

# FUNCTIONING OF NIGHT SHELTERS – IN DELHI

*Report by Arunava Das*



***Façade of a Night Shelter***

Delhi the capital city of India has become the world`s second most populous city in 2014 after Tokyo (Japan), more than doubling its population since 1990 to 25 million, according to a UN report. It is also projected that India shall add the highest number of people to its urban population by 2050, ahead of China.

A growing city always experiences inflow of population from elsewhere and many of such migratory population settles down but initially a large number of such population do not have any shelter and settles down in public place.

It is estimated that even in Delhi, quite a substantial chunk of population of about 30 lakh is living in approximately 6 lakh jhuggies whose shelter and social infrastructure inputs are becoming serious and increasing concern of Government.

In Delhi the said government functions are administered by Delhi Urban Improvement Board (DUSIB). This Board has come in existence under Delhi Urban

Shelter Improvement Board Act, 2010 which has been passed by the Legislative Assembly of the National Capital Territory of Delhi on the 01st April, 2010 and has come in force by the orders of Hon'ble Lt. Governor of Delhi on 1st July, 2010.

DUSIB has been also assigned the role of looking after the Jhuggie Jhomprie (JJ) squatter settlements / clusters by way of provision of civic amenities and their resettlement too besides improving the quality of the life of Slum JJ Dwellers by implementing number of approved plan Schemes on behalf of Delhi Govt.

DUSIB is running 271 permanent/temporary Night Shelters (Raein Baseraas) across the City for providing shelter to such homeless people, especially for protecting them from the vagaries of harsh and extreme climate of Delhi.

The ever growing population of Delhi city poses a big challenge to the Government and the night shelters face over capacity utilization. In such a scenario many of the capital's floating population do not find shelter and resort to pavement dwelling. Such act, especially during winter nights not only exposes one to extreme cold and possible death but is also detrimental to the good work being done by the Government.

The Government with its limited resources and workforce is unable to keep patrolling the entire capital and trace out such destitute and pavement dwellers. Therefore, this year the Lt. Governor of Delhi has devised a unique solution for increasing the patrolling capacity by inducting student volunteers.



**Care Taker of Sector-12, Dwarka Night Shelter**

Your writer is one of such volunteers and my observation during the stint may be summarized as under: -

## **Background**

As a student volunteer one is expected to work in a team. The teams can be split into sub groups viz. one team can roam around the allocated area for finding out homeless/sick persons and assist them in relocation/shifting to one of the night shelters. Another group may help in daily/efficient running of the Night Shelter while another group may assist the administration/NGO in mobilizing resources/development of social awareness and team up with law enforcing agencies or medical team.

This volunteer is a resident of south west Delhi and pursuing his studies from a professional course imparting Institute. Therefore, constrained with limited time for such voluntary work. Hence has opted to render his services restricted to the Night Shelters in Dwarka Sector: 3 and 12.



**DUSIB Night Shelter at Dwarka Sector: 12**

## **Observations**

Started working for RB from 16<sup>th</sup> January 2015 after being influenced by the advertisement in Hindustan Times. This is the first noble cause for which I have volunteered.

I am grateful to the Delhi Government / DUSIB / NGO for motivating me to do some good social work.

First two nights had associated myself with the night patrolling team for moving around the vicinity of Dwarka Sub City to find out homeless persons, who needed shelter but such exercise yielded naught result.

Therefore, I undertook the activity involving supervision/running of Night Shelter (situated in Dwarka Sector: 12), New Delhi and most of the observation being made is based on such experience: -

- This shelter has been made by the government and is run by a NGO having its office in Madhu Vihar. There is no permanent water supply and in its absence supply of water is through storage water facility. The Delhi Jal Board supplies 200 liters of potable water while another private tanker (Mayur) is supplying 1000 liters of water. However, it was found that the supply was made every alternative day instead of on daily basis. Therefore not only took up the matter with appropriate authorities but also personally followed up the case with Delhi Jal Board and ensured that potable water is supplied every night. Delhi Jal Board provides 200 L water tank.



***Water facility at a typical DUSIB Night Shelter***

- A doctor is also assigned for visiting the night shelter and check the inmates but there were murmurs that the Doctor seldom visits and even if someone is coming, no medicines provided. The issue was suitably taken up with the

Doctor on duty for ensuring that visits are invariably made on every Monday and Thursday.

- The RB at Dwarka Sector: 12 (near DMRC Station) has been set up with envisaged living capacity for 35 persons but due to lack of slum / low cost residential facility the shed is occupied by over 60 men.
- Most of the residents are occupied as cycle rickshaw pullers and after a hard day's work prefer to get drunk with their earnings and retire to the RB for the night, oblivious of all the facilities provided.
- Picking up conversation with drunk rickshaw pullers is a gigantic task but my mission would be a total failure, in case I failed to have talks with these occupants of RB. Therefore, after daily visits during the night managed to interact with the individual residents. The outcome of such conversations revealed that most of them do not want to cook food at the shelter, as there is no facility of kitchen and cooking outdoors in the Cold winter nights is neither possible nor practical. Therefore, facility of food may be made.



**Sector- 10, Dwarka Night Shelter**

- Surprisingly the Night Shelter has also become home for a large number of street dogs who are not only a threat to the inhabitants but also a menace in the Metro station area, especially at late night. We have complained to Municipal Corporation, in response they informed that they had received many complaints before also in this matter but they informed that it is their

duty only to vaccinate the stray dogs. Keep them under observation for few days and release them back, reason being they do not have Dog shelters.

- It is also observed that most of the Night Shelters in Dwarka have been established close to the DMRC stations and are devoid of toilet facility. Apparently this has been done with the aim of cost cutting and thriftiness. The need of toilets in the Night Shelters is taken care of by the existing Sulabh Sochalayas housed in the Metro Stations. The existing toilet facility at Metro stations have failed to satiate the demand of the occupants of Night Shelters as they incessantly are demanding for toilet facility at the RBs.
- The Night Shelters are also a favorite of the rats/rodents, who makes it a point to attack the occupants when they are fast asleep. In order to curb the menace complaints were made and now a protective skirting has been put up in the buildings' perimeter, which has yielded in reduced rat attacks.
- The Night Shelter at Metro Station, Sector: 10 has roof leakage problem. Complaints has been made, now waiting for resolution. The women's Night Shelter in Sector: 3 is not occupied / hardly any resident because there is no women caretaker.



***Low Occupancy at Women's Night Shelter***

- Drinking water is a problem and has to be addressed expeditiously, say by installing a water purifier.
- During day time there are hardly any occupants and the shelter is the fiefdom of the Caretaker; Sweeper and an attendant or two. The situation is not favorable and may become the den for anti-social elements.
- The shelters needs to be equipped with first aid kits and one educated person, who may dispense the duties of care taker and rendering first aid, in case of emergency.
- One day Mr. B.K Singh, General Secretary of NGO (Shree Gyan Gangotri Vikas Sansthan) visited the Night Shelter at Dwarka Sector: 12, New Delhi for carrying out identification of the inmates and Voter ID card was issued to 102 people under my supervision, but 17 people could not be issued Voter ID Card as they could not produce any proper proof of identity. I was involved in this exercise right from the time of survey and issue of IDs.
- The Night Shelter at Sector: 12 is also prone to Electricity problem i.e. the supply is erratic as there is negligence in payment of Bills. One day there was no power supply for more than two hours, just because of the fact that, electricity bill was not paid and after much follow-up with Mr. B. K. Singh, the Bill was paid by the NGO and power restored.



***Recreational facility at Night shelter***

- It was found that only the Beat Constable on duty was regular in making his visits, yet two days back there was an incident of burglary. It is anticipated that the boy who was responsible for maintaining cleanliness must have committed the crime because it was found that Mobile Phone of four inmates were missing and even Rs. 39000/- cash was missing from the Care Taker's custody, which has coincided with the fact the safai karma Chari is found absconding.
- My attempt to bring the matter to the notice of all concerned landed in deaf ears because no one has owned the responsibility and even complaint made to central control room has evoked any response.
- As most of the inmates are drunkard, I have also contacted Alcoholics Anonymous, for arranging a workshop for possible DE addiction.

**In view of above the readers are requested to answer the following: -**

1. Whether the Night Shelter(s) are to be run by NGO or directly by DUSIB?
2. The caretaker should be an employee of DUSIB or on contract basis.
3. How the social evils are to be addressed.
4. How people's participation in this Noble cause can be made more effective.



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