

Homeless despite having a home - Mr. Prabhu Mehto : A Case Study

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Ganesh Nagar (Shelter No. - 145)**

1. Mr. PRABHU MEHTO – THE PERSON

Mr. Prabhu Mehto, an old gentleman of 58 years old, with a stooped posture, frail body and grave expression on his face. He is Rickshaw-Puller on the roads of Delhi. His attire consists of a pair of old shoes, loose trousers, oversized fleeced coat over withered sweater and a monkey cap. He has been sleeping in the Night Shelter from winters of this season 2014-2015. He pulls Rickshaw on the route of Mother Dairy to Mayur Vihar Phase-1 and can be generally found on the same stand looking hopefully towards the passengers descending the buses to get passengers in his Rickshaw, calling out to them naming various destinations to where he generally gets most passengers for.

His daily routine consists of waking at 7 am in Night Shelter, getting his tea and 2 fans. After the tea, he waits for the chill of the morning to drop and then goes on his daily task at around 11 am. After his hard toiling around the day, he comes back at around 5 pm as soon as the winds start to flow and the winter becomes unbearable for his old and weak body to take. Drawing his rickshaw at the side of the night shelter and safely locking it, he secures his bed in the same position that he got after getting displaced from his previous position by some anti-social elements that frequent the Night Shelter many times with the intention of sometimes stealing something and other times just to spend the night after getting intoxicated by the Drugs. With his fumbling movements of his trembling hands he prepares his bed, placing his own blanket as cushion and the bag of his unwashed clothes at his side. Interacting little with his fellows, he sleeps at night around time when his thoughts cease to dwell on his past and present circumstances. Next day starts same as the previous and so are the days of his old age are passing.

Mr. Mehto's daily earnings are around 100-120 rupees, comparatively less than other Rickshaw-pullers. Because of his old age, people generally don't opt for him. From that scarce earning, he has to pay the daily rent of the 50 rupees of the Rickshaw to the Rickshaw-owner who is a former Acquaintance of Prabhu ji. He has to make most out of the rest of his money, utilizing it for his meal (that is mostly 1 or 2 times in a day), his tea and the Tobacco and *Beedi* that is arguably the most widespread ill habit in the underprivileged class in our country and essentially the cause of most of the terminate diseases like Cancer, Tuberculosis etc.

2. MY FIRST MEETING WITH Mr. MEHTO

Having reached the DUSIB Night Shelter allotted to me, No. 145 in Ganesh Nagar, I met with caretaker Mr. Avanish there who introduced me to the functioning and other vital information about the dwellers, facilities provided to them etc. during that period, I noticed Mr. Mehto lying in his bed urging every visitor to not step on the sleeping mats with shoes on, telling the new persons regarding the sleeping arrangement etc. and in general helping everyone whom he could.

On asking if he was a regular dweller in the Shelter, he replied in affirmative, saying he had been coming here since the winters started and hence started telling his present circumstances that lead him to seek shelter here. I noticed that he is a very reserved person with a thoughtful face with a stoic expression, talking in a polite way. Feeling intrigued by his story, I started talking more to him every day and he also gradually opened up to me. Trusting me, he told me the aspects of his life that he hadn't even told his friends in the Night Shelter. His story gave me a most wide framed aspect of the lives of all these Homeless persons spending their nights in these Night Shelters across the city.

Seeking his permission for writing a Case Study, I started talking with him for at least an hour every day, writing everything he told me. The facts in this Case Study are provided by him and written exactly as he told me with no infringement of any type.

3. THE BACKGROUND OF Mr. MEHTO

Born Prabhu Mehto, he was born in Gram Kuruvadha, Tabka, Bihar as the third son of Mr. Kacho Mehto. His childhood consists of 1 or 2 years of Schooling only as his parents couldn't afford even the minimal amount of 2 rupee as the exam fees and the additional cost of lamp oil for studying at night (since he was busy helping his family in farming during daylight). That led him to start taking cattle to graze and finally start working as laborer since the age 12.

He got married at the age of 18 and after 2-3 months came to get a earning in Karnal, Haryana. There he started working as a Truck Driver. After 3 years, he brought his wife with him to Haryana. In 1983, he came to Delhi where he worked as a Vegetable-seller for some time and later as a mason. Many times, the contractor would employ them for 2-3 months and then flee after the construction was completed without giving them their salary. So, Mr. Mehto started Rickshaw-pulling as an occupational occupation. He used to live in a 10 ft and some meters wide hole in one of the construction site with fellow laborers during the emergency period.

Due to the problems associated with working under an individual contractor, he started working under a construction company. On the project of this company, he went to Aligarh as a laborer and lived there with his wife for 3 years. He came back to Delhi after the project was completed in Aligarh and started working here on another construction project of the same company.

The company provided one Slum for 3-4 families of the laborers at the construction site, where he started living with his wife and children. The general belief of the Slums to be permanent prevailed among the residents and so they got their documents like Ration card, BPL Cards etc on the same address. Near the completion time of the under-construction building, they all came to know that this arrangement was only temporary and the contract between the government and the company was signed prior to the construction regarding the removal of Slums, once the construction was completed.

4. THE STRUGGLE PERIOD

As predicted, they were turned out of Slums forcefully by the police. Their belongings like clothes, utensils, mattresses etc were thrown out on the road one rainy day in winter and they were left without a roof over their head. All these families were turned on the road with their little children and half destroyed belongings. Mr. Mehto who had been given around 20 quintals of Wheat by some nobleman to use anyway he liked only few weeks ago, kept going places to places with that wheat on his rickshaw to sell that wheat before it got rotten in rainy season, accepting whatever meager amount anyone offered just so that he could support his family in such critical times.. The other families too had similar situations. For 3 months, all of the families slept on the road-side. Then they pitched tents and started living there. This sudden displacement enraged the hundreds of laborers as they always believed their dwellings to be permanent and felt incredibly betrayed by the turn of the events. This led to a major conflict between government and the laborers as a consequence that lasted for around 18 years.

During that period, he started earning as a Rickshaw-Puller. He purchased the Rickshaw in Meerath in 800 rupees and brought it to Delhi. Feeling crushed by the responsibilities of his wife, 5 children and old parents, he started driving Rickshaw Day and Night so that he could feed them well and pay the loan on Rickshaw as soon as possible.

After some time, they came again to the area where there Slums were and once again started living there in Slums. Amongst themselves, they appointed a leader that could represent them against the government and collectively paid him too. Unfortunately, they were betrayed by the appointed leader himself who got a larger sum of money from the political leaders, DDA officials and Policemen from the opposing side and thus, reverted back on his words in the court. Turning against the laborers, he used to extort money from them and on refusal, get them arrested in false

accusations so that they could become weaker by number to raise voice against anything. During this period, his daughter got married. But he was so caught up in this affair that he sent money for the marriage but couldn't attend the marriage himself.

During this crucial period when they all were feeling the helpless, an NGO of South Indian people helped them. They raised this issue and presented this case in front concerned authorities and officials. The poor survival conditions of all of them were recorded in form of photos, reports, videos etc and represented by this NGO to inform the general public. Feeling gratitude for this NGO, Mr. Mehto says, "All of us were feeling utterly helpless at that time, cursing ourselves for being uneducated and blaming our inabilities for all that happened to us. If it weren't for these good people, we would've been long forgotten with no compensation at all."

5. THE END OF STRIFE

The involvement of the Public at large was the final push to the government and after a long period of struggle, the government finally accepted the proposal to compensate 96 families out of 400 families that were affected by this whole scenario. They were proposed to accept DDA flats of worth 1 Lakh, 20 Thousand rupees at that time. The area where the flats were proposed, was completely inhabitable, surrounded by forests on all sides. Also, the monthly installments were too large for any of them to afford. So, they refused to accept those flats and demanded for affordable plots instead.

At last, the DDA consented to give them plots on an initial payment of a fixed amount with no installments later. The areas proposed were all in remote corners of the city with hardly any population. But due to low cost and no installment policy, they agreed on the proposal with mutual agreement. As Proposed, plots of twelve and a half yards were given to those who made a payment of rupees 5 thousand and plots of eighteen and a half yards were given to those who paid 9 thousand rupees. Though till this date only 46 families have been allotted plots out of those 96 families whose applications were passed. 30 families are still waiting till date for the allotment of plots.

Mr. Prabhu Mehto, made a payment of 9 Thousand rupees with the amount left after the marriage of all three daughters from the savings done over all these years in which they demanded a permanent residential place. He was given the Plot in year 2002. The plot allotted to him is in Narela, on Bawana Road. It is a scarcely habituated under-developed area with very high crime rate. Snatching and Loot are very common. Murders are done in broad daylight for loot purposes. Even the police is incapable of controlling any of these crimes.

He made a house of one storey on the allotted land and started living there with his elder son. Since the area was inhabitable and there were no sources of employment, he continued pulling Rickshaw on the same route of Mother Dairy to Mayur Vihar where he had done the same job for last so many years of his life. Soon, he started noticing difference in the behavior of his son. His son often quarreled with him on trivial matters. Mr. Mehto believes that his bad company was the reason that influenced him. The quarrels worsened and Mr. Mehto started going to his home less and less, disturbed by the ill behavior of his son.

On one such day, while Mr. Mehto was sitting with his property and other important documents, his son came and forcefully took possession of all those documents. The Ration Card was given by him to a family that Mr. Mehto believes to be the bad influence on his son. The property papers were given by his son to some else crook. Mr. Mehto was severely disrespected and banned from coming home by his son. Feeling hurt and ashamed by his continual disrespect repeatedly, Mr. Mehto ceased going home. Mr. Mehto on knowing about the whereabouts of his documents requested the said person to return his property papers but was asked to submit a sum of 50 thousand rupees in turn. At last, after much negotiation he finally gave that money after taking loans from here and there and got hold of his property papers. When his son came to know this, he turned him out of the house even though the house belonged to Mr. Mehto.

Since then, Mr. Mehto has been spending his day in Rickshaw and sleeping in the patparganj area at night. At first, he used to sleep in the premises in the premises of an under-construction building in west Vinod Nagar. After few months, one day the watchman refused to let him sleep there any longer. Finding no other option, he started to sleep in the open Balco Market area. Sometimes, he used to use the Washroom provided to the watchman of a nearby apartment building for freshening up and washing his clothes etc, after paying 50 rupees to the watchman. However, this was also short-term solution as he was threatened to not there anymore by the shopkeepers of that market. Once again, he started sleeping on the roads.

One day while talking to the Tea-stall owner about his problems, he asked for a place where he could spend the approaching winter. He was sure of the fact that his body was no longer in the condition to tolerate that much cold and he would surely die if he couldn't arrange a proper place to sleep. The Tea-stall owner after much coercing and payment of 20 rupees informed him about the night shelter.

The next evening he was led to the Shelter by the Tea-stall owner. He says, "I was very much expecting some kind of charges to sleep there. When I came to know that it was a free facility, I was happy, very happy, because probably I couldn't have afforded the charges even if they would've been as low as possible."

His overall experience here has been alright. He accepts that there are problems but all of them seem very small when compared to the gigantic one – "Sleeping on roads in Winter Nights". He talks very less and gives his opinion only when asked. His friends here are the Cleaner here, Mr. Ramlakhan; another boarder, Mr. Vidya Swaroop and a small kid of 12 years old, who works as an apprentice in a Mechanic shop. He has no mobile phone as his last one was broken around one and a half years ago so he uses the phone of that kid sometimes. When once in a while he has money enough to get a recharge on his mobile number, he talks to his wife at village who works as a farmer in the farms of his family that are currently undertaken by his older brother. His wife lives with the family of his older brother.

On asking about his younger son, he says, "I have no expectations from him." During his adolescence, he fell in bad company. To stand up against those anti-social elements that were corrupting his son, Mr. Mehto got in a fight which landed him in jail for a short span. But despite his efforts, his younger son was caught up in such anti-social activities. Last he heard from him, he was working as a waiter in a Banquet Hall. But Mr. Mehto firmly believes that he must be one of the members of the pick-pocketing gang near Hasanpur Depot as he has himself seen his son among them.

It is not that he didn't save anything during his entire life. He did and a considerable amount of sum, often working empty-stomached so that he could support himself during his old days. But most of that money was spent in the marriages of his three Daughters and going from office to office regarding the plot allotment. From the remaining sum, he had to pay nine thousand for getting plot and Fifty thousand rupees, he had to give to retrieve his Documents. But even after these expenses, he had expertly saved some thirty thousand rupees. That amount he had given to an old acquaintance whom he calls *Gujjar* around one year ago without telling his son (fearing he might claim over that money also). Now the said person promises to return the money but still hasn't returned even a penny. They hadn't met for nearly 5 months and no communication had taken place.

6. REMINISCENCES OF SWEET OLD LIFE :-

While talking about his life in his native land, a ghost of a smile plays on his lips. As he rarely smiles, it is not hard to deduce that he cherishes that time of his life, no matter how short. He delves in the sweet memories of his childhood telling about the time he used to spend with his family. "We used to work together, all family members. My father used to cut the woods, my brother used to collect them and bring to me and then I would go to sell them or earning the livelihood for the family." Though, most of the times, they used to work empty-stomached but they

all used to eat together at the night with meal prepared from the grains and vegetables grown in the farms owned by the family. The sisters and mother of Mr. Mehto used to work in the farms.

However, to make the ends meet, each person had to work wherever and however they could. Mr. Mehto also worked as a shepherd, farmer, laborer etc in his childhood. The major drawback this caused in his life was the void of education from his life. "I went to school for one or two years. But then I couldn't go to school many days when I had to go to work. So, the teacher used to beat me. When the time for exams came, we couldn't give the exam fees of 2 or 3 rupees. I couldn't give exam so at last, I left school." Thus, the constrain of working for feeding the family, the fear for corporal punishment and the inability to provide the school fees deprived him from attaining education, which proved to be the biggest loss of his life which he felt at every vulnerable point in his life, even now.

On asking about the festivals celebration in Bihar, his entire demeanor changes pleasantly. The joy in his eyes shows the happiness felt by him on those rare occasions where he was able to spend the holidays with his family and relatives. "We have festivals in every other month where we meet and celebrate together. *Chath Pooja* is our biggest Festival. When we ask for a wish from Chath Maiyya and it is fulfilled, we have to follow the Chath ritual for the rest of our lives. It is difficult but every wish asked from Chath Maiyya is granted, so it's all good. We make dishes from wheat, sugar etc, many kilograms of which are delivered to married sisters, daughters etc. Relatives come to our home, we go to theirs."

He clearly states that the warmth of relations and good and simple nature of people is what he misses most in Delhi. "People lack the humanism and it is difficult to find a person with a good nature and nice attitude towards people like us. Most of the people call us bad names and talk disrespectfully irrespective of age or gender. *Hamse aadhi umar ka bachcha bhi dutkar ke chala jata hai, kya kar sakte hain ?Hamein to aadat ho gayi hai ab.Kuch aap jese ache log bhi hote hain jo tameez se baat karte hain* (People half of my age talk disrespectfully to me, what can I do? I've developed a habit of bearing it now. I also find some people like you who talk with respect.)"

7. CHALLENGES OF LIVING WITHOUT HOME OR SHELTER

On asking about the challenges that he faced on living without shelter, he gives a sad smile and says, "Yes, of course there are problems but now after this much time, I'm habitual to them." Further elaborating, he tells that these are the problems that he has faced during the past 1 year in which he slept on road-

1. **WHERE TO SLEEP** :- There is a constant question every day for him, "Where to sleep tonight?". As the evening approaches, it becomes a big worry for him to find a suitable place where he can sleep. He has to find a place **clean enough** for his bedding, **discrete enough** where he is not disturbed by any commuting passengers and **safe enough** where he is not mugged and attacked by any anti-social elements.
2. **STEALING OF RICKSHAW** :- Mr. Mehto is not the owner of the Rickshaw he pulls. He pays the rent of 50 rupees per day to the Rickshaw-owner. The prevention of the theft of Rickshaw is his responsibility. He has to find a place where he can safely lock his rickshaw without the fear of it getting stolen or getting towed. Even though, the Rickshaw-owner is an old acquaintance of his, he has to pay the cost of Rickshaw is damaged in any way or worse, stolen.
3. **PEOPLE DON'T LET SLEEP** :- Mr. Mehto says that this is the most common problem of any Homeless person who sleeps at roadside at night. "People don't want *their area* to be clustered by *such* people." Often at night, any watchman or any resident of that locality or apartment near which he is sleeping, wakes him up and threatens him to leave immediately.
4. **LABELLED AS DRUNKARD AND/OR THIEF** :- He says that half of the times when people wake him up, they call him names like Drunkard, Druggie, Thief etc, accusing him of different crimes. Very few

people have the decency to assess the situation first. Those situations are not only troublesome but humiliating too.

5. **NO WATER FACILITY** :- The very few places where drinking water facility is available in the city is for free are highly unhygienic. Cough spits, Tobacco spits are very common. But due to his inability to purchase cleaning water, he has to drink water from such places. Also, to wash his clothes, he has to go to the public toilets, that too, when the cleaner is willing to allow him to wash his clothes in the toilet and demands a fees that he can pay like 5 or 10 rupees. It is highly unhygienic and he knows it too but he is helpless as there is no other way.
6. **RELENTLESS WINTERS** :- This is the most important reason why Night Shelters were required in the first place. The Temperature in Delhi at night can go as low as 1 degree Celsius or below. It is next to impossible for any person to survive such harsh nights under the open sky, let alone an old people with poor health. The approach of winters was what made Mr. Mehto desperate to ask each and every homeless person he knew about their sleeping places. He says, "I had survived last winters just barely. But this winter I knew that if I couldn't find a place to survive it would become very tough for me to survive.

These are only some of the problems that Mr. Mehto faced. In different areas, different problems arise for homeless person making it difficult for them to find a suitable place to sleep.

8. HEIGHTS OF VULNERABILITY

On asking him the points where he felt weakest in his life, his prompt reply is, "A person feels weakest when there is no support to him. There have been only two such situations with me till now." He mentions these two circumstances that made him most vulnerable.

1. When his shelter was destroyed in front of his eyes. He says, "It was one of the painful moments of my life. Our home was demolished in front of us by bulldozers. All of our belongings were thrown carelessly on the road, without hearing any of our pleas. All those things that were hard earned by us by working day and night were suddenly ripped off from us. Within a day, we were left without any roof, any possession and any place to go. There was no one to listen to us- no authorities, no government, no politicians, no officers, no one. All we had left were the broken pieces of utensils, furniture etc that we could collect and some ration. We were supporting each other but we were victims after all. There were no one from outside who supported us." Although after some months of their forceful removal, an NGO helped all of them by presenting their case in front of concerned authorities.

He says it was hard to sleep on the roads after living under a roof, on a bed for so many years. It was even more difficult for him, as being the head of the family, his priority was the safety and comfort of his family- his wife and children. "At that time all that I had on my mind was that we have to survive these winters anyhow, I can't let my children die." With his fighting spirit and the will to survive, he ensured the well-being of his family. All those families facing the similar situation came together and with the collective support of each other got the upper hands after struggling for the major part of their lives.

2. The second time in his life when he is feeling most vulnerable is right now when he is shelter less. Many factors make this as the weakest point of his life. The main reasons being-

- This time he is alone. This time he alone has to face this difficult situation. It is not a problem where hundreds of families were together to raise voices against the injustice. Not even his family is with him. He is deserted by his own children and his wife is in a similar pitiful situation.

- His fight is not with any of the authorities but his son. Previously he was standing up against the outside world but now it is impossible for him to drag his own flesh and blood to court to get his rights and his control over his own property.
- Even if he wanted to seek any legal advice regarding unauthorized possession on his plot by his son, he doesn't have the resources and most importantly, he's uneducated. Even his hard-earned money is with the person he calls *Gujjar* who will most probably not return his money now.
- The most vital point to consider is his age. At 58, he is as it is an old man. Also, his body is very frail and weak. Almost every other day, he is suffering from fever. Sometimes, he keeps shivering even if it's warm outside. The doctors have cautioned that his two ulcerous boils with abscess may be the result of Tuberculosis in his body.

9. ASPIRATIONS

It is hard to imagine at the first glance at any of these homeless people that they too have any aspirations or any dreams left. But, that's where we generally misunderstand or simply stating- underestimate them. Even at the dawning age of 58 years, Mr. Mehto cherishes his aspirations and never lets them die by thinking about them everyday whenever he can. These are some of his aspirations that he shared with me.

1. As a man Mr. Mehto has spent his entire life working hard to get stability and a shelter in life so naturally his aspirations revolve around the same dream that he has lived his entire life. His strife has always been for a stable home and that's what he wants to get now.

Mr. Mehto's paternal property was to be distributed in three equal parts amongst him and his 2 brothers as per the general trend of property distribution in India (because sadly, daughters are completely neglected during the distribution of shares). However, Mr. Mehto himself has been working in Delhi for the entirety of his life and has only been once to his village for a proper stay of 10 months in past 30 years. The brother older than him died in an accident many years ago. So, currently the eldest brother has the hold over the entire property left by their father after his death.

Mr. Mehto tells that his eldest brother has eccentric behavior and therefore, it is difficult to say if he will willingly give Mr. Mehto his fair share or any share at all in the property. Still, he estimates that probably he will get one third of the share of the property. Also, the plot of 18.5 square yards is under his name. With much confidence he tells about his future plans, "Currently the house there is just one storey with temporary walls and roofs but after some time I will sell my share of property in village and then build a proper house on my plot with actual roof and permanent walls."

However, his plans don't seem to have any fix time and sometimes just appear as a fiction of his imagination. When I gently reminded him that there was not much time left in his life to keep planning and he should start working towards fulfilling his dream, he says, "Soon...Soon...Perhaps this summer or next summer but soon" and then he gets lost in his own world, perhaps re-planning and changing his plans.

2. One of the regrets that he has in his life apart from trusting the wrong people; is that he couldn't give enough time to his family. During talking with me, almost every other day he mentioned with moistened eyes that he couldn't go to the marriage of his second daughter in Bihar due to the unsolved issue of the plot allotment in Delhi. Similarly, he regretfully mentions that his sons went onto the wrong paths due to lack of parental guidance. Elder son disowned him and has banned him from coming to his own house and lives his life under the influence of other people while the younger son has fallen in the bad company of thieves, druggies and pickpockets. It is clear that he finds himself responsible for the destructive paths they have chosen.

Similarly, he remembers his wife often feeling bad for her time and again. “She lives with the family of my brother without any of us by her side (Mr. Mehto and his children). There she works in the farms despite her old age. She is also not well but there’s no one to take care of her.” It is a prime example of how the necessity of earning has left Mr. Mehto’s family bereft.

However, he still aspires to mend his broken relationship with his family. “My sons are young and young people act stupid. But, they will become sensible as time passes. They are not bad, just foolish.” Such are his hopes that I sincerely wish to be true. But perhaps, Mr. Mehto himself feels that perhaps his wish may be too good to be true because in his next line he adds, “Even if they don’t understand their duties, I will not be a burden on them. After I get my home made, I will bring my life from village and we will live together here. I will rent the rooms in my house for our living.”

It is hard to explain what are the cost that he estimates for building his house and whether he will be able to finance the making of his dream house or not but his enthusiasm makes it impossible to not believe in him.

10. ACCEPTANCE BY VARIOUS SOCIETIES

1. **THE HELP BY POLICE** :- Mr. Mehto says that apart from the time of the demolition of the slums, the no policeman has ever troubled him for anything. He says, “People say that Policemen take the weekly sum of money from them or else keep nagging them for no specific reason. But no such incident has ever happened with me. Policemen respect my age and I respect their duty and try to not interfere them or trouble them voluntarily or involuntarily”.
2. **THE INVALUABLE SUPPORT FROM NGO** :- Every time he tells about those demolition days, he doesn’t forget to mention the help and support of those kind people from the NGO that helped them to raise their collectively in front of all the concerned officials and formed their case and presented it from their side in the court. Remembering those days, he says, “They used to be with us from morning till night., talking with us, seeking information about our case, clicking pictures of our disarranged living system caused by the demolition. They collected donations and helped us purchase food and other necessities. May god keep those people happy always. We all are forever grateful for them.”
3. **BEHAVIOUR OF GENERAL PUBLIC** :- Mr. Mehto feels that the outlook of people has changed to a certain extent. When he pulls Rickshaw, most people talk politely with him except some rude people, sometimes youngsters who don’t even care about the age gap. However, the story is different at night if he is sleeping on road. In that case, people accuse him of various charges as stated above.
4. **DUSIB** :- The Night Shelter is a big relief for Mr. Mehto. He says, “It is one of the best facilities provided by government for people like me. I can sleep in warm bed in a warm room, under a roof without any chilly winds, that too, free of charge, what else would I need ? Even though sometimes some problems arise but it is ten times better to sleep here than outside in such freezing winter nights.”
5. **VOLUNTEERS** :- Mr. Mehto told me that sometimes some people voluntarily come and donate winter clothes for the homeless people living in night Shelters. Sometimes some kind-hearted people come and provide them with food or tea once in a while. It makes them feel good to know that people care about them.

11. CURRENT SITUATION

- These are not the only problems of Mr. Mehto. His health is deteriorating fast. During talking to me, he showed me his two tumors on his collarbone that were formed near one week ago before the Volunteering camp began i.e. around 8 January on roughly estimating. He firmly believed them to be only formed by a change of season. I advised him to go to doctor but he refused, firstly saying it was a trivial problem and later on admitting that he didn't want to lose his one day of earnings. After much explanations of the potential danger, he agreed to go to Doctor. The next day he went to Dr. Hedgewar. There the doctor gave him painkillers and medicines to settle the tonsils down.
- As this report was being written, I visited the night shelter again on 4 February, 2015. The caretaker Mr. Dinesh told me that he had taken him to the hospital that day and the doctors had suspected of Tuberculosis in Mr. Mehto's body. However, Mr. Mehto is still not taking it seriously and not willing for diagnosis.
- When I tried to persuade him to get admitted to hospital, he gave one very delusional reason, "I have never taken even an injection in my entire life, no matter how ill I must have fallen. It's nothing new this time." Now, one of his boils has settled down but the other one has exploded.
- He has applied his cotton handkerchief on it to prevent the leaking water and puss from coming out and believes himself to be healthy. Not ready to admit that it can be dangerous for his health, he is now happy believing that his problem is solved.
- On the regular persuasion of fellow boarders and the caretakers to get T.B test done and get admitted to hospital in case of the confirmation of his, Mr. Mehto grew restless. He finally moved out of the night shelter on 8 February, 2015. On the same day, while going somewhere, I met him on the way, sitting on his rickshaw. Our faces broke into a smile on meeting each other.
- He at once told me that I would no longer find him there when I go to meet him. "I have left the shelter. They were all pegging me. I think they all have the misconception that I have T.B. but I don't want to trouble them. It would hurt me if they all start discriminating me. So, if before that turn me out, I left it this morning and got my luggage too", he says while pointing to his luggage of unwashed clothes kept at the bottom of the passenger seat in rickshaw. His one proud possession, his blanket was tied on the rickshaw with the help of plastic strings.

12. SUGGESTION FOR MAXIMIZING REACH OUT OF SHELTER

1. **MAPS IN EVERY MAJOR HUB FOR HOMELESS PERSON** :- These hubs include major Railway Stations (like New Delhi Railway Station, Old Delhi Railway Station, Hazrat Nizamuddin Railway station in Delhi), Inter state bus terminals like ISBT Sarai Kale Khan, ISBT Kashmiri Gate and ISBT Anand Vihar. In each of these stations and terminals an elaborate map showing the locations of all the night shelters across Delhi must be shown along with the directions to reach there and the concerned contact person. It is a well known fact that thousands of new people come to Delhi everyday in search of employment without any relatives living in Delhi where they can take shelter. In such case, the DUSIB Night Shelters may be come their temporary shelter where they can stay until they find a suitable place to stay.
2. **VERY BIG AND VISIBLE INFORMATORY BOARDS** :- The Boards depicting the location of a Night Shelter and the directions to reach there should be big and visible to all those who are in dire need of a shelter. They should be in Hindi preferably as almost all most these people can't read or communicate in English. Also, a picture of shelter would be very helpful to those who are illiterate so that they can get an idea of the place. These boards should be situated around a periphery of 2 Kilometers near the Night

Shelter so that everyone can know about them, even educated people so that they can bring homeless people to the Night Shelter. The DUSIB officials should contact with the concerned people like Traffic police officers and MCD officers so that they don't get these boards removed as this is a quite common problem that the caretakers face.

3. **LIGHTNING OF INFORMATORY BOARD AT NIGHT** :- The informatory board should be lighted with LED bulbs at night so that they are visible throughout the night, irrespective of the efficiency of street Lightning System. Mostly these boards are not visible as soon as dawn arrives and this problem makes it impossible for Homeless people who are new in that particular area to get informed about the presence of Night shelter/
4. **ADVERTISEMENTS IN FM** :- Instead of relying upon the informatory boards and the Caretakers to inform and bring Homeless people inside the night shelter, Advertisements should be made on FM. The Homeless people don't have the access to Television but generally most of them listen to Radio. So, DUSIB advertisements can help many of those who are still clueless about Night shelters and sleep on the road.
5. **BETTER COORDINATION WITH POLICE** :- While talking to the Caretaker, I came to know that many times the Policemen bring the Homeless People from Laxmi Nagar to this Night shelter at Ganesh Nagar, even though there are already two DUSIB Night Shelters in Delhi. Many times it creates accommodation problem in winters when the numbers of Homeless people sleeping inside the Night Shelter is already high. So, to solve this problem, better coordination with Police is required. The Policemen at patrolling duty at night should be well informed about the Night Shelter locations in the area so that they bring the Homeless person to the nearest Night Shelter saving trouble for them as well as the caretakers of the Night Shelter. Caretakers may be assigned this task to inform the local policemen about the Night Shelter location and the area that the shelter usually admits Homeless People from.
6. **IMPROVEMENTS IN NIGHT SHELTER** :- One of the major problems that is faced by the caretakers is that some people refuse to sleep at night in the Night Shelter after some days because of some troubles faced by them. These Problems are-
 - A. **FEAR OF DISEASE** :- Many of the dwellers at night shelter are facing some or other illness. Every second person is coughing and despite the efforts of the caretaker, they spit the cough here and there on the sleeping mat discreetly. No matter how many times they are told, some people never cover their mouths while coughing. No doubt, this may cause the infections and germs to spread to the healthy people. It will be very helpful, if weekly sessions on the contamination caused by such habits and the need of hygiene are arranged in these shelters by DUSIB. It will inform them about how they are spreading the diseases unknowingly.
 - B. **THE UNHYGIENIC CONDITIONS** :- In the Ganesh Nagar Shelter, the area is swept twice in a day by the sweeper Mr.Ramlakhan ji. The caretakers don't allow shoes on the sleeping mats. Despite these efforts, the unhygienic habits of the dwellers there go uncorrected. Cleaning their cough on the mats, refuse to bath for months, keeping the uneaten food by their side for many days are just of some of the habits that clearly show the unhygienic environment of the Night Shelter. The Caretaker should take corrective actions on such people.
 - C. **THE FREQUENT VISIT OF DRUGGIES** :- There are many pickpockets in the area that spend their day in such activities throughout the day and at night they come to sleep at Night Shelter after getting their high dosages of Drugs. All of them are well off and belong to the families living in the area but they don't sleep at home due to their drugs addiction. These people should not be allowed inside the Night Shelter as they threaten and fight with other dwellers in the Night Shelter. If possible, they should be admitted to rehabilitation centers. Also, for the people at their initial stages of Drugs addiction and others who Smoke or chew tobacco etc, weekly sessions informing them about the dangers of Drugs and Tobacco should be arranged that primarily emphasize on the methods by which they can get rid of their addiction.

- D. **THE MONOPOLY OF SOME COMMON DWELLERS** :- Most of the people with whom I talked, accepted that they were threatened by one or two frequent dwellers that spend their every night at the night shelter. Many people are forced to change their beds from their position, asked to leave the night shelter, asked to remove their mobile phones from charging socket by these frequent dwellers. These all happens when the caretaker is absent for some time or ill. In my opinion, such frequent dwellers who start to create nuisance for others, must be stopped from sleeping in the Night Shelter until they change their behavior with other home less people.

ABOUT ME :-

I am Anjali Bhatt. I am 19 years old. I live in Patparganj, East Delhi. I have completed my schooling from Rajkiya Sarvodaya Kanya Vidyalaya, West Vinod Nagar and Rajkiya Pratibha Vikas Vidyalaya, Gandhi Nagar. Currently, I am a third year student of Aeronautical Engineering in Manav Rachna International University, Faridabad.

Social work is what that has always interested me. I believe that India is in dire need of Social reformation. For that change, the primary responsibility lies with us – the youth of India. Discussing the problem won't help. We have to start working towards eradicating the social problems that have plagiarized the country and hampered its growth.

Hearing won't do, we have to listen.

Talking won't do, we have to act.

In past, I have tried to help the society in whatever way I could. During my school days, I have done many plays creating awareness about the burning stigmas of our society such as Poverty, Illiteracy, and Gender bias etc. For past two years, I have been voluntarily teaching underprivileged children who can't go to school in weekly classes. Apart from that I have taken part in many events and campaigns that raise the issues that need to be addressed by us as soon as possible. But debates and speeches don't change anything except widening our mindsets and making us more open-minded.

So, this volunteering event highly interested me as it provided me with the first opportunity to get involved with these people who need our support. It gave me an opportunity to help them, and to understand them, their problems, their opinions, their thoughts and most importantly how they felt to be left out. What I learnt was invaluable and showed me the other side of these people that we don't take the time to see.

They are also humans with feelings and emotions. They also feel good and bad. They can also have a kind heart that even the most polished of people lack. After all, they are a part of us.

I cordially thank DUSIB for providing me with opportunity. This experience has been one of the best learning phase of my life where I learnt the Lessons of Life with these homeless people as my teachers.