respondents have been collapsed into 8 major categories and depicted in figure 7. It should be noted that each migrant pavement household could give upto two reasons for migration and the Bombay-born households were not asked this question, which is why the number of responses exceeds the number of migrant families.

An overwhelming 67% of the reasons for migration related to acute poverty, landlessness and lack of employment in the native place. These were usually expressed as "Bookhe mar rahe the", "kuch kam nahin milta tha", "pet ke liye", "kamaayi poora nahin padta tha", etc.

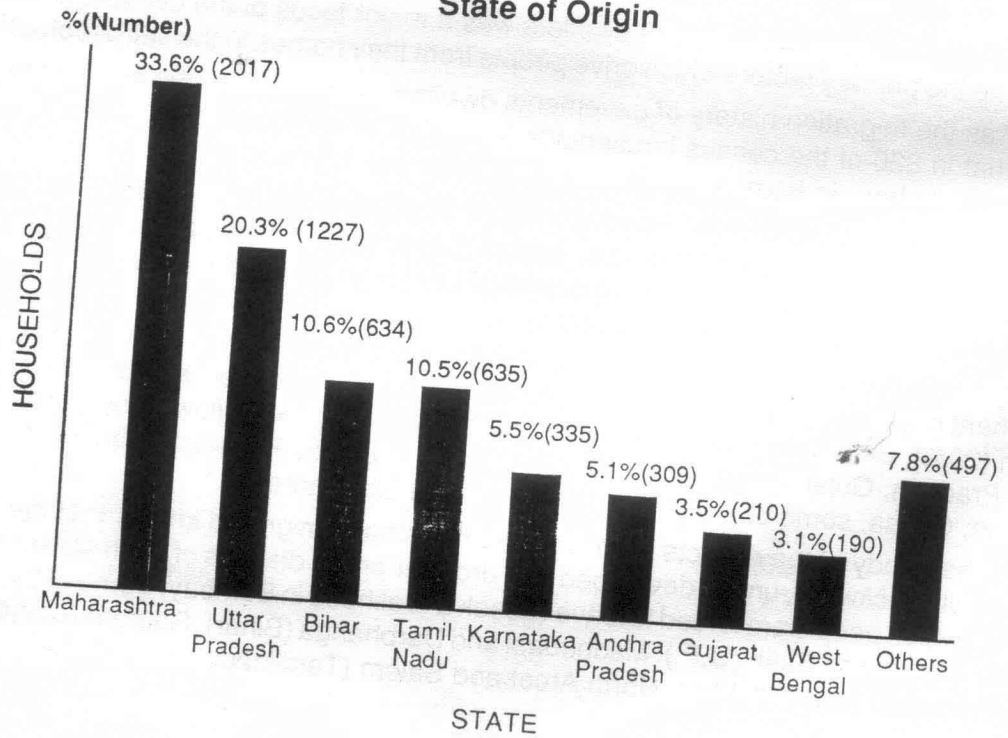
Figure - 5
Pre Migration Occupation



(Figure - 3)
When Migrated to Bombay



(Figure - 4)
State of Origin



carpenters, weavers, and those engaged in collecting and recycling metal, paper and other kinds of scrap.

The 'others' category, it must be noted, includes a large number of Municipal workers and even a few while-collar workers.

The discrepancy between the number of earners and the number of persons having a regular, identifiable occupation is due to the fact that a large number of people earn small amounts at various odd jobs, although they are not regularly occupied or employed or have a clear occupation.

The next table (No.4) relating to the travel time to the work-place and the mode of transport used, reveals one of the most important facts about pavement living.

A majority (51.5%) of earners either spend no time at all (home-based employment) or reach their workplace within a half-hour's walk. If those who walk even longer are included, it is revealed that 58.7% working pavement dwellers walk to their work and do not use any form of public or other transportation at all. The category 'varies' again consists of those who walk varying distances to work (scrap collectors, handcart pliers, vendors and hawkers). If we include the latter, then 84.65 or more than four-fifth of pavement dwellers do not even use the city's transport systems.

Those utilising trains to reach their workplace comprise only 8.9% and bus-commuters are an even lower 6.3%

If viewed strictly in terms of time, it is seen that 62% pavement dwellers reach their workplace in less than half an hour, by virtue of their dwelling place.

The pattern for females and males is more or less similar, with the larger percentage of female earners (65.4%) reaching their place of work in less than half hour, mostly through walking.

3. Migration History:

The migration history of pavement dwellers was a major focus of the census, in order to determine the primary factors which drive people from their homes to the city's footpaths.

As far as the migration history of pavements dwellers is concerned, the first fact to be noted is that in 820 of the census households (or 13.5% of all households) heads of the household were born in Bombay, and hence they had **not** migrated to the city.

Among migrant households, however, figure illustrates the fact that almost 60% migrated to Bombay over **a decade ago**, and of these, around 17% had been in the city for nearly 3 decades, and 6% for almost 4 decades. Less than 20% of the pavement families have arrived in the city in the last six years.

Where have these migrants come from? Contrary to popular opinion, the largest group of pavement migrants - nearly 34% - are from within Maharashtra itself (see figure 4). Uttar Pradesh (20%), Bihar and Tamilnadu (about 10% each) are next, followed by Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat and West Bengal. 'Others' includes Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Orissa, some of the Union Territories and other areas.

A further study of the districts from which families have migrated shows that the most economically backward, under-developed and drought-prone districts of each state are the ones from which people are forced to leave to seek a livelihood in Bombay. Some of the main ones are Gonda and Basti (U.P.). Madhubani and Darbhanga (Bihar), Ratnagari, Sholapur and Osmanabad (Maharashtra), North Arcot and Salem (Tamilnadu) and Gulbarga (Karnataka).

TABLE - 3
PERSONS WITH REGULAR AND IDENTIFIABLE OCCUPATIONS

| Occupations | Total | Male | Female |
|-----------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| | 10334 | 7570 | 2764 |
| Unskilled Labour | 3456 (33.4) | 3049 (40.3) | 407 (14.7) |
| Self-employed | 1462 (14.2) | 1155 (15.3) | 307 (11.1) |
| Small Traders - edibles | 1352 (13.1) | 952 (12.6) | 400 (14.5) |
| Domestic Servents | 1280 (12.4) | 82 (1.1) | 1198 (43.3) |
| Skilled Labour | 1215 (11.8) | 1138 (15.0) | 77 (2.8) |
| Small Traders - other goods | 865 (8.4) | 547 (7.2) | 318 (11.5) |
| Others | 704 (6.7) | 647 (8.5) | 57 (2.1) |

Note: Figures in parentheses denote percentages.

TABLE - 4
TRAVEL TIME AND MODE TO PLACE OF WORK

| Time and Mode of Travel to work | Total | Male | Female |
|----------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| | 10462 | 7687 | 2762 |
| Nil | 414 (4.0) | 301 (3.9) | 113 (4.1) |
| Walking for less than Half hours | 4957 (47.5) | 3451 (44.9) | 1457 (52.8) |
| Walking for more than half hour | 751 (7.2) | 522 (6.8) | 229 (8.3) |
| Bus for less than half hour | 491 (4.7) | 389 (5.1) | 102 (3.7) |
| Bus for more than half hour | 172 (1.6) | 141 (1.8) | 31 (1.1) |
| Train for less than half hour | 615 (5.9) | 482 (6.3) | 133 (4.8) |
| Train for more than half hour | 312 (3.0) | 230 (3.0) | 82 (3.0) |
| Varies | 2750 (26.1) | 2171 (28.2) | 579 (22.2) |

Note: Figures in parentheses denote percentages.

Figure 2 depicts the major languages spoken by pavement dwellers. The single largest group is Hindi speaking - 26.9% - and if combined with Urdu and grouped as those speaking Hindustani, over 42.5% fall into this language category. The second largest group is Marathi-speaking - 26.1% - followed by Tamil, Bengali, other South Indian languages and minor dialects. 5.7% of the people speak other languages (Gujarati, Odiya, etc.).

2. Economic Profile :

Table 2 depicts the per capita daily income of all earners. A number of important facts are highlighted in this table. Firstly, we see that the proportion of wage earners to the total population at 43% is significantly higher than the national figure of 38% (India Statistical Outline, 1984, p. 9). This means that the work participation rate among pavement dwellers is higher than the national average.

Secondly, women comprise 27% of all wage earners and men 73% (these figures are identical to the national trend).

Thirdly, over 74% of the wage earners earn less than Rs. 18/- per day, which is below the Bombay minimum wage. Within this category, we also see the inequality in wages (and in access to better-paid employment) between the sexes : while 67.6% of men are below this level, an overwhelming 90.9% of the women wage earners fall into this category. Only one-quarter (26%) of all earners make a daily income of Rs. 19/- or more; of these, barely 10% are women. Only 14% of all earners are able to earn something over Rs. 750/- per month, and that too only if they are able to find work every day.

The main occupational groups of pavement dwellers are set out in Table 3. It must be stressed here that over 90 different occupations were elicited during the census, but these have been grouped for convenient analysis.

The largest single occupational group (33.4%) are unskilled labour (including construction workers) - the manual labourers - hamals, dockworkers and headloaders who toil for meagre wages, unorganised, exploited and unprotected by laws or benefits - nearly 12% of these are women.

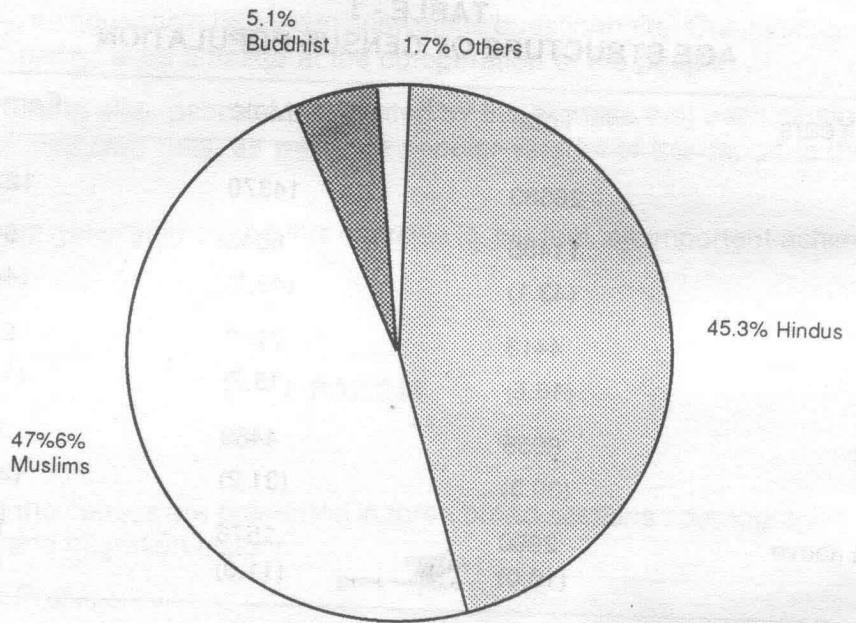
The second largest group are the small traders of edible and other goods - some 21.5% combined. These are the bhajiwalas and other food vendors who bring daily necessities to our doorstep, and make hundreds of little items available to the middle class consumer (purses, wallets, clips and pins, railway - pass covers, cheap readymade clothing) at a fraction of what they cost in shops. A third (32.3%) of these hawkers are women - our 'macchiwalis' and 'sabjiwalis', among others.

Next come the domestic servants 12% (94% of whom are women, of course) who do all the dirty work in middle-class homes for paltry salaries of as low as Rs. 33/- per month, making ends meet by working for two or three families.

The self-employed account for the third largest occupation group, with 14% of all earners. These include the legions of handcart pliers, barbers, tailors.

Pavement dwellers have little access to skilled work - less than 12% are engaged in such occupations and women pavement dwellers have the least access to skilled jobs, only 6% of skilled workers are women. Skilled occupations include metalwork, weaving, electrical repairs, machining, tailoring, plumbing, etc.

**Figure - 1
Main Religious Groups**



**Figure - 2
Main Language Groups**

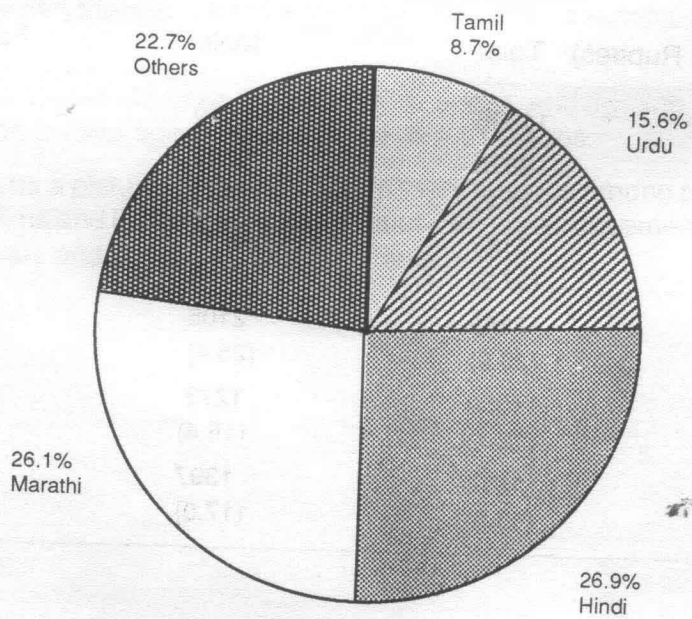


TABLE - 1
AGE STRUCTURE OF CENSUS POPULATION

| Age in Years | Total | Male | Female |
|--------------|-----------------|----------------|----------------|
| | 26583 | 14370 | 12213 |
| 0 - 15 | 11455 (43.1) | 6046 (42.1) | 5409 (44.3) |
| 16 - 24 | 4413 (16.6) | 2259 (15.7) | 2154 (17.6) |
| 25 - 44 | 8055 (30.3) | 4489 (31.2) | 3566 (29.2) |
| 45 and above | 2660 (10.0) | 1576 (11.0) | 1084 (8.9) |

Note: figures in parentheses indicate percentages.

TABLE - 2
PER CAPITA DAILY INCOME OF CENSUS POPULATION

| Per Capita Daily Income (In Rupees) | Total | Male | Female |
|--|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| | 11396 | 8280 | 3116 |
| 1 - 6 | 2875 (25.2) | 1204 (14.5) | 1671 (53.6) |
| 7 - 12 | 3180 (27.9) | 2298 (27.7) | 882 (28.3) |
| 13 - 18 | 2389 (20.9) | 2108 (25.4) | 281 (9.0) |
| 19 - 24 | 1380 (12.1) | 1273 (15.4) | 107 (3.4) |
| 25 and above | 1572 (13.9) | 1397 (17.0) | 175 (5.7) |

questionnaires were shown to people and the role and import of each item of information was explained. All doubts, fears and suspicions were cleared up. This was done even in the arterial roads where SPARC had never worked before.

Consequently, no household refused to answer the questionnaire. Our investigators (all young college students) were amazed at the co-operation of the people.

More than anything else, people were excited by the promise that each cluster would receive a copy of their own data, as well as a popular version of this report in their own language.

The enthusiasm generated during this exercise is, we feel, an important achievement of the census.

PART III

THE RESULTS:

The results of the census are presented in three broad sections : demographic profile, economic profile and migration history.

1. Demographic Profile :

The total number of individual pavement dwellers covered by the census was 26,583, out of which 14,370 (54.1%) were males and 12,213 (45.9%) were females.

Table 1, depicting the age-sex structure of the population shows that while the percentage of the child (under 16) population, i.e., 43.1%, is the same as the national figure (as also those aged 16-24), the adult working age population, i.e., 25-44 years, is somewhat higher at 30.3% than the national figure of 25%. It is also important to note that there is no rank disparity between male and female child population - if anything, there are 2% more girls.

A total of 6,054 household were covered in the census, and dividing the total population by this figure yields an average household size of 4.4 persons.

Figure 1 gives us a picture of the major religious groupings among pavement dwellers. It is seen that Muslims and Hindus account for nearly 93% of all pavement dwellers. Another 5% are neo-Budhists and barely 2% are Christians and others.

- (i) To prepare a complete demographic profile of all individuals and households in the defined areas;
- (ii) To determine the cause, history and pattern of migration of each family (including a study of pre-migration occupations and assets);
- (iii) To study the present occupation and income levels of all the individuals, in order to obtain insights into their role in the urban economy;
- (iv) To understand, through a sub-sample, the factors leading to pavement dwelling and the choice of particular location.

A single sheet questionnaire was designed on the basis of these objectives with individual data on the front and family data on the back. We were guided by the need to have a simple, short format which would be intelligible to the respondents and also relatively quick to administer. We felt that the findings of the census should be ready at least two weeks before November 1, 1985, if they were to have any impact on policy makers. Therefore, time was of the essence.

4. The Time Frame :

The idea for the census was conceived on August 18, 1985. By August 28, we were ready to begin data collection. Twelve investigators were recruited through a market research agency, trained and sent into the field on August 30. Since we had mapped every cluster, efficient deployment of investigators posed no problem.

A supervisor was also recruited, and in addition all SPARC staff were continuously involved in on-the-spot supervision. One in every ten questionnaires was completely cross-checked, ensuring a very high level of accuracy in data collection, which was completed on September 28, 1985.

Initially four and later eight coders were recruited and commenced work on September 17. Despite this, certain items - such as reasons for migration and present occupation - were coded by SPARC staff, since we felt that the coding of this data required a certain sensitivity to and knowledge of pavement dwellers which can only be acquired through the experience of work with them.

Coding of all questionnaires was completed on October 3, 1985. **In all over 6000 households, comprising nearly 27,000 individuals, had been covered in the census.**

Data processing and generation of tables has been entirely computerised.

5. People's Participation :

This is perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the census and deserves elaboration. From the outset, we saw this as a **people's census**. Accordingly, through continuous meetings with the people, the decision to do the census, the advantages and need for such an undertaking, why they were an "invisible" group, how the information should be used, to whom it should be addressed, and many other issues were discussed and debated. The response was overwhelmingly supportive, though many did voice their bitterness at not having received any feedback from earlier surveys. But even the cynics felt it would do no harm.

People were kept informed about the progress of the census at every stage. Meetings were held with each cluster a day before the investigators were due to arrive there; the

limited resources and within a very short time. Such a demonstration would also, we hope, put paid to the myths and misconceptions about pavement dwellers in general and the difficulties of enumerating them in particular.

THE METHODOLOGY :

1. Selection of Area:

As a small organisation (comprising only five people) we naturally did not have the resources to conduct a city-wide census of pavement dwellers. We could, however, undertake one in a limited geographic or administrative area. The Municipal Corporation divides the city into 'Wards' each of which contains two to five lakh people. Earlier studies had also indicated (Ramchandran 1972) that pavement dwellers were most heavily concentrated in South and Central Bombay. Finally, SPARC's own area of operation (where we had been working since January, 1985) was the 'E' Ward (roughly corresponding to the Byculla and Mazgaon areas) of Central Bombay. It thus seemed logical in every way to conduct our census in 'E' Ward.

Meanwhile, the BMC had announced that the major arterial roads in the city, particularly of the 'island' city or South and Central areas of Bombay would be a primary target of clearing operations. Therefore, we felt that a census of pavement dwellers in the major arterial roads of the island city was also vital. Thus, the 'E' Ward and the arterial roads (Senapati Bapat marg, Tulsi Pipe Road, P.D' Mello Road, Reay Road, E. Moses Road and Sewree Road) were chosen.

2. "Mapping" the pavement slums:

To census pavement dwellers is not as simple as it sounds. One has to first determine exactly where they are. When SPARC began working in 'E' Ward in January 1985, our first task was to locate every single pavement slum in the area. For this, we developed a "mapping" technique. Using a Ward map obtained from the BMC and starting from the boundaries of the defined area, we walked street by street in concentric circles, marking the pavement slums (with a rough hut-count) until we reached the centre point. In this way, we had not only located every pavement slum (or 'cluster' as we call it) in 'E' Ward but had also established contact with the women in each cluster and held meetings with the majority of them over the preceding seven months.

But we realised that in order to map all the pavement clusters on the arterial roads, we would have to accelerate the process considerably. Having obtained large road maps of the city from the BMC, we asked for volunteers who spent two entire Sundays traversing these roads, marking the clusters on the map and counting huts as they went along.

In this way, we had identified the universe for the census : some 6000 pavement households in 'E' Ward and the arterial roads.

3. Research Design :

Realising that the task we had set ourselves could not be achieved without assistance, we approached various well wishers in different organisations, who had a lot of experience in designing similar research studies. They readily agreed to help us, taking on the tasks of designing and printing the schedules, devising the data analysis framework and undertaking the electronic data processing for the census - all in close collaboration with SPARC.

The specific objectives of the census were:

PART II

THE CENSUS:

For pavement dwellers and the agencies working among them, the Supreme Court Judgement created shock, dismay, and a sense of helplessness. SPARC was no exception. As an organisation set up exclusively to work with the poorest migrant women - and in Bombay, this means the pavement dwellers - we were beset by the people of the 39 pavements where we work, all asking for some direction.

Initially, we ourselves were confused, so we decided that providing concrete and accurate information about the judgement and its implication, and promoting discussion among the people about available alternatives was an important role we could play. In the meanwhile, we began to wonder how such a massive eviction exercise would be carried out, and exactly what kind of numbers of people would be affected? How many pavement dwellers were there in Greater Bombay? What was the magnitude of this problem we were talking about?

In the search for answers, we contacted a variety of research centres, institutions, and Government and Municipal Corporation Offices and gathered most of the information which has been summarised in the introductory part of this report. We soon realised, however, that there were no hard facts and figures about the **total** numbers involved, primarily because there had not been a specific census of pavement dwellers in the recent past. We also discovered a number of myths and misconceptions about the difficulty of conducting any census of this population. The main one of being that pavement dwellers are highly mobile and transitory, "here today and gone tomorrow", so that no accurate enumeration was possible. From our years of contact with pavement women, we know this impression was totally unfounded - if anything, most had been on the same pavement for years together, and many for several decades. **They did not move unless they were forced to.**

All these factors gradually crystallised the need for a census aimed exclusively at pavement dwellers. It may well be asked why this was necessary when several surveys had already been conducted, the answer is three-fold :

1. None of the previous surveys covered a significantly large sample; at best, a few hundred households had been canvassed (see Mahtani, no date, and Ramchandran, 1972). Moreover, the sampling methods used in the survey were not very scientific, and hence one could not rule out the possibility of unwitting skews and biases in the results. Indeed, such rough and ready sampling methods (if a pavement has 50 dwellings, canvass 5, if it is larger, canvass 10) were not the fault of the study designers - for in the absence of any quantification of the universe itself, how could any scientific sampling be done at all?

2. Previous surveys had directed their results only at officials, planners and the media. The surveyed communities never received any feedback about themselves. We saw an information gathering exercise like a census **as a means of mobilising the community** and helping them to organise themselves and seek solutions on the basis of a clear, quantified understanding of the dimensions of their problem. It would also break the isolation in which most pavement dwellers live, by establishing the common denominators they shared with thousands of others in the same plight. Information like this could help them articulate their needs and demands clearly and concretely.

3. Finally, we felt that a comprehensive census undertaken in a defined area by a small organisation like ours, would demonstrate the feasibility of such an exercise even with

to livelihood; in the absence of guaranteed employment, shelter and wages for all, if people seek out work where it is available and house themselves, they have a right to live on pavements - especially since the state provides no alternative.

4. It was also argued that if people are paid less than the minimum wages, and are thus pushed below the poverty line, then their right to life has been violated.

The counter arguments posed were:

1. By evicting illegal encroachers from the pavements, the authorities were not depriving them of their right of life. They were not stopping them from living, only from living on pavements, which were public property. Only the act of depriving them of life could be deemed a violation of their right of life, and this had not been done.

2. Similarly, the right to livelihood had not been violated either. Pavement dwellers had been evicted from pavements, but they had not been stopped from pursuing their work and earning their livelihood.

3. The right to life of pavement dwellers cannot be at the cost of the right to life of another section of the public - viz, the pedestrians - who are endangered by having to walk on the road because the pavements are occupied; i.e. the right to life of pavement dwellers is not greater than the right to life of pedestrians.

4. That if occupation of one form of public property - viz. the pavements - is condoned, then other (such as railway tracks and other key places) could similarly be occupied, using the same argument of right to life, and seriously disrupting vital services.

Another crucial aspect of the case was when the petitioners asked the Court to define the rights of a child born on the pavements - and surveys have shown that a significant percentage of pavement dwellers were born on the pavement. As Chief Justice Chandrachud himself put it, the pavement is their "matrubhoomi". The Court was apparently unable to solve this conundrum.

Next the Court attempted to reach a settlement with the Government of Maharashtra by asking them to provide land for the resettlement of pavement dwellers. However, the Maharashtra Government filed an affidavit stating that they were under no obligation to give land to house pavement dwellers; and even if they were, they had no vacant land to allot for this purpose.

After four years of this legal see-saw, the Supreme Court delivered its judgement on July 11, 1985. This controversial judgement is remarkable mainly for its ambivalence. It reflects an acceptance of the major arguments put forth on behalf of pavement dwellers - that the right to life includes the right to livelihood, that pavement dwelling is the result of dire poverty and socio-economic distress and of the lack of viable alternatives. Yet the judgement proclaims that eviction of pavement dwellers is legal and permissible as long as "prior notice" is given and the demolitions carried out in as "human" a manner as possible (meaning after the monsoons). They have only restrained Municipal Authorities from taking any action upto October 31, 1985. It is **not** necessary, the Court decrees, to provide alternative location or accommodation to the affected. The Court does not tell us where they should go.

tion took an ill-considered and inhumane step which has had profound and far-reaching implications.

THE LAW AND PAVEMENT DWELLERS:

As pointed out earlier, pavement dwellers have always been, as far as the law is concerned, "illegal" trespassing on public property. In Bombay, the main legal instrument used in their removal was the Bombay Municipal Corporation Act of 1888, section 61 (D), which made the removal of "obstructions and projections in or upon streets, bridges and other public places" one of the "Obligatory and Discretionary Duties of the Corporation". But in the absence of any long-range planning or in-depth understanding of the socio-economic forces leading to pavement dwelling, the authorities could invoke this or other legal measures only for temporary effect. Moreover, the pavement dwellers themselves had never taken recourse to the law, despite periodic evictions.

But the massive demolitions of July 1981 changed all that forever. Horrified by the inhumane destruction of shelter in the height of the rains, and the deportation of thousands of Indian Citizens from one city of the Union, irate journalists and civil rights groups filed a writ petition in the Bombay High Court and obtained a stay pending admission. The petitioners contended that the deportations were completely illegal because every Indian Citizen had a right to free movement within the Union. Government though its advocate, at the first hearing, conceded this. The presiding Judge granted temporary relief to the hutment dwellers, by restraining government from demolishing the huts till mid- October 1981. The petition was thereafter dismissed, following which an appeal was filed in the Supreme Court.

The "pavement dweller case" as it came to be known, was subjudice for almost four years, during which period the phenomenon of pavement dwelling became a national issue for the first time. These residents of the city's footpaths, who could never command the slightest attention in the countless years when they formed "the vast legion of bairs, vendors, mochis, dhobies, milkmen and newspaper boys who toil to make (our) life more liveable" (Fernandes, 1985), shot to prominence only when they were cast away like chaff.

In the course of the Supreme Court hearing, all the dimensions of the problem came to light : the impoverishment and destitution in rural areas, especially the backward, drought-prone districts and states (the "push" factors); the growing rate of urbanisation, industrial development and employment opportunities in the metropolitan areas; the high cost of housing (even in slums) resulting from the above factors; that the unskilled rural migrant can find work only in the unorganised sector, where low wages (usually lower than the minimum wage), poor job security and lack of any benefits make pavement or slum dwelling the only alternative.

The petitioners argued along four major lines:

1. that pavement dwellers are not trespassers because **pavements are public property**; public property is held in trust for the public, and pavement dwellers are part of the public.
2. that if people are **forced to live on pavements out of necessity** - i.e. because there is no other alternative - then this cannot be deemed trespass.
3. that Article 21 of the Constitution guarantees each citizen the "right to life"; no one can be deprived of the right to life except by law. But **the right to life includes the right**

far from their present location is likely to create not only employment dislocation but increase costs for this population which have very marginal levels of economic existence. " (Mahtani, 1982).

PUBLIC POLICY AND PAVEMENT DWELLERS:

It is clear - and somewhat discouraging - that basic demographic and socio-economic information about pavement dwellers has been available to public planners for over a decade; data which was adequate for the purpose of seriously studying the problem and setting in motion the beginnings of a solution. Yet official reaction to this growing issue seems to be characterised by paralysis on the one hand and sporadic, short-term actions on the other.

For instance, a city-wide comprehensive census-cum-socio-economic study of pavement dwellers, which can become the foundation for both planning and action, seems an obvious need. Virtually all analysts agree that the obsessive concern with slums has led to the neglect of pavement dwelling as presenting an equal - if not greater - challenge to urban planning and development. Both the 1961 and 1971 census enumerated the numbers of pavement dwellers in the four major Indian Cities (Singh & De souza 1980). The Government of Maharashtra itself undertook a census of Bombay's slum population in 1976, but even officials admit that pavement dwellers were not included in this exercise. What is more, unlike for slum dwellers, "resettlement", "rehousing" or "rehabilitation" of pavement dwellers has not found a serious place in the official urban policy either at the State Government or Municipal Corporation levels - at least not until now.

As far as we can gather, the main approach of city authorities to pavement dwellers has been to view them as illegal "encroachments" on public land. This attitude manifested itself in periodic demolitions on one street or another, whenever the dwelling created sufficient nuisance to come to the notice of the authorities. Over the decades, pavement dwellers came to cope with this official response by simply scattering for a few days and returning to the original location or moving to another area which was reputed to be relatively "safe" from demolitions. In some strange way, this was almost a policy of "live and let live", or perhaps more accurately, it was a minor war of attrition between pavement dwellers and the Municipality, with occasional skirmishes. Pavement communities, it would seem, were left alone until they caused inconvenience to someone. Meanwhile, the unending debates on "low-income housing" and "slum development" rarely, if ever, addressed the question of pavement dwellers. In any case, with all the problems besetting housing development for the poor, the snail-like rate of construction and the powerful vested interests involved in the private sector construction industry, it is doubtful if even a miniscule percentage of pavement dwellers could have gained access to any such low-income housing schemes.

What is more, the experience of those slum dwellers who were "relocated" in outlying colonies and "transit" camps is worth noting: either these houses are captured by certain elements and the original allottees forced out; or the vast distances they must travel to work places (and the resulting expense) and lack of nearby employment opportunities result in their return to the city centres where economic survival is more feasible.

In July, 1981, however, public policy towards pavement dwellers took a sudden turn. Overnight, and in the midst of the worst monsoon downpours, large scale demolitions were carried out, and thousands of pavement dwellers were loaded into buses and lorries and dumped outside the city or at various points along the Maharashtra border. After decades of laissez-faire towards pavement dwellers, the State Government and Municipal Corpora-

numbers of landless in particular (Desai, 1981, Ramachandran 1972, Safa 1983, DeSouza & Singh 1980, De Souza 1983, Fernandes 1985).

The second major study of pavement dwellers, again at the request of the BMC and also the Bombay Civil Trust, was carried out by the Social Research Department of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) in 1969. Some 828 pavement families (living in wards A & B) were covered in the survey, along with 59 in-depth interviews with individual pavement dwellers.

Apart from basic demographic data such as age structure, sex-ratio (65% of the sample population was male), marital status and education, this study was one of the first to bring out some of the important socio-economic facts about dwellers. For instance, it highlighted the fact that most pavement dwellers are employed in the unorganized or 'informal' sector, either as self-employed workers/petty traders - 22% - (hawkers and vendors, cobblers, repairers, tailors, barbers, etc.), manual labourers - 53% - (coolies, hamals, hand-cart pullers, etc.), or in the unorganized service sector, - 7% - (domestic servants, waiters and other hotel workers, food carriers, etc.). The low income levels of this population which put even slum housing beyond their reach, was also brought out by this report.

Most importantly, a detailed analysis of migration history and patterns was undertaken in this study for the first time. The fact that economic distress such as loss or seizure of land, lack of employment, indebtedness or loss of the wage earner (due to death, divorce, separation, etc.) as the major cause given by 70% of the migrants, substantiated the hypothesis that pavement dwelling was closely linked to rural poverty.

Finally, the study demonstrated that the main cause of pavement dwelling was the lack of resources to buy or rent better housing. Interestingly, the TISS survey found that evictions and demolitions in slum areas and jhopadpatti colonies also resulted in people taking to pavement dwelling. Also, 65% of the respondents said they had chosen their present locations because it was convenient and close to their jobs, minimising any expenditure on transportation, which they could ill-afford.

The next major study of pavement dwellers was conducted by the Nirmala Niketan College of Social Work from November 1981 to January 1982, in response to the large-scale demolition of pavement dwelling in June 1981. This survey covered 329 households in 18 pavement communities located in South, Central and North Bombay. Based on the belief that little information was available on the "actual life-situation of pavement dwellers", the study set itself the following objective :

".....to gain preliminary insights in order to better understand the problem, as well as to suggest areas in the life situation of any group of pavement dwellers for whom the Government plans, or may plan to rehabilitate."

The major findings of the College of Social Work survey were very similar to those of the TISS study. One sees a hardening of trends in that 85% of the working respondents were either self-employed (43%) or casual/manual labour (42%), compared to 75% in the TISS survey. The multiplicity of employment opportunities of the poor and unskilled in a metropolitan city was brought out by both studies. The TISS study listed 35 different occupation groups, the College of Social Work listed 47.

The latter survey also brought out the fact that 64% of the pavement dwellers worked within a 5 km. radius of their residence, stressing that "the findings regarding distance also have implications regarding cost and time of travel. Hence any plan to move them very

PART I

INTRODUCTION :

Pavement dwelling is probably as old as cities themselves. Every city has its share of the homeless, and Bombay more than most. In fact an English woman, who lived in Bombay in the 1920's wrote of her shock and distress at the numbers of people for whom the pavements were the only home. The only real change since then has been in the **magnitude** of the problem and in the **nature of official reaction to it.**

Pavement slums are a phenomenon peculiar to the largest Indian metropolises (especially Calcutta and Bombay). They are radically different from what people generally understand slums to be. They are not the juggi-jhopadis or bastis which spring up on vacant lots or stretches of land, but hutments actually built on the footpaths/pavements of city streets, utilising the walls or fences which separate building compounds from the pavement and street outside.

Why do people live on pavements? Is it, as one journalist wrote, because they have lost their human sensibility and are, in some sense, sub-human? Or is it because they find no alternative, or even because pavement dwelling is the best of the alternatives available to them?

It is a paradox that pavement dwellers are highly visible on the one hand - no one in the city of Bombay can have failed to see them - but virtually **invisible** on the other. We see them only as festering sores which ruin the appearance of this allegedly 'fair' city, but they are invisible as human beings who have a history, a story to tell and a future to build, just like ourselves. Where have they come from and why? What work do they do, how much do they earn and where are they heading? Why do they end up living on pavements? These questions have been asked more and more frequently in the past two decades as the struggle to get rid of this urban blight gains urgency.

Many attempts have been made to get to the root of the problem. These attempts have been at two levels; the macro level, where analysis of the broader socio-economic factors leading to rural decay and urban migration has been the main focus; and the micro level, through studies of the pavement dwellers themselves, their history and causes of migration, their occupation patterns and aspirations. Economists, sociologists, social workers, urban planners, architects, environmentalists and futurologists have all, in their various ways, attempted to understand pavement dwelling and formulate viable alternatives. The information generated in this process is quite significant and needs a brief review.

WHAT WE KNOW :

The first study of pavement dwellers in Bombay city was undertaken in 1959 by the Economic Survey of Greater Bombay and study of trends in Urbanisation, at the behest of the Bombay Municipal Corporation. According to their report, there were over 20,000 pavement dwellers in the city as early as 1952 (Mahtani, no date). A few years later, the 1961 census of India report enumerated almost 1.5 million 'house-less persons' in the country, of which over 62,000 were located in Greater Bombay. The later comprised approximately 1.5% of the city's total population at that time. Furthermore, the majority - or over 82% of these homeless persons - were living in the island city (south and central Bombay).

The rate of migration into the city has steadily accelerated since then, a factor attributed by most analysts to the growing impoverishment of rural areas in general and the increasing

WE, THE INVISIBLE

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Preface to the Second Edition :

For those of us who were part of it, "We, the Invisible" was the culmination of a magical and unique endeavour. An infant SPARC, then comprising only seven people, set out to census thousands of pavement families in one part of South Bombay, with the conviction that the information thus generated would somehow stave off the demolition of their homes. At that time, people were anxious to represent to the authorities, the policy-makers, and other citizens of Bombay; to tell them who they were, why they were here, and what they contributed to the city. It was the only way of combating the myths and prejudices surrounding pavement dwellers.

We now know "We the Invisible", and the all Bombay census conducted by Nirmala Niketan (College of Social Work) succeeded in doing this. Myths and prejudices have been substituted with facts and figures. Mass demolitions did not take place - but we will never know how much "We, the Invisible" - or any of the myriad other efforts of that time contributed to this outcome, and continues to do so. Otherwise, this second edition would not have been necessary. Letters and requests for the document have kept pouring in long after the first 1000 copies were exhausted.

Readers may notice "We, the Invisible" has not been revised for this edition except for a minor addition in the section on Law and Pavement Dwellers (P.7) This was a conscious decision we took, despite the enormous temptation to alter it, lengthen it, strengthen it, based on the tremendous increase in our knowledge and understanding since it first came out in 1985. But we know, from the scores of complimentary letters we have received since then that the impact and appeal of this document was its essential simplicity and directness. Written in a period of 24 hours, amid the worst crisis SPARC has ever faced, "We, the Invisible" came straight from the heart, uncluttered and clear in its message. Nor have the essential truths it conveyed changed in any real way.

One final word about the people in "We, the Invisible:" We are often asked, "What happened to them? Where are they now"? Barring 300 families from E. Moses Road who were forcibly moved to Dindoshi Nagar in Goregaon (a north western suburb of Bombay), some 40 kms from their former homes, the rest are where they were. There have been sporadic demolitions now and then, in E Ward and the arterial roads, but the people hold fast, determined to evolve alternatives which reflect their own aspirations and needs. The most important of these is the initiative taken by over 600 families in E Ward, spearheaded by the women, to plan and design an entire settlement for themselves, and demand land in a suitable location to make their dream a reality.

We do not know what the future holds. But one thing is certain : those thousands of people, who told their stories in this document, are no longer invisible.

Srilatha Batliwala
Hon. Research Director
SPARC

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DEDICATION:

This report is dedicated to the pavement dwellers of E Ward, Carnac Bunder, Masjid Bunder, Wadi Bunder, Reay Road, Sewri Road, E. Moses Road, Tulsi Pipe Road, Senapati Bapat Marg and to all pavement dwellers in the world — the invisible.

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A census of this type in such a short time could not have been possible without the support, and assistance provided by a large number of persons at different stages of the census and publication of this report. We can only mention their names: Joy, Sarang, Partho, Shaila, Sarla, Shetty, Lawrie, Bangera, B. Patel, Panditji, Wilson, Gilbert, Anil, Ives, Atul, Royston, Ganesh, Anil Kumar, Smita, Beena G., Beena K., Alka, Jitendra, Sanjay, Narendra, Kamal, Shirin, Raju, Sarat Chandra, Pradip, Peter, Shaila, Hilary, Christopher, Lakshmesh, Darryl, Geeta, Britto, Miheer, Colin, and all our family.

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