

Housing the Homeless(?): A study of Night Shelters in

Delhi



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Introduction

Institute of Perception Studies (IPS) was founded with an aim of creating new knowledge by incorporating multiple perceptions and adopting critical lens in the analysis of it. Perception studies as conceived by IPS thus can be used to study social, economic and political processes and bring out analyses by uncovering the multitude of perceptions involved within it. One such attempt by IPS within the broad scope of perception studies is this report which looks at the scheme to provide night shelters in Delhi and the perception of the homeless involved in conceiving, structuring, implementing and inhabiting the shelters. Our category of analysis also includes homeless and their (in)visibility on the streets, which will reveal the true nature of the government policies, in this case through recent mushrooming of night shelters, aimed at hiding the poor from public spaces.

The night shelter scheme of Delhi has got attention of the public in the recent years, especially under the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government. The program providing night shelters to homeless of Delhi has been in existence for quite some time now. From 2010 it has been functioning under the Delhi Urban Slum Improvement Board (henceforth, DUSIB). The program while undergoing some changes in the past year is one of steps of government which when analyzed could reveal the perception of the government towards the homeless. We try in this report to understand the perception of the government towards the homeless in the city.

One of the significant events that shaped the approach of the government towards the homeless people living in Delhi was the attempt to make Delhi a “world class city” in preparation for hosting the Commonwealth games. Large scale evictions of about 300,000 people took place till

2007 in preparation for the Commonwealth games¹. This was because Delhi government's conception of a "world class" city was "inconvenient and incompatible"² with the beggars, slum dwellers, homeless people etc. The "beautification" of Delhi in order to make it a "world class" city had to find ways of making its poor and homeless "invisible" to the world. This attempt at making the poor and homeless "invisible" manifests itself in a wide range of activities from eviction of slums to construction of shelters for homeless.

The criminalization of begging by the extending the Bombay Prevention of Begging Act (1959) to Delhi in 1960³ also reveals one way in which homeless and poor have been perceived by the government. This law reveals that the state criminalizes poverty and understands it through a reductionist approach by individualizing the causes. Such criminalization rather than addressing the issue of poverty and its causes attempts to sweep the poor under the rug. A connection can also be made between criminalization and making invisible of the poor, where the former is nothing but an attempt to make the beggars invisible. We can clearly see that such a law acts as a restraint over the rights of the poor to the public spaces in the city by criminalizing their way of occupying the city.

Without romanticizing 'street dwelling' it is necessary for us to look into how the government looks at the right of the homeless and the poor to inhabit public spaces (or not) in the city. Especially when we have seen large scale evictions and relocations take place at the whim of governments like in the case of Commonwealth Games.

¹ "Fair Play for Housing Rights: Mega Events, Olympic Games and Housing Rights: Opportunities for the Olympic Movement and Others", *Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions* (2007):12.

² "Humanity-Equality-Destiny? Implicating tourism in Commonwealth Games 2010", *Equations*(2010):56.

³ "Humanity-Equality-Destiny? Implicating tourism in Commonwealth Games 2010", *Equations*(2010):64.

One of the major changes that Delhi saw in the recent past was the emergence of the Aam Aadmi Party (henceforth, AAP) from the anti-corruption movement to go on and capture power through elections. The rhetoric and discourse of the party from the time it has come to power has been that of a pro poor agenda. The perception towards the party has also been influenced by such rhetoric. The projection of AAP government's policies like Mohalla clinics, free water supply and reduction in electricity costs as policies for 'pro poor' and 'common people' also feeds into this perception. Similar discourse was also constructed around the night shelter scheme where the government claimed to provide housing for the homeless⁴. However before and after the establishment of DUSIB, major changes in providing night shelters to the poor was brought about after repeated pressure from the Delhi High Court and the Supreme Court of India⁵. The various aspects of government policies discussed above set the background against which our research could be placed to get a deeper understanding of perception of government towards homeless.

Research Methodology

For the purpose of our research, we followed qualitative research method, involving personal interviews and secondary research on the government reports and documents. In order to grasp and unravel the government's perception in its program of providing shelters to the homeless, the team conducted detailed open ended interviews with our respondents over six days. In order to

⁴ "Government Will Ensure No Homeless Dies of Cold: Arvind Kejriwal", *NDTV*, last modified December 04, 2015, <http://www.ndtv.com/delhi-news/government-will-ensure-no-homeless-dies-of-cold-arvind-kejriwal-1251093>

⁵ Mayura Janwalkar and Aneesha Mathur, "Delhi: Behind push for night shelters, some politics and plenty of court intervention", *Indian Express*, December 5, 2016 <http://indianexpress.com/article/cities/delhi/delhi-behind-push-for-night-shelters-some-politics-and-plenty-of-court-intervention-4410558/>

problematize the ideas of in-visibility and beautification, Vasant Vihar, being a posh colony, was chosen as the research site. Researchers visited Vasant Vihar rain basera (Porta Cabin), which is close to the Munirka enclave in South Delhi.



Figure 1 Rain Basera Porta Cabin with Ramesh Singh in orang jacket

Interview- The two care takers employed in the Vasant Vihar Night Shelter, Mr. Ramesh Singh and Mr. Rajpal Singh were interviewed to gauge the perception of the new government in Delhi with respect to the night shelters. Rajpal Singh, 62, is a care taker of the morning shift in the rain basera/night shelter and Ramesh, 60, is a care taker of the night shift. While Rajpal works from 8 am to 8 pm, Ramesh works from 8 pm to 8 am. To further enrich our understanding of the DUSIB's functioning and involvement of night shelters, we interviewed DUSIB's official Mr. D.

Kartikeyan, Deputy Director, Night Shelter Department, Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (henceforth, DUSIB). Mr. Santosh, Manager of the night shelter was interviewed to understand the approach and perception of the NGOs managing the night shelters. Finally, Mr. Amar Nath, Former CEO, DUSIB was interviewed in order to understand the formative years of night shelters and the shift from Municipal Corporation of Delhi (henceforth, MCD) to DUSIB. He is an authority on tracing the changes and evolution of night shelters from an emergency rescue activity to a permanent and sustainable housing for the homeless.

Respondents List

Name	Designation
Mr. Ramesh Singh	Care Taker
Mr. Rajpal Singh	Care Taker
Mr. D. Kartikeyan	Deputy Director
Mr. Santosh	Manager, Vasant Vihar Night Shelter
Mr. Amar Nath	Joint Secretary, (Exploration) Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas and Former CEO, DUSIB

Research Team

Team Member	Designation
Ms. Ragini Pant	Senior Research Associate
Mr. Venkata Narayana	Research Associate

The Structure of the Scheme

Out of the total 190 shelters, only 83 are in in RCC buildings, 115 are porta cabins, and one tent¹⁰. The National Urban Livelihoods Mission (henceforth, NULM) guidelines assume that the proportion of men among the homeless is higher and thus only 11% of the night shelters are constructed for women while 71% are for men under the category of ‘general’. Rajpal revealed that the women often come for shelter, but have to be turned down and redirected to the basera in R.K.Puram sector-1.

One of the monumental guidelines issued by the Government of India with regard to the housing of the homeless in the city was the “Scheme of Shelters for Urban Homeless” (henceforth, SUH) issued under the NULM. The guidelines operate as a standard which the State governments are required to abide by. The mission was started in September 2013¹¹ under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs. The operational guidelines for SUH were issued by NULM in December 2013. The objectives of SUH included providing access for homeless people to permanent shelters with basic infrastructure facilities and entitlements like social security, PDS, identity etc. The guidelines formulated framework within which development, management and monitoring of shelters for providing services to homeless was to be organized¹².

The proliferation of the night shelters in Delhi came about after multiple efforts both by the state governments and the Public Interest Litigations (henceforth, PIL) filed in Supreme Court of India

¹⁰ District wise Night Shelters List, Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board, Report last updated on 13 July 2017.

¹¹ Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, last accessed on August 1, 2017
http://mhupa.gov.in/User_Panel/UserView.aspx?TypeID=1494

¹² Scheme of Shelters for Urban Homeless (Operational Guidelines), Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, Government of India, http://nulm.gov.in/PDF/NULM_Mission/NULM-SUH-Guidelines.pdf

and the Delhi High Court¹³. While historically the shuttle between the MCD and Delhi Development Authority (henceforth, DDA) over the night shelters' construction and management resulted in transfer to DUSIB in 2010, under the DUSIB Act of the Delhi legislative assembly its functions were mostly regarding the improvement, redevelopment, removal and resettlement of jhuggi jhopri bastis in Delhi¹⁴ and not on night shelters.

Bidding Process

The current 2017 tender notice seeks bidders for the operation & management of shelters. Under the plan for the 2010 winters, DUSIB invited expression of interest (EOI) calling upon NGOs to run shelters. The NGOs were in-charge of management and running of the shelters¹⁵ while DUSIB provided infrastructural and financial help. In 2014 a total of 9 clusters were formulated, for the 'better administration' and to 'standardize' the system. Tenders were invited for Shelter Management Agencies (henceforth, SMA) for each cluster rather than a shelter.

According to the 2017 Request For Proposal (RFP)¹⁶ the Bidder may be either a single incorporated entity, or a group of maximum three incorporated entities (called 'Consortium') implementing the Project. The term "Highest Bidder" for each project mean the bidder for the project who has quoted the lowest for shelter management. The profile of bidders includes

¹³ Mayura Janwalkar and Aneesha Mathur, "Delhi: Behind push for night shelters, some politics and plenty of court intervention", *Indian Express*, December 5, 2016
<http://indianexpress.com/article/cities/delhi/delhi-behind-push-for-night-shelters-some-politics-and-plenty-of-court-intervention-4410558/>

¹⁴ Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board Act, 2010.

¹⁵ Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board, Expression Of Interest 2010
EOI <http://www.delhi.gov.in/wps/wcm/connect/c6571180441e7d88b19dff03de560051/Uploading+of+EoI+onto+UD+website.pdf?MOD=AJPERES>

¹⁶ Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board Request for Proposal (RFP) Management of Night Shelters in Delhi
VOLUME – I Instructions to Bidders July 2017 at <http://delhishelterboard.in/nig/14992552124327.pdf>

homeless persons' collectives, RWAs, and Private Sector Companies or Associations, amongst many others. For the sake of convenience and easy management, the shelters are divided into 16 clusters and the bidding is for each cluster consisting of 8-13 shelters. The document further states that "The Bid of the Bidders for the Project/s would be evaluated solely on the basis of the quoted Payment for Shelter Management by the Bidder in its Financial Bid".

Understanding the perception of homelessness

DUSIB is an "engineer's body" for development of urban infrastructure like slum rehabilitation. As Mr. Amar Nath postulates "DUSIB traces its origin to DDA as a development agency, mostly comprising of Engineers. There have been efforts to bring social development staff but it never had adequate staff to perform social function for the slum dwellers". Prior to the establishment of DUSIB in 2010, a lot of juggling of responsibility of the shelter homes management happened between DDA and MCD. As Mr. Amar Nath explained during the interview "the erstwhile Slum and JJ Wing had shuttled between DDA and MCD several times based on what priority was being assigned at a particular point of time". He further added that the focus on housing for the poor took it to DDA, being the land owning and development agency while focus on MCD brought it under MCD, being the agency responsible for providing civic amenities. Ultimately, DISIB was created in an effort to find a solution to the issue in an integrated manner. In 2010 DUSIB becoming a nodal agency for the night shelters as soon as it was formed (for providing services to slums). He said that as the body lacks man power, it thus hires agencies to run them.

The DUSIB's 2017 tender notice shows that the DUSIB, apart from dissemination of funds (or reimbursement if any), isn't involved in the process of night shelter management and operation. While it does conduct inspections and is answerable over the question of night shelters, the DUSIB is an 'engineer's body' as Mr. Amar Nath reiterated. The agencies are supposed to facilitate orientation, training and identification of shelter staff. DUSIB intends / proposes to outsource the operation, maintenance and management of night shelters in Delhi. Mr. Santosh believes that the transparency has increased in the process, but the accountability and responsibility only lies with the NGOs.

The expenditure heads in the NULM guidelines specifically includes staff salary of 3 caregivers in 8 hour shifts and 1 full time manager. Vasant Vihar shelter on paper, has 3 care takers, however Ramesh Singh and Rajpal Singh are working on a 12 hour shift in the shelters for Rs 8500 monthly salary. Rajpal claimed that the third care taker came when any of the two had to take leave. The salary which they receive is less than the minimum wage in Delhi. The bidding amount is quoted with the idea of receiving the project by quoting the lowest, which explains the failure to fulfill service requirements by SMAs.

For each cluster the eligible agencies must have a 'turnover' of not less than Rs. 30 lakhs in last three years. This ensures that only the capital intensive agencies are liable for the bidding process and the less 'liable' get eliminated. Further the notice states that the bid would be evaluated solely on the basis of the "quoted payment for Shelter Management by the Bidder in its Financial Bid" and that the evaluation of the Bid will be entirely at the discretion of DUSIB.

Mr. Santosh calls it a scheme turned into a business model where the RWAs, SHGs, and private sector companies/associations compete for the 'project'. According to Santosh, during the tenure

of Lieutenant General, he along with other NGOs had met AAP party president, Mr. Kejriwal to prevent private sector entities to bid. Although they were assured of their ousting, it did not materialize. The AAP government has continued with the tender process without major shifts.

Rajpal, who is an enthusiast AAP supporter, boasts of the positive changes since the change in the government. He says the cleanliness is being maintained, they now have mats, and blankets, amongst many other things. While amongst the many postulated facilities at the shelter in the NULM guidelines, few important ones are water arrangements, portable drinking water and other needs, adequate bathing & toilet facilities, and cooking space (necessary utensils for cooking and serving, cooking gas connections etc). The night shelter wherein the researchers studied had no toilets for the shelter occupants, and were using the DUSIB's toilets for the Kuli camp slum, while toilets were being constructed for the shelter (See Pic).



Figure 2 Construction of toilets in Kuli Camp area

Ramesh Singh, the night care taker and a Kuli camp resident, is 60 years old. An ardent follower of Kejriwal, he believes that the change in the government has brought few very basic facilities like water and toilets for the occupants. He informed that before the AAP government, the Baseras had nothing but the shelter. The water for the basera and slum was to be drawn from the water tanks in Vasant Vihar. Previously, the residents of the posh area would abuse them, while they tried to draw water from their locality.

The Delhi Outcome budget reveals that the approved outlay for the night shelters were Rs. 1200 lakhs in the year 2013-2014 and shoot up to Rs. 2000 lakhs in the year 2014-2015. The massive 40% rise in the budget does not translate into an equally pleasing on-ground reality. Surprisingly

the RTI reply says that the Delhi Government hasn't created a single shelter in period between February 2015 to December 2016¹⁷. The AAP government, as a populist measure, merely seems to be focusing on increasing the budget, without shift in the approach. Similarly Mr. Kejriwal had announced biscuits and tea for the occupants during winters, which was reported in the newspapers¹⁸ but the care takers informed the team that it was for a short while during winters. D. Kartikeyan said that the provision of food was only applicable in 40 selected shelters in Delhi.

Any serious attempt by the government to address the issue of homelessness should have a holistic approach towards homeless. It must be able to assess and address multiple causes that lead to homelessness. This would include larger structural and economic issues that have brought about significant shifts in the economic lives of the people. The massive increase in size of the informal sector in India and the increasing tendency towards precarity in the labor market has also led to seasonal migration from rural areas to the city. Most of such seasonal migrants survive by providing cheap services without any form of security in the vast precarious labor market. Such migration has contributed to constant mobility and a drastic increase in the precarious poor in the cities of the country. Mr. Amar Nath in his interview to us argued that in recent times it is not only rural to urban migration that is taking place in India but rather a fluid mobility of the working population from cities to cities for short spurts of time. Addressing the issue of homelessness in the cities of India cannot be done without addressing the increasing tendency towards precarity in Indian economy. While attempts by the government to provide shelter to the homeless must be welcome they should not be viewed without skepticism. While

¹⁷ Gaurav Vivek Bhatnagar, " RTI Reveals no new night shelter added in Delhi under Kejriwal government in last two years", *The Wire*, January 23, 2017

<https://thewire.in/101795/rti-reveals-no-new-shelter-added-delhi-kejriwal-government/>

¹⁸ Mohit Sharma, "Night shelters for homeless to get TVs and barbers", *DNA India*, December 14, 2016

<http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-night-shelters-for-homeless-to-get-tvs-and-barbers-2282657>

there exist bureaucratic mechanisms to provide shelters a legislative will to holistically address to issue of homelessness is yet to be seen in spite of tall claims being made by the various governments.

The NULM operational guidelines for SUH say “The Urban homeless persons contribute to the economy of the cities and thus the nation as cheap labor in the informal sector”. This point out to a perception of the government, that does not aim to address the structural conditions that underlay poverty and homelessness but rather provides certain services like shelter that might merely be cramming the poor and perpetuating the conditions of poverty. The ‘cheap labor’ that the homeless person provides is taken as a contribution to the economy of the country and the marginalization of the person providing the cheap labor which causes homelessness is ignored. While the NULM guidelines do not have as its objective “providing permanent shelters with essential services” and “access to various entitlements” it is not conceived as a measure to root out homelessness. This is because the guidelines are aimed at making the homeless invisible rather than addressing the problems of their livelihood. “The shelters will be permanent, running though out the year; and open round the clock” are ones conceived to house the ever-changing faceless and migrating homeless. While the permanent shelters conceived here (SUH) provide facilities that are far better compared to the streets of cities, whether they conceive of uprooting the issue is questionable.

The DUSIB came about after the DUSIB Act 2010, for removal, resettlement, redevelopment and improvement of jhuggi jhopri bastis. The mandate of night shelters was also added to DUSIB while it was not conceived in the 2010 act. Both Mr. D. Karthikeyan and Mr. Amar Nath pointed out that as shelters were shifted overnight to the DUSIB while it did not have the man power to run them. This led to the outsourcing of the maintenance of night shelters to private

entities (the trajectory of which is discussed in the section on bidding process). DUSIB has today come to function more like a reimbursement agency, without employing workers under it to run the shelters. The perception embedded in the approach of DUSIB towards the homeless is the same as the one seen in the operational guidelines of NULM's SUH. This is obvious from the objectives of night shelter project that are mentioned in the 2017 tender document which reflect the objectives of the NULM's guidelines. While they attempt to provide shelter, there is no amount of effort that goes beyond that in terms of addressing the issue of homelessness.



Figure 3 inside of the Porta Cabin, Vasant Vihar Night Shelter

The Rain Basera in Vasant Vihar (See Figure 1) which the researchers visited was right next to Kuli Camp Basti, located in a posh area like Vasant Vihar, which caters to the elites of the city.

The shelter and the slum, thus represent containment of the poor from the sight of the elite. The guidelines of SUH state that the priority may be given to cities with population above one million and cities/towns of special social, “historical or tourist importance” identified by the GOI/State government. While the document also talks about locating shelters in places with homeless concentration, the hidden intent of the state is revealed with focus on places with historical and tourist importance. The underlying attempt to beautify the city by making the homeless invisible to create a perception to the other sections of the society becomes evident.

The DUSIB in managing night shelters through clusters has come to give multiple night shelters in a particular area to a single Shelter Management Agency. The agency is also responsible for rescue operations within the area under its jurisdiction. Such rescue operations are also backed by the control room that is connected with the Rain Basera app. The application is for general public that can inform the control room for rescue of homeless people. According to Ramesh, the caretakers have been trained to seek shelterless from the nearby areas and direct them to basera. This training is done by the NGO staff. The reason to bring shelterless to basera according to Ramesh is to save them from being run over by the drunk drivers at night, as they are ‘collective bunch of drunkards, beggars, and rickshaw pullers’. While expanding on the ‘rescue’ drives, he said that they “convince, motivate, and get people off the streets”.

The making ‘invisible’ of the homeless through the shelters is only re-enforced by ‘rescue’ measures which could be initiated by the general public using their smart phones. The operation of night shelters with rescue teams while providing shelter in the winters also attempts to

“convince, motivate and get people off the streets”. Thus sheltering the homeless also involves an attempt to hide them (especially in summers).

Findings

- The scheme of night shelters is being run as a “business model”. DUSIB functioning more like a reimbursement agency outsourcing management of shelters. While the NGO’s might argue that such a model might exclude them from the framework, the DUSIB operates within a logic that claims that when they pay for a service to be provided who provides the service might not be of relevance. We found that the recent tender policy of 2017 leads to monopoly of capital intensive agencies in running shelters.
- The outsourcing of man power itself as any agency that takes up maintenance of shelters would prioritize profit making. This problem does not merely rise with the issuing of tender but in the genesis of DUSIB itself. The lack of mandate for DUSIB to run night shelters in DUSIB Act 2010, must be remembered. When the night shelter department was shifted under it, the pressure to establish more night shelters overnight and run the existing ones by an agency that did not have the man power to do it led to the emergence of outsourcing the work to third party agencies. Though DUSIB has now been running night shelters for about 7 years now there seem to have been no attempts to hire human resources under its aegis.

- While we were able to find government measures to shelter the homeless, the lack of understanding the issue of homelessness holistically with its causes in the functioning of DUSIB and NULM's guidelines was evident. Any attempt merely aimed at sheltering the homeless like in the guidelines of NULM and the functioning of night shelters under DUSIB does not understand or address the roots of homelessness.
- Even the sheltering of homeless becomes beautification of cities through making invisible the poor population. This became very evident during the preparations for Commonwealth Games and the subsequent attempts at making Delhi a "world class" city. When there is no holistic approach to address the causes of homelessness whether shelters are to provide shelter or to hide the poor is a question that still remains.
- While nearly 71% of the night shelters provide services under the category of general for men, sadly only 11% of the shelters cater to women.
- In the Vasant Vihar night shelter that we visited the residents had to use the toilet that was built for the Kuli camp basti behind them. Though the night shelter has been in existence from 2013, a toilet for rain basera is under construction only now. While there were 3 caretakers listed, 2 of them functioned in 12 hour shifts while the third man would fill in when others took leave.
- AAP government's since its coming to power has been using the rhetoric of pro poor in its discourses in perception creation of public towards itself. There were no significant

changes or shift in the approach towards the homeless and the night shelters were not registered despite the increase in budget.