

PUNE'S INVISIBLE PEOPLE
A study of pavement dwellers in Pune

INTRODUCTION

Pavement dwellers in Pune are amongst the poorest of the city's population. They are not just poor in comparison to the rest of the urban population, but were also the poorest families in their native villages. Most of them come from the drought prone areas of Maharashtra, were landless and they worked as agricultural labourers over there. Frequent droughts almost completely stopped their employment in the villages and they were forced to move out of their native places to look for alternative ways of earning money. People from these areas have been migrating to the big cities like Mumbai and Pune for a long time. Therefore, when it was time for these people to move out of their villages, Pune or Mumbai was a natural choice. They have limited skills, and so have little or no access to the better paying jobs, even within the informal or non-formal sector. What they make is enough to pay for food and the most basic of shelter. They cannot even enter the informal slum housing market.

They find place to live on the pavements of the city. Pune pavement dwellers are not as prominent as the pavement dwellers of Mumbai, because the numbers in Pune are still quite small. Most of these settlements are concentrated in the areas between Pune and Khadki Station. (See Figure 1.) Their settlements are small in size, the largest comprising of 50 huts. They are settled in lines along the road.

In Pune, the Mahila Milan (MM) comprised of women collectives in slum settlements only. As part of their activities, they have been gathering information of all the slum settlements in city which will later be compiled to form a "Slum Directory". On the 24th of July, 1997, they were working in Pune's Shivajinagar area where they met Kumar Sonjare from Astitva Nagar. Astitva Nagar is a pavement settlement. Kumar was interested in Mahila Milan activities, particularly since his own settlement had been demolished several times and was once again under threat of eviction. The Mahila Milan went over to visit his community. His settlement was located along the roadside opposite the Shivajinagar Court, in between the railway line and the road. There actually was quite a long string of houses, but many houses were hidden from view. This was because the Railway Authorities had built a high compound wall along the road to fence off their property. The houses, which used to be along the pavements on the side of the court, had moved over to the other side and settled in a line *behind* the wall. This way, they were hidden from view, and felt safer and more protected from evictions.

Kumar's settlement was under threat of eviction from the PMC for a long time. The MM and Shelter Associates (SA)

followed up on his story and later decided to carry out a census of all pavement dwellers in Pune. They would then include pavement settlements into the "Slum Directory" and a door-to-door enumeration would, in addition to providing vital information about pavement dwellers in Pune, also be an opportunity to introduce the pavement dwellers into the federation's activities. It would also be a continuation of the federations commitment to working with the poorest population of the city.

In 1984 the SPARC/ Mahila Milan team had made an extensive study of pavement dwellers in Byculla, Mumbai. The study was published as *We, the Invisible: A Census of Pavement Dwellers*, from which we have taken our title. Following the example of the SPARC/ Mahila Milan study, the Pune Mahila Milan/ Shelter Associates decided to put together the survey results in the form of a report. A lot of the survey results have been compared to the results of the Bombay report. As far as we can ascertain, there have been no previous studies on pavement dwellers in Pune. Therefore, our entire report is based on primary data from detailed interviews carried out by Shelter Associates and the Pune Mahila Milan.

At present compared to the quantum of the urban poor in Pune, the proportion of people living in pavement settlements is very small. But, in absolute terms, these people represent some of the poorest people in Pune. They cannot return to their villages because they have no land, no houses or any way of finding work. Many of them have never returned to their villages after moving to Pune. Pune gives them a chance to survive.

We hope to be able to explain through this report the reasons why the people are so poor, why they cannot return to their native villages, why they continue to live on the pavement in the most basic of shelters. They also continue to be the least-paying, back breaking and often obnoxious work to earn money. We also hope to project their feelings of insecurity and vulnerability in the city, as far as their stay is concerned. And most of all, we hope that we can make them, in the course of our work and through the report, a group of people who do not feel the need to hide, or be invisible.

KUMAR'S STORY

As Kumar, introduced the MM and SA team to various pavement dwellers, he told us his story. It was a story which typified the problems, jobs, reasons for migration, insecurities and anxieties of the average pavement dweller in Pune.

Kumar belongs to the Sonar community. Traditionally they were goldsmiths and jewelers, but now they deal mainly with the repairing and selling of kitchen utensils. In Pune, they are known as the Bhandiwala Samaj. Their community stays together in Pune, even after so many years

in the city. When his family first moved to Pune, they joined other Sonar people in a settlement in Ramtekdi. But this place was too far from Mandai, so they looked for another place where other Sonar people were living, which was comparatively closer to the market. The Sonar people in Pune live in groups in various settlements across the city. After five years Kumar's parents found a place in a slum in Swargate, which was ideal. Not only was it closer to the market, but the settlement was located in an obscure place, which gave them a feeling of security from eviction. But five years later, their settlement was demolished. The Swargate community dispersed into other Sonar settlements. Kumar and his family came to Shivaji Nagar.

At that time, an activist/ lawyer was settling a number of people on a piece of land opposite the city courts. He named the settlement Astitva Nagar. Kumar's people approached him and were given a plot for their huts. This activist was also fighting for a permanent settlement for these people. Everyone got together for demonstrations, but the authorities weren't interested, so the excitement died down and people just got on with their everyday lives.

On 4th November 1996 their hutments were demolished by the PMC. Kumar had heard that the court wanted the land for car parking. The people of Astitva Nagar moved to the pavements alongside the courts. A few months later there was a big function at the court. An important dignitary noticed Astitva Nagar, and said that they were dirty and should be moved. They were. It was a violent demolition. People were pulled out of their houses, their possessions were destroyed and they were told to leave the city.

They didn't leave, they just moved back to their old piece of land. But they settled at the back of the land, where there was a slight depression, so they'd be hidden from view. But that didn't work either, because this part of the land belonged to the Railways. So they were demolished again. They moved back to the original Astitva Nagar, which was still empty as the court had yet to build the car park.

Kumar's hut was demolished three times in eight months. They are still not free from the threat of eviction, as the court still plans to build the car park. They get repeated threats of eviction from the authorities, and they feel very insecure and are worried that they might be evicted again. Both Kumar and his wife possess Photo Identity Cards proving their residence in the city before 1.1.95. This should mean that they cannot be evicted without being given alternative land. But Kumar and his community don't know about laws and regulations. However, this has not made them any less vulnerable to evictions .

Kumar is 28 and married to Shakuntala who is 25. They have no children. Kumar moved to Pune from Belgaum in Karnataka 16 years ago. They belong to the Sonar

community. His father was trained to be a goldsmith and jeweler, , but over the last two decades, mass-produced jewelry has become widely available, putting them out of work in the village. His parents used to wander from village to village selling the jewelry they had made, but after time they couldn't make enough money doing that either. It wasn't just Kumar's family who faced this problem at this time, others in the Sonar community were faced with the same crisis.

Some Sonar families had already moved to various cities to look for other work. People from surrounding villages had migrated to Pune and found work there. So, when the time came for Kumar's family to move out, they opted for Pune. Kumar was just 12 at that time. They met up with others from their community, who had had little success selling jewelry in the city. As Kumar was just a little boy at that time, he's not sure exactly when and how the Sonars became Bhandiwalas. All he could tell us was that since their people had always worked with metals, they opted for another trade which dealt with metal. He said 'Gold and silver are all metals and so are the german [local term for aluminum], brass and copper of vessels'. They were also familiar with weights and measures, so their decision to work with vessels made sense. This is the work that most of the migrant Sonar people still do in Pune.

We asked him what their work involved. He told us that they have fixed bastis where they go to collect broken vessels. They sell these old pots and pans to bhandi shops in Mandai, and buy new ones from the same shops. They sell the new ones in the same bastis, on part exchange for more old vessels. From this work they are able to make a small profit. Kumar makes about RS. 100/day. His wife continues the tradition of making rings, which she sells to supplement the household income.

The Mahila Milan and Shelter Associates were now fairly involved with Kumar's settlement. They were the first pavement settlement in Pune to become part of the PSDF/Mahila Milan. It. We worked with the Astitva Nagar people to locate and survey other pavement settlements in Pune.

LOCATING ALL THE SETTLEMENTS

Using Astitva Nagar as the centre point, we started locating the other pavement settlements between Pune Station and Khadki Station. Astitva Nagar led to Kamgar Putla Godown which was initially a part of Astitva nagar. After being scattered they had assumed an identity of their own. They had settled mainly on the pavements at the back of the court opposite the main godown. Further east was a cluster of 7-8 houses along the Juna Bazar Road. North-west of Juna Bazar is the PMT Bus Stop settlement. East from Astitva, there are two settlements. One is a cluster at the Sangam Bridge. The second is the Maldhakka settlement. Part of that settlement stretches down south to the Pune Asiad Bus Stand. The rest of the settlement

continues eastwards along the Sassoon Hospital. These houses are in a line, but not a continuous line. There are gaps in between especially near the gates of the compound wall they use as part of their houses. These settlements are all fairly close to each other.

Further down west are the Khadki settlements. They are also located between the rail tracks and the road. The MM/SA team found two more settlements with the help of Maldhakka. These are located on two ends of the city, Saswad Road settlement in Hadapsar and the Vitthalwadi Settlement along the Sinhagad Road.

It is important to emphasize at this stage that this is an ongoing project. So far, we have identified a total of 9 pavement settlements in Pune city based on the network of our pavement dwellers. There are more in the city. The MM and SA team will continue the survey and census of the newly identified settlements. This report, however, just tells the story of these 9 settlements and clusters..

Some of these settlements are so small, that we call them clusters. None of them, except Astitva Nagar had names, so we have given them names, based on their location for this study. These eight surveyed settlements are listed in Table 1 below.

TABLE 1: LIST OF SURVEYED SETTLEMENTS

SETTLEMENT NAME	LOCATION	LANDOWNER	HOUSEHOLD	POPULATION
Astitva Nagar	Opposite Shivajinagar Court	Private	29	114
Juna Bazaar	Mangalwar Peth, near the Juna Bazaar	PMC	7	32
Kamgar Putla Godown	Alongside Shivajinagar Court	PMC / Court	58	214
Khadki Railway Line	Along the Khadki Railway Station	Central Railway	27	101
Maldhakka	From Pune Railway Station to Maldhakka	PMC and Central railway	45	178
PMT Stop	On Congress Bhavan Road by the PMT bus Stop	PMC	29	111
Sangam	Under the Sangam Bridge	Central railway	6	23
Saswad Road	Hadapsar	PMC	44	200
Vitthalwadi	Sinhagad Road	PMC and MSEB	44	194
TOTALS			289	1167

Source: SA and Pune MM Primary Survey, 1997.

JAMIL'S STORY.

Once these settlements were identified, the MM worked out how they would like to conduct the study. They wanted to meet people informally first, get to know a little bit about them, mainly why they live on pavements, the kind of lives they lead in Pune, the problems they face, their houses, etc., before going in for a total census.

They met 12 people from all the settlements who gave their different stories. One of the aspects we had already discovered was the vulnerability of the people towards evictions. Kumar was living on footpaths for many years, he had the requisite documents, but he still felt that he could be evicted at any time. What happens to a new entrant? Jamil's story describes the fears of a recent entrant.

Jamil

Three years ago, a consolidated slum at a Mangalwar Peth was demolished, to make way for a road widening scheme. The residents moved to the pavements near the Juna Bazaar.

Jamil and his wife, Shakila, and their son came from Latur [in Maharashtra] to Pune two years ago. They moved in with Shakila's mother who was living in a slum near Juna Bazaar. But her house was too small for so many people, so Jamil and his family had to move out. The only place they found was on the pavement where the evicted people from Mangalwar Peth were living.

A few months later, more people moved to this settlement. Amongst them were Jamil's brother-in-law and his family, as well as his sister-in-law who had run away from her abusive husband.

By now the Juna Bazaar settlement was clearly divided into two groups. The Mangalwar Peth slum people perceived the new migrants as a threat. The former have lived in Pune for several years and have Ration Cards and other documents. They firmly believe that their stay on the pavement is temporary and that someone is going to resettle them on alternate land. They feel the newcomers compromise their position because they are recent migrants who have no documents, fixed jobs, etc. The newcomers are aware of the hostility of the rest of the settlement, which further isolates them even within their settlement. This increases their vulnerability because they feel that even people in their own settlement want them out, let alone the rest of the city.

For these reasons, Jamil urgently wants to obtain Ration Cards for his family. He feels that this would somehow legitimize their position and make them less vulnerable. But he's never had a Ration Card. Shakila's name is registered on her mother's Ration Card, and she has no

idea how to obtain a new one. They are very scared of the Ration Card officials because to him, contact with any official would make him very "visible" to the authorities. In addition to that, they are intimidated at the thought of entering the office itself and by the paperwork he assumes he will have to do or resort to bribing, which he cannot afford.

Jamil has a severe health problem and can only work under medication, which means his job opportunities are very limited. He works intermittently as a ragpicker, and has to spend a lot of his earnings on medicines. Shakila stays at home to look after their son.

At the moment they feel very despairing. They were forced to leave Latur because of the earthquake. Not everybody migrated just because there was an earthquake. But Jamil and his family were very poor in Latur. They had no money to recover from the damage caused by the earthquake and re-settle there again. Jamil said that leaving Latur was all they could think of as a solution. They chose to come to Pune because of Shakila's mother, but she has no room for them. Living on the pavement they face daily hostility from others in their settlement. They feel they should move out, but they don't know how?

The irony is that Jamil feels that a document such as a ration card will give him security to stay in the city, while Kumar and his family have all these documents and still have no security.

SOME SPECIAL AND COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PAVEMENT SETTLEMENTS

Some settlements comprise of a certain group of people. For example, the people of Astitva Nagar are mainly "bhandiwalas" (vessel traders). These bhandiwalas have a very strong feeling of community within them. They move together in groups and ideally, would all like to live together in one settlement. The settlement at the Maldhakka footpaths are made up of groups of people who "look" or "appear" different from normal people. A number of them are handicapped, mainly polio victims, and have lost one or more limbs because of the disease. Some are handicapped from birth, either mute, or mentally retarded. A few couples are transvestites. Then there are a number of people who live along the Sassoon Hospital footpath. These people have been to Sassoon for treatment, but have had to leave because of lack of space or, when no further treatment could be given. These are individuals who have no other place to go to, mostly rejected from their families. They are mainly lepers, burn victims and accident victims. Some live near the hospital morgue, and the smells from the morgue are so strong, that some of these people are perpetually nauseated. A number of them continue to live on this particular pavement because they are given one cooked meal a day by local charities plus snacks by other charities. This takes care of a very basic

need, as many of them have very limited means of earning.

The people of Kamgar Putla Godown(KPG) and Pune Metropolitan Transport (PMT) stop spend all their time outside their houses. The houses of KPG are against the wall of the court. They have built simple "lean-to" plastic sheet tents against that wall. The PMT houses are rounded tents as they have no wall to build against. These tents are made of made of cloth and bamboo. The houses in both these settlements are used mainly to keep their possessions together rather than as a place to live. On the pavement opposite to the settlement is a large peepul tree. At any time in the morning or afternoon, a group of women can be seen there. They are from the PMT settlement. They spend most of their time there, eating, chatting, cutting vegetables, taking naps etc.. The KEG women also spend their time in little groups outside their houses, under the trees over there.

Some common characteristics are:

LOCATION

All the settlements surveyed are located along the sides of roads, in lines along pavements. The people do everything on the pavement, cooking, eating, sleeping, sitting and chatting. They are vulnerable to the danger of traffic passing right by their houses. And their vulnerability extends to countless health hazards: exhaust fumes; sun exposure in summer; stray dogs, dumped garbage; flooding during the rains; burst drains resulting in a sudden flood of filthy sewage water. After just two hours of rain the houses are full of water, which means there is no place even to sit, or to sleep. Their children are most at risk, because they are less aware of the dangers of the environment around their homes. They run out on to the main roads, and play in the garbage or sewage water.

On top of all this, these settlements are under a constant threat of eviction, to make way for road-widening schemes, or usually because they are in the way or are unsightly. Everyone living in them has experienced many evictions and threats of demolition, which has left the people feeling insecure and traumatized.

HOUSING

People live in very basic dwellings, which can hardly be described as 'houses'. Dwelling types fell broadly into three categories:

- .makeshift tents made of plastic sacking and gunny sacks, supported by wooden poles, and held together with rope, usually 6' wide and 10' to 12' long. At the ridge of the tent the height is about 5'.
- .lean-to shelters, similar to the above, but constructed against an existing wall, also made of sacking, poles

and rope, ranging from 6' X 6' to 6' X 10' in size, with a height of about 3'.

- .kutchha houses constructed of mud/ bricks and patra (just some houses at Khadki Railway Line). The average size is about 8' X 10', with a height of 6' at the highest point.

ACCESS TO BASIC AMENITIES

There are no toilets, water taps, drains or electricity in any of these settlements. People living in settlements near the railway stations use station facilities. In other settlements, people have to walk for 20 minutes to reach the nearest available toilet and water tap, which they may not be entitled to use, so they have to beg, pay or fight to use them.

Food is cooked on open fires by the roadside. People use kerosene lamps to light their homes, or just make do with the light from the street-lamps.

RESIDENCY RIGHTS

At present, all poor people have to prove their residence in Pune prior to 1.1.95 in order to qualify for any improvement, upgradation or resettlement scheme. Very few pavement have Photo ID Card, which is the most important document for proving residence in the city prior to 1.1.95. Their names are not even on the 1995 Electoral Roll. Most do not have a Ration Card, which would entitle them to subsidized food. This lack of documents is partly due to a lack of awareness about the importance of identity papers and partly because most pavement dwellers are unaware of where to obtain documents. They also feel that it requires considerable paper work, which is frightening because most are illiterate. They also feel that they might have to bribe the officials. Additionally, they feel that applying for documents would attract the attention of the authorities, and therefore expose them to a greater threat of eviction.

THE SURVEY METHODOLOGY IN BRIEF

1. The MM/SA team entered into Astitva Nagar and got an idea of what it means to be a pavement dweller in Pune.
2. They heard Kumar's story.
3. They identified the rest of the settlements.
4. They conducted 12 other in-depth interviews out of which Jamil's story is given.
5. They conducted a door-to-door enumeration of 274 households in all the 9 settlements using a single sheet questionnaire. This covered the basic socio-economic and demographic profile and intra-migration histories of each household. (the houses which could not be included in the survey was because the people were never around. Since it was only 15 houses, we decided to go ahead with the rest of the study.)
6. The data was initially processed by SA.
7. It was then decided that details about pre-migration assets and lives were to be studied in-depth in 4 settlements. Questionnaires were prepared and MM and SA carried out this part of the study.

As the survey progressed, the federation process also started. Some women from the Pune MM were involved in the actual gathering of information, and others held meetings, started crisis savings schemes, provided support and advice when demolition was threatened, and accompanied a group of pavement dwellers to Mumbai to learn demolition management strategies from pavement dwellers in Byculla.

All the processed information was discussed with the people who were interviewed, which has created a forum for discussion between the other Mahila Milan settlements, the pavement dwellers and Shelter Associates. After the initial processing, the pavement dwellers from Kumar's settlement started accompanying the rest of the MM and SA team to the other pavements for the survey and to federate them. They drew up master lists of the residents to identify the kinds of documents the people have. They have also started visiting the election offices to verify which people are listed on the Electoral Roll. If people are not listed in the Electoral Roll, then they are trying see what kinds of documents the pavement dwellers have to prove that they have been residing in the city since 1995 to protect them against demolition without provisions for moving into alternate land.