

HOMELESS PEOPLE IN INDIA: AS A SOCIAL PROBLEM

Mr. Ghatage Jayant Chandrakant

Head of the Sociology Department

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Mahavidyalaya, Peth Vadgaon,

Dist: Kolhapur; Maharashtra.

Abstract:

This year we, Indians are celebrating 'Azadi Ka Amrita Mavostav'. Prime Minister has shown us the dream of becoming 'Vishvaguru' in near future. But on the contrary we facing various socio-economic problems; among them homeless people in India was a crucial problem, as till today we are unable to provide shelter to all. With the objective of providing home for all various programmes (Yojana) were undertaken by government, but till today it was not achieved by us. As we come across the fact that more than 1.82 million people (urban 9.43% and rural 8.33%) were homeless. We easily come across a picture that homeless people in various cities were wandering on the sidewalks, sleeping in parks, under bridges, flyovers, using public toilet facilities and make our cities very ugly. We also come across the evidence of the problem of homelessness in villages as more people living in villages are still away from shelter, living in 'Kutchha' homes. In this research paper I am trying to define homelessness, extent of homeless and various causes of it, its impact on society, analyze various programmes undertaken by government.

Key words:

Census house, hidden homelessness, homelessness, urban homelessness, rural homelessness, Kutchha and pukka house, rural-urban migration.

Research Methodology:

This research paper descriptive in nature and it is totally based on secondary data available in the form of various books, articles, journals and online material.

Glossary:

1. Census house: Indian census defines census house as any dwelling which has a roof. a separate main entrance from the road, and which is recognized as a separate unit of residence,
2. Hidden homelessness: It has two meanings, first homelessness in rural India is hidden as of the lack of studies about the phenomenon, as most the studies concentrated on urban homelessness and secondly, it refers to the homeless people, who live with other households in rural

areas. Because their housing need is not officially registered, so they remain an invisible or hidden.

3. Homelessness: In India emphasis is placed on those without any form of shelter rather than including those living in temporary, insecure accommodation.
4. Rural-urban migration: Rural poverty and landless often leads to rural-urban migration, which in turn serves to increase levels of urban homelessness. This migration is of seasonal; with migrants returning to their villages to engage in agricultural work.
5. Kutchha and pukka house: Kutchha means rather temporary or of a low standard and of an inadequate standard, either in terms of the quality of its condition and amenities, while pukka house means of reliable quality with minimum required qualities in the home.

Extent of homelessness:

Rural homelessness exists in India but it is hidden in nature. As many will stay with other households and these people are not recognized by any official count as homeless people. Rural poverty and landlessness often triggers rural-urban migration which in turn serves to swell the numbers of urban homeless people. Cities like Delhi and Mumbai are populated largely by people who have migrated from rural areas and neighboring states in search of employment. Promising employment opportunities in millions of cities was thought to be comforting and therefore families with no employment have to work for the landowners in rural areas compelled them to migrate to urban areas in search of some employment. However, the urbanization process in recent times is unwilling for unskilled population and as of this they remained without proper home facility. Also some families, such as ostracizing from the village due to wrong doings end up in urban areas with no employment and shelter. According to 2011 census there are 15 homeless populations for every 10,000 persons. It is higher in urban areas. Which means that 1.77 million or 0.15 percent of the country's total population is struggling for shelter?

All the Union Territories reported the highest homeless people. Among states Rajasthan reported 26 homeless populations per 10,000 populations. This can be explained by the desertification process leaving them with no agricultural land. Various urban areas in Rajasthan attract population only to end up in misery. Madhya Pradesh reported 38/10,000 population in 2001 were able to drastically reduced to 20/10,000 population in 2011 census. If this regime counted it will indeed wipe out the homeless population in near future. Out of the total population Uttar Pradesh recorded largest population followed by Maharashtra. According to 2011 census data of these states have large homeless population. On the other hand states like Nagaland, Lakshadweep and Andaman and Nicobar Island recorded nil in 2011 census. On the other hand in Northern states we come across a very low percentage of homeless population. Only urban centers like Guwahati and Dimapur were noted with few slums along railway lines where we come across the poor homeless people living in slum areas alongside the railway lines with poor or no housing facilities at all. According to the United Nations World Urbanization Prospects Report of 2018 about 34 percent of India's population resides in urban areas, making an increase of three percent since 2011 census. The report also suggests that we will come across 35 percent of the growth in the world's urban population from 2018-2050, is expected to occur in just three countries—India, China and Nigeria. India is estimated to be more than 415 million to the urban population in this period. This will definitely increase the homeless population in India. The Census of 2011 estimates the homeless population to be about 1.82 million in the country, however, some studies has shown that the Census figure is grossly underreported due to the lacunae in enumeration. Most homeless people maintain a distance from enumerators and surveyors, or are daily-wage workers who are not available during the daytime when surveys are generally conducted. Some are also constantly on the move, in different parts of the city, or from city to city, in search of work or safety.

Along with these we come across other groups of people who did not see themselves as homeless. Among them we find groups of sadhus and faquirs who themselves chosen a radical form of homelessness for religious reasons, while some tribal groups follow nomadic lifestyle for economic and social reasons. While religious mendicants are respected in our society and occupy an established place, nomadic groups increasingly find it difficult to claim their economic and social space. For

example the Van Gujjar of Uttar Pradesh has a feeling of homelessness in their self home. In 2009 they denied permission to return from their winter grounds near Dehra Dun to their summer pastures in Uttarkashi district of Uttar Pradesh, thus threatening their traditional way of life. Residents of rural squatter and slum settlements are included as they have little or no security of tenure, and their accommodation is likely to be inadequate. It is also true about their urban counterparts who are often not included in definitions of homelessness, they are included since their poverty and insecurity of tenure is likely in many cases to cause them to enter the rural-urban migration cycle and therefore join the ranks of the urban homeless population.

Till 2001, there were more homeless people in villages as compared to cities. However, in just a decade, rural homelessness fell sharply and urban homelessness saw a increase. Also in 1981, the rural homeless population stood at 17.24 lakhs, whereas in 1991, the rural homelessness came down to 12.82 lakhs, a decrease of nearly 4.5 lakhs was seen. The most important reason for this decline is that Post 1991 reforms in India offered new opportunities and employment to the rural poor, who then migrated to cities in search of decent wages and improved living conditions. Out of those migrated to cities are absorbed in the labour market, there are many who ended up with starvation wage or were left unemployed. Expensive property and rental rates and lack of police to tackle the situation it became impossible for some of them to afford a place of residence and, as a result, rendered them homeless. Thus, post-reform urbanization in India led to phenomena called 'urbanization of poverty' based on the fact that a rapidly increasing proportion of the nation's poor who were now living in urban areas as homeless.

Defining homelessness:

According to the United Nations, approximately 100 million people worldwide do not have a place to live, and more than one billion people are inadequately housed. As far as Indian situation is concerned the Indian statistics distinguishing between serviceable housing units (pukka, semi-pukka and Kutcha categories), which are included in the category, it doesn't include them in the homeless category. Policy analyst's, mostly in developing countries have pointed out the inadequacies in the existing definitions of homelessness. They argue that the narrow characterization of homelessness in terms of shelter, house in terms of shelter-,house-,habitation-or rooflessness, is inadequate as it fails to recognize the elements of social exclusion and

marginalization. They see homelessness as more than 'having nowhere to sleep', and include the sense of 'belonging nowhere'. In India, the idea of 'home' itself is analogous to a sense of identity, family and community. Our understanding of homelessness, mostly borrowed from the west, needs to be reworked in the Indian context, accounting, for greater heterogeneity in terms of age, occupation, gender, family background.

Causes of homelessness:

As far as the causes of homelessness are concerned we are unable to identify a single cause which explains the homelessness in India. Natural disasters cause large scale rural homelessness. For example up to 600,000 people were made homeless by the Gujarat earthquake in 2001 while 275000 houses were destroyed in the 1999 Orissa cyclone. One such disaster includes the flooding of the southern states of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka in 2009, when 2.5 million people were made homeless. In one area alone, around 200000 people were displaced from 100 villagers along the Krishna River in Andhra Pradesh. Annually around 30 million people were affected by disasters, with 2.134 million houses being lost, which is around 1% of the total housing stock of 233 million houses. But migration and lack of employment opportunities are some of the causes for homelessness. There could be many others such as poverty, failure of the housing supply system, natural calamity, physical disability and mental illness among others. Sometimes, social constraints for example around 100,000 people have been displaced by the building of the Tehri dam in Uttaranchal, northern India, many remaining homeless for years as disputes are entered into regarding compensation for lost land. These figures are also replicated in other major infrastructure projects across the country. Social conflict may also cause widespread displacement and long-term homelessness. Insurgency campaigns in Kashmir and the Northern states have displaced many thousands of people, while about 150,000 people were made homeless—staying in around 100 relief camps—following the communal riots in Gujarat in 2002. Like rigid caste hierarchies and religious discrimination push people out of villages. Distress migration is thus an important cause of homelessness. Distress migration is particularly acute among rural youth, who migrate to cities because it is the only perceived option for improving their standard of living and employment prospects and realizing their aspirations. The social factors might have an effect on the economic ones and vice versa.

Problems faced by the Homeless in the Indian Context:

The issue of homelessness is imbued in crucial questions about livelihood, sanitation, food and clean drinking water. It further opens up questions of identity, belongingness and self-esteem. While 'slum dwellers' have been the focus because they occupy a commercially viable piece of land, the 'street-dwellers' have been invisible to policy-makers in India. As a result, these people effectively remain cut-off from the benefits of citizenship such welfare schemes, proper sanitation facilities, voter cards, public distribution system. This absence of a formal address makes them anonymous and unidentified. Moreover, homeless people are also victims of extreme poverty and malnutrition, their state renders them insecure and vulnerable to threats of violence. People with physical and mental illnesses, neither have access to healthcare facilities nor can afford them. The status of living on the streets with multiple vulnerabilities exacerbates or even causes mental health problems to develop, often resulting in increasing dependence on drugs and alcohol. Many homeless people thus end up engaging in substance abuse.

Women are particularly more vulnerable when it comes to homelessness. They are not only unsafe on the streets but also in the night shelters if provided by the government or any NGOs. There have been many complaints by women, of molestation, sexual assaults and harassment in the streets or shelters provided by government or NGOs. As of this they prefer to live on the streets. As far as the employment opportunities are concerned they are either not preferred for offering at all, or paid significantly lower wages than their male counterparts. This shows the intersection of gender with homelessness and even substandard housing are closely related to abuse and violence.

Empirical data from India also highlights that the growth, development and security of children who are homeless or living in dismal conditions are seriously compromised. Homeless people living under subhuman conditions do not have any access to water and sanitation services like proper sewage and garbage disposal system, clean water, etc, and thus highly vulnerable to infectious diseases. Along with this, homeless people lack of community or social support which further isolates them. Finally, stigmatization and social exclusion only adds to their vulnerable state.

Impact of homeless population on society:

Homelessness is not only a housing problem. It also affects on health facilities. It is associated with significant morbidity and mortality as people in

homeless condition are likely to have multiple acute and chronic health issues. According to the study conducted by Hibbs and others age-adjusted mortality was 3.5 times greater for homeless compared with non-homeless individuals. Homeless people were often having mental illness and substance abuse issues in addition to being subjected to trauma. These people are often uninsured and face significant barriers in accessing health care facilities as they have no any documents like Adhere card, permanent address proof, as of which they were unable to get government health facilities and also as of poverty among them they were unable to purchase insure for health facilities. These people were also adding problems like bagging for food as of which we come across the problem countless baggers in urban areas. Due to poverty they were indulge themselves in begging for their survival. Most of the homeless people became addicts which also impact on their health conditions. Some of them were also indulge in illegal activities as of which the rate of illegal activities in urban area becomes more acute. On the other side we come across a fact that some female members from homeless families have also indulge in prostitution for getting some getting some money for fulfilling basic need of food for themselves and the people dependent on them. This leads to spread of various sexually transmitted diseases in large society. So that we across the fact that spread of sexual transmitted diseases mostly in urban areas and it becomes acquit when they came back to rural areas from where they migrated in search of employment opportunity.

The impact of homelessness on individual is not only to lose access to decent and secular shelter: it is also to lose many basic human rights and entitlements. It is very common for homeless people to lack voting rights. Often their status is illegal or, uncertain, they may lack birth certificates and other documentation and so they frequently do not appear on voters' lists. Therefore—unlike slum dwellers—they do not represent a vote bank and have very little or no political influence. In New Delhi, for example, one NGO (Aasharys Adhikar Abhiyan) has taken the initiative to register homeless people to vote, but similar initiatives are yet unheard of in rural areas. Majority of homeless people also lack ration cards entitling them to subsidized food, even though they clearly belong to the poorest sections of society. (Times of India, 2006). Some may have been born into homeless families while others are rural-urban migrants. Also lack of identity card means they could not get permanent government jobs or access any

government schemes. They were vulnerable to being exploited by the street mafia and the police. Though these problems are major for urban homeless people in some rural areas they have to face same problems about obtain birth certificate, caste certificate which minimize their educational admission or scholarships, and any other schemes offered for their educational upliftment provided by government.

Government Programmes or Yojanas for eradicating homelessness in India:

The country's housing has been connected with the Integrated Rural Development and Jawahar Rozar Yojana according to the administaraon's National Housing Policy. Among these some major programmes implemented by government includes Indira Awas Yojana, with the objective of providing new houses for the homeless and replace Kutcha rural houses Indira Awas Yojana' was started and under this about 11.5 million rural houses were built between 1985-2004. (Ministry of Rural Development, 2002-2005). The main recipients have been those living below poverty line and also belonging to the most socially disadvantaged groups. Bharat Nirman Programme was undertaken with the objective 'to end shelterness' in rural areas was undertaken under this from 2005-2006 about 7,716 million houses were built. The plan has extended further with the objective of completing 12 million houses during 2009/10 enough to accommodate 54 million people was also undertaken. However, there is a shortfall of 28 million houses for accodomodation of 126 million people. As far as the urban homelessness was concerned it was in 2013 that MoHUA Mission initiated the Scheme of Shelter for Urban Homeless under the National Urban Livelihoods Mission. According to the guidelines the cities were to "ensure availability and access of the urban homeless population to permanent shelters including the basic infrastructure facilities like water supply, sanitation, safety and security". These all weather shelters were to be well-ventilated, catering to 50-100 people with sufficient bathing and toilet facilities, clean drinking water; standard lighting, pest control, clean and hygienic environment, and other are facilities are included. Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin and Urban of housing for the world's biggest lodging programme for the country poor was started by the central government with the objective of providing home or shelter to all till 2022. On the eve of explaining the achievements of central government he explained that the government has successfully

build 2, 38, 83,495 house units for the poor people. (Sakal, daily news paper 30th May 2022).

Conclusion:

If we have to emerge as a ‘Vishvaguru’ in near future, it becomes our prime duty to provide shelter to all. It’s absolutely right that various programmes were implemented by the central and state governments for solving the problem but on the other hand it is also true that we fail to provide shelter to all. For this we have to re-evaluate and rework the existing policies to include a more holistic and pragmatic approach to tackle the problem of homelessness in our society. Education, training and skill development services for homeless people must be inclusive, relevant and built around their needs. So that there is an urgent need for implementing innovative, flexible problem-solving policy. For this a more individualized approach requires combination of interventions across variety of formal and informal organizations. Such network is intended to encourage a shift from large-scale bureaucratic public agencies towards more collaborative organizational structures. An all-inclusive policy approach should be adopted which tends to the fulfillment of the family’s needs, like healthcare, education, employment, transitional services; and permanent or supportive housing arrangements for every houseless family as early as possible.

References:

1. Susan. J. Smith: ‘Rural Homelessness in India,’ International Encyclopedia of Housing and Home, 2012.
2. Ku, B.S., Scott, K. C. Kertesz, S.G, And Pitts, S.R. (2010)

3. Hibbs, J.R., Benner, L., Spencer, R., Macchia, I., Miller, A.K. and Fife, D. ‘Mortality and cohort of homeless adults in Philadelphia, New England Journal of Medicine, 1994
4. Harihar Sahoo and R., K. Jeermison, ‘Houseless Population in India: Trends and Characteristics’
5. M. Swathi, Dr. D. Vezhaventhan, ‘A Study on the Housing in Rural Areas with Special Reference To Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana,’ International Journal of Pure and Applied Mathematics’ volume 120, No. 5 2018, 87-99.
6. Ministry of Rural Development, 2002; 2005.
7. Dupont, Veronique, ‘Morbidity Patterns and Economic Strategies of Houseless People in Old Delhi. (2000)
8. Government of India, Scheme of Urban Shelters for Urban Homeless, National Urban Livelihood Mission, New Delhi, Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, Government of India, 2013
9. Ramani, Chitra, ‘Shelters for the city’s homeless are far from livable’, The Hindu, October 12, 2019.
10. Department of Economics and Social Affairs, ‘World Urbanization Prospects : The 2018 Revision, UN DESA.
11. UN Economic and Social Council, ‘Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing,’ ECOSOC (2005)
12. UN Commission on Human Rights, Commission on Human Rights Resolution 2004/28: Prohibition of Forced Evictions, 2004.