BECOMING HOMELESS, SURVIVING HOMELESSNESS

The lives of six working homeless men in Yamuna Pushta, Delhi

Ashwin Parulkar

CENTRE FOR
POLICY
RESEARCH

ABOUT THE WORKING PAPER AND THE UNDERSTANDING METROPOLITAN HOMELESSNESS PROJECT

This working paper from Centre for Policy Research (CPR) and Tata Institute of Social Science's (TISS) *Understanding Metropolitan Homelessness* project tells stories of six migrant homeless men from Uttar Pradesh and Nagaland who live, for various durations, in shelters along the western bank of the Yamuna River in North Delhi, locally referred to as 'Yamuna Pushta'. Through tracing their journeys from villages and towns to Delhi's streets, the paper explores how these men *became homeless* and how they *survive homelessness* in Delhi.

This project is funded by the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) and is being conducted by CPR and TISS. It is led by Partha Mukhopadhyay and Ashwin Parulkar at CPR and Tarique Mohammed at TISS. A key objective of the project in general, and this paper in particular, is to better understand the structural causes of homelessness (e.g. poverty, unemployment) *and* how these are interlinked – through capturing the lived experiences of the homeless in their voice. This research aims to inform successful policy and implementation responses to address the current ineffectiveness of outreach efforts to homeless people in Delhi, despite interventions by the Supreme Court and support schemes designed by the government.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

RATNAKAR[1]: THE VETERAN

The most experienced man I know at Yamuna Pustha is Ratnakar. He once lived in a thatch-grass home he had built in a *basti*[2] along the Yamuna River in the late 1970s. The *basti* was demolished by the Delhi government in the run up to the 1982 Asian Games.   These days, he spends summer months on streets along the expressway between the Interstate Bus Terminal at Kashmere Gate and Nigam Bodh Ghat.   Winters, he sleeps in one of the 13 porta-cabin shelters on the riverbank, known locally as Yamuna Pushta. A cumbersome path of stone and uprooted cement slabs demark shelters from small hills and dry knolls bordering the Yamuna River. On dirt and grass patches along the river, men play cards and smoke. Some commiserate with stray dogs. Some bathe in the river. Inside shelters, men who haven't found work that day, and those who have just returned from construction jobs and days-long stretches working in *dhabas*[3] or in wedding catering parties, nap or read newspapers.

In one of these blue walled shelters I'm sitting with Ratnakar, trying to find out where he has lived and how he has survived in Delhi these last few decades. But he only divulges information pertaining to time selectively. To labour contractors and other men in the shelter -- who tip him off to available jobs – he is 50 years old because 'no one has faith in old men to work hard labour.'

He is, in fact, much older.   'Listen' he says, 'I was born in 1952. Don't tell anyone around here.' One of the first things Ratnakar told me was that he wanted to live as long as his mother. She's 105 and lives in Lucknow with her other son. Ratnakar's five elder brothers and father are dead. He mentions those facts of time in each conversation we have. There is joy and lament in his voice. An image of his mother -- a woman whom I have never met, of course -- enters my mind. He's mercurial. Sometimes his talk is jazz riffs – improvisations of a theme (e.g. -- theme: places in Delhi he has lived; riff: he expands and retracts the list of Delhi neighbourhoods over the last three and half to four decades). In another mood, he answers in non-sequiturs that deny my attempts to construct a timeline of his life. Here's a classic example:

Me: 'How long did you live in the *jhuggis*?
Ratnakar: You could have also built your own *(jhuggi)* and lived there too.
Me: No, I'm asking how long you lived there.
Ratnakar: Where were the people? There were no people at that time.

Which time! Eventually, he says three years. As I write it down, he says maybe five or six.
He's leaning against the metal shelter wall. Another answer frustrates me. We stare at each other's foreheads.
 'You're a man with tension,' he says.
'I do have a headache,' I say.
'Listen,' he says, 'you need to learn something very important.'

---

[1] The names of men in this report have been changed.

[2] 'Basti' is the colloquial Hindi term for 'slums' used for informal settlements built on land owned by the local government. As Bhan & Shivanand point out, the legal definition of 'slum' in Indian urban policy refers to 'officially recognized locations protected by the Slum Areas Act 1956.' *Bastis*, also known as *jhuggi jhompdi clusters* (JJ clusters), ' are not recognized as notified slums or as resettlement colonies.' I use *basti* and *jhuggi* to refer to informal settlements that are not legally recognized by state authorities, such as the Delhi Development Authority (DDA). See Bhan, G., Shivanand S. (2013). (Un)Settling the City: Analysing Displacement in Delhi from 1990 to 2007, Economic & Political Weekly Vol 48(13)

[3] A *dhaba* is a colloquial Hindi term for a small, family or single person owned eatery that cooks and serves simple, hot meals of staple Indian foods: rice, *dal* (lentils) and *sabzee* (various vegetables). They are located on roadsides, on highways between cities and towns, in busy markets, neighborhoods and numerous other spaces throughout urban and rural India. I use the word *dhaba* to refer to these places throughout this piece.   The English equivalent used by workers is 'hotel.' For the non-Hindi speaking reader, 'hotel' may paint an inaccurate picture of the *dhaba*.

He scoots close to me and taps my notebook. 'Pen and paper — your first mistake. Yesterday we agreed to meet today at 12:30. And you show up at 12:30. Mistake. Show up at 11:30. See these guys talking around us? But you don't know what they're saying because you're talking to me. Show up at 11:30, listen, then you'll know what to ask me.'

I remember something. I slept in the shelter one night. I was to speak to one of the men the next morning before he set out for work. I'll save time and energy, I thought. That night, the man sleeping next to me was assaulted by a nightmare. He garbled something aloud. It startled me awake. His left arm draped over my chest. His hand clutched my right shoulder. His left leg locked over my thighs. Then he held me tightly. A sour smell filled my head. I was frozen and afraid.

'You've written down what I said yesterday to know what to ask me today,' Ratnakar says. ' You do this every time. Why? You're the same person you were yesterday. I'm never the same person I was yesterday. I was robbed for Rs. 150 last night by the river. Questions have different answers on different days. Yesterday, we talked faith. I have no faith. I have less faith than I did twenty years ago. I have faith. I keep two photos of myself on me.'
He pulls two passport size photos from the wallet in his left pant pocket.

'This one -- from when I was 18. This one, last year, after 5 months of not getting 'the call.' Look at my eyes then,' he says, handing me his teenage self.

Four decades will age any man. But something apart time has physically reduced him. His eyes are sad and tired. Only his voice remains young. Not young-sounding but with gusto, the fight-spirit of youth.

'And now. Look at my hair. This is what I am saying. I see you — I see tension. Die your hair. Eat lunch. I offered you a biscuit yesterday. A man needs strength in his body to survive this. You're going to die. But I have my God. The only thing I ask of my God is to let me live as long as my mother. She's 105. She has her health. When I can't speak to her for 5 months, I feel tense. I lose faith. She still eats hard candy with her fake teeth. My father, whom I once told you is dead, knifed me in the stomach when I was a child but there is one thing he said to me that I'll never forget: never forget home.'

I realize now. There is a timeline. They are points of, not necessarily between, knowing home, leaving home, forgetting home, and remembering home. Chronology gives story a scale-model of life to understand individual experiences in response to change. But telling a life-history also requires a parallel organizing principle: actively listening to another person with intent to understand the emotional connection he or she has to life-defining experiences — be it traumatic, joyous or the inexplicable. I'm trying, here, to understand how working homeless men in Delhi became homeless and how they survive. Memories, shared repeatedly or divulged in response to seemingly unrelated questions, are, often, the essential constructs of these men's stories 'before homelessness' and 'during homelessness.' Ratnakar's 'story' is a string of remembrances. They don't deny time but they don't depend on it either.

The other memory he shared often was why and how he believes he became homeless. When he was eleven or twelve years old his family, originally from Allahabad, lived in a rental home in Lucknow. He was a carefree kid. Maybe too carefree. He ditched school frequently and spent most days at chai stalls and food joints in the city's Hazratganj market with friends. He was fond of one stall where patrons of a nearby bicycle shop sipped tea, waiting on repairs. Ratnakar preferred hanging out with those people to his family and schoolmates.

'If someone told me to do something at home I wouldn't do it. My brothers and my father would scold me. 'You're lazy', they'd say. I spent all my time outside the house,' he recalls. One day a man, he calls him 'baba', struck up conversation with Ratnakar and some other boys. He offered them *ladoos* (a '*ladoo*'an Indian sweet).

'There used to be those types of local guys who – if a child was needy or craving attention – would get them food to soothe them,' he says. Ratnakar says that he experienced memory loss after eating the sweets. 'My head got messed up. I forgot about my own home, my parents.' He doesn't remember what the man looked like. He can't recall their conversations or the names and faces of the other children.

He does, however, remember traveling with the man and the children on trains to different cities – Delhi, Banaras, and Bangalore. Ratnakar says this man was a child trafficker who sold children in each of these destinations. 'I was one of the few,' he says, 'that he wasn't able to sell.' One day after many days, the train neared Allahabad. Ratnakar says he looked out at the houses, the shops, and the people. A thought entered his mind: this is my home. In desperation, he jumped off the moving train. There was a thud, then blackness. A fisherman found him laying unconscious by the railroad tracks and carried the boy to his home. There, he revived and cared for him.

Ratnakar's father brought him home to Lucknow after receiving a telegram from the fisherman. He describes childhood memories with his family before the kidnapping like this: 'My parents experienced poverty in their own lives but we (Ratnakar and his siblings) never felt it – I had no responsibilities and we always had food to eat.'

He had always been at odds with his father and elder brothers. But the rift grew post return. His father, a government employee in the railway division, was frustrated with his son's defiance. Ratnakar refused to go to school. He didn't display the work ethic of his elder brothers. A few of them would also obtain government jobs and live in decent houses in Lucknow when they grew up. He loved his father and his mother, he says, but had to leave home after his father attacked him with a knife.

One day, he hopped on a train to Bangalore. He slept on the streets and ate meals at local temples. He eventually worked a short stint washing cars. It was the first life lesson he says he learned: 'the hardship of having to feed myself and search for work. When I was new in Bangalore it was very hard getting work. I was very young then.' He washed Ambassadors and jeeps through an arrangement with a vegetable seller in a local market who paid him Rs. 150 a month.

I'm unclear on his life between his late teens and mid twenties. All I can say is that he lived nomadically, travelling to various cities looking for new experiences. Once, he went to Mirzapur to visit his uncle who worked in the local government's electricity department. 'You went there to ask him for a job in the electricity department,' I ask. 'No,' he says, 'I went there just to see how electricity was made.'

Ratnakar arrived in Delhi in his 20s, between the mid to late 1970s. 'When I came here (Delhi), I didn't like it at first. I walked the city after reaching the train station and didn't find anyone I could be friends with.' He slept on the streets of Jama Masjid and in the empty spaces around Raj Ghat, the memorial of Mahatma Gandi. There was a 'babu' there, he says, who was kind and had cleared a space for single men and families to sleep. One day, he met another migrant who had recently started pulling rickshaw. He decided to approach one of the garage owners in Old Delhi to get a job. 'In those days, if you didn't watch out for yourself, people would give you trouble. The seasonal rental rate (for rickshaws) was Rs. 12 a day. It was raised over the years to Rs. 35. If you made Rs. 75 in one day that was a good day. But I could expect to earn about 30 to 35.' He ate meals at local *dhabas* and rented beds from local shop keepers in Old Delhi.

He eventually built his own *jhuggi* on the Yamuna River bank, near Loha Bridge. He helped four other families build theirs too. If you go there today, you'll find hundreds of homeless rickshaw pullers, all single men, mostly from Uttar Pradesh, who sleep under that bridge each night. There is a small, blue tarp covered shop, in which a television shows Bollywood movies some nights for a fee. Rickshaws are lined up on the dirt before the water like shopping carts at a grocery store. Decades ago families of rickshaw pullers and construction labourers lived here in homes they built from scavenged materials. These homes were part of a set of demolitions by the Delhi government in the late 1970s. An estimated 700,000 people lost their homes to make way for large infrastructure projects in the run up to the Asia Games hosted by Delhi in 1982. Ratnakar's strongest memory of that day is the moment he got word that his home was in peril.

'My friend told me that a bulldozer was going to come to raze our homes. He was a very good man. An elderly Muslim fellow. He said, 'Son, take what you can and leave.'

He grabbed his cash savings and fled, with others, to Moolchand. There he built another make-shift home in a *basti*. He helped other families of rickshaw pullers build theirs too. How long did he live there? The number changes – months to years.   All I can say is that Moolchand was his home until he arranged a rental room in Usmanpur, in a neighbourhood called Jagdish Nagar. Ratnakar's family and others who lived in the demolished *bastis* of Yamuna Pushta were, later, eligible to receive a small plot of land without housing in a government resettlement colony if they could provide proof of residence and Rs. 7,000. Did his family receive their plot of land? That's one of the questions that has 'different answers on different days'. Once, he told me that he had, in a resettlement colony called Bawana on the outskirts of Delhi. He had sold it, he had said, because it was just a dirt patch, no house, no facilities. 'Where were the rooms? The kitchen? Bathroom?' Later, he said he'd never received the plot of land.

In Ratnakar's early days in Jagdish Nagar, he was perhaps in his early thirties, he married a woman from Haridwar. They raised two sons together. 'I was very happy there (Jagdish Nagar). We didn't want for anything. We used to meet and spend time with neighbours and if anyone was in trouble people would help out. I don't see anyone nowadays.' For two decades he supported his wife and sons by pulling rickshaw and delivering oxygen cylinders, on his rickshaw, to wholesalers in Chandani Chowk and Faridabad and patients throughout the city. He worked six days a week, waking each morning at 4 am, returning home at 9 in the evening.

Ratnakar doesn't say much about his wife. I sense he loved her very much. 'She was a good woman. Her name was Meera,' he says. He has two smiles. One is mischievous. It usually precedes a wisecrack. A comment like 'You should shave. Every time I say the word 'tension' your beard turns whiter' is preceded and followed by this smile. The other one is sad. All that weight in his eyes comes down and he breathes hard through his nose. His only mention of Meera is preceded and followed by this smile.

How did she die, I ask. He recalls a Bihari man who made and shared *kheer* (an Indian desert, made of rice and sweetened milk) with other families during his last days in the *basti* near Loha Bridge. Then he says, 'That's how she died.' I don't know what to say. I am, I admit, confused. I say '*kheer*' – the word used most frequently in his story – to encourage him to elaborate. He just says, then repeats, '*Kheer*.'

Why did he leave Jagdish Nagar? He says he wasn't evicted.   But he's not willing to elaborate. His two sons are in their late 30s now. They are married and have children. His older son lives in Roorkie, in Uttarakhand, the younger one in Delhi's Karawal Nagar. The elder son has one son, one daughter. The younger one has two daughters. He doesn't know what they do for a living. Just that they work office jobs and 'are home by 5pm every week day.' He phones them regularly but doesn't visit. 'What purpose would it serve (to visit)? They have their own families now. If there's an important function – then I'd go. The problem now is that I work 4 months, sit idle for 8 months.'

He stopped pulling rickshaw and delivering cylinders two years ago. The physical strain was too much. 'The owner of the oxygen cylinder company still calls me but I can't do it anymore. The work requires pulling a heavy load. Multiple oxygen cylinders at once – sometimes it's 100 kilograms, sometimes 150. How am I supposed to lift it?' His health is getting worse – he has a persistent cough. He doesn't visit a doctor, he refuses to go to the hospital. He buys medicines at local pharmacies instead. Like other men at the Pushta, he relies on work in the wedding catering parties during the marriage season. Peak months are between October and February. Labourers get these jobs through contractors ('thekedars') in Old Delhi at a dedicated site to avail daily wage jobs, colloquially named 'Company Bhag'. Sometimes they get these jobs from the Pushta through word from friends in shelters or point men of contractors, who are also homeless. Contractors and bosses hire a driver and van to take men to storage facilities, called 'godowns', outside the city. There, workers load a separate vehicle with tables, silverware and other materials for the event. At the venue, they change into uniform, arrange tables, prepare the food, serve guests during the ceremony, do clean up, and return to the godown to off-load the materials. 'I get work in wedding parties because a lot of people know me here,' he says.

He used to work construction jobs but he says he's getting to old for that too. He refuses to work as a cargo loader or puller because it's beneath him. Men say this work pays the lowest of all available jobs. He says he'd rather sleep on the streets year round, instead of only in the summer months, than load and pull cargo in Old Delhi.
What keeps him going, he says, are trips to Lucknow to see his mother. He hadn't seen her in over three decades. When he received word that his father was dying he went home. This was about a decade, or a little more, ago. After his father died he promised his mother he'd visit every 5 months. He's not able to keep his promise every year. Ratnakar is in Lucknow as I write this. I spoke to him on the phone a couple of days ago. 'How's your mother,' I ask. 'There's a family situation,' he says. 'We'll talk when I get back to Delhi.' He says, 'I want to tell you something when I get back.' I don't ask what. He laughs, says, 'This is my life, this is my life.'

THE WORKING AND DESTITUTE HOMELESS MEN OF YAMUNA PUSHTA

The vast majority of the homeless in Yamuna Pushta are adult male migrants. They live on the streets and in the shelters along a 1.8 kilometre distance between the Interstate Bus Terminal (ISBT) at Kashmere Gate and Nigam Bodh Ghat bordering the west bank of the Yamuna River. The failure of the government to re-house most poor families who had lived in the demolished *bastis* of yesterday did create homelessness in the area (*see text box*: **The Invisible People of Yamuna Pushta**) but the homeless people in today's Pushta, largely, do not share Ratnakar's experience of having lived in some kind of housing nearby. Like Ratnakar, however, most of them experience Delhi, primarily, as a homeless person. People who lived in the *bastis* of days passed were also migrants from other states, such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Bengal. But they were mostly families, not single men. In their study of the Pushta evictees, Menon-Sen and Bhan reported that many of these people were construction workers 'who had been brought to Delhi by labour conractors during the Asian Games in 1982 and settled in the Pushta' (Menon-Sen 2008). The fact that homelessness has replaced the *basti* as the dominant form of housing poverty in this area raises questions on poverty and urban spaces in Delhi of interest to our long-term research on homelessness: Does neglect of the urban poor in the design and authorization of development projects that result in large scale evictions and deserted city spaces[4] also foster migrant homelessness ? Are the single male homeless migrants in the Pushta another iteration of the 'invisible' poor vulnerable to eventual expulsion?

---

[4] Dupont (2008) showed that one-fourth of the land reclaimed by the government in 67 eviction sites in Delhi remained vacant and unused at the time of her study. The area accounted for land previously inhabited by 21,551 families. See Dupont, V. (2008). 'Slum Demolitions in Delhi since the 1990s: An Appraisal,' Economic & Political Weekly, 43(28). See also Bhan, G. & Shivanand, S. (2013). 'Analysing Displacement in Delhi from 2000 to 2007,'Economic & Political Weekly, 48 (13)

In what conditions do homeless people in the Pushta currently live? It takes one 24-hour period of observation at Yamuna Pushta to form a first impression of these men. Let's imagine this together.   It takes 20 minutes to walk the path between the Interstate Bus Terminal (ISBT) at Kashmere Gate and Nigam Bodh Ghat along the Yamuna River. Six thousand[5] men live on the streets and in shelters along the river. What would you see?   Nights, large numbers of men afflicted with serious illnesses, physical disabilities and injuries, and malnutrition sleep on the ISBT foot bridge, behind bushes, on expressway medians, in the empty spaces of Yamuna Bazaar Park and, of course, the pavements along the way.

---

[5] Commissioners of the Supreme Court. (2011). Delhi Homeless Shelter Plan

THE 'INVISIBLE' PEOPLE OF YAMUNA PUSHTA: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

In her examination of the recent history of the Yamuna area, Amita Baviskar shows that episodic, violent changes to its landscape since the 1970s have made the work and living conditions of its poor people unstable and insecure. Government led demolitions cleared homes of hundreds of thousands of poor people living in informal settlements between the 1970s and early 2000s for infrastructure, corporate, and private real estate projects -- the expressway and metro, power plants and info-tech parks (Baviskar 2011). In the 1970s, 700,000 people lost their homes for infrastructure projects for the 1982 Asian Games in Delhi. In the early 2000s, approximately 350,000 people in the area were evicted from their make-shift homes in the run up to similar projects for the 2010 Commonwealth Games (Menon-Sen 2006; Baviskar 2011). According to Menon-Sen, the latter 'evictions destroyed people's lives by removing them from areas of work, cutting off social networks and destroying housing and infrastructure they had built with life savings (Menon-Sen 2006).'

In the 2000s, the Delhi High Court authorized demolitions. The bench 'ordered that the Yamuna Pushta *bastis* be removed because they were responsible for polluting the river (citing the practice of open defecation) and they were encroaching on the riverbed (Baviskar 2011).' The *bastis* were built on land held in trust by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) . The DDA's direct land sales to private corporations, however, also violated the Delhi Master Plan. A government resettlement policy promised people small plots of land, without housing, in government colonies outside the city if they could pay a Rs. 7,000 fee and furnish a proof of residence before specified dates. People who could prove they had lived in the bastis before 1990 would receive 18 square metre patch of land while those who had documentation between 1990 and 1998 were promised a 12.5 square meter plot. But 84% of Yamuna residents who lost their homes and had required documents did not receive even these minimal provisions (Baviskar 2011). People who did get land were also not entitled to ownership rights. The land was provided, instead, on a license basis (Dupont & Ramanathan 2009).

The demolition-for-development-without-compensation trend in Delhi has been described by scholars as a modern value held among policymakers and middle-class Indians in the quest to transform the capital into a 'world-class' or 'global city' (Speak 2013; Baviskar 2011; Dupont&Ramanathan 2009; Menon-Sen&Bhan 2008). An immediate result of this value in action is rapidly changing, but poorly used, city spaces and the creation of homelessness. Bhan & Shivanand showed that half of the nearly 65,000 families evicted in about 220 demolition drives in Delhi between 1990 and 2008 were not provided plots in government resettlement colonies (Bhan & Shivanand 2013).

What makes the people and landscape of Yamuna expendable in pursuit of this goal? Baviskar argues that this area of Delhi is perceived to lack a cultural and historical identity worth preserving. Instead of 'manicured parks,' she writes, the Yamuna Pushta has long been marked by 'wilderness of shifting sandbanks, grasses, and crops'. And though the river is consecrated in the Hindu pantheon as 'the sister of Yama, the god of death and righteousness,' the Yamuna area has few visible markers venerating this tradition. There is one temple in Jamuna Bazaar. But it is known, today, as a space inhabited by homeless men.

The illegal living status of the poor in Yamuna Pushta (particularly, over multiple generations) a*nd* the perceived lack of cultural and historical identity have, Baviskar argues, rendered this area a 'non-place' in the minds of policymakers and middle-class aspirants. Unlike an 'anthropological place', where a sense of community is forged through acknowledged and 'shared social relations,' the work life, cultural practices and personal histories of the Pushta's people are invisible; its land and ecology, neglected. Today, empty spaces, flyovers, highways and new (often half constructed) buildings exist where *bastis* once did. The people who live there are still extremely poor. But the faces of the Pushta, today, are predominantly single homeless men who sleep in shelters, barren land near the riverbank, on the the streets, and between hidden spaces provided by new infrastructure (e.g. spaces between pillars and foundations of flyovers). The government's construction and use of these shelters by homeless men in Yamuna Pushta now makes me curious as to how these men survive here, and if that survival does, indeed, depend on 'shared social relations.' Are those relationships, that, in part, result in jobs in the city's daily wage circles, invisible, or neglected?

Some men look as though they are on the verge of death. Some assuredly are. Between mid-February to mid-March 2017, 22 of the *recorded* 194 homeless deaths in the city occurred along this stretch[6]. Said another way, there is a nearly 80% chance that a homeless person in Yamuna Pushta dies each day. Additionally, just over a quarter (51) of the city's deaths in this period occurred in this district (North). Many of these men are, upon first glance, a 21st century manifestation of what Howard Thurman called 'the disinherited' – people in the throes of suffering whose daily lives are literally circumscribed by the question: 'under what terms is survival possible (Thurman 1949)'?

By daybreak, another reality emerges. An equally sizable number of young and middle aged men from these streets and shelters walk to labour markets – referred to, locally, as labour '*mandis*' or '*chowks*'[7] - in Old Delhi, Shahadara and Gandhi Nagar for daily wage work. They compete for jobs at these locations with other daily wage labourers, most of whom are not homeless. These men find jobs in the informal economy through labour contractors -- as wedding catering party workers, *dhaba* cooks and servers, construction labourers and cargo loaders and pullers in Delhi, Haryana and Punjab. Follow the men to these sites and you witness a complex set of negotiations between labourers and key powerbrokers, or gatekeepers, in Delhi's daily wage economy: small business owners, labour contractors, middlemen (foot soldiers for contractors who scout labourers in heavily homeless populated areas for contractors; they are, often, homeless themselves), and, sometimes, the police.

These men talk their way into jobs for the day. Scores of men stand in areas demarcated by specific contractors and bosses. A *dhaba* and wedding catering party contractor, for instance, stand in different parts of the *mandi*, usually by their motorcycles. When called upon, men recite where they are from, their age, and work histories. Meanwhile, the contractor or boss sizes the candidate up. He squeezes a forearm, holds a man's jaw. He's checking for physical strength and, to the degree that it can be ascertained quickly, the desired level of obedience. If successful, men find work for at least the day. The wage rates are between Rs. 150 to 300 for twelve hours of work in *dhabas* and on construction sites and between Rs. 500 to 700 for daylong shifts in wedding catering parties. Young, experienced men who've established contacts with one or two contractors find jobs more steadily. The elderly and new arrivals, particularly those with no friends or contacts, find the least work.

I imagine you would be struck by two 'first impressions'. One is, it appears that a form of destitution that seems impossible to escape besieges these men. Another, reflecting on men who compete for and work with labourers who are not homeless, is: they are 'surviving' and, through their jobs, are part of what makes Delhi tick and recognizable to people who live here (it's fair to assume that most Delhi residents have attended weddings , witnessed labourers mixing and carrying trays of cement to build houses, and – or -- have eaten meals in the city's numerous *dhabas*).

These realities co-exist. In one of the earliest comprehensive studies on homeless labourers in Old Delhi, Dupont showed that nearly all (97%) of the 243 unsheltered people she surveyed worked jobs as cargo loaders, cooks, cycle rickshaw drivers or construction workers (Dupont 2000). Because these jobs were integral to the daily 'economic functions of Old Delhi', a vigorous labour market was in place to continually attract daily wageworkers despite the lack of local housing options and public services in the area. The unsheltered people engaged in these jobs were also primarily migrants from rural farming families who were supporting loved ones and actively maintaining contact with home. These findings helped view homelessness in Indian cities akin to other contours of urbanization, namely migration and informal employment. That was a crucial break from the early literature on homelessness, established

---

[6] http://zipnet.in/, official website of Zonal Integrated Police Network.
[7] 'Mandi' is the Hindi word for 'market'. Chowk is the colloquial Hindi term for 'place'. Homeless men use these words interchangeably. For the sake of continuity and specificity, I will use 'mandi' to refer to these sites throughout this report because that word more accurately connotes why labourers go to these sites and how they get jobs.

in the United States, which linked its causes to social exclusion because most homeless people in American cities were unemployed (Tipple & Speak 2009; United States Conference of Mayors 2015)[8] .

But later investigations of how working homeless people in Indian cities survive uncovered serious risks they face to disease, violence, hunger and death (Mander 2008; Armstrong et al, 2013; Chaudhary et al, 2013; Armstrong et al, 2014; Chakravarti 2014; Walters and Gallard 2014).   Mander, for instance, showed that homeless labourers don't find work regularly due to the seasonal nature of daily wage jobs. In lean periods, they struggle to save, buy food and physically protect themselves (Mander 2008). Studies on homeless deaths in Delhi show that nearly 80 percent of people who die on the streets are working age men (Kumar et al, 2009; Chaudhary et al, 2013; Saurav et al 2014). Lung and respiratory diseases, including high rates of tuberculosis, are causes of death in two-thirds of these cases (Kumar et al, 2009; Chaudhary et al, 2013; Saurav et al 2014).

Many working homeless people contribute to the city and rural India (through remittances).   Over time, some become vulnerable to further impoverishment. Our team wanted to examine how and when this happens. Understanding how people on the streets and in shelters of Delhi become homeless is our starting place. To revisit the thought experiment above, you would in your 24-hour period at Yamuna Pushta, also see men working while sick or impaired, men who once worked daily but now much less, or not at all, because of injury or depression, and able bodied men who have cut off ties back home who work to feed themselves.   That is to say, the narratives of 'the helpless destitute' and 'daily wage survivor' are simultaneously true in the lives of some homeless men at the Pushta. In some lives, men become 'destitute' after years of 'surviving' the streets over a span of time experiencing homelessness.   The attempt here is to capture these conditions and their consequences through stories of people who, while all homeless, experience modes of survival, risk, destitution, and even, freedom and agency, differently.

HOW DID MEN AT YAMUNA PUSHTA BECOME HOMELESS? HOW DO THEY SURVIVE HOMELESSNESS? AN OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

A breadth of experiences has led these men to the streets and shelters of Yamuna Pushta. Their lives, once homeless, are also diverse.   These narratives, therefore, explore the range of those experiences, in response to key, straightforward, questions: What were the conditions at home before these men left? Do men stay connected to their native places? How do they survive homelessness in Delhi and in other cities where they work? What risks do they face on the streets or in shelters to health burdens and violence?

In long-form interviews, our team asked these and related questions to 65 working homeless men in Yamuna Pushta, from April to December 2016. 63 men are migrants. Why 'working' homeless men? Our team – two field researchers and me -- had worked in two homeless shelters in Yamuna Pushta from 2013 to 2016 for a Centre for Equity Studies (CES) program that provided outreach and health services to homeless people in the area.   During this time we observed three types of men: those who were working in daily wage circles; those looking for work (usually new faces to the Pushta); and those who were no longer able to work due to health ailments, physical injuries or substance abuse problems. Work was, therefore, central to the experience of homelessness in the Pushta. On that basis, we approached men in the Pushta for this study who were working, actively searching for work or whose ability to work had, over the years, been compromised by age or diminished physical abilities. Not everyone wanted to talk. Some said there was no point of this research if we could not assure them it would provide an immediate or tangible benefit to their lives. Others didn't want to discuss their private lives, no matter what the outcome or purpose of this research was.

---

[8] The 2015 United States Conference of Mayors Report estimated that 82% of homeless people in 22 cities were unemployed.

This is the process we follow for each of the men who do agree to speak to us. We first hold informal conversations with men on the streets, in shelters and at labour *mandis* . We tell them who we are and the objective of our research: to know how men became homeless and survive on the streets and shelters. We ask: Would you be open to speaking to us about how you became homeless and how you live in Delhi? If they agree, our two field researchers, Suneel Kumar and Balgovind, conduct the first long-format interview based on pre-prepared questions, recorded on audio. Next, I follow up with men over multiple conversations.

Because the male homeless working migrant is the face of poverty in today's Pushta, the six stories in this report also try to 'show' the diversity of experiences that arose from responses to these main questions in the sample population: Where do these men come from? Why do so many men live in the Pushta like this?

A bird's eye view answer to the first question is that 22 of the 65 men we spoke to hail from Uttar Pradesh (32%), 9 from Bihar (14%), and the rest from Nepal and ten other Indian states -- Punjab , Rajasthan, Assam, Nagaland, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Jharkhand, and Uttarakhand..

But Delhi is only one chapter in many of their stories. 40 (62%) travelled to at least one other city before becoming homeless in the capital – Mumbai, Bangalore, Ludhiana and several smaller cities throughout the country. There, they experienced various housing conditions – on the streets; in a rented room; or an accommodation, usually attached to a work site, provided by an employer. The stories in this report[9] highlight the circumstances and choices that informed individual migration patterns, as well as the work and housing conditions that followed. They also capture the extent of contact these men have with family members back 'home' and the role relationships in Yamuna Pushta -- with friends, shelter caretakers and contractors -- play in helping them avail food, shelter, work, physical protection and financial security. Some men who appear to have become homeless for similar reasons, such as extreme poverty, perceive those causes differently.

Take Dev and Anup's stories, detailed below. Both are young men who have spent years at various times in their lives on streets, in shelters and work sites. Since adulthood, each has saved earnings to support family members in their villages. They both maintain close emotional bonds to their loved ones. Those are facts, told by them. They are data points in their larger stories. Equally important is: What do Dev and Anup think of these experiences? Anup says that he became homeless because his family is poor. He needed to support his wife, children, parents and siblings. That's pretty straightforward. Dev says that he became homeless because he wanted to see the wider world. After multiple conversations, we learned that Dev's father was also a migrant who lived and worked on the streets of Mumbai for many years. He was experiencing a period of homelessness, himself, when Dev left home for the first time as a child. So, did Dev leave home because his family was poor? Because he wanted to see the outside world? It can be both. We'll possibly never know which -- poverty or his own volition – played a larger role. Our team hopes that keeping in mind observable, verifiable 'story data' *and* men's own perceptions of their journeys to the streets will help us better understand the structural causes of homelessness (poverty, joblessness and social inequalities) and its ontology – how it is understood through experience by homeless people themselves.

The perceptions homeless people have of their journeys to the streets, and their reasons for living on them, aren't confined to stories of 'destitution' and 'survival'. Asking how working homeless men, particularly those who support family members back home, perceive their own conditions helps us understand the strategies they employ to better

---

[9] With exception to Aafaq's case, material for the stories in this report was gathered during the pilot study, between April to December 2016. I held multiple conversations with Aafaq before this pilot as a member of the Centre for Equity Studies. Anhad Imaan, also with Centre for Equity Studies (CES) at this time, assisted the research on Aafaq's case. The design for this study arises, in part, from my experiences with Aafaq and other homeless men with whom I had worked previously.

their lives. How they understand their own choices to leave home compels us to acknowledge the extent of agency, freedom and even empowerment that may co-exist alongside inordinate struggles in their past and on the streets.

Why do these men live in the Pushta? The area has 25 night shelters between Kashmere Gate and Nigam Bodh Ghat, which can accommodate about 1,780 people. But that's less than a third of the number of homeless people who live in the Pushta and just under about 1,000 people actually use them[10]. Each of the men in the overall sample , however, with the exception of one, does live in the shelters of Yamuna Pushta at various times. That means the stories I am about to tell represent the experiences of men who use shelters in this area at some time during the year and not, necessarily, those who never use them. 14 men (22%) w spoke to use the shelters only in the winter months, spending remaining nights on city streets, under flyovers or in parks. The main reason for not using shelters year round is weather-related – in the summer, the heat is too much to bear; in or around the monsoons, mosquitoes are abundant. These shelters are 'porta-cabins' of various sizes. They are officially categorized as 'temporary.' Buildings that have been converted into shelters are deemed 'permanent'.

While the Courts played a role in demolitions that caused homelessness in the early 2000s, later judgments were seminal to homeless policy formulation in India. In January 2010, the Delhi High Court raised a case against the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) for demolishing a homeless shelter on the Pusa Roundabout in late December 2009.[11] 250 shelter users were forced onto the pavement.[12] This was a particularly cold winter in Delhi, in which 588 people died on the city's streets that December and January.[13] The High Court Case and the high death toll compelled the People's Union of Civil Liberties to file a public interest litigation in the Supreme Court on behalf of homeless people. The Hon'ble Supreme Court directed states across India to build shelters in response to deaths on grounds that widespread mortality of unsheltered people was a violation of the Constitutional Right to Life (Article 21) .[14]

States were to equip these shelters with basic services and provide homeless people identification cards and access to social programs. At that time, no national homeless policy was in effect.[15] Later, in 2013, the Hon'ble Supreme Court directed states to implement the National Urban Livelihood Mission (NULM) Scheme of Urban Shelters, which aims to provide shelter and services for 900,000 homeless people in 790 cities. This provides financial support to state governments to build one shelter for at least 100 homeless people for every 100,000 residents.

Delhi has made some progress in building such shelters. Currently, 201 shelters in Delhi can accommodate 16,979 people, about 36% of the total homeless.[16] Still, only about 9,400 people currently use them. In 2005, the government had discontinued a 2002 shelter policy on grounds that it was poorly designed and underutilized by state governments.[17] The efficiency of the shelters that are in place remains in question because large numbers of

---

[10] See http://www.delhishelterboard.in/occupancy-report/, the official website for DUSIB's occupancy record of shelters in Delhi.

[11] High Court Rulings Case No. W.P. (C) 29/2010;

[12] Taneja, R. 'The deplorable plight of Delhi's homeless,' DNA India, February 19, 2014

[13] see http://zipnet.in/, the official webste for the Zonal Integrated Police Network

[14] People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) vs. Union of India and others, Civil Writ Petition 196 of 2001

[15] A 2002 shelter policy had been discontinued in 2005 due to low utilization of funds by State governments. See Commissioners of the Supreme Court (2014) Shelters for the Urban Homeless. New Delhi: Books for Change

[16] The census count of 46,724 homeless people in Delhi (0.29 percent of its population) in 2011 is contested by a number of field surveys. A United Nations Development Program (UNDP) survey in 2010 counted 55,955 homeless people and an Aashray Adhikar Abhiyan survey in 2000 counted 52,765.

[17] For an extensive critique of the October 2002 'Night Shelter for Urban Shelterless' policy please see Commissioners of the Supreme Court (2014) Shelters for the Urban Homeless. New Delhi: Books for Change. The authors site a number of flaws with the previous policy, including '(1) dependency of soft loans from Housing and Urban Development Corporation (HUDCO) to finance shelters (2) it was a demand driven program, based on the demand from local and state governments, which rarely came because of the invisibility, powerlessness and stigma of homeless persons and (3) marginal budget allocations.'

homeless people in Delhi are still dying. Over 3,000 homeless people also died on the streets of the capital city each year between 2009 and 2014.[18]

The quality and services of the Yamuna Pushta shelters will be analysed in a future report. Here, it is possible to say that these stories show that the shelters do play a role in connecting men to work opportunities at nearby labour *mandis*. They also foster friendships, and, for some men, enable access to valuable services, through shelter caretakers, like identification cards and bank accounts. But they do not protect men from exploitation and abuse they sometimes experience by contractors and bosses at their worksites.

The men we spoke to are either actively working or searching for work. 86% (56 men) hold two or more jobs throughout the year; 37% (24 men) three or more. 82% (53 men) work in wedding catering parties six months out of the year. These jobs are only consistently available from November to late February and late March through May. 5 7% (37 men) work as cooks in *dhabas*, 46% (30 men) as construction laborers and 21% (14 men) as manual laborers loading and transporting cargo. The following stories look at the lives of these men, who like Ratnakar, left home and use the Pushta as a space to live and to work.

ANUP, 31: A FAMILY MAN

When he was twelve years old, Anup began selling wood he cut from trees in forests near his village in Nagaland's Mon district to local shopkeepers for 30 to 40 rupees a bundle.   His mother was also a wood cutter-forager. The money helped her feed her four children when Anup's father was away in Assam several months a year building houses as a *raj mistri*[19] on construction sites . The family had a ration card to buy subsidized rice, sugar and cooking oil from the local government grain shop. But purchasing food every month required that Anup supplement his father's income. Money was short during monsoon season, Anup remembers. That's when Assam's heavy rains routinely held up his father's work. In crisis times, neighbours and friends shared food to stave hunger.

 'We had relationships and an understanding with other people in the village,' Anup says. 'Neighbours. Family members. Many families, including children, (in my village) have to gather and sell wood to support themselves. In our society, people help others in need.'

In the coming years, central and state governments began implementing programs to address the needs of poor people in the area. Officials paved over dirt roads leading to the village and issued ration cards to more people. Grain shops stocked more items like *dal* (lentils) and salt at discounted prices and distributed chai leaves for free. Widows and elderly people began receiving pensions.   The government also ensured a measure of housing security. They authorized villagers' legal deeds to land. A local government scheme, Anup says, insured people below the poverty line up to Rs. 3500 of healthcare costs at local hospitals.

Anup's family benefited from these programs. The land scheme, for one, included interest free loans to purchase materials to rebuild homes. His family used the money to buy better quality wood to renovate theirs, which had always been made of forest wood and grass. The loan program also helped them evade debt. They previously sought help from local men who charged high interest on the pay back.

---

[18]See http://delhishelterboard.in/main/, the official website of Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB) and http://zipnet.in/, official website of Zonal Integrated Police Network.

[19] '*Raj mistri*' is the colloquial Hindi term for 'house builder.' It connotes a higher level of skill on construction sites, compared to other workers, such as brick layers or cement mixers, who are called '*beldari*.' *Raj mistri* workers usually undergo a period of apprenticeship and receive more days of work and higher pay than daily wage workers on project sites.

'There was a lot of improvement, in relation to what life was like for the previous generation. They had experienced violence, competition over resources with people from other villages, even murder, and having to kill animals to eat meat. But those things stopped after the government's support.'

Then, the family grew. Anup quit school in class 10. He married. By his late teens, he and his wife had two daughters. His father showed signs of fatigue from long stretches on construction sites so Anup and his brother convinced him to work less. Then, his mother fell ill. Anup assumed the responsibility to support the family of seven -- though his brother, aged ten, would begin foraging wood soon too.

'My family was facing a lot of problems and it wasn't possible for me to handle them by own there. I had to look after everything. I had to take that step -- to leave. One thing was that we didn't have food at home. The second thing was the problem in finding work. My family needed food. I felt that if I could find work somewhere else, my family may be able to get by.'

It was a family decision. Work was scarce in the area. The local government started a program for labourers that provided daily transport to and from distant work sites but many young men in the village opted for jobs in *dhabas* and on farms and construction sites in Punjab, Assam and West Bengal. Anup was ready to leave. He was also ambivalent.

'Where could I find work? How I could find work,' he recalls thinking. 'I didn't have information on these things and I had never been anywhere in my life. I was leaving home for the first time, thinking: we'll see how things turn out. But it was also easy for me to leave. Half my mind was on where and how to find work, the other half on responsibilities at home.'

Anup left for Amritsar nearly a decade ago. After speaking to local men about their experiences working in *dhabas* and on farms in Punjab he searched and found both types of work at labour *mandis* in the city near the train station. He lived in and near Amritsar for five years alternating between farm and *dhaba* jobs for trips home to support his family. From our conversations, the chronology of events during his stay in Amritsar is unclear – whether he worked on farms or in *dhabas* first, how long each stint lasted and how often he alternated between the two. What is certain is that these jobs and relationships with employers and co-workers, according to Anup, were critical to improving his life. As a farm labourer, he earned Rs. 3,000 a month and was provided a room and food free of charge. At a *dhaba* in the city, he cooked, washed dishes, swept floors and served customers for Rs. 1200 a month. Nights after close, he slept on the floor next to 8 to 9 other migrant workers. Between jobs he slept on the streets. 'I didn't know how I was going to survive that situation,' he says of times with little money and work. 'There's no other option for people who are helpless but to sleep on the footpath.'

He returned home periodically to give his savings to his parents. While there, he collected and sold wood with his brother. After six months at home in 2009, Anup returned to Amritsar eager to find new work. 'I worked (in the *dhaba*) for a short time after (I returned from home) because it was getting difficult to support my family on Rs. 1200 a month.' He had met labourers in Amritsar over the years who'd worked jobs in Ludhiana. 'It was from hearing others (talk about their experiences) that I was motivated to try to find work there.' When his boss's father passed away unexpectedly, Anup decided to delay his move for about six months.

But as soon as he reached Ludhiana, he was keen to start afresh. He asked locals for the nearest labour *mandi*. Like Amritsar, there was one near the train station. Five to six hundred labourers from other states, like Assam and West Bengal, Anup recalls, gathered at 5 each morning at this *mandi* looking for jobs in *dhabas* and on construction sites. Unlike Amritsar, *dhaba* owners in Ludhiana didn't hire permanent workers. He searched for work and a place to sleep

daily. 'I slept in different places,' he says. 'The *gurudwara* (a place of worship for adherents of Sikhism), the train station and the footpath. I didn't have any information on where to go so I had to sleep at these places.' There was only one shelter in the area, according to Anup, and 'when it was full there was nowhere to go.'

Anup did find work frequently, in the city's numerous *dhabas* and on construction sites. *Dhaba* owners hired 4 to 5 young men for Rs. 150 to 200 a day. Labourers typically worked 12 hour shifts cooking, cleaning and serving customers. Arrangements between employers and labourers in Ludhiana were insecure, but Anup considers the working conditions better in comparison to the *dhaba* in Amristsar because he 'found work regularly and got on well with people there too. But you'd have to work in different *dhabas* everyday.'

In Amritsar, Anup's job included shelter and food, but the pay was too low to support his family. In Ludhiana, the assurance of daily work did not offset the struggle to find a safe place to sleep. He was ready for another change. Six months after he arrived in Ludhiana, he met a contractor at the labour *mandi* who supplied workers for *dhabas* in cities across the country. 'I started working with him - one place for 15 days, another for 10, 5 days, and like that I ended up working in Hyderabad and then Bangalore.'

He also worked in Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Mizoram and Assam. After one year, a hotel in Bangalore eventually offered him a permanent job cleaning rooms for Rs. 350, 8 hours a day with a room and free food — he was previously earning Rs. 200 a day for 12 hours a day. He still works there.

Why then — and when, exactly -- does he live in the shelters of Yamuna Pushta? Thousands of men on the footpaths and in shelters of the Pushta are, ostensibly, 'homeless'. They live 'unhoused' in the city. But among them exists a heterogeneity of work and family conditions they experience elsewhere (including places where they have housing) that determine the need to come to Delhi for work. Despite having a fixed job, Anup still looks for opportunities to make more money to send home. Anup's network of friends led him to the Pushta, where he was told of job opportunities during the wedding season (between October and February).

'Friendships here mean that once you get to know someone you're automatically brothers. It doesn't matter to me where they are from, about their home life. I've made friends at the temple, whom you meet through work and keep in touch with to find work.'

He started coming to Delhi 4 years ago to work one month each year in wedding parties. He informs his boss in Bangalore two or three days before he leaves and comes directly to the shelters at Yamuna Pushta. His friends help him find jobs. 'The more days you work the more you can save, which enables you to take care of your daily expenses and send money home,' he says. The shelters at Yamuna Pushta serve as a hub for on-the-move workers like Anup and are particularly useful when men have friends they know in these areas. The opportunity to increase his savings helps him keep the promise he made to himself long ago to take care of people back home. 'The most important thing is family,' he says. 'My parents did so much for me — they raised me, fed me, and educated me. They went hungry and fed me. They did all of that for me, and now, at this stage of my life, when they can't support themselves, it's up to me to provide for them.'

KISHORE, 30: THE INDIVIDUAL

Kishore laid brick near his village of Rampal, in Uttar Pradesh's Bairelly district, when he was sixteen years old. He earned Rs. 20 per 1000 bricks. His weekly chore was buying supplies for home at the local market from his pay. But when I ask him to tell me the biggest difference between life at home and in the shelter at Yamuna Pushta, he says, 'The concept of 'responsibility'. I didn't understand what it meant until I left home.'

'We weren't poor,' he says, 'We lived in a decent house, though we didn't have a toilet. ' The family owned 15 *bhiga* of land that his parents farmed and his father was a *raj mistri* who built houses for about Rs. 350 a day.

People in Rampal got along and helped each other in times of need, Kishore remembers. Villagers shared a car that escorted sick people to the local hospital and Kishore's family owned the only tractor in Rampal, which they lent to neighbours for farm work or wedding processions.

But life inside the home was turbulent. Kishore's father drank and beat his sons. 'It's not like he didn't love us,' Kishore says. 'but he used to hit us. That's why my brother and I don't drink or do drugs.'

When Kishore was in the 8th class, his older brother fled to Ludhiana to escape their father. The whole family – his parents, his sisters, brother-in law, and two uncles -- went to the city to bring him home. They found him two months later at the home of a family friend from their village. He stayed there nights after his shift pulling rickshaw ended. It was the first time Kishore had left the village. His brother's courage -- to flee and find work in a new place -- and his own experience in a new city sparked a desire to leave home too. When the family returned to the village, Kishore dropped out of school. He had missed exams and opted not to repeat the school year. Days, Kishore and his brother laid brick. Nights, they talked how and when to leave the village. His brother was confident that he could find rickshaw or *dhaba* jobs for both of them.

'We had a place to stay (in Ludhiana),' Kishore remembers. ' The place where my brother had lived when he first came to the city.' In 2002, when Kishore was 17, the brothers decided to leave. 'When my brother and I told our parents we were going to Ludhiana they forbade us. But we were both angry. And I was afraid. It was from that anger and fear that we left.'

In Ludhiana, Kishore got a job through his brother's contacts as a rickshaw puller. He also swept floors and served customers at a chai stall, where he earned Rs. 30 a day. The brothers sent small amounts of savings home. Their father returned the money each time. When they visited home the next year, their father issued an ultimatum: "If you are not coming home',' Kishore remembers him saying, "I do not want your money.' And that made me even angrier,' he says. 'Why? My money is no good? So that meant: you don't need me.'

This was the last conversation Kishore had with his father.

Instead of returning to Ludhiana with his brother, Kishore went to Patiala alone. 'I didn't work there. I'd eat at the *gurudwara*. I slept outside at Dara Market for three years.   Then I started to understand...' that his decision to permanently break ties with home   required him to find work and shelter to survive.

'When I left home, I didn't know anything. I was still in contact with my parents. I wasn't thinking in terms of 'I'm free' or 'I'm trapped'. My only problem was the fear of my father. I didn't leave for the need to earn money. We went to Ludhiana because we had already been there and had a place to stay. But if they wanted us home they could have come for us. We sent money through the post – they had our address. Our father did not come. Why not? He didn't need us. So we didn't need him.'

Kishore arrived in Delhi in 2006 alone. He slept in Fatepuri shelter near Old Delhi Railway Station, one of the oldest in the city. 'Never on the streets' he says, because, 'there are people on the streets who drink and do drugs that are dangerous.' He quickly found daily wage jobs from the labour *mandi* in Company Bhag as a labourer in wedding parties and in *dhabas* in Gurgaon. Between October and March, he would work half the month in wedding parties, then struggle the rest of the year to find jobs in *dhabas*. In those early years in Delhi, Kishore's fear of physical assault

('Years ago,' he says, 'it was a violent place. There were criminals here --- no one would understand.') and the lack of consistent work compelled him to accept an offer from a local contractor for a job in Mumbai. A sari shop in Bandra was hiring workers to design saris. He was also promised a shared room to live in with 8 other labourers.   His boss increased his Rs. 7,000 monthly trainee salary to 12,000 once Kishore learned to successfully operate the design machine.   The shift was 12 hours a day. The flat mates -- laborers from, UP, Bihar and West Bengal -- split the Rs. 2000 monthly rent.

'We would work for 12 hours and then sleep upstairs. Four guys stay there for 12 hours while the others are working. There's a latrine and bathroom to bathe. It's a big enough room. That's why I stay here for a few months, leave for a few months.   It's a place to come and go. It's a place to work and sleep.'

Kishore has been splitting time between Mumbai and Delhi for the last seven years. He works stints in Surat, as well, where he intermittently finds shifts through another contractor at a thread factory. When NGOs began running shelters in Yamuna Pushta, after the 2010 Supreme Court Orders, Kishore began to stay in them in periods in Delhi during the wedding season.   He says he could earn as much as he could in Mumbai and save on expenses living in the shelters. Crucially, the shelter caretakers at Yamuna Pushta, he says, physically protected him and his money.

He became close to one caretaker. His name is Satayavir , a social worker who has been working with homeless men since 2003, first with the NGO Aashray Adhikar Abhiyan, and now with Centre for Equity Studies.   Homeless men in the area respect Satyavir. He's affabale, smart, gracious, yet, tough. His good grace ensures that people at the Pushta who who are new, ill or friendless, won't be harmed.

'He protected me,' Kishore remembers. 'And now everyone knows me. When I lived in Fatepuri, people would say things to me but after our friendship, no one says anything to me and no one beats me. ' The CES shelter created storage spaces for men to keep valuables. They also opened bank accounts. 'When I came back from Mumbai, I had about Rs. 15,000 on me and I gave it to caretakers to save. It was like that at the shelter – they announced that people could keep their money at the shelter for safekeeping until they had opened our bank accounts. It was a good idea. Whenever we wanted to withdraw, we could.   Then they opened up my bank account and deposited my money.'

Men like Kishore, who have a 'fixed' job elsewhere, are relatively more financially secure than labourers who depend exclusively on daily wage work in the city. How sustainable is working daily wage jobs and living in cost-free shelters? In describing the conditions of wedding party work, Kishore says, 'One day's work is a full 24 hours. You have to be awake for 24 hours. That means if you work one day, you're not able to work the next day – it's hard labor.   For hard labor – you work one full day, rest the next. If you do 10 days of such work a month, that's a lot. Even if I wanted to work each day, I wouldn't be able to.'

Kishore admits that his struggle in the city is less compared to men who have families to support. 'I don't have any burdens on my head. And I can improve my own life – sometimes life improves and then something happens. Why? Because I don't have any burdens on my head. I'm only working to earn and feed myself. There's no one to tell me what to do. And who is going to improve our lives? The government forgets that we exist but we also don't do anything for ourselves. So what should I do? Wherever there is work – I should find it. And work to improve my own life.'

Dev, 22: THE WANDERER

Asked to recall childhood in Bishanpura village in UP's Deoria district, Dev says, ' My brother, sister and I only had sandals (*chappals*) and clothes to wear when my father found work.' His father lived half the year on the footpaths of Mumbai selling apples and oranges. Nights he slept on a *dari* (a thin bed spread) next to his fruit cart . At home, Dev's mother farmed a small plot of land in the village. She grew wheat and rice to feed the children and sold the potato crop in local markets for income. She borrowed from wealthier relatives when in need. Dev's *dada-ji* – his paternal grandfather -- had been a government employee in the railway division. Post-retirement, he received his pension each month. His *chacha-ji* – his father's brother – was also employed by a government department. He lived in a house with his family he had bought in the district town.

Dev looks me in the eye. The skin below below the eye brow and his upper eyelid are swollen. A long, thin scab runs through the brow hair. He smiles. He looks like the underdog boxer in in his corner the moment the bell for the next round dings. 'But you want to know why I left home?' he says. 'Wanderlust (ghumne ka shawk bahut zyada tha, bachpan mei). I wanted to see the outside world.'

He decided to leave home one morning in school. His father was working in Mumbai; his mother, in the fields. He was in the 5th class. After the afternoon's mid-day meal, he returned home, took Rs. 300, and walked 22 kilometres to the district train station. 'I went to Gorakhpur first. Then Lucknow where I met some other kids at the station who took me to an orphanage run by Christians – though I don't remember the name. I stayed there for about 15 to 20 days. It was boring and I ran away again. I took the night train from Lucknow and reached Delhi in the morning.'

Nights, he slept on the platform at Old Delhi Railway Station. Days, he received food and water from shopkeepers and travellers. The thought, 'Why did I run away from home?' kept running through his mind. Days passed. He sold bottled water on the platform for money to buy food. One morning a woman approached. May I speak to you, she asked. They walked to the Government Railway Police stand. She was a social worker from Salaam Balak Trust, an NGO that works with street children. 'We talked at length and she convinced me to come and live at their centre. They had all necessary facilities: education, food, water, lockers to store our belongings, and they even took us on tours once a year to see other places. They ensured my education up through class 10.'

He passed the 10th class, aged 17. Days later, he told staff members that he wanted to go home. He wanted to see his family. A senior staff member accompanied him. 'He took two kids back home. We dropped the other boy off at his home in Bihar. Then me.'

Family and neighbours were happy to see him. 'My mother, brother and sisters were home and my father left Kolkata the next day to see me,' he says, ' (In the time that I was gone), my father's health had deteriorated from a liver infection and I didn't know about it. Everyone was happy to see me because my *dadi-ji* (paternal grandmother) and my cousin-sister had passed away since I had left and no one knew where I was.'

But his family's economic condition did improve after his father recovered from the liver infection. It was a struggle. His mother had to borrow Rs. 350,000 from Dev's *dada-ji* and other relatives for surgeries and post-op care while she supported her family alone for months. Her husband recovered and began working in Kolkata about seven years ago, selling turmeric, ginger and garlic. He lived in a room in Kolkata provided by his boss, who was also from their village. He eventually set up his own stall. By the time Dev returned home, his father was earning more money than he had been able to in Mumbai. Dev's younger brother was also now helping his mother on the farm.

Dev stayed home for three months. He learned that his parents and the police searched for him over the years. Relatives even made trips to Delhi to find him.

Despite the warm welcome, some family members had not forgiven him for leaving.

'Over time, people would come to our house and say things that made me feel bad. I have one *mama-ji* (maternal uncle) who lives nearby who would tell my parents that I'm dead to him because I'd been away for seven years – he'd just stare at me quietly.'

The discomfort compelled him to leave. Dev grew close to his parents again. His father convinced him to come to Kolkata to work with him. He accepted, but didn't stay long in the new city. His mind was made: Delhi was where he needed to be.

Dev returned to the SBT centre. 'I told them that if I get work I'll leave (the centre).' For the next year he found work consistenly, through contractors at Company Bhag, the foremost labour *mandi* in Old Delhi, in wedding parties for about Rs. 350 a day and washing dishes in *dhabas* for about Rs. 60 a day. He slept on pavements outside Hanuman Temple, near Kashmere Gate, with friends. The temple provided free daily food. A local NGO got him an ID that he used to open a bank account. Some friends were young men who had also lived in SBT at various times. They introduced him to contractors and other labourers. These connections secured steady jobs about fifteen to twenty days after he started looking. But he soon realized that quantity, or consistency, of work had no bearing on the quality of conditions at job sites. The next few years entailed a series of *dhaba* jobs in numerous cities in Haryana, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh through Company Bhag labour contractors under terrible conditions – physical abuse, cramped living quarters, and the refusal of bosses to pay months' worth of wages.

Labour contractors at Company Bhag send workers to various *dhaba*s in North India. Young men who find consistent work, like Dev, are usually in contact with the same contractor. In Dev's case, there are two. Contractors earn fees from *dhaba* owners per the number of workers they provide. According to Dev, the rate is between two to four thousand per worker for a group of ten workers. Young men who arrive in Delhi alone are to exploited quickly. 'So when there's someone new who comes along,' Dev says, 'others will inform them of the situation. It's been bad most of the places I've been – Hapur (Uttar Pradesh), Ambala (Haryana), and Ludhiana (Punjab) -- and people are scared of where they'll be sent for work. Contractors load people into a van and take them to *dhabas* in various cities.'

In Shamli, Uttar Pradesh, Dev worked the *tandoor* (a clay oven in *dhabas* operated by cooks who prepare various breads) in a *dhaba* at a truck stop for three and half months without pay. He says the *dhaba* owner chained workers by their feet to the *tandoor* while four men stood guard during each 12 hour shift so they couldn't leave. 'I stood at the *tandoor* and was told 'you're up first.' I was made to stand at the *tandoor* and they chained my feet to it,' he says.

Five men worked night shifts, ten during the day. 'As soon as your shift is over they grab you and pull you like a goat to a room in the back, shove you in and lock the door,' he remembers. 'We got food and water. They'd say, 'Eat, drink, do drugs, whatever you want but don't ask for money. Go ahead and drink two bottles of liquor a day, drink chai, but don't ask for money. Just work.'

Workers who tried to leave were caught, brought bak to the *dhaba* and beaten. One evening, on night duty, Dev fled. He 'ran through the fields' toward Meerut, and took the train back to Delhi. In other places he had worked, such as in Panipat, he met labourers who had been working in these conditions for decades. He had similar experiences in Ludhiana. Instead of *dhaba* work, as promised there, he was taken to farm outside the city. 'I was trapped in a village. From there, I fled to another a village and they caught me and then another village after that and they caught me.

There was a disabled man there whom I asked how to flee. He said, look if you know how to swim there is a way.' He fled to the river and swam to the other side to get to the train station.

The one place outside Delhi Dev says the working conditions were decent was in a 'proper restaurant' in Khurja, Uttar Pradesh, where he worked for six months. He got this job through the restaurant owner's staff, who came to Company Bhag regularly, and had previously hired one of Dev's friends.

It was a two-story building. The restaurant was on the ground floor. There was a room upstairs for men to rest during the day. 'At night we'd remove the tables in the restaurant and sleep. There were 18 workers there.' Dev worked alongside men who were currently and no longer homeless in Delhi. The three 'main cooks' had been employed by the restaurant for 20 years and had also lived on the streets of Old Delhi previously. The owner had arranged their marriages. 'He gave them everything – a good job, a place to live.'

But the bad experiences outside Delhi convinced him to only look for work in the capital. His first move was to start sleeping in the shelters at Yamuna Pushta where labourers exchange information on jobs and contractors. In 2015, he managed to find a job in a *dhaba* in Shahadara through a friend. 'The boss was good, the store was good, and the labourers were good. I earned Rs. 8,000 a month working the tandoor.' He worked there for about seven-and-a-half months before making a trip home. When he returned to Delhi a *dhaba* owner in Azadpur market offered a 'fixed' job as a tandoor cook . 'It's a day shift, all day, and I can rest at night,' he says. He earns Rs. 12,000 a month and sends two-thirds of his income home through his bank account. 'For the last two and a half years,' he says, ' I've been able to save and send. Before, I didn't have any savings and would spend what I had on food, and live that way.'

PRAVEEN, 53: THE PATIENT

Praveen's father ran a small shop out of their rental home in Gorakhpur, a city in north-eastern Uttar Pradesh, where his mother also made and sold liquor. The family was poor. But it was after his mother died, he says, that an interminable feeling of distress would besiege him throughout life . She was a kind woman. She helped others in need. His strongest memories of her are days she would visit pregnant women nearby to give them baby clothes. Praveen was in the 6th class when she fell ill with cancer. 'My exams were on at that time,' he says. 'We didn't know the extent of it then – we were poor and didn't have money.' She died soon and young. His relationship with his father changed. 'After my mother died, my father…it was like he didn't want me. He used to beat me.'

His father remarried. His step-mother, he says, abused him too. One day she bound his legs and feet to the bed (*katiya*) and refused to feed him for two days. 'I was hungry. I said, 'I have to go to school. So the next morning she untied me, and fed me. I wore my school uniform, grabbed my books and walked out the door.'

He didn't walk to school. He walked to the bus stand. The bus conductor looked at the boy and asked for ticket fare. 'I didn't have money. He asked me, 'Where are you going? I knew the name of a town nearby. So he let me on and I got off near the Bihar border. I was small, didn't have any money, and hungry.'

He found work at a tea stall washing dishes. Days later, he left and walked to the train station. ' I was standing at the platform. I saw the train coming and didn't even know where it was headed. I got on and found out it was going to Delhi. When I reached Old Delhi Railway Station, I thought, 'what am I going to do here – in this big city?'

He worked for a few days at a *dhaba* in Company Bhag, where he was given food instead of wages. In Paharganj, he begged for food. ' I saw all these foreigners sitting there. I was hungry so they took pity on me and fed me some fruits. I kept saying I was hungry and they took me to a small *dhaba* where they fed me rice and *dal* (lentils). I ate until my

stomach was full. Then I found a place on the pavement to sleep. I slept on the footpaths and lived on the streets like that for a long time.'

Praveen lived on the streets of Paharganj between the ages of 11 and 13.   He found work at a local *dhaba*, one day, after asking the owner for food.   He recalls, 'The owner asked, "Will you work?' I said, 'Yes, I'll work.' He asked, 'What can you do?' I said, I can wash dishes. I don't know any other kind of work. He said,' I'll give you 200 a month plus food.' There were about 6 or 7 people who worked in that *dhaba* and slept on the streets.

'It was like the people who worked in these *dhabas* all knew each other,' he says. ' But I was alone. I had no one – no mother, no father.'

He spent his early adult life learning how to hustle for numerous jobs through contractors at a labour *mandi* in Old Delhi's Kaudiya Pul, including wedding party work, numerous *dhabas,* and construction jobs on stone crushing sites. His monthly earnings those days were about Rs. 400 . When work from the *mandi* was slow, he worked as a rag picker. 'The work took care of my daily needs, but it was very dirty.'

 He slept on the streets outside Hanuman Temple for 30 years. He bathed and washed his clothes in the Yamuna River, ate food from nearby *gurudwaras* and temples, and continued working daily wage labour jobs.   Like Dev, he decided not to leave Delhi after a stints in *dhabas* in Harayana where he experienced physical abuse and was refused pay by bosses.

His late teens and early adulthood were filled with terrible loneliness and uncertainty.   He had decided to never go home again. But what future did life on Delhi's streets foretell? He had no close friends. He was routinely harassed by the police. Officers, he says, would frequently beat people on the streets. He was arrested once and detained in a government remand home, authorized by a state beggary law, originally passed in Mumbai, and later adopted by Delhi. The law criminalizes the act of begging but has also been used to arrest homeless people who avail free food at places of religious worship. 'I was arrested with 6 or 7 other men. The judge asked me, 'Son, what work do you do?' I said I work in the wedding parties, and when there is no work and I am hungry I go to Hanuman Temple for food, and that's when I was arrested. He asked me if I had ever been there before and I said it was my first time.' He was released fifteen days later.

He started drinking alcohol and fell into drugs -- injecting smack, or crude heroin – in his early adulthood to cope with the solitude, fear and insecurity. 'I was drinking regularly for two and half to three years. I learned how to smoke weed and do smack from kids on the street.'

By his early forties, Praveen's health was declining. One day, near Hanuman Temple, about a decade ago, he started shivering. When the sun set and the night grew cold, he passed out.   Two outreach workers from an organization called Sahara found him unresponsive on the streets and admitted him to Safdarjung Hospital. A hospital physician diagnosed him with malaria. Blood tests also revealed that he was HIV positive. After he recovered from malaria and was discharged by the hospital the caretakers arranged further care at their drug de-addiction and HIV care centre in Darya Ganj. 'They asked me if I wanted to quit drugs. I said, yes I want to quit, it's ruined my life.' Social workers at the centre, he says, cared for him with compassion. They administered his HIV medications, they fed him nutritious food regularly, and provided facilities to bathe and rest.

The 15 days of detox and 3 months of rehab services helped him quit drugs.   'They saved my life,' he recalls. The organization then arranged a job for him as a sweeper at Honda Company in Gurgaon for Rs. 2500 a month.   Food rations were included and he would share a rented room with seven other working former drug users. The rental had

a kitchen, bathroom, and a main room where the men slept. 'Nights, we'd make *dal* and rice in the kitchen,' he remembers.

But Praveen quit his job the next year because, he says, the contractor through whom he was receiving his salary would not help him obtain an ID so that he could open a bank account.

He found another job as a sweeper at Minda Company, also in Gurgaon, through other recovering drug users that were living in a separate rental accommodation operated by Sahara. Each man's rent was Rs. 350 a month. 'There were beds. There was a kitchen for food, a bathroom,' Praveen recalls. Sahara would deliver free HIV medication to the centre through a tie up with Lok Nayak Jai Prakash (LNJP) Hospital , as there were other working men with whom Praveen lived that were afflicted with the disease. The organization also provided monthly rations and a gas cylinder.

The men, Praveen included, started using drugs again. 'I'm not going to lie. We would spend their money on drugs. I ended up on the streets again. I came back to Yamuna Bazar and started doing drugs again.'

In 2015, Praveen was diagnosed with tuberculosis. ' I lost my appetite, and was very ill. I went to LNJP and was diagnosed with TB in my liver. From there, someone told me about Aman Biradari.' The NGO Aman Biradari, associated with the Centre for Equity Studies, runs a health recovery shelter for homeless men in the Yamuna Pushta area. The centre arranges follow up health care for homeless men who've been discharged from local hospitals. They also initiate treatment in hospitals for seriously ill or impaired men on the streets, such as those wounded by traffic accidents. The shelter tries to fill a gap in the public healthcare system by providing homeless men a sanitary and supportive environment to recover, with an aim to help them either return to working in the city or to their native places.

Treatment for men like Praveen, who've been on the streets for years, have multiple serious ailments, and have no ties back home are, perhaps, the most difficult cases. The staff doctor, nurse and a team of caretakers helped Praveen recover from tuberculosis over an eight-month period. A shelter caretaker accompanied him to the hospital each week for his dosage of Directly Observed Treatment, Short-Course (DOTS) treatment, the official course of TB medicines recommended by the World Health Organization. The medicines are free through public hospitals and notified municipal dispensaries in India, as part of the Revised National Tuberculosis Control Program (RNTCP).

After his treatment, he continued using the shelters of Yamuna Pushta, where he currently sleeps each night, and rests on days that he either does not find, or is not physically able to, work. Throughout the years – perhaps due to a combination of life on the streets, drug use and serious ailments – he's lost mobility in his foot, and walks with a crutch. 'I used to work a lot,' he says 'I'm 53 now and am working less these days – two to three days a week.' He is no longer able to endure the physical demands of wedding party work and only looks for jobs as a sweeper.

AAFAQ, 39: LAZARUS

Aafaq left his village in Uttar Pradesh's Bahraich district, about 115 km from Lucknow 'because there is absolutely nothing at home. There are no farming opportunities, we can't grow our own food and there are few sources of income in the area.' His was not a family of farmers. They did not own land nor had they ever worked anyone else's. His parents sold vegetables in a local market to support their seven children. Aafaq has three brothers and three sisters. His brothers sell vegetables too. They have never left the village. But Aafaq went the way of many young men he grew up with who, in young adulthood, commonly migrate to Lucknow, Kanpur and Delhi to find work. 'I did the same. I thought the same,' he says. ' I started going outside when I was 19 or 20 -- for one month, or even two or four -- to earn money to bring home.'

Kanpur was his first stop. The short distance from home – about a five-hour bus journey -- allowed frequent travel back and forth. Friends who had worked in Kanpur and returned home told him about jobs and labour *mandis* there. For six years, he worked on construction sites and in *dhabas*, earning Rs. 50 to 60 a day. He preferred serving, cooking and cleaning duties in the city's small *dhabas* -- 'that were like huts with straw mats for a roof' in some parts of town and '*pakka*' (connotes 'good physical quality') *dhabas* in downtown 'that were of better quality' -- over construction work because *dhaba* owners often provided free food and spaces for workers to bathe. In the coming years, he started pulling a rickshaw too.

He slept by the railroad tracks next to other workers and took savings home three times a year. He and friends at the railway tracks ventured to the nearby labour *mandi* each morning at 10 am. They'd begin shifts at noon in the city's *dhabas* or on construction sites. Each midnight, the end of the workday, the boss would give him his daily wage and he'd eat with friends at a roadside eatery or by the railway tracks before heading to sleep.

Friendship provided emotional, physical and financial security on the streets of Kanpur, Aafaq remembers. It dammed the dreaded loneliness he feared would overcome him, alone in a new city. It ensured job opportunities, protection from violence and support in times of need. For although there was no mutual sense among men, he says, of 'one for all and all for one,' the labourers he knew in Kanpur did, nevertheless, 'help each other when someone needed money or was sick. Sometimes we'd work together and when we 'd return (to the railway tracks) we would get to know one another even better.' When still new in the city and down with a fever for one month, unable to work, he says, ' Every night upon returning from work, they would take care of me. Someone would give me 10 or 20 rupees, buy me medicines, and get me tea and food.' The support helped him persevere to work for his family. 'My relationship with my parents and siblings have always been good. They knew I was in Kanpur to work, earn and go home each year for a month or two.'

Aafaq came to Delhi alone in 2006 or 2007 hoping to earn more money for his family. In the early days, he slept outside Old Delhi Railway Station. Bedding was available. Local vendors on the streets of Meena Bazaar rented out blankets to homeless people for Rs. 10 a night. In the rainy season, he slept in cool spaces under temporary roofs, known colloquially as *kirpals*. Finding work was difficult. 'Somedays I found work in the labour *mandi* at Uttam Nagar and some days I wouldn't. On days I didn't find work I would come back to the footpath and go to sleep and begin the process again the next day. I did this for my first 3 months in Delhi.'

One day, he met a friend named Shakeel from his Kanpur days who was living and working in Yamuna Bazar as a rickshaw puller. 'We worked together, lived together, did everything together. He got me my rickshaw here in Delhi.' The two friends rented their rickshaws for Rs. 30 a day from an owner in Yamuna Bazar. When he didn't earn enough he picked up wedding party work during the wedding season about 8 to 10 times a month, where he'd earn about Rs. 1000 for each job. He also worked in *dhabas* in the city. 'I couldn't earn more than Rs. 200 a day pulling rickshaw,' he says, 'which I'd spend on food. Wedding party work helped me save. I worked hard and ate well.'

Wedding party work, he says, is especially taxing. 'There are about 20 to 25 workers on the job. Sometimes there are about 40 but a minimum of 15 people is needed to do the work. We go to the godown in the morning and load needed materials from the basement into the truck. We reach the venue at night and sleep for a few hours. That night, we set up tables, wash and wipe plates that are to be used and arrange the cutlery. Then we wear our uniforms and pick up used cutlery during the event. After the event, we wash cutlery and clean the venue until the morning. Then we load all the materials back onto the truck, drop them off in the godown basement, and receive our pay.'

He'd spend nights on the footpaths of Yamuna Bazaar. 'In the evenings I'd hang out with four or five of the other guys, eat, smoke weed. It was okay –we used to work and eat, that's all.'

Aafaq fell ill one day in the winter of 2011. He was coughing blood, became too weak to walk, and thus work. He had a persistent fever. He bought medicines from a local dispensary. A friend suggested he may have tuberculosis and urged him to visit the mobile medical unit, run by the Delhi Tuberculosis Association, which made rounds in Chandani Chowk each week to offer free sputum testing. Tests confirmed he had tuberculosis. Social workers associated with the mobile clinic started the four-drug DOTS regimen, recommended by the World Health Organization and instituted by India's Revised National TB Control Program (RNTCP). He says he was instructed to visit the van weekly upon their rounds for six months – the officially recommended time of treatment -- but stopped taking the medicines after two months. He had started to feel better and needed to work.

Months later, he fell ill again. He visited Safdarjung Hospital. He did not have proof of identification so the doctor, he says, asked him to call 'someone with identification who could vouch for him'. Or, the doctor said, he could try Kasturba Hospital, near Jama Masjid, where he was living at the time. His attempts at Kasturba Hospital were unsuccessful so he went to a Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) clinic in Patparganj that administers TB exams and medicines under the RNTCP. A second sputum test there reconfirmed tuberculosis. Aafaq says that health workers at the MCD clinic said they could start his medication after he provided a proof of address. 'How could I have done that,' he remembers. 'I sleep on the street.'

In the coming days, rickshaw pullers at Cycle Market told Aafaq that the Aman Biradari health recovery shelter in Yamuna Pushta provides free treatment for homeless men. The shelter refers tuberculosis patients to a range of hospitals in the public health care system for testing and care, depending on the severity of the disease. Nassir had a past history of tuberculosis which made it likely that the infected bacteria may become resistant to particular drugs in the regime, known as multi-drug resistant (MDR-TB). The shelter physician, Dr. Bhijalwan, thus recommended a 'drug susceptibility test,' which is conducted by physicians in AB's partner facility, Rajan Babu Tuberculosis Hospital. Aafaq was admitted at this hospital, in Kingsway Camp, for six days, where exams confirmed that he had multi-drug resistant tuberculosis. When he returned to the shelter, the doctor told him that he would have to take the course for two years instead of six months to recover. Aafaq stayed at the shelter for over a year. One day, he disappeared. Staff members searched for him on the Pushta, on the streets of Jama Masjid and Yamuna Bazaar, Company Bhag and rickshaw garages. No one had seen him. They asked other homeless men to notify the shelter if they saw or heard from him. A few months later, word among other homeless men spread that Aafaq had died. The story was that his body had been found in a ditch. Which ditch? Who found him? Did the police identify the body? No one could say. His story was frequently told at the shelter. He was a good man, people said. They recalled his fondness, an obsession, for card games. One day he reappeared. In the shelter. He looked healthy. The staff was elated. I wish I could have been there. But I'm happy with what I heard. He had returned home, he told staff members, completed his treatment, and was now living with his family.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

What do these stories tell us about the conditions at home that lead these men to the streets? In our conversations with each of the 65 men, the main reasons reported for leaving home were: the search for work due to poverty (27 men, 41.5%) and family conflict (24 men, 36.9%). To state the obvious, 'poverty' and 'family conflict' are complex dynamics. They don't, by simply being named, provide an understanding of how life at home may have led men to the streets.

Stories of journeys from home to the streets place risk factors of poverty and family strife in context of individual lives. Understanding the nature of poverty or family conflict that people on the streets have endured *and* their perceptions of those events helps shed light on how they respond to -- are not merely passive receivers of -- social and economic injustice. In other words, what support structures – decent jobs, social protection programs, and family bonds -- existed when these men lived at home, and how (in their eyes) did the lack or quality of those factors impact decision to leave?

The lack of jobs and the need to support family compelled Anup and Aafaq to leave home. For Praveen, who was also poor, and Kishore, who says he wasn't, physical abuse by family members triggered journeys to the streets. What unites these four men is that each left home out of similar inner turmoil – the feeling of having nowhere else to go. Dev and Ratnakar's stories caution against focusing solelyon either poverty or abuse to explain conditions leading to homelessness. Dev's family was poor. His father was also a migrant homeless person. But Dev doesn't believe his poverty informed his decision to leave home. It was 'wanderlust.' Freewill. Dev asserts that he wanted to go somewhere else. That is unlike what other men revealed in having no other option but to leave. And what about Ratnakar? He left home after being abused by his father. But there is more to his story. What impact did being kidnapped have on further alienating him from his family? How did his disobedience frustrate, aggrieve or infuriate his father to the point that he physically abused his son? Do these events and his struggles in Delhi have anything to do with his inability or refusal to abide by chronological time?

No matter the causes were for leaving home, journeys to and experiences on the streets are circumscribed by the need to work under insecure conditions to survive. The ways men find work in wedding catering parties, *dhabas*, construction sites and other daily wage jobs through contractors and small business owners reveals how the informal economy in multiple cities determines where migrants who become homeless live: in *dhabas*, the streets and open spaces near labor *mandis* and, particularly in Yamuna Pushta, homeless shelters where information on jobs spreads quickly. Relationships workers have with labour contractors and business owners further determines the quality of working conditions at sites. These conditions can be highly exploitative and unsafe while providing the only means for men to support themselves. Anup's current job as a hotel cleaner in Bangalore and Kishore's sari design job in Mumbai provide a modicum of safety and security relative to daily wage jobs. Wedding catering party jobs, which nearly all men at Yamuna Pushta do at some point during the year, are insecure and low pay is incommensurate with the hard labour required. Dev's experiences in Haryana are the dark side of the informal economy. Not being paid wages, witnessing workers being chained up, and living in fear of local thugs who abuse and prohibit employees from leaving work sites is, clearly, a violation of human rights and dignity. There is a need to acknowledge homeless people as part of the urban working poor and further investigate how the informal economy makes diverse groups of urban poor people vulnerable to exploitation and violence.

The National Urban Livelihood Mission (NULM) is the only scheme with explicit provisions for the homeless. It specifically calls for cities to build specialized shelters near work cites, implement skill training programs and link homeless people to social protection programs, such as the public food distribution system. But the policy does not mention how cities should bring the working homeless under the ambit of current labour policies that would

establish rights to minimum wages and redress in cases where they are physically abused and do not receive their pay (GoI, MoHUPA 2013).

Shelters and NGO services can help men at crucial points in life when they were at risk to further poverty and exploitation, or death. Salam Balak Trust educated and reconnected Dev to his family. The Centre for Equity Studies bank account drive provided Kishore financial security. Friendship with a staff member also rid him of worries of physical abuse from other homeless people. Most starkly, health and drug de-addiction programs saved Praveen and Aafaq's lives. Shelters are currently the sole physical manifestation of policy to specifically address homelessness. Ensuring quality infrastructure, clean and enough space, and basic services is, on one hand, important to foster an environment that makes people comfortable and leads to friendships and social networks. That's one reason Anup views the Pushta as a transitory place that can help him earn some quick cash to send home while he lives cost free in the company of close friends. From the outside, it doesn't look ideal. But from his perspective, it serves a very pressing need to be able to continue to support loved ones.

Equally important is the need to understand the role shelter caretakers play in delivering critical services. Praveen's return to homelessness is not a failure of service delivery. By his own admission, health workers and counsellors were kind, compassionate and saved his life. Difficulties throughout his life that played a role in his becoming homeless and alone also caution against blaming him for not being able to kick drugs. These two realities raise the question of what combination of infrastructure, staff, services and locations are required to successfully address job security needs, health burdens and substance abuse problems that plague homeless people in various degrees.   On the challenge of ensuring services reach homeless people, I think of a conversation I had with Kishore. I was going through my notes one day and asked him something like, 'Tell me again how you get this kind of work.' He looked at me quick. '*Get* work? You don't *get* work. You don't *get* anything. You have to seize it.'

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aashray Adhikar Abhiyan. (2001). The Capital's Homeless – A Preliminary Study

Armstrong, G., Jorm, A., Samson, L., Joubrt, L., Nuken, A., Singh, S., Kermode, M. (2013). Association of Depression, Anxiety, and Suicidal Ideation With High-Risk Behaviors Among Men Who Inject Drugs in Delhi, India. *Journal of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, 64*: 502-510

Armstrong, G., Jorm, A., Samson, L., Joubrt, L., Nuken, A., Singh, S., Kermode, M.(2014). Suicidal ideation and attempts among men who inject drugs in Delhi: psychological and social risk factors. *Social Psychiatry & Psychiatric Epidemiology, 49*: 1367-1377

Bhan, G., Shivanand S. (2013). (Un)Settling the City: Analysing Displacement in Delhi from 1990 to 2007, *Economic & Political Weekly* Vol XLVIII No. 13

Baviskar, A. (2011). What the Eye Does Not See: The Yamuna in the Imagination of Delhi. *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol XLVI No. 50: 45-53

Census Commissioner of India <Http://censusindia.gov.in>

Chakravarti, P. (2014). Living on the Edge: Mapping Homeless Women's Mobilization in Kolkata, India. In Women, Political Struggles and Gender Equality in South Asia pp. 117-137. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Commissioners of the Supreme Court. (2011). Delhi Homeless Shelter Plan

Commissioners of the Supreme Court (2014) Shelters for the Urban Homeless. New Delhi: Books for Change

Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board <http://www.delhishelterboard.in/occupancy-report/>

Dupont V. & Ramanathan U. (2008). The Courts and the Squatter Settlements in Delhi – Or the Intervention of the Judiciary in Urban "Governance". pp 312-343. In I.S.A. Baud & de Wit (eds), New Forms of Urban Governance in India. Shifts, Models, Networks and Contestations. New Delhi: Sage

Dupont, V. (2008). 'Slum Demolitions in Delhi since the 1990s: An Appraisal,' *Economic & Political Weekly*, 43(28)

Dupont, V. (2000). Mobility patterns and economic strategies of houseless people in Old Delhi. *Delhi: Urban Space and Human Destinies. Manohar Publishers, Delhi*, 99-124.

Government of India (2013). Scheme of Urban Shelters for Urban Homeless, National Urban Livelihoods Mission. Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, Government of India

Kumar, A., Lalwani, S., Behera, C., Rautji, R., & Dogra, T. D. (2009). Deaths of homeless unclaimed persons in South Delhi (2001-2005): a retrospective review. *Medicine, Science and the Law, 49*(1), 46-50.

Mander, H. (2008). Living Rough: Surviving the Street. Centre for Equity Studies.

Menon-Sen, K. & Bhan, G. (2008). Swept off the Map: Surviving Eviction and Resettlement in Delhi. New Delhi: Yoda Press

Menon-Sen, K. (2006). Better to Have Died Than to Live Like This: Women and Evictions in Delhi. *Economic & Political Weekly*, May 2006

Saurav C., Aayushi, G., Behera C., Millo, T., Gupta, S. (2014). Medico-legal autopsy of 1355 unclaimed dead bodies brought to a tertiary care hospital in Delhi, India (2006-2012). *Med Leg J*. Sep; 82(3), 112-115

Speak. S (2014). 'Values' as a tool for conceptualizing homelessness in the global south.

Taneja, R. 'The deplorable plight of Delhi's homeless,' DNA India, February 19, 2014

Thurman, H. (1949). Jesus and the Disinherited. New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press

Tipple, G. & Speak, S. (2009). The hidden millions: homelessness in developing countries. Routledge.

United States Conference of Mayors (2015). 'Hunger and homelessness survey 2015'

Walters, V. J.C. Gallard (2014). Disaster risk at the margins: Homelessness, vulnerability and hazards: experiences from India's cities. *Habitat International* 44 (2014) 211-219 Zonal Integrated Police Network <http://zipnet.in/>

CENTRE FOR
POLICY
RESEARCH

TISS