

DIALOGUE on *Homelessness and Destitution* Law, Issues and Possibilities



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Jointly organised by



INTRODUCTION

The seminar was conceived through a shared commitment between The Koshish Trust, Centre for Dalit Studies, and the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, South Asia to collectively engage with the structural, legal, and lived aspects of homelessness and destitution.

The Koshish Trust, an organisation comprising of a team with a long history of working with people in situations of destitution, homelessness, and related vulnerabilities, anchored the seminar. Its work, rooted in everyday field practice and continuous engagement with institutions, ensured that discussions remained closely tied to lived realities rather than abstract debates. The Trust's emphasis on people's narratives, dignity, and rights provided the ethical base for the seminar.

Centre for Dalit Studies, based in Hyderabad, is an academic and research institution committed to the study of caste, social exclusion, and structural inequality, contributed a critical scholarly lens to the discussions. By foregrounding evidence based research and the political importance of data, CDS strengthened the seminar's engagement with law, policy, and public discourse. Its interventions helped connect lived experiences of homelessness with broader questions of identity, discrimination, and systemic exclusion.

The Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, an international foundation working on issues of social justice, inequality, and democratic rights, brought a wider global and ideological perspective to the collaboration. RLF highlighted how homelessness intersects with issues such as extreme heat, environmental vulnerability, and economic marginalisation. Its engagement emphasised the importance of solidarity, alliances, and transnational learning in addressing these challenges.

Together, the three organisations created a space where grassroots experience and academic inquiry could meaningfully interact with one another. The collaboration reflected a shared belief that homelessness and destitution cannot be addressed in isolation, and that sustained partnerships across civil society, academia, and progressive foundations are essential for building informed narratives, influencing policy, and advancing justice for the most marginalised people in our cities.

PROCEEDINGS

Welcome and Opening Remarks – Prof. Vijay Raghavan (Trustee, The Koshish Trust)

Prof. Vijay Raghavan from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences delivered the welcome address, drawing attention to the urgent yet often overlooked issue of homelessness and destitution. He highlighted that despite being a large and visible social concern, homelessness does not receive the same level of priority or recognition as other public issues. Prof. Raghavan encouraged everyone to reflect on why this issue remains under-flagged and what collective actions can be taken to bring it to the forefront. He emphasised the need for stronger advocacy, better public awareness, and a more empathetic understanding of people experiencing homelessness.



Following the opening remarks, Mr. Tauqueer Sabri from Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, South Asia, talked about the relationship between extreme heat and homelessness. He explained how rising temperatures create severe health risks for people living on the streets, affecting their physical and mental well-being. He shed light on how heat stress, dehydration, and lack of shelter intensify the vulnerabilities of homeless populations.

Keynote Address: Shri Ujjawal Uke, IAS (retd)

Shri Uke emphasised the importance of building strong alliances with multiple organisations and stakeholders. He explained that many field challenges cannot be solved by a single organisation alone. By forming alliances, teams can share resources, gain wider support, and respond more effectively to complex community needs. He stressed that collaboration is essential for sustainable and long-term impact. He encouraged all members to work collectively across sectors. He also spoke about the value of perseverance. Early efforts may not show visible results, yet this should not discourage us. Just as a worker strikes the same point on a boulder and nothing appears to change until it suddenly cracks, we too must continue engaging with systems even when progress is not immediately visible.



Voices from the Ground

The session on “Voices from the Ground,” was an experience-sharing session by the participating organisations, moderated by Prof Vijay Raghavan. It highlighted the lived realities, persistent challenges, and vital insights gathered directly from experienced people from the grassroots, who shared that although their efforts are valued, the absence of proper documents remains the biggest barrier, as it delays essential services and restricts individuals from accessing support systems. Many people do not have Aadhaar cards, which prevents them from availing any government schemes; and when they try to apply for Aadhaar, they face bureaucratic hurdles such as lack of other documents proving their identity, date of birth and address. It leaves them stuck in a continuous cycle of exclusion.



Organisations also expressed that funding limitations affect the continuity and quality of their grassroots work. Additionally, concerns were raised about the extremely limited number of shelters available for persons with disabilities, which leaves an already vulnerable group without adequate protection and care. Together, these voices

emphasized the urgent need for stronger networks, collaborative action, and structural reforms to ensure that no one is left behind.



Two key points emerged from this discussion:

1. Mr. Mohd Tarique, managing trustee of The Koshish Trust, suggested creating an alliance so that organisations can work together collectively on these issues.
2. Prof. Raghavan shared that under the DLSA Saathi Scheme, Aadhaar cards can be made for those children whose basic records are already available.

Thematic Discussion: Challenging Popular Perceptions to Build People's Narrative

1. **Lived Experiences:** The session began with a presentation by Shahid Afroz, researcher with The Koshish Trust, who introduced the organisation's forthcoming report titled "I Exist." In his presentation, Shahid explained that the study aims to make the experiences of vulnerable and marginalized communities visible, especially individuals who remain overlooked in public policies and societal narratives. Explaining that the study was conceived with the idea of bringing destitute persons' voices to the fore which has been subdued in the discourses of the society, the government and NGOs. He spoke about how social and systemic invisibility contributes to cycles of exclusion, and how research like "I Exist" brings these hidden realities to the forefront. He emphasized that creating visibility is the first step toward fostering dignity, justice, and informed interventions.



2. **Transforming Public Perceptions-Youth as Agents of Change:** The second speaker, Dr. Saman Afroz, faculty member, Nirmala Niketan College of Social Work, highlighted the profound need to transform public perceptions surrounding vulnerable communities. She emphasized that youth hold the power to act as catalysts for meaningful social change. When young people are informed, sensitized, and encouraged to question dominant narratives, they have the capability to challenge stigma, break down stereotypes, and advance more inclusive ways of thinking. Dr. Saman stressed that empowering youth with awareness and responsibility can ultimately shift societal narratives and contribute to long-term structural transformation.
3. **Creating Evidence from Research:** Following this, Dr. Vinod Mishra, faculty member, Centre for Dalit Studies, Hyderabad, delivered a talk on strengthening civil society through the effective use of data. He reiterated that “data speaks louder”, emphasizing its role in shaping public opinion, informing policy, and exposing forms of discrimination that often remain unreported. Dr. Mishra shared insights from his own research, focusing on social identity and housing discrimination. He explained how reliable data helps uncover patterns of exclusion such as biased rental practices that might otherwise be dismissed as hearsay. According to him, evidence-backed findings not only validate the lived experiences of marginalized groups but also provide civil society organizations with the tools needed to advocate for systemic reforms, accountability, and equitable policies.

Thematic Discussion: Legislative and Policy Framework

1. **Role of Court Directives:** During this session, Dr Mahesh Kamble, member, State Level Shelter Monitoring Committee, provided an in-depth analysis of the recent court orders and their broader implications. He specifically discussed the directive concerning the removal of certain payments, explaining how policies that appear technical or administrative on the surface often indirectly trouble homeless individuals, tightening the structures around them instead of easing their vulnerabilities. He emphasised that these decisions, without adequate consultation or understanding of lived realities, can further marginalize those already on the periphery.



Turning to the issue of NULM shelters, he outlined what these shelters are meant to provide: safe accommodation, hygiene, daily living facilities, counselling services, linkages to welfare schemes, etc. and pointed out how several shelters fall short of these guidelines. He highlighted the mismatch between the actual need and the number of functional shelters, stressing that the insufficient infrastructure forces people to remain on the streets despite the availability of government schemes. Dr. Kamble concluded by urging the organisations to focus on strengthening social action, building collective voices, and ensuring that rights-based advocacy remains consistent and grounded in community experiences.

2. **Towards Decriminalisation:** Mr Raghwendra Singh, National Human Rights Commission of India, expanded the discussion by focusing on the SMILE Scheme, describing it as a framework that, if properly implemented, can build important rehabilitation pathways. He spoke about the essential and often under-recognized role of social workers, who act as bridges between policy and people. According to him, meaningful change is not only possible but already underway because

there are individuals within the government who are genuinely committed to reform. However, he emphasized that for policies to transform into practice, ground realities must reach those in power. The everyday stories, challenges, and obstacles faced by the homeless must be documented, shared, and consistently communicated to ensure that policymakers understand the real impact of their decisions.



3. **Humanising the Institutions:** Ms Pallavi Thakare, coordinator, The Koshish Trust, shared her experience of working in the Beggars' Home where she saw tangible changes happening through the work of the team. She explained that in the initial phase, the attitude of the caretakers of the Home was negative towards the mentally ill residents. They used to mistreat them believing that their behaviour of not following rules was a result of defiance rather than illness. But through the work of the team, which involved them at every step of the rehabilitation process, they saw and realized that mental illness is a condition where the patients is often unaware of their actions. Slowly, the team saw changes in their behaviour towards them. Then came a day where the Beggars' Home staff itself started pointing out to us that such and such person needs psychiatric care. This, she said, was a live example of an achievement towards humanizing the institution. She reinforced the belief that change is possible within institutions, and that even small shifts in communication, approach, and teamwork can eventually lead to larger systemic reforms.

Mr Sherbhadur Thapa, programme officer, The Koshish Trust, offered a deeply personal and reflective account of his journey. He spoke about his earliest days in the Beggars Home as to how unfamiliar and challenging the environment felt, and how he gradually learned to navigate it. Over time, he began noticing both visible and subtle changes in the functioning of these spaces. Sharing moments from his recent visits to clients, he described the stark gaps that still persist: some locations lacked even the most basic toilet facilities, highlighting the urgent need for infrastructural upgrades.

Together, the speakers presented a layered and comprehensive understanding of institutional systems, policy gaps, and the collective responsibility required to drive social change.

Thematic Discussion: Climate Change and Homelessness



1. **Rising Temperatures, Increasing Invisibility:** The thematic discussion began with Mr. Mohd. Tarique drawing a comparison between the challenges homeless individuals face during winters and summers. He explained that in winter, the cold immediately hits our senses and prompts concern. We instinctively think about how difficult it must be for someone without a shelter. However, in summer, even though the heat can be equally, or even more dangerous, society often fails to recognise the suffering of homeless people. Mr. Tarique highlighted how our narratives are shaped by perception: winter hardship feels more visible and urgent, while summer struggles are normalised and overlooked.

2. **Resourcing for Justice:** Building on this theme, Mr. Tauqueer Sabri spoke about the severe impact of extreme heat on homeless populations. He discussed how rising temperatures lead to dehydration, heat stress, exhaustion, and even medical emergencies, yet issues related to hot summers remain largely unflagged. Both speakers emphasised that the silent and often invisible suffering of homeless individuals during extreme heat demands stronger awareness, more advocacy, and focused interventions to ensure their safety and dignity.



DEBRIEFING SESSION

After the seminar, the team sat with Mr. Tauqueer Sabri and Mr Raghwendra Singh to reflect upon the day. These are the key points that came out.

1. Reflections from Mr Tauqueer Sabri (Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, South Asia)

Mr Tauqueer Sabri appreciated the fact about The Koshish Trust (TKT) bringing together a strong alliance around the issue of homelessness and destitution. He said that the alliance has significant potential and that Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung (RLS) would consider how to extend concrete solidarity to this collective.

He noted that a joint research between RLS and TKT would be a meaningful step on the issue. He proposed about planning an inception workshop to map out areas of collaborative research and shared objectives.

Mr Sabri mentioned that TKT's grasp of the issue is strong and grounded in its long-standing field engagement. He added that "the organisation is overweight," but projects itself as "underweight." In his view, TKT's contributions and strengths are larger than what it projects. It should project its image as it is, and should not underplay it.

He emphasised that the whole team must keep track of global developments related to the field. Continuous learning and regular updates on international trends can greatly strengthen both its work and strategy.

He said that feedback from participants during the seminar had been very positive. The session was quite interactive, which kept the audience engaged.

2. Reflections from Mr Raghwendra Singh (National Human Rights Commission of India)

Mr Raghwendra Singh reiterated the point that the TKT team must remain updated on global developments and emerging discussions in the sector. He observed that a stronger understanding of potential supporters and collaborators would help TKT build partnerships and strategy.

He praised TKT's grassroots connection, describing it as one of the organisation's strongest assets. He highlighted that such grounded work provides credibility and authenticity of voice.

He supported the idea proposed by Mr Mohd Tarique of cross-organisational learning through mutual visits. He felt this would create a richer exchange of strategies, insights, and experiences. Such visits would help all teams understand the depth of each other's work. He noted that this process would strengthen the alliance and improve coordination.

Mr Singh stated that issues should be taken to the government at delegation level, with data. He encouraged TKT to use extensive data to present evidence-based insights to the government. He said that strong data backed by field experience can lead to more meaningful policy dialogue.

He concluded by saying that TKT should project its work more assertively. He felt that the organisation has been underplaying its contributions and should present its work in a more visible and powerful way.

CONCLUSION

Through the seminar, the fact got reiterated that homelessness and destitution are not isolated problems of individuals, but the result of long standing social inequalities, weak systems, and neglect. By bringing together experiences from the ground, research based insights, and policy discussions, the seminar helped move the conversation away from charity towards dignity, rights, and justice.

The discussions stressed the importance of working together, using evidence, and keeping people's experiences at the centre of all interventions. These discussions also reminded us that change takes time and requires perseverance, sustained effort, collaboration, and the willingness to question dominant perceptions and practices.

It opened space for continued dialogue, stronger partnerships, and collective action aimed at building more humane policies, responsive institutions, and a society that recognises the dignity of people living in destitution.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS AND THEIR AFFILIATION

Sr. No.	Name	Organisation
1	Prof Vijay Raghavan	Tata Institute of Social Sciences
2	Shri Tauqueer Ali Sabri	Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, South Asia
3	Dr Vinod Mishra	Centre for Dalit Studies, Hyderabad
4	Shri Ujjawal Uke	Former Addl. Chief Secretary
5	Dr Mahesh Kamble	Member, State Level Shelter Monitoring Committee
6	Shri Raghwendra Singh	National Human Rights Commission of India
7	Mr Mohd Tarique	The Koshish Trust
8	Ms Farzana Ansari	Shraddha Rehabilitation Foundation
9	Ms Sampada Surve	Jeevan Anand Sanstha
10	Mr Shailendra Kadam	Jeevan Anand Sanstha
11	Ratna Mane	CORO India
12	Mr Shahid Afroz	The Koshish Trust
13	Mr S. M. Thapa	The Koshish Trust
14	Ms Pallavi Thakare	The Koshish Trust
15	Dr Saman Afroz	College of Social Work, Nirmala Niketan
16	Mr Valentine Fernandes	Grace Foundation
17	Mr Ananda Nirmale	Niradhar Vidyarthi Pragatik Sangh
18	Mr Ashok Pujari	Niradhar Vidyarthi Pragatik Sangh
19	Ms Kusum Kale	Aakaar Mumbai
20	Ms Sharda Arondekar	Aakaar Mumbai
21	Mr Sudhir R. Jadhav	Apna Ghar
22	Ms Rajeshwary	Sukh Shanti
23	Ms Sarika	Sukh Shanti
24	Mr Shashikant Bhalerao	The Koshish Trust
25	Ms Khan Mehroz	The Koshish Trust
26	Mr Prashik Tayde	The Koshish Trust
27	Ms Aaliya Rakiba	The Koshish Trust
28	Mr Salman	Community member
29	Mr Deepak	Community member
30	Ms Mitali	Community member