

# **ALWAYS ON THE RUN**

**A Report on the Plight of Slum Dwellers in  
Two Relocation Sites of Delhi**

*Prepared By*

**Delhi Janwadi Adhikar Manch**

**May 2001**

The last few years have witnessed the dislocation of thousands of working class families due to the closure of factories in Delhi and the demolition of jhuggi bastis. Regarding demolitions, the last one year has been the worst so far with a series of demolitions taking place on the quiet. Over 15,000 jhuggis, home to approximately 75,000 people, have been demolished. Most of them have not been relocated, and the few instances of relocation have forced people into living in abysmal conditions.

A recent report by the Delhi Janwadi Adhikar Manch, *How Many Errors Does Time Have Patience For?* (April 2001), drew attention to the various demolitions that have taken place in this city over the last few years and the plight of slum dwellers in the process of being evicted. The present report focuses on living conditions in the new rehabilitation sites and the imminent problems facing those who have been dumped there in the name of alternative housing. It is based on interviews with local residents at two relocation sites, Bhalsava in North Delhi and Madanpur Khadar in Southeast Delhi.

The following two accounts of these rehabilitation sites show how people's basic rights have been violated with impunity. They reflect the plight of other rehabilitation sites too and more clearly the attitude of the government towards those on whose labour this city lives and thrives on.

## BHALSAVA

It is four kilometres from Alipur Chowk in north Delhi, approachable by a metalled road from Outer Ring Road (near Jehangirpuri) that takes one to what is commonly described as Bhalsava dairy. Here is flat, open ground devoid of trees or shade, open on all sides to the elements. Beyond the houses of the local farmers lies the area where 20,000 people have been left to fend for themselves. They have been dumped here after the jhuggis they stayed in were demolished, in areas as far away as Garhi, Gautampuri (near ITO), Pashchim Vihar, Sanjay Camp (Rohini), and Ashok Vihar. And many more are slated to be brought here from demolished JJ clusters elsewhere. All those brought to Bhalsava had been staying in their area they were brought from for over ten years. With sheer hard work and determination they had made their JJ clusters livable providing a semblance of stability to their lives. In demolishing their houses what got destroyed were homes built by people with their hard-earned money, sweat, and labour.

The process began on November 3, beginning with Garhi. The most recent to be dumped here are people from Sanjay Camp, brought here on April 3. They were all

assured, prior to being shifted, that they were being taken to an area that was developed with all facilities provided. Not only was this not true but the little that has been made available to them was the result of their protests. The struggle to get the bare minimum continues but it is a race against time since the monsoons are less than two months away.

The land they were moved to was agricultural land. It was not levelled, has no drainage and is unsuitable for human habitation. The soil retains water and as a result with the slightest downpour the area becomes muddy and slushy. Since there is no sewage system to drain the water, the pits dug by people to dispose used water mixes with the downpour making the area appear like a pool of wastewater. The area is open on all sides and the temporary shelter built by the families is incapable of protecting them from the vagaries of nature.

Before being brought here, people were asked to fork out Rs 7000. Their receipts gave this as "amount received towards security and license fee for 10 years". The same also referred to the plot to be provided to them. The size of the plot varied from 12.5 to 18 sq. metres. That is barely enough to provide a room or two. Not everyone who lives in the JJ cluster can provide this fee. Many borrowed the amount at exorbitant rates of interest. But even after this not everyone received the plot, because the task of 'cutting plots' continues at a snail's pace.

Those who have been allotted plots face another problem. Since the soil is porous each plot owner has to spend up to Rs 15,000 just to dig and then fill it up to be able to build a house over it. Usually, the depth dug is five feet and raised another two feet for it to be considered suitable for protection against seepage from below. When that is done another Rs 35,000 is required to build a 'pucca' house. Few have the savings or the borrowing capacity to raise this amount. Thus, even where plots are demarcated there are raised platforms that stand forlorn.

Those fortunate to build a 'pucca' house face another problem. There is no drinking water available. The water provided is salty and therefore its use even for house construction is risky; salt can corrode the walls and the foundation. If this hurdle is somehow crossed, the next problem faced is the lack of electricity. The DVB has a supply centre and street connections are there but because power is provided in fits and starts, re-organizing life anew becomes difficult. For the families with children it's not only the lack of power that causes problem because the area attracts mosquitoes bearing malaria, dengue etc but nature's call arouses fear of snakes. Many a child has been bitten.

The nearest hospital is Babu Jagjivan Ram hospital in Jehangirpuri. There is a dispensary in block D 1. Only two primary schools have been set up in tents (in block

A 2 and D 1). These temporary schools have classes only up to Class 5. The older children have to travel to their earlier schools spending Rs 20 to 24 each day. The prospect of continuing school in the next academic year seems bleak for several families who somehow managed to get their children to sit for their final exams this year. The children had to prepare for exams under candle light and plagued by mosquitoes. As a result many have discontinued their studies.

In terms of facilities it is shocking that no ration shops are provided. Neither for fuel nor for basic items such as sugar, wheat, rice, etc. Instead of the ration price of Rs 9 for a litre of kerosene, they pay Rs 15; for sugar, instead of Rs 14 anything between Rs 16-18 per kg; atta Rs 8 against Rs 7 in ration shops; and finally rice costs them Rs 12 per kg against Rs 10. What is more, the price of fuel made out of dung (gobar ke uple) has more than tripled because the local farmers realize that the people have no choice but to use it both for fuel and as a mosquito repellent.

The transport costs for families living here have gone up several times. Bhalsawa to Paharganj, up and down, costs no less than Rs 16. The only other option is to board connecting buses from Jehangirpuri.

Jobs are scarce in the area, with no industry, little commercial activity of any other kind and therefore everyone has found their earnings slump. Daily wagers and rickshaw pullers barely manage to get work for even 15 days a month.

## **MADANPUR KHADAR EXTENSION**

This is actually part of the village Madanpur Khadar behind Sarita Vihar. About three months ago, in January 2001, the DDA resettled several families from Ambedkar Colony jhuggis near Nehru Place bus depot. Most families hail from Bihar and U.P., and many had been staying in Ambedkar Colony for years, some for over 20 years. The relocation site at Madanpur Khadar is at a slight distance from the village. The entry to the resettlement site has a board that says 'Transit Accommodation'.

The plots in Madanpur are of two types, 22 sq. metres and 12 sq. m. The difference is whether the residents had the ID cards issued by the V.P. Singh government in 1990. In Madanpur Khadar, on one side (in block A-1) are plots of 22 sq. metres. On the other side, in block A-2, are 12 sq. metre plots. In a map of the site there, 1,006 22 sq. metre plots have been drawn, but only about 560 families or so have actually been moved there and plots marked out. Of the 12 sq. metre plots, the figure of 900 were mentioned, but whether so many have already moved is not clear. The relocations from Ambedkar Colony are not complete and the relocation process is still carrying on. Not only have all families not shifted here, some families

who have been allotted plots continue to live in Nehru Place because this place is so out-of-the-way.

The DDA charged Rs 7,000 for 22 sq. metre plots and Rs 5,000 for 12 sq. metre plots. People had to invest in even leveling this highly uneven land. For a 12 sq. metre plot, three truck loads of material is needed at Rs 300 per truck or Rs 900 in total.

People have not been told how long they can stay here. They only have a xerox copy of the drafts they deposited with DDA without any receipt or any idea of the duration of the lease. The government has uprooted people from an area they had been staying for several years, taken money, and dumped them in a faraway place on the outskirts of Delhi with no guarantee that they would not be uprooted in the future.

Madanpur Khadar is extremely far away from their earlier places of work. Despite the bus, it is in different ways difficult to commute. The bus to Nehru Place takes a circuitous route and hence is Rs 8 one way. Along with the connecting bus to their place of work (many work in Okhla, and Gobindpuri), transport fare can be Rs 20 to Rs 24 per day per person. Some have stopped working because it is difficult to get to the earlier workplace on time. At night, the last bus to this place is at 7 p.m. Anyone who comes after that would have to walk long distances either from the Kalindi Kunj bus stop or from the Khadar Mode bus stop on Mathura Road. This entails a walk of over 2 km in the dark. Though there is a government school nearby, the children have not been admitted in it because they have been unable to procure the ration cards for identity. Ration cards are yet to be issued based on the new addresses. Those who go to school still have to go to their old government schools. Even rations are still procured from Nehru Place. Women trudge there on the first of each month, and get the month's provisions. In short, the lives of men, women and children is still connected hugely to where they stayed earlier since Madanpur Khadar has little to offer being on the faraway southern outskirts of the city.

There are drains lining the jhuggis, but the drains are uncovered, shallow and narrow. In the monsoons, the drains will definitely overflow all over. No electric power has been provided officially. There are three contractors in this jhuggi who supply electricity, at the rate of Rs 150 per point per month. Hence, those who ask for one bulb and one fan connection have to pay Rs 300 a month. This is a very high rate for the level of power consumed. We were told the contractors deposit a lakh of rupees with the DVB, and recover their money through the jhuggi dwellers. Hence, those in the DVB and middlemen profit hugely from these jhuggi dwellers. The source of water is uneven. A tanker comes in the evening. A few have installed hand-pumps, but the water is hard water, unfit for drinking. There is a row of mobile toilets at one end of the settlement, but few use that.

With little ventilation inside their houses, most sleep outside, but all we spoke to complained about mosquitoes and being unable to sleep at night. There is also the complete absence of any health services for miles around, particularly hazardous in case of any emergency at night. In most areas of the settlement, one is constantly attacked by fly ash emitted by the chimneys of the NTPC's Badarpur Thermal Power Station on Mathura Road. It is also a dust-prone area with lots of construction taking place in the vicinity. While there are long-term health hazards from constantly being exposed to dust particles and fly ash, their daily lives become a torture in either keeping the house clean or breathing clean air. Throwing large numbers of people into the face of such large emissions of dust and fly ash is a mockery of the stated concern to reduce pollution and safeguard the health of people.

## COMMON CONCERNS

There is striking similarity in the lived experience of the people brought here from areas where they had lived for 10-20 years. It was their homes that were demolished. In both places they were starting from scratch to rebuild their lives. If in one place the land threatens to turn into a marsh, in the other the proximity to the river Yamuna means that it would be inundated as the water level in the river rises. Left on their own devices few have money to construct houses and fewer still to pay "development fee" for the pleasure of acquiring a plot in this undeveloped land which boasts of no drainage system, sewage, or drinking water facility. The fear of dengue and malaria epidemics hangs heavy in both areas. Neither has a ration shop nor a primary health centre. As for school they are few in number functioning out of tents, and the electricity marks its presence in the shape of a DVB supply station that does not supply power. Above all there is no work available close by, forcing workers to travel long distances and making it difficult for others in search of a livelihood.

In the largely undeveloped and undemarcated land people continue to live under tin or plastic sheets in the open. These are transit camps since the arrangement is valid for only 10 years (several respondents said five years) whereas even in the days of the Emergency slum dwellers were given a lease of 99 years. This means that the allotted plot size has shrunk from 80 sq. metres to 18 sq. metres (and less), lease from 99 years reduced to 10 years, and each round of demolitions pushes them towards the periphery. That is until such time that land is developed by the sheer labour of the people and begins to attract commercial interests for its exploitation. Then, another round of demolitions will ensue under a new pretext. Working people will be forced to move yet again.

## CONCLUSIONS

The situation in these two rehabilitation sites holds true for the other resettlement sites at Papankalan, Narela and Molarbund. The Delhi government's promise of regularization of slums ends in relocation to such far-flung places that in effect it becomes a question of life and death for lakhs of slum dwellers. And on flimsiest of grounds. People are a problem, to be removed from the range of vision of those in power or the affluent. Thus, the eviction of bastis in Gautampuri near ITO was no random selection. The jhuggis wiped out were those visible from the newly acquired Delhi secretariat building. In similar fashion, all jhuggis located on the road leading to the Lotus temple in South Delhi were removed by the single order of a minister passing by who felt that they were an eyesore for tourists!

The link between livelihood and one's place of residence is critical. Invariably, slum dwellers are engaged in manufacturing units near their jhuggies. Many are daily wage earners, vendors, hawkers, sweepers, drivers, rickshaw pullers, and domestics in neighboring residential areas, markets, and offices. Relocation to far flung areas amounts to destitution as it deprives thousands of their livelihoods. In the Bombay Pavement Dwellers Case in 1985, the Supreme Court ruled that the fundamental right to life (Article 21) includes the right to livelihood and since the livelihood of pavement dwellers is linked to their place of stay, removing them from the pavements would be tantamount to deprivation of livelihood and therefore unconstitutional as it deprives them of the right to life. Today, sixteen years later, the milieu has changed and the right to life is being threatened by the Supreme Court in the name of fighting pollution, and cleaning as well as beautifying Delhi. People are being denied their means of livelihood and are getting pauperized in the process. The right to decent uncrowded housing too has ceased to hold any meaning. The struggle of the working class for equitable distribution of urban land, air and water has now become a question of their survival. Clearly, along with the right to livelihood, every slum rehabilitation has to be accompanied by access to water, electricity, schools, health services, ration shops, and proper drainage and sewage systems. However, the living conditions of those rehabilitated in Papankalan, Bhalsava, Madanpur Khadar, Narela and Molarbund violates the fundamental right to life and testifies to the abdication by the government of its responsibility to people by failing to provide basic amenities.

The initial norm for a decent living space for the poor in the Master Plan for Delhi 1962 (MPD-62), was estimated at 80 sq. m. per family. This was followed in practice in the initial 18 resettlement colonies created by the DDA in the 1960s. By May 1992 the National Housing Policy brought it down to 25 sq. metres and at present the plot size has shrunk even further; 18 sq. metres for some and 12.5 sq. metres for most.

What will become of these rehabilitation sites when the rains come? What will people do if they are unable to build pucca houses? Where will the money come

from? The government has washed its hands off these problems. People are even denied loans from HUDCO to build low cost housing for themselves. The authorities turn to the NGOs to provide the guarantee for these loans. Those who cannot even provide the Rs 7000 fee are worse off because they do not know how long they can survive and where they will go or to whom they should turn to get a plot. How will everyone make ends meet when jobs are getting fewer in the city, and fetch lower wages for longer hours of work? With the reality of depleted incomes, higher price for basic items, and scarcity of basic facilities such as water, electricity, sewage, etc., life holds a terror of uncertainty for these people.

**We therefore demand :**

1. That the following facilities be provided urgently: (a.) Ration shop (b.) Primary Health Centre (c.) Drinking water (d.) Electricity (e.) Sewage and Drainage (f.) School and (g.) Regular bus-service to different parts of the city.
2. That no development or license fee be charged from those whose homes are being demolished;
3. That loans from HUDCO be provided to enable the people to pay for the construction of their homes;
4. That all demolitions cease forthwith until such time that levelled land and basic facilities are in place for the people being relocated there;
5. That the size of the plot be restored to 80 sq. metres with a lease life of 99 years;
6. That land for re-location not be on the periphery of the city of Delhi but found within the available vacant land inside the city.

**We meet every Monday at 5 p.m. in the lawns of Constitution Club, Rafi Marg, New Delhi. We look forward to more people joining us, and strengthening the struggle of workers.**

**We also appeal to you for small financial contributions to keep our work going.**

***The Manch Comprises :***

All India Federation of Trade Unions; All India League for Revolutionary Culture; Akhil Bharat Nepali Ekta Samaj; Bandi Karkhana Sanyukt Sangharsh Samiti, Bigul Mazdoor Dasta, Delhi Leather Karigar Sangathan, Delhi General Mazdoor Front; Democratic Students Union; Indian Council of Trade Unions; Lok Dasta; Mehnatkash Mazdoor Morcha; Progressive Students' Union; People's Union for Democratic Rights; Pragatisheel Mazdoor Trade Union; Rahul Foundation; Saheli; Stree Adhikar Sangathan; Jhuggi Jhopri Nivasi Adhikar Samiti; Workers' Solidarity

**Suggested Contribution: Rs.5/- only.**