

A Case Study

of

# Bhalaswa Lok Shakti Manch



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**Bhalaswa Lok Shakti Manch**

2009

**Hazards Centre**

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Edited by: Anand Kumar

Cover page & Layout Vartika Srivastava

Printed by: Print Craft, 9891094240

Suggested Contribution: Rs.

## Foreword

On the western bank of the river Yamuna in Delhi there used to be a small settlement called Gautampuri from where men and women sallied forth every day to serve the needs of the wealthy around them – the commercial areas of Daryaganj, Bahadurshah Zafar Marg, Connaught Place, the host of institutional areas lying between the Delhi High Court and LNJP Hospital and the high-class residential areas of Sundar Nagar, Kaka Nagar and Bapa Nagar. They worked as drivers, maids, loaders and vendors, clerks, peons, waste-pickers and rickshaw pullers – formed the very muscle and blood of the vast army of informal sector workers who keep the skeleton of the city alive.

In this sea of humanity the needs of many children went un-noticed and un-served until the voluntary agency Ankur began a small informal school to experiment with innovative methods of education. So curiously dynamic was this enterprise that the volunteers of Ankur rapidly realised that the needs of the children could not be separated from those of their parents – water and electricity, dispensaries and sanitation, wages and food. So slowly they began to sit with the men and women and a small group emerged that began reflecting and acting on these issues too. Thus, Ankur started the People's Education programme.

We first came into contact with this group when, in the spring of 1998, we were invited to explain the intricacies of how electricity bills were computed. Within half-an-hour 20 semi-literate women from Gautampuri had picked up the concepts of watts and units, ratings and bills. Within the next half an hour they went back to their own homes to make their own calculations; and, by the time a week was over, they had explained the process to 200 other women, arrived at an estimate of the total electricity consumption of Gautampuri, and led a mass delegation to the local office of the Delhi Vidyut Board to engage in the first informed discussion that eventually culminated in the modification of electricity bills for the whole community.

Many other similar attempts followed in the next few years, but in 2002 Gautampuri was forcibly demolished as part of the administration's drive to "clean up" the city and convert the "riverfront" into a "world class" enclave. In spite of a long struggle, led by the children and women, the whole settlement was uprooted and "resettled" 25 kilometres away in Bhalaswa.

In the process, Ankur also withdrew its support, and the women felt helpless and abandoned. But the embers of resistance persisted as they now strove to rebuild their lives in what was supposed to be a “model” rehabilitation programme but was, in reality, a wasteland worse than the “slum” they had earlier inhabited.

This is the inspiring story of this band of women, and their struggle to build a more just and humane society.

We are happy to have been a small part of this story and to present it here as told by the members of the Bhalaswa Lok Shakti Manch themselves.

### **Hazards Centre**

## **A Case Study on Bhalaswa Lok Shakti Manch**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Bhalaswa is a resettlement colony on the out skirts of North-West Delhi. In November 2002 people from eleven JJ clusters were evicted on the pretext of beautification of the city and sent here for settling. These clusters were: Yamuna Pushta, Garhi, Teen Murti, Jahangirpuri, Rohini (two camps), Preet Vihar, Ashok vihar, Seelampur, Dakshinpuri and Nizamuddin. As usual the authorities had backed out from the promises made to these people about providing facilities in the new place and help them in proper resettlement. People were grappling with several problems on the one hand and the government's apathy on the other. At this juncture an organization named Ankur began awareness programme amongst these people. Gradually people realized the need for forming an organization and formed the Bhalaswa Lok Shakti Manch. Under the banner of this organization people started their campaign against the apathy of the authorities. The Manch comprises of all - men, women, youths and children. But women play leading role in the activities of the Manch. The activists who associated themselves with the Manch were mainly from the Ankur Alternate Educational Institute where they had worked for many years. They were trained and exposed to the methods of fighting for the rights of the people. It included:

- Reaching people through meetings and corner meetings
- Meeting government officials.
- Gathering information
- Using RTI
- Training people within the Manch and outside.

At organizational level keeping in view the problems of the colony three different committees were formed to take up separate issues. From these committees an action group of 15 women was constituted which was given special training to take up the matters with the government officials. Later this group went to other areas also to help people fight for their rights.

### **INITIAL PROBLEMS TAKEN UP**

The problems of the people began from day one. They have been sent about 30-40 Kms. away from their original places. Initially they had to grapple with the following problems:

#### **a. Possession of the plots**

Getting possession of the promised plots was not an easy task. The Manch

had to continuously struggle for this. Several visits were made to the MCD office at ITO to shake the government officials out of their slumber. Many demonstrations, dharnas (sit-ins), and vocal protests were made before getting possessions of the plots.

**b. Change in Layout Plan.**

The Manch demanded one court yard for each block of four houses. For this they had to fight for months together bearing the vagaries of nature by living in the open. Finally they succeeded in putting enough pressure and force the government to change the layout plan. It was a big success story because it became precedence for other areas also.

**c. Protest against the MCD's Survey.**

MCD was carrying out a survey to find out about entry of any new person in the colony. Under the garb of this survey they were sealing many houses in the area. It was vehemently opposed by the Manch. MCD people were forced out of the colony and finally the survey was stopped.

## CONTINUOUS STRUGGLE FOR PROBLEMS OF THE COLONY

After being successful in resolving the basic resettlement issues a continuous struggle for the basic facilities/services ensued. For electricity, water, ration, roads, cleanliness, schools etc. the people had to run from office to office and pressurize callous officials to attend to the problems of the people.

The Manch extended its support and shared the experiences with other resettlement colonies of Delhi like Holambi Kalan, Bawana, Madanpur Khadar, Nangla Machhi, Kanak Durga Basti, Vinod Nagar, Wazirpur etc. It also sent its representatives to Lucknow to educate people about settlement rights of the people.

### Reviving the Manch

Unfortunately Ankur encountered some problems within the group in 2006 which had a bearing on the functioning of the Manch. Later in 2007 the programme in Bhalaswa was completely stopped. But the some of the activists kept the activities of the Manch alive. In spite of the paucity of funds the struggle continued. After braving various ups and downs the Manch revived itself fully and began its full fledged activities from September 2008. It rededicated itself to the cause of the people with the following new resolves:

- We will deliberate on the problems of the colony ourselves and will decide

on issues to work on.

- Will make rules for ourselves about attendance and punctuality and will strictly follow proper accounting rules.
- Will associate with weakest in the colony and work for them.
- Will try to associate more and more people with the Manch to fight for the rights of proper shelter.
- Direct contact with the people will be our motive.
- Will restrict activities to Bhalaswa only due to paucity of resources.

People of the colony were very disappointed with attitude of the organization which left them high and dry. But the activists of the Manch tried to regain their trust by arguing that they are the local residents and if anyone finds anything wrong one can easily catch hold of them in their houses. This reassured people. They began cooperating with the Manch. They started discussing their problems. The following problems were identified:

**a. Ration and Kerosene oil**

- Not getting full quantity of allotted ration
- Do not know how much quantity is mentioned in the cards
- Being charged arbitrary rates for the ration and kerosene oil.
- Difficulty in getting ration cards.
- Discrimination and ill-treatment by the shopkeepers.
- No regular timings for opening of the ration shops.

**b. Water**

- Have to fetch water from far away places.
- Health problems due to use of hand pump water.
- Cropping up of tensions and fights amongst people on arrival of water tanker.

**c. Cleanliness**

- No one comes to clean the colony
- Breeding of flies and mosquitoes spreads diseases like malaria etc.
- Safai Karamcharis demand money for cleaning.

**d. Electricity**

- Erratic supply of electricity.
- Inflated electricity bills.
- No street lights.



## HOW THE MANCH TACKLED VARIOUS PROBLEMS

### a. Ration and kerosene oil

People of the colony were highly upset with the rationing system. They recounted their woes endlessly before the activists of the Manch. Main problems were as listed above. In addition to that they told them that they have to leave their work to go to get the ration because of erratic timings of the opening of the shop. They have to make several trips to the shop. The shop keepers get their thumb impression unscrupulously and refuse to disburse the required items.

#### STEP 1: Visiting the rationing office of the area to gather information and to ascertain correct position

To tackle the issue first of all two members of the Manch visited the rationing office of the area to gather the information and ascertain correct position. They were able to collect the following information:

- On APL/BPL/AAY cards total 35 Kg. food grains are disbursed – 25 Kg wheat and 10 Kg rice. 6 Kg of Sugar is disbursed except on APL cards.
- On all the three types of cards ration is given at different rates.
- 15 ltrs. of kerosene oil is given on the APL and 22 ltrs. on BPL/AAY cards.
- Timings for opening of the shop are – 10.00 a.m. to 12.00 noon and 2.00 p.m. to 4.00 p.m. in the afternoon.
- Shop keepers are required to keep the shops open daily till all the people take away their ration.
- About new cards the Food Supply Officer (FSO) told them that all the cards will be ready by the month of November.

#### STEP 2: Sharing the information gathered with the people

After collecting the information the Manch went to the people. Arranged several meetings. People attended in large numbers. In one of the meetings at the Manch office 70 people came to attend. The information gathered by the Manch was shared with the people. People were amazed as they were not aware of many things. Their reactions are as given below:

- We were not aware that we were entitled to get so much of ration on our cards!
- Its surprising that we could get ration on so much less money. The shop keeper has been fooling us and we were so ignorant!
- We must raise our voice against this.
- No one has ever given us such information.
- We will not spare those who are exploiting us.

- We need support of the Manch to fight.
- The shop keeper has been swindling us by giving only 3-4 ltrs of kerosene. We will no leave him.

#### STEP 3: Visiting the ration shops in and around the area and having a dialogue with them

In the meetings it was also decided that some activists of the Manch along with the people of the colony will visit ration shops in and around the area. Some shops are located in the colony others are at different places like Jahangirpuri, Gujjar Chowk, and Shradhanand colony which are around 2 to 4 kilometers away. Inside the colony there was only one shop about which no complaint was received. Detailed discussions were held with others who assured that no complaints will be received in future.

Jahangirpuri has maximum number of shops. Visit was made to 15 shops. There were 4 activists from the Manch and 20 people from the colony in the team. In the beginning shop keepers panicked at the sight of so many people then they tried to contact other shop keepers and forge a front. Some of them were still adamant and were not prepared to relent. They argued by saying that we have our own problems with the rationing office, no one comes to our aid in fighting with them. We will continue the way we are. They asserted that they get very little commission @ of 35 paise. Therefore they are unable to disburse full quantity of ration. You may do whatever you like. At this people of the Manch introduced themselves and lambasted them. They were told emphatically that they cannot penalise people for their problems. If you are not able to disburse the ration properly give it to us in writing. And if you find it unprofitable you can surrender your license. At this they mellowed down and assured of no complaints in future. One of the shop keepers was still trying to get tough with people. He declined to give full ration to a client. He was caught hold of and was forced to fall in line. He got scared and complied. The people of Jahangirpuri who were witnessing the entire episode got highly impressed and wanted the Manch people to remain there till the ration is disbursed to every one of them. Manch people explained to them the importance of uniting and struggling. They offered to take up their issues if contacted. Reactions of the people on the visit were:

- Today we learnt as to how to get one's rights.
- Now onwards we can go with people to get them ration and kerosene.
- People were extremely surprised and were finding it unbelievable that they were able to get full quantity of ration at such low rates. They were all very happy and wanted to continue to fight for their rights with the Manch.

#### **STEP 4: Filing of complaints against shop keepers and applications for corrections in the ration cards**

Some shop keepers were still creating problems for the people. So it was decided to file complaint against them. Further in many ration cards faulty entries of gas connection were made whereas they did not have one. Therefore they were not getting kerosene oil. In some cards kerosene entry was made but Depot number was not mentioned. In such cases it was decided that applications for corrections will be filed with the rationing office.

Total 114 applications were written and 41 complaint letters. It took around 15 days as there were very few literate people available to help. The Manch wrote a covering letter for these. FSO was contacted on the phone about deposition of all the applications. He advised that there was no need to come with so many people only 2-3 people should come and deposit with the inspector concerned as he would not be available. Following which 4 activists of the Manch were sent. At the rationing office some shop keepers noticed them. They requested not to file the complaints and expressed willingness to resolve the issue amicably. It was agreed and the complaint letters were withheld. The applications were deposited with the inspector who was reluctant to acknowledge receipt but had to do it on the insistence of the Manch activists.

#### **STEP 5: Meeting with the Shopkeepers**

13 Shopkeepers kepters attended the meeting with the activists of the Manch and the people of the colony. In total there were 35 people in the meeting. The issues discussed were:

- Position of the quota
- Timings for opening of the shops
- Whether samples are kept or not
- Complaint register is kept or not
- Whether rice could be given in lieu of wheat to rice eating people
- Whether shopkeepers have any union.

Activists of the Manch emphasized on the harassment of the people by over charging, not giving full quantity etc. adding to the woes of already suffering poor people. Shopkeepers recounted their problems as given below:

- Government never thinks about us. Gives only 35 paise as commission whereas in Mumbai commission rate is Rs. 1.65.
- Get less quantity in the gunny bags supplied to them.
- Have to bear the cartage.
- Full quantity is not received.
- Wheat is supplied in place of rice.
- Clearance of draft takes more than 6 months.

- Officials and politicians demand cuts.

But Manch people clearly told them that they should fight for their problems themselves with the government. They can go to court. But they must not try to take it out on the people. They were warned to mend their ways or face the action. Shopkeepers agreed to give full ration and their phone numbers to people to find out whether shop is or open or not.

#### **Result:**

*On the basis of their struggle for ration the people of Bhalaswa concluded as follows:*

- *Entire rationing system is rotten and ridden with corruption. There is need to have dialogue with the food supply departments.*
- *Shopkeepers are indulging in malpractices therefore they cannot fight with the government.*
- *There was some success in making shopkeepers agree to give full ration at correct rates.*

It was decided that they will continue their struggle and keep people aware of the developments.

#### **b. Water**

The colony was facing acute water problem both in terms of scarcity and quality. The area is surrounded by the landfill due to which the ground water is highly contaminated. People are facing health problems. They go to other colonies to get clean water. Mostly depend on the tankers which are not regular. People fight amongst themselves whenever tankers arrive.

#### **STEP 1: Discussion of the problem with the people and initiating a SIGNATURE CAMPAIGN**

The Manch activists noticed the problem gave a thought to it and started discussing with the people. It was decided to start a signature campaign. A format was devised and signatures of about 925 persons were collected.

#### **STEP 2: Consultation with Hazards Centre for advice.**

For further action the Manch decided to consult Hazards Centre for advice. Hazards Centre provided some basic information and the procedural details to lodge complaint which are as given below:

- Delhi Jal Board works under Delhi Development Authority.

- Resettlement colonies are exempted from development charges.
- For new water connection one has to apply on a form which costs Rs. 10/-
- There is a provision of 40 liters of water per person and upto 6000 liters no bill is raised.
- New connection costs around Rs. 1000/- and documents for proof of residence like ration card are required.

In addition to this Hazards Centre also informed about water tankers which are provided free of cost. A tanker has a capacity of 3000 liters. Further the community taps can also be installed- one tap on 150 persons or 30 families. The following information like where to lodge complaints was also shared:

- Can go to DJB junior engineer (JE).
- ZE, R C Duggal and SE JP Goel are available at Gulabi Bagh office.
- CEO Arun Mathur sits in Varunalaya, Karol Bagh
- Can ultimately go to Chief Minister or Lt. Governor.

### STEP 3: Lodging complaints and meeting the officials

Following the advice of the Hazards Centre we decided to lodge complaint with the JE who was unable to do anything. Then we tried to contact ZE R.C. Duggal whom we were unable to meet in spite of our several efforts but we were able to speak to him over the phone and he directed us to slum & JJ department as resettlement colonies fall under their purview. They gave us a letter to that effect. Next we contacted Executive Engineer, he directed us to AE who told us that there will be a visit of higher officials on 20.11.08 we can meet them there to present our case. But our team decided to go to site office at Swarup Nagar where all JE, AE, EXEN, SE were present. We gave them the letter under acknowledgement. SE instructed the JE to visit the area and submit the report. He visited the area. Later we again tried to meet SE/ExEN but kept avoiding us. One day we all barged into the room of ExEN. Then he had to listen to us. We met SE again he assured us of action but nothing happened. After all these meetings the problem was not solved but some interim relief was given.

#### Result:

- D-1 block got 2-3 taps installed which supplied raw water
- People continue to suffer because of bureaucratic delays.
- Will wait till 10<sup>th</sup> December then take up the matter again

**The struggle will continue till the problem is solved.**

### c. Cleanliness

The area was full of dirt. Polythene bags strewn all over. Water channels clogged. Mosquitoes were breeding freely posing a threat to the health of the people. Sweepers do not come to the area. They demand money for cleaning. All these problems relating to cleanliness were studied by the Manch and action plan was made.

#### STEP 1: Meeting with slum wing JE-

For getting the clogged water cleared we decided to meet the JE. To meet the JE slum wing for continuously visited his office for over 20 days. Ultimately pump operator was told that matter will be reported to higher officials. At this the pump was brought to suck out the water. But it just sucked from one side and drained on the other which was of no use. We again tried to meet the JE. The new JE Bhagnani heeded to our request and got water pumped out. We were successful in our effort.

#### STEP 2: Meeting with Malaria Department

A team of the Manch visited the local malaria office and found that area has been attached to the new office at Nangli Poona. They went there to find a big lock hanging on the office door. The inspector concerned was contacted on the phone who initially tried to avoid and when Manch asserted he agreed to come to the colony and discuss. He came and the following issues were discussed:

- How many areas fall under his office?
- How many people work in the office?
- What steps are taken to control mosquitoes breeding?
- When do they visit the area?

He explained everything in details and also told about malaria and mosquitoes. He informed that they visit the area every week. 9 villages and 22 colonies fall in their jurisdiction and there are 8 people working in the office. They sprinkle drugs, use specie of fish and fumigation etc. to control mosquitoes breeding. He gave the names of the concerned employees to be contacted in future. They also gave some chemicals drug (larcon SG) to be sprinkled in the affected areas. The minutes of the meeting were recorded and signed.

After the meeting sprinkling of the drug and fumigation is being done regularly. It was a successful effort.

#### STEP 3: Meeting with Sanitation Department

The matter was first discussed with the people in details. They were asked to not to pay anything to the sweepers since it is their job to clean up the area. Assistant Sanitary Inspector Sandeep first avoided the meeting but later, on



insistence and threats of complaint with the higher officials he agreed to meet. Matters relating to sweeping of the area, demand of money by sweepers, absence of sweepers etc. were taken up with the ASI. He pleaded that he has very scarce manpower to cope with the amount of work. He blamed people of throwing garbage in the open and not cooperating. People countered that in the absence of a proper garbage dump they have no place to deposit garbage. However he agreed to do something. A meeting with the sweepers was also arranged. They assured to cooperate. Now there is some impact on the cleanliness of the area. Garbage is being removed though not so regularly.

#### **STEP 4: Meeting with Municipal Councilor**

A letter was drafted describing the problems related to the cleanliness and other problems like sewage system, garbage dump, street light etc. After making efforts 2-3 times, we got a chance to meet the councilor. He was briefed about the problems of the colony to which he replied that he is aware of the problems. He also said that his people keep visiting the colony. At this Manch activists quipped that why don't they solve problems of the people. Councilor showed his arrogance by saying that his men are not supposed to talk to common people. Manch activists reminded him that he is a councilor on the basis of common people's votes. He replied that there are some problems waiting to be solved after the issue of land between main road and colony is resolved. He was reluctant to listen to any further. Then it was decided to hand over the letter to him under acknowledgement but he refused to acknowledge in spite of repeated requests.

#### **d. Electricity**

After discussions with the people it emerged that the main problem related to the electricity was installation of proper connection with the approved meter. People were not aware of the procedures and documentation. Manch activists took up the matter. Had meetings with the local MLA, DM and the NDPL officials. Keshav Raghvan Zonal Manager of NDPL proved very helpful. He agreed to organize a camp to explain matter to the people in details. It helped. Later a special camp was organized where all the papers were collected and the charges were deposited. Thus the new connections and meters were installed.

### **RTI: AN EFFECTIVE TOOL IN THE MANCH'S STRUGGLE**

With the struggle awareness of the Manch activists as well as people grew. They became aware of the RTI which can be used as an effective tool in

gathering information from the government agencies about the issues and the status of the pending matters. They used it for the water problem. They sought information from the Slum wing and DJB. They came to know that slum department only lays the pipe line and it is DJB that supplies water. Presently the colony is getting water as per the standards of the Bureau of Indian Standards. Resettlement colony gets one 4" main line and 1/2" service line. On the basis of information gathered Manch is deciding to take up the matter with various departments.

### **CONCLUSION**

Bhalswa Lok Shakti Manch has been doing commendable job in creating awareness amongst people and providing them guidance in their struggle for their problems. It was unfortunate that the Manch could not function for about over a year due some problems encountered by it. After its revival in September 2008 it has again started its activities with full zeal. The Manch has been able to regain the trust of the people. The success of the Manch is being appreciated and emulated in other slum and resettlement colonies of Delhi. Manch also provides consultancy to other areas in Delhi and outside. The Manch has set a fine example of people's initiative.

The struggle of the Manch is continuing on all the above issues. Now they are able to take up the matter with more confidence and more effectively.

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