

## Model Market at Sewa Nagar Attempts at Collaboration with City Administration

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**A**fter the announcement of the Prime Minister's New Policy for street hawkers, and rickshaw pullers in response to *Manushi's* campaign and public hearings, the municipal authorities were expected to announce a concrete plan of action for both these sectors which would incorporate the principles and guidelines enunciated in the PM's Policy Note. (See *Manushi* Issue No. 125) However, till date no concrete steps have been taken by the municipal authorities, even on paper. In the meantime, raids, confiscations,

"clearance operations", harassment and extortion continue unabated. For a while, all our efforts to get the New Policy implemented were being stonewalled, with the Lt. Governor of Delhi, the administrative head responsible for putting into operation the new framework taking on a hostile stance and refusing to even negotiate on the issue. Therefore, we felt compelled to approach the Delhi High

Court for a stay order on the continuing economic assaults on street vendors, rickshaw owners and pullers. We managed to get only an interim stay order. Even during the period of the stay order, the city

sectors had been evolved and promised to submit it before the Court. However, nothing of the sort has materialised so far.

In the meantime, *Manushi* took the initiative to develop Sewa Nagar

hawker market as a model for the rest of the city (See *Manushi* No. 127). As soon as we began the process, the local police and municipal authorities began to threaten eviction of especially those hawkers who became active in this endeavour. We made a special plea to the High Court to protect Sewa Nagar from the impending

"clearance operation". On January 4, 2002 the Court provided interim relief by way of a limited stay order against eviction of Sewa Nagar hawkers. But that made the local authorities even more hostile. We realized we could not count on the Court for long term protection. The legalistic arguments presented in Court by the lawyers representing the police and municipal authorities against hawkers tend to carry more weight with the judges than



**Mr. Negi Addl. Commissioner MCD addressing Sewa Nagar vendors**

authorities continued with their assaults as before giving ample proof of how little they respected the Court's order. On January 31, 2002, the lawyers appearing on behalf of the municipal corporation argued vociferously against our plea, despite the fact that it amounted to their going against the stated policy framework laid down by the Prime Minister. They told the Court that a new policy framework for these



**Mr. Negi performing Jhadu Puja**

the issues raised by us on behalf of hawkers. The law, as it exists, does define the very existence of hawkers as illegal, does treat them as “encroachers” on public land.

Moreover, it became increasingly clear that by engaging us in a long drawn out confrontation the authorities could easily exhaust our energy and break our spirit. Given how frightened and vulnerable the average citizen in India, especially poorer sections like hawkers feel with regard to the police and other government functionaries, we had to ensure that the city administration felt compelled to cooperate rather than treat us as permanent adversaries.

Even without the fear of further harm, we felt it was important to break through the wall of hostility because confrontation might make good copy for press releases but is not likely to produce results. Even our plans of developing Sewa Nagar had come to a standstill in the face of administrative hostility. We were hesitant to invest money we had collected for the purpose of architectural and civic improvements in Sewa Nagar unless we were

assured of a measure of protection from the authorities. As we mentioned in our report in issue No. 127 of MANUSHI, each vendor had contributed Rs. 500 towards the initial fund for civic improvements in that area. In addition, MANUSHI has been able to raise Rs. 50,000 towards Sewa Nagar Improvement Fund. If after investing all the time and money, the entire area is attacked by the MCD under the guise of removing “encroachments” the

resultant demoralisation among vendors would have made it impossible for us to carry forward this task any further. Without government agencies agreeing to collaborate with us and treat us as partners for the improvement of the city, we could not make much headway.

### **Operation Cooperation**

Our first breakthrough came with the Additional Commissioner of MCD Mr. Ramesh Negi, agreeing to visit Sewa Nagar on December 19, 2001 to get an idea of our plans and the process we had set into motion. Since all our meetings at Sewa Nagar start with *Jhadu Puja*, Mr. Negi also joined us in the worship of the sacred broom. Incidentally, our architectural plans at Sewa Nagar include a Jhadu Mandir. He was visibly touched by the new culture of self regulation MNAM was trying to build and was open enough to admit that he too was initially annoyed at the challenge posed by MANUSHI to existing policies and the upset created by the Prime Minister’s intervention for reform in policy. The vendors who had gathered for a



**Vatavaran’s Cleaning Brigade starts their work with Jhadu Puja**

**Our architectural plans at Sewa Nagar include a Jhadu Mandir.**

dialogue with him were surprised to hear him candidly share with them how the bureaucratic mind-set prefers inertia to a shake-up — no matter how well meaning or how necessary. However, Mr. Negi cheered us all by declaring that he would be willing to cooperate if we come up with a worthwhile proposal for civic improvement and self-regulation, especially with regard to sanitation and rational garbage management.

At the same time Mr. Negi insisted that we get the Delhi government and the Court to formally endorse our efforts and make them part of policy so that its survival does not solely depend on the goodwill of one or two officials who cannot deliver much in the face of resistance and sabotage by their own colleagues, unless the policy framework changed.

Therefore, we approached the Chief Minister of Delhi, Mrs Sheila Dikshit to include our project of creating model hawker markets in the *Bhagidari* (partnership) scheme promoted by Delhi government which envisages a collaboration between citizens and the city administration for the improvement of civic services. So far only a handful of residential colonies have been adopted in this partnership project. We are pushing for the adoption of hawker markets under

**Our biggest challenge, however, lies in dealing with touts who claim police protection.**

the aegis of the *Bhagidari* scheme. The initial response of the Chief Minister has been positive and we are hopeful something worthwhile may well come of it.

Our biggest challenge, however, lies in dealing with touts who claim police protection. Even while some of the senior officials are beginning to consider collaboration with MNAM, the attitude of the local police and local municipal officials remains obstructive because they stand to lose a lot of money and clout, if our plans actually succeed. The touts are working overtime to disrupt the culture of self regulation that Manushi Nagrik Adhikar Manch is trying to inculcate.

While our architectural design and beautification interventions in Sewa Nagar are awaiting the formal approval by the Chief Minister's office, we entered into collaboration with an NGO called *Vatavaran* headed by Iqbal Malik for garbage recycling and disposal. They have deputed

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three trained *safai* karamcharis for this job in Sewa Nagar at a salary of Rs. 2000 each. Each vendor is paying Rs. 25 per month towards the salary of this Cleaning Brigade. The money for uniforms, and other equipment needed for garbage management has been provided from the fund collected by MANUSHI. We hope to start the architectural and design upgradation of the market and *rehdis* very soon. We will keep our readers informed about its progress. □

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