

# Demand for night shelter for street dwellers

Jyoti Shelar

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Thirty-year-old Ajay Singh has been sleeping on the Mumbai roads from the past 14 years in fear of being run down by a speeding car driven by rich brat.

"I work throughout the day and sleep on the road since I failed save enough to buy a house for myself", said Singh, as he readied himself to sleep at the Mahim Reti Bunder. Singh hailed from Jharkhand and began working as a daily wage worker in the city.

Like Singh, over one lakh people in the city spend their nights on the streets and all they hope for is a night shelter where they can pay some minimal daily charges and sleep in the night time. Even as Delhi has 11 night

shelters for homeless and migrant laborers, Mumbai has none.

"Most people here are earn enough but spend the money on alcohol and gambling. The rest who earn really less have no choice but to stay on the road", said Arif Khan who hailed from Uttar Pradesh, seven year ago.

Khan who is into hoarding repair work, added, "We have to risk our life by sleeping on the streets and over the years we have become used to it. But if there were shelters provided by the government for people like us, it would have lessened our life risks", he added.

While the government is yet to realise the need of night shelters in the city, a group of volunteers from Alternative Realities, an organization working for the homeless in the city, have began raising their voice to demand for the same. The recent Carter Road carnage has added fury to their demand.

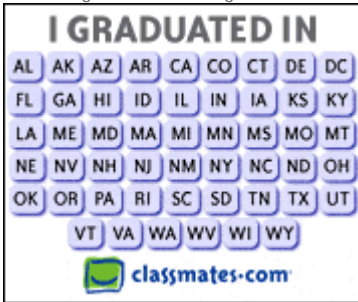
"All of these people who spends their day and nights on the streets want a shelter but somehow their voices are not reaching the right ears", said **Abhishek Bharadwaj** of Alternative Realities, who began with this campaign three years ago.

"The recent Carter Road accident wouldn't have been so gruesome had the laborers been housed in a transit shelter instead on the streets where they worked throughout the day", added **Bharadwaj, a former student of Tata Institute of Social Sciences**.

Bharadwaj and his team of volunteers recently had meeting with Vandana Krishna of the state's Women and Child Welfare Department and have put forward a proposal for night shelter.

"We are regularly interacting with various authorities and we are looking at converting the Chembur beggar jail to a open night shelter", said Bharadwaj as he interacted with the people at the Mahim Reti Bunder on Monday night, where more than 300 people sleep daily.

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"These are people like us and they do the core which makes the city run. But when it comes to give them dignity, no one comes forward", said Bharadwaj, who regularly interacts with the homeless and tries to get them together and unite to protest for a night shelter.

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