

DELHI MASTER PLAN

TOWARDS AN ALTERNATIVE

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Over ten years ago a lawyer from Delhi, M.C. Mehta, filed a “public interest” petition in the supreme Court that the Government be ordered to take steps to clean the pollution in the river Ganga. Over the years the case expanded to cover many issues, from the tanneries at Kanpur to the municipal sewage of Calcutta. Between march to December 1996 the Court also issued a set of orders that related to Delhi, one of which said: “...The city has become a vast unmanageable conglomeration of commercial industrial, unauthorised colonies and unplanned housing... The only way to relieve the capital city from the additional burden and pressures is to deconcentrate the population, industries, and economic activities in the city and relocate the same in various priority towns in the National Capital Region (NCR).” In another directive the Court ordered the closure of 168 industrial units on the basis that all these were polluting units. Furthermore, 39,000 other units were issued notices for relocation because they were in nonconforming areas.

These orders have come as a severe jolt to about 4 lakh workers employed in these industries and their families. The Delhi Janwadi Adhikar Manch was formed by several workers’ organisations and their sympathisers to protect their rights. One of the issues tat the Manch has raised is the question of non-representation of workers in the case. They have demanded the formation of a Tripartite Board with mandatory worker representation, and the participation of workers in the planning of the city.

Another on-going case has been brought before the High Court of Delhi by another “public-spirited” citizen, H.D. Shourie, who has argued that thousands of unauthorised colonies have come up in Delhi because of the vested interests of land mafias, politicians, and officials protecting their profits and their vote banks. This has resulted in “Delhi’s prestige” being lowered and the “great danger of epidemics breaking out in the city”. Hence, he asked the court to order that these unauthorised colonies be moved out of the capital. Following this case, the Delhi Government has announced several times that these colonies will be regularised, but the Court says that regularisation cannot be permitted until final orders and has also stayed all construction activities. Shorie has further requested that the jhuggi jhonpries be also considered as part of the case. At stake are the lives of a population of over 50 lakh people. The Jan Sangharsh Vahini has demanded that these people be given a fair hearing in the case.

What is common to both these cases is that they have been filed in the “public” interest; common people are being made to indirectly pay for the “illegal” activities of industrialists, mafias, politicians, and officials; the actions of just two prominent individuals are thus affecting the lives of more than two-thirds of the total population of the city; these people are not being given a fair hearing in either of the cases; and the Courts are basing their orders on what is “authorised” under the Master Plans of Delhi.

Both the Manch and the Vahini have, therefore, challenged the basis of the Master Plan itself. They have raised questions about who is doing the planning, for whom, what are the norms of planning, and what re the notions that planners have about how people actually live in the city. Thus, both these organisations (and many others in the city) are beginning to demand a different kind of planning which meets the real needs of the vast

majority of the population that works and lives in the city and actually contributes to its “prestige”.

In the beginning of 1997 a small beginning was made to contribute to this DIFFERENT kind of planning. Small meetings were held in different colonies (unauthorised, resettlement, and jhuggi jhonpri) of the city to explain what the Master Plan was all about, and how the two cases mentioned about were affecting the lives of the people. Community volunteers then undertook to collect information in their colonies about the actual working and living conditions of the people. A simple survey form was designed which could be filled in by the people themselves and which would give limited but critical information. The Transport Research Group in IIT Delhi provided a small grant to cover the costs of the survey forms.

Over a period of 6 months more than 1200 forms were filled in by families from 8 colonies. 2 of these are unauthorised colonies, 3 are resettlement colonies, and 3 are jhuggi jhonpris. The forms filled in so far give a fair idea of how the people in these colonies are surviving and what are their needs. The information could, therefore, give a starting point for working out how the city should respond to these needs – in other words, for making a different kind of Master Plan.

In the following pages we present some maps which show how Delhi has grown over many centuries and indicate how the process of formal “planning” has affected the growth. We also present all the information collected from the surveys in the forms of charts. Finally, we try to show how the information could be used to work out what are the possibilities in critical areas such as water supply, sewerage, electricity, employment, housing, transport, housing, and education. Thus choices are possible from amongst these various possibilities to demand what the government MUST do to meet the basic needs of the people.

It has to be mentioned here that the survey done so far is inadequate. If the condition of a population of 60 lakhs is to be represented, then there must be at least 10,000 forms filled in and these should come from as large a number of colonies as possible. Also, all the different social strata in the colonies must be covered. With the growing participation of more people, more communities, and more organisations, this can be easily done in the future, and that too, at minimal cost. In the meantime, we present what has been learnt so far to act as an educational exercise for all of us. This is a splendid example of “people’s research” and must go back to the people.

We hope that this document can provide enough material for a wide-ranging debate amongst people on the nature of planning and how the city in which they live and work should be planned. A city grows on the backs of its labouring poor and not in the fancies of the idle rich. The former give their all to the city, the latter know only how to take. This booklet offers the basis for the demand that the city must give back to its working people what is their rightful due.

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