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**Structure and Mobility inside a Delhi Slum:
1988-2008**

Devesh Vijay



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Abstract

Slums constitute the fastest growing segment of most developing countries today. Their weight in the economy as well as politics of these regions is also likely to grow with time. The need to understand the changing economic profile and patterns of mobility of slums through selected long term studies along with the routine macro analysis presented in large scale surveys is obvious. As a small contribution, the present essay draws upon my engagement, since 1988, with a Delhi slum called Aradhaknagar to present an outline of shifts in the occupational, income and assets profile of the community over two decades. While a small improvement in the living standards of organised sector employees is discerned in wage trends as well as assets held by concerned families, continuing marginalisation of several unorganized sector workers is also noted. An attempt has also been made to describe the internal stratification within the community and to pinpoint the factors which pull down workers trying to struggle around the bottom rungs of the urban social ladder and those that occasionally help in their efforts.

One of the appalling images associated with most third world cities is that of a squalid slum huddled in the shadow of a luxury apartment or a high rise. According to a UN-Habitat survey, about one billion or fifteen per cent of the world's people were residing in slums in 2006.¹ Slums can be of varying sizes ranging from quasi towns with lakhs of residents to tiny clusters of a few hundred. But some of the largest such clusters are located in the developing world whose slum population is expected to double within the next twenty years (growing at a rate of 5% per annum or more in many regions).²

Besides rapid growth, another important aspect of most slums today is their internal stratification and diversity. Despite the image of uniformity conveyed by many large scale surveys of poor habitats, metropolitan slums actually are home to a vast stratum of the poor as also petty traders and organised sector workers who may be better off but incapable of buying a regular home in the exorbitant city space.³ A number of such communities have been subjects of celebrated works by sociologists and anthropologists in the past.⁴ In India too, urban 'jhuggi-jhopries' or 'J.J. clusters' have been studied by a number of scholars. However, many studies on Indian slums have had a short term focus on problems of housing and infrastructure while long term surveys have relied on secondary statistical data mainly.⁵ The resultant gap in our knowledge of a proximate phenomenon seems particularly amiss at a time when slums are not only growing rapidly in India but are expected to play a major role in our politics and economy for decades to come.⁶

The Scope of Enquiry

The following essay aims at addressing this gap in a small way by researching a Delhi slum (called Aradhaknagar) across two decades to chart its changing 'structure' i.e. inter group relations covering demography, occupations and social stratification as also pressures behind upward and

downward mobility among residents.⁷ Aradhaknagar is the real name of a middle sized slum located next to the Grand Trunk Road on the border between Delhi and Ghaziabad. The slum has been visited repeatedly by me since 1988 when I wrote a dissertation on its occupations and demography and specially, since 2006 when I began a post doctoral survey on the changing income and consumption profile of the community and its interfaces with various organs of the state.⁸

Survey data on population, assets etc. was gathered by me in Aradhaknagar both through personal interviews and group discussions in 1988-89 and again in 2006-08 and reaffirmed by distributing about fifty copies of the Hindi version of my report among the subjects in 2010.⁹ Besides this, sixteen life sketches were also developed with willing subjects from diverse occupational, caste and gender categories for deeper insights into the daily experiences of various groups. Still, two limitations in the following evidence need to be noted at the outset. Firstly, our findings relate only to one particular slum from India's capital which may be similar to some in cities like Mumbai and Bangalore but does not illustrate conditions among the poorest shanties specially in smaller towns of India.¹⁰ Secondly, complete precision in our understanding of every household's finances is not claimed here.¹¹ Still a broad understanding of the same is definitely expected as the method of combining group discussions with personal contacts across castes, occupations and gender yielded double checked information on incomes, assets, occupations etc. among subjects who showed a remarkable degree of mutual knowledge emanating from close and proximate living. Errors in data collection were further minimized by me by maintaining and sharing field notes in the Hindi script, using actual names wherever permitted by concerned subjects and sharing the first version of this report with the community in its principal language. With this methodological preface, we may now turn to a survey of the locale itself.

Mapping Aradhaknagar

As mentioned, the slum of Aradhaknagar lies close to the Grand Trunk Road on the border between Delhi and Uttar Pradesh. The quadrangle of about 5.5 acres, on which this basti is spread, is flanked by the aforesaid highway on its north, the railway line connecting Old Delhi and Ghaziabad train stations to its south, the urbanized village of Chikambarpur to its east and a flyover in the west. Surrounded by these structures, Aradhaknagar slowly turned from a grove of shrubs and 'keekars' on the outskirts of Chikambarpur into a dense community of about 1800 residents by 2006. The first jhuggies were raised here in the early sixties. But Aradhaknagar's growth took off in the following decade with growing immigration of labourers from the villages of Uttar Pradesh and, to a lesser extent, from Bihar and Madhya Pradesh in the wake of growing demand for manual workers in surrounding middle class colonies such as Vivek Vihar and Surya Nagar as well as the Jhilmil Industrial Complex and in the village of Chikambarpur which has turned into a maze of transporters' offices, godowns and shops (now known as Bhoora Mandi).

By 1988, when I first studied Aradhaknagar, the slum had already grown into a community of 91 families with 442 men, women and children living cheek by jowl in 90 odd 'jhuggies' or kutchha houses made of mud, stones and thatched roofs. But, in 2006, when I returned to the slum for a detailed restudy, the jhuggies had given way to 256 semi pucca houses (housing 291 families) and the population had swelled to 1794 (showing a jump of about 400% in 19 years). Eighty of the 91 families counted in 1988 in Aradhaknagar were present here in 2006 too. The major dalit castes of the region viz. Valmiki and Jatavs account for almost 83% of Aradhaknagar's population while the rest consist of 'other backward' castes like Ahirs, Gurjars and Yadavs (10%), upper castes including Brahmins, Thakurs and Baniyas (6%) and a few Muslims (1%). The male-female ratio, in Aradhaknagar, has hovered around 10:9 while the proportion of children (aged below fourteen) has fallen from 59% to 45% between 1988 and 2007, apparently due to growing acceptance of family planning over time.

Occupations and Strata

Unlike mega slums like Dharavi or Delhi's Yamuna Pushta, Aradhaknagar does not house lakhs of people with thousands of production units. Yet, the two thousand odd residents of this slum also pursue a variety of occupations including those of sweepers, rag pickers and servants; hawkers, loaders and rickshaw pullers; skilled and unskilled factory and construction workers and of several kinds of semi-skilled artisans (masons, carpenters, tailors etc.) and service providers (cobblers, barbers, vendors and hawkers, domestic maids etc.). Out of 700 odd workers (including 70 children) in Aradhaknagar, in 2006, nearly 500 were engaged in such low paid jobs while 200 had more secure organized sector jobs. Within the latter, there were 54 better off clerks, supervisors, local politicians and petty businessmen and families with more than one member in the formal sector. It is these fifty odd families who may be equated with the slum's middle class. But the vast majority of the residents of Aradhaknagar survive on prolonged and often unsafe hard labour. Some of them are too weak or constrained to go out of the slum for work and manage with low incomes from local vending, animal rearing or home based stitching, packing, etc. But for better pay, many more go out to work as the slum has not been allowed to house production units apart from home based tailoring, small repairs and some catering which also survive only by bribing officials from time to time.

Apart from occupational categories, Aradhaknagar's residents can also be divided more broadly into distinct social strata, mobility between which is not uncommon yet, each of which reflects different 'life chances' or command over incomes, assets, social links and status. Although all such classifications are heuristic and may vary with our analytical preferences, for the present, we have identified four major socio-economic categories within Aradhaknagar. The most conspicuous economic divide in the slum is between organized and unorganized sector workers i.e. those who work in the formal economy which is covered by some constitutional and legal provisions and those who are tied to the vast informal sector of barely protected hawkers, maid servants, rickshaw pullers etc. As stated, the total number of workers (excluding women doing

housework) was 700 in Aradhaknagar, in 2006, of which nearly 500 (or about 70%) were in the unorganized/ informal sector.¹²

Although most organized sector employees are also engaged in low grade jobs of sweepers, peons and labourers yet, their economic position vis-a-vis unorganized workers is much better due to regular employment, higher salaries as well as legal and trade union protection. But it is important to remember that organized workers living in Aradhaknagar can in turn be classified into those in extremely secure government jobs (92 men and 20 women) and those who work in private factories, corporations, public schools, etc. (96 in all, in 2006); with the former faring even better in terms of job security and insurance cover.

For workers in the unorganized sector, even the rights and pay of a sweeper in the public sector are highly enviable. Indeed, most unorganized workers are desperately looking for an entry into the former sector, if not for themselves then for their children. But unorganized workers can also be divided into skilled and unskilled employees working for others (as drivers and gardeners on one hand and domestic servants and construction workers on the other) as also a broad section of self employed service providers (such as cobblers, barbers, petty shop owners and hawkers, etc.). In fact, the sub-class of vendors, women and child workers showed considerable variation in incomes as the old and the sick who could not sell wares far from their homes barely earned fifty rupees daily, in 2006, while those who could put up a stall even on the footpath on the thoroughfare made upto two hundred rupees daily.

A less noted but sharper distinction in the social structure of Aradhaknagar is that between the mass of manual workers (organized and unorganized) and a small 'middle class' of two dozen educated professionals (semi qualified medical practitioners, teachers etc.) and grade III employees (lower division clerks, factory supervisors etc.). Another part of the slum's 'middle class' came from 28 families, in 2006, which had more than one member in the organised sector. Many of these were employed as sweepers only yet, their combined family incomes also were distinctly higher than the rest of the slumdwellers as shown in the monthly budget of Geeta and Ramesh in Table IX. At the top of the social pyramid

of Aradhaknagar sit about half a dozen 'multi tasking' entrepreneurs who dabble through their small capital and connections in a variety of economic pursuits including money lending, sale and purchase of unauthorized properties and in procuring ration cards, pensions, etc. on commission. It is these local entrepreneurs who are also politically well connected and have secured organised sector jobs for two or more family members. They form the most powerful and wealthy section of the slum and own a car or additional property too.

On the other end of the social pyramid of Aradhaknagar, lies a small underclass of beggars, 'criminals' and the sick or physically challenged who have lost family support also and sell petty wares from their door or are practically unemployed. The same underclass also comprises a few prostitutes, bootleggers and pickpockets who have short spells of good earnings. But most such 'deviants' suffer indignities and sharp slides in fortunes too.¹³ More generally, it is worth reiterating that extreme destitution in a metropolitan slum has a close correlation with poor health and old age. While the strong may find sufficient demand for their labour in cities, those who are relatively weak among the urban poor are left with very few props. In fact, debility sharply accentuates misery among unorganized workers who lack savings, social insurance and any property that could strengthen support from inheritors. In such dire conditions many perish while some fall back on selling petty grocery or confectionary outside their homes. As most of their clients are also poor and competitors many, returns from such work remain very low. Indeed, we found that even beggars who could go out daily were earning better than petty vendors within Aradhaknagar.

As far as occupational shifts are concerned, two significant changes can be noted in the slum's profile since 1988. Firstly, the small number of permanent grade IV employees (including sweepers, peons, gardeners etc.) in the public sector has fallen in the decades of 'liberalisation' but those employed in private sector malls, schools and offices as well as courier services and construction work have gone up. Thus, in 1988, we had found that out of a total of 157 workers in Aradhaknagar, 26 were employed as *safai karamcharis* or cleaning staff in government

departments, schools etc. In 2006, on the other hand, the number of total workers had gone up to 700 but the number of regular sweepers in the corporation and other public sector units increased to 63 only. Organised private sector workers were 27 in 1988 while in 2006 the section had expanded to 96. At the same time, it is striking that a good number of clerical or grade III employees and even some teachers and medical practitioners and contractors are residing in the slum which has a slightly better infrastructure now and offers a cheap alternative to skyrocketing rents in regular colonies. While in 1988 only one such educated professional was seen by me in Aradhaknagar, by 2006, their number (including clerks) had risen to 26. The third noticeable change is that the proportion of earning women workers in the slum has risen conspicuously (from 30 among 90 adult women in 1988 to 235 among 408 in 2006). The biggest rise in this category has been in the number of domestic maids which were only 20 in 1988 and had gone up to 158 by 2006 partly due to greater pressure for work and income now and also because of increased demand for domestic maids in the surrounding middle class homes in which more educated women are going out to work and apparently are more open to allowing dalit women inside their homes and kitchens.

Some Narratives

Statistics provides an overview of broad economic and demographic trends. But in order to gain insights into daily experiences of various groups inside a slum, personal narratives and life histories of a range of subjects can be extremely useful. No doubt issues of memory, bias and rhetoric pervade all such recollections. Yet, as a corrective to the author's own biases, the first person accounts from subjects' life sketches are valuable. It was with this aim that I developed sixteen life sketches or short life histories of willing subjects representing different class, gender and age groups in Aradhaknagar between 2006 and 2009. The following section offers a sample of experiences from these narratives.

1) This is a childhood recollection of Seema, a 32-year-old woman with two school going children. Seema herself runs a small grocery

stall outside her two room house in Aradhaknagar while her husband is a rickshaw puller.

"It is never easy for a poor girl to pursue her studies. When I was about nine years old, my parents gave me the charge of looking after three younger siblings while they laboured in a mandi through the day. As a result, I could join school only when my younger brother also needed to. The school was two kilometers from home. I used to walk the whole distance with younger siblings and was chided even if others made mischief—We never bought new stationery. I used to produce my own writing books by stitching the left over pages of friends' discarded copies; costlier texts were copied out by us (siblings) from borrowed library books —Even then I had great difficulty in learning and, in primary classes, used to just fill up the exam sheets by copying the question paper repeatedly.

Among my best friends there were two rich girls. They used to share their food with me though I could never visit their homes. I had no boyfriends as I was fat and dark and was nicknamed 'Black Brinjal' by my classmates. But I was very bold and also good at sports. I won several championships in shot put, discus throw and specially volley ball—One of the happiest days of my life was when I received a prize of Rs.20 for standing first in an inter-school competition. My father put his arms around me that day and said that he was proud of me.

Somehow I kept clearing my exams and joined college on the basis of my sports record. I loved college and was keen to learn dance along with Jolly-- my best friend. But when they asked for fees, I abandoned this dream--. My studies were also discontinued soon after."

2) A testimony regarding anti Sikh riots of 1984 from Rajkumar, an ailing, 58-year-old mason of Aradhaknagar.

"Two devils murdered Indiraji. But the price of this crime was paid by thousands with their lives. On that fateful day, in 1984, I was on the job at Naveen Export Company in Shahdara. As the news of the murder spread, my colleagues started rushing back home. I too

managed to board train for my village from Shahdara station somehow. But next morning, when I returned, I found the railway platform on Ghaziabad station in complete commotion. Gangs armed with knives and rods were stopping trains and dragging out Sikhs by their turbans, stabbing or even setting them on fire alive. On hearing the wails of those trapped in the mayhem, my heart sank and I could barely stand on my feet. I mumbled: 'Oh God! What wrong have these innocents done to suffer such tortuous end?' Somehow I managed to walk out of the station and boarded a bus for home. I was so shaken by the mayhem that for days I could neither eat nor work. My digestion failed completely and my body stopped responding to medicines. It was not before three months that I could get back to work."

3) A personal account of acute poverty from a 47-year-old beggar Noor Ali.

When we were young, my mother often asked us to give up begging and take up simple jobs for living. Thus, when we were still at Ghonda, I along with my brother worked on a dhaba for two months. Our job was to serve and clean dishes and the owner in return allowed us to eat the leftovers. We were also to be given Rs. 30 at the end of one month. However, the employer kept postponing payment and we left the job after two months. Meanwhile my mother had started collecting dung from the streets to make dung cakes which we used to sell to other families in Ghonda. This did not work either as we did not have a proper roof to keep the cakes dry. Another work tried by ammi was of making laddus in cheap jaggery which we children were to sell in buses and bazaars. However, we ourselves would consume half of them because of hunger and barely made any profit. Such failures finally lead our parents back to begging which has remained our profession till this day.

4) Initial struggles of Chaman, a 60-year-old head sweeper and garbage contractor who managed to move out of Aradhaknagar by cultivating connections among local politicians.

"When I was in Kolkata in the early seventies, I had become

close to the Naxal Party since they helped me in my police case against the factory management. I also liked their programme of fighting the rich and helping the labourers always. But there were too many strikes and violence and demonstrations. Many workers and leaders were also getting arrested or killed. So I decided to leave the place and eventually landed in Delhi where a Congress leader helped me get the sweeper's job in the Municipal Corporation. My wife and two sons also got temporary sweepers' jobs in the same body subsequently. I have always voted for Congress since then. My whole family and most persons in the Valmiki caste vote for Congress here. I know the Communist Party is more committed to the workers. But in Delhi, they have no chance of winning. Hence to vote for them would be just like wasting our votes. Also, we would not receive help from the dominant party here which we need so many times against police, for school admissions, for ration etc."

Houses and Infrastructure

The above excerpts from the life sketches of selected individuals from diverse segments of Aradhaknagar offer a glimpse into special experiences of these residents. However, to gauge broader trends in poverty and assets among our subjects, we need to consider collective data on housing, incomes and assets too. In this regard, in our long term study of Aradhaknagar, a number of indicators point towards a small and slow improvement in incomes and living conditions of the majority of slum dwellers since 1988. As stated, during my first visits to Aradhaknagar, in 1988, I had found only two pucca houses out of 90 present then; none of these was a double storey. In 2006, out of a total of 250 odd abodes in the slum only two were kutcha and 40 were actually two storied while one had three stories. Yet, even pucca houses in Aradhaknagar are simply hovels consisting of one or two all purpose rooms with no separate kitchen or store; neighbouring houses often have windowless common walls while front lanes are also narrow and lined by overflowing open drains on both sides.¹⁴

During the five decades of its existence, Aradhaknagar has seen

some growth of facilities (around election times mostly) yet, the gains have been small and delayed while congestion, stench and squalor have actually grown over time. Thus the residents' names were included in voters' list in 1980 and the area's long time MP, H.K.L. Bhagat, is reported to have got the administration, through the eighties, to install a few hand pumps, construct brick lanes or 'kharanjas' and also put up a few street lights and electric poles as rewards for his 'vote bank' in Aradhaknagar. (Some slumdweller could draw power by attaching wires to overhead cables for some time then.)

The early nineties brought a few more crumbs to this 'electoral prop' of the Congress Party, though at the same tardy pace. Thus the water department of the state government installed a bore well and a storage tank in Aradhaknagar in 1995. The unit worked for two years only and, as piped water had been ruled out due to the construction of the flyover to the west of the slum, the same department began sending a water tanker daily, from 1999 (till potable piped water could be provided finally in 2011 through street taps). The late nineties also witnessed the installation of a motor pump for throwing sewage to the eastside of the slum (at the instance of Mr. Narendranath — the three-time MLA from the area since the 1990s) and the construction of a semi-functional community toilet, in 2000, with the help of the NGO--Sulabh Shauchalay. The regulation of these delayed services also remains highly unsatisfactory.

The first decade of the new millennium brought several contrary developments for Aradhaknagar. While numerous factories were sealed in Delhi around this time and electric supply was privatized (imposing an additional burden of enhanced power bills on the poor), a community hall with facilities for marriage and other functions was built at the instance of Ms. Priti (the area's municipal councilor since 2007) next to the central ground in 2008 and the extension of the 'Red Line' of the 'Delhi Metro' train brought a better mode of transport which also helped in raising room rents in Aradhaknagar.¹⁵ In 2002, drains had been made pucca by the municipal corporation and since then about a quarter of the homes in Aradhaknagar have constructed toilets on their roofs. But their waste is

flushed into open drains lining the streets.

The closing year of the decade, however, dealt a severe blow to nearly 1/5 of the inhabitants of Aradhaknagar with major demolitions done by the PWD. As Delhi dressed itself for the Commonwealth Games, construction activity around Aradhaknagar further blocked the outflow of sewage from the slum and created unbearable stench and cesspools leading to more and more illness here. The local resident doctor, Mr. Mukul Biswas told me, in September 2009, that children were particularly succumbing to malaria and typhoid in the slum hit by seasonal rains as well as choked drains this year. In the midst of all these dangers and problems, most residents were still desperate to stay on in Aradhaknagar and not be evicted by a threatening administration (even if it came with alternate plots on city's outskirts).

Incomes and Consumption in Aradhaknagar

On the other hand, a clear change for the better was noted in Aradhaknagar with regard to the ownership of consumer durables between 1988 and 2006. As per my initial count, out of a total of 91 families in the slum, 21 had black and white TV sets, one had a video cassette player, 4 had two wheelers and one had a room cooler. By 2006, however, among 206 families (which shared such data out of a total of 291), 178 had colour TV sets, 84 had refrigerators, 73 had room coolers and 30 had washing machines (mostly second hand) while 194 persons had cell phones. In addition, almost every dwelling now has a cable TV connection while 6 families had cars in Aradhaknagar and 35 had two wheelers by 2006. It was also heartening to note that in the new millennium, banking and insurance services have also improved rapidly in Aradhaknagar and a large number of families have bank accounts as well as life insurance policies (worth fifty to hundred thousand rupees in all and carrying a monthly premium of Rs. 300 to 600 generally) now.

Even more than assets and housing, it is the assessment of average monthly incomes of the residents of Aradhaknagar over the past twenty years that would reflect their changing living standards precisely. The official

figure for the proportion of people falling below the poverty line of about Rs. 600 per person per month for Delhi was only 15% in 2004-05. My own efforts at gathering exact income data for all families in Aradhaknagar were not very successful as subjects' responses continued to be hesitant and extremely variable on this issue. A rough estimate suggests that about 30% of the residents of Aradhaknagar fell below the said poverty line based on minimum calory intake (or Rs. 20 per person per day in Delhi) in 2005.¹⁶ Their number appeared much higher twenty years back when I had not conducted a full census on the same.

In the absence of continuous local level data on incomes, trends in real wages of skilled and unskilled workers (who form the vast majority of slumdweller in most cities) can serve as a useful yardstick of changes in living standards in Aradhaknagar through our period. Fortunately, I had noted prevailing wage rates as well as prices of many staples in my field visits in 1988. Comparing them with the same in 2008 and also with official data, it is possible to say that while the consumer price index rose by about 500%, current wages have risen for both skilled and unskilled construction workers by about 600% (from Rs. 25 for unskilled labour and Rs. 50 for skilled workers, in 1988, to Rs. 150 and Rs. 300 for the same in 2008).¹⁷ At the same time, starting salaries of grade IV employees in the public sector have risen even more, by about 800% (from Rs.600 for temporary and Rs. 1200 for permanent employees in 1988 to Rs.5000 and Rs.11,000 respectively, after the implementation of the sixth pay commission recommendations in 2009). Thus the rise in real wages of skilled and unskilled construction workers was around 20% between 1988 and 2008.¹⁸

The small rise in wages, some growth of second hand consumer durables or arrival of a few metropolitan services in Aradhaknagar in the preceding two decades do not reflect a major turnaround obviously. Even for those organised sector workers who have risen above acute poverty, general living conditions in Aradhaknagar have actually deteriorated with increased congestion. If we were to count access to a functional toilet, running water and sanitation as minimum requirements then the entire slum would fall in the category of the poor and vulnerable stratum.

Lastly, it is noteworthy that the small rise in real wages experienced by the urban poor also seems halted now in the wake of hyper inflation specially in food articles since 2008. In this context, the real incomes of many slumdweller who are unable to endure hard labour on construction sites or in the transport sector (where wages have risen more rapidly) and are forced to work as hawkers, small vendors etc. have suffered the most (more so when they do not have BPL ration cards for availing monthly 35 kgs. of food grains per family at roughly Rs.2 or 3 per kilo). Thus Karan who supplies stitched badges to a garment exporter confided that the demand for his tailoring work has gone down due to slump in the export market forcing him to cut down even on essentials like milk, ghee etc. whose prices have skyrocketed in the meantime. Similarly, Madanlal who sells grocery within Aradhaknagar after prolonged illness lamented that his daily earnings rarely cross Rs. 50 while his household purchases have more than doubled in the last four years. It is only because of the yellow ration card issued to him recently and the support extended by his two sons (who have started tailoring work recently) that he was able to make ends meet in these difficult times.

Factors Behind Upward and Downward Mobility

In this light, it would be useful to now clearly analyse various processes that seem to promote downward and upward mobility among our subjects. These can be classified into micro factors such as illness and family size which figure in subjects' own narratives conspicuously and macro processes like public policies and inflation over which they have little personal control and still deeper societal structures such as class, gender and caste that are difficult to change in the short run. Most of these, however, affect the urban poor in very similar ways across slums and cities. Hence, in the following section, we have applied terms like the 'urban poor' and 'slumdweller' in a more general sense alongside references like 'residents' or 'subjects' that allude to our specific research sample.

Structural Constraints

An obvious structural constraint that obstructs upward mobility among residents of Aradhaknagar is their 'class' position or near lack of capital (economic, social and cultural) that many in the upper classes inherit without exertion. Thus eighty per cent of the residents of Aradhaknagar reported, in 2007, that they do not have any property in the city apart from the unauthorized hovel in which they live. The tiny class of 'entrepreneurs' within the slum do dabble in properties and own one or more authorized or unauthorized plots in other lower class neighbourhoods. Seventy families were also earning some rent from tenants (generally lodged in a terrace room). But most households in the slum have sold off whatever share they had even in the tiny holdings in their villages since migration. Often such sales were forced by exigencies like a daughter's marriage, severe illness or a court case in the city. Exact figures on savings and finances were difficult to obtain in our survey but most residents said that deposits in the bank accounts (which many have opened in recent years) also had a few hundred rupees at best.

But lack of wealth is only one aspect of the proletarian status of the majority living in Aradhaknagar. Even the returns on the hard labour that the poor offer day after day to the city barely ensures survival for the majority that work particularly in the unorganized sector. Not only the daily wage of Rs. 150 or so available to a labourer in Delhi in 2008 does not add up to even a seventh of the daily average of the clerical staff in government but also offers a huge contrast to the minimum wages of upto ten dollars per hour assured in developed countries for unskilled work. The complete absence of social welfare or security against unemployment, illness, old age, accident or death, etc., further marginalizes the real proletariat that resides in slums of the underdeveloped world.

It is true that residents of Aradhaknagar do not explicitly talk of 'class structure' as the primary cause of their poverty yet no analyst can ignore that their 'have not' status on material, social and cultural fronts together is the major constraint on workers' economic mobility. In this light, the differences between the 'sub strata' within the slum are also less fundamental than those between slumdweller and the rich as a whole.

For instance, many extended families in slums have nuclear units falling in organised as well as unorganized sectors who also pool resources occasionally. Moreover, a large number of problems faced by all sections in the slum are similar. These include the challenges of surviving in a nauseating environment that lacks proper drainage, piped water, toilets and ventilation and of eking a living in a 'free market' where basic state services also have to be 'purchased' through bribes often. It is in this sense that the slum dwellers of Aradhaknagar may be seen as members of a larger 'class' of India's urban poor.

Gender and Caste

Like class and lack of capital, caste and gender relations also act as major structural constraints in slum dwellers' lives. Gender discrimination is clearly evident in different wage standards being applied to women's work among the poor too. Out of a total of 270 female workers in Aradhaknagar, in 2006, nearly 158 (including 47 girls) were low-paid domestic maids and only thirty had grade IV organised sector jobs. Of the remaining two hundred odd 'home makers' some actually spent hours on stitching, packing or tailoring work from home. Returns on such work were the lowest of all. Thus we found stitching work, packing and labeling or envelope making, etc. from home fetching not more than fifty rupees a day while domestic maids got less than a thousand rupees per month for washing, sweeping and dusting from households whose children spend such amounts daily on snacks. Yet, a number of slum women were running their homes solely on these earnings by working in two or more such jobs specially where the male head was alcoholic or physically challenged or a deserter. Most such families fell below the absolute poverty mark of about Rs. 25 per capita per day in 2009.¹⁹

Our fieldwork also suggests that caste restrictions on dalits' choice of vocations, residence and movement have declined but not disappeared in and around Aradhaknagar. In a survey of 200 dalits in Aradhaknagar, in 2008, 167 mentioned caste identity as a source of discrimination and/ or humiliation faced by them in the city. Some vivid examples of such abuse also stood out in the several life sketches drawn by us among dalit men as

well as women. Thus Kanhaiya reported how he was taunted and rejected at an interview for a peon's job a decade ago when he told the panel that he is a Valmiki. Similarly, Jaggu was insulted at the local police station as a 'chamaar' and denied any help when he went there to report loss of his money and ration card as the dealing officer had a pronounced dislike for the lower castes. Another instance of caste discrimination and humiliation was reported by Arun, a twenty-year-old Valmiki, who was keen to join a college but could not because of poor grades. He still spent a lot of time around a local college in the hope of making friends among the well educated and even tried to pick up conversational English as well as Urdu poetry for this. However, most of his friendships ended as soon as others learnt that Arun was a Valmiki by caste. Many other instances of dalit slum dwellers suffering both socially and economically came to my notice repeatedly during fieldwork.

While dalits of Aradhaknagar face discrimination, humiliation and exclusion frequently in the world outside, within the slum their social position is better. Firstly, an overwhelming majority (about eighty per cent) of the slum's residents are dalits while the upper castes form only seven per cent of the populace. Secondly, among the relatively better off residents of Aradhaknagar, Valmikis constitute a major section as grade IV organised sector jobs are held almost entirely by them, though Jatavs, who form the second major dalit caste in Aradhaknagar, remain largely in low paid unorganized sector professions. Some Valmiki families, in fact, have more than one member in low grade but secure public sector employment and a couple of these have accumulated capital for investments in petty money lending and small unauthorized properties too.²⁰ In this light it is not surprising that of the thirty three families (out of 206 surveyed in Aradhaknagar) which had a per capita monthly income of Rs.2500 or more, as many as 29 were dalit and only three were upper caste in 2007.

It is also noteworthy that the slum itself is not divided into caste zones/ streets as in villages and lower caste and Muslim domestic workers who were not allowed in upper caste kitchens only two decades back are beginning to find employment even as cooks in more households now.

Similarly, the association between various dalit sub castes and their traditional occupations (like Jatav-cobblers, Chamadh-hide cleaners etc.) has eroded though their overlaps at the extremes of the caste hierarchy remains. Thus there are no brahmin sweepers or kshatriya cobblers or dalit priests but the interchange of occupations within the shudra and dalit sub-castes has increased significantly. Thus some Valmikis have become masons and petty contractors while one gadariya (a lower middle caste) has taken up the job of a sweeper outside Aradhaknagar.

Despite these departures from the traditional caste and class or income hiatus, the overlap between lower caste status and poverty is strong in the city as a whole and the vast proportion of the slumdweller as well as the poor still come from dalit castes. Within Aradhaknagar, barring a few entrepreneurs and public sector employees, most dalits remain extremely poor and vulnerable. The legacy of past marginalisation as well as continuing covert prejudices and discrimination clearly weigh down on the latter even in a cosmopolis.

The State

Besides the social structure, aspects of our polity such as rampant corruption in the administration, unresponsive bureaucracy and the class bias pervading the police, courts etc. also hurt the labouring poor first. The use of the law and order machinery to 'discipline' labour does not require elaboration here. But it is important to note that the state still remains the most powerful source from which the urban poor expect help like emergency relief, secure employment, subsidised ration etc. Some top political leaders like late Indira Gandhi, Ambedkar and Ms. Mayawati are well known to the urban poor though reviled and praised simultaneously. While the participation of the poor in the democratic process has strengthened expectations from the state, at the same time, the failings of the system are also well recognized and frequent complaints are directed against the same state or 'sarkar' for not delivering on services, despite having the resources, because of the corrupt 'neta', 'daroga' and 'babu' nexus.

Being a part of the capital city, Aradhaknagar has benefited from the better funding infused in some welfare measures such as mid day meals and free texts for school students, monthly pensions for the old, the physically challenged and widows, education allowance for girls till college and subsidised rations for those issued below poverty line (BPL) cards. On the other hand, critical needs of the urban poor for secure jobs, decent wage, stable prices, reliable medical services and empowering education and above all for healthy, affordable housing remain largely unaddressed in a populist yet callous political order. Ironically, thousands of crores are spent every year both by central and state government on departments of slum rehabilitation, urban housing, etc. yet, in recent years, the race for global investment and beautification of cities has further increased the displacement drives against the poor while welfare schemes such as the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission and the Rajeev Awas Yojna for slumdwelleres still remain unrealised.

Debt and Daily Vicissitudes

Besides the broader social and political structures that drag down the hard working poor trying to better their position in the urban space, numerous processes in their immediate environment also pull them down repeatedly and visibly. Among the personal tragedies which precipitate sharp downturns in many lives, accidents, prolonged illness and the early death of a bread winner are familiar. However, the poor are hit much more by such exigencies because their buffers are meagre, the need for daily earning is pressing and working conditions extremely threatening for those who labour in underground sewers, on electric poles or in under-construction high rises etc. The near absence of an insurance cover or even minimum social security against these major dragons on life's play board evidently deepen the anxieties and insecurities in slumdwelleres' lives and also leave them enmeshed in difficult debt traps often. In the absence of collaterals, information, links and bribe money, bank loans are out of reach for most slum dwellers. Yet, emergencies are many and local and outside money lenders charge interest at the rate of five to ten per cent per month from the hapless poor who are then forced to sell their petty assets like a share in a village plot or a little jewellery or their slum abode itself.

Besides natural and man-made calamities, other factors with which the slum dwellers struggle daily include: 1) unemployment and underemployment brought by summary dismissals, privatization of public sector units, sudden closures of factories, slow downs brought by globalization or vicissitudes of the market, state checks on hawking, vending etc. and, occasionally, by prolonged riots and political disturbances; 2) prolonged and steep inflation specially in the prices of essential commodities; 3) rise in the number of dependants associated with the arrival of more children, marriage or the disability of an ageing elder; 4) desertion or alcoholism in a family and 6) trouble with the police or court cases.

A major factor behind poverty for which the poor themselves are frequently blamed, is the large number of children and relatively lower age of marriage common among them. The ratio of adults to children (below 14 years old) was 10:9, in 2006, in Aradhaknagar though some adults who have come recently have not brought their families yet. While the number of children per couple does exceed four in many families of the slum, the fact that only about 70 odd children below the age of 14 (out of a total of 587) in the slum go to earn, suggests that the custom of early marriage and early parenthood cannot be linked to parents' desire for additional income. In fact, on eliciting slum dwellers' own views on this sensitive matter, we found most admitting that restricting family size would be better for the poor. Still the problem of many barely schooled and unattended children in the slum persists and not only reduces per capita availability of goods in concerned families but also pushes down wages in the already skewed labour market that pays a pittance for hard labour both because of inherited attitudes and also because large families maintain a reservoir of cheap labour.

Sources of Help

Turning to the sources of help available to slum dwellers in emergencies it may be noted that the extended family still serves as a major fall back for most residents. This does not imply that poor families have a lot to offer or that acrimony and family splits are not common at the bottom of the social pyramid but that even today, among distant relatives

too, and specially among blood relations, help is expected and extended in times of need. In fact, beyond family too, ethnic ties based on region, language, locality and caste bring forth help even in the absence of prior acquaintance. For the poor too, caste and other ties remain a vital mechanism for survival as the state provides little by way of social or even physical security. Such support is particularly helpful for recent immigrants in the slum from those who have stayed for long and are better informed and connected to the wider metropolis.²¹ In the recent past, some families in Aradhaknagar joined 'Chit funds' in which they deposited fixed amounts every month to be able to borrow back in emergency. However, most of these ventures proved risky and many lost their hard earned money in the process.

Political solidarity can also strengthen a community's bargaining power. But Aradhaknagar hasn't had a regular panchayat or even an elected or appointed association. A pradhan has acted as the self appointed spokesman of the slum and mediated between the residents and authorities besides mobilising electoral support for the Congress party that has been a dominant force in city's politics. However, not all residents accept the self appointed pradhan's leadership and his standing derives entirely from his closeness to local Congress leaders of the zone. It is not that slum dwellers have not mobilised on their own for improvements and against outside threats. A memorable effort in this regard was against demolition of 51 dwellings by the Central Public Works Department in the front row of Aradhaknagar in 2009. Not only the affected families but neighbours also pooled in resources to hire vehicles for meeting the chief minister and the area's MP and MLA collectively and pressed for alternate shelter for evicted families. There are several other instances of the slum dwellers getting together to help neighbours threatened by police, illness or accident etc. Yet, in a survey of 573 adults in Aradhaknagar, in 2008, we found only 22 who cited popular rebellion (*vidroh*) or collective struggle (*aandolan*) as a viable means of raising their lot in the future; the vast majority (249 among 573), rather touchingly, described one's own hard work and education as the most important channel for upward mobility.

In the absence of a regularly elected local body, Non Government

Organisations could play the role of a catalyst in slums' improvement and mobilisation. NGOs do have some presence in Aradhaknagar. But one such called Bhagat Singh Sewa Dal which provides a useful ambulance service is actually run by a councilor who has been contesting for the assembly seat as well. The Young Men's Christian Association also rented two rooms in the slum and ran a crèche and women's counseling unit for five years but wound up after 2008. I myself held remedial classes for school students for one year in an improvised class room in 2007-08 but discontinued later. In this situation, it is not surprising that residents see most 'social workers' as non serious or powerless whose actual work and proclaimed intent do not often match.

While ethnic and caste ties and some charitable organizations and NGOs as also the slum as a community come forward to help residents occasionally none of these is geared for providing sustained and reliable aid to residents in emergencies. In dealing with state's 'daftars', police and other powers, the slum dwellers are thus forced to seek help from hated politicians and employers often. But the vast majority of slum dwellers are self employed in petty trades and employers' help is out of question for them. The principal source of help against police and other officials, for ration, a job, school admission, caste certificate, a pension application or even a small aid in case of death, fire, riot etc. is thus the area's MLA, councilor or the sitting MP. But these patrons are often to be approached through the dominant party's link with the slum or the unelected 'pradhan' who often gets necessary work done in state's 'daftars' but charges his own commissions and demands political support in return during elections, rallies etc. The experience of Chaman cited above clearly illustrates this link between poor slum dwellers and local power structures. What should be theirs by right thus becomes a favour; granted selectively and in bits, against stated or unstated expectations of the political class.²²

Democracy, Affirmative Action and Education

Among the larger institutions and processes that bring some relief or upward mobility to slum dwellers, our democratic state, its policies of social

justice and welfare, phases of rapid economic growth and the education system are worth considering. In a democracy, competition for votes among parties can also be a catalyst of pro-poor stances of political actors. It is true that six decades of democratic government has still not ended mass poverty even in our major cities. Yet, most slumdweller still expect the 'sarkar' to not just maintain law and order but also deal effectively with challenges of unemployment, price control, subsidised rations, education and health facilities and housing. At a personal level too, the most sought after route for upward mobility among slumdweller is that of public sector employment. Indeed, the better off in Aradhaknagar consist almost entirely of families with more than one worker in public sector employment as shown above.

In this light, it is not surprising that most residents cite good education as the best hope for their children and invest considerably in it by sending kids to costlier private schools also. My rough estimate is that out of 291 families in Aradhaknagar, only ten were not sending children to any school, in 2008, while about thirty kids were going to private schools in adjacent colonies which charged Rs. 200-300 per month. Since the slum itself has no school, poorer students walk down to Vivek Vihar or Dilshad Garden while some go packed in rickshaws or three wheelers that charge Rs. 300 or so per month per child.

The state government had recently made it compulsory for private schools to reserve a quarter of their seats for children from economically weaker sections and educate them free. But as late as May 2012, only six students from Aradhaknagar had benefitted from this scheme. While both parents and the Constitution lay considerable stress on education, the quality remains low in government's own schools. However, near absence of skill building specially for own ventures in our pedagogy leaves the potential of schooling grossly untapped and job reservations for dalits also benefit a tiny minority only. Thus the number of dalits who have found employment in the public sector in grade III or higher jobs through the system of reservations was only six in Aradhaknagar till 2007. But the number of dalit students gaining admission to higher education through reserved seats has been growing of late. Not all manage to pass through

college but affirmative action has definitely helped in this regard and, in 2006, I counted seven graduates and thirty one intermediate or diploma holders (including nine girls) in Aradhaknagar. Though small, it is this group of the educated and the public sector employees that remains a source of hope and leadership as also a base for further organisation and mobilisation among dalit residents.

Economic Growth and Liberalisation

Our intensive study of Aradhaknagar began a little before the ushering of economic 'liberalisation' (1988-89) and closed a few years after the 'India Shining' campaign (2006-08). In these two decades, public sector employment shrank though some improvement in the living standards of a section of the slumdweller was noted in indices cited before.²³ This may be attributed partly to acceleration in economic growth between 1993 and 2008 which apparently created additional jobs of sweepers, peons, drivers etc. in sectors like call centres, malls, courier companies, computer centres, cable TV and for servicing the expanded middle class as drivers, domestic maids, etc. Similarly, innovations like cell phones and cheaper watches, TV sets, etc. also brought limited improvement in slumdweller's lives in our study period.

Yet, a direct correlation between 'liberalisation' and reduction in poverty would be wrong to deduce from the same not only because Aradhaknagar is not representative of the vast pockets of poverty outside the capital but also because decades of economic 'reforms' also happened to be the era of considerable expansion in welfare expenditure of the central government propelled by increased competition between political parties and the decline of one party dominance at the centre. The evidence from Aradhaknagar indeed shows that along with economic liberalisation, from the mid nineties, several welfare schemes were introduced by the centre including subsidized rations for below-poverty-line families, old age and disability pensions, mid day meals for government schools, etc. There is no doubt that these measures, despite considerable 'leakages' in implementation, have saved many in the slum from further misery. In other

words, more than our skewed economic growth, it is the expansion of welfare in recent decades that may have helped in raising many above extreme poverty since the nineties.²⁴

Imperatives

Our study of Aradhaknagar indicates that though incomes, assets and wages have marginally improved in the slum between 1988 and 2008, the turnaround has been far from effective and given the abysmal wage levels offered to menial work in our society, the 'free market' cannot be expected to generate a decent income for the mass of workers. The need for large scale public intervention for the urban poor is thus essential. In this light, we shall try to outline a few areas of critical concern and urgent interventions required for the urban poor here.

It is evident from our study that the factors that tie urban workers to low incomes include many structural constraints and without addressing the broader issues of class, caste and gender inequities, a radical change in slumdwellers' condition is implausible. Yet, even within the prevailing model of development, a number of measures can help in improving conditions inside slums. The callous neglect of adequate wage, training, social security and low-cost housing for unorganized workers who form the majority of slumdwellers has been one of the biggest failures of governance in India. It is these workers who provide highly cheap labour to cities while surviving amidst stench and squalor and living with constant threats of eviction, police harassment and disasters like fire, flooding and epidemics. Eschewing indifference as well as forced evictions, urban bodies need to concentrate possibly on raising, in situ, multi storied tenements rapidly and continuously for the growing mass of the urban poor. Systematic attention also needs to be given to maintenance aspects while providing for public facilities such as community toilets, taps and lighting in congested slums. Interestingly, programmes for wage assurance and job creation and infrastructure building and maintenance can be synergized to a large extent. Much more needs to be done with regard to health and education too. Services at the local state hospitals require a major overhaul. As far as government schools are concerned, enhancing the skill based component

in curricula and simpler options against papers like English and Maths (which are difficult to clear for slum children without tuitions) may not only bring down the drop-out rate of poorer pupils but improve their employability too.

Last but not the least, local government needs to be restructured for better use of welfare funds and implementation of numerous schemes existing for the poor on paper. The experience from Aradhaknagar suggests that a critical tool for better implementation of state's schemes could be found in empowered colony and slum level 'samitees' or associations (below the elected MLAs and councilors). The population of most urban neighborhoods far exceeds that of a median village. Yet, unlike rural panchayats urban wards with denser populations have not received sufficient help or recognition in our constitution. The population of Aradhaknagar is touching two thousand but it has neither a regular association nor an elected pradhan. Local confidantes of the area MLA and MP do liaison between residents and officials but their dependent status restricts this trickle of selective help. With the regularization of elections and funding for slum (and colony) level associations, the administration of welfare and local infrastructure could receive a boost since elected representatives residing within a community can serve area's needs much better than NGO volunteers or MLAs and councilors or their unelected agents who offer very limited access to residents.

Table I
DEMOGRAPHIC STRUCTURE OF ARADHAKNAGAR
(1988)

Castes	No. of Families	Number of Males			Number of Females			Grand Total
		Adults	(Below 14 years)	Sub Total	Adults	(Below 14 years)	Sub Total	
Valmikis	48	55	62	117	42	71	113	230 (52.0%)
Other SCs	21	22	31	53	17	34	51	104 (23.5%)
Middle Castes	14	15	28	43	14	16	30	73 (16.5%)
Upper Castes	05	06	08	14	03	04	07	21 (04.0%)
Muslims	03	03	03	06	04	03	07	13 (2.9%)
Total	91	101 (22.9%)	132 (29.9%)	233 (52.8%)	80 (18.1%)	128 (29.0%)	208 (47.1%)	441

Index: SC denotes Scheduled Castes including Valmikis, Jatavs and Kanjars while Middle castes (OBCs) refer to Jats, Gurjars and Yadavs (Upper Middle Castes) and Teli, Kumhar, Ahir etc (or Lower Middle Castes).

Table II
DEMOGRAPHIC STRUCTURE OF ARADHAKNAGAR
(JULY-SEPT 2006)

Castes	No. of Families	Number of Males				Number of Females				Grand Total
		In Working Age	Children (below 14)	Old (above 60)	Total	In Working Age	Children (below 14)	Old (above 60)	Total	
Valmikis	160	260	228	23	511	232	225	28	485	996 (55.51%)
Other SCs	75	137	101	11	249	111	96	12	219	468 (26.08%)
Middle Castes	32	43	46	04	93	40	49	05	94	187 (10.42%)
Upper Castes	20	47	22	06	75	20	22	06	48	123 (6.85%)
Muslims	05	06	05	01	12	04	03	01	08	20 (1.11%)
Total	292	493 (27.4%)	402 (22.4%)	45 (2.5%)	940 (52.39%)	408 (22.74)	395 (22.01%)	52 (2.89%)	854 (47.6%)	1794

Index: SC denotes Scheduled Castes including Valmikis and Jatavs; Middle Castes (OBCs) include Kumhars, Gujars and Yadavs, Ahir and Telis.

Table III
PLACES OF ORIGIN OF
RESIDENTS OF ARADHAKNAGAR
(2006)

Name of State	Name of District	Number of Families
Western Uttar Pradesh (147 out of 211)	Aligarh	31
	Meerut	30
	Ghaziabad	23
	Bulandshahar	19
	Modinagar	04
	Other Districts	40
Eastern Uttar Pradesh	Gorakhpur	04
	Other Districts	05
Madhya Pradesh	Chattarpur	03
	Other Districts	12
Delhi	Central Zone	09
	Other Zones	09
Bihar	Nawada	04
	Other Districts	06
West Bengal	Purlia & Other Districts	05
Uttarakhand	Almora & Other Districts	04
Punjab	Amritsar	02
	Other Districts	03
Rajasthan	Bhati	02
Total		211

Table IV
Occupations in Aradhaknagar (1988)

Caste Groups ----- Occupations	No. of Adults	Domestic Maids	Unskilled in the Informal Sector	Skilled in the Informal Sector	Vendors	Sweepers in Public Enterprises	Other Class III/IV Empl. employees and Professionals	Private Sector Workers	Entrepreneurs	Total Employed
SCs	136 (77 M+59 F)	15	53	02	18	23	00	05	00	116
Middle Castes	29 (15 M+14 F)	03	06	05	03	04	00	05	00	26
Muslims	07 (03 M+04 F)	02	01	02	04	00	00	00	00	09
Upper Castes	09 (06 M+03 F)	00	00	00	02	00	01	02	01	06
Total	181(101+80)	20	60	09	27	27	01	13	01	157

Index: SCs refer to Valmikis and Jatavs, Middle Castes (OBCs) refer to Ahir, Kumhars, Gurjars and Yadavs; M stands for Male and F for Females.

Table V
OCCUPATIONS IN ARADHAKNAGAR
(JULY-SEPT 2006)

Total Member in Various Castes (1464)	Adults (1 to 60 years old)	Women working from home	Domestic Maids (including 47 girls below 14)	Other Unskilled workers	Skilled Unorganized Artisans	Vendors	Pvt. Sector Employees	Ad hoc Contract Sweeps	Regular Sweeps in Public sector	Regular Dual Salary Homes	Entrepreneurs, Professionals & Class III Employees	Working Boys below 14	Total Employed	Seeking Employment
SCs (1464)	742 398M+344F	156	134	137 81M+56F	26 26M+0F	83	75 66M+9F	21 21M+0F	62 48M+14F	25 20M+5F	15 10M+5F	19	597	10 8M+2F
Middle Castes (187)	84 44M+40F	19	13	14 9M+5F	01 1M	02	09 8M+1F	00	01 1M	03 2M+1F	03 3M	02	48	00
Upper Castes (123)	69 49M+20F	12	06	08 7M+1F	04 4M	02	11 11M	00	00	00	07 7M	00	38	00
Muslims (20)	10 6M+4F	1	05	09 6M+3F	00	00	01 1M	00	00	00	01	01	17	00
Total (1794)	905 497M+408F	188	158 (22.5%)	168 103M+65F (24%)	31 31M (4.4%)	87 (12.4%)	96 86M+10F (13%)	21 21M (3%)	63 49M+14F (9%)	28 22M+6F (4%)	26 (3.7%)	22 (3.1%)	700	10 8M+2F

Index: SC refers to Valmikis and Jatavs; Middle Castes (OBCs) include Ahirs, Kumhars, Gurjars and Yadavs; M stands for Males and F for Female.

Table VI
Distribution of Consumer Durables in Aradhaknagar
(1988)

Caste/ Assets	Television Sets	Video Cassette Players	Two Wheelers	Coolers
SCs	16	01	01	0
Others	05	00	03	01
Total	21	01	04	01

Table VII
THE DISTRIBUTION OF CONSUMER DURABLES IN ARADHAKNAGAR
(JULY- SEPT 2006)

Castes & No. of Families	Televisions	Refrigerators	Gas Cylinder	Coolers	Washing Machines	Recorders	Mobiles	Two Wheelers	Cars/ Three Wheelers
SCs (172)	151	69	56	58	22	39	162	28	03/ 03
Middle Castes (19)	15	04	03	05	00	02	16	02	00
Muslims (03)	02	02	01	01	01	00	04	00	00
Upper Castes (12)	10	09	09	09	07	04	12	05	00
Total (206)	178	84	69	73	30	45	194	35	03/ 03

Index: SCs refers to Valmikis and Jatavs; Middle Castes (OBCs) include Kumhars, Gurjars, Yadavs etc. Cited Assets are based on data gathered in July-Sept. 2006 in Aradhaknagar and offer rough estimates only with a possibility of some underreporting. The listed figures are based on detailed data offered by 206 families (1310 persons) of Aradhaknagar out of a total of 292 families (1794 persons).

Table VIII
Comparative List of Prices of Household Purchases
As Reported in Aradhaknagar in 1988 and 2009

No	Name of Commodity	Average Price for 1988 in Rs.	Average Price for 2009 in Rs.	Percentage Change
1	Wheat	4 per kg	16 per kg	400%
2	Rice	6 per kg	22 per kg	360%
3	Pulses	10 per kg	70 per kg	700%
4	Cooking Oil	16 per litre	70 per litre	450%
5	Gas Cylinder	60 per cylinder	300 per cylinder	500%
6	Sugar	9 per kg	30 per kg	300%
7	Potato	3 per kg	15 per kg	500%
8	Cloth	10 per meter	40 per meter	400%
9	Rent	10 per room	600 per room	600%
10	Kerosene (in open market)	4 per litre	25 per litre	600%
11	Average for 10 Commodities			490%

Table IX
Domestic Budgets of one of the Poorest and a Relatively Well Off
Valmiki Family in Aradhaknagar (May, 2009)

Assets and Monthly Expenses of Puran			Assets and Monthly Expenses of Geeta and Ramesh		
Commodity	Monthly Expenses in Rupees	Family Members// Income and Assets	Commodity	Monthly expenses in Rupees	Family Members Income and Assets
Wheat/ Flour	260*		Wheat/ Flour	300	
Rice	40*	Seven Members	Rice	125	Five Members
Sugar	70*		Sugar	150	
Pulses	200	Total Family Income shown as	Pulses	250	Total Family Income
Vegetables and Fruit	300	Rs.4000 per month	Vegetables	600	Rs 17,000 per month
Edible Oil	250	including Rs. 3000 from son's	Cooking Oil	400	including 9,000 of
Kerosene/ Gas	275*	unskilled labour & 1000 monthly	Kerosene & Gas	610	husband & 8000 of wife
Milk	300	from mother's daily begging	Milk	600	(organised sector grade IV
Tea, Spices, Soap, Shave etc	300		Tea, Spices, Soap, Shave etc	500	employees)
Meat & Eggs	00		Meat & Eggs	400	
Smoking Drink	150 + 450		Smoking & Drink	00	
Clothes & Footwear	300		Cloth & Footwear	1000	
Education	60		Education	7000	
Medicines	200	Among assets	Medicines	300	Among assets
Conveyance	300	1 TV & Cycle, Some Silver jewellery sold	Travel	1000	TV, Fridge, Bike, Cooler
Consumer Durables	00	because of a court case filed		500	
Entertainment	00	by Puran's daughter in law	Entertainment	500	Music System
Children Pocket Money	100		Children Pocket Money	1000	
Electricity	200		Electricity	300	
Phone	00		Phone	500	
Religion/ Festivals	50		Religion Festivals	200	
Relatives	100		Relatives	500	
Debt Court/ Police	Silver Jewellery Sold Recently		Debt Court/ Police	00	
Saving	00		Saving	500	
Total	4005		Total	17,035	

*These purchases were on subsidised rates applying to the red ration card issued to persons below the poverty line fetching 25kg wheat at Rs. 2.50 per kg and 10 kilo rice at Rs 3.5 per kg. per month.

Table X
Literacy in Aradhaknagar*
(1988)

Persons above 7 years old	Literates	Illiterates	Total
Male	99	80	179
Female	21	116	137
Total	120 (38.%)	196 (62.0%)	316

Table XI
EDUCATION IN ARADHAKNAGAR
(JULY- SEPT 2006)

Caste/ Community	No. of Illiterates	Total Literates	Categories among Literates*				Holding a Diploma (after school)
			Barely Literate	Till Middle School	Matric/ Inter	BA/ MA	
Valmikis	215	494	207	269	14	04	13
Other SCs	130	204	92	102	08	02	15
Middle Castes	31	74	41	38	05	01	03
Muslims	10	03	01	01	01	00	00
Upper Castes	20	51	21	29	01	00	00
Total	406	826	363	439	29	07	31

Index: SC denotes Scheduled Castes including Valmikis and Jatavs; Middle Castes (OBCs) include Kumhars, Gurjars and Yadavs. The count of educated persons was taken among those above 7 years in age. The listed figures are based on detailed data offered by 206 families (1310 persons) of Aradhaknagar out of a total of 292 families (1794 persons) counted in 2006.

Table XII
POSITION OF WOMEN IN ARADHAKNAGAR
(JULY - SEPT 2006)

Castes	Numbers				Employment				Education**			
	Total No. of Females	Girls Below 14	Women Above 60	Women of Working Age	Working from Home	Employed in Unorganised Sector *	Employees in the Organised Sector *	Barely Literate	Matric/ Inter Pass	BA/ MA	Illiterate (above 7 yrs old)	
SCs	705	321	40	344	156	199	29	194	05	02	314	
Middle Castes	94	49	05	40	19	19	02	18	01	00	41	
Upper Castes	48	22	06	20	12	07	00	14	05	00	04	
Muslims	08	03	01	04	01	08	00	00	00	00	12	
Total	858	395	52	408	188	233	31	226	11	02	371	

Index: SC denotes Scheduled Castes including Valmikis and Jatavs; Middle Castes (OBCs) include Kumhars, Gurjars and Yadavs.

* The number of females employed in the unorganized sector includes about 47 girls working as domestic maids.

** The count of females educated up till various levels covers only those above 7 years old.

Some Inhabitants of Aradhaknagar in 1989



Edges of the Slum



After a downpour



The Slum Today



Hard - earned Assets



Notes

¹Cited from <http://www.unhabitat.org> viewed on May 10, 2011. Although the term 'slum' has been used to refer to a variety of habitats ranging from concrete but congested multi storied structures to clusters of make shift mud and straw huts, the figure cited here refers to congested dwellings as a whole. Common to them is unhygienic environment arising from dense populations concentrated in small and claustrophobic homes with very limited amenities. The proportion of persons living in slums in developed countries has been shown as less than 5%.

²See Davis, Mike (2006): *The Planet of Slums: Urban Involution and the Informal Working Class*, New York. And Planning Department, The Economic Survey of Delhi (2001-02), Government of NCT of Delhi.

³ For further data on slums, rural population and pavement dwellers in Delhi refer: National Sample Survey Organisation, 58th Round Report (2003); and www.delhigovt.nic.in.

⁴ Whyte, William Foote (1969): *Street Corner Society*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

⁵ Refer Ali, Sabir (2003): *Environmental Situation of Slums in India*, New Delhi: Uppal Publishing, Kundu, Amitabh (2009): 'Exclusionary Urbanisation in Asia: A Macro Overview', *Economic and Political Weekly*, November 28, Kumar, Naveen and Suresh Chand Aggarwal (2000): 'Pattern of Consumption and Poverty in Delhi Slums', *Economic and Political Weekly*, December 13. Among detailed studies of selected Indian slums see Rao, Ratna N (1990): *Social Organization in an Indian Slum*, New Delhi: Mittal Publications, Sharma, Sharma, Kalpana (2000): *Rediscovering Dharavi*, Penguin India, Dewan, Geeta (2002): *Slumming India*, Penguin and Antony, Margaret and G. Maheshwaran (2001): *Social Segregation and Slums*, New Delhi: Indian Social Institute.

⁶According to the 2001 census, 28% of India's population was concentrated in towns and cities. Of the total urban population (of about 30 crores), 15% lived in slums or on pavements. In cities like Mumbai this ratio could be as high as 50%. Delhi's 'jhuggie' clusters grew from about 200 (with a population of about 1.2 lakh), in 1951, to about 2500 (with a population above three million) by 2010 showing a jump of about 25 times in 60 years as against the growth of just 8 times in the city's total population over the same period.

⁷Although the term structure suggests abiding patterns in group relations at various levels these are not to be seen as changeless either. It is the slow, long term shifts in such relations at the level of demography, caste, class and gender that the present study seeks to throw light within one slum of the national capital.

⁸Here I would like to gratefully acknowledge the financial help received in present research from the Indian Council of Social Science Research and the University

Grants Commission of India for my second extended survey of Aradhaknagar between 2006-2009. The stimulating environment provided by the Institute of Economic Growth and support from its Ratan Tata Fellowship were of immense help again in finalising this paper.

⁹ Vijay, Devesh (2010): इक्कीसवीं शताब्दी में दलितों के बदलते हालात और सोच (Ikkeesveen Shatabdi mein Daliton ke Badalte Halaat aur Soch), Swaraj Prakashan, New Delhi

¹⁰ Refer Schenk, Hans (2001): *Living in India's Slums: A Study of Bangalore*, New Delhi: Manohar Publications and Sharma, Kalpana op.cit. Most slums around Aradhaknagar (including Sunlight colony, Sonia Camp, Rajeev Camp) have indeed seen similar transition from kutcha to pucca housing and many more consumer durables in past two decades.

¹¹ Here I would like to acknowledge the hard work put in by my project assistant—Mr. Rakesh Bihari. I am also extremely grateful to all the residents of Aradhaknagar for their patient responses to our intrusive queries and specially to Virender Kumar, Satyaprakash Gautam and Rajender who helped in data collection.

¹² The terms 'unorganised' and 'informal' sectors have been used to refer to related but slightly different aspects of the economy. With the former pointing towards smaller units where workers remain unprotected by unions the latter stands particularly for production or distribution that is not formally registered. In both cases workers or self employed labouring masses remain out of the legal and social security cover.

¹³ More than unemployment, the problem faced by the urban poor hence is low wages. In Aradhaknagar too, only 10 adults described themselves as unemployed during our 2006 survey. A couple of these were physically challenged and others were inter or matric pass who, with special support from parents, were looking for non menial jobs.

¹⁴ It may be added here that very few slum families have claims in other properties within the city or elsewhere. Recent immigrants do often return to ancestral villages seasonally but their dependence on rural properties or incomes seems marginal as many of them were landless to begin with or have very small agricultural holdings whose incomes can hardly be shared with real cultivators. In fact, parents and other family members in ancestral villages, wherever ties still exist, depend more on slum dwellers' financial support rather than the other way round. Those few residents who had substantial properties of their own in villages, have also sold them, either to meet sudden demands of money in the city or to invest in the more lucrative urban and suburban properties as noted in the case of Rajender, Chaman etc in Aradhaknagar.

¹⁵ A room could be rented out for just Rs. 50 in 1991 while in 2008, after the completion of the metro link, rents shot upto Rs 500 and today stand above rupees 1000.

¹⁶ The criterion for identifying the poor in India had traditionally been minimum calorie intake which translated into Rs. 18 per day per capita in urban areas and Rs. 12 per day for rural in 2004-05. The same translated into Rs. 20 per person per day in 2006 when I conducted a survey among 206 families of Aradhaknagar. More recently, the planning commission has revised the yardstick for poverty to Rs. 650 in urban and 450 in rural areas per month per person.

¹⁷ Although the interpretations of changes in the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) and the Consumer Price Index (CPI), in India, have also been diverse in recent years, yet the broad range of inflation between 1988 and mid 2009 may be said to have been in the range of 500% or so. Refer 'Current Statistics', *Economic and Political Weekly* and *Statistical Outline of India*, Tata Information Services, 2010.

¹⁸ Daily wages cited here are those of adult male workers attached to labour contractors for long durations. It is noteworthy that wages for even unskilled labourers can vary significantly by region, gender and occupation. From Aradhaknagar itself it was evident that when a male worker could earn about Rs.150 in Delhi, a female agricultural worker's wage in surrounding villages of western Uttar Pradesh could be as low as Rs. 40 (for four hours of daily work).

¹⁹ The criteria for identifying the poor have been at the centre of a major controversy recently. Indeed, various types of poverty need to be recognized and the criteria of minimum calorie intake adopted since 1973 is also relevant though its application to exclude families from state's aid programmes would be highly unjust. It is in this sense that Rs. 20 per capita daily consumption as marker of poverty in urban areas for 2004 or Rs. 25 as a rough marker for 2009 has been adopted in our study here.

²⁰ On this point, our findings differ with conclusions drawn in Antony, Margaret and G. Maheshwaran (2001): *Social Segregation and Slums*, New Delhi: Indian Social Institute. Interestingly, many of the examples cited in their case studies seem to belie their conclusions (ibid, pp. 53-54 and pp. 59-60). In fact, the authors also contradict themselves on the question of caste segregation in Delhi's slums (as on page 6 and 59 on one hand and page 40-41 on other).

²¹ For similar argument regarding the effect of duration of stay in the city on incomes of slum dwellers refer Mitra, Arup (2002): 'Rural Migrants and Labour Segmentation', *Economic and Political Weekly*, January 12.

²² Also see Edelman, Brent and Arup Mitra (2006): 'Slum Dwellers' Access to Basic Amenities: The Role of Political Contact, its Determinants and Adverse Effects', *RURDS*, Vol. 18, No. 1, March.

²³ Refer data on changes in wages and consumer durables in section titled *Incomes and Consumption in Aradhaknagar* above.

²⁴ For contrasting views on trends in poverty in India since liberalisation see Sundaram, K. and Suresh D. Tendulkar (2005) and Aiyar, Swaminathan S. (2012),

'Poverty has Truly Fallen', *Times of India*, March 25th on the one hand and Sengupta, Arjun, K. P. Kannan, G. Raveendran (2008): 'India's Common People: Who Are They, How Many Are They and How Do They Live?', *Economic and Political Weekly*, March 15, Patnaik, Utsa (2007): *The Republic of Hunger and Other Essays*, New Delhi: The Three Essays Collective, Bhaduri, Amit (2008): 'Predatory Growth', *Economic and Political Weekly*, April 19, Breman, Jan. (2002): *The Labouring Poor in India: Patterns of Exploitation, Subordination and Exclusion*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press on the other.

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