

# Housing and Slums in Poona

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THIS note deals with the problem of housing in Poona, in particular with the problem of clearance of slums. It presents factual data which are available for a period covering nearly 20 years. The Gokhale Institute conducted a socio-economic survey of Poona in 1936-37 and a resurvey in 1954. It helped the Poona Municipal Corporation authorities to conduct a housing survey in 17 wards of the city in 1956. The information available from these surveys is condensed in the accompanying tables.

As all the surveys followed a proper sampling procedure the proportions revealed by these data can be taken to represent the conditions in the whole of the area surveyed. The area of the Municipal Corporation at the time of the 1954 survey was larger than the area included in the survey in 1937. However, the 1954 data, in all the tables have been separately tabulated. The area of the 1956 survey was slightly smaller than the 1937 and 1954 area represented in these tables. It omitted wards in which town planning schemes were under execution. It may, therefore, be said to represent conditions of somewhat greater congestion of population than the average of the omitted areas. In interpreting the data, the slight modification made necessary by this disparity as well as the greater extent of non-reporting in the 1956 returns, should be borne in mind.

## High Density per Boom

Table 1 gives the types of tenement classified by the number of rooms occupied by families surveyed, the number of occupants in the various types of tenements and the number of persons per room in each type of tenement. The data indicate that an overwhelming proportion of the total population lived in 1 and 2 room tenements and that there was high density per room. There appears to have been some decline in the percentage of one room tenements in

the total number of tenements as between 1937 and 1954. This might have been, perhaps, due to the enforcement of certain municipal regulations; but the improvement is not marked if the 1 and 2 room tenements are taken together, and there is definite deterioration in the situation between 1937 and 1954 if the numbers of persons per room, either in the group of 1 room or of two room tenements, are compared.

The density of persons per room in 1954 appears much worse than in 1937, and in 1956 it worsened still further. Since the difference in the area covered in the two surveys would lead to some differences in the average conditions, it may not be possible to state definitely that, on a comparable basis, the conditions in 1956 would have definitely appeared worse than in 1954. However, the 1956 data refer to 17 wards in which by far the largest bulk of the population of Poona lives, and reveal the great congestion in the existing housing situation.

Table 2 refers to the rents paid by tenants. Because of the operation of rent control legislation, these data have been tabulated in relation to the time since which the tenant had been occupying his tenement at the time of the survey. Presumably the older occupant is protected by rent control. However, those who seek tenements of recent construction are not protected in the same manner. This is indicated in the table by the steady increase in median rents paid as the duration of the occupancy of the tenement shortens.

There are two points to which special attention may be drawn. Firstly, the level of median rents per 50 square feet area for recent occupancy is over Rs 4. This means that the minimum tenement of 200 square feet per family would cost well above Rs 15. Secondly, in the median rents paid, difference in occupancy from 1951 to 1956 makes a difference of about 25 per cent. This may be taken as a measure of the rate of increase in the average rentals charged during recent years.

**Table 1—Tenements of Various Classes and Their Occupants in 1937, 1954 and 1956**

	Tenements		Occupants		Persons per room (Nos)
	Nos	%	Nos	%	
<b>1937</b>					
One Room	2,555	56	8,232	46	3.22
Two Rooms	1,135	25	4,815	27	2.12
Three Rooms	405	9	2,107	12	1.73
Four Rooms	185	4	1,078	6	1.46
Five Rooms or more	249	6	1,663	9	1.34
<b>1954</b>					
One Room	2,281	52.5	8,451	42.9	3.74
Two Rooms	1,191	27.4	6,072	30.8	2.59
Three Rooms	443	10.2	2,599	13.2	1.95
Four Rooms	200	4.6	1,259	6.3	1.57
Five Rooms or more	232	5.3	1,349	6.8	1.16
<b>1956</b>					
One Room	1,093	37.3	4,330	49.6	3.96
Two Rooms	485	16.6	2,419	27.7	2.49
Three Rooms	161	5.5	964	11.0	2.00
Four Rooms	75	2.6	513	5.9	1.71
Five Rooms or more	64	2.2	498	5.8	1.31
Not stated	1,050	35.8			

**Table 2—Median Rent (Rs) per 50 Sq ft Paid by Sample Families Classified by Duration of Stay in the Tenement**

	Since:—1956	1953	1952	1951	1945-50	1939-44	1938
1954 Survey		4.39	4.37	4.19	4.00	2.19	2.00
1956 Survey	4.40	4.22	3.54	3.53	2.81	1.97	1.74

Prepared for a Conference on Housing in Poona, this note would be found of particular interest as there are very few cities for which similar data are available—Ed.

### Water and Sanitation

Table 3 shows the availability of water taps and latrines per family. There has been some improvement in the overall position since 1937 in relation to water taps, but none in relation to availability of latrines in houses, though this is a matter in which enforcement of municipal regulations should bring about a change much more readily and easily than in the supply or quality of tenements themselves.

The most important feature of this table, relevant for the purpose of the note, is the large number of tenements to which no latrines are made available by the landlord, and the very large proportion of families which share a latrine with 3 or more other families.

### Plight of LoW Income Groups

Table 4 shows income distribution of the surveyed families in 1954 and 1956. What is striking is the enormous proportion of families which have total incomes below Rs 2,000 and Rs 1,000 per annum. Even if allowance is made for a degree of understatement in incomes reported, it is clear that the bulk of the housing problem in a city like Poona is provision of housing for families whose incomes fall below Rs 100 per month and who could not therefore, afford to pay monthly rentals of Rs 15 to Rs 20. This appears to be the prevailing level of rent for minimum accommodation. In recently constructed houses,—of even subsidised rentals in government housing.

### Spreading Slums

The problem of the slums has to be considered against this overall background. For slum dwellers conditions of housing and of public amenities are such that their description in terms of the standard form—such as that used for house surveys whose results have been condensed above—is neither relevant nor significant. These conditions are far below any level which could be described even as barely tolerable. This is so in all respects: as regards the extent of the area, the height of the dwelling, the quality of the material used in providing the shelter and the surroundings in which it is placed. It is, therefore, difficult to give statements relating to conditions in slums in the form given above. However, we are fortunate in possessing more data than are usually available. Along with the socio-

economic survey conducted by the Institute in 1937, a detailed spot count of all the slum-like localities was taken, and a detailed family survey was made of a sample of these slum localities.

On the basis of these data, it may be confidently stated that the number of families living in what might be described as slums in 1937, was less than 1,000 and more probably about 800. The Corporation also conducted in 1951 a survey of slum areas. This survey revealed that 6,304 families were living in these areas. A recent survey, by a private agency, of slums in Poona is said to have indicated that nearly 9,000 families are at present living in slums.

### From Bad to Worse

It must be pointed out that because the agencies conducting these surveys were not the same and no rigorous definitions were framed, the three results are not necessarily comparable; but they seem to indicate the broad trends correctly. Between the two surveys conducted by the Institute, i.e., in 1937 and 1954, the number of families in Poona appears to have increased from the level of about sixty to sixty-five thousand to about a lakh and a lakh and five thousand, that is a net increase of about forty thousand. That this increase should add 5,000 families as slum dwellers is not an unexpected result.

Table 3—Availability of Water Taps and Latrines  
(Per cent)

	1937	1954	1956
(1) Families which did not have a water tap	18	9	10
(2) Families having one or more water taps	16	34	47
(3) Families sharing a water tap with another family	17	6	8
(4) Families sharing a water tap with two other families	21	6	7
(5) Families sharing a water tap with three or more other families	28	45	28
	100	100	100
(1) Families which did not have a latrine	18	10	11
(2) Families having one or more latrines	7	11	8
(3) Families sharing a latrine with another family	11	6	7
(4) Families sharing a latrine with two other families	12	9	6
(5) Families sharing a latrine with three or more other families	52	64	68
	100	100	100

Table 4—Distribution of Sample Families According to  
Total Family Income

Total Family Income (Rs)	Poona City & Suburban Area 1954 Survey		1956 Survey	
	No of families	Percent-age	No of families	Percent-age
Upto 250	206	4.7	58	1.7
251—500	441	10.1	312	9.3
501—1000	1332	30.6	1168	34.9
1001—2000	1349	31.0	825	24.7
2001—3500	588	13.5	250	7.5
3501—5000	221	5.1	137	4.1
5001—7500	90	2.1	27	0.8
7501—10000	29	0.7	7	0.2
1001 and above	34	0.8	7	0.2
Income in kind only	3	0.1	—	—
Income not stated	54	1.3	550	16.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>4347</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>3341</b>	<b>100</b>

On the basis of the facts stated above, the following conclusions may be said to be fully warranted. Poona city and presumably all other towns and cities in India are suffering from great inadequacy of housing supply. A very large proportion of urban families are living in highly congested conditions and with great inadequacy of amenities. Finally, this situation appears to be getting not better, but progressively worse.

### Lag in Housing Construction

A priori consideration indicates the basic factors which are responsible for the steady worsening of the situation. It is generally agreed that the rate of growth of urban population in India is currently much larger than the rate of growth of the rural population. The average rate of growth of the Indian population is estimated to be between 1.5 and 2 per cent per annum. The average rate of urban growth may, therefore, be put safely at 2.5 and 3 per cent. If we assume that in Poona there were, in 1951, about 1 lakh families, then an annual addition of about 2500 families would be a modest estimate.

The picture as revealed in the 1954 and 1956 data is that the private and public building activities are not commensurate with the additional demand created by the increase of population. An important feature of private building activity is the construction of houses which benefit largely the middle and the richer classes. It seems very likely that current private and cooperative activity is meeting comparatively adequately the needs of the middle and richer classes, while leaving unsatisfied to a greater and greater extent the requirements of the poorer and the lower middle classes. The recent level of median rents taken together with the increasing number of persons per room in our tables would support this contention.

### Policy Must Change

In the circumstances, there is nothing surprising in the trend for the number of slum-dwelling families to grow. As the Resurvey of Poona showed, immigrant families in the city usually come from the unskilled and poorer strata. The bulk of these would not find fresh accommodation suitable for themselves and would add to existing congestion. And, in particular,

when they belong to the untouchable or similar communities they have inevitably to resort to the slums.

In relation to policy all this must lead to the definitive conclusion that present programmes are utterly inadequate to deal with the problem. They are inadequate even to prevent a steady worsening of the situation. If it is desired to bring about an improvement in the situation within a reasonable period of time not only must the existing programmes be overhauled but the whole approach to the problem of slum clearance and housing for the poor will have to be altered.

### Not by Private Effort Alone

It must be recognised that this problem can be tackled only if the responsibility is undertaken by public authorities. Private effort, and in relation to slum dwellers and the poorest, even cooperative effort, would prove infructuous. Secondly, the problem must be treated as a problem of extreme urgency. Thirdly, the provision of housing in the immediate future for these classes must be conceived on a short-term basis at a minimum level of comfort, durability and amenities. This

minimum level, however, would itself constitute, if properly conceived and implemented, an enormous improvement on the existing conditions of the slum dwellers. The approach has essentially to be that adopted in such emergencies as that of refugee settlement, or even in conditions as that of a new industrial settlement.

The present programme is inadequate largely because it is too costly and it is too costly entirely because it sets for itself a standard of durability and quality of construction and amplitude of amenities which, as the above picture shows, the large majority of our city dwellers do not possess and cannot afford. The immediate need, therefore, is to first clear the slums, which are like plague spots. In our midst, and, at the same time, to provide the slum dwellers immediately, with dwellings with minimum space and with pooled amenities but which are clean and are adequately looked after by public authorities. It is only when such a programme aiming at a cost of less than Rs 1,000 per family is conceived that clearance of slums and improved housing supply may be thought of in realistic terms.

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