The vitality of food, cloth and shelter to human life has exposed civilisations to struggles throughout history. Keeping in mind its gravity, this chapter plucks shelter as an issue of human security to dwell upon. Shelter can apparently be perceived as a protective shield against physical attack, danger, rain, heat, wind, etc. Hence it absorbs both the physical and the psychological aspect of security. Shelter has also a class dimension. A homeless person is kept at arm's length and is looked down upon which is sufficiently dehumanising in any society. While some societies have managed to provide this comprehensive pattern of security to its members, others have failed to do so. Even western societies have remained largely unsuccessful to assure all its members of such a kind of security. The problem, however, is more acute in African and Asian countries. South Asian countries are also not lagging behind in depriving large number of its people of such vital human security and certainly India too is not an exception to it. The populist political rhetoric have been religiously displaying the issue of Roti, Kapda Aur Makan (food, cloth and shelter) since India's entry into its democratic phase of history. This issue has managed to find a place in the election manifestoes of most political parties but it is struggling to find a confirmation in the real political agenda of governance and development of successive governments. We must, however, point out at this stage that the Supreme Court of India has indicated that the right to life includes the right to live with human dignity and all that goes along with it, namely, the bare necessities of life such as adequate nutrition, clothing and shelter (Iyer, 1998:54).

In this part of the study, we propose to look into the question of security of shelter, particularly in the Indian context. Notwithstanding the severity of the problem, there are only few studies of shelter in South Asia; this study may, therefore, be regarded as an exploratory
one. Hence, it has inherent limitations; nevertheless, this study is likely to help us understand the enormity of the problem and the resultant insecurity. Herein, we have taken up shelter as a part of larger human security issue and concern. Obviously, any human security issue is also linked with the issue of "human rights." Of late India has shown an increasing tendency to look at the issue of shelter as one of the important issue/category of rights.

Soon after independence India realised the importance of shelter issue along with the issue of food and clothing. However, colonial legacies like famines and poverty made the new Indian rulers cautious on the issue of food security alone. They, therefore, concentrated on facing the challenge of food security only by attaining self-sufficiency in food grain. In the process, the issue of shelter was eclipsed.

Shelter continues to be an important issue but there has not been much pressure on the government to bring this issue at par with the issue of food. Attainment of self-sufficiency in food has become a national issue, but not shelter. However, it seems that, by 1960, the Government of India realised the importance of having data on the housing situation in the country as a part of its planning process. For the first time, a uniform house-listing form was adopted in the 1961 census for the entire country at the time of house numbering. We must point out that India has a fairly large and reasonably sophisticated decadal census enumeration system. The house-listing operations of 2001 census witnessed a major qualitative shift in approach. For the first time, the census emphasised primarily the qualitative aspects of living, rather than just on number of houses alone. Earlier in 1994, the Government of India promulgated the National Housing Policy, which stated that, "Shelter and development are mutually supportive. Housing is to be viewed as an integral part of overall improvement of human settlement and economic development" (Government of India 1994). Thus, the state accepted the concept of shelter or housing as something inseparably linked to the living standard of the people.

Very often, housing is conceived in terms of structure or a built up space. A house is a shelter free from the vagaries of external environment, and as such, consists of at least four walls and a roof. When we talk of a 'house,' we normally refer to a structure. We must also distinguish between a house and household. A household is functional part of the structure, i.e., house. Hence, a house plus the people living in the same structure constitutes a household. As per 2001 Census, 'a household is defined as a group of persons who normally live together and take their
meals from a common kitchen (Government of India, 2001a). In the absence of any universally acceptable definition, we can broadly accept the census definition while analysing the Indian situation. Sociologically, a shelter is both a house and a household. A shelter reflects, by and large, the socio-economic and cultural background of the people in which they live. Security of shelter is not only a question of providing physical security; it goes far beyond it. Shelter also provides social, economic, cultural, and psychological security as well as the security of identity in a fast changing uncertain world. Hence, having a shelter or a home remains a major concern of each and every individual at one or all points of life. Even the question of individual self-fulfillment in any contemporary society is also largely linked to having a home and owning a shelter. In India, it goes far beyond that, owning a shelter is regarded as an achievement in life. One’s dignity is linked with it. A person without a shelter lives without dignity.

Here we propose to look first into the enormity of the problem of shelter in India mainly on the basis of data provided by Census 2001. Then we are looking into the question of shelter in conjunction with water, sanitation and power/electricity in the Indian context. Our deliberate conjunction is essential because shelter is incomplete without access to water, sanitation and electricity.

3.1 ENORMITY OF THE PROBLEM
The Census of India, 2001 has revealed that there are 249,095,869 houses, out of which 177,537,513 (71 per cent) and 71,558,356 (29 per cent) were located respectively in rural and urban areas (Figure 3.1). Figure 3.2 shows the total number of occupied and unoccupied houses in India. Here, we need to keep in mind the difference between a house and a household. Obviously the number of households is likely to be less than the number of actual number of houses. The Census of India found 191,963,935 (roughly 191 million plus) households in India, out of which 138,271,559 are rural households and 53,692,376 are urban households. The housing survey reveals that about 96 million (52.2 per cent) are in “good condition,” 84 million (44.3 per cent) are “livable” and the remaining 10 million (5.5 per cent) in a “dilapidated” condition (Figure 3.3). This unmistakably points to the fact that nearly half of the Indian population have no access to good housing. And little less than half of Indian people survive somehow in “livable” houses and the remaining 5.5 per cent Indian live in “dilapidated” houses. It is to be mentioned here that India’s 5 per cent plus population means a huge number, more than...
the total population of the United Kingdom. The census data reveal that shelter is still a very serious problem for half of its total 110 billion plus population. In terms of quality only just half of the total population lives in "good" houses. A large section of Indians have no access to proper shelter. Shelterlessness, in other words, is a state of homelessness as well as rootlessness in one's own society. This is a severe form of social exclusion. This situation generates social, economic as well as cultural destitution and undoubtedly reflects a profound form of social alienation. The problem, obviously, is much more acute in urban India.

![Figure 3.1: Number of Houses in India 2001](source).

![Figure 3.2: Classification of Houses](source).
As stated earlier, the Census of India incorporated a questionnaire/schedule in order to collect primary data on the housing situation in India. This has helped significantly in assessing the housing/shelter situation in India. The following questions were added to the house list schedule of Census 2001 (Government of India, 2001a):

1. Condition of residential houses was categorised as good, livable or dilapidated;
2. Number of married couple living in the household;
3. Number of married couples having independent rooms for sleeping;
4. Waste water outlet and whether this is linked to closed/open drainage or no drainage;
5. Availability of bathroom;
6. Availability of kitchen;
7. Availability of assets such as telephone, car, etc;
8. Availability of banking services;
9. Whether houses have the facility of 'lighting' or 'no lighting';
10. Type of latrine used;
11. Uses of houses for different purposes; and
12. Plastic/polythene was added to the list of materials of wall and roof of a census house for the first time.

The census data provide very interesting and quite revealing information about the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the housing situation in India. Figure 3.4 provides information regarding the materials used in roofing. This will help us understand the quality of houses in India. In India, a wide variety of materials are used in
Source: *Census of India, 2001*

**Figure 3.4: Houses of predominant Material of Roof**
building rooftops, depending on geographical situation and the economic condition of the owner. Still, one-fifth of the people use bamboos, thatch, grass etc. as material for rooftops. One-third of the people use tiles as rooftop and one-tenth use metal like steel CI sheet and asbestos etc. Despite knowing that asbestos is harmful, many people still use it as building materials. One out of 200 houses uses polythene and plastics for the rooftop. Most urban slums use these two materials to build their shanties. These are the last resort of the urban poor.

For the first time, the 2001 census gave recognition to materials such as plastic/polythene as one of the predominant materials for building the roof of census houses. Generally, a roof is considered as ‘kutcha’ if the material used is grass, leaves, reeds, bamboo, thatch, mud, un-burnt brick or wood. It is ‘pucca’ when the material used includes tiles, slates, shingle, corrugated iron, zinc or other material sheets, asbestos, cement sheets, bricks, lime and stone or RBC/RCC concrete. Going by this definition, one can conclude that most of the roofs of the census houses are ‘pucca’ roofs. Empirically, 77 per cent of the total census houses have ‘pucca’ roofs, 22.4 per cent have ‘kutcha’ roofs, while 0.6 per cent roofs are made of ‘other’ materials (Figure 3.4). As three-fourth of the roof is ‘pucca’, one may conclude safely that all these roofs have a potential rain-harvesting structure. If this potential is tapped, it is likely to contribute immensely towards resolving water crisis in most parts of India.

The 2001 census assumes that a room can be viewed as a dwelling room if it has the walls with a doorway and a roof, and is wide and long enough for a person to sleep in. This means that the room should have a length of not less than 2 meters and breadth of at least 1.5 meters. The ideal height is 2 meters. In 1981, as per census data, about 45 per cent households had only 1 room dwellings. In 1991, it decreased to 40.4 per cent and in 2001 it came down further to 38.5 per cent. This positive trend indicates that over the last twenty years people living in one room dwelling have been decreasing gradually.

Compared to about 56 per cent in 1981, now about 62 per cent of the Indian population live in more than 1 room dwellings as per 2001 census. There has been a gradual and of course, slow mobility towards more than 1 room dwelling. This is obviously a positive sign in the otherwise grim housing situation in India.

Figure 3.6 points unmistakably to the fact that nearly three-fourths of the houses of India are inhabited by one couple families. This shows
Source: Census of India, 2001

Figure 3.5: Distribution of Households According to Dwelling Rooms occupied 1981 to 2001
Figure 3.6: Households by Number of Married Couples
a very significant qualitative shift in the traditional joint family system. It is moving towards a dominantly nuclear family system. This also marks the erosion of the joint family system, as more and more families are opting for independent living space, if not sleeping space. The Census 2001 also recorded that, 60.8 per cent of Indian households have independent sleeping rooms for married couples. This also meant that as high as nearly 40 per cent of married couples in India do not have independent sleeping rooms. This severely restricts privacy, intimacy and sexuality of two-fifth of the married couples of India.

3.2 SHELTER AND SANITATION

Lack of adequate sanitation is the dominant characteristic of Indian houses. As many as 63.6 per cent of the households in India do not have latrine within the house (Figure 3.7). And 53.6 per cent of these houses do not have any drainage connectivity for the wastewater outlet (Figure 3.8). Besides, Census report also reveals that 63.9 per cent households do not have bathrooms facilities within the household. Households in rural areas have lesser access to sanitation facility compared to those in urban areas. The 1991 Census revealed that this inaccessibility is more dominant in the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe households than any other households.

It has been estimated that a very high percentage of the Indian population, i.e., 80 per cent, defecates in open spaces or smelly public toilets. In rural areas, only 3 per cent have access to sanitary latrines.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Pit latrine</th>
<th>Water Closet</th>
<th>Other latrine</th>
<th>No latrine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11.50%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>6.90%</td>
<td></td>
<td>63.60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India, 2001

Figure 3.7: Households by Type of Latrine within the House
(Sulabh International Social Service Organisation, as quoted in Government of India 2001b: 41). This is true even in urban areas where hardly 20 per cent of the population have access to water-sealed/flush toilets connected to a sewerage system, and only 14 per cent enjoy water-borne toilets connected to septic tanks or leach pits. In rural areas, merely 3 per cent of the population have access to sanitary toilets. This lack of adequate sanitation is responsible for severe health problems. Cholera, dysentery, typhoid, paratyphoid, infectious hepatitis and many other diseases can be traced to the unsanitary disposal of human excreta. Lack of sanitation also has grave social consequences, the need to have “night soil” removed has given rise to the profession of scavenging or collecting it from bucket latrines, the streets and other locations. Though this practice has been banned and the Indian Constitution bans the segregation of those who service this profession, there are many areas in the country where the practice continues unabated (Sulabh International Social Service Organisation, as quoted in Government of India, 2001b:41, emphasis added).

Sanitation has a strong gender bias too. Women face much more difficulties for not having latrines in their homes than the male members. “Indian society places strong restrictions on the defecation behaviour of women rather than on men. In most villages, women who do not have household latrines usually go out into the fields to defecate when they cannot be seen; before dawn, that is before the men get up or after dark” (Centre for Science and Environment, 1982:111).
Box 3.1: Sanitation and Mahatma Gandhi

Ultimately, sanitation and personal hygiene are matters of public attitudes. New attitudes can be created or changed only if there is a concerted drive towards them. Hardly any Indian leader considers sanitation an important public issue. The usual reaction is one of annoyance when existing unsanitary conditions are pointed out. Mahatma Gandhi was a leader whose politics and behaviour were deeply rooted in Indian culture. But because he paid considerable attention to sanitation problems, unlike other Indian leaders, novelist V.S. Naipul pronounced that he was really a "colonial" in his perspective. [State of India's Environment: The First Citizens' Report (CSE, 1982:111)]

It seems the problem of sanitation has nothing much to do with the "resources" but with the sense of urgency and will. With its own resources, India is definitely capable of handling the problem of sanitation. Besides, organisation like Sulabh International provides low cost sanitation with appropriate technology that suits the Indian situation. The problem of sanitation has a direct bearing on the health situation in India. In order to enhance and insure health security in India, it is important that sanitation standard and facilities must go up. Besides, as noted earlier, improper sanitation has ensured the continuity of traditional occupational groups like "scavengers" who collect and dispose human excreta even today. The perpetuation of the occupation of traditional scavengers is both shameful and highly degrading. Drastic improvement in sanitation standards is likely to liberate the traditional scavengers in India, something which the legal-constitutional framework failed to achieve for them.

3.3 SHELTER AND WATER

Access to safe drinking water is a condition for enhancing the health security of people. Safe drinking water is an asset to a household for it prevents a large number of water-borne diseases. The 1991 Census reported that about 62 per cent of households in India have access to safe drinking water, among which 81 per cent households are located in urban areas and 56 per cent households belong to rural areas. The Census states that drinking water supplied from tap, hand-pump, or tube-well is considered safe drinking water. If this definition is accepted, then according to 2001 census, 30.7 per cent of the total households have access to tap water, 35.7 per cent have access to hand-pump, 18.2 per cent drink water from well, and 5.6 per cent from tube-well (Figure 3.9). The data signal that a large number of Indian households do not have access to safe drinking water.
The 2001 Census reveals that only 39 per cent of the total households in India have direct water connectivity/availability within the premises. As high as 44 per cent plus households had to collect their water from nearby sources (Figure 3.10). And, the remaining 17 per cent of households depend on water brought from distance places. In the absence of access to basic necessities like sanitation and water, a shelter is not a shelter at all. It remains incomplete and inadequate. A large number of people in India live in such incomplete shelters permanently.

We must also point out explicitly that traditionally women are mainly expected to take the responsibility of fetching water for the family. The longer the distance of the source of water, the higher is the predicament for women, as they have to walk longer distance. Access to water has a solid gender dimension.
Box 3.2: Millennium Development Goals: Water and Sanitation

In 1990s the number of children killed by diarrhoea—the result of unsafe water and sanitation—exceeded the number of people killed in armed conflicts since the Second World War. Moreover, half the world's hospital beds are occupied by patients with water borne diseases, meaning that expensive curative services are being used to treat diseases that could easily have been prevented.

In South Asia only 37% of the population has access to adequate sanitation...
Rural people suffer more from lack of safe water...

Over the years many natural water bodies have become polluted. People living in the riverbank too are increasingly facing crisis because of contamination of river water. Significantly, industrially backward states like Assam too are facing serious crisis of drinking water. It has been discovered that groundwater in some parts of Assam is not at all safe for drinking because it is contaminated with a toxic substance like fluoride and arsenic. This has severely affected a large section of people and many of them have become physically disabled in recent years. Down South, a city as big as Chennai, is also facing serious crisis of drinking water.

It has to be pointed out that access to safe drinking water has not been evenly percolated down to different regions. The 1991 Census noted that proportion of households having access to safe drinking water is much lower in North Eastern India than the rest of the country. For example, nearly 92 per cent rural households and 94 per cent urban households in Punjab had access to safe drinking water. In Delhi, 95 per cent households had access to safe drinking water. However, in reality the picture is not that bright. As a result of environmental degradation, contamination of ground water, rampant use of pesticide and other harmful chemical, safe drinking water in India has become scarce. Along with shelter, water too has become an issue in human security and human rights in India. As a result of globalisation, one can see the forceful entry of powerful multi-national corporations in India, and gradual privatisation of water sources and supply is taking place in different parts of India. One may not find safe drinking water in most parts of India; however, so-called safe 'mineral water' bottles are available in almost all markets, including rural ones.
A BBC report says that there are nearly 2 billion people around the world who do not have adequate access to safe drinking water and proper sanitation (BBC, 2005). Obviously, most of them are located in the developing countries of Latin America, Africa and Asia. We have already discussed the situation in India. From the discussion, one can well imagine the water and sanitary situation in the remaining countries of South Asia. UN in its Millennium Development Goals (UNDP, 2003:116) has taken up access to water and sanitation as one of the goals of the millennium to be achieved universally by 2015. However, the millennium development goals did not take up the issue of providing shelter to the millions of marginalised and the needy homeless people around the world. Water and sanitation are not enough for the poor without their access to shelter. Security of shelter along with access to safe drinking water and proper sanitation should have been part of the UN millennium goals.

3.4 SHELTER AND ENERGY

It is necessary to look into the question of the linkage between energy like electricity and shelter in India. Quality and importance of a shelter depends crucially on its access to water and electricity. Both are regarded as essentials for shelter. Security, or for that matter insecurity of shelter, is inseparably linked with the insecurity of water and electricity. As we have already discussed the linkage between shelter and water, we would like to deal now with the linkage between electricity and shelter briefly.

The Census of India categorised households by sources of lighting. It reported that only 55.8 per cent, i.e., little more than half of the Indian households, have access to basic energy source like electricity. Even now, a little above 43 per cent use kerosene as a source of lighting at night. Users of other sources are very insignificant. Many people in India still do not use any energy for lighting their houses. There are a large number of people in India who go to bed as soon as the sun sets. They use only natural sources of lighting. All these point to the fact that along with the insecurity of shelter; there exists an all-encompassing energy insecurity in India. Both go hand in hand, and obviously, it deeply affects the people who live at the margins of Indian society.
3.5 SHELTER AND WOMEN

The whole question of security or insecurity will remain incomplete if we ignore the gender question. A large number of women in India suffer as a result of being homeless. It is necessary to treat Women's Right to Housing (WRH) as a fundamental right within the broad framework of human right. Patel observes, “WRH is linked with women’s right to property, land and inheritance. For women, beyond shelter, housing is a place of employment, a place of social interaction, a place of child care and a refuge from social instability and sexual violence” (Patel, 2005:2).

Source: Census of India, 2001

Figure 3.11: Households by Sources of Lighting in 2001
From gender perspectives, women are more vulnerable to homelessness than men. A large number of women become homeless because of the following reasons:

1. They are victims of structural as well as personal violence;
2. They are deserted by their families;
3. They are rejected by their natal or matrimonial families, and
4. They are cheated by their relatives as a result of conflict; or environmental and development-induced displacement.

Perhaps it is easier for women to get a job and get their children to school even after she becomes homeless, but it is very difficult for her to get accommodation. Here comes the question of housing rights for women (Patel, 2005:2). Although one-tenth of the households in so-called peaceful areas and three-tenths of the households in conflict-prone areas are headed by women in India, they still face hurdles as far as proper accommodation is concerned. A woman's identity is inseparable from the house she occupies, yet she plays little or no role in the decision-making process that finally leads to the building or functioning of the household. The market economy devalues domestic work, and mainstream planners and policy-makers consider it as “non-work”. In the process, women are marginalised within the household and consequently deprived from being the owner/co-owner of the house. It is the men who own and inherit the property/house. They monopolise exclusively the housing delivery system (Patel, 2005:2).

It is to be noted here that the gender-neutral approach in housing goes against women’s interest. Hence, there is a need to introduce gender-conscious approach in housing that takes women's strategic and practical needs, concerns and rights into consideration in a holistic manner. House layouts influence and affect gender roles among household members and therefore, mirrors change in society’s concept of family. Designing of house should promote the ethos of shared housework by men and women of the household (Patel, 2005:2).

There are some contributing factors which prevent women from accessing their rights to proper shelter (Patel, 2005:2). These are:

1. Gender-biased laws which prevent women from owning, inheriting, purchasing, leasing, renting, and bequeathing housing, land and property.
2. Domestic violence that challenges the security of tenure of women by generating fear, tension, and insecurity among women victims and their minor children.

3. Financial and material barriers such as gender-biased policy in financing for housings, and unavailability of services, materials, etc. as well as social attitude towards single women living in rented houses, absences of old age home for older women, traditional Hindu attitude towards widows etc. that do not allow women to have proper access to shelter/accommodation.

4. Desertion by family members.

5. Environment-induced disasters like earthquakes, floods, cyclones, caste, communal and ethnic conflicts and war, and development projects also forcibly displace women from their original habitat. As a result of such situation, women are forced to stay in sub-human and obviously gender-unfriendly relief camps. Homelessness enhances the vulnerability and insecurity of women and children much more than men.

As far as the question of access to shelter is concerned, besides the poor, women too experience severe marginalisation and exclusion. Perhaps, compared to the poor, the situation in which women are entrapped is, in fact, more severe. Hence, we need to emphasise the gender question vis-à-vis shelter in order to make the security of shelter more gender and justice sensitive.

3.6 SHELTER: THE DIFFICULT TERRAIN

The very issue of security and insecurity is indeed complex. It needs much more attention. Shelter is fundamental to society like security of food and health. Unfortunately, adequate attention has not been given to this crucial issue. Whatever research and studies have been conducted on the subject is not enough to help us understand the difficult terrain that one has to traverse to understand the problem in its totality. Here, of course, we would like to stress the status of the poor and their linkage to the problem of shelter along with some of the recent case studies. Some of these difficult areas are discussed below:

1. The high cost of shelter, conventional or formal, is out of the reach of most people. Therefore, the poor are compelled to live in slums and urban streets. Teeming with more than 10 million
people, Mumbai has half of its inhabitants dwelling in slums (Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action, 1990). The term ‘slum’ is used in a loose sense to designate areas that are overcrowded, dilapidated, wrongly laid out and generally with highly unhealthy sanitary, drainage and drinking water facilities (Mander, 2005:17). Mander goes on to describe: “they are crowded in precarious locations that are deemed to be ‘illegal’: open drains, low-lying areas, and banks of effluent tanks, vicinity of garbage dumps, open pavements and streets. They survive in chronic fear of eviction, fire and flood. Housing for those who do not sleep in open is in shambles—literally, overcrowded inside and outside the house, the house itself is constructed of whatever material is available and often fails to keep out the cold or the rain” (Mander, 2005:17).

Independent studies have established that one-third of the population in most cities and towns live in slums and out of these at least half of them are below the poverty line. One may argue that slums are the direct outcome of the failure of state policy (Mander, 2005:17).

2. Housing solutions devised by the poor are treated as “illegal.” These structures are treated as vulnerable to eviction. During January to June 1994, 45,000 such houses were demolished by the state (Beyond Settlement, 1996). Since early December 2004, the government of Maharastra started demolishing the slums in order to reclaim nearly 306 acres of urban land, clearing over 70,000 shanties in the process and rendering over 3 lakh homeless (Economic and Political Weekly, January 22, 2005). However, a report published later in The Hindu estimated that over 90,000 families were displaced, rendering about 4 lakh people homeless and forcing about a lakh children out of school (The Hindu, 16 March 2005, emphasis added). And the operation continued against the poor slum dwellers without any viable alternative. “More than 80,000 impoverished and defenseless families subsisting in precarious slum shanties, were mercilessly rendered homeless by state power. Their ouster was accomplished by the relentless march of bulldozers, backed up by the police batons, often with not more than two hours notice” (Mander, 2005:17).
In a memorandum submitted to the Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment, on 15th March 2005, the Mumbai slum dwellers under the banner of Zhopdi Bachao Sayunkt Kriti Samiti, pointed out that the demolition of slums was a violation of the National Common Minimum Programme (NCMP) announced by the Congress President, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, soon after it assumed power in May, 2004. The Samiti said that the Vision Mumbai Plan was against disadvantaged sections and favoured the builders, corporations and the rich to whom the land was allotted (Mander, 2005:17).

3. The so-called development projects, constructions of dams, road and railways, airports, industries, tourist spots, etc. have made millions of people homeless throughout India since independence. Unfortunately, majority of them belong to marginalised tribal communities (Chapter 6 on Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons). Development projects not only have a direct bearing on their shelters but also callously impacts their livelihood, culture and community structure.

4. Various kinds of internal political conflicts since independence have rendered millions of people homeless. Conflicts in Jammu and Kashmir, Gujarat and the entire North East have induced massive internal displacement of population in India (Mander, 2005:17). Even in a small district like Kokrajhar in Western Assam, 1,26000 conflict-induced displaced people have been living in state-sponsored relief camps for a long period. Some of them have been there for more than a decade now. The state has failed to provide the necessary resettlement and rehabilitation package. The place from where they were evicted used to be officially forest area. Now these displaced people cannot go back to those land from where they were brutally evicted as a result of ethnic conflict because the Supreme Court of India meanwhile passed a judgment, which banned human habitation in “forest” areas. Sharpening of ethnicity and competition for space and resources has propelled massive displacement of population in North East India (Hussain, 2002, 2004, 2005 and 2006).

5. Post-colonial India experienced massive displacement of population not only due to development projects and internal
political conflicts, but due to environmental degradation also. As such, these IDPs may also be categorised as "Environmental Refugees." In recent times, the great Orissa cyclone of 1999, the Gujarat earthquake of 2001, massive flood and river bank erosion in Assam's plains and the recent Tsunami, have killed lakhs of people, besides rendering millions homeless. In the absence of proper resettlement and rehabilitation policy and package, the plight of the IDPs in India has become pathetic. In the absence of a concrete policy on the IDPs, the IDPs neither get adequate protection from the state nor from the international community. India could have accepted the United Nations Guiding Principles on Internally Displaced Persons. Among the homeless IDPs are undoubtedly located at the bottom of the hierarchy.

6. A large number of people do not have access to basic necessities such as drinking water and toilets. For instance, the 2001 census data suggest that only 39 per cent of households have drinking water within premises. The rest have to fetch water from outside their premises. As far as the issue of "toilet" or "latrine" is concerned, the census data reveal that as high as 63.6 per cent of total households in India have no access to it. Shelter without access to water and electricity is a serious problem throughout India. India is facing both; water as well energy security, which is likely to affect the issue of shelter drastically in the future unless remedial measures are taken.

7. In terms of issues like access to shelter, another related concern, particularly in rural areas, is that of the growing scarcity of traditional building materials. Deforestation and its consequent effects mean that traditional materials and technologies have become more expensive and less accessible (Bhide, 1998:344).

8. The gender question is also very important in terms of accessibility of shelter. The structure of housing policies and provisions has perpetuated the dependent status of women. There is a long way to go for women before they can achieve equal access to shelter.

9. Privatisation and liberalisation have further marginalised the poor and have denied them access to adequate housing materials and technology. As a result, it has failed to recognise and offer security to them.
Thus, the issue of housing or shelter has several inter-related dimensions of access, quality, ecology, technology, finance, infrastructure and legislature. The moot point is that the poor and women are in a disadvantageous position in all these dimensions (Bhide, 1998:344). The present housing situation is also a product of interplay of various interventions—the state, profiteers in the housing market and the people (Bhide, 1998:344).

3.7 GOVERNMENT APPROACH TO HOUSING

Even if the government regards housing as an important need, the outlay to housing programmes has never gone beyond 2 per cent in any of the plans (Ravi, 1999). Mander points out, “Whereas almost all plan document has acknowledged the need of extending shelter rights to the urban poor, the practice has suffered greatly in terms of abysmally low investments, misdirected subsidies, reliance of on highly skewed market forces, and a legal and regulatory regime which is extremely hostile to the poor .... Housing has received only one per cent of the central plan allocation, and most resource-starved state governments have not added significantly to these resources” (Mander, 2005:17, emphasis added).

The issue of shelter has always been a low priority concern for the government both at the centre and the state level. Local bodies virtually play no role in providing shelter to the poor and the needy. Even most destitute homes in India are run by NGOs and other charitable organisations. As far as state policies are concerned, it may be said that they have never been adopted in any gender-friendly approach to enhance the security of shelter for women.

Slums reflect the hard reality of the degradation of urban poor. The dominant state approach to slums has been “one of slum clearance, a policy of forced eviction of slum-dwellers from their tenements, and demolition of their shelters, as was enforced with cold-blooded bestiality during the emergency in 1975-77 in Delhi and most recently in Mumbai” (Mander, 2005:17).

Initially, the government considered slums as illegal. However, of late, the government of Maharastra is considering the slums as shelter alternatives created by the poor and is seeking to supplement these efforts. There is also more emphasis on the quality of housing rather than quantity in the 2001 census. Slum dwellers, particularly of big
metropolis in India do not accept the position of the state from their own day-to-day experience and encounter with the state. Unfortunately, the state remains inaccessible for slum dwellers and *vice versa*.

Slums dwellers have been opposing government-sponsored projects to renovate slums. The residents of Dharavi, Asia's largest slum located near metropolitan Mumbai, hold a different view about the government's efforts to rebuild slums (*The Hindu, Sunday Magazine*, August 8, 2004). They believe that this "bottom-up" planning has not been designed to meet people's need. For instance, traditional industrial units in Dharavi of which textiles, pottery, leather, *zari* stitching and plastic processing are important need large housing spaces to function. Yet the government is planning to make compact houses.

The current Mumbai Metropolitan Regional Development Plan acknowledges that private housing market essentially leaves out the poor. Justice Ramaswami has suggested that the government can construct housing units for the poor from its savings. Grassroots organisations like *Sajha Manch* (Delhi); *Niwara Hak Suraksa Samiti* (Mumbai); Committee for Right to Housing (Mumbai), *Jhuggi Basti Sangarsh Morsa* (Indore); *Jan Adhikari Manch* (Ahmedabad) and various other human rights organisations are working collectively to assert and establish the unconditional right to adequate housing of every citizen and also to resist illegal evictions. In this context, former Indian Prime Minister V.P. Singh has said that the city belongs to all, labourers and the poor have the same right to live in here as politicians and bureaucrats, so there should be space for them all (Srivastava, 2004:12).

**Box 3.3: Judiciary and the Shelter**

The status of shelter for the homeless living on the pavements is shocking, elegant, judicial eloquence notwithstanding. The government, without shame, agrees that the Urban Ceiling Law of long ago is hardly implemented except for corrupt purpose of granting exemptions. Without seizing such surplus land under the Act, no housing space for the poor is possible. No displacement without just habitation must be that rule when public projects and private industries are planned. The Indian earth is the common asset of all Indians. Statistics of rural and urban homelessness are frightening and increasing. Where is the political will to empower the poor? So the court must compel the Executive to find dwellings for the have-nots. This is judicial activism commanded by our humanist constitutionalism. [*Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer* (Iyer, 1998:54)]
Another problem related to housing in India is floods. In Assam, for instance, flood creates havoc in the lives of the people as many houses near the riverbank and char areas (river shoals) are destroyed by floodwater every year. Most of the people living in the char areas are Muslims of East Bengal origin. The native Hindu-Assamese community, by and large, treats them as illegal migrants and therefore, it is difficult for them to get rehabilitation during and after flood. In the process, the poor, who lack the basic security of shelter, and are neglected by the state, are further marginalised by the dominant groups living in the same multi-cultural and hierarchical society. Consequently, the poor continues to suffer perpetually from the insecurity caused by inadequate shelter. The poor are deprived of realising their dream of a small modest shelter.

3.8 SHELTER AND GLOBALISATION: INSECURITY OF POOR AND SECURITY OF MIDDLE CLASS

The Indian poor have become more vulnerable in the wake of globalisation. Poverty restricts the access of the poor to shelter. The urban poor are obviously most vulnerable to become and remain homeless; even if they find shelter, it is obviously in dehumanised and unhygienic urban slums. Because of their class position, they are again constantly under threat of eviction and demolition. In recent times, the plight of street children in India has drawn some attention after it was quantified. These ascribed marginalised children apodictically belong to the urban homeless families. In the process, homelessness becomes the inherited burden of helpless street children in urban India. There is no visible sign of abnegation of this vicious cycle of urban homelessness and the consequent destitution.

As a result of globalisation, the class divide between the middle class and the urban working class, on the one hand, and the poor, on the other, has sharpened deeply. Neeraj Hatekar observes, “The middle and upper classes like to see the slum dwellers as criminals. Being a worthy and good citizen is seen as ‘possessing enough property.’ People without property are viewed as not being worthy of citizenship” (Hatekar, 2005:20). Hence, it becomes easier for the state to go in for ruthless demolition of slums with the overt and covert support of the urban middle and upper classes. In very recent slum demolition, “large section of the middle class joined the building lobby and the corporate sector to
applaud the State action as decisive governance ... to clean up the city and free it from the intolerable burden of its teeming ‘illegitimate, unclean and unlawful’ citizens” (Mander, 2005:17). Earlier, the middle and upper classes of the metropolis co-existed side by side in the same city. Now they are not prepared for action. They want to drive slum dwellers out of the city, but at the same time, are prepared to take the services/labour provided by slum dwellers. Now, all sorts of financial capital are welcomed to cities but not labourers. Because of its own inherent logic, the poor/labour will continue to be a part of the city. The sooner the middle and upper classes realise this reality, the better it will be for all stakeholders.

Undoubtedly, the urban poor living in slums are highly vulnerable and close to total destitution in the wake of globalisation. They lack security of shelter. However, the situation under which the Indian middle class has been placed as a result of globalisation of the country’s economy is qualitatively different from that of the poor. India’s Structural Adjustment Policy has ultimately resulted in the reduction of bank interest rates. And, this has had a decisive impact on housing financial institutions and borrowers. Compared to 18 to 19 per cent interest rate in the early nineties, the interest rate of the housing loan has come down substantially to 7 to 8 per cent per annum now. As a result, the Indian middle class has been largely able to realise their dream of having a decent house through easily available loans from banks and other financial institutions. For those who have a secure job, access to loan has become very easy. Besides, income tax rebates on the loan interest and the principal amount have further helped ease the financial burden of the growing Indian middle class. For the middle class, housing loans have become easily accessible. This has obviously enhanced the security of shelter for a large section of the Indian middle class. Neo-liberal economic policy has also helped immensely in the expansion of the urban housing market. However, the rural areas and the urban poor have largely remained outside the recent boom in the housing market; people continue to suffer from the insecurity of shelter. It must be pointed out that the boom in the urban housing market has also helped very significantly the growth of markets for cement, steel and other building materials produced by the MNCs and other large corporate houses. On the other hand, because of environmental degradation, not only has the forest cover been reduced substantially, it has also caused scarcity of conventional building materials traditionally
used by people living in rural and hill areas. Environmental degradation has affected the access of a large number people to shelter.

3.9 SHELTER AS FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT

The question of shelter has become an issue of fundamental rights for the citizens and is to be looked at in that light if we want to scrutinise it from the human security perspective. It is important to recollect here that when a couple of years back in the name of urban beautification a large number of Delhi slum dwellers were forcibly evicted and the administration like other civic administrations elsewhere in India abdicated its responsibility towards uprooted citizens, the judiciary intervened positively. In the famous Shantistar Builders case in 1990, and subsequently in the Chameli Singh case in 1996, the Supreme Court of India passed judgments and ruled that housing constituted a fundamental right under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution—the right to life (Economic and Political Weekly, January 22, 2005). The Supreme Court ruled that the right to housing includes adequate living space, decent structures and clean surroundings. Again, in a later judgment in 1997, the court specified that it was the State’s duty to construct houses at reasonable rates and to make them easily accessible to the poor. “The state has the constitutional duty to provide shelter to make the right to life meaningful” (Economic and Political Weekly, January 22, 2005). But government has neglected to provide for this right, at least to the poor (Economic and Political Weekly, January 22, 2005).

Notwithstanding the constitutional-legal support, the poor have been left out of this crucial fundamental right. There exists a vast gap between the ideal and real situation. Insensitive administration and inadequate civil society initiatives have together allowed the poor to suffer perpetually from the insecurity of homelessness. The right to shelter as a right discourse, too, has largely failed to catch the imagination of academics and the media. However, some grassroots organisations have emerged to take up right to shelter as an issue of fundamental right. But at the present stage of political development, vested interests are too powerful to be displaced from their present position for a poor friendly and a right oriented housing policy in India to be set in motion. In the wake of globalisation, now the government of India is thinking of allowing Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) of up to
100 per cent in the housing market. Needless to say, the housing market never tried to address the insecurity of shelter experienced by the large group of marginalised people in India, i.e., the poor and the women. The brutality of housing market continues unabated. This may become much more brutal in future in the wake of globalisation of the Indian economy. The state too has failed to address basic issues like housing, sanitation, water and electricity, putting the poor in perpetual disadvantaged situations and consequently confining them to marginality, exclusion and insecurity.

References


