Chapter 4

The Housing Conditions and Social Environments of Leather Workers
Closely related to the phenomenon of urbanization was the problem of workers housing. Industry and commerce led to the concentration of population in the cities and towns. In Kanpur there were periods of sudden growth followed by a decline, and no consistent attention was paid to the problem of housing an increasing number industrial workforce.

It has been observed that the shift from rural to urban residence brought along with it many changes in the social relationships, associative patterns, and indeed the way of life of the worker. In this chapter an effort is made to study these changes with special reference to the question as to how the limitation of space in the city affects the housing pattern of the factory workers. We shall focus upon how this adaptation to city living affect the workers interpersonal relations and how the associations formed outside the workplace, in the neighbourhood, in the market place, liquor shops and recreational activities led to the formation of new social identities.

The character of the urban social relations have been studied by a number of social scientists. Occupation, environment, size of community, density of population, heterogeneity of population, social differentiation or stratification, mobility and system of interaction are the eight characteristics, enumerated by Sorokin and Zimmerman, which differentiate the urban world from the rural world. These factors make significant dents into the social relations and personality structure of labour.

E.P. Thompson initiated the study of the social aspects concerning the factory workers in his classic work on the English working class. A number of similar works followed in India, Dipesh Chakrabarty in his work, ‘Rethinking Working Class History’, contested that the urban factory worker was not totally dislinked from the rural life, rather, their culture was deeply influenced with a preindustrial consciousness; and Nita Kumar in her study

of the popular culture of Banaras also suggests that "formal and informal associations are old, continuous and multifarious, and that ties and parallelisms based on everyday activities cut across lines of caste and religion".  

Emergence of Cities

Over a period of time a number of large cities emerged in India. While some developed as capitals of former ruling dynasties and owed their importance to their position as political centres, others situated along waterways grew up as emporia of trade. The importance accorded to commercial activities in the early years of British rule led to the emergence of a number of important towns at “the confluence of rivers, heads of navigation fords, meeting points of hill and plain and other places where the physical configuration requires a change of vehicle”. Gradually these distribution centres became the growing entrepots of trade. The next stage was the emergence of new industrial cities caused by a shift in policy of the British from using India as a colony merely for collection of raw material and as a market to setting up factories in India. The Laissez Faire policy, which was prevalent regarding the location of industries led to the haphazard growth of towns and industrial centres. The employment opportunities provided by the factories led to a large-scale movement of population from the rural areas into the urban centres.  

Kanpur, in the United Provinces, owing to its rapid industrialization, attracted a large population of migrants. It emerged as one of the largest railway junctions and the biggest collection and distribution centre in the state. This led to the location of a number of cotton, sugar and leather factories in Kanpur, and the consequent growth into a major industrial centre.

5 V.R. Bhattacharya, Some Aspects of Social Security Measures in India (Delhi, Metropolitan Book Co. Pvt. Ltd., 1970), p.85. According to figures, while in 1892 there were 656 factories employing 3,16,816 workers, in 1950 the numbers shot upto 2,5,00,000 workers in 20,000 factories in India.
in the country. Unlike the great port cities of India, which had a blend of Indo-European urban traditions, the development of Kanpur has been haphazard with a mixture of different types of layouts and buildings. As a result, “the industrial development brought the chimney soot and smoke, the overcrowding and insanitary conditions. Unplanned narrow streets and closely built structures characterize the old and central part of the city in contradistinction to what is seen in modernized civil lines.”

The establishment of large concerns after 1860 led to a steady increase in the population of Kanpur. The earliest figure available is of 1847 when the population, excluding the garrison, numbered 108,796; of which 58,821 lived in the city and 49,975 in the cantonment. The figures in the following table show the population in the second half of 19th century and early 20th century; there are statistics of great value because they include pre-census estimates.

Table 4.1 :Population of Kanpur, 1853-1911

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1853</td>
<td>118,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1865</td>
<td>113,601</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1872</td>
<td>122,770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>182,727</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>188,712</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>197,170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>195,498</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Proceedings Municipal Department, Draft report of the Cawnpore Expansion Committee, File no.220E/1919*

The population figures between 1872 and 1881 show an increase of 76 percent; this corresponds to the establishment of a number of factories during the period. This trend carried into the 20th century with an increase in both the number of factories and the population. Kanpur, owing to the huge inflow of

---

migrants, became the seventh largest city in India. The population of mill workers shot up from 14,000 in 1894 to 30,000 towards the end of First World War.\textsuperscript{7} There was a particularly large population jump during the 1930s. A number of factories were set up during this period, the J.K. group established factories one after another.\textsuperscript{8} Parachute factory, ordnance factories and many small factories came up during the war period.\textsuperscript{9} Between 1929 and 1938, while the number of factories in Kanpur increased by 26, the average number of workers daily employed went up by 23,663.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Factories</th>
<th>Number of Persons Daily Employed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>56,280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1943</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>103,645</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>116,508</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textit{Source: S.C. Agarwal, Industrial Housing in India, (New Delhi, 1952)}

The population continued to increase but there was no effort on the part of the Government or the employers to provide for their accommodation; this resulted in overcrowding.

The Question of Housing

The rapid increase of industrial population increased the pressure on inadequate housing at all the industrial centres. Overcrowding led to a steady deterioration in the housing standards and resulted in the growth of slum areas. The local bodies in these new industrial centres with their meagre resources were unable to cope with the enormous problem confronting them. Thus, the question of industrial housing during the period became a formidable one. The indifference of the authorities made the work of local bodies more difficult.

\textsuperscript{7} D.N. Majumdar, \textit{Social Contours Of An Industrial City, Social Survey Of Kanpur. 1954-1956}, op.cit,p.22
\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., pp.25-26.
\textsuperscript{9} Housing Department., United Provinces, Proceedings, File No.IT/1942.

97
In the field of industrial housing the only legislation enacted prior to independence was the Land Acquisition (Amendment) Act, 1933, which enabled the employers to secure land for the construction of houses for their employees. In March 1938, the Congress Government of Bihar set up the Bihar Labour Enquiry Committee under the chairmanship of Dr. Rajendra Prasad to conduct an enquiry into the conditions of industrial labour in the state.\(^\text{10}\) The Rege Committee (1944-46) commented on the general apathy of the Government towards the crucial question of industrial housing. It noted that, “very little, by way of providing more and better housing for industrial labour has been done either by Government or municipalities. Employers have no doubt made some contribution to better housing by erecting lines, tenements or small cottages in certain industrial centres. The houses created by them differ greatly from one another and only a small percentage of workers are on the whole accommodated in them.”\(^\text{11}\)

In 1946, the Government of India formulated a housing scheme for the country. In the same year, the United Provinces Government conducted a survey of industrial housing at Agra, Firozabad, Aligarh and Hathras, to assess the requirements of labour housing in industrial centres of the provinces other than Kanpur.\(^\text{12}\) The problem in Kanpur had already been highlighted, time and again, by a number of committees. It was found that many industrialists in these places were willing to construct houses for their workers on their own initiative, provided the Government gave them necessary facilities, e.g. land and building material at concessional prices and in some cases financial help also “on principle the Government was opposed to such a housing scheme, as direct association of the employer as a builder

and landlord in any housing scheme was liable to place the labour in a position of disadvantage at times of differences between them."

The negative side of industrialization was brought to light by a number of agencies, who drew attention to the inadequacy of housing and its poor quality. Vivid descriptions of the way in which the workers lived and the social consequences became a major concern in the subsequent writings on labour in India. In a survey conducted by the International Labour Organisation on the housing conditions, it was noted that the housing conditions of the majority of industrial workers in India was deplorable. It was observed by the survey team that the houses were built too close to one another without sufficient space being left for streets or roads, the only approach to them being winding lanes; in most bustees there is no provision for light and air, the only opening being a low door. In Kanpur for instance, 82.5 percent of the dwelling, surveyed had no windows. No proper provision existed for the supply of water or for drainage. Mukhtar Ahmad, a member of the Labour Investigation Committee, 1946, described the deplorable conditions in the following terms, "Bad ventilation or the entire absence of it, vitiated atmosphere lowers the vitality and thereby increases the susceptibility to disease. It decreases both physical and mental capacity for work. Rooms are small in dimensions and are generally overcrowded." He further states that the unhygienic habits of labourers were mainly due to their illiteracy and poverty and the streets in which the worker’s quarters were located in cities were filthy. Cows and buffaloes were tied in them at night. There were no enclosures to these houses. No privacy was possible. It was observed that the floors of the worker’s dwellings were generally uneven and uncemented. And no separate baths and urinals were provided. To make matters worst they did

13 Ibid., p.85.
15 Ibid., pp.306-08.
not have access to pure water and the wells wherever used were kept in unsanitary conditions. Commenting on the living condition of labour Sukomal Sen writes, “In the newly developing industrial centres in the latter half of the nineteenth century there was hardly any housing arrangements for the workers who gathered there for jobs leaving their rural hearth and home.... thus a hellish life with devastating consequences on their health and moral was what they were compelled to live in the wake of industrialization of colonial India.”

The Royal Commission on Labour, covering various aspects of factory workers in the country, drew attention to the deplorable condition of housing. “In the urban and industrial areas, cramped sites, the high value of land and the necessity for the worker to live in the vicinity of his work have all tended to intensify congestion and overcrowding. In the busiest centres, the houses are built close together, cave touching, cave and frequently back to back in order to make use of all the available space.”

**Emergence of Kanpur as Industrial Centre**

Industry and commerce contributed to the concentration of population in the cities. Kanpur which was emerging as an industrial centre attracted a huge population of migrants. This flow of working class population aggravated the housing problem tremendously.

The desirability of suitable houses for workers was in theory realised by the Government and the employers. In 1937, in the opening proceedings of the Labour Enquiry Committee it was stated that, “... well fed, well housed and efficient labour force can increase the general efficiency of industry and promote both the quality and quantity of goods produced.” On the recommendation of the Committee, the Government agreed to assist schemes of building suitable houses for workmen in Kanpur, and to assist “in the

---


acquisition of suitable land, the provisions of necessary amenities of light, water, roads etc. and payment of interest on capital outlay..." But these were empty promises without any following action. Between 1938 and 1946, the employers provided no new workers quarters on any appreciable scale. In 1943, the employers provided houses for less than 10 percent of the total 1,03,000 industrial workers. According to a study in 1950, the conditions did not improve much with only "18 percent of the workmen families living in their own houses, 2.5 percent in rent -free houses provided by the employers, and the rest as rent paying tenants." 

**Agencies Providing Houses; The Kanpur Improvement Trust**

The housing accommodation of workers in organized industries were supplied either by "employers, public or semi-public bodies, by the workers themselves, by trade unions and cooperative societies or in most common case by private landlords." A survey based 14 industrial centres found that of the 4,710 dwellings, 1,642 were provided by the employers, and 3,068 were owned by private landlords. The plantation and mining worker were generally housed by their employers or in certain cases assisted by them in the construction of their own houses. In 1929-30, the 22 cotton mills in Bombay supplied housing to only 20 percent of their workers. The Government of Bombay since 1920s has built 207 Chawls, containing 16,206 tenements. In United Provinces, one fourth of the factories provided 5,400 single rooms and 1,045 double rooms. In 1931-33, 2,035 single and 736 double rooms were added, to this additional 1,889 rooms were added in 1935-36. But a major section of the working class population of Kanpur as in other industrial

---

21 Labour Investigation Committee, 1946, Main Report, pp.305-06.
22 D.N. Majumdar, Social Contours of an Industrial City, op.cit., p.99.
24 Labour Investigation Commission, 1958, Main Report, p.302
centres lived in dwellings rented out by private landlords. It was noted that in 1930 landlords owned nine tenths of the houses in Kanpur.\footnote{27}

The municipality of Kanpur came into existence in 1861. In 1873, a Municipal Board consisting of six officials and twelve persons, to be elected every two years by the taxpayers was constituted. The Board took up the work of municipal development of the city. As a result, the kerosene lamps along the roads were replaced by electric lights in 1909. Motor bus service was introduced for the convenience of persons residing in the outlying parts of the city. The Government realised that unless the mill workers were housed in healthy environment, their health and efficiency could not improve. As a result "Cawnpore Town Expansion Committee" was appointed in 1916-17, with Sir Henry Ledgard as its President, to prepare a general scheme for the expansion of the town. The internal improvements were entrusted to the municipal board. The scheme was examined by Mr. Lanchester, a town planning expert from England, and a Commission presided over by Mr. Stiffe.\footnote{28} The Commission recommended the establishment of Improvement Trust. In 1919, the U.P. Town Improvement Act was passed and Improvement Trusts were constituted at Kanpur, Allahabad and Lucknow. After 1920 the Trust took up the expansion of the city and its suburbs. The main object of the Trust was to "facilitate the expansion of the city on planned lines over suitable areas besides undertaking such other works as slum clearance and road construction."\footnote{29} In 1923 a scheme was formulated to develop one thousand acres of land, in the factory area around Kalpi area, which was to be offered to the public for building purposes. During this period, working jointly, the Improvement Trust acquired the areas, and the municipality provided roads, sewers, surface drains and water and electric light.\footnote{30} By 1926 the Improvement Trust had built 185 flats for middle-class

\footnote{28} Letter from Chairman and Members of Kanpur Improvement Trust to Sir W. Malcom Hartey the Governor, United Provinces, dated 22 January 1930.  
\footnote{29} D.N. Majumdar, \textit{Social Contours of an Industrial City}, op.cit., p.23.  
\footnote{30} \textit{UICC, Annual Report}, 1932, p.165.
government servants, besides selling or leasing out 577 flats. In 1927, the Trust constructed about 200 model workmen's quarters of which half were sold to Messrs Elgin Mills Co. for their workers and the rest were sold directly to workers on a 12 years hire purchase system. The Improvement Trusts in all the major centres viz, Bombay, Calcutta and Kanpur were handicapped due to the limited revenue sources at their disposal. The Trusts were dependent on the state Governments for financial assistance, as the Central Government confined itself to the provision of houses for its employees. To tide over the financial obstacle, Mr. E.M. Souter, the Chairman of the Trust, in 1932 proposed to provide loans to the employers for construction of workmen quarters. It was only in 1947, on being confronted with the problem of refugees, the Government for the first time took up a large scale housing programme to assist people other than their own employees.

Between 1938-43 the employers were forced to take up the construction of workmen quarters due to a large influx of labour into Kanpur. A number of new concerns had come up during the period and the old concerns were working overtime to meet the war demands. To avoid the problem of housing labour from within city was given preference. But, it was noted that, "all the labour in Cawnpore and surrounding villages is already fully employed and the villages crowded and that for the last six months labour has been recruited from outside and from long distance, the excess of incoming over outgoing Third Class tickets in this period being about 1,00,000". Thus the semi-skilled and unskilled labour employed in these factories were from outside areas, having no place to stay in or near Kanpur. Under such pressing conditions it was acknowledged that the Government and

31 D.N. Majumdar, Social Contours of an Industrial City, op.cit., p.24.
32 Annual Report, Upper India Chamber of Commerce, 1928, p.81.
33 UICC, Annual Report, 1932, p.28.
the Trust could not undertake the entire responsibility of providing houses. The employers were, therefore called upon to share the responsibility. In such cases, the Trust was to provide the land and in certain cases, roads and sewers too. The internal development of plots was to be left to the mill employers.\textsuperscript{36} The municipal powers regarding sanitation, construction of drains, latrines, houses and wells had already been transferred to the Improvement Trust in 1930 under Section 21 of Town Improvement Act. The powers and duties of keeping drains, latrines, houses and wells clean and disinfected remained with the Municipal Board.\textsuperscript{37}

**Employers Initiative in Housing:**

Some of the employers took the initiative as a result of which mill settlements came up in a number of other industrial cities; the anxiety to secure a stable industrial force was one of the major reasons for the construction of these mill settlements. Following the plague riots, the Kanpur mill owners faced a severe shortage in 1900. The riots had erupted following the establishment of a plague camp where the infected travellers were quarantined. In 1902, plague struck again claiming 7,800 lives, the panic created by the spreading epidemic rendered the industrial labour precariously unstable.\textsuperscript{38} The crisis had become so acute that, "men who left home in the morning to work in the mills would return to find members of their families already dead. Those who had homes in the country went off to them without delay."\textsuperscript{39} The scarcity of local labour induced managers to attempt to import men from distant places. Under such conditions, the civil authorities, and the employers got together to take steps to improve the sanitation and housing in the city. In the annual meeting of the Chamber of Commerce in 1902, concern was expressed over the filthy and overcrowded labour areas like Gwaltoli,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{36} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{37} Department of Housing, *Amendment to the Kanpur Town Improvement Act (VIII of 1919)*, file No.48-IT/1930.
\item \textsuperscript{38} D.N. Majumdar, *Social Contours of an Industrial City*, op.cit., p.20.
\end{itemize}
Parmat, Sadar Bazar and Lachmanpurwa.\textsuperscript{40} It was decided by the members of the chamber that all the mills should establish model villages for the workers. Mills acquired large areas through the municipality under the cover of the land Acquisition Act.\textsuperscript{41}

Messrs Cooper Allen & Co. and the Cawnpore Woollen Mills took the initiative in construction of model villages for their workers. As a result Messrs Cooper Allen & Co. constructed the Allenganj settlement in 1899 and Macrobertganj was started in 1901. The Allenganj settlement provided houses for Cooper Allen & Co. and the North West Tannery. Spread over an area of 15 acres, it accommodated 1,102 workers. The Macrobertganj spread over 26 acres accommodating 937 workers of the Cawnpore Woollen Mills.\textsuperscript{42} The houses in these settlements were grouped around central courtyards; each house having, in addition, a little courtyard of its own at the back. Trees were planted along the lanes between the houses. These settlements also provided other amenities like, a school, a dispensary and arrangement for midwives, and a large playground for the workers. The two settlements were under the management of a welfare superintendent. A \textit{Panchayat} consisting of a Brahmin, a Mohammedan, a Chamar and other representatives of the community, assisted the welfare superintendent to settle the disputes of the residents.\textsuperscript{43} These settlements were known for the better facilities, as was noted by the factory inspector in 1906.\textsuperscript{44} The Indian Industrial Commission, 1916-18 too was impressed by the sanitary arrangements in these settlements.\textsuperscript{45} In 1930, the B.I.C. provided houses for about 83 to 90 percent of its workers in its three settlements. By 1936, the Corporation provided

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{40} D.N. Majumdar, \textit{Social Contours of an Industrial City}, op.cit., p.21.
\item \textsuperscript{41} F.N, Wright, \textit{Final Report on the Settlement of the Cawnpore District}, (Allahabad, 1878).
\item \textsuperscript{42} Municipal Department file, file no.220E/1919. \textit{Draft Report Cawnpore Expansion Committee}, p.5.
\item \textsuperscript{43} G.M. Broughton, \textit{Labour in Indian Industries}, (London, Oxford University Press, 1924) pp.139-40.
\item \textsuperscript{44} \textit{G.A.D, United Provinces, Proceedings}, July 1906, File No.66/1906.
\item \textsuperscript{45} \textit{Indian Industrial Commission}, Inspection Notes 1916-18, p.10.
\end{itemize}
1,655 quarters in these settlements. In 1961, 11 tanneries had made provisions for housing their workers. Of these, nine tanneries in Jajmau provided 493 rent free quarters to their workmen. One Tannery provided quarters at a rate of Rs.2 per month, another changed between Rs.1/6/2 to Rs.10 per month. A number of other mills also provided houses. By 1938, Kakomiganj, Elgin settlement and Nishartganj were prominent among them.

The residents in the mill settlements had another advantage, they were free from police interference. With the increasing trade union activities after 1919 the workers were under constant fear of harassment by the local police. They, as a rule did not patrol the village though they were not debarred from entering the village. The residents were assured that as long as they adhered to simple rules of decency and order, they would not be harassed by police interference.

The village had its own guards (chaukidars) on point duty; there was a European assistant to look into the complaints. The police, with the sanction of the mill owners, closely watched the movement of the suspicious characters in the villages. But later it was this presence of chaukidars at the entrance which put off the workers.

Despite of the cheap rents and better facilities, the mill settlements were not very popular among the workers. In the initial years most of the houses remained vacant, out of 3,000 workers of Cooper Allen & Co. and North West Tannery, only 700 took up quarters in the mill settlement. The occupancy rate fluctuated in winters when there was an epidemic in the city; there was a flow into the village, but it away with the approach of the summer time. Some suggested that the low occupancy was due to the workers having

---

49 Miscellaneous Reports, Govt. of United Provinces, Bundle, no.137, "Papers Relating to the Provision of Model Dwellings for Inhabitants (1907).
their own houses in the city, many others were indebted to the bania landlords who would not permit them to lease their city dwellings under threats. The feeling of being under some sort of surveillance was another reason why the workers preferred to stay away from the mill settlements. No meetings were allowed within these settlements, informers were known to patrol the areas specially during strikes. At the time of a strike there was always a danger of being turned out. This insecurity was also pointed out by the Cawnpore Labour Enquiry Committee as, “psychologically also it is not good for a worker to feel that he is under some restriction or other imposed by the employers not only during the working hours but also for the rest of the day.” The sanitary restrictions on keeping cattle and goats in the mill settlements made it even more unpopular. As a result, these mill settlements catered to only 9.4 percent of the total industrial population of Kanpur in 1935.

**The Ahatas**

Since the efforts of Improvement Trust and mill owners was insufficient, a major section of the workers lived in slums locally known as *ahatas*, where small dingy rooms were let out on exorbitant rates. The Kanpur Development Bye laws defined an *ahata*, as “a group of tenements not being less than nine in number and each of them having two or less than two rooms intended for human habitation”. A tenement, was “a house or building or portion there of which is let out for residence to four or more families living independently and cooking independently of each other and having a common right in the halls, staircase, yard or cellar.” Each *ahata* had to be registered.

---


53 Cawnpore Labour Enquiry Committee, 1938, p.82.

54 Ibid.

with the Medical Officer of Health Kanpur.\textsuperscript{56} Niehoff in his study of the factory workers in 1950s states, “the migrant to Kanpur moves into a walled compound which has from a dozen to two to three hundred separate quarters.”\textsuperscript{57} These compounds were generally single-storeyed brick structures, the quarters were partitioned off from one another with the entrance facing the inside of the courtyard. According to the Bye Laws the owners of \textit{ahatas} were supposed to keep sufficient number of sweepers, to clean the common courtyards, common latrines and drains twice a day, removing all the refuse and filth to the nearest dustbins. All common staircases and passage were to be lighted by the owner of the \textit{ahata}. Each house was to be white washed once a year.\textsuperscript{58} How far these guidelines were implemented is evident from the various reports. “Most of them (were) in extremely insanitary and overcrowded and lack adequate sunshine and ventilation, to say nothing of water, light and conservancy... They must be hot beds of disease, most of them are absolutely unfit for human habitation.”\textsuperscript{59} By 1944 more than 90 percent of workers were living in these \textit{ahatas},\textsuperscript{60} “which were more or less like civil counterparts of concentration camps with a common entrance and common compound, latrines, taps or wells.”\textsuperscript{61} The condition of these \textit{ahatas} was deplorable. The bulk of these \textit{ahatas}, 64.4 percent of the aggregate, were constructed between 1910 and 1940. Of these 82.8 percent were pica or made of bricks, while 17.2 percent were those in which walls were made of clay or mud.\textsuperscript{62}

\textsuperscript{56} Kanpur Development Board, \textit{Bye Laws}, p.58.


\textsuperscript{58} \textit{Municipal Bye Laws}, pp.59-60.

\textsuperscript{59} Cawnpore Labour Enquiry Committee, \textit{1938}, p.77.


\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., pp.25-26.
The Royal Commission on Labour described the pathetic condition in these *ahatas* as, "most of the houses consist of a single room, 8 ft x 10 ft., with or without a verandah and such dwellings are frequently shared by two, three and four families. It is not uncommon for the floor to be below ground level and drainage, ventilation and sanitation are entirely wanting."\(^63\) The only improvement carried by the improvement trusts in these *ahatas* over the years was the provision of roads and drainage. On the recommendation of the Cawnpore Labour Enquiry Committee an enquiry into the housing condition of mill workers of Kanpur was conducted by the Bureau of Economic Intelligence, United Provinces in 1938-39, covering all the important *bustees* and *ahatas*. The survey painted a very grim picture - 96% families occupied either one room or two room dwellings; while 65 percent were staying in one room dwellings, 31 percent stayed in two room dwellings. Dwellings with 3-4 rooms accounted for only 4 percent of the aggregate. There was no dwelling with more than four rooms. Even the basic amenities were denied to the inhabitants. According to the survey only 7 percent families had private taps for water supply, while 46 percent took their water from public taps. The average pressure per public tap being as high as 53 families or 200 persons per taps. In the absence of proper disposal of the waste, 96 percent families generally threw their house refuse indiscriminately on the lanes or roads.\(^64\)

The number of *ahatas* and the workers living in them kept increasing. In 1938, it was estimated that 40,000 of the workers in Kanpur lived in 200 *ahatas* in the city.\(^65\) In 1948 the numbers rose to 81,825 workers living in 455 *ahatas*. The Municipal Medical Office of Health put the number at 1,23,775 persons living in 812 *ahatas*, i.e. one-fifth of the city's population was living in these *ahatas*.\(^66\)

---

\(^63\) *Royal Commission on Labour, Main Report*, p.276.

\(^64\) *Report on the Enquiry Into Family Budgets and Housing Conditions of Mill Workers in Cawnpore City, 1938-39* (Bureau of Economic Intelligence, United Provinces) and Labour Investigation Committee, Main Report, 1946, pp.306-07.


\(^66\) D.N. Majumdar, *Social Contours of an Industrial City*, op.cit., p.35.
Sanitation In The Ahatas

The sanitary condition of the workers dwellings particularly in the ahatas was pathetic. The Cawnpore Labour Inquiry Committee pointed out that, “Most of the workers have to live in slums locally known as ahatas, where small dingy rooms were let out on exorbitant rents. Most of these ahatas are extremely insanitary and overcrowded and lack adequate sunshine and ventilation, to say nothing of water, light and conservancy. Quite a number of huts are below the street level. The conditions under which men, women and children in their thousands - about 40,000 souls live in these ahatas are indescribable”.67 These small underground rooms in which thousands of Kanpur workmen lived were compared to “the dug outs of France during the war time where they were an easy victim to those ever active enemies of mankind, namely the germ and the bug.”68

These insanitary clusters became the hot bed of a number of diseases. Incidentally it was the characteristic of this class as breeders of disease and repeated plague epidemics that drew the attention of the Governments towards the question of housing.69 In the 1890s plague, believed to be a disease of filth and squalor hit many Indian towns. In Kanpur, the “vigorous plague control measures had been eschewed and attempts to sanitise the poor; had been reined in, following an initial, short-lived outburst of zeal in 1900 which had provoked riots in the city”.70 The policy of caution to implement measures to control plague for the fear of political unrest was reversed only after the First World War. “It was from this period that the identification of the poor as the creators of insanitary ‘plague spots’ came into play in framing local policies, not primarily geared to ending congestion and overcrowding in

68 Ibid., p.78.
69 Municipal Department, File No.220E/1,1919, Draft Report of the Kanpur, Extension Committee, p.3.
the settlements of the poor."\textsuperscript{71} Nandini Gooptu in her study of the urban poor in U.P points to this change in policy indicating the change to the attendant moral and social deterioration and political instability.\textsuperscript{72}

The question of plague was of great concern to the authorities in the initial decade of the twentieth century; it was repeatedly cited as a major reason for the shortage of labour by the factory inspectors.\textsuperscript{73} Plague attacked Kanpur frequently during this period, when all factories were exceedingly busy owing to large demands for tents and other requisites for the Delhi Durbar. The U.I.C.C. President in his address stated that, "during the past year we have been face to face with the long dreaded epidemic of plague and deaths from the past within the boundaries of the Cawnpore Municipality are over 7,800.... it is no exaggeration to say that the effect on the trade and commerce of the city has been disastrous. During the months of October, November and December the supply of labour in the mills and factories had been reduced to less than half in some cases to even one third of the normal attendance. The workers had been seized with panic and they precipitately left their employment and the city."\textsuperscript{74} The filthy overcrowded \textit{bastis} where most of the workers were staying in Kanpur were blamed for the repeated plague epidemics.\textsuperscript{75} It was said of these \textit{bustees}, that, "an aura of stink affectionately clings to these labour bustees, emanating from the heaps of putrescent garbage deposited by the road side and from open drains and stagnant pools choked with human excrescence and animal dung. Many localities had no sewage system. The dirty water of these localities often collected in odorous pools. The labour areas in the vicinity of factories dealing in hides and skins

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{71} Nandini Gooptu, \textit{The Politics of the Urban Poor in Early Twentieth Century India}, (Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp.73-74.
\item \textsuperscript{72} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{73} \textit{G.A.D. Proceedings, 1907}, File No.205/1907, and File No.61/1907.
\item \textsuperscript{74} \textit{G.A.D. United Provinces, Proceedings, 1903}, File No. 392/1903, Report of C.A. Walsh, Special Inspector of Factories, on the Working of Factories Act, 1902.
\item \textsuperscript{75} \textit{G.A.D. United Provinces, Proceedings, 1904}, Working of Indian Factories Act, 1895 for the year, 1903, file no.69/1904.
\end{itemize}
were worse.\textsuperscript{76} Benajhabar \textit{bustee} with a number of tanneries, had become even a nuisance for the commuters.\textsuperscript{77}

Lack of water and adequate latrines added to the insanitation. It was estimated by the report on the enquiry of 1938-39 into family budgets and housing that 26 percent families did not have any latrines, public or private, as a result, open spaces were used for the purpose.\textsuperscript{78} According to the available figures only 19 percent of the families in Kanpur were provided with private latrines and the rest were provided with common latrines. The condition of private latrines was not much better in the absence of any flush system. Besides being a constant source of insanitation, the common latrines were invariably overcrowded where the workers had to stand patiently in queues for a turn. A considerable section, i.e. 45 percent of the families used public latrines or the fields. Of these 21 percent were forced to create insanitary and unhealthy conditions in their own vicinity.\textsuperscript{79} Sometimes open drains and \textit{nullahs} were used for the purpose. Figures show that the pressure for latrine was disgusting since on an average 761 persons used the same latrine.\textsuperscript{80}

The absence of ventilation and sanitation in these dark dingy and suffocating hovels, forming about one half of the total number of habitations was responsible for a high mortality rate in Kanpur. Within the city the mortality rate was the highest in the bustees like Gwaltoli, Khalasi lines and Raipurwa located in the proximity of old mills with largest concentration of labour population.\textsuperscript{81} Infant mortality is the most sensitive index of social welfare and of sanitary administration. Congestion affected the life and well being of the infants of the country the most. "The bad housing coupled with

\textsuperscript{76} Vidyadhar, Agnihotri, \textit{Housing Conditions of Factory Workers in Kanpur}, op.cit., p.9.
\textsuperscript{77} UICC, \textit{Annual Report, 1935}, p.201.
\textsuperscript{80} \textit{Report on Enquiry into Family Budgets and Housing Conditions of Mill Workers in Cawnpore City, 1938-39}, p.28.
malnutrition, inherited disease, contributed to the high infant mortality and death rate. It was found that nearly 70 percent of the infants under one who died annually belonged to the one room tenements.\(^8^2\) The infant mortality in Kanpur was the highest in the province.

Urbanisation with its congestion of population, fatigue and humid condition of the atmosphere offered a fertile ground for the spread of another infectious disease-tuberculosis. Tuberculosis, like poverty, intemperance and unemployment was more or less a product of modern industrialisation. It was a chronic infectious disease with a high degree of infectivity. It was dreaded as more than half the victims were in their youth, and once infected, it invariably ended in a slow and torturous death. The workmen’s dwellings, with a number of people crowded into a single room were the breeding places for this disease. One patient infected the entire family and gradually spreading it to other families in the densely inhabited tenement houses. Women subjected to the purdah system, which relegated them to the innermost apartments in the dwellings, were easy victims of all kinds of diseases.\(^8^3\)

Alarmed by the increasing mortality and incidences of epidemics in the city, the Cawnpore Improvement Trust directed its activities to the removal of congestion and insanitary conditions. New schemes included the acquisition and clearing up 27 ahatas.\(^8^4\) Besides the efforts of the Trust, the employers were called upon to provide accommodation by constructing settlements on lines of Allengung settlement. It was observed to be more sanitary with low mortality rates.

Inspite of the efforts not much was achieved. According to the National Commission on Labour in 1969, “the dowrahs in the coal mines, ahatas of Kanpur, labour camps in Bombay, Shanties of the south and bustees


\(^8^3\) Letter from the Chairman of Cawnpore Improvement Trust to the Governor of United Provinces of Agra and Oudh.

\(^8^4\) Ibid.
in the eastern region have not materially changed in their appearance; if anything, they are uglier than before and more crowded.\textsuperscript{85}

The effectiveness of the supervision of the sanitary conditions in employers colonies varied from mill to mill depending on the type of staff entrusted with this work. In some, sanitation was left in the hand of a regular staff of medical officers, sanitary inspectors or welfare inspectors. In others it was in the hands of darwans, \textit{iamadars}, sardars, clerks or sweepers.\textsuperscript{86}

Social Ties And The Choice Of Neighbourhood

In the rural settings the villager spent his life in a community, which was a small homogenous and relatively social group. The most noteworthy feature of this village society was the caste and joint family systems, which controlled, moulded and defined the social behaviour of its various members. For the villagers, birth generally determined the whole course of his domestic relations, throughout his life what he must eat, drink, marry and give in marriage in accordance with the usages of the social group into which he was born.\textsuperscript{87} In the cities the migrant pressed by problems like housing, employment and credit tended to stick to his friends, caste fellows and relatives for support. Trying to find the security he was used to in the village the migrants frequently lodged with them. The distance from the place of work was another factor which determined the worker's choice of neighbourhood. In the case of Bombay it was noted that in 1937, 90 percent of the city's mill workers lived within 15 minutes walking distance of their place of work.\textsuperscript{88} In Kanpur the \textit{ahatas} that were in the heart of the city and were in close proximity to the old mills were the most crowded ones. The mechanisms of the labour market also tried workers influence the choice of neighbourhoods. To find work, most people relied upon their friends and relatives to recommend them to jobbers and supervisors. Under such

\textsuperscript{86} Labour Investigation Committee Report,(1946), Main Report, p.304.
\textsuperscript{87} S.C. Agarwal, \textit{Industrial Housing in India}, op.cit, p.15.
\textsuperscript{88} Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, \textit{The Origin of Industrial Capitalism in India, Business Strategies and the Working Classes in Bombay 1900-1940}, (New Delhi, Cambridge University Press, 1994).
conditions the workers tried to establish social relations with the jobbers outside the workplace. In the initial years, the migrants were in constant touch with his village. During this period he remitted money to his family and as such he was continuously in need of credit. “It was through the social ties of the neighbourhood that workers helped to tide their friends, and relatives over spells of unemployment by paying their rent or loaning them cash.”

Leisure and political activities also contributed to the development of the street and the neighbourhood as a social arena. Each neighbourhood organized various forms of communal activities.

The neighbourhoods, according to some historians and sociologists were in fact the reconstitution of villages in the urban setting, with the neighbourhood leaders corresponding to the village headman. Lynch Owen in his study of Jatavs of Agra states that “just as one retains an ancestral affiliation to a village, so does the Jatav retain an affiliation to his ancestral household and its neighbourhood.”

The neighbourhood ties in the city became so strong that people were generally identified by the name of their neighbourhood. The relations (bhai band) with the persons of their own neighbourhood reminded one of the feeling of brotherhood (gaon bhai) in the villages. As residential units the neighbourhoods played an important function in kinship and marriage. “All the people of a neighbourhood came to be related as real or fictive kin. All such relatives are called a bhai band.”

The neighbourhoods were generally divided into sub-units, thoks of Agra and mohallas of Banaras, and ahatas of Kanpur corresponded to these sub-units. These units were effective means for regulating the social relations, commenality and cooperation and in strengthening the feeling of brotherhood among the residents. The thoks, mohallas or the ahatas had their own

89 Ibid., p.171.
91 Ibid., pp.188-89.
panchayats which decided all types of questions. There was separate open space, where the meetings of these panchayats were held. Like in villages it became a meeting place, where in the free time men gathered to talk, smoke and sleep in the summers. Occasionally, feasts and public entertainments were organized at this place. Each unit had a leader who was the headman, a position passed from father to son. “Besides maintaining peace and order, the headman officiated at weddings and other ceremonies.”

In her study of Banaras, Nita Kumar describes a neighbourhood as a complete unit with an official name, its own register at the local police station, and a sardar or a mukhia. Each mohalla had certain features by which it was identified i.e., “either a temple, mosque or mazar (Muslim shrine), an akhara (gymnasium), a pond or well where several mela (fair) is held and an old haveli”.

Restructuring of the Household

In cities, the rural links continued though it took different forms. The first change was in the family structure, there was a transition from a joint to a nuclear family. A nuclear or a natural family, according to the Royal Commission consisted of a father, mother and their unmarried children, while a joint family included other relations as well. According to figures for 1929-30, in Kanpur there were 44 percent natural and 56 percent joint families. In a survey in 1939, it was found that of the 277 families of Hindus, 185 were joint households and 92 were natural families. It was observed by the Royal Commission that the higher income groups maintained joint families, in this group 71 percent of the families were joint while in lower income group the percentage was just 50 percent. This section kept their family members away

---

95 Royal Commission on Labour, XI(i), p.71.
at home. The size of the dwellings, which were a contrast to the mud houses of the villages, and the wages of the workers in the city were important factors which determined the size of the family. Even in the 1950’s in a study by Niehoff, the workers admitted that they could not afford to keep their families with them because of low wages. He also noted that there was a greater tendency towards maintaining joint family in the Allengunj settlement as compared to the private ahatas. He attributes this tendency to the amount of space available and the restriction on the number of members imposed in the settlement.

**Rents**

High rents in the cities compelled the workers to crowd in small ill-ventilated houses. The size of the dwellings, distance from the mills, markets and schools had a bearing on the rents which varied from ahata to ahata, ranging from Rs.3 to Rs.20 per month. It was observed that in some cases, the rent alone absorbed 15 to 25 percent of the total income of the worker.

In 1938, the average rent for a two room tenement in Kanpur was Rs.2-8-4 and Rs.4-7-6 per month for a three room house. During the war the rents shot up by 100 to 150 percent. Those who had occupied the houses before the war were legally protected. But there were many ‘instances when landlords compelled their tenants through force and coercion, either to pay more rent or quit the house’. Despite the Rent Control Order, there was large-scale black marketing in houses.

Shortage of houses and high rents together forced most of the workers in the working class areas to spend a considerable proportion of their lives on

---

99 Ibid., pp.77-78.
100 Vidyadhar Agnihotri, *Housing Conditions of Factory Workers in Kanpur*, op.cit., p.32.
the street. The street was used both for cooking and sleeping. Under such
conditions "the distinction between the home and the street was eroded." 104

The economic constraints forced the new migrants to leave their
families in the village. In the villages the women contributed to the family
income considerably whereas in Kanpur only a very small proportion found
employment in the factories. "Wives of the worker migrants worked in the
fields and looked after older members and infants in the households." 105 This
resulted in a great disparity in the sex ratio in Kanpur. The number of women
per 1000 men, in 1931, in Kanpur was 696. 106 According to factory statistics
in the early 1930s, around 95 percent of the industrial labour was male. The
percentage of women in the total population of urban earners was 9.2 in
Kanpur, 21.8 in Allahabad, 17.7 in Benares and 8.5 in Lucknow. 107

Nature of Household

The predominantly male industrial population led to a new form of
household in urban Kanpur - the male co-residential unit. The single male
workers, either unmarried or those who had left their families in the village,
would share a common dwelling unit in the city. Generally, migrants from the
same village or neighbouring village would live together. There were several
ahatas where married men of different castes and same religion lived
together. These mixed residential units were generally restricted to the upper
and middle castes only. Niehoff attributes this to the general feeling of
"superiority of caste Hindus and the attached rules of purity and pollution.
The absence of such units in the lower castes was due to the fact that most of
the chamars were the 'original residents' or had migrated in the early phase of
industrialization and settled down in the city with their families." 108

104 Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, The Origin of Industrial Capitalism in India, Business Strategies and
the Working Classes in Bombay 1900-1940, op.cit., p.170.
105 Chitra Joshi, Lost Worlds, Indian Labour and Its Forgotten Histories, op.cit., p.103.
106 Census of India, 1931, p.50.
108 Arthur Niehoff, Factory Workers in India, op.cit., pp.78.
Lack of accommodation and financial constraints had led to the establishment of mixed households, but sharing could not completely do away with caste prejudices. These prejudices became evident in the eating habits of the coresidents where, "each man cooked separately, either on a separate fire or else when the man from other caste was not at home. At times of illness, 'a Brahmin' was called to do the cooking since his food is permitted to all castes." 109 Another form of joint households was when two or more families shared rooms. Sometimes relations or friends from villages resided with the workers in their houses.

**Residential Segregation**

Another tradition carried on from the traditional Indian villages was the spatial segregation along caste lines. Within the village, the untouchables were segregated from the habitations of the general population in thatched huts outside the village boundary. This residential segregation was replicated in the urban surroundings, though not with the same rigidity. In the United Provinces, it was a general custom to have neighbourhoods distributed along caste lines. As the mill population was not restricted to one caste or one district, it would be interesting to study the settlement pattern in the city.

While in case of other castes, clustering was a means to obtain moral and material support, in case of leather workers it was also external wherein they were forced to live in separate sections due to purity and pollution principle.

Nandini Gooptu in her study on dalits remarks that, “the experience of segregation and exclusion of the untouchables in rural life was not reversed in the urban context. They were absorbed almost entirely in ill paid menial service jobs or in work connected with handling leather in keeping with their traditional low or impure occupation.” 110

109 Ibid., p.79.

The untouchable, who had lived on the village periphery, similarly in the towns he had no access to the residential areas of higher castes. They were concentrated in the urban outskirts and in rare cases where they lived in the mixed settlements, along with people of other castes, their houses formed separate blocks.\textsuperscript{111} Lynch Owen notes similar occupational and residential segregation in case of Jatavs in Agra, because of their profession of leather work. Commenting on the strong caste ties among the immigrants in Bombay, Ghurye stated, they “began to congregate as far as possible according to their castes... this tendency for every large caste to live in isolation from other castes kept growing. It was the manifestation of the old caste practice of reserving separate parts of the village for the different castes moulded to suit the changed conditions of city life.”\textsuperscript{112} The strong castes affiliations modified the people to build houses for specific castes only. In Bombay such buildings had prominent boards blatantly announcing the fact of their reservations along with the nature of philanthropic donor.

In Kanpur, workers belonging to the various castes lived in segregated blocks. In the social hierarchy in Kanpur the upper castes included Brahmin, Thakur, Rajputs, Vaish, and Kayesthas. The intermediate caste included the Ahir, Lodh, Kahar, Luniya, Murao, Kurmi, Kackhi, Lohar, Godaria, Kawal, Nai. The low castes consisted of Pasi, Jaiswaro, Chamar, Kori, Khatik, Dhanus, Momin, Ansari, Sheikh. The lowest in the order were the untouchables – Dom, Bhangi, Lalbegi etc.\textsuperscript{113} It is significant that all the leather workers-- the Hindu chamar and the Muslim Momin, Ansari, Sheikh and Khatik were included in the class of low castes. This had a bearing on the status of the leather workers since much of the economic activities, social attitudes and group physiology were governed by this dominant social trend. Some ahatas were dominated by one or two castes only, but most of the ahatas had mixed residents. The mixed ahatas formed 72 percent of the total

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid. 
\textsuperscript{112} G.S.Ghurye, \textit{Caste And Race In India}, (Bombay, Popular Prakashan, ,2000), p.298. 
ahatas located in Juhi, Darshanpurva, Gwaltoli, Khalasi lines, Zarib-ki-Chowki and Deputy ka Paro.\textsuperscript{114} The major reason for the existence of these mixed ahatas was their locational factors situated in close proximity to the major cotton and leather factories; they were all overcrowded. Segregation on the basis of caste was quite rigid in these ahatas too, where upper and intermediate castes could be found occupying tenements side by side. But the lower castes, including Chamars, seldom occupied rooms along with the upper castes. A large number of ahatas were predominantly inhabited by the low caste groups which formed the bulk of the labour population. Ahatas in Jajmau, with large concentration of leather factories, were inhabited by the lower caste Chamar and low caste Muslims, like Momin, Sheikh and Ansaris.\textsuperscript{115} Similar segregation was visible in Dholikar, which was inhabited by butchers and Chamars. Colonelganj had 53\% of the low caste population. Old Kanpur (50.5\%) and Harbans Mohal (48.4\%)\textsuperscript{116} were important clusters. The condition of such settlement was deplorable, they were neither paved nor provided with proper drains. In most of these settlements the various processes involved with leather work were carried out and in the absence of proper facilities for the disposal of water and refuse, the conditions became unbearable.\textsuperscript{117}

Economic necessity did not permit a segregation similar to that in the villages. But wherever the mixed ahatas existed there was an effort to keep away the low caste residing in that compound. The compounds were generally brick structures most often of one storey, the quarters being partitioned off from one another with the entrance facing the inside of the courtyard.\textsuperscript{118} In many compounds, there were rooms with entrances on the outside. In addition the more common type of residential quarters faced the wall in courtyard. It

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{116} Nandu Ram, The Mobile Scheduled Castes-Rise of a New Middle Class,(Delhi, Hindustan Publishing Corporation,1988)p.33.

\textsuperscript{117} G.A.D. United Provinces,Proceedings No.98,10 May,1910, File No.278/1910.

\textsuperscript{118} Arthur Niehoff, Factory Workers in India, op.cit., pp.52.
was in these quarters facing the outside that the low castes were allowed to live.119 Compounds where the low castes lived along with the upper castes, the latter tried to keep themselves isolated from their low caste neighbours as best as they could. They could not avoid mingling with them somewhat in the lanes and outside the places of the compound but they could keep them out of their quarters.120 These separate block of tenements far from the main dwellings of the upper and intermediate castes, were mostly dilapidated, insanitary, small and overcrowded.

Discrimination was witnessed blatantly in the use of common amenities, like use of common taps and wells. The untouchables could not touch the bib-cock or open the pipe or drop their buckets in the well while the upper castes were using it. The discrimination was also practised between the lower castes and the untouchables. The buckets of a Pasi, Kori and Raidas could not be introduced into a well simultaneously, care was also taken to avoid the touching of vessels by the low castes. Polluted vessels were either replaced or purified by fire.121

Within the neighbourhood discrimination was most glaring in the performance of religious ceremonies. The untouchables and the lower castes were forbidden to enter temples of caste Hindus.

Within the city segregation was also witnessed on communal lines, with Hindus being segregated from the Muslims. This segregation intensified with the repeated communal riots in Kanpur. The tendency of clustering was more evident among the Muslims as they were lesser in numbers as compared to the Hindus. As a result of this Chamanganj, Begamganj, Moolganj and Colonelganj developed into Muslim dominated areas.122 In Jajmau a number of low castes Hindus and Muslims shared the ahatas. Unlike the Hindu dominated ahatas there was no segregation in those dominated by the

119 Ibid., p.48.
120 Ibid., p.50.
122 Nandu Ram, *The Mobile Scheduled Castes-Rise of a New Middle Class*, op. cit., p.33.
Muslims where, the Saiyads and the Pathans lived in the same compounds with the Momeins, Sheikh, and Ansari weavers lived.  

**Formation Of Neighbourhood Social Ties**

Leisure and political activities also contributed to the development of the street and neighbourhood as a social arena. For a factory worker time was sharply demarcated into two periods, work time and free time. In the cities the workers had more opportunities to spend the free time. The street corner, the liquor shops and the *akharas* (gymnasium) drawing from the neighbouring workers population contributed to the formation of social ties among the workers. Raj Chandavarker, in his study of Bombay workers, mentions the organization of communal activities like *tolibands* of Moharram or the *melas* at Ganapati or Gukulastami. Nita Kumar identifies the *akharas* as the means of forming new identities among the members.

In the urban neighbourhood the tea stall became the focal point of neighbourhood gossip. The stall owner was often a Brahmin so that the food prepared by him was acceptable to all castes. Men congregated here after work. The tea stalls in the main *bazaars*, away from residential areas for those who did not want their caste fellows with whom they were associating, were more popular. The market became the centre of communication in the city which, besides purely commercial function, performed latent functions. Lynch notes that, “It is specially so far the Jatavs who meet friends there in tea, sweets or wine shops and after passing few minutes gossiping on the street.” The majority of the relationships took place in the secrecy of hotels. The food was almost always pukka.

---


125 Ibid.


127 Lynch Owen, *The Politics of Untouchability, Social Mobility and Social Change in a City of India*, op.cit., pp.43-44.

The liquor and gambling were two vices most commonly found among
the low caste people. The overcrowded and ill paid labourer living hundreds
of miles away from his family found in a liquor shop a place where he could
forget the toils and worry of the day. Many of them absented from work and
were found dead drunk on weekends, and on noon days the manufacturers
often hunted them out from their dens. In this regard the Chamars were
notorious for their excessive use of narcotic drugs and intoxicating beverages
besides their immoral activities. In his evidence before the Indian Industrial
Commission, 1916, L.P. Watson of Cooper Allen attested that this habit of
drinking among workers resulted in frequent absenteeism and stated that the
workers had to be brought back to work on the day after he got pay. It was
a major reason for the low economic status of Chamars, to tide over the
economic difficulties he was forced to take credit, which further worsened
their condition.

The predominantly male population in the city had an adverse effect on
the moral principles of the workers without the restraining influences of the
family and with no fixed home, young men in the city sought diversion in
drinks, drugs and the bazaar. The culture of the bazaar soon was associated
with sexual promiscuity. Moolganj, the main centre for prostitution was
located in the Central Bazaar. At the junctions of several major roads, at
the heart of the bazaar the mandi zone was a central place for workers and
labourers to congregate every day. The menacing nature of the area was
believed to be aggravated since drinking and gambling opportunity and
prostitute quarters were close at hand.

129 Lynch Owen, The Politics of Untouchability, Social Mobility and Social Change in a City of
India, op. cit., pp.52-53.
132 Chitra Joshi, Lost Worlds, Indian Labour and Its Forgotten Histories, op.cit., p.119.
133 Arthur Niehoff, Factory Workers in India, op.cit., p.88.
134 Ibid., p.89.
The culture of bazaar stood for sexual promiscuity, intoxication, hooliganism and crime.\textsuperscript{135} The bazaar girl or prostitute was the sole recreation and luxury the workers indulged in; men spent Re.1 to Rs.12 on a prostitute. In the urban centres the question of prostitution was closely linked to large populations of widows in the industrial towns. In Kanpur the high caste widow who could not remarry generally stayed with the unmarried workers. To check the sexual immorality in the company settlement, the Cooper Allen & Co, posted guards at the Allenganj settlement to check the people entering the walled compound. Some women were brought in as friends or in the purdah rickshaws finally the manager forbade the entrance into the settlement of any purdah vehicles. To take care of the widows, the Cooper Allen & Co. set up widow lines, a certain area of the compound for the widows; soon this area also become notorious for its prostitution. Finally the widow lines were eliminated and the women were spread out.\textsuperscript{136}

The workers were a constant threat when under the influence of country liquor, he played the hooligan. Such men were not only considered immoral but were also a turbulent and riotous lot.\textsuperscript{137} The large bazaars, cinemas, travelling shows and labour welfare centres maintained by the Government provided opportunities to spend the leisure time. The privately owned compounds of the British Indian Corporation: Macrobertganj and Allenganj provided special facilities for recreation\textsuperscript{138} which included a labour welfare centre, workers club, provision for outdoor and indoor games, medical facilities. Two government labour welfare centres were set up in Jajmau for the leather workers.\textsuperscript{139} Games were an important source of recreation. Pachisi, chess and card games were commonly played. Patridge fights were popular among the workers. Bets were placed on the birds and on

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., p.88.
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., 88.
\textsuperscript{137} Chitra Joshi, Lost Worlds, Indian Labour and Its Forgotten Histories, op.cit., p.120.
\textsuperscript{138} Arthur Niehoff, Factory Workers in India ,op.cit., p.94.
Sundays the owners and those interested in betting went bicycle or rickshaw to the site where the various birds were pitted against one another.\textsuperscript{140}

Akharas were a common form of recreational activities. Nita Kumar describes in detail the akharas as mode of recreation among the artisans of Banaras.\textsuperscript{141} Every neighbourhood generally had an akhara, the arena or pit for wrestling, or the space marked for exercising and weight lifting. In Kanpur there were several municipal akharas in the labour welfare centres of the city besides the private ones.\textsuperscript{142} Each akhara had three essential aspects, the arena, the well and the place to rest. The inevitable presence of shrine, temple and trees demonstrates, that akharas are not merely gymnasiums. “They are places of ritual as well as social intercourse, of menial discipline as well as physical training.”\textsuperscript{143} These social centres became the focal point of political organization. But akharas were not associated with physical culture or self defence alone. The men trained here had considerable potential for political mobilization and frequently provided a basis for neighbourhood action. The gymnasiums were supposed to be the domain of the unemployed hooligan.\textsuperscript{144} Membership was open to all, but in terms of actual membership, akharas were “typically Hindu or Muslim depending on the population of the locality.”\textsuperscript{145} Once a member the person felt a devotion to the teacher and the soil of the akhara.

Dipesh Chakraborty describes this tendency in the upcountry labourers in the Calcutta Jute mills in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century. Among these immigrants, “one common aspiration was to earn a name for themselves as wrestlers in the akharas... set up in north Calcutta by their fellow immigrants.”\textsuperscript{146}

\textsuperscript{140} Arthur Niehoff, \textit{Factory Workers in India}, op.cit., pp.96-97.
\textsuperscript{142} Arthur Niehoff, \textit{Factory Workers in India}, op.cit., pp.95-96.
\textsuperscript{143} Nita Kumar, \textit{Artisans of Banaras, Popular Culture and Identity, 1880-1986}, op.cit., p.113.
\textsuperscript{144} Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, The Origins of Industrial Capitalism in India, op.cit., p.215.
\textsuperscript{145} Nita Kumar, \textit{Artisans of Banaras, Popular Culture and Identity, 1880-1986}, op.cit., p.115.
Over the period of time the neighbourhood became important arena for the social organization and political organization of the factory workers. Migration was influenced by caste and village connections. The migrants entered into a number of new associations, to find work, credit and housing. The associations formed in the neighbourhood helped in the organization of religious festivals and the activities of the akharas. But caste and communal segregation continued.