

ACCORDING to the 1981 census the slum population of India was 28 million and it is estimated that it will increase to 52.2 million by 1990. In Calcutta, Bombay, Delhi and Madras, slum dwellers account for nearly 25 to 40 percent of the total population.

As many studies have pointed out, the housing problems in cities have arisen not from actual shortage of land or overpopulation but basically from unequal distribution of land.

The housing situation for the poor in India has become very critical in recent years. The population of slum and pavement dwellers is increasing at a much faster rate than the total population, the percentage of houseless population is on the increase, and a process of peripheralisation of the poor is taking place whereby they are continually being pushed to the outskirts of the city.

This process has been brought about by the market mechanism whereby prime land is exclusively for commercial and residential use as well as speculative misuse by the rich and which the poor cannot even hope to afford; and also by government programmes which try to "rehabilitate" the poor in settlements far from the main city.

Government eviction of slum dwellers may not be followed by rehabilitation in alternative settlements. But if it is, it is generally in a distant place, far from the central areas of the city. Even if basic amenities are provided in these places, survival of the slum dwellers in distant resettlements becomes more difficult because of their dependence on the main city for employment.

The poor migrate to the cities for employment opportunities. Failing to get the desired jobs in the urban formal sector immediately, many migrants take up whatever jobs are available, which are generally in the informal sector and not very remunerative.

Urban slums are made up of these migrants as well as a sizeable number of the permanently disadvantaged among the urban residents. The point to be emphasised here is that slum dwellers mostly belong to the informal sector,

## Women Victims of Slum Resettlement

by U. Vindhya and V. Kalpana

working as domestic workers, construction workers, vendors and petty traders. The nature of their employment is such that they have to depend on the main city for their livelihood.

The first priority for these people is not shelter but employment and the related access to food. Squatter settlements on public and private land thus mushroom wherever employment opportunities are available. Just as these slum dwellers depend on urban society for their livelihood, the urban society too needs them because they provide various services and goods not produced, or produced only at relatively high costs, by the formal sector. They make several

important contributions to the urban economy.

But our city planners, while trying to provide housing, have failed to take into consideration their critical need for employment as well as their subsequent need to be integrated within the city. Instead, the planners have sought to banish them to the outskirts so that they no longer appear as eyesores to the more privileged residents of the city.

So far, we have said that resettling the slum population in distant locations is disadvantageous to them. But women among them are by far the most vulnerable group to be affected. Women, being the first to be deprived of work, are now forced





**Displaced to the outermost edge of the city — a view of Arilova**

to depend more on the *men*.

As members of a local women's group called Stree Shakti and the Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee, we visited Arilova, the site of a major rehabilitation scheme carried out by the Visakhapatnam municipal corporation from July 1986 to June 1988 and observed the abovementioned features.

Visakhapatnam is the second biggest city in Andhra Pradesh and a rapidly growing industrial, commercial, educational centre and administrative headquarters. Its population is around 800,000 spread over an area of 76 sq kms. Its slum population in 1971 was 86,567 in 75 slums; in 1981 it was 152,000 in 168 slums. By 1988, 170 slums had been identified which had 36,658 houses.

The Visakhapatnam municipal corporation has been engaged in carrying out random evictions from July 1984 but it was only since July 1986 that evictions and resettlements were done on a large scale in Arilova, located about 15 kms from the city. In April 1988, the corporation was sanctioned a grant of Rs 18.5 crores for three years from the Overseas

Development Agency, a British organisation, for its slum rehabilitation schemes. The corporation, however, had started the process of eviction in anticipation of the grant and by June 1988 nearly 2,050 families (about 10,000

population) were resettled in Arilova in phases.

The urban community development (UCD) wing of the corporation is directly in charge of the eviction and resettlement operations. The entire area spread over nearly 60 acres is dotted with long rows of houses on small plots measuring 90 and 60 sq yds each. Each family has been provided with a plot and an ownership *patta* (title deed). While drinking water and street lighting have been provided by the corporation, the huts or shacks are supposed to be put up by the people themselves. People who lived together previously in a slum continue to group together in small colonies of two or three rows of houses. Each colony has its own name and 'president' (local leader).

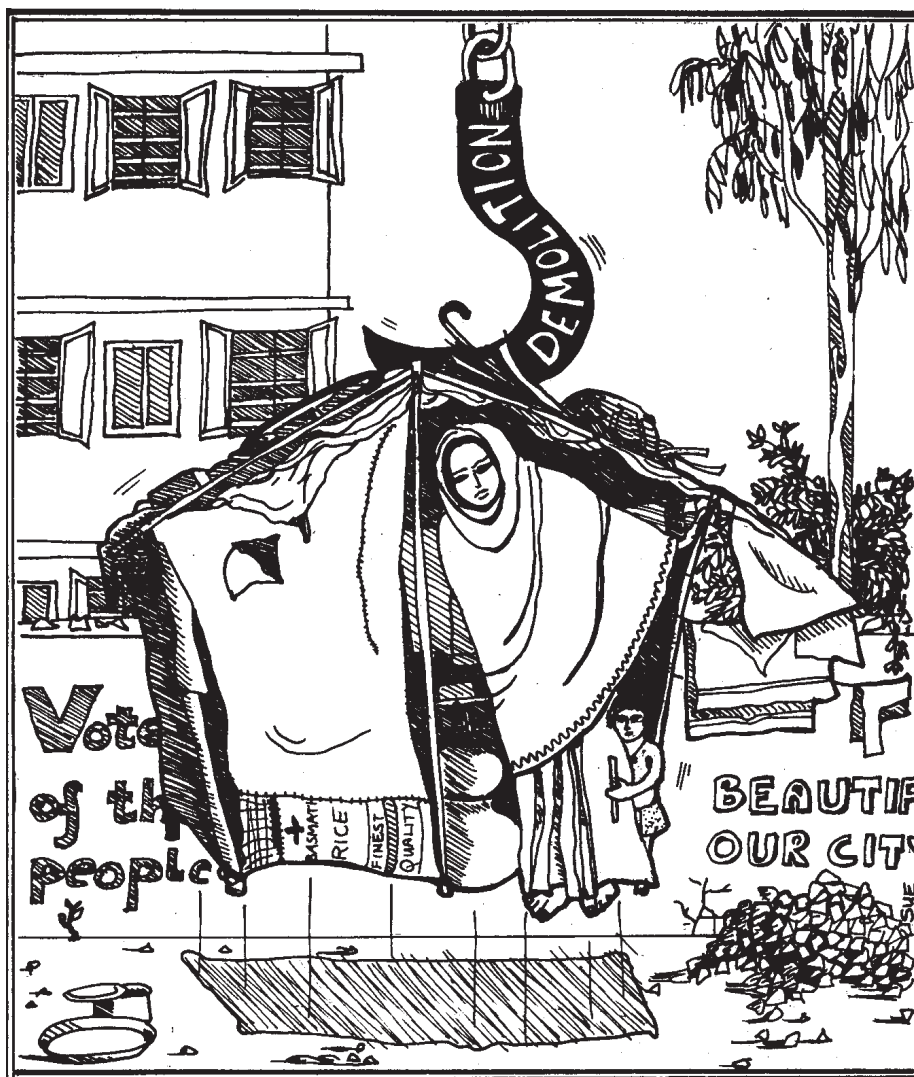
Balaji Nagar is a colony of about 225 households. We studied this colony more extensively because people were settled here two years ago and so were in a position to assess their experiences and problems at length.

A majority of the women we spoke to worked either as domestic servants or on construction sites as coolies prior to their resettlement. A sizeable number of women were engaged in the old clothes trade. All these sources of work are not available in



**Bringing firewood**





Arilova.

Since these rehabilitation colonies are meant exclusively for slumdwellers who cannot afford domestic help, the women have to commute at least five kms to reach the nearest middle class locality. Public bus transport in Visakhapatnam is inefficient, unreliable and expensive. There are only two bus stops in Arilova and people from the far end have to walk nearly

two to three kms to reach the stop.

Some of the women who continued to work after settling here had to give it up subsequently because they could not reach their place of work on time and as a result had to suffer reproach from their employers; they could not afford to spend on bus fares daily and finally, they could not leave the house earlier because they had to attend to the needs of their

husbands and children first. We observed that many of the families, being migrants, were nuclear families, so there were no old people at home to look after the children who could not be left alone at home for long periods of time.

All the women who had worked as domestic help earlier complained bitterly that they were handicapped because of the distance; the husband's earnings could not meet the family expenses; and that, earlier, in spite of low wages, they could at least feed themselves and their children and also get an occasional set of clothes from their employer. They are now forced to depend on the husband's earnings and are barely managing to stave off starvation.

Women who were previously employed as coolies on house construction sites face the problem of getting steady employment. They are not members of a work gang, an informal network which at least ensures continuity of employment to its members. Therefore, when the women reach the work spot late the work has already been grabbed by others. On such days, they search around for other work but the uncertainty remains, as well as the reduction in their working time. Earlier, they could earn Rs 13 to Rs 15 daily; today, they barely manage to earn Rs 5 to Rs 7 a day.

Forty families in Balaji Nagar earn their living by bartering steel utensils for old clothes. Earlier, the women used to go around in nearby middle class localities, collecting old clothes, which were then sold in the suburbs by the men. The steel utensils are bought either by men or women once a week with loans from *kabuliwalas* who charge an exorbitant interest rate of 50 percent per month.

The division of labour in this trade was not very rigid earlier and work was interchanged according to their convenience. Now, however, the women cannot do their share of the work. They cannot do their business in the neighbourhood since there are no middle class localities nearby and the wholesale shops where they buy the utensils are too far away.

The women are doubly handicapped because of the general restrictions on their movements, their lack of security and of freedom to move about at all times of the day combined with the burden of domestic responsibilities. The women are facing a steep fall in their earnings. The men, on the other hand, although similarly affected by the distance, do not at least face any such restrictions nor are they tied down by domestic responsibilities. Reduction in family income as well as lack of earnings for the women means further dependence on the men. With most of the men addicted to alcohol, the problem has assumed

serving as a roof. The plot belongs to one who has stayed back in the city and

who has let Lakshmamma's family stay there. Her "home" is made up of a *chulha* in the corner and two bags stuffed with her family's belongings hanging from the roof. With a husband too ill to do any work and a group of children to feed, and deprived of her little earnings in the resettlement process, Lakshmamma does what millions of the poor in India do: curse her fate. Not able to bear the high interest rates of the *kabuliwala* she survives on the charity of her neighbours. Taking small loans from them, she barely manages to



**Unable to go out for paid work, women are bound to domestic drudgery along**

serious proportions.

A poignant case was that of Lakshmamma, aged about 40 years but who looked 60, with a cancer-stricken husband and a brood of six children hovering around her. By some curious bureaucratic quirk, her family was not included in the list of evacuees and she was not given a plot.

However, they came along with their neighbours and are now literally living under a roof: a temporary shelter with four posts and sparsely spread palm leaves

buy the steel utensils. Since she is not able to go out every day, collection of old clothes and their sale is done just once a week. While we were talking to her she sent out her 12 year old daughter with a couple of old blouses to sell within the colony. The girl returned after an hour, saying no one was willing to buy them. When we asked the price, she said 50 paise apiece. Such tales of poverty and misery are legion.

About 15 percent of the UCD's funds are for social inputs like health and

education. But we found that only 10 health clinics out of the 45 proposed were working. Twenty eight *balwadis* were proposed but now only 20 are considered to be

sufficient.

As part of the Manila Mandal programmes initiated by the UCD, the women were taught how to make *sherbets* and pickles. The women dismissed any further questioning by us, saying that fruits and pickles are luxuries which they could not hope to afford. They said they were also taught a lot of other dishes for their nutritional content but made with ingredients which they could not see even on TV commercials. There was some talk of distributing sewing machines but the scheme does not seem to have materialised. No efforts have been made to teach the women a homebased trade or skill or to help them launch a homebased business.

The haste with which the corporation has evicted people and hustled them into the resettlement colonies has not been matched by building up the necessary infrastructure like sanitation, drainage, health care facilities and primary schools. The only boon which the people have got is a sufficient supply of drinking water. But as they said "We now have to fill our stomachs with water and fresh air. We have no work, no food."

These colonies, exclusively meant for slumdwellers, and located far from the city, have isolated the poor further, with no opportunity for them to be integrated in the growth of the city. Women, as always, become the worst victims.