

## A SLUM OF THE NATIONAL CAPITAL: QUESTIONS ON DEVELOPMENT, GOVERNANCE & ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETIES

A report by Ravi Nitesh

Dhobi Ghat , a slum area with a majority of muslim population , is situated on the bank of river Yamuna, near Batla House, Jamia Nagar, New Delhi with around 150 families. These families are mostly deprived and poor, surviving with low literacy rate, malnutrition, hunger and lack of sanitation.

Khudai Khidmatgar had organized a youth camp under the guidance of social activist Faisal Khan, with its objective of 'service of God' on 26<sup>th</sup> feb 2012 for the families of dhobi ghat. There were 20 volunteers in this campaign. I was one of them to experience the ground conditions of this area.

One of the most shocking facts discovered was that no civil society group/ government officials had ever visited them, even though this area is in the capital city and is situated near Jamia Nagar. How is it possible that NGOs who get crores of rupees to work in slum , to eradicate poverty, to fight with malnutrition, to raise voices for rights, to campaign for education etc; have never visited this area, I wondered.

My report here is dedicated to those people, with the hope that their condition will become better gradually through joint efforts of the government, civil society and their own.

In my first sight of this area, I saw children playing, not with modern era toys, but with plastic bags immersed in waste, garbage of river etc.



Pic-1: Children playing with garbage on the bank of river Yamuna

## Mohammad Jais: Bada Hoke Doctor Banega? (Will become a doctor)

I met Md. Jais, the only school going boy among the 12 families that I had met. I asked him why he was going to school and what does he want to become when he grows up. His reply was unexpected. He smiled...“doctor” he replied, in a low pitch. Probably he thought that his desire would be seen as a joke. He was so dirty with his clothes, but probably so fresh in mind, he was so unhygienic in physical condition, but so pure from heart. His mother proudly smiled with a pain. The pain was her foresight by which she was almost sure in her heart about the future of her child. Her heart was breaking in parts at the same moment... she was thinking that her child will not become a doctor due to her poverty, at the same time, another part of the heart believe in God, then again the man of her heart tells that even if God will not want, she will make it happen through her hard labor; another moment she again became dependent on people around her to support her, and then some more and more thoughts.... Now, My voice probably vibrated in her ears because I was in front of her, but she was unaware about my presence, she was in her own thoughts and was busy with listening the sounds of her breaking hearts... but I interrupted (and it helped in stopping the breaking heart in parts),



Pic-2: Mohammed Jais with his younger brother: Bada Hoke Doctor Banega? (will become a doctor?)

“what do you want?”. she expressed her concern over the problem of drinking water. Yes, safe drinking water is still not available to those people. On an average, one family consumes 30 litres of water per day for drinking and cooking purpose, and they arrange it only through nearby houses. They keep plastic gallons with them, and they (mostly females) go to nearby colonies, (mostly from the houses where they work as maid) to bring water. Sabana told that many times, they also hear abuses / bad tones from these rich people because they get irritated from our “water begging”. (Link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=27vsa5B00Ag>)

## WATER

During our visit, we found some hand pumps were installed there and some residents were using it as a bath water. When I inquired about them, we got to know that these hand pumps were installed by residents themselves but the water that comes out from hand pump is very dirty and impossible to use for cooking and drinking purpose. They showed us a plastic bucket that was yellow in color in the inside because of the hand pump water. (see picture) River Yamuna is adjacent to this Jhuggi Area, and thus a ground water level is up but not clean. Water is related to life and thus denial of safe drinking water is a violation of right to life. Getting safe drinking water is right of every citizen of this country regardless of his/her economical and social status.



Pic-3: Plastic bucket inside's surface affected due to dirty water

## MALNUTRITION & HUNGER:

Anyone can see that children of this area are not getting proper food and thus they are living a different life than other children of an average family living in Delhi. This difference is a clear reflection of inequality and it will affect on their psychology that may ruin their constructive growth.



Pic-4: A balanced diet?

## SANITATION

It was also seen that all these 150 families don't have toilets. They have to go on the bank of river to relieve themselves. It is shameful that we (the government) are so helpless (?) to install community toilet facility? Or even mobile toilet van? Sanitation condition was so unhygienic there and no proper drainage/pits are available. Waste is accumulated at many places in this area. This condition is an invitation to various kinds of diseases.



Pic-5: Open Toilet

## DISASTER: FLOOD

The area is situated in low line land and therefore during monsoon season, water starts filling in this area (through rain and flood of Yamuna river). People migrate from this area to nearby high place for one month and then again they return to this area. It repeats every year.

## POVERTY & ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN

They don't have any cooking range, and cylinders etc. They use 'Chulha' (a burner made of soil) and fuel use in it is wood. It increases carbon emissions too.



Pic-6: Conventional Cooking

## GOVERNANCE

Governance system is such that some people there have ration card, some don't have; some people have health card, some don't have. Even after having ration card, they don't get ration each month and whenever they get, they used to get less than the ration limit.

During our visit, we experienced that talking with these people was a different experience. They were so polite and true, they were in deep pain but became used to with this panic condition. They didn't have any hope but still they expressed their problems before us. And I remember the lines of Mohammad Yunus " Sahab, hum toh vote bhi dete hain, kaam bhi karte hain, immandaari se rehte bhi hain; par sarkaar ko hamara koi dhyan nahee, aakhir aap batayeye hamare vote dene ka kya fayda mila raha hai humko? (Sir, we cast our vote, we work too, we live with honesty, but government doesn't care us, please you tell what benefit we are getting after using our vote?" and I was speechless, I could not tell him that value of vote is same in principle only, in practice its really differs.

(Views are personal and based on visit and personal interaction with persons of the area)

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