ABSTRACT

Rehan Basera or a Night Shelter seeks to provide aid and shelter to the homeless in the city. A homeless person typically, is a person without a home and living on the streets. A night shelter provides a roof to the homeless and a community that they can survive the nights in. Night shelters come majorly into play during the winters when the cold wave often results in deaths of the people living on the streets. There are both permanent and temporary night shelters being operated throughout the city of Delhi. However, they fail to suffice the needs of the teeming homeless. Where does the glitch lie - Is it the system or is it the people? How do we facilitate the usage of these night shelters so that we don’t see people suffer on the streets at nights under flyovers? Is there an answer that lies within the current scenario or do we establish a new system?

OVERVIEW

The study aims to analyze the current system to identify the functioning of these night shelters, the issues involved in their functioning on one hand and on the other hand aims to come up with solutions and alternatives to maximize the potential of these night shelters. It seeks to connect one to the sensitive issues of these night shelters and find out the reason for the loophole, if any, in the system.

This sensitive issue crops in everyone’s mind but only for a minute or two. This research will revolve around not just understanding what they go through but also to make ignorant people aware and make them realize their role towards it. The point of this research is not to produce a bunch of papers which just talks about the problems and how helpless they are but focus more on result oriented steps.

The study will be based mostly on the empirical and practical approach than just the theoretical approach. The study is mostly about the Identification of issues and the analysis done by the help of various case studies and hence its important to have a firsthand experience for a better understanding of the nature of the system, become a part of that system and then only think of changing it.

Over 1% of Delhi’s total population constitutes of the homeless. They live around us, multiplying with urbanisation. We collect pockets of change, that we donate to them on street lights or on Saturdays (respecting the ‘shani’), we talk about them once in a while to stay in touch with humanity, but what we really do about it, negates all of the above. What we find most pathetic about this topic is not the deficiency of concern, or cruel ignorance, but the utter lack of awareness. What we actually know about them, where they disappear when the traffic light turns green, what they do on all other days of the week or how they keep warm during winters.

If the Master Plan norms stipulate one night shelter per lakh population, why are we fulfilling an astounding 24% of the requirement? It’s not about the numbers any longer, but about the
fact that they are entitled to basic survival amenities, along with the dignity and respect, and not just a make-do shelter. We want to study where planning and basic design goes wrong, whether its lack of funds or whether it’s plain ignorance played on our part. So even beyond what we can do as students of architecture, as fermenting designers and as preachers who talk about the next big thing, is to get down to the bottom of it, and to first be in the know. It is only then that we could (and sure hope to) take a stand on it.

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

Estimated figures say that 200,000 to 300,000 people a year settle in Delhi permanently from other states in India as migrants. These people come in search of employment and education opportunities and become the permanent resident of Delhi. A large portion of this population is formed by a section of migrants labourers coming for temporary or unskilled labour jobs. According to the latest directives of the Supreme Court the government must provide for at least one shelter per one lakh population in all the urban centres. The population of Delhi has increased to around 18 million by 2010. The current figure of 1,80,00,000 would require about 180 shelters or more.

"The shelters (currently 150) cater to 15,000 to 16,000 homeless," says Paramjeet Kaur, head of Ashray Adhikar Abhiyan (Shelter Rights Campaign), started by ActionAid.

WHO ARE THE URBAN POOR?

According to government estimates of 2005, over one quarter of India’s urban population is living below the poverty line. That’s almost 81 million people. The urban poor have little or no access to shelter, water, and sanitation even as they contribute 65% to the national income. India’s booming economy has not trickled down to the street level, where most of its unorganised sector workers live and earn. They constitute about 93 percent of India’s workforce. These are our construction workers, porters, electricians, rag pickers, plumbers, domestic help, drivers and vegetable vendors who service our cities. Poorly educated and semi-skilled, they work hard in an informal economy that gives no job or social security. No health benefits, pension plans, holidays or unemployment compensation. They usually live in slums. Many are homeless. And as rural livelihoods disappear, the poor in cities increase.³

INITIATIVES SO FAR

There are several governmental as well as non-governmental organisations that have with time, set up a number of night shelters across Delhi. Action Aid, Butter Fly and Indo-Global Social Service Society are some of the NGOs, whereas the DDA (Delhi Development Authority), MCD (Municipal Corporation of Delhi), DUSIB (Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board) and DJB (Delhi Jal board) are some of the governmental bodies that are running these shelters.

Slum & JJ Department (now DUSIB) is implementing an approved Plan Scheme namely “Construction, Management and Maintenance of Night Shelters" in Delhi for which the funds are being provided on year to year basis by Delhi Government. An amount of Rs. 80 lacs has been approved for the above scheme for the year 2010-11.

Under the Scheme, DUSIB had constructed 12 permanent night shelters at various location across the city. In addition, the first floors of 13 Community Halls in the walled city have been converted into night shelters.
In addition, two night shelters with an intake capacity of 45 persons have been opened on permanent basis for women and children including Mentally challenged wherein shelter facilities are provided free of cost. These Night Shelters have been opened at Rangshala Complex, Kabir Basti & Community Hall Regarpura, Karol Bagh which will be managed and operated in collaboration with the NGOs throughout the year.

Thus in totality 64 night shelters existing in permanent buildings, wherein 9085 inhabitants have been provided shelter facilities, are being run by the MCD. The entry fee in these Night shelters is Rs. 6/- per head per night but the women and children (below 16 years) have been provided shelter facility free of cost. During the two months – January and February, the entry for all the inhabitants is provided free of cost.

DUSIB has been providing various facilities like Blankets, Durries, Jute Mats, Color T.V., Newspapers, Drinking Water, etc in these Night Shelters. It is further mentioned that out of 64 Night Shelters, 17 Night Shelters are being run by in collaboration with the NGO’s namely Ashray Adhikar Abhiyan, Butter Fly and Indo-Global Social Service Society wherein all the activities are being managed and controlled by the NGO’s.

In order to cater to the need of the shelterless people, concerted efforts are being made to identify suitable locations/sites where the Night Shelters can be put up either in tents or in the Community Hall buildings so that shelter facilities can be provided on need-based basis to the shelterless people.

The steps taken to ensure that all the facilities being extended to the inmates of these Night Shelters are sustained with proper sanitation throughout the year are as under:

1. Adequate number of blankets, durries and jute mattresses have been provided to the inhabitants in all the 64 Night Shelters. In addition 2000 blankets, 2000 durries, 1000 meter jute mattresses have been procured to meet the additional requirement in future.

2. Toilet facility is made functional. In case the same is not functional, Mobile Toilet Vans have been installed.

3. Electricity, Water Supply, Sanitation arrangements are properly functioning in all the Night Shelters.

4. Requests have been sent to Health Department, MCD and GNCTD for providing medical facilities either through deputing doctor once in a week in the Night Shelters or providing mobile Health Vans.

5. To ensure the security and safety of the inmates, request has already been sent to the Police Headquarters to issue directions to all the area SHO to advise the Beat officers and PCRs Vans to inspect the Night Shelters from time to time during the night.

6. In order to create awareness amongst the shelterless people vide publicity has been made in the leading newspapers (English and Hindi) and Electronic media.

7. A team of the Sr. officers have been constituted and instructions have been issued to give special attention to ensure that the facilities being extended to the users of these Night Shelters are sustained throughout the year. 

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PREPARATION AND WORK THUS FAR

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS AND PILOT STUDIES

The night shelter next to the railway station in Chandni Chowk, Delhi is run by Ashray Adhikar Abhiyan. The Aashray Adhikar Abhiyan project has 15 shelters in Delhi, each housing about 500 people. It is a campaign run by Action Aid with the help of a fantastic set of volunteers, led by 34 year old Sanjay Kumar, who has spent the last 9 years dedicated to this project - a really inspirational young man. Many of the staff had been one of Delhi's homeless at one time and others like Sanjay have given up secure profitable jobs to do this work. Inside the shelters sleeping space is provided, nothing more than your own space on the cold concrete floor, but it is secure, dry, with blankets provided and available for a small fee of 6 rupees for an adult and free for an older person or children. The kids who come here are mostly orphans or ones who have run away from home under certain circumstances. These kids are given two rooms, out of which one is their study room and the other is for sleeping. In total there were about 15-20 kids. Apart from providing shelter at night these kids were given education free of cost by tie-up with the government school and getting them admitted in groups. They have tie-ups with the hospital (government) in case they need to admit any patient and had doctors who visited the shelter once a week for regular checkups. There were men of varying age groups and mostly from outside Delhi. These were mostly laborers, coolies and few of them even educated graduates who under difficult circumstances were left homeless.

The shelters run throughout the day, with an additional charge of Rs.6. A canteen now under renovation sits on top of the washrooms and urinals.

This shelter is strictly only for males. The children admitted therein are boys as well. When asked why so, the supervisors talked of how they did try running one with women, and to get entire families admitted, but it was too hard to manage and sustain through with. They accused the women to have greater psychiatric issues, and to have been creating conflicts within the shelter. So in order to avoid complications, they decided to convert the shelter into one for males only.

Action Aid admits drunkards and drug addicts, whereas other government based organizations don't. They pass out and often lose consciousness, but the people at the shelter help bring them in and put them to sleep.

The night shelter, though for the homeless, there still exists a social hierarchy so to say. There are a group of men with stable jobs (to the extent of having their own shops), there are a handful literate and educated, skilled and perfectly employable. But we had the other end of the spectrum, where men needed psychiatric help, are illiterate, unskilled and did not have a regular source of income. For people who didn't have enough money for a night, the shelter tries to pay them off by generating employment within the shelter, and give them a free night in turn. The shelter has even facilitated bank accounts, ration cards and other such amenities for those of them who do manage to make an earning. Some immigrants even go home to visit family.

The volunteers at the night shelter have ‘night-outs’ twice every week. Here, they venture out on Delhi streets in the middle of the night in search for more homeless, those who either aren’t aware of such services, or who are too scared. The volunteers talk them into trusting the campaign, and to move in. The shelter is not just a place with a bunch of bunks and free blankets, but a place where the homeless seek to find new families and support.

What then causes people to still resort to the streets? One of the primary reasons are the distances and the locations of these sites. Most people refuse to move in simply because the area doesn’t allow them jobs other areas would. Families want to be together and refuse
to split up, even though a lot of parents often leave their children at such night shelters. People are scared of thefts and fights within the night shelter as well.

The temporary night shelters portray a whole new story altogether. Provisional tents, with beds and blankets stacked up then become synonymous to comfortable nights in the winter. Beds and water are free of charge, but food and sanitation (Rs.5 for a bath) are not accounted for. These shelters run for three months of the year, from mid December to end of February. These tents have a local in charge for supervision, and to see to the security of the rest of the people. The police however walk right in, paying no heed to the persons in charge, and harassing the women. The women we spoke to accused the policemen of abuse and at instances burning their belongings. They did so to the extent of giving us the names and phone numbers of the policemen, hoping for us to make a change.

**METHODOLOGY AND PLANNING OF WORK**

**CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The study begins by understanding night-shelters as a phenomenon from a macro level, studying the bodies that help provide this service and then narrowing down to a micro level, where specific night shelters are taken up, making comparative analysis where required and drawing necessary conclusions. The aspects we dwell into will be;

- The number of night shelters running in Delhi.
- The organizations running these shelters, and their functioning.
- Types of night shelters; temporary and permanent.
- The filtering down of financial funds.
- The lack of coordination amongst the organizations.
- Case studies of both permanent as well as temporary night shelters.

This framework then leads us to a set of research questions. Questions that tackle issues at a greater scale, of greater significance and that are pertaining to the future of 'night shelters'.

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

To begin with, what defines homeless? Who would be categorized as homeless?

Why do these night shelters fall short of expectations? Does the fault lie in the current system, in the lack of funds, or a whole new reason altogether?

What is the social stigma associated with a night shelter?

- How is it different for women?
- Can one hope to break free from this stigma ever, if yes then how? How important a role do children staying in these night shelters play in bringing about this change?
- If people staying in the night shelters are happy then what gives anyone the right to consider them outcastes?
Can a night shelter be taken to a greater scale, by trying to create self-sustainable communities? If so, what goes into making a self sustainable community? Night shelters run by organizations should limit it to be their aid, and not their spine.

Does it make sense to constantly work at collecting funds in order to provide the homeless shelters that is only temporary, or should one go beyond, and strive towards helping them gain independence?

The permanent shelters are primarily vacant during the day. A system must be proposed so as to use this space for multipurpose activities, a dual role of employment generation during the day, and night shelters during the night.

Will these be misused? If so, how can one keep a check on it?

SITE JUSTIFICATION

At a macro level, we choose to opt for Delhi as a city. Delhi that supports astounding figures of the homeless, which continue to increase with the rapid rate of urbanization.

At a micro level, it is hard to focus on a particular night shelter, so a zone wise mapping of the various night shelters at different parts of Delhi is proposed. This leads to the understanding of the pockets on the macro level and at the same time one gets to compare the various night shelters at the micro level.

The study plans to direct most of the research questions towards the night shelter in Chandni Chowk, a permanent night shelter next to the railway station, said to be the biggest permanent night shelter in Delhi. Along with which, we will also investigate into a temporary night shelter for women at the Meena Bazaar. The two sites would look at both the permanent type as well as the temporary type, along with looking at a shelter for men, and women separately. The necessary observations, comparisons and thus deductions could be made.

STUDY COMPONENTS

There will be three broad study components namely, theoretical, empirical and practical.

THEORETICAL: Study of homelessness
Study of what is a social stigma

EMPIRICAL: Case studies and reports published by the different NGOs (like AAA , Prerna etc)
Case studies of various night shelters functioning all over India

PRACTICAL: Visit a number of night shelters of various zones identified
Interviewing the people living in these night shelters and the people running these Night shelters

SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES

The first month prepared us for the seminar proposal which involved pilot studies, initial research and ground work for the studies to be done in the following months. The next few weeks will involve primary data collection, visiting the Maha panchayats, experiencing nights
in the night shelters taken up as case studies, interaction with the government agencies and the different organizations involved. The weeks after that will be dedicated to compilation and writing of research paper with all the information collected and analysis done henceforth. The final weeks will be spend to formulate a proposal on the basis of all the answers found during the research.
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