

**How Rise of Middle Class Activism in Indian Cities  
is changing the Face of Local Governance  
[case of delhi]**

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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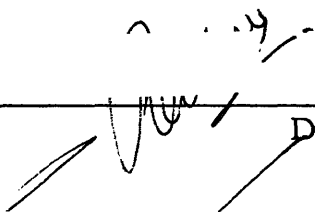
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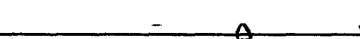
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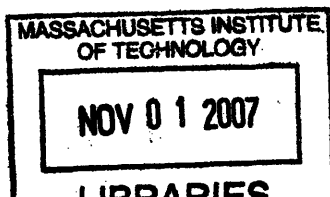


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## **Abstract**

Neighborhood Associations, called Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs), have assumed an important role in public policy decision making in Delhi as the principal voice of the middle class. This represents a departure from the traditional role of these institutions that was restricted to the boundaries of their neighborhoods. This development also follows a Government of Delhi program, called *Bhagidari*, that institutionalized citizen government participation through these very associations. This thesis attempts to establish a relationship between middle-class activism, exemplified by the rise in neighborhood associations, and local governance in mega-cities using the case of Delhi.

I observe that although implementation of *Bhagidari* did not change any formal political structures in the city, it led to friction between political representatives and the Delhi Government and Resident Welfare Associations. The media focus on the program and the administrative mechanism adopted in its implementation contributed towards the rise of RWAs. RWAs were able to influence public policy by forming citywide horizontal networks with other RWAs and bargaining with the State through the channels of the media. The various cases of activism reveal that this mobilization has been triggered by some form of privatization of service delivery which resulted (or was believed to result) in increase in user charges. The two RWA umbrella organizations that developed as a consequence of this mobilization point towards a change in the traditional 'apolitical' character of middle class in India. Although both shared related opinions on public policy issues, one assumed a 'watchdog' of the State role, while another mobilized neighborhood associations to contest municipal elections. I discovered that neighborhood associations with pre-existing networks with government agencies were more likely to remain apolitical, while the ones without these social networks seek to become part of the government machinery through formal electoral channels. Policies on decentralization instituted by the Federal Government and the *Bhagidari* program have been instrumental in this change.

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# Chapter Outline

1. **Introduction:** The first chapter sets the contextual background for the thesis. I introduce the city of Delhi in India, my case study and define key terms and institutions that come up often in this research. I lay down main observations that intrigued me during the course of fieldwork and define my research questions around them. I briefly describe the main body of literature that aims at explaining these developments and how they are able to explain only part of the puzzle. In the second part of this chapter, I describe the process through which research evolved during the course of a year and two periods of fieldwork. I finally elaborate on methodology and sources of data.

2: **How associations of the Middle Class and the Urban Poor Access the State:** Chapter two describes the different channels through which middle-class associations and residents of informal settlements access the State. I explore the history, membership characteristics, and methods of operation of neighborhood associations in Delhi. The Government of Delhi institutionalized citizen-government participation with these neighborhood associations in 2000 through a program called *Bhagidari*. I study the factors that led to implementation of the program and the administrative mechanisms through which it was implemented. This chapter lays the contextual and theoretical background for understanding how middle-class associations have come to dominate public policy discourse in the city that I explore in the successive chapters.

3: **New forms of accessing the State: *Bhagidari* story retold...**Chapter three examines the political impacts of the *Bhagidari* program. I look at the evolution of the program as perceived by the various stakeholders (RWAs, Delhi Government and other government agencies) and Chapter 2). I study the impact of the program on service delivery and on the relationship between the Government of Delhi and other government agencies involved in service delivery. I also describe the ways in which the relationship between citizen-groups and government agencies, especially political representatives, changed as an outcome of the program.

4. **'Apolitical' Activism by the Middle Class:** This chapter reviews the dominant literature that explains the rise of neighborhood associations in India in recent years and its impact on urban public space. I describe the larger impacts of neighborhood associations on public policy through formation of horizontal networks with other associations, exploring the key role of media and judiciary in the process. I explore the factors behind this collective action and the extent to which *Bhagidari* was instrumental in this change. I discover that contrary to common perception, RWAs umbrella organizations are fragmented and represent a change in the traditional role of civil society in India that has been disjointed from formal electoral politics.

5. **Political Impacts of Middle Class Activism:** In chapter five, I try to understand 'who' within the array of neighborhood associations in the city decided to join formal politics. I also explore the 'indirect' means through which neighborhood associations influence formal politics by influencing the behavior of local political representatives. I argue

that policies on decentralization adopted by the Government of Delhi and the Municipal Corporation of Delhi have been instrumental in this change.

6. **Concluding thoughts:** This chapter seeks to answer research questions introduced at the beginning of the thesis. I try to understand the factors behind the implementation of the Bhagidari program and the resultant (unintended) political impacts. I explore how middle-class neighborhood associations are beginning to influence public policy both through direct and indirect means and identify the external factors that have been instrumental in this change. I also speculate on what these developments could mean for the future of Indian cities.

# Acronyms

74 <sup>th</sup> CCA	74 <sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
CM	Chief Minister
DDA	Delhi Development Authority
DISCOMs	[Electricity] Distribution Companies
DJB	Delhi Jal Board
DVB	Delhi Vidyut Board
GNCTD	Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi <i>also</i> Government of Delhi/ Delhi Government
GoI	Government of India <i>also</i> Central Government/ Federal Government/ Center
INR	Indian Rupee
JJ	<i>Jhuggi Jhopris</i> or Slum settlements
MCD	Municipal Corporation of Delhi <i>also</i> Municipal Government
NDMC	New Delhi Municipal Council
RWA	Resident Welfare Association <i>also</i> Neighborhood Association
MoHA	Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India
MoI&B	Ministry of Information and Broadcasting
MoUD	Ministry of Urban Development, Government of India
MLA	Member of Legislative Assembly ( <i>here</i> Government of Delhi)
MP	Member of Parliament, Government of India
URJA	United Residents Joint Action

“...middle class anger *pays*.  
the louder you scream the better.”

*Civil Society*, New Delhi, September-October, 2005



# Chapter 1

## Introduction

This chapter sets the contextual background for the thesis. I introduce the city of Delhi in India, my case study and define key terms and institutions that come up often in this research. I lay down main observations that intrigued me during the course of fieldwork and define my research questions around them. I briefly describe the main body of literature that aims at explaining these developments and how they are able to explain only part of the puzzle. In the second part of this chapter, I describe the process through which research evolved during the course of a year and two periods of fieldwork. I finally elaborate on methodology and sources of data.

### 1.1 The City of Delhi

Delhi is the second largest metropolis in India after Mumbai with a population of more than 13 million. Located in northern India on the banks of the River Yamuna, it is one of the oldest continually inhabited cities in the world. New Delhi, built by the British as an administrative quarter, is now the capital of the Republic of India. As the seat of the Government of India, New Delhi houses important offices of the federal government, including the Parliament of India, the *Rashtrapati Bhavan* (Presidential Palace) and the Supreme Court of India.

Delhi has the political status of a federally-administered Union Territory<sup>1</sup> known as the National Capital Territory of Delhi (NCT). A constitutional amendment in 1992 (69<sup>th</sup>



**Map 1.1** Delhi: Location Map

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<sup>1</sup> A Union Territory (UT) is an administrative division of India. Unlike States, which have their own local governments, Union Territories are ruled directly by the National Government. The government of UT is headed by the Lieutenant Governor, appointed by the Central Government. There are seven union territories in India. Delhi is on the verge of being granted statehood and currently has the status of National Capital Territory (NCT).

Amendment) gave Delhi a special status among the Union Territories; Delhi has its own Legislative Assembly (called *Vidhan Sabha*, with 70 constituencies) although with limited powers. The National Capital Territory of Delhi comprises nine districts, three statutory towns viz. Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), New Delhi Municipal Committee (NDMC) and Delhi Cantonment Board (DCB), 59 census towns and 165 villages. Delhi has four major satellite cities which lie outside the National Capital Territory of Delhi. These are Gurgaon and Faridabad (in Haryana), and Noida and Ghaziabad (in Uttar Pradesh).

Delhi has grown very rapidly in the last thirty years owing to immigration of workers from across the country, especially from the states of Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. The population of the city as per the 2001 Census stood at 13.7 million. The corresponding density was 9,294 persons per km<sup>2</sup>, with a sex ratio of 821 women per 1000 men, and a literacy rate of 81.82%. The estimated Net State Domestic Product (SDP) of Delhi (2004-05) was US\$ 20.5 billion (or 830.85 billion Indian rupees). The city has a per capita income of US\$ 1,329 (53,976 INR) which is about 2.5 times that of the national average. The services sector contributes 70.95% of Delhi's gross SDP followed by secondary and primary sectors with 25.2% and 3.85% respectively.

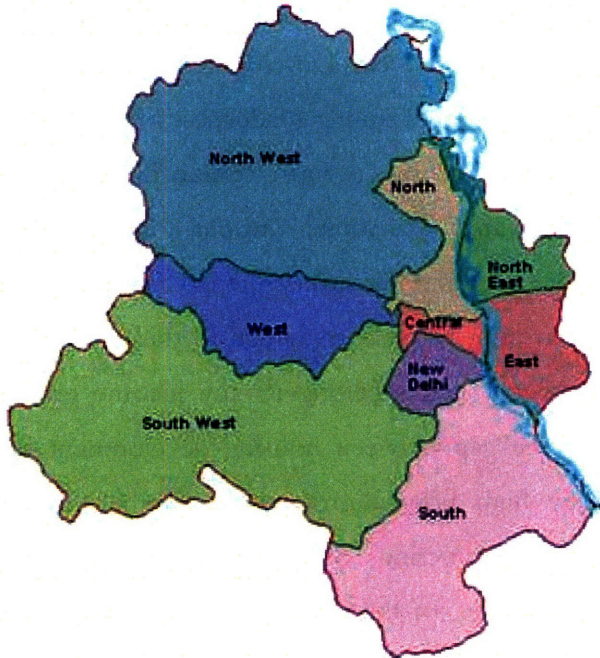
## **1.2 Institutional Environment**

### **1.2.1 Government and Politics**

As a special Union Territory, the National Capital Territory of Delhi has its own Legislative Assembly, Lieutenant Governor, Council of Ministers and Chief Minister, forming the Government of the National Capital Territory of Delhi (GNCTD). The Legislative Assembly seats are filled by direct election from territorial constituencies in the NCT. However, the Union Government of India and the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi jointly administer New Delhi. The legislative assembly was re-established in 1993 for the first time since 1956, with direct federal rule in the span.

Delhi was a traditional stronghold of the Indian National Congress, also known as the Congress Party. In the 1990s the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) under the leadership of Madan Lal Khurana came into power. However in 1998, Congress regained power. Sheila Dixit of Congress Party is the incumbent Chief Minister. A Congress-led alliance has also been in power at the Central Government from 2004 onwards.

The Delhi High Court exercises jurisdiction over Delhi. The Delhi Police, headed by the Police Commissioner, is one of the largest metropolitan police forces in the world. The Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) is responsible for running the public bus system while the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) operates the subway system.



**Map 1.2** The nine Administrative Districts in Delhi as per the Government of Delhi

The NCT of Delhi has three local municipal corporations: **Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD)**, **New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC)** and Delhi Cantonment Board.

The Municipal Corporation of Delhi is one the largest municipal corporations in the world and has jurisdiction over an estimated 13.78 million people. The capital of India, New Delhi, falls under administration of NDMC. The chairperson of the NDMC is appointed by the Government of India in consultation with the Chief Minister of Delhi. The

Delhi Development Authority (DDA) is the main agency involved in planning and development of the city. DDA is also responsible for preparation and enforcement of the Master Plan of Delhi. MCD and NDMC are chiefly responsible for maintenance of public goods, most of which are developed by the DDA. Delhi is divided into 9 administrative districts (see Map 1.2) by the Delhi Government. The MCD area is divided into 12 zones and 272 wards (increased from 132 in 2007) (refer Map 1.3). The water supply in the city is managed by the Delhi Jal Board (DJB). The Delhi Vidyut Board (DVB), the state-owned utility agency was in charge of supplying electricity to the city until 2002 when it was privatized into distribution companies (DISCOMs).

### 1.2.2 Typology of Settlements in Delhi

Neighborhoods in Delhi are typically termed as 'housing colonies'. The housing typology is generally indicative of the socio-economic background of its residents. I would broadly classify these into six categories. **Planned neighborhoods** are either plotted (single family homes) or apartment style housing developed either by the Delhi Development Authority or Cooperative Housing Societies through formal regulations/zoning guidelines. Most people who live in this typology belong to middle-high income groups. **'Unauthorized' or 'unplanned'** development refers to housing privately developed without following the zoning regulations laid down by the Master Plan. As a result infrastructural facilities, like electricity lines, water supply, paved roads etc, are not formally extended to these areas by local governments. The population in this category could belong to any income group because such housing is more a reflection of the gap between housing development by government agencies and demand pushed by high population growth. Further, many planned neighborhoods in the city have illegal constructions or alterations that are also termed as 'unauthorized'. According to MCD estimates, of the total 3000 housing colonies in Delhi, an estimated 1,600 are unauthorized with a population of more than 4 million people. Further, of the 3.4 million buildings in the city, the MCD states 70-80% of them have major or minor illegalities. **Slum settlements, known as Jhuggi Jhopris (JJ) Clusters** are unauthorized settlements where residents do not have formal land titles. The population in these settlements belongs to low-income groups, often migrant workers. These settlements do not pay property tax. They are provided with very little infrastructure or services beyond community water facilities, street lighting and community toilets (at times). The other forms of settlements fall between the broad categories of 'planned' and 'unauthorized'. **'Regularized Colonies'** are settlements that used to be unauthorized colonies but were subsequently regularized, usually through political pressure often before local elections. In the case of squatter settlements, this process is accompanied with granting tenure rights to the residents. Till 1985 the government of Delhi 'regularized' these colonies by providing services on a reduced scale to them. There are 660 such colonies spread all over Delhi (Harriss, 2005a). **'Resettlement Colonies'** are housing settlement developed usually at the outskirts of the city where residents of JJ Clusters have been relocated. Residents of these settlements belong to low-income group. Some researchers argue that the poorest

segment of the population resides in these settlements, as opposed to slum settlements within the city (Baud, Shridharan, and Pfeffer 2006). '**Urban Village**' is a concept unique to Delhi and some other cities in northern India. These were villages within the National Capital Territory of Delhi and treated as 'special areas' as per the Delhi Master Plan with the intention to preserve their unique lifestyle and built form. As the city grew, these villages too urbanized but without any urban design guidelines. Most urban villages are low-middle income in nature, but there are a few high-income urban villages located in South Delhi.

### 1.3 The Actors and the Props

This research is set in the background of a Government of Delhi program called *Bhagidari*, implemented in 2000. *Bhagidari* is a 'program of partnership between government agencies in Delhi and citizens'. The 'government agencies' include the Government of Delhi, local municipalities (**Municipal Corporation of Delhi** and New Delhi Municipal Council), Delhi Development Authority, and utility agencies and companies (Delhi Jal Board and **power Distribution Companies**) (see section 1.2.1). 'Citizens' were represented by neighborhood associations, called **Resident Welfare Associations**<sup>2</sup> (RWA), Market and Trader Associations (MTA), Industrial Associations, Village Groups and NGOs. The main focus of the program however has been on RWAs. RWAs are essentially neighborhood management committees in apartment blocks or housing colonies to which the residents are required to pay regular charges, and which look after maintenance of common resources (Harriss, 2005b). It is important to note that only RWAs from the planned parts of the city, all of which are **middle class** in nature, were part of the program. Although *Bhagidari* has diversified to other sectors like education, health, industry, etc in the last seven years, RWAs continue to be the only institutions that represent neighborhoods. RWAs at the city level are represented by two large **umbrella organizations**: 'People's Action' and 'Delhi Resident Welfare Association Joint Front'.

Since RWAs are chiefly concerned with provision of civic amenities, the organization they interact with most (on a day-to-day basis) is the MCD. MCD is in charge of solid waste management, maintenance of roads and parks, drainage and provision of community facilities. MCD comprises of two sections: the 'executive' and the 'deliberative' wing. The executive wing is the technocratic part of the organization comprising of civil-servants. The

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<sup>2</sup> I use 'Neighborhood Association' and 'Resident Welfare Association' interchangeably in this thesis.

deliberative wing is represented by elected **councilors** at the ward level and the Mayor at the city level. Political representatives from the Delhi Government are **Members of Legislative Assembly (MLA)**. They are headed by the **Chief Minister** of Delhi, currently **Sheila Dikshit**. During my fieldwork, the **Congress party** was in power at both the Delhi Government and MCD. The Congress also leads the coalition government at the Union. The main opposition party is the **Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)**. The Central Government exerts significant control over Delhi, principally through the **Ministry of Urban Development (MoUD)** and **Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA)**.

#### 1.4 Middle Class in India

The central actors in this story are Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs). These associations are prevalent in middle class neighborhoods in the city in both the 'planned' and 'unauthorized' parts. This includes high income neighborhoods as well as middle income neighborhoods. I use the term 'middle class' to represent both types of neighborhoods although many of these neighborhoods would theoretically fall in the 'upper middle class' category. The residents in these neighborhoods are employed in white-collar salaried jobs, mostly as professionals and managers. RWAs have been in existence in Delhi for many years, growing fastest in the 1980s. The *Bhagidari* program put them in spotlight in the last few years.

The 'middle-class' in India is however notoriously hard to define. Pavan Verma (1998) uses a consumption based definition: who can afford three meals a day, have a home to live in, access to basic healthcare, public transport and schooling. But most scholars have tried to categorize this class based on 'cultural capital'. The Indian middle-class was artificially created under British rule primarily through the educational policy introduced specifically for meeting the administrative requirements of the Raj. Since educational achievement during the period was tied to caste, higher caste *Brahmins* came to dominate the middle class. Even after independence, the middle class was Nehruvian civil service oriented sect. Later, this term referred to more than just the educated professional and business classes but also included the landed proprietors (Frankel, 1988). In the 1970s and 80s, the middle class came to include the entrepreneurial class. Fernandes (2006) argues that the newness of the middle-class in the 90s refers to a 'process of production of a distinctive social and political identity' that represents and lays claim to the benefits of liberalization.

This segment of the middle class comprises of the professional and managerial class that has grown as an outcome of economic growth, especially the location of multinational firms in large Indian cities.

The middle class is the main addresses of the national media and are at the core of every political party's campaigning strategies. Interestingly, the middle class is characterized by its distance from electoral politics with voter turnout having dropped to 35-40% by the late 90s as opposed to more than 80% in poorer and slums. Politicians who choose to ignore the middle class may not always lose a crucial vote bank, but make themselves vulnerable to 'punishment' from the institutions that the middle class elites dominate and control: the judiciary, the civil service, the election commission and the media (Mazzarella, 2006).

### 1.5 Key Observations during Fieldwork

I began this research by studying *Bhagidari*, a Government of Delhi program that institutionalizes citizen participation in governance. Why Delhi was the first city where this happened may perhaps be explained by its unique institutional environment: significant control by the federal government that gives very little political space for implementation of formal policies on decentralization laid out in the Constitution of India. But having grown up in the city, what interested me more were developments surrounding the program. Central to this was the changing role of **Resident Welfare Associations**, the principal partners in the *Bhagidari* program. The sphere of influence of RWAs until a few years back was restricted to the boundaries of their neighborhoods. *Bhagidari*, to an extent, strengthened the relationship of these associations to the State. But what followed was an extension of these boundaries to the realm of the city through development of horizontal networks with other RWAs. RWAs from all over Delhi organized, and became one of the principal 'voice' of the citizens in the media and public policy discourse. Not only did they become the biggest critic of the state, but they also managed to tilt public policy decisions in their favor on multiple occasions, like forcing the government to revert the hike in electricity rates or prevent the privatization of the water utility agency.

This **mobilization** is rooted in the local but is not unique to it. Neighborhood associations are on the rise in all large cities in India. But the graininess of the local is what makes this story more interesting. Delhi saw formation of citywide horizontal networks

between neighborhood associations, many of which were part of the *Bhagidari* program. I was surprised at how the two largest organizations of RWAs, that seem to represent a unified voice in the media, embody diametrically opposite ideologies. While both groups had similar opinions on government action, one chose to remain a watch-dog of the state while the other sought to become a part of it by participating in the electoral process. What surprised me even more was that RWAs, that is principally comprised of a middle-class traditionally known to have extremely low voter turnout rates chose to run for political office.

While interviewing political representatives, I discovered that neighborhood associations were able to exert significant influence in public expenditure decisions at the local level. This was a deviation from the past when many RWAs did not even know their local councilor. These observations made me wonder if this was the beginning of a change in **local democratic politics** in Indian cities. My research question seeks to answer some of these questions that intrigued me during fieldwork in India.

## 1.6 Research Question

What drives the *Bhagidari* program are Resident Welfare Associations, not a product of *Bhagidari*, but a manifestation of the rise of ‘middle-class activism’ in various spheres of public life in large cities in India. This is a recent phenomenon, explained as an outcome of the economic reform process of the early nineties. The behavior of neighborhood associations in this respect is often associated with the literature on ‘global cities’. Chatterjee (2004) and Fernandes (2006) argue that in order to ‘create conditions for foreign investment and producing for the global market, the city is refurbished and new infrastructure put in place’. The middle class is defined as the ‘primary agents that mobilize to regain control over urban public space’ and reproduce a clear socio-spatial separation from groups such as street vendors and squatters. Their argument is based on the rise of neighborhood associations in a number of large Indian cities, all of which have significant global investment. This includes Advanced Locality Management (ALM) program in Mumbai, Janagraha in Bangalore, Resident Welfare Associations in Chennai, Delhi and other cities. Another body of literature on the middle class focuses on governance - the mechanisms through which the middle-class associations and the poor approach problem-solving in their respective neighborhoods (Rao, Woolcock and Jha, 2007 and Harriss, 2005a). While the poor are more likely to be involved

in electoral politics, the middle class is known to access the State through the channels of bureaucracy and judiciary. The political influence of the middle class is often characterized by its 'apolitical' role, understood as its distance from formal electoral politics (Harriss, 2005b).

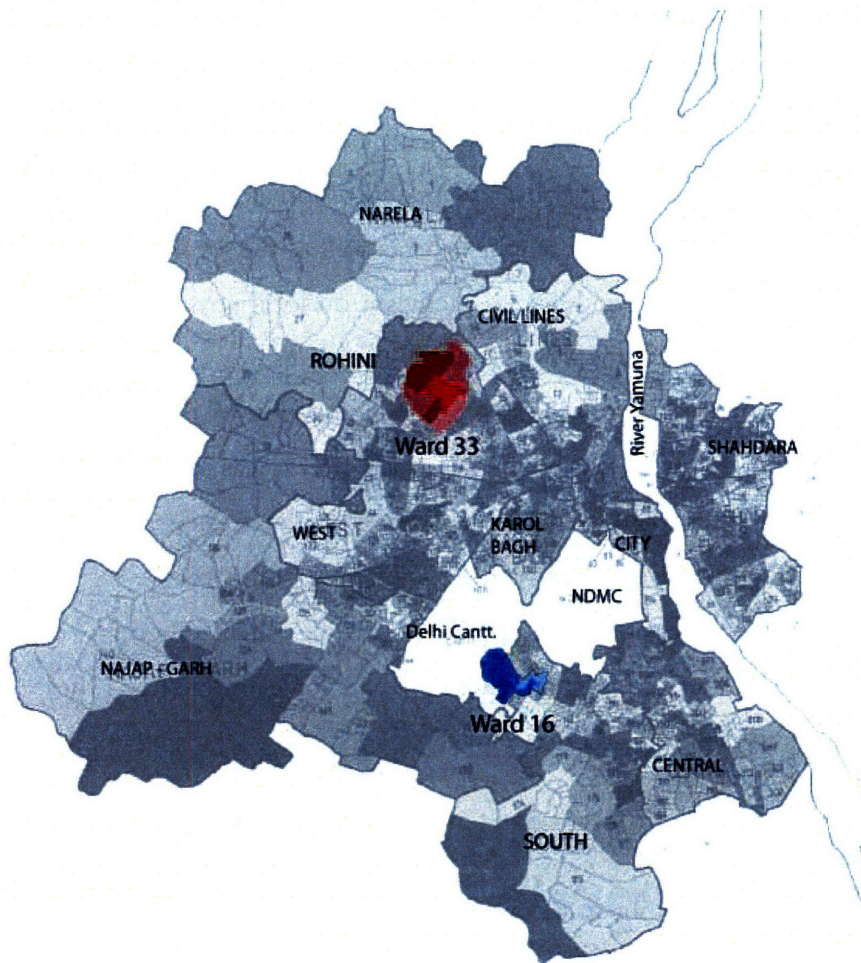
Both these theories, however, are able to explain only part of developments that intrigued me during fieldwork: i.e. change in relationship between RWAs and government agencies as an outcome of *Bhagidari*, and activism by RWAs and umbrella organizations of RWAs that influenced public policy outcomes at the city level as well as the local ward level. This research aims to look at the impact of middle-class activism on local governance. The following sub-questions might be helpful in uncovering the larger puzzle:

1. What have been the reasons behind the implementation of the Bhagidari programs and the (unintended) political impacts after it was implemented?
2. What are the factors that led to collective action by Resident Welfare Associations and how did they influence public policy outcomes?
3. Why are some RWAs contesting local elections while others are not?
4. What are the other contextual factors that have influenced these developments: Bhagidari and the rise of RWAs?

## **1.7 Methodology and Sources of Data**

I spent about three and a half months in fieldwork in Delhi spread over the summer of 2006 (2.5 months) and in December 2006-January 2007 (one month). This research is primarily based on qualitative research. I conducted more than 50 interviews with current and retired government officials (Government of Delhi and Municipal Corporation of Delhi), political representatives (the Chief Minister, Members of Legislative Council of Delhi, Municipal Councilors), members of RWAs and umbrella associations of RWAs, leaders and residents of slum and informal settlements, academics and independent researchers working in this area, representatives of media, and NGOs. I used both structured and unstructured interviews (Refer Annex 1). Some of the analysis is ethnographic in nature: observing *Bhagidari* meetings held in government agencies, public meetings held with political representatives and media, etc.

I used two wards as case studies<sup>3</sup>. The objective was not to conduct a comparative analysis of the two wards, but to form a sample that would be representative enough of



**Map 1.3** MCD Ward Map of Delhi, 2007

different socio-economic groups in the city. The ward in South Delhi (Ward 16) is primarily middle-high income in nature, with some regularized colonies and urban villages. The ward also has some of the elitist neighborhoods in the city. The second ward I selected is in North Delhi (Ward 33), a part of the city called Rohini, towards the outskirts of the city (see Map 1.3). This comprises

of middle income neighborhoods as well as informal settlements like JJ clusters, unauthorized colonies and resettlement colonies. Henceforth I will refer to the two wards as North Delhi and South Delhi Ward.

I use government reports, documents and circulars provided to me by the Delhi Administration, MCD, DDA, and the Delhi Jal Board. I also collected data on Public Interest Litigations (PILs) on civic matters in Delhi (from 2000 onwards) from Delhi High

<sup>3</sup> Before the Municipal Elections in March 2007, when I carried out fieldwork, the MCD area was divided into 132 wards. The number of wards increased to 272 before the Municipal Elections in March 2007. This division was based on population size: now every ward represents about 50,000 people. The gradation in color in highlighted wards in Map 1.3 represents the sub-divisions that were hence created in the case-study ward. Ward 16 in South Delhi is now Ward 165 and 166, and Ward 33 in North Delhi is now divided in six wards, namely 21, 22, 49, 50, 51, 52.

Court. I was on the e-mail list for two of the RWA umbrella organizations and I use those emails to trace the activities of the organizations. I collected newspaper articles while in Delhi and from online sources again from 2000 onwards [under the search items: *Bhagidari*, MCD elections, and Resident Welfare Association] to corroborate my findings from interviews and to study the evolution of *Bhagidari* and RWAs. I use 2000 as a base year (wherever possible) because *Bhagidari* was implemented in early 2000 and data since then would have allowed me to analyze changes since its inception. Finally I have used published and unpublished articles, theses, and books for literature review [on urban governance, fiscal federalism, middle class and contemporary Indian politics]. A more details account of methodology is presented in the section below (my research journey).

### **1.8 My Research Journey:**

The questions that I have been trying to explore have evolved considerably since the summer of 2006 as I began to understand the developments in Delhi (and the larger context - social and economic changes and similar developments in other cities in India). This section summarizes this thought process and the methodology I adopted for fieldwork:

#### **Question in summer of 2006: What happens when you institutionalize citizen participation: an evaluation of '*Bhagidari*'**

This research is part of a larger cross-national study on the impact of collective action on service delivery carried out by Institute of Development Studies (IDS) Sussex. The most recognizable form of collective action in Delhi is Resident Welfare Associations. Delhi made for an interesting case because the Government of Delhi had institutionalized citizen participation through a program called '*Bhagidari*'. Citizen in this process were represented by RWAs. I spent most of the summer trying to evaluate the success of *Bhagidari*/Resident Welfare Associations in service delivery. This seemed like an interesting question because there is a huge normative literature on why community participation is important - this is something that virtually every development agency advocates - but I was not certain what would happen when the State tried to engineer this process since community participation is understood as an inherently 'organic' process.

### **1. Collective action and service delivery:**

RWAs are a form of collective action. Measuring service delivery was tricky. The idea was that collective action would be most effective when resources were scarce. Some parts of Delhi have severe water scarcity. Other factors (income levels, type of neighborhood, tenure status etc) remaining constant, I thought that water delivery would be a function of collective action through RWAs. This approach could help me identify two neighborhoods and identify the factors that made one successful. The case study I chose was in the south of Delhi that has been facing water crunch for some time and although high to middle income, has quite a few low-income/squatter settlements that would provide a balanced sample. I spent a lot of time looking for neighborhood level data on water delivery, that does not unfortunately exist! Water is delivered through different medium (pipes, tankers, kiosks, etc) and utility agencies do not maintain data beyond the zonal level (comprising of about 50 neighborhoods). Water delivery is more a function of physical and technological factors like slope, distance from the main (city) lines, etc. The second methodological problem was that although water seemed to be the most important area-level issue, all neighborhoods did not list water as their prime concern.

### **2. Collective action and problem solving:**

The new methodology I adopted was to concentrate on how problems regarding local infrastructure (internal roads, construction works like boundary walls, community halls, parks etc) and service delivery (garbage disposal/collection, maintenance of parks etc) are solved. The Government of Delhi did maintain a database of RWAs (that participated in the program), which it did not update very often. The entry point I used was an RWA umbrella organization. I built the rest of contacts mostly by snowballing from this entry point and the ones further developed. I interviewed many RWA members in South Delhi and talked with government officials (in the Chief Minister's Office) involved with the *Bhagidari* program. I did not use a structured questionnaire; but I mostly tried to understand how development works in their neighborhood were done, what worked, what did not, who they contacted for services, what has changed after *Bhagidari*, etc. I went to *Bhagidari* meetings conducted at the District level by representatives of the Delhi Government (i.e. the District Commissioner). During this process, I also interviewed the local councilor who seemed to have done a lot of work in this ward, especially in the middle/high income neighborhoods. This was a little surprising for me because I had imagined a patron-client relationship between the low-

income residents in the ward and the councilor. Having grown up in this city, I know that most middle-class residents don't even know their local councilor (it is not that the middle-class does not depend on services provided by local governments, but that they use bureaucratic channels for accessing the State). So why did the councilor bother to work in their neighborhoods? What was driving this change? And what did it mean for demand-making for the poor who traditionally access political representatives? These were questions I wanted to explore further the next time I went to Delhi.

During this period, I had used the RWA umbrella organizations mostly to get contacts of RWAs and talked with some of the members. I did not think that their activities would be very useful for my research, but they were doing was interesting anyway. There were a number of federations of RWAs in Delhi in various zones, but two large groups. One was called 'People's Action' and another 'Delhi Residents Welfare Association Joint Front'. These groups had managed to organize RWAs (that were traditionally concerned with issues only within the boundaries of their neighborhoods) at the city level. They started working in 2003-04 and within a very short duration of time had become the principal 'voice of the citizen' in local media. This was very interesting for me. Since they [People's Action and their RWA wing United Residents Joint Action (URJA)] had helped me find contacts, I felt obliged to attend one of their 'protest marches' in downtown against reservation for backward classes (Scheduled Castes/ Tribes and other minorities<sup>4</sup>) in higher education: elite engineering and management schools – Indian Institute of Technology (IITs) and Indian Institute of Management (IIMs). The 'activists' were mostly RWAs members from the city, many of who were also alums of these schools. But the protest wasn't even on a city issue, leave alone a neighborhood issue! The President of the organization later told me that he was trying to 'get the middle-class in a habit of protesting'. My hunch was that the group was also trying to get the middle-class to join formal politics. The plan in January 2007 was still to find out more about the relationship between the councilor and RWAs, rather the activities of the two organizations.

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<sup>4</sup> Backward castes: (Scheduled Castes (SC) and Tribes (ST) and Other Backward Castes (OBC) are provided reservation in the public sector as a means of affirmative action by the Constitution of India

**Question over January 2007: How does institutionalization of community-led development affect traditional channels of participation and demand making for the poor?**

This time I had a more structured research plan (mostly because I didn't have a lot of time and needed to get a lot of information very fast!). I selected two wards: revisiting the ward in south Delhi I worked on during summer (this was a ward with mostly middle to high income neighborhoods with some scattered slum populations) and the second was in north Delhi (towards the outskirts of the city where many unauthorized/slum and resettlement colonies were located and had a sizable population in planned neighborhoods represented by RWAs). Another reason I chose this ward was because my friends (working in an NGOs) got me in touch with 'facilitators' who worked in the slum settlements in north Delhi and knew the headmen (pradhans) and other people I could interview. Around that time, 'People's Action' had announced that RWAs would form ward committees and might stand for the upcoming municipal elections and north Delhi was one of the selected wards. So this seemed like an interesting ward to study! This time, I interviewed RWAs, the municipal councilor, Members of Legislative Assembly in both wards, as well as members of RWA umbrella organizations (two main bodies), government officials (those currently working on the project and the person who initiated the program), the NGOs associated with implementing '*Bhagidari*', independent researchers, and the Chief Minister.

I spent two weeks in December filling in data gaps in the south Delhi ward and in selecting the second case study. This was towards the end of 2006: time for the media to reflect on the main developments of the year. Hindustan Times (a leading English daily) called 2006 the 'year of the middle-class'. NDTV (a news channel) voted two activists as 'people of the year'. This was in wake of the Jessica Lal and Priyadarshini Matto murder cases where the activism by the middle class resulted in the reopening the cases and bringing accused to justice<sup>5</sup>. This research did not only concern a governance issue in Delhi, but

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<sup>5</sup> In both these cases, the victims were murdered by family members of powerful politicians/ bureaucrats. In February 2006, almost all witnesses turned hostile resulting in the acquittal of all the nine accused in the Jessica Lal murder that took place in 1999. This is typical of many of high profile crimes in India where the rate of conviction is less than 30%, but what was unusual was the public outrage that has followed the acquittals led by the middle class and widely supported by the media. This included protest rallies, candle light vigils, mobile text messaging campaigns etc. One television channel collected more than 200,000 messages and petitions asking the president of India to intervene in the matter. Because of this pressure, the case was finally reopened. In December 2006, the court convicted the son of a governing Congress party politician of the murder. Observers say the case encouraged sustained media campaigns and public protests which have resulted in other cases

reflected a much broader phenomenon. Before starting fieldwork again in January, I spent about three weeks in Lesotho for another class. Since I had so much free time (with nothing to do in the village after work!), I prepared for fieldwork: wrote questionnaires for political representatives, RWAs, slum settlements, government officials, RWA umbrella groups etc. I also read up on the history of the middle-class in India and the evolution of municipal government, especially the working of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi and the role of councilors.

This middle class activism is part of a larger socio-economic phenomenon and the rise of neighborhood associations is perhaps a manifestation of it at from the perspective of local governance. From Spring 2007 onwards, I have been thinking more about the impact that middle-class associations have had on public policy decision making and formal political processes. This is reflected in the research question I elaborated on earlier in Section 1.6.

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being reopened and convictions secured. In October '06, the son of a former senior policeman was convicted of raping and murdering Delhi student Priyadishini Mattoo in 1996.

# How associations of the Middle Class and the Urban Poor Access the State

This chapter describes the different channels through which middle-class associations and residents of informal settlements access the State. I explore the history, membership characteristics, and methods of operation of neighborhood associations in Delhi. The Government of Delhi institutionalized citizen-government participation with these neighborhood associations in 2000 through a program called *Bhagidari*. I study the factors that led to implementation of the program and the administrative mechanisms through which it was implemented. This chapter lays the contextual and theoretical background for understanding how middle-class associations have come to dominate public policy discourse in the city that I explore in the successive chapters.

### 2.1 Associations of the Middle Class: Resident Welfare Associations

For the purpose of this research, I concentrate on associations of the middle class engaged in delivery of services in urban areas, either through their own resources or through government agencies. In Delhi and in many other large Indian cities, neighborhood associations, called Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) are engaged in this function. Neighborhood associations are on the rise not only in India, but also in countries in Latin America, the United States and China. In these countries, however, neighborhood associations represent a trend towards privatization of service delivery. In China, for example, homeowner associations are encouraged by the Ministry of Construction on grounds of 'greater efficiency in provision of community services' (Deng, 2004). In the case of United States, Nelson (2003) even suggests that states should replace municipalities with private community associations. His analysis is based on the astronomical growth of developer-designed community associations since 1970, with about half of the new housing units in major metropolitan areas being built within the legal framework of private collective ownership (Fishel, 2003 and 2005). Neighborhood associations in India, however, continue to access the State for services. The rise of neighborhood associations in India is linked to

larger socio-economic changes associated with the growth of the middle class after the economic reforms after early nineties

Neighborhood associations are primarily middle-class in nature, but prevalent in both planned neighborhoods and unauthorized colonies<sup>6</sup> (many of which are not poor). Harriss (2005b) describes RWAs as essentially neighborhood management committees in apartment blocks or housing colonies to which the residents are required to pay regular charges, and which organize and pay for security and look after maintenance of common resources. They also engage with city governments over issues such as access to public services: water, electricity and street lighting, roads maintenance and drainage, solid waste management, and parking. After the launch of the *Bhagidari* program in Delhi (see section 2.4), many RWAs have been carrying out additional tasks like securing payment and collection of water bills, electricity meter reading, house tax collection, the supervision of sanitation services, and the maintenance of community parks and community halls in their neighbourhoods. Legally, RWAs are registered under the Societies Registration Act of 1860 that applies to civic associations of all kinds (NGOs, housing societies, community based organizations, etc). RWAs in Delhi Development Authority (DDA) Group housing are registered under the Apartment Owner's Act of DDA.

### 2.1.1 History of RWAs in Delhi

Researchers argue that Resident Welfare Associations were the first form of collective action in Delhi following Indira Gandhi's assassination<sup>7</sup> in 1984 as security concerns heightened in both Sikh and non-Sikh neighborhoods in the capital<sup>8</sup>. This was also the beginning of gated neighborhoods in the city. The primary function of RWAs during this period pertained to security: construction of boundary walls, paying for security guard, etc. 67% of the RWAs in the city were formed in the 80s (Harriss, 2006), although it must be noted that a number of new RWAs have come into existence after Harriss' study as a result

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<sup>6</sup> For example, the Urban Development Department of the Government of Delhi invited applications from RWAs in unauthorized areas in 2005 to consider them for regularization

Source: "Government seeking detailing for regularization: unauthorized colonies to come out in droves", *The Statesman*, New Delhi, 31 January 2005

<sup>7</sup> Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her two Sikh bodyguards in October 1984. After her death, anti-Sikh pogroms engulfed Delhi and other cities in northern India, resulting in over two thousand seven hundred deaths, mostly innocent Sikhs.

<sup>8</sup> Personal interview with Prof. Sridharan, Department of Urban Planning, School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi [Delhi, December 2006]; and Lalit Batra, Independent Researcher [New Delhi, January 2007]

of *Bhagidari* and related developments. Another reason for the growth of RWAs in the 1980s was the development of DDA housing during this period. The DDA Act<sup>9</sup> made it mandatory for group housing colonies to set up a management committee that could take care of maintenance of common facilities when the housing units were handed over to residents.

It is difficult to draw any generalization about the trajectory of growth of RWAs in Delhi. The general perception about RWAs is that most existed only on paper (since it was a requirement in many DDA housing) and have become active only in the last 5-10 years. However during my interviews with RWA members, I discovered that many RWAs have always been active not only in dealing with security issues, but also in bargaining with government agencies with regard to access to services in their neighborhoods. This is especially true for housing colonies developed during the 80s that during the time were located at the outskirts of the city where infrastructure facilities like water supply, transportation (bus service), internal roads, etc had not been completely developed. I was told that some RWAs had worked extensively during this period to lobby with political representatives and government officials for such service provision. Some RWAs have been formed and/or become active since the *Bhagidari* program was implemented. Regardless of how active RWAs were in problem solving, what is clear is that their realm of influence was restricted to the boundaries of their neighborhoods until the launch of the *Bhagidari* program. In the last five years, they are assumed an important role in public policy discourse and are projected as the prime representatives of citizens by the Indian media. This period also saw formation of horizontal networks amongst RWAs at the city level (see chapter 3 and 4).

## **2.1.2 Membership and Methods of Operation**

### **a) Membership**

There are a few distinctive characteristics of RWA members that run across these associations irrespective of the socio-economic backgrounds of the neighborhoods they represent. One, most of the members are retired professionals (and some are housewives),

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<sup>9</sup> Much of the planned housing (both plotted and group housing) in Delhi is developed by DDA. Group Housing in this context is apartment style housing (more than one floor) developed by DDA. Plotted housing (similar to single-family homes in the US) is privately constructed, although infrastructure is laid out by the DDA.

because of the amount of time this work entails. Their occupations generally reflect the occupational characteristic of the residents, but in the neighborhoods in the high income ward in South Delhi, retired corporate managers, army officers and bureaucrats dominate the membership. In the North Delhi ward, most RWA members are school teachers and in mid-level service sector jobs. But in both the wards professionals, as opposed to traders, dominate the membership even though the neighborhood population may be partly comprised of traders.

Their incentive to join in both wards is largely similar, but there are some interesting nuances. In the South Delhi ward, I was struck by the number of ex-army men and high-level managers in RWAs. The rationale behind it is that these members believed that this was their chance to give back to society having spent most of their lives away from 'public life'. I didn't interview any bureaucrats during my fieldwork, but most often they [or their family members] were coaxed to become officers because of their preexisting networks within some of these public agencies. Many of the RWA members in the North Delhi ward however, came from backgrounds of public service: as teachers, trade union leaders, etc. What defines their backgrounds is an ability to manage people and projects. I was surprised at how some of these offices had begun to acquire the structure of real organizations: well defined agendas, division of labor, computerized management, deadlines etc. Most members take great pride in their work (even though it does not involve any financial benefits) and believe that it is important public service. For example, it is normal for many RWAs to put in 3-5 hours per day on neighborhood related work.

Being a member of an RWA gives social recognition to its members, both within and outside the neighborhood and adds to their social capital [both individual and collective]. For example, influential people in the neighborhood have high individual social capital [vertical networks within the government]. Being in the association helps develop collective social capital by building horizontal connection within the neighborhood. They do that mostly because it brings goodwill, but many RWA members also leverage their position in the association to have development work carried out next to their houses, for example, improving the lane, park or boundary wall next to their house. Membership reinforces their networks within the government and also brings them further recognition through the *Bhagidari* program. Most recently, RWA members have become the focus of media attention as the prime representatives of citizens.

## **b) Methods of Operation**

Each RWA has its own constitution that governs its rules of membership, elections, office positions and terms of office. These do not vary significantly across neighborhoods. Some RWAs, however, exclude renters from membership. There are usually 11 office positions [which include President, Vice-President, Secretary, Joint Secretary and Treasurer]. Most collect an annual/monthly fee from residents which is used to maintain public facilities.

RWA views are considered public opinion by the media and government agencies. RWAs are commonly believed to be democratic since the members are elected through majority vote. But I would describe RWAs as voluntary bodies rather than the next level of democracy, although they may still be representative. This is because the number of nominations for office posts is usually less than the number of positions. Residents are often coaxed to nominate themselves by other and/or preceding officers. True, there are elections, but the turnout for Annual General Body Meetings, where broad issues concerning the neighborhood are discussed and some decided upon and annual elections for officers held, is less than 5-10% of the total membership. In comparison, the voter turnout in local municipal elections in middle class wards of the order of 30-40%. There are very few instances when a position is really contested. I discovered that most of these associations were representative, nonetheless, since they worked as per the requests of residents in the neighborhood<sup>10</sup>.

RWAs use multiple means of service delivery, the State being the most important source. But many RWAs generate funds internally. This fee ranges from a few hundred rupees to about 2500 rupees annually for some areas. Payment to RWAs is not legally binding, but most pay due to social pressure by RWA members and other residents. A recent trend in service delivery is the involvement of private sector either through the means of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) or for advertising rights in return for maintenance of public facilities. For example, in 2000 more than 80 RWAs signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) and the corporate sector for maintenance and development of city parks across the city<sup>11</sup>. Many high income

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<sup>10</sup> This is reflected by complaint registers that many RWAs maintain. The daily work schedule of RWAs members revolves around fixing those complaints [Interviews with RWA members in North and South Delhi]

<sup>11</sup> "RWAs to develop 80 parks", *The Hindu*, New Delhi, August 17, 2000

neighborhoods use private corporations, most of which wish to set up their franchises in their neighborhoods, to provide public services. This includes maintenance of parks, back lanes, sponsoring annual events, etc for advertising rights in the neighborhood or in return for contact information of the residents/marketing opportunities in these events. This is a relatively new development in Indian cities.

## 2.2 Associations of the Urban Poor

The primary focus of this research was to study the organization and impact of neighborhood associations, almost all of which are middle class in nature and lie in the planned parts of the city. But in order to understand how associations of the middle-class impact the urban poor, it was important to understand associational life in informal settlements. For this purpose, I draw mostly from empirical studies on informal settlements in Delhi and elsewhere in India. I also add to my understanding of service delivery in such settlements through interviews with leaders and residents in regularized, unauthorized, slum (JJ) clusters, and resettlement colony, and with political representatives and NGOs working in these areas.

'Associational life', as understood in middle-class neighborhoods governed by a constitution and clear organizational structures, is generally weak in informal settlements. Instead residents are represented by local headmen called '*pradhans*'. The title '*pradhan*' is one that recognizes someone who has some clout in a locality, and who is able to exercise some influence (Harriss, 2005a). This person is usually not elected through any organized process by the community, but one mostly likely to have taken initiative at times of crisis or need in the settlement. Subsequently, he or she is called upon for other problems that residents of the area might be facing. Sustained performance in problem-solving establishes him or her as the informal leader of the community<sup>12</sup>. The primary means of problem-solving is through bargaining with political representatives. A '*pradhan*' acts as an intermediately between elected political representatives and/or government officials and slum residents. This person is approached by political parties because of his/her horizontal networks in the settlement and because of the credibility he/she enjoys in the community. Rao, Woolcock and Jha (2007) conclude that links to political parties, a proven track record, education and network

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<sup>12</sup> Personal interview with facilitators from the Center for Urban and Regional Excellence (CURE); and *Pradhan* in unauthorized settlement, Rohini Sector 17 [Delhi January 2007]

entrepreneurship, and claims to a democratic mandate are the primary sources of legitimacy regardless of how *pradhans* acquire their power<sup>13</sup>.

Edelman and Mitra (2006) describe this process as a client-patron relationship between slum dwellers and politicians where tenure and basic amenities are exchanged for votes 'with the expectation of receiving large scale support at election time'. The *pradhan* is the person who gathers support for politicians by boosting attendance at rallies and assuring sources of votes. Most often, this transaction also involves some personal (material and political benefits) for the *pradhan*. *Pradhans* also work closely with party workers, while many *pradhans* are themselves formally associated with political parties. Political leaders with different ideological disposition have often rallied with the poor and slum dwellers, partly because the latter constitute their vote bank (Oldenburg, 1978).

Edelman and Mitra (2006) draw a distinction between tenure security and service provision in slums, although the role of political representatives is central in both. The process of tenure security is described as a process of negotiation between local political representatives and *pradhans* in which a semi-legal passport to stay in the city is obtained by issuing voter's identity and ration cards<sup>14</sup> to participate in the public distribution system. In certain periods, particularly on the eve of elections, *pradhans* demand regularization of slum colonies. Basic services, like water connections or tube-wells, sanitation, approach roads, sewerage, etc, are also provided through a similar process of negotiation, also during the eve of elections. Political parties, no matter what their limitations and weaknesses, remain the primary channel through which poorer people access the State (Harriss, 2005a). Voting patterns for local municipal elections in Delhi indicate a strong correlation between increase in voter turnouts and the extent of deprivations experienced, indicating that poor residents see political representatives as a important channel for making their voices heard (Baud, Sridharan, Pfeffer, 2006).

It is important to note that while these informal leaders (*pradhans*) are accessible to all slum dwellers, government officials are most accessed by the wealthy and the well-connected (Rao, Woolcock and Jha, 2007 and Harriss, 2005a). Rao, Woolcock and Jha (2007) note that

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<sup>13</sup> Rao, Woolcock and Jha (2007) observe that in ethnically homogenous settlements, leadership institutions are transplants from traditional village *panchayat* (local self government) systems. Heterogeneous settlements acquire leadership roles through multiple means, education and political networks being the two most important determinants.

<sup>14</sup> A ration card is a card issued by a government to poor sections of the society. The card allows the holder to obtain certain goods (usually food) at highly subsidized prices.

bureaucrats and politicians are most likely to interact with *pradhans* which further reinforces their position within the community. We should, however, be careful to not overemphasize the position of the *pradhan*. During my fieldwork, I found that there are often multiple *pradhans* in a settlement, often defined by their political affiliations. These affiliations shift with time, depending on which party is able to offer more concessions. All *pradhans* have been involved in problem-solving in the community at some point of time, but usually no one person enjoys absolute support amongst the residents. Competition between *pradhans* should theoretically result in larger cumulative concessions for the residents (and maybe it does), but workers in slums pointed out that often a status quo is reached and most of the concessions end up being short term material gains. For example, residents told me that instead of providing services, most *pradhans* and politicians deliver blankets, cash, liquor, etc before elections.

I also observed that associations begin to emerge as these settlements develop [with time, or when they acquire tenure]. Individual *pradhans* are prominent in slum/ *Jhuggi Jhopris* (JJ) clusters while resettlement colonies and unauthorized colonies have *pradhans* as well as registered associations of some kind. Residents in unauthorized settlements are usually financially better off and demographically more diverse (in terms of age structures, gender etc) as opposed to JJ colonies that primarily comprise of male migrant workers<sup>15</sup>. Most unauthorized colonies are also older than JJ settlements and also more developed. This allows certain individuals, usually retired workers, to spend more time in welfare activities in unauthorized settlements. These associations are not as formally structured as RWAs, but the members are typically more educated than other residents, and many had been in government service earlier. These individuals understand the needs of the community but their experience in government jobs, however insignificant it might be, familiarizes them with government procedures and allows them to converse in the language of the government agencies. For example, a registered welfare society in an unauthorized settlement I visited in North Delhi (Rohini) was headed by a retired policeman. Having served in the Delhi Police for more than thirty years, he was aware of official paperwork and procedures required for doing development work. He now regularly visits engineers in the

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<sup>15</sup> This is because slums settlements/ JJ colonies are squatter communities. Unauthorized settlements on the other hand have come up because of unauthorized sale of land by private developers or landowners. Many unauthorized settlements are also poor, but economic conditions are generally better than JJ clusters.

MCD Zonal office to check the status of tenders for construction of roads, drains, etc commissioned for his neighborhood, even though the work itself is carried out through the instructions of the local political representative (councilor or MLA)

### 2.3 Access to the State: Difference between RWAs and *pradhans*

**“Only the poor agitate, the rich operate...”**

Civil Society Activist, Former Civil Servant, Chennai

(Harriss, 2005b)

Surprisingly, although RWAs and *pradhans* represent completely different parts of the city, they share some similarities. First, both institutions are essentially voluntary; RWA members and the *pradhan* are most often not really elected. Yet most often they tend to be representative of residents in either settlement. In middle class neighborhoods this is reflected by RWA work plans. Multiple *pradhans* in slums ensure that the *pradhans* that not able to deliver would be substituted by another. Most *pradhans* and RWA members tend to have better networks in the government agencies than other residents. *Pradhans* have networks with politicians within the government, RWAs mostly know bureaucrats. The reason why ex-civil servants are often coaxed to become RWA officers further supports this argument. The main difference between RWAs and *pradhans* however lies in the mechanisms they use to access the State.

RWAs use multiple means of accessing the State, through public officials at various levels in the agency and political representatives. There are two important distinctions between the nature of interaction between political representatives and residents of middle class neighborhoods and the urban poor. One, in informal settlements (as noted earlier) the main process of bargaining between the politicians and residents takes place prior to the election. This is because the urban poor influence political outcomes directly through ballots, as opposed to middle-class neighborhoods that can influence policy through judicial and bureaucratic channels. The second difference is at the level at which interaction between the two groups takes place. Residents of slum settlements, although known to have networks with high level politicians, often interact with local political representatives. Middle class associations on the other hand bargain directly with top politicians and bureaucrats. Within

the middle class, income and networks determine the level of government that respective RWAs are able to access.

One may argue that this difference in the process of political-bargaining is based on structures of legality that often define middle-class neighborhoods<sup>16</sup> (as opposed to squatter settlements). This is true to an extent, but a larger reason behind this is networks that middle-class residents have in government agencies. For example, the MCD estimates that 70-80% of the city's buildings have unauthorized constructions, many of which are in planned parts of the city. This is clearly a violation of the law, but RWAs in Vasant Kunj, a middle-class neighborhood in South Delhi for example, bargained with government officials for concessions regarding unauthorized construction. This process included meetings of more than 100 RWAs in the area with the Union Minister for Urban Development and senior officials of the DDA<sup>17</sup>, as opposed to negotiating with local politicians ahead of elections. This is also an example of collective action by RWAs on a localized single issue prior to organizing at a massive scale that took place in 2005. In other instances demolitions of unauthorized construction in middle class neighborhoods have been stalled because of informal networks between residents of these areas with government officials and politicians<sup>18</sup>.

## 2.4 New forms of Accessing the State: *Bhagidari*

*Bhagidari*<sup>19</sup> is a 'program of partnership' between government agencies in Delhi and citizens (GNTCD, 2006). The 'government agencies' include the Government of Delhi and its departments, local municipalities (Municipal Corporation of Delhi and New Delhi Municipal Council), Delhi Development Authority, and utility agencies and companies

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<sup>16</sup> Chatterjee (2004) for example argues that the reason why squatters are not given any kind of 'legitimacy' by government authorities is because that would threaten the entire structure of legally held property

<sup>17</sup> "Mr. Jagmohan [*Minister for Urban Development, GoI*] declared that no action - in terms of demolition, notices or allotment cancellation - would be taken for any unauthorized or illegal construction... he asked the RWAs to bring in concrete proposals after duly being passed by their associations on what should be done with the unauthorized constructions and how much relaxation in rules and regulation of the building by-laws should be given.... The announcement was welcomed by the RWAs, which participated in the interactive session with the Minister and DDA top brass."

Source: "A breather for DDA residents", *The Hindu*, New Delhi, June 26, 2000

<sup>18</sup> For example, this is a case of demolition of illegal construction ordered by the High Court in Defense Colony "...the drive was "deliberately slow" because of pressure from influential people having stakes in such buildings...Throughout the day, top officials in the MCD received a large number of calls from politicians, senior bureaucrats and influential people asking them to "spare" their properties."

Source: "MCD drive a non-starter", *The Hindu*, New Delhi, Sep 21, 2004

<sup>19</sup> Bhagidari means 'collaborative partnership' in Hindi

(Delhi Jal Board and Power Distribution Companies). 'Citizens' were represented by neighborhood associations, called Resident Welfare Associations (RWA), Market and Trader Associations (MTA), Industrial Associations, Village Groups and NGOs (GNCTD, 2006). This is the first such program started by a government in any city in India. The main focus of the program however has been on RWAs. It is important to note that only RWAs from the planned parts of the city, all of which are middle class in nature, were part of the program. Although *Bhagidari* has diversified to other sectors like education, health, industry etc in the last seven years, RWAs continue to be the only institutions that represent neighborhoods. The program started with 20 RWAs in 2000 and has grown to more than 1900 RWAs in seven years. The implementation of the program was carried by a professional organization called Asian Center for Organization Research and Development (ACORD) that specialized in change management in large organizations. Implementation mechanisms included workshops with RWAs and government agencies and institution of special 'cells' within each of the participating government agency. The intended objectives of the *Bhagidari* program, as laid out the Government of Delhi (GNCTD, 2006) are as follows:

- To empower the common citizens to have a greater say in planning and developing of his neighborhood
- To evolve a joint forum of citizens and service providers for developing strategies by consensus for better maintenance of public assets
- To develop a sense of ownership and commitment among the citizens and the official through joint preparation of strategies and action plans

The program is largely seen as successful as reflected by the number of national and international awards that it has received, including the UN Public Service Award in 2005<sup>20</sup>. This perception of success has influenced policies on governance at both state and national levels in India and led to launching of similar programs. While the program does reflect how city governments are becoming more responsive to citizens, the political implications of the program have not been very well understood. I have discussed the impact of *Bhagidari* in Chapter 3.

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<sup>20</sup> Other awards were presented by Government of India (2001), Commonwealth Agency for Public Administration and Management (2002 & 2006), Sao Paulo Municipal Government (2003), UN HABITAT (2004), UN Economic and Social Affairs (2005)

## 2.5 *Bhagidari* and RWAs

There are two reasons why RWAs were chosen for implementation of the program. The first concerns the issue of scale: first do what is simpler, and then expand; the second is based on the concept of legality. *Bhagidari* was started as an experiment by the Government of Delhi. The idea was to start small and later look for avenues for expansion. RWAs were the only institutions that represented citizens at the neighborhood level. It allowed the Delhi Government to build on institutions that already existed<sup>21</sup>. Since these organizations were already involved in civic issues of their respective neighborhoods, it gave a common entry point to begin this process. With the absence of formal representative associations (like RWAs) in slum settlements, organizing deliberative meetings is difficult in slums. The organization that conducted *Bhagidari* workshops believed that such a model would not be appropriate for slum areas since the needs of slum residents are basic and obvious which do not require participative processes<sup>22</sup>. It is interesting to note that only RWAs in the planned part of the city were included of this program, although these institutions are also prevalent in middle class but unauthorized colonies. This was because it is bureaucratically and ideologically difficult to implement this program in unauthorized and slum settlements. Issues of development in such areas 'inevitably bring up issues about land tenure' and 'no civic agency will carry out any developmental work where land titles are in question'<sup>23</sup>. So although government agencies continue to provide basic amenities like water supply, street lighting and pavements in slum settlements, they want to avoid negotiations that may result in provision of land titles. This rationale is well summarized by Chatterjee (2004): 'If squatters were to be given any kind of legitimacy by government authorities in their illegal occupation of public or private lands, then the entire structure of legally held property would be threatened'.

## 2.6 Genesis: Factors behind Implementation

The *Bhagidari* program is radical in the sense that such an initiative to institutionalize citizen-government participation [by a government agency] has never been tried at a large

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<sup>21</sup> Personal interview with Mr. Regunathan, Principal, Secretary to the Chief Minister in 2000; and Kiron Wadhwa, President and CEO ACORD [Delhi, February 2007]

<sup>22</sup> Personal interview with Kiron Wadhwa, President and CEO ACORD [Delhi, February 2007]

<sup>23</sup> Personal interview with Special Secretary to Chief Minister [Delhi, July 2006] and NGO Center for Urban and Regional Excellence (CURE) [Delhi, December 2006]

scale in any Indian city before. There are two important factors behind the implementation of the *Bhagidari* program. One, the program gained support from both senior political leaders and bureaucrats, who then made institutional changes within various government agencies for implementation of the program. Second (and more important) is the unique institutional environment of Delhi that is dominated by institutions of the Central Government. *Bhagidari* is a mechanism that Delhi Government used to exert its presence in the city.

### 2.6.1 Political and Administrative Support

*Bhagidari* is believed to be the brainchild of the Principal Secretary<sup>24</sup> to the Chief Minister in 2000<sup>25</sup>. The idea was to implement the agenda on ‘involving citizens in governance’ as listed in the Congress Manifesto, the party in power. Senior bureaucrats in the government supported this concept because they expected citizen participation to improve responsiveness of government officials and local politicians by creating an accountability mechanism. It was also believed that decision making by local politicians is usually not representative of most of the ward population<sup>26</sup>. This was because ‘elected politicians represent only majority vote of the population that votes in local elections that take place every five years when voter turnouts are not even very high’. Further public participation in governance in India has been low because of problems associated with implementation of the 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act<sup>27</sup> (see section 2.5.2)

But there are many programs that are recommended by policy analysts and civil servants that are unable to find political support. Why was it that the Chief Minister not only supported this idea, but took personal interest in its implementation by creating special ‘*Bhagidari* Cells’ in all government agencies in the city? The program has come to embody the Delhi Government now. There are two main reasons why the Chief Minister has supported the program. The first reason is because she has had a history of implementing progressive public policies. This includes conversion of all public transport in the city (buses, and para-

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<sup>24</sup> A civil servant of the Indian Administrative Service

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Kiron Wadhwa, President and CEO ACORD [Delhi, February 2007]

“...considered an officer of high integrity and efficiency, Mr. Regunathan was also the main force behind the successful implementation of the *Bhagidari* Scheme of the Delhi”

Source: “Regunathan takes over as Chief Secretary of Delhi”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, July 1, 2004

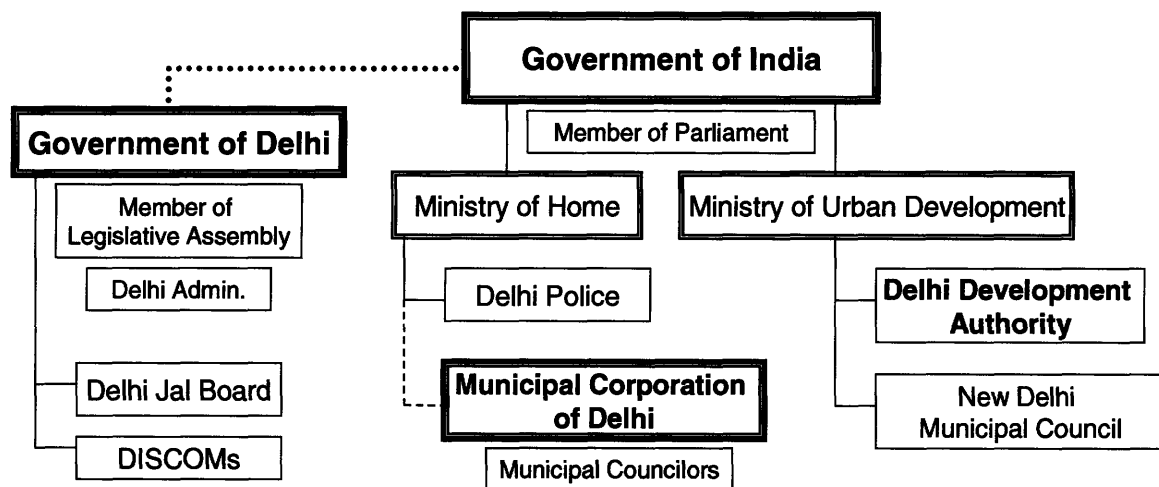
<sup>26</sup> I have observed from many interviews that bureaucrats generally hold this opinion, and to an extent this statement reflects the general opinion about local politicians in Delhi and elsewhere in India

<sup>27</sup> Personal interview with Mr. Regunathan, Personal Secretary to Chief Minister 2000 [New Delhi, February 2007]

transit like auto-rickshaws and taxis) to Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) systems which improved the air quality of the city substantially<sup>28</sup>. *Bhagidari* was intended as a measure to improve governance through citizen participation<sup>29</sup>. Leadership, however, explains only part of story. A more important reason is the unique political and institutional environment of Delhi.

### 2.6.2 Institutional Environment of Delhi

Unlike other State governments, the Government of Delhi can exert very little direct control over the working of government agencies in the city. Most of these agencies are directly controlled by Government of India (GoI). The New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) and Delhi Development Authority (DDA) are under the Ministry of Urban Development, Government of India (GoI). The MCD, although an autonomous body, is controlled by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA) GoI through amendments in the MCD Act. The Delhi Police is also under MoHA. GoI appoints the Chief Secretary of the Delhi Government and the Commissioners of the Delhi Police and Municipal Corporation of Delhi respectively.



**Figure 2.1:** Administrative setup of the National Capital Territory of Delhi<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Until 2000, Delhi was one of the most polluted cities in the world. The policy on CNG drew international recognition.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Sheila Dikshit, Chief Minister of Delhi [New Delhi, February 2007]

<sup>30</sup> This is a simplified version of the institutional structure of Delhi. Only key government agencies (relevant to this study) are included in the chart. There are more than 120 public bodies that function within this territory (Jain, 2005).

On the legislative side, the Government of Delhi cannot introduce any bill without the consent of the Lieutenant Governor who appointed by the Government of India (GoI). Delhi is empowered with legislative powers, but had no direct control over Public Order, Police and Land<sup>31</sup>. The Parliament of India can make any law related to Union Territories and has the authority to nullify a law made by the legislative assembly (Bagchi, 2003). The key agencies under the Delhi Government are the Delhi Jal Board (DJB), power companies: DISCOM (BSES and NDPL, previously a state corporation called Delhi Vidyut Board), and the Delhi Transport Corporation. This has two major implications.

#### **a) *Bhagidari* and the Constitutional Amendment Act**

The first implication relates to the institutional environment of Delhi with respect to federal legislations. The first major initiative in decentralization in urban governance in India was the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act (CCA). The act laid the framework to incorporate changes in the organization, functions, and jurisdiction of the urban local bodies<sup>32</sup>. It also provided for the constitutional recognition of local bodies for the first time. Although the CCA was enacted in 1992, apart from conducting local elections and some devolution of functions and finances to local bodies implementation of the Act as been limited. It is interesting to note that the act was initiated by the federal government and was not a result demands for greater autonomy by the state or local governments. Heitzman in Harriss (2006) notes that 'For most public administrators in India, the movement towards decentralization seemed a grim necessity or a historical trend, rather than a positive good ...'

The Act also required constitution of 'Wards Committees' (WCD) comprising of one or more wards for management of services and infrastructure at the local level. This committee was to include local political representatives and residents of the respective wards to encourage participation of citizens and citizen groups in local governance. But with the exception of two States, West Bengal and Kerala, both of which have been run by strong communist governments for many years, decentralization (and particularly creation of ward

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<sup>31</sup> The government of India has significant influence over the administration in Delhi, not only because it had been a Union Territory but also because it is the capital city. Also, mega-cities are generally considered too important to be left totally to local bodies as they are required to perform functions vis-à-vis the regional and even the national economy (Kundu, 2003).

<sup>32</sup> For example, the Act made it mandatory for urban local governments to conduct democratic elections, failing which the State and Central government could withdraw transfer of grants to these organizations. The 12th Schedule of the Act listed 18 functions that were recommended to be devolved to municipalities.

committees) has been difficult. The ambiguity in the Act regarding the size of the constituency, and criteria and procedures for selection of its members<sup>33</sup> resulted in the creation of defunct WCDs in most cities. The institutional environment of Delhi, described earlier, makes implementation of the act even more difficult. The strong presence of the federal government in the city and now the newly formed legislative assembly leaves very little political space for another level of government that could involve citizens. The limited decision making power in the capital is shared amongst political representatives from three levels of government (highlighted in yellow in the figure 2.1): Government of India [Members of Parliament], Delhi Government [Members of Legislative Council], elected representatives from the Municipal Corporation of Delhi



**Figure 2.2** One of the many displays at the *Bhagidari Utsav* at the Trade Exhibition Ground in Delhi [January 2007]

[Councilors] amongst a host of technocratic institutions<sup>34</sup>. In Delhi, this has translated into creation of Ward Committees for populations of as high as 1.25 million people per committee, which could not ensure proximity and accountability between the people and their elected representatives (Kundu, D., 2006). *Bhagidari* institutionalized citizen participation at the level of the neighborhood without changing any formal political structures. Hence it was in a way able to fill a space that formal policies on decentralization instituted by the center were not able to do so. The ‘need’ for this space is however a function of larger socio-economic conditions brought about after liberalization.

<sup>33</sup>The Constitution of India consists of three lists: a central list of subjects over which the central government has exclusive control, a state list of subjects with exclusive control by the state governments, and a concurrent list of subjects. Urban development is listed as a ‘State Subject’, which makes functions on 12<sup>th</sup> Schedule under the discretion of State Governments

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Mr. Yadav, Special Secretary to Chief Minister [Chief Minister’s Office, Delhi, July 2006]

## **b) *Bhagidari* as means of establishing Delhi Government presence**

The Delhi Government has to constantly work under the shadow of institutions created by the federal government. An important reason why *Bhagidari* found political support was because it was one of the most visible means for the Chief Minister to publicize the workings of her government. This gains even more significance since *Bhagidari* was implemented when the major opposition party BJP was in power at the Central Government. This is reflected by the publicity campaign for the program for which a multinational advertising agency was hired. *Bhagidari* posters and billboards are displayed all over the city. Events like the annual *Bhagidari* festival are organized at a huge scale (see Figure 2.2). Much of what the Delhi Government does now is under the rubric of '*Bhagidari*'. This is exemplified by the new insignia for the government: the 'bhagidari' logo hands symbolizing partnership next to the tricolor 'Delhi Government'. All Delhi Government documents, reports, public notices and even business cards of government officials bear the *Bhagidari* sign. It is argued that the success of the program in the initial years was instrumental in the Chief Minister being re-elected after her first term in office (see chapter 3). A spin-off of the publicity campaigns resulted in Resident Welfare Associations assuming space in the media as representatives of the citizens.

## **2.7 Implementation**

The implementation of the *Bhagidari* program was carried out by an organization called ACORD that had had previous experience in change management in large organizations like labor unions, large steel plants, etc. They employed the principles of 'large group dynamics' and 'small group dynamics' in especially designed three-day 'workshops'. The purpose of '*Bhagidari* workshops' was to facilitate dialogue in large groups of 300-400 key stakeholders (RWAs and officials from government agencies). This large group was further divided into twenty five to forty identical 'small groups'. These groups constituted of members from various stakeholders of a particular area. 'Action teams' are formed on the concluding day of the workshop for implementing the agreed solutions within a timeframe (GNCTD, 2006). The purpose of these meetings was essentially consultative to draw up a list of concrete issues or problems as perceived by the various stakeholders. Eight-nine *Bhagidari* workshops are held in a year.

Officially, the *Bhagidari* program was structured into four phases. This included 'Planning' (January 2000 to June 2001), 'Decentralization' (July 2001 to October 2002), 'Empowerment' (Nov 2002- Dec 2003) and 'Institutionalization' (Jan 2004 onwards). The focus of the first phase was on awareness and building a critical mass of RWAs and government department that would be part of the program. Four large workshops were organization in this 'launch phase', three of which were with RWAs. *Bhagidari* workshops during this phase were centralized at the "*Bhagidari* Cell" created in the Chief Minister's Office (GoI, 2002).

In the second phase, the organization and management of the workshops decentralized to the Deputy Commissioners of the nine revenue districts of the city. The idea behind it was to 'create ownership at deeper levels in administration' and to involve a greater number of RWAs in the process. More than 50% of citizen groups reported concrete success due to *Bhagidari* during this phase. The Deputy Commissioner played a key role in facilitating the 'partnership process' between citizens and officials. Other government organizations like the MCD, DDA, DJB and Departments of Social Welfare and Education (Government of Delhi) became part of the program (GoI, 2003).

In the third phase, the program was extended to rural areas and other related programs like *Bhagidari* in Schools (Vidyalaya Kalyan Samities in Government Schools) were implemented. The main focus of this phase was on the Municipal Corporation of Delhi. During this phase special units called '*Bhagidari* Cells' were instituted in each of the participating government agency. Also 'Nodal officers' in these agencies and government departments were appointed as to remove roadblocks in their respective organizations for smoothening of the implementation process. At the District level, monthly review meetings were instituted to monitor feedback from RWAs and participating agencies. In the last phase, the focus was on 'institutionalization' of the program through strengthening '*bhagidari* cells' and 'nodal officers' in the government agencies (GoI, 2004)

The scope of *Bhagidari* has broadened much since; the focus earlier was primarily on RWAs, now it has diversified to include programs with school children, environmental campaigns, reforms in hospitals, programs for senior citizens etc. Some of these do not involve RWAs, like developing industrial areas while some involve RWAs in non-traditional roles, like helping in maintenance of local government schools and hospitals. From just 20 RWAs in 2000, the program has evolved to the extent that much of what the Delhi

Government does now is under the rubric of '*Bhagidari*'. The following chapter discusses the evolution of the program from a political lens. I discuss how *Bhagidari* influenced the relationship between the Delhi Government and the Municipal Government and the relationship between government agencies and RWAs.

## Chapter 3

# New forms of Accessing the State: the *Bhagidari* Story retold...

This chapter examines the political impacts of the *Bhagidari* program. I look at the evolution of the program as perceived by the various stakeholders (RWAs, Delhi Government and other government agencies) and Chapter 2). I study the impact of the program on service delivery and on the relationship between the Government of Delhi and other government agencies involved in service delivery. I also describe the ways in which the relationship between citizen-groups and government agencies, especially political representatives, changed as an outcome of the program.

### 3.1 Evolution of *Bhagidari*

The *Bhagidari* program was implemented in four phases as discussed in chapter two. This included 'Planning' (January 2000 to June 2001), 'Decentralization' (July 2001 to October 2002), 'Empowerment' (Nov 2002- Dec 2003) and 'Institutionalization' (Jan 2004 onwards). But these 'official' phases were structured around the administrative mechanisms through which the program was implemented. A more useful way of looking at its evolution would be to study the ways in which perception of the program has changed in the eyes of the various actors involved: government officials, RWAs, NGOs and the media. ACORD, the organization involved in the conception and implementation of *Bhagidari* in its first five year, reflected on these changes. They seemed to suggest that the program evolved in three main phases: first was when there was sharp criticism of *Bhagidari* from the media and parts of the government; second when the program gathered support from all its stakeholders and with it national and international recognition; third, period of 'politicization' that saw fragmentation of Resident Welfare Associations and Market Traders Associations, and conflicts with the *Bhagidari* stakeholders and local political representatives<sup>35</sup>. Later I corroborated their analysis with newspaper reports. I agree with ACORD's understanding of the first two phases, which I term 'period of skepticism' and 'feel-good period' respectively.

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<sup>35</sup> Personal interview with Kiron Wadhwa, President and CEO ACORD and Professor George Koreth, Chairman Board of Governors, ACORD [Delhi, February 2007]

But although the main political impacts of the program are observed in the last phase, central to this change in power dynamics between different government institutions was Resident Welfare Associations. They had grown in power especially in the last phase by forming horizontal networks with other RWAs in the city in response to changes in mechanisms in service delivery. I call this the ‘period of the Rise of RWAs’.

### 3.1.1 Period of ‘Skepticism’

“...launched in January 2000 by Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit, it was termed an exercise in futility. Members of her Cabinet privately termed it a misadventure. And Congress MLAs were upset at their rights being infringed upon. The Opposition BJP termed it as misuse of official machinery<sup>36</sup>.”

*Bhagidari* now is often cited as a success story in citizen participation in India. But during its first two years (2000-2002), this initiative drew a lot of criticism, not only from the media but also from parts of the administration, as reflected in the newspaper excerpt above. Citizen groups and government officials thought that it was a waste of time and government resources with no precedent to which they could anchor their expectations<sup>37</sup>. Neighborhood associations were unhappy with the lack of cooperation from government officials, especially outside the Delhi Administration<sup>38</sup>. Officials, usually junior level engineers and technicians, who had to interact with residents on a day-to-day basis, were opposed to the program because it translated into more work for them (see 3.2.2).

The Chief Minister however continued to be supportive of the program and this translated into greater efforts by Delhi Administration to make it work. For example, during the first two years, when the monitoring of the program was based in the Chief Minister’s Office, she supervised over the progress of the program personally. She also invited RWAs to approach her directly in case government officials were not responsive<sup>39</sup>. During the appraisal of her Council of Minister in 2002, *Bhagidari* was key on her agenda<sup>40</sup>. The Delhi Administration therefore took additional measures, like more meetings and interactive

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<sup>36</sup> “Congress waits to reap *Bhagidari* harvest”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, November 14, 2003

<sup>37</sup> Personal interview with Kiron Wadhwa, President and CEO ACORD [Delhi, February 2007]

“*Bhagidari* scheme draws flak”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, September 18, 2000

<sup>39</sup> “Disaster control: CM reaches out to RWAs”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, May 05, 2002

<sup>40</sup> “Sheila preparing Ministers’ report card”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, November 03, 2002

sessions, with RWA representatives ‘to set things right and eliminate the obstacles in the way of the smooth functioning of the scheme’<sup>41</sup>.

During this period, the program was ‘decentralized’ to the Administrative Districts (*Bhagidari* Phase II) and other government agencies, including the DDA, joined the program<sup>42</sup>. The most important amongst these agencies was the participation of MCD, the agency involved in most civic issues that concerned RWAs. It is interesting to note that the participation of MCD followed the victory of the Congress Party in the municipal elections, the party in power also in NCT Delhi,<sup>43</sup>. The next Phase in *Bhagidari*, Institutionalization, as a result focused on the MCD to a great extent (as has been discussed in chapter 2).

### 3.1.2 The ‘Feel Good’ Period

“Fighting all odds within and outside her party, Delhi Chief Minister, Sheila Dikshit, has not only proven herself to be an able administrator but also a scheming politician with strong survival skills... the *Bhagidari* Scheme of the Chief Minister has been able to build a huge chain of Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) bringing into focus the government-citizen partnership at the grassroots level. The *Bhagidari* concept has been able to bring about some sense of accountability in the set-up which has been ridden with corruption and efficiency<sup>44</sup>.”

Towards the end of 2002, *Bhagidari* gathered support across different stakeholders, especially RWAs, and the media<sup>45</sup>. The Government of Delhi did not try many new things with the program itself, but started publicizing the program in a big way. For example, participation of federal government agencies was still weak in *Bhagidari* workshops and meetings, but the achievements of the program were highlighted. This publicity included

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<sup>41</sup> “*Bhagidari* scheme draws flak”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, September 18, 2000

<sup>42</sup> “...what could be termed as a major breakthrough in this endeavor for transferring power to the grassroots level, the Delhi Government has been able to enlist the support of the Delhi police, DDA, RWAs and market associations for implementing and monitoring various projects under the *Bhagidari* scheme. The Chief Minister, is keen that the workshop ensures perfect coordination between the various wings of the administration and the people at large. She is also actively taking part in the proceedings.”

Source: “*Bhagidari* scheme gets a boost”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, February 02, 2001

<sup>43</sup> “With the MCD under our control, it would now be possible to ensure better coordination and improved development of the Capital.” Sheila Dikshit, CM Delhi

Source: “Reverse count for NDA begins: Congress”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, March 28, 2002

“The Standing Committee Chairman of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi, Ram Babu Sharma, today said the Congress party would go in for implementing the *Bhagidari* scheme of the Delhi Government”.

Source: “MCD to pursue *Bhagidari*”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, May 18, 2002

<sup>44</sup> “Sheila enters fifth year in office”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, December 03, 2002

<sup>45</sup> “A popular scheme”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, September 17, 2002

“Many milestones, also potholes”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, December 30, 2002

announcement of the program under various Government of Delhi notifications and advertisements in newspapers, and the Chief Minister herself glorifying the achievements of the program in her public addresses<sup>46</sup>. The annual *Bhagidari* Festival (called *Bhagidari Utsav*) was started in early 2004 in the trade-exhibition grounds in a huge scale. The best RWAs were awarded ‘*Bhagidari* prizes’, which Delhi government officials and some RWAs argue is a big incentive to conduct/monitor works in their respective neighborhoods. These awards included cash prizes (from US\$500-2,000 onwards) for best kept gardens, significant improvements in sanitation, rainwater harvesting systems (which are subsidized by the Delhi Government) etc.

Central to this period was the Assembly Elections for Delhi in 2004. The *Bhagidari* program was advertised as one of the key achievements of the government, one they claimed was ‘taking the shape of a movement’<sup>47</sup>. During the course of this period, the program was extended to a large population base<sup>48</sup>: the rural areas of Delhi with village groups and industrial areas. The Chief Minister also promised to extend the program to slums and JJ colonies in the city<sup>49</sup>, although this plan did not mature until the end of 2006. During this period, the media was strongly in favor of the program, which translated into the creation of a good image of the government especially since *Bhagidari* by now had formed the core of all Delhi Government activities. The following newspaper excerpts illustrate this understanding:

“Political observers here are of the view that Ms. Dikshit holds sway over the electorate due to good governance and visible developmental projects undertaken during her five-year tenure. The Chief Minister has been able to establish a special rapport with the Delhi electorate...And her standing with women and children has gained strength over the last three years due to several initiatives taken by her Government including the internationally recognized *Bhagidari* scheme<sup>50</sup>”.

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<sup>46</sup> Example of a public address by Sheila Dikshit: “Our focus has been on involving the citizens in day-to-day governance and strengthening accountability at the grass-root level. The Administration has been made more open, transparent and effective by bringing it closer to the people through the concept of *Bhagidari*.”

Source: “Sheila never had it so good”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, May 13, 2003

<sup>47</sup> “Govt. set to derive mileage from Assembly Session”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, March 17, 2003

“...the ‘*Bhagidari*’ scheme was flaunted as the policy that had set off a flurry of development initiatives in transportation, power and water, created news jobs and visibly improved the quality of life in the Capital”.

Source: “Vote for our ‘positive message’: Congress”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, November 30, 2003

<sup>48</sup> Note that RWAs are one of the many participants in the *Bhagidari* program. They are however the only group that represents neighborhoods. Other citizen groups represented occupations (like traders) or sectors (health, industry etc)

<sup>49</sup> “Team Delhi will deliver, promises Sheila”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, December 14, 2003

<sup>50</sup> “Sheila still the best bet for Congress”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, October 10, 2003 and “Sheila completes full term in office”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, December 03, 2003

“Ms. Dikshit emphasized that the Congress was confident of getting a second endorsement from the people of Delhi and promised to serve their cause and provide even better governance in the second innings...The Chief Minister said the "*Bhagidari* Scheme", which started on a small scale and faced stiff resistance had come to be accepted as a major successful initiative aimed at citizen-people partnership...Ms. Dikshit said the biggest achievement of the Delhi Government during the past five years was that it had succeeded in involving the people in the process of governance<sup>51</sup>”.

“Having received national and international accolades, *Bhagidari* has made citizens feel part of the administration and enabled the Congress Government to make inroads into areas where the **BJP** had a strong presence - that is the middle class and the trading community...Now the Congress is just waiting to reap the benefits in the elections. The Chief Minister, who has turned the tide in favour of her party, said the growing support for *Bhagidari* was a good sign. In fact, through RWAs, the party might be able to make a dent in the traditional BJP vote bank in the cooperative group housing societies, residential colonies and the trading community<sup>52</sup>”.

The Chief Minister was voted back into power in 2004. *Bhagidari* was one of the major reasons behind this victory: ‘what was thought to be fanciful idea of the Sheila Dikshit led her to win the elections<sup>53</sup>. *Bhagidari* was also believed to attract middle-class support towards the Congress Party, who have been traditionally Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) supporters (the major opposition party).

### 3.1.3 Period of the ‘Rise of RWAs’:

Although the ‘Rise of RWAs’ begins with the *Bhagidari* program, RWAs came to dominate the media and public policy discourse after 2004. Two important developments took place in this period. One, Resident Welfare Associations formed horizontal networks at the city level to protest against increase in user-charges brought about as a result of privatization of certain services, like electricity (refer to Chapter 4 for details). These protests drew support from prominent citizens and celebrities and a lot of media attention. The Government of Delhi was ultimately forced to revert to the old user-charges. The opposition party used this as an opportunity to criticize the government of ‘overlooking the interests of the people of Delhi and selling them out to multinational and private companies<sup>54</sup>’. With this development however Resident Welfare Associations became the key

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<sup>51</sup> “Congress to face elections with full confidence: Sheila”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, October 07, 2003

<sup>52</sup> “Congress waits to reap *Bhagidari* harvest”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, November 14, 2003

<sup>53</sup> Personal interview with Kiron Wadhwa, President and CEO ACORD [Delhi, February 2007]

<sup>54</sup> “BJP criticises seven years of Sheila's rule”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, December 17, 2005

'voice' of the citizen through local media and were often very critical of the policies of the Dikshit government, including the *Bhagidari* program. For example:

"It is felt that for the first time during the Congress rule in Delhi, the common man has come out on the streets in protest against the policies and programs of the Congress Government in Delhi with respect to power and water situation. Not only are the RWAs asking questions about power and water issues, but they have also started doubting the intentions of the Government on the *Bhagidari* scheme itself. "There is hardly any action taking place in the *Bhagidari* workshops. The officials at the lower and higher level care the least for the programs agreed during these workshops and the last five years of *Bhagidari* have been frustrating. The intention is good, but the implementation is pretty bad especially in the Municipal Corporation of Delhi," said a senior RWA member<sup>55</sup>".

RWAs were the most important part of *Bhagidari* until the beginning of this phase, all of which were middle class in nature. The program was criticized by politicians and officials within the State and Central government for being elitist (see newspaper excerpt below). By the middle of this period, the *Bhagidari* program diversified to include other government initiatives like programs on environment with school children, rural areas, industrial parks, that reached out to a larger population base.

"Union Minister of State for Urban Development Ajay Maken on Thursday took pot shots at the much talked about scheme by stating that it had not been able to penetrate the deep pockets of population in the Capital and had ended up becoming elitist in nature -- something that needs to be changed...It is not practically possible in the present set-up as 69 per cent of Delhi's population is presently residing in slums and unauthorized colonies. This large chunk of population does not have any representation in this scheme as the Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) of such areas have been largely left untouched by the *Bhagidari* scheme<sup>56</sup>".

Further, the friction between RWAs and the Delhi Government 'outside' the *Bhagidari* program translated into the Government of Delhi shying away from RWAs. The number of *Bhagidari* workshops and meetings declined (as observed in the newspaper report below), which was another source of criticism of the Delhi Government. I attended a seminar on governance in Indian mega-cities in summer 2006 which the Chief Minister attended. I was a little surprised that she didn't even mention *Bhagidari* once. Instead she talked about how citizens want governments to deliver, but forget about their responsibility (referring to non-payment of electricity bills by RWAs, discussed later in the report). Later a

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<sup>55</sup> "Bhagidars turn the heat on Sheila Govt.", *The Hindu*, New Delhi, July 31, 2005

<sup>56</sup> "Maken lashes out at *Bhagidari*", *The Hindu*, New Delhi, March 10, 2006

professor of Urban Economics at the Jawaharlal Nehru University (who had organized the seminar), told me that he thought that Bhagidari had reached its peak and now she was deliberately trying to distance herself from it given that RWAs had become so powerful. It is true that focus of the program has shifted away from RWAs in the last one and a half years, but *Bhagidari* continues to be as high profile. New sectors like education and the environment and most recently slum settlements in the city are the new focus of the program (see Chapter 5).

“What has been one of the biggest setbacks for Ms. Dikshit, observers feel, is the stagnation of the much talked about *Bhagidari* scheme with its stakeholders coming out on the streets against the Delhi Government. Most of the RWAs have come down heavily on the Government on the power and water issue and now have threatened to launch an agitation...The Government is so wary of the "bhagidars" that it has for months shied away from holding *Bhagidari* meetings...Apart from the "bhagidars", the MLAs too are very vocal on the power and water issues and saying that "if elections are held today, the party will lose power in Delhi<sup>57</sup>”.

The second important development was a Supreme Court ruling that ordered closing down or ‘sealing’ of all unauthorized commercial establishments like shops in the city (also described in detail in the following chapter). The MCD, which during this period was governed by the Congress Party, was to carry out the implementation of the order. The business community in Delhi on the other hand has traditionally been BJP supporters, the main opposition party. BJP, that seemed to have lost support from RWAs in Assembly Elections in early 2004, started working with associations of traders called Markets and Traders Associations<sup>58</sup> (MTAs). MTAs were another stakeholder in *Bhagidari* program. BJP along with MTAs protested against the Congress Party, the party in power at both the Delhi Government and the MCD. For example, BJP supported “Delhi *bandh*<sup>59</sup>” called by Confederation of All-India Traders and about 500 MTAs<sup>60</sup>. They also appealed to the Supreme Court to review its ruling<sup>61</sup>. RWAs umbrella organizations, that had by now become a major voice in city level policy making, however supported the Court judgment.

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<sup>57</sup> “Resentment clouds Sheila's 7 years in office”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, December 14, 2005

<sup>58</sup> Personal interview with Kiron Wadhwa, President and CEO ACORD [Delhi, February 2007]

<sup>59</sup> Literally meaning 'closed' in Hindi, *Bandh* is a form of protest used by political activists, but not the same as strike. It means the closing down of a major marketplace of a city for the day; but there have been instances when entire Metros come to a standstill because of *bandh*.

<sup>60</sup> “Delhi traders' *bandh* turns violent”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, September 21, 2006

<sup>61</sup> “Temporary relief for Delhi shops”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, September 29, 2006

This further created friction between two of the most important ‘stakeholders’ in the *Bhagidari* program: RWAs and MTAs. Conflict between the two groups continues as of now (see chapter 4).

The major political implications of the *Bhagidari* program, most importantly the change in the relationship between RWAs and government agencies, and the Delhi Government and Municipal Government are also best understood in this period, although they draw their roots to the ‘administrative mechanisms of implementation’ that took shape from 2000 onwards. The following section describes these processes in detail.

### 3.2 Impact of the *Bhagidari* Program

One way of evaluating *Bhagidari* would be to study the impacts of the program as against the intended objectives (listed in Chapter 2). But these objectives are rather vague; empowerment or ownership to government programs can mean many things. Even if we were to determine indicators that could measure these objectives in some way, it would still be difficult to attribute the results to *Bhagidari*. No agency keeps any systematic records on projects done with RWAs, or the number or type of complaints that are reported to the ‘*Bhagidari* Cells’ in various government agencies that are part of the program. The Special Secretary to the CM described *Bhagidari* “not as a specific program, but a way of doing things that enables us [government agencies] to identify the root cause of problems in infrastructure delivery through consultation with citizens<sup>62</sup>”.

This section is not intended to be an evaluation of the program, but I try to examine the ways in which delivery of services has changed as result of the program. I also look at how *Bhagidari* influenced the relationship between government agencies [the Delhi Government and MCD], and citizen groups and government officials and political representatives.

#### 3.2.1 Service Delivery

Independent studies indicate that government responsiveness and service delivery has improved as a result of *Bhagidari*. These studies are not based on actual measurement of services (say improvement in water supply) but on perception of RWA members. For

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<sup>62</sup> Personal interview with Mr. Yadav, Special Secretary to Chief Minister [Chief Minister’s Office, Delhi, July 2006]

example, a survey of 132 RWAs across Delhi conducted by TNS-MODE in August-September 2003 presents that 74% of the respondents believed *Bhagidari* had improved the quality of life in Delhi. 96% said that *Bhagidari* was a good concept and process and 30% said that corruption has decreased after *Bhagidari*. 68% said that government officials have become more responsive (GoI, 2004). As per another survey carried out in 2004 by the Government of Delhi, 19-54% of the citizen groups perceived an improvement in delivery of services. The main sectors of improvements, as observed by RWAs, have been maintenance of roads, water supply, and garbage removal (see table below).

**Table 3.1 RWA Perceptions of Improvement in Service Delivery**

Civic Services in Delhi	Proportion (%) of respondents who felt services had			Main Implementing Agency
	Improved	Constant	Deteriorated	
Water Supply	47	42	11	Delhi Jal Board
Maintenance of Roads and Parks	48	29	23	MCD
Garbage Removal	35	46	19	MCD
Maintenance of Sewers and Drains	34	46	20	MCD
Law and Order	39	48	13	Delhi Police
Water Conservation	23	69	8	Delhi Jal Board

Source: TNS-MODE Survey, August-September 2003 (GoI, 2004)

There may be two main reasons behind this change. The first could be because of the administrative mechanisms devised for the program. After 2003, ‘*Bhagidari* Cells’ and ‘Nodal officers’ were constituted in various government departments. RWAs had the recourse of contacting the ‘*Bhagidari* Cell’ in these agencies or the Chief Minister’s Office directly in case they were unsatisfied with services. Since the CM was taking personal interest in the program, especially in the initial stages of the program (discussed earlier), this acted as a strong incentive for government officials and political representatives to be more responsive to RWAs. In a way, RWAs emerged as pressure groups for government agencies to deliver. Some RWAs told me that the response time for government agencies to address maintenance issues (like fixing water leaks, garbage collection etc) had reduced after *Bhagidari* was introduced specifically for this reason. They did not always approach the Chief Minister’s Office, but merely ‘threatening’ to do so helped in attracting the attention of government officials and local politicians. It is however important to note that this mechanism did not always have positive implications. The Third Working Report on *Bhagidari* (GoI, 2004) notes that “some RWAs and their main office bearers became very

aggressive and overbearing in their dealings with officials. There were several reports that they walked into government offices without appointments, flashing the 'Bhagidari-Team Delhi' identity card, using strong language, pressurizing officials, and threatening to 'report them to the Chief Minister' etc. The officials hence recoiled and became even more non-cooperative and intransigent". The following section (3.2.2) describes service delivery with respect to responsiveness of government agencies.

The second reason why service delivery might have improved could be because RWAs have taken up certain service delivery functions themselves as part of the *Bhagidari* program. This includes the sectors of power, solid waste management, water conservation, environmental protection, disaster management, crime prevention and even heritage conservation<sup>63</sup>. For example, RWAs collaborated with Delhi Vidyut Board (DVB), the electricity utility agency before its privatization, to take over the work of switching on and off street lights in their area, maintenance of breakdown registers, meter reading and delivery and payment of electricity bills<sup>64</sup>. RWAs also collect water bills for the Delhi Jal Board (DJB)<sup>65</sup>. They assist DJB employees in finding leaks in the distribution network<sup>66</sup>. Many RWAs took up the responsibility of planting trees (supplied by government agencies) and maintaining community parks and other community facilities. The Government of Delhi provided subsidies and technical expertise to RWAs to implement rainwater harvesting projects, especially since Delhi is a water scarce region.

There are two ways of looking at this development. One, government agencies in India still do not always have adequate financial and monitoring capacity. The program facilitates citizen groups to assist the government by filling in the gaps in finance and maintenance, thereby allowing neighborhoods to enjoy facilities that previously they were not able to. RWAs however are being encouraged to involve not only in the maintenance of services but also in making capital investments. For example, Delhi Government subsidizes half the cost of rainwater harvesting plants constructed by RWAs. This policy hence places

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<sup>63</sup> "Asiad complex cleaner, greener", *The Hindu*, New Delhi, July 07, 2000

"Disaster control: CM reaches out to RWAs", *The Hindu*, New Delhi, May 05, 2002

"Drive to check crime", *The Hindu*, New Delhi, July 24, 2004

"Residents to help clean Sanjay Lake", *The Hindu*, New Delhi, September 28, 2004

<sup>64</sup> "RWAS to develop 80 parks", *The Hindu*, New Delhi, August 17, 2000

<sup>65</sup> "Jal Board's new schemes", *The Hindu*, New Delhi, August 03, 2000

"RWAs to help DJB in finding leaks", *The Statesman*, New Delhi, September 7, 2005

<sup>66</sup> "RWAs to help DJB in finding leaks", *The Statesman*, New Delhi, September 7, 2005

"Optimum use for Barat Ghars", *The Hindu*, New Delhi, February 11, 2002

high-income neighborhoods in a better position to access government revenues for developmental work thus raising the issue of cost-sharing on part of the State (Kundu D, 2006). The argument of 'augmenting local facilities with citizen help' is presented by the Delhi Government, while the 'cost-sharing critique' is put forth by RWA umbrella organizations and academics.

### 3.2.2 Relationship between RWAs and Government Agencies

During my interviews, not many RWAs acknowledged that *Bhagidari* led to improvement in service delivery, but one observation that ran across all RWAs irrespective of income and locational characteristics of RWAs was that the program had made public officials and political representatives more 'approachable' to citizen groups. The improvement in responsiveness seems to lead to improvement in service delivery as well.

a) **Government Officials and RWAs:** Public agencies in India have traditionally been highly technocratic and most officials consider interactions with citizens 'intrusive' to their work. This can be traced back to the history of bureaucracy in India which was designed with the purpose of creating a distance between the 'natives' and the 'State' (Maheshwari, 2005). This mind-set is well exemplified by the Special Secretary to the CM in one of the interviews when he was trying to explain the reasons behind *Bhagidari* program: "You know how we are; we would tell them [citizens] that we are busy in meetings so they would leave us [government officials] alone and let us do our work. *Bhagidari* aims to change this attitude<sup>67</sup>"

An instrument used to bring about this change was workshops and monthly meeting organized under the *Bhagidari* program. Public officials and political representatives from all the Zonal Offices of government agencies are required to attend these meetings. According to RWAs, these meetings provided a platform for residents and government to meet and helped in developing a one-to-one relationship with public officials working in a particular ward or sector. It also provided information about the officials in specific departments within the agencies. The meetings helped in reducing the anonymity of 'the RWA' to government officials and 'the public agency' and its various 'fractions' to RWAs. While describing this process the RWA Secretary in Munirka Vihar, a relatively high income

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<sup>67</sup> Personal interview with Mr. Yadav, Special Secretary to Chief Minister [Chief Minister's Office, Delhi, July 2006]

neighborhood in South Delhi, said, “They [MCD officers] give us numbers, sometimes personal cell phone numbers; we know who to call for our water problems or for maintaining roads, or our garden. Earlier we [RWAs and residents] wasted all our time being redirected from one office to another to register our complaints. This was definitely a change”. The RWA President in Munirka Enclave observed that once a personal rapport is built with the officials, work gets done in a much smoother way. He said, “We no longer see them as some *babu*<sup>68</sup> in a government office; we understand their constraints and are assured that our problems will be resolved. And they [problems] are resolved most often”.

While it is true that responsiveness of government officials seems to have improved with the implementation of *Bhagidari*, public agencies however are not homogenous. Different government agencies and different level of officials responded to the program differently. The first major difference is between agencies administered by the Delhi Government and by Central Government respectively. While most government agencies in Delhi have ‘*Bhagidari Cells*’, evaluation studies on *Bhagidari* have pointed to the irregular attendance of ‘nodal officers’ from MCD, DDA, NDMC and Delhi Police in *Bhagidari* meetings and workshops (GoI, 2004). All these agencies work under the Central Government. During my fieldwork, both the *Bhagidari* meetings I attended (in North and East Delhi) did not have any representatives from the Delhi Development Authority. During the meeting, officials and RWAs expressed their frustration at the uncertain attendance of DDA and MCD employees. This is important because DDA and MCD works most closely with RWAs in issues like garbage collection, construction and maintenance of parks and roads, and other infrastructure development. The Deputy Commissioner<sup>69</sup> told me that this is a trend that runs across all districts. Also these agencies are often represented by a different official every month, which makes follow-up on old complaints difficult<sup>70</sup>. Response from the private electricity distribution company, also under the regulatory framework of Delhi Administration, however was very good and they were also known to quite effective in redressing complains.

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<sup>68</sup> The term *babu* in modern-day South Asia is used as a sign of respect towards men (especially in the public sector). The word hints at corrupt or lazy work practices.

<sup>69</sup> Personal interview with Ms. Achala Singh, Deputy Commissioner North Delhi [Delhi, August 2006]

<sup>70</sup> During the *Bhagidari* Meetings however I observed irrespective of government agency that there was no effort to discuss whether complains in previous meetings were resolved.

This is not surprising because *Bhagidari* is a Government of Delhi program. The carrot and stick mechanism that may work with Delhi Government agencies, with the end of the accountability loop tied to the Chief Minister's Office, would not work in agencies that are under the Federal Government<sup>71</sup>. Secondly, both MCD and DDA are large and powerful organizations that are involved in bulk of the development work in the city, long before the Legislative Assembly of Delhi was even constituted. MCD and DDA officials were unhappy about working under Delhi Government officials who were junior to them. For example, 'Deputy Commissioners of the MCD conveyed to the Municipal Commissioner that they would not attend *Bhagidari* meetings at the District level because Deputy Commissioners of the Delhi Government who far junior to them<sup>72</sup>. *Bhagidari* also created tension between the Delhi Government and the MCD. MCD, especially Municipal Councilors within MCD, saw *Bhagidari* as an 'indirect means' that the Chief Minister was employing to control them. This further led to resistance on part of MCD officials and councilors to implement the program (see section 3.2.3 for details).

Studies on government responsiveness across agencies also indicate discontent against the DDA and MCD. According to the 'Public Perception Survey, the performance of all governance agencies in Delhi improved with the exception of MCD and DDA [see table below]. It is interesting to observe that the Delhi Police and NDMC, which are also under Government of India, seem to be doing better.

**Table 3.2 Perceptions of success and failure by 240 Citizen's Groups**

Department	Success (%)	Failure (%)	Interface with RWAs	Multiplicity of Tasks
Delhi Jal Board	74	26	Medium	Single
DVB/DISCOMs	73	27	Medium	Single
MCD	40	60	High	Multiple
DDA	43	57	High	Multiple
Delhi Police	73	27	Medium	Both
Dept. of Environment, GNCTD	52	48	Medium	Single
NDMC	71	29	Medium	Multiple

Source: Public Perception Survey 2004, (GNCTD, 2006)

<sup>71</sup> Both DDA and MCD are autonomous in its internal administration and the organizations are ultimately accountable to the Ministry of Urban Development and Home Affairs Government of India respectively.

<sup>72</sup> "Delhi Govt., MCD set for a clash", *The Hindu*, New Delhi, June 03, 2005

A closer look at Tables 2.1 and 2.2 however indicate that these statistics may not entirely reflect the better performance or the lack of effort on part of some agencies. For example, the most improved infrastructure according to Table 2.1 is ‘maintenance of roads and parks’ which is undertaken by MCD. MCD also looks after garbage collection and sewerage and drainage, the two sectors that did the worst. Table 2.2 reveals that most agencies with single tasks tend to have a better perception. Secondly, although MCD and DDA officials do not attend *Bhagidari* meetings often and have not been very supportive of the program, it is important to note that these two organizations, especially the MCD, are responsible for bulk of the development and maintenance works in the neighborhoods that RWAs are most concerned with. These two agencies also interact with RWAs more than any other local agency<sup>73</sup>. Therefore it will not be fair to judge the performance of certain government agencies based on whether or not they were responsive to *Bhagidari*, as current evaluation studies tend to do.

The second important distinction in responsiveness is between different levels of government officials. Evaluation studies on *Bhagidari* conclude that mid-level officials are less inclined to be involved in the program (GoI, 2003). Lack of awareness of the program is cited as the most important reason behind it. This may be true to an extent, but it does not explain the responsiveness of lower-level employees. Another possible explanation could be traced back to the degree of interaction between different kind of government officials and RWAs. High-level officials usually head different government departments. These officials make presentations to large groups of RWAs in public meetings and workshops but do not interact with RWAs on a day-to-day basis. They are directly accountable to the Heads of their respective agencies or to the Chief Minister directly. They are the most likely to institute policy level changes and reforms in their organizations, but the direct impacts of the changes are borne by mid and lower level staff. The lower-level staff works in the field. They interact with residents and RWAs on a day-to-day basis. Implementation of the *Bhagidari* program did not lead to many changes in the nature of their work. In some cases their work, which often goes unnoticed, was recognized was RWAs. The mid-level officials, whose job

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<sup>73</sup> NDMC is an exception in this analysis because it has a much smaller jurisdiction compared to any of the other agencies. The NDMC area comprises of the Capital: Federal Government and International Institutions and State-owned housing for Central Government Ministers, Parliamentarians and Officials. NDMC is funded by the Center and the level of infrastructure and amenities is better than other parts of the city.

entails a mix of fieldwork and administrative work, were the ones who had to go out of their way to meet with RWAs. *Bhagidari* was an added burden for mid-level officials.

**b) Political Representatives and RWAs:** While the behavior of government officials can be traced back to the history and purpose of bureaucracy in India, the relationship between RWAs and municipal councilors follows a different dynamic that varies across wards. The middle class in India is known to have low participation rates in election, especially in local elections. In the South Delhi ward, for example the voter participation rate in the 2002 MCD election was only 32.5%. RWAs from some of the neighborhoods from this ward met with the Municipal Councilor for the first time during *Bhagidari* meetings. RWAs from the North Delhi Ward (that has a slightly higher voter turnout rate of 43.6% for the same year) knew however their councilor even before the program, but the administrative mechanisms built in the *Bhagidari* (i.e. *Bhagidari* Cells and Nodal Officers) allowed them to access local politicians through other means. For example, if RWAs were not satisfied with the councilor, they could approach the '*Bhagidari* Cell' in the MCD to register complaints against him/ her. While such mechanisms were helpful in improving the responsiveness of councilors to an extent, they also resulted in tension between RWA members and local politicians (see Chapter 5 for details). But an important impact of *Bhagidari* was that it brought RWAs and local political representatives (both MCD councilors and Members of Legislative Assembly) to one forum.

### **3.2.3 Relationship between Delhi Government and Political Representatives**

I already discussed how representation of MCD employees was difficult to ensure in *Bhagidari* meetings and workshops (in section 3.2.2). But we would imagine that participation of political representatives in the Delhi Government and MCD would be smooth since the Congress Party was in power at both the State and Municipal Level. Further the program had not changed any formal political structures. That was part of the reason why *Bhagidari* could be implemented while similar central government policies on decentralization could not find political support. But *Bhagidari* led to a tug of war between the Delhi Government and the Municipal Government of Delhi nonetheless. This was because local political representatives saw *Bhagidari* as a means of intrusion into their political space by the Delhi Government.

“The latest round of confrontation has been touched off by the MCD leadership's decision to curtail the number of officials deputed for the *Bhagidari* scheme meetings on the ground that it was affecting the working of the civic body...The *Bhagidari* scheme is close to the heart of Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit and her close bureaucrats and any attempts to downsize its reach is likely to draw the ire of the Government...Interestingly, the Congress Councilors have from the very beginning opposed the *Bhagidari* scheme, describing it as an attempt to clip the wings of the elected representatives<sup>74</sup>”.

A number of cases support this argument. For example, *Bhagidari* had the support of Heads of government agencies, including the MCD, as discussed earlier (see section 3.2.2). Municipal Councilors however claimed that the Chief Minister was trying to run the MCD ‘through a remote control called the ‘Commissioner’<sup>75</sup> and implementing her plans in the name of ‘*Bhagidari*’<sup>76</sup>. Evaluation studies on *Bhagidari* again state that local politicians ‘did not want RWAs work closely with officers *directly*’ (GoI, 2003). This may be part of the reason why councilors demanded that ‘MCD’s Zonal staff be stopped from attending the district-level ‘*Bhagidari* Workshops’. They also complained that with most of the officer in the workshops, zonal offices are left with no one to attend public grievances<sup>77</sup>.

Another important development towards the end of 2004 was that the Government of Delhi proposed to fund RWAs directly through the District level Deputy Commissioners. This again evoked strong reactions by both Municipal Councilors and Members of Legislative Assembly, interestingly both of who belonged to the Congress Party. The proposal was to provide RWAs with approximately US\$120,000 (50 lakhs INR) per year to identify projects at the local level and allocate funds for the same. Local political representatives viewed this proposal as ‘not only undermining the role of the legislator but also throwing up a parallel administration by creating a new system and a new set of administrators’<sup>78</sup>. The proposal was ultimately withdrawn.

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<sup>74</sup> “Delhi Govt., MCD set for a clash”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, June 03, 2005

<sup>75</sup> The MCD has two branches: Executive and Deliberative. The ‘Executive Wing’ is the technocratic part of the organization that comprises of civil servant [Commissioner, Additional Commissioner, Heads of Departments, Deputy Commissioners and Administrative Officers]. The ‘Deliberative Wing’ comprises of the Mayor and Statutory Committees and Sub-Committees comprising of elected Councilors. In most Indian cities, the ‘Executive Wing’ continues to have more administrative and decision making powers than the deliberative wing. The 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act (discussed in Chapter 2) seeks to give more functional responsibilities to Municipal Government [from State and Central Governments] and to the ‘Deliberative Wings’ within municipalities.

<sup>76</sup> “MCD chief faces corporators' ire”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, May 16, 2002

<sup>77</sup> “*Bhagidari* workshops”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, 05/05/2005

<sup>78</sup> “*Bhagidari* runs into rough weather with MLAs”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, January 02, 2005

"How can the Chief Minister inaugurate such a function when the MCD has not even approved such policy?" Mr. Arya [*Leader of Opposition in MCD*] asked. "This shows that Ms. Dikshit has been trying to bypass the deliberative wing of the MCD. This is undemocratic," he alleged. "This is an insult to the MCD," he observed. We as responsible opposition cannot let this happen as this is nothing but an attempt to throttle grassroots democracy in the Capital," he stated<sup>79</sup>.

This is interesting because the Chief Minister was careful about not to introduce any legislation that would institutionalize RWAs when *Bhagidari* was implemented in 2000 specifically because she did not want the program to undermine elected representatives<sup>80</sup>. RWAs on the other hand have been demanding legislation that would give RWAs an independent legal status<sup>81</sup>. Currently RWAs are registered under the Societies Registration Act of 1860 which allows any group of seven people to form an association. RWA umbrella organizations argue that such legislation would institutionalize RWAs with respect to guidelines for elections, membership criteria, functions, etc thus giving them more credibility and decision making powers in their neighborhoods<sup>82</sup>.

RWAs have nonetheless assumed a powerful position not only within their neighborhoods but also at the level of the city in the last few years. This was an outcome of formation of horizontal networks with other RWAs and protesting against government agencies. They have as a result influenced public policy outcomes on multiple occasions. The next chapter is an account of the process of middle class activism by RWAs in Delhi and the factors that led to it.

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<sup>79</sup> "Government bypassing MCD, says BJP", *The Hindu*, New Delhi, October 30, 2004

<sup>80</sup> "This is a voluntary movement and we cannot create any parallel system by introducing legislation. We have a bureaucracy and an elected government which are a part of this system and they will regulate execution of the plan"

Source: "*Bhagidari* a voluntary movement, says CM", *The Hindu*, New Delhi, June 17, 2000

<sup>81</sup> "Delhi RWAs ask for legal status", *Civil Society*, New Delhi, July-August 2005

<sup>82</sup> "The best future for RWAs is as urban *panchayats*", *Civil Society*, New Delhi, September/ October 2005

## Chapter 4

# Middle Class Activism and Public Policy

In the last two chapters I had described how different population groups typically access the State and how the relationship between neighborhood associations and government agencies had been influenced by the *Bhagidari* program. This chapter reviews the dominant literature that explains the rise of neighborhood associations in India in recent years and its impact on urban public space. I describe the larger impacts of neighborhood associations on public policy through formation of horizontal networks with other associations, exploring the key role of media and judiciary in the process. I explore the factors behind this collective action and the extent to which *Bhagidari* was instrumental in this change. I discover that contrary to common perception, RWAs umbrella organizations are fragmented and represent a change in the traditional role of civil society in India that has been disjointed from formal electoral politics.

**“For hundreds and thousands of consumers there is only one lesson from weeks of complaining and coming out on the streets. It is that middle class anger pays. The louder you scream the better”.**

*Civil Society*, New Delhi, September-October, 2005

### 4.1 Rise of Middle Class Activism:

#### The Dominant Explanation and Evidence from Delhi

The recent body of literature on the rise of middle class in India focuses on the impact neighborhood associations on the use of urban public space. Political scientists and sociologists explain the behavior of neighborhood associations in the context of ‘globalizing cities’. Fernandes (2006) argues that the ‘new’ middle class in India is a product of economic reforms of early nineties which led to exponential growths in income of the managerial class employed in multinational firms. The formation of neighborhood associations by this class, she argues, is a means of ‘reclaiming public space and consolidating a style of living that can adequately embody its self-image as the primary agents of the globalizing city and nation’. This is reflected by slum evictions from public spaces that are often carried out through these associations on grounds of ‘public interest and the environment’. Soloman (2005) also

explains these associations as a sociological phenomenon as the middle class begins to mimic the lifestyle of the 'global city' and displace subaltern groups in this process. These agents of globalization here are represented by the managerial and technocratic elite that 'form their own community – spatially bound, interpersonally networked subculture built around the business centre, segregated residential areas, arts and culture complexes, and easy access to airports' (Chatterjee, 2004). He further explains the mobilization by organizations of middle-class as a means to 'assert their right to unhindered access to public spaces and thoroughfares and to a clean and healthy urban environment'. He ties this development to economic liberalization and argues that it is a result circulation of images of global cities through cinema, television, and the internet as well as through the India middle classes' far greater access to international travel. Fernandes (2006) emphasizes that these associations seek to reproduce a clear socio-spatial separation from groups such as street vendors and squatters.

In Delhi too the actions of many Resident Welfare Associations support this explanation. For example, vendors have been restricted to enter the colony through the efforts of Sundar Nagar RWA. In another instance, an RWA sent a petition against vendors, encroachments and poor sanitary conditions to the Delhi High Court. Following the Public Interest Litigation (PIL), the court directed the MCD to remove all slum clusters from the colony. Kundu, D. (2006) argues that the appointment of court commissioners by the Delhi High Court to monitor illegal construction is not new in Delhi. But appointment of RWA members in the committee instead of lawyers is definitely a departure from the previous organizational structure. In my own interviews with members of RWAs, they often equated slum settlements within and around their neighborhood to criminals (because they occupy land illegally) and stated that removal of 'encroachments' was one of the objectives of the association. Almost every middle class neighborhood that I visited in Delhi was gated (often with the name of the RWA on a banner on top of the main gates)<sup>83</sup> pointing towards the exclusionary nature of middle class neighborhoods.

While it is true that some neighborhood associations have begun to assume a hegemonic role in determining the use of public spaces, this observation is perhaps true only

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<sup>83</sup> I have lived in New Delhi from 1998 to 2005. During the last nine years I have observed that the number of gated neighborhoods has increased. These gates are almost always privately constructed by Resident Welfare Associations.

for the elite neighborhoods in the city. Most neighborhood associations continue to be chiefly involved in management of service delivery in their respective areas. Secondly, although the frequency of slum eviction/ resettlement has increased in the last few years (the period also associated with the rise of neighborhood associations) there have been other factors that have contributed to it. An exponential increase in land values as a result of rapid economic growth is an important reason. In the case of Delhi, many recent slum relocations may be attributed to the 2010 Commonwealth Games that Delhi is hosting. As reflected by the Asian Games 1983, before every such event the city, especially the venues near the games, are spruced up and infrastructure for visitors created, often resulting in large slum relocations. With the attention of the world media on Delhi, 'beautifying' the city becomes high on the agenda of local agencies. Further, there is a strong focus on improving large scale infrastructure in cities to attract global investment; which too results in displacement of informal settlements. Government agencies and political leaders in Delhi term this as creation of a 'world-class city'. For example, of the US\$1350 million (5,500 crore INR) National Urban Renewal Mission, a Government of India program on urban development, about US\$380 million (1,560 crore INR) grant is allocated to finance key infrastructure projects in mega cities<sup>84</sup>. This investment has been channeled in the power, water and transport sectors in particular in Delhi<sup>85</sup>. This sentiment is well exemplified in a newspaper interview with the Chief Minister: "The Games will result in an urban transformation of Delhi, and shall give us the opportunity to upgrade Delhi's infrastructure and make it a world-class city<sup>86</sup>". So, while RWAs might not be the main factor responsible for the change in the use of urban public space, these developments are nonetheless consistent with the globalizing city theory.

While defining the behavior of neighborhood associations with respect to other subaltern groups is a useful way of understanding the evolution of the middle class, the impact of these associations is not just restricted to the use of public spaces. Umbrella organizations of RWAs in Delhi have also had a very significant impact on public policy decisions made by the State and Municipal governments. Within the context of this research,

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<sup>84</sup> "Delhi eyes Center's urban renewal pie", *The Indian Express*, New Delhi, March 1, 2005

<sup>85</sup> "Govt. committed towards making Delhi a world class city: Lieutenant Governor", *The Hindu*, New Delhi, March 16, 2005

<sup>86</sup> "It is an honour for Delhi: Interview with Chief Minister Sheila Dixit", *Frontline*, New Delhi, Volume 23, Issue 06, Mar. 25-Apr. 07, 2006

I describe mobilization by Resident Welfare Associations as a form of Middle Class Activism. This mobilization is chiefly a result of formation of horizontal networks with other RWAs in the city. This chapter focuses on the process through which such networks were formed and the factors that contributed to this development.

## **4.2 Origins of RWA Mobilization: The Two Groups**

Collective action by RWAs is not new to Delhi. In chapter two (Section 2.3) while illustrating the mechanisms through which RWAs access the State, I discussed how RWAs in a large high-income neighborhood of Delhi bargained with government agencies collectively to prevent unauthorized constructions in their neighborhoods from being demolished by the DDA. This included 100 RWAs from a single part of the city dealing with a single issue. The Government of Delhi had encouraged formation of Federations of RWAs at the district level in Delhi that could discuss issues of larger scale that individual RWA can not. These associations have been however represented only a part of the city and have died out after the issue was resolved. There are two large umbrella organizations of RWAs that have a city-wide presence and are covered most often by the media. Both were formed within the last five years. They are the 'Delhi Residents Welfare Association Joint Front' and 'People's Action'.

### **4.2.1 Delhi RWA Joint Front**

The 'Delhi Residents Welfare Association Joint Front' was formed in 2003 in response to change in cable television technology in the city which was expected to lead to increase in user-charges. Conditional Access System<sup>87</sup> (CAS) was introduced in India for the first time in South Delhi in October 2003. In addition to the increase in monthly subscription charges, customers also needed to make additional investments on 'set-top boxes' or tuners. Cable television in India is privately operated but the entire system is under the regulatory framework of Government of India through the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (I&B). There was a lot of public resentment against this government regulation. The Chief Minister was 'flooded with protests from various RWAs' regarding this

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<sup>87</sup> 'Conditional Access System' is a system by which electronic transmission of digital media, especially satellite television signals through cable, is limited to subscribed clients. The signal is encrypted and is unavailable for unauthorized reception. A 'set-top box' containing a conditional access module is required in the customer premises to receive and decrypt the signal.

issue in a *Bhagidari* workshop. RWAs blamed the Union Information and Broadcasting Ministry for being ‘hand in glove with cable operators instead of catering to the interests of consumers’<sup>88</sup>. While discontent against the regulation was high among the residents, a few of the RWAs that attended *Bhagidari* workshops in the South Delhi district realized that it would be easier to bargain with government agencies as one group, rather than disjointed voices. These RWAs mobilized like-minded people from other RWAs and the Joint Front was formed with an initial membership of 20 associations, all from South Delhi<sup>89</sup>. Joint Front claims to have been able to standardize the implementation of the new cable television technology by bringing 30,000 cable operators under the regulatory system. This standardization was achieved through meetings with the Chief Minister, Union Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Chief Secretary of Delhi, and forming public opinion with the help of media. The Government of Delhi views this as a means of involving citizens in ‘complex policy proposal which would have a direct and significant impact on citizens’ (GoI, 2004). In fact, they were supportive of this development as is reflected by the following excerpt from the official evaluation reports on *Bhagidari* (GoI, 2004):

“Delhi Government sought the views of RWAs and RWA Federations. In addition to proving their feedback, RWAs and RWA federations quickly organized themselves into a strong residents movement against powerful cable channel operators. The citizens and RWA movement was so strong that the proposal had to be first postponed to December 2003 and subsequently withdrawn by the I&B Ministry (GoI).”

The Joint Front has continued to attract more RWAs since the CAS issue and the current membership exceeds 300. The organization comprises of a number of sub-groups that work on sector specific issues. For example, the architect/ planners in the group work on planning and Master Plan issues, the ‘Women’s Task Force’ works on women specific issues and in ensuring that there are at least three women represented in each of member RWA. This body has been most active in protesting against increase in electricity charges and in implementation of the Delhi Master Plan (see Section 3.3).

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<sup>88</sup> “RWAs up in arms over CAS”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, 21/12/2003

<sup>89</sup> Personal interview with Pankaj Aggarwal, Secretary Joint Front [Delhi, February 2007]

### 4.2.2 People's Action

The second association of RWAs, called '**People's Action**', was also formed in 2003 but under somewhat different circumstances. The President of the organization heads a Public Relations company that in 2002 was consulting for the newly introduced radio-taxis in the city. His firm prepared a log-sheet for the taxi company that calculated fares based on distance. He suggested that the same concept be used for standardization of auto-rickshaw fares and presented the matrix to the Transport Commissioner of Delhi Government. The government adopted this system and it was widely advertised in the newspapers. The Transport Minister for Delhi for example issued a public warning to auto-rickshaw drivers for exploiting passengers by running faulty meters and even announced that the Department of Transportation would form 80 squads to discipline the drivers<sup>90</sup>. But this order was soon followed by a hike in auto-rickshaw fares, ahead of the Assembly Elections of 2004. The President of People's Action argued that the two developments are connected. He explained the mechanics behind this policy as: "the government gets tough on auto drivers with the help of the police (directly) and through public notices in newspapers – the auto drivers in turn agitate – the government then makes small concessions by increasing auto fares – drivers are content again - more than 50000 driver and their families vote for the party in power in return and also help out during election campaigning (as carriers and workers)". People's Action was formed to protest against such practices<sup>91</sup>.

The Government of Delhi however presents a very different perspective on this issue. The increase in auto fares is cited as an achievement of *Bhagidari* as citizen groups were involved in an important public decision and the outcome of which was 'balanced' as a result of consultation with different stakeholders (GoI, 2004):

“...the auto and taxi unions realized that the citizen and their RWAs exerted a powerful voice on the side of a “balanced” increase, while earlier with auto unions could hold the city to ransom. The rate revision finally worked out and agreed, reflected the new balance of moderation between the key stakeholders: the citizens as “customers” (through their RWAs), the auto and taxi unions, and the Delhi Government’s Transport Ministry”

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<sup>90</sup> “Errant auto drivers will face the music: Minister”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, Sunday, Jan 04, 2004

<sup>91</sup> Personal interview with Sanjay Kaul, President People's Action [Delhi, December 2006]

People's Action is very critical of the role of RWAs in *Bhagidari* and the Delhi Government. The head of the organization argues that *Bhagidari* and RWAs have become a means of off-loading State responsibility on citizens and shifting blame on citizen groups for bad public policy decisions. It is important to note that the initial membership of People's Action did not include RWAs. People's Action comprised of only the staff of the Public Relations firm and later grew to include RWAs in Gurgaon (a high income suburb of Delhi) where its President lives. The RWA membership in Delhi in the beginning grew through personal contacts of People Action members and grew exponentially during protests against hike in electricity tariffs in 2005. During this period a sub-group within the organization, called United Residents Joint Action (URJA), was formed that was comprised exclusively of RWAs. The other sub-groups include 'United Students', a youth group and New Delhi People's Alliance (NDPA), created as a larger pressure group comprising of NGOs, RWAs and Market and Trade bodies and unions.

#### **4.3 Middle Class Activism: Impact and Interpretation**

The middle class in India is typically known to access the State through the channels of judiciary and bureaucracy. The middle class is active in associations but mobilization by these associations is rare. By Middle Class Activism, I refer to large scale mobilization by RWAs that was geared towards changing public policy outcomes. This is surprising because mobilization of this kind in India is commonly associated with the poor. The two RWA umbrella organizations, Joint Front and People's Action were at the forefront of this activism. I refer to three cases of activism by RWAs. In the first case RWAs protested against the increase in electricity user-charges after the privatization of the Delhi Electricity Board (DVB). The second involves also protests against privatization of the water utility agency (DJB). This was mostly led by NGOs and social activists, but RWAs also joined the protests. The third case involves protest against unauthorized commercial properties and zoning regulations in the city.

##### **4.3.1 Hike in Electricity Rates**

The Delhi Vidyut Board (DVB), the state-owned utility agency in charge of supplying electricity to the city, was privatized in June 2002. This agency was undergoing losses and it was expected that privatization would lead to better management and hence

better service delivery. In fact privatization of DVB was publicized and one of the major achievements of the Dikshit government ahead of the 2004 elections and was supported by the public as reflected by opinion surveys<sup>92</sup>.

DVB was broken into a holding company, a generation company, a transmission company and three privately owned distribution companies (DISCOMs) - New Delhi Power Ltd. (NDPL), BSES Rajdhani Power Ltd. and BSES Yamuna Power Ltd. owned by the Tata and Reliance companies, were formed. As part of their up-gradation strategy, new electricity meters were installed. While the DISCOMs claimed that the new meters reduced power leakage and loss, residents alleged that the meters were faulty and led to higher electricity bills. Errors in billing were experienced from early 2004 onwards<sup>93</sup> but the new private enterprises announced a tariff increase of 10% in mid-2005. This led to further discontent. Residents approached RWAs in their neighborhood to resolve this with government agencies. People's Action and Joint Front began to mobilize RWAs to protest against this regulation.

What was unique about these protests was that it was not led by any political party. While the opposition parties did take a stand against the tariff hike (as did some people in



**Figure 4.1** RWA demonstrations against hike in electricity rates  
(*The Hindu*, New Delhi, Dec18, 2005)

the government), the protest was led by associations of RWAs. The protests were extremely well managed; public meetings, press conferences and rallies were the main forms of protest. Many prominent citizens and celebrities (though not RWA members themselves) supported the rallies and became its spokesperson<sup>94</sup>. This generated a lot of media attention which translated into further pressure on the government. Some RWAs refused to pay the 10% hike as a

<sup>92</sup> For example, 82% of RWAs were in favor of privatization of DJB in the TNS-MODE in August-September 2003

<sup>93</sup> "Reader's Mail: Weird billing", *The Hindu*, New Delhi, February 09, 2004 and "Billing errors continue to haunt residents", *The Hindu*, New Delhi, February 26, 2004

<sup>94</sup> Supporters included theatre/cinema personality Roshan Seth, author and management guru Shiv Khera and journalist and media/entertainment company owner, Prithvi Nandy

mark of protest. Some negotiated with power companies and the Delhi Government to reverse their regulation. Within eight weeks, the State Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission restrained private power distribution companies from charging consumers on the basis of the newly installed electronic meters<sup>95</sup>.

One of the most important reasons behind the success of the protest has been the mechanisms that RWA umbrella organizations used to draw the attention of the people and the government. The use of media, both electronic and print, is central to the protests assuming a citywide presence. It is important to note that heads of both RWA organizations are associated with the media: People's Action President heads a Public Relations agency and has had networks within the media, and Joint Front President was the Chief of Press Trust of India (PTI), a major news agency. The use of famous personalities was an important means to attract media attention. All major newspapers circulated in Delhi carried the power hike story regularly<sup>96</sup>. Many RWAs boycotted meetings with the Chief Minister until she decided to withdraw the hike and during this period the main source of communication between RWAs and the government was through newspapers and television. Live television broadcasts of protests by residents in a neighborhood called Greater Kailash in television news channels gave the protests a perception of mass gravity (Sirari, 2006).

Mass media in India has itself gone through significant changes in the last fifteen years after liberalization. The first is the exponential increase in the number of television channels<sup>97</sup> resulting in competition between channels. There is hence a constant struggle over Television Ratings Points and effort to fill in air-time. This contrasts with the one State-owned channel in India prior to 1992. Competition between channels has further contributed to the localization in media. Local supplements [newspapers and television news channels] cater specifically to city level issues and give citizens' a space to articulate their day-to-day problems. All newspapers have exclusive local sections; the coverage of the power hike story in newspapers reflects its popularity. It may be argued that media can also be used

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<sup>95</sup> Personal interview with Mr. Pramod Chawla, Chair United Residents Joint Action (URJA) [Delhi, July 2006]

<sup>96</sup> For example, from July 15<sup>th</sup> to September 5<sup>th</sup>, 'The Hindu' newspaper ran 35 stories on the power issue. 'The Times of India' had 15 and 'Punjab Kesri' (a Hindi newspaper read the masses) had 33 stories respectively (Sirari, 2006)

<sup>97</sup> Starting with just 41 television sets in 1962, television covers more than 70 million homes, more than 400 million individuals, in India currently. Until 1992, there was only one government owned channel [Doordarshan] in the country. The government liberalized its markets and cable television was launched in 1992. Currently there are more than 250 national and regional channels. Of this, there are more than 40 news channels, many of which focus exclusively on local issues.

as a medium to control public opinion, especially by politicians. The Indian news media is however credited with being one of the most plural and independent in the third world (Besley, and Burgess, 2001)<sup>98</sup>. Although political parties largely do not control the media in India, it has been argued that the media is one of the institutions that the middle class dominates (Fernandes, 2006).

### 4.3.2 Privatization of Water

Delhi has severe water crisis especially during the summer months, and the situation exacerbates with poor management of water resources by residents and government agencies<sup>99</sup>. In order to carry out water sector reforms in the city, the water and sanitation utility agency, Delhi Jal Board (DJB), applied to the World Bank for a US\$150 million loan in 1998. As part of the reform, the World Bank recommended privatization of DJB. The Delhi Government planned to hand over the management of each of the 21 zones of the Delhi Jal Board to multinational companies. The bank gave a loan of US\$2.5 million to appoint a consultant to work on the privatization project. Privatization of water has been culturally and politically difficult to carry out on the rationale that water is a basic human right, but the mechanism through which bids for the consultancy was carried out in this case drew more criticism<sup>100</sup>. This protest was led mainly by social activists and NGOs, including Arvind Kejriwal of the NGO 'Parivartan' and Vandana Shiva from the 'Research Foundation of Science, Technology and Ecology'<sup>101</sup>. They argued that privatization of water would have harmful consequences for the urban poor who will not be able to afford the increase in water charges<sup>102</sup>.

It is surprising to note that RWAs from South Delhi, which is a relatively well off part of the city, joined the protests. This was because they were unsatisfied with the outcome

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<sup>98</sup> Sen in "Development and Freedom" even argues that the reason why there has never been any famine in independent India is because of the role of the media. The press has been ascribed as a major source in monitoring the actions of politicians and in ensuring their responsiveness to droughts and floods (Besley, and Burgess, 2001)

<sup>99</sup> For example, 25% of Delhi's population does not receive DJB water. 40% of the city does not have sewer lines (CCS, 2003)

<sup>100</sup> According to social activist Arvind Khejriwal, PricewaterHouseCooper had lost thrice in the normal bidding process for management for DJB zones, but won the final contract after intervention of World Bank employees overruling strong protests by DJB and elected representatives.

Source: "Probe 'irregularities by World Bank officials: Parivartan", *The Hindu*, New Delhi, 21 August, 2005

<sup>101</sup> Both Kejriwal and Shiva are internationally acknowledged social activists.

<sup>102</sup> "24/7 water: Citizen's for a protest outside the WB office", *Times of India*, New Delhi, 21 August 2005

from privatization of the electricity board. They claimed that while the user-charges had increased, the quality of services had remained poor and feared similar consequences with water privatization<sup>103</sup>. RWAs threatened to stop paying water bills unless the Delhi Government withdrew from the World Bank project<sup>104</sup> (similar to the power hike protests). The involvement of RWAs in this protest was limited since this development coincided with the power hike protests. But it is interesting to note that the Chief Minister referred to RWAs, rather than the opposition party and social activists, when she withdrew from the project (see quote below). This incident too reflects the rise in power of Resident Welfare Associations. Media was used as an important instrument in this protest as well.

“Sheila Dikshit, today completely ruled out "privatization" of the water distribution system in the Capital and asserted that water tariff would be raised "only" if it was approved by and acceptable to the consumers...Seeking to allay fears of the RWA's representative with regard to privatization, she said: "We do not intend to privatize the water sector. This is a basic necessity of every person. It cannot be handed over to the private sector<sup>105</sup>.”

### 4.3.3 Master Plan and Sealing

One of the most controversial issues that RWA umbrella organizations have been involved with regards a Supreme Court ruling that ordered the sealing or closing down of unauthorized commercial establishments in the city. The order is based on the zoning regulations laid out by the Master Plan for Delhi<sup>106</sup>. The plan outlines amongst other guidelines ‘non-conforming’ land uses, primarily for industrial and commercial use in residential areas. It is interesting to observe that although the Master Plan outlines normative guidelines for development, these guidelines are often enforced through the judiciary (the Delhi High Court or the Supreme Court) often after a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) is filed. For example, in 2000, a number of polluting industrial units were shut and relocated to

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<sup>103</sup> “Privatisation a bonanza for water companies” Wednesday, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, July 13, 2005

<sup>104</sup> “Agitation by RWAs against water tariffs gains momentum”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, 6 October 2005 and “RWAs to wage battle on water front”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, October 3, 2005

<sup>105</sup> “No privatisation of water, says CM”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, August 25, 2005

<sup>106</sup> The Master Plan is a statutory planning document that outlines the broad policies for the long-term (usually 10-20 years) development for the city. The plan is prepared and enforced by the Delhi Development Authority and a host of local bodies are responsible for its implementation. The first plan for the city was prepared in 1962 with consultation with the Ford Foundation. The next plan could not be renewed till 1986 due to the Asian Games that Delhi hosted in 1983. This plan came into effect in 1991 for the 2001 perspective year. The Master Plan for 2021 was enacted in February 2007.

the outskirts in the city after a Supreme Court ruling to enforce the industrial zoning laws in the Plan.

In February 2006 the Supreme Court intervened again after a PIL and ordered the sealing of unauthorized commercial uses in residential areas. Many of these shops were decades old and located in the heart of the city. It was estimated that more than 500,000 people were employed in such shops<sup>107</sup>. MCD started action in March 2006 and by May had sealed 13,000 illegal shops amid agitated traders setting fire to MCD vehicles, pelting stones on officials, and police *lathi-charge* (baton charge). Associations of traders, called Markets and Traders' Associations (MTAs) along with BJP (the main opposition party that has traditionally attracted support from the business community) protested against the Congress Party - the party in power at both the Delhi Government and the MCD. The BJP supported the "Delhi *bandh*" (strike) called by Confederation of All-India Traders and about 500 MTAs<sup>108</sup>. They also appealed to the Supreme Court to review its ruling<sup>109</sup> and demanded Central Government intervention. Union Ministry of Urban Development (MoUD) intervened and passed an ordinance in May that put a moratorium on sealing.

This led the 'Joint Front' to file another PIL in the Supreme Court demanding 'resealing of illegal shops' on the grounds that the Central Government intervention was



**Figure 4.2** Violent protests by traders against sealing in the Seelampur part of the City  
(*Frontline*, Volume 23, Issue 20, Oct. 07-20, 2006)

politically motivated to appease traders ahead of the 2007 MCD elections. The Supreme Court nullified the Central Government order and the MCD began closing down illegal shops on the grounds. This led to further protest by traders. Violent protests in

Seelampur area of the city for example claimed four lives (see Figure 4.2) after which the

<sup>107</sup> "Chaos at MCD office over sealing drive", *The Hindu*, New Delhi, May 03, 2006

<sup>108</sup> "Delhi traders' *bandh* turns violent", *The Hindu*, New Delhi, September 21, 2006

<sup>109</sup> "Temporary relief for Delhi shops", *The Hindu*, New Delhi, September 29, 2006

MCD stopped again. The Supreme Court announced that final policy on unauthorized commercial uses was to be decided by the new Master Plan for Delhi which was under preparation at the time. In February 2007 the New Master plan was approved by the MoUD; the plan regularized 1500 unauthorized colonies and allowed for mixed-land use (commercial use in residential areas) on 2138 roads in the city. Since then, a number of RWA organizations, including the Joint Front, have challenged the Master Plan on grounds that it is politically motivated to appease traders ahead of municipal elections.

The role of the law and judiciary in the 'Master Plan and Sealing' case exemplifies two important arguments about the middle class and RWAs in Delhi. One, although RWAs are prominent in most middle class parts of the city, including ones the inhabited by the business community, RWA Activism by is primarily led by professionals. These professionals often belong to the more wealthy parts of the city<sup>110</sup>. RWAs from the low-middle income parts of Delhi criticized the Joint Front for being elitist and unaware of the 'ground realities and the unemployment prevailing in the Capital'<sup>111</sup>. Secondly, this case is also an example of 'judiciary' as one of the most important channels that which the middle class uses to control the State. This is not only because of their knowledge of the law and access to resources, but also because law is at times the only course for the middle class because it is outnumbered by the more politically active community of traders and the urban poor. This may be because the occupations of traders and the poor are not always based on the same structures of legality as the professional class. While political leaders regularized illegal shops on the grounds of securing livelihoods of thousands of people, RWAs used the rationale of 'planning, public interest and citizen's rights' to approach the courts. For example, about 90% of the Public Interest Litigations filed by RWAs since 2000 (till May 2007) are regarding encroachments on public land and unauthorized construction<sup>112</sup>. The two statements made by 'Joint Front' and 'People's Action' support this argument:

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<sup>110</sup> For example, while RWAs from high income areas like Defence Colony, Kalkaji, Greater Kailash and Lajpat Nagar strongly opposed commercialization of residential areas, those in middle-low income neighborhoods like Rohini, Naraina and some trans-Yamuna areas wanted shops not to be sealed as they were meeting needs of local residents.

**Source:** "Chaos at MCD office over sealing drive", *The Hindu*, New Delhi, May 03, 2006

<sup>111</sup> "New mixed land use policy evokes mixed response", *The Hindu*, New Delhi, March 28, 2006

<sup>112</sup> Office of the Registrar General, Delhi High Court

“Joint Front President: When nobody else listened to us the courts listened. Today at last the MCD, Police and government are under pressure to implement their own law, which so far they have cynically disregarded and lined their pockets<sup>113</sup>:

“People’s Action President: Our hope was that irrespective of the incidents and the pressure, the Court would seek a fresh way to resolve the endemic problems of Delhi by putting the fate of the city in the hands of a group of qualified planners rather than tired bureaucrats who are influenced by the political dispensation of the day<sup>114</sup>”

#### **4.4 Factors behind RWA Activism**

Three important factors contributed to mobilization by Resident Welfare Associations. First, all RWAs that led the protests are tied by a single identity. All RWAs are middle class in nature, but the RWAs that led the protest are also part of the professional class. Second, we observe that almost all cases of protest have been triggered by some form of privatization of service delivery that resulted in, or was expected to result in, increase in user-charges. Hence RWAs were also united by a single issue. Third, Bhagidari has been instrumental in bringing RWAs under one umbrella, not only as partners in the program but also as an outcome of the publicity that the program received in the local media.

##### **4.4.1 Class Identity**

An interesting feature of RWA mobilization has been that it was led by professionals even though RWAs in the city are prevalent in all kinds of middle class neighborhoods. As observed in the Master Plan and Sealing case, the professional class is tied by a structure of legality that the trading class does not always embody. Secondly, the issues that RWAs raise are not only defined by its own middle class identity, but also against other social groups. This is exemplified by protests that People’s Action and URJA led against reservation for backwards classes in institutes of higher learning (as affirmative action)<sup>115</sup>. As observed in the power hike case too, the rationale for protest was not just the increase in user-charges. The power distribution companies were forced to increase rates because of power thefts, often by residents of informal settlements. The protest was also based on the argument that the middle class would not pay for the urban poor who form the ‘vote-bank’ of political

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<sup>113</sup> “Delhi residents put politicians on the mat”, *Civil Society*, July-August, 2006

<sup>114</sup> RWAs feel let down by the court directions, 23/10/2006

<sup>115</sup> The Youth Group of People Action started the rally against reservation in educational institutions in April 2006. This was followed by similar protests by medical fraternity in elite Medical Schools.

leaders<sup>116</sup>. Another important reason for collective action was learning from the successful experience of other forms of middle class activism (outside of RWAs) and a belief that mobilization by the RWAs would also lead to change. This followed activism by the middle class and media to deliver justice in the Jessica Lal case<sup>117</sup>, in which People's Action was also involved in.

#### 4.4.2 Single Goal

A feature that runs across most examples of RWA activism is that they were triggered by some form of privatization of service delivery. The first issue on which RWAs from all over the city came together and which established them as one of the key pressure groups in decision making was regarding the hike in electricity rates. This protest followed the privatization of the State owned electricity agency, Delhi Vidyut Board. RWAs also protested against the World Bank recommendation on privatization of the Water Board, which they believed would lead to increase in water rates. The 'Joint Front' was formed after Conditional Access System in cable television was introduced which led to increase in subscription charges.

There may be two ways of looking at this development. One, RWAs are protesting against transfer of costs of service delivery from the State to the middle class as reflected by the increase in user-charges in reaction to power thefts by informal settlements. But although the 10% hike triggered the protests, the hike was also a result of installation of new electricity meters which the private company claimed would improve power delivery. It has often been argued the recipients for subsidies in urban services in South Asia are mostly the middle class. In that case, RWA activism is also a reaction against changes in modes of service delivery from a subsidy-based model whose beneficiaries were often the middle class.

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<sup>116</sup> For example: "RWAs lamented the insensitivity of the State Government towards consumers who pay their bills honestly and alleged that political parties and politicians in order to protect their vote banks were covering up power theft".

Source: "Power privatization review urged", *The Hindu*, New Delhi, December 18, 2005

<sup>117</sup> Jessica Lal was murdered by a family member of a senior politician. Since all the witnesses in the case turned hostile, the guilty were acquitted by the court. This was followed by massive public outrage led by the middle class and widely supported by the media. This protest included rallies, candle light vigils, mobile text messaging campaigns, etc. Because of this pressure, the case was finally reopened and the Court convicted the guilty.

### 4.4.3 *Bhagidari*:

“With the “bhagidars<sup>118</sup>” of the Bhagidari scheme becoming more and more demanding, the citizen-government partnership in governance is slowly turning into a government-bashing platform where the new buzzword is “empowerment of the common man”. Not only are the residents' welfare associations increasingly asserting themselves and seeking a more decisive role for themselves in the day-to-day affairs, they are also scrutinizing the actions of the Government, past and present<sup>119</sup>”.

“Dikshit on her part observed rather significantly that empowering the RWAs had become a “double-edged sword”. Clearly what she had originally hoped would be contended middle class residents playing a benign role in governance had grown into a shrill and demanding constituency<sup>120</sup>”.

Media reports like the one above seem to suggest that Bhagidari as the most important reason behind activism by RWAs. This activism is, however, part of larger sociological phenomenon as reflected by protests by middle class groups on a range of issues (like the Jessica Lal case) and by the fact that neighborhood associations are on the rise in most large Indian cities. But *Bhagidari* has been a very important instrument in bringing RWAs from all over the city together in two ways. One, RWAs before the beginning of Bhagidari were chiefly concerned with issues specific to their respective neighborhoods. The program brought RWAs under one roof and facilitated communication between them. For example, the reason why ‘Joint Front’ was formed because issues related to cable television/CAS regulation were discussed in a Bhagidari workshop in South Delhi. Like-minded RWAs who attended the event decided to bargain with the Central Government on the regulation collectively and hence an umbrella organization of RWAs was formed. The Delhi Government in fact had encouraged this development as a means of ‘empowering citizens’ (GoI, 2004). Secondly, an important factor behind the implementation of Bhagidari was that it was a means of publicizing the programs led by Delhi Government. Publicity of RWAs, who were the most important partners in the program, was a spillover effect of Bhagidari. In this process, the media came to regard RWAs as the main representatives of the citizens of Delhi. As discussed earlier, the role of media was key in the protests led by Resident Welfare Associations.

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<sup>118</sup> ‘Bhagidars’ means partners in Hindi. ‘Bhagidars of the Bhagidari’ refers to partners in partnership (Bhagidari program) having turned against the government

<sup>119</sup> “Bhagidars of Bhagidari’ up in arms against Sheila Government”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, July 17, 2006

<sup>120</sup> “Delhi RWAs ask for legal status”, *Civil Society*, July-August 2005, New Delhi,

#### 4.5 Fragmented RWAs: Is the 'apolitical' role of middle class changing?

I had earlier described the important role of the media and the judiciary played in protests by RWAs. This however is not new; it has often been argued that the middle class in India controls and dominates these two institutions as a means to influence the State (Mazzarella, 2006). But the fact that middle class residents were rallying in the streets of Delhi is radical. RWAs in the last few years have come to represent a body unified by their opinion on public policy (most often against the government) and as representatives of the 'common man'. A detail that most people miss however is how fragmented these RWAs are. This is best exemplified in the power hike protests discussed earlier.

Both 'Joint Front' and 'People's Action' mobilized RWAs for these protests. Both opposed the hike in electricity charges and used similar techniques, like attracting celebrities, to gather media attention. Heads of both the organizations had strong affiliations with the media due to their occupations, which they leveraged for the protests. But People's Action appealed to RWAs to not pay the 10% hike. They protested under the banner of 'Campaign Against Power Tariff Hike' (CAPTH) and made analogies with the ideas of "civil disobedience/*satyagraha*" and "non-cooperation" used during the non-violent freedom struggle against the British<sup>121</sup>. This part of the campaign was launched on Gandhi's birthday (Gandhi Jayanti, a national holiday in India); Gandhi had led the civil-disobedience movement during British India. Forced installation of meters was called 'Meter Terrorism'. Private electricity distribution companies argued that the hike was a result of electricity thefts, often by unauthorized settlements that do not have formal power connections. People's Action/ URJA were protesting against "illegal method of charging honest consumers for the dishonesty of others by the private power companies in league with the Delhi Government<sup>122</sup>". They argued that "if the private DISCOMs have not been able to implement the promise of reduction of transmission and distribution losses then they (and not the customers) should be penalized<sup>123</sup>". The Joint Front refused to join this campaign, although they also protested against the power hike. Joint Front President argued that drastic steps like non-payment of bills should be reserved for extraordinary circumstances. People's Action boycotted all meetings with the Chief Minister until the power hike was withdrawn.

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<sup>121</sup> "NGO launches power protest-II", *The Hindu*, New Delhi, October 03, 2005 and "Consumers start movement", *The Hindu*, New Delhi, May 07, 2006

<sup>122</sup> "Delhi 'Bhagidari' partners on the warpath", *The Hindu*, New Delhi, July 30, 2005

<sup>123</sup> "Power consumers threaten movement", *The Hindu*, New Delhi, March 20, 2006

Joint Front instead attended these *Bhagidari* meetings called by the Chief Minister and engaged in negotiations with government officials and politicians. They insisted that RWAs be a part of consultation before major policy decisions are made. This included the electricity meter review and testing initiative announced by the Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission (DERC)<sup>124</sup>. The Joint Front even complimented the government for “taking concrete measures (like holding meetings with RWAs and DISCOMs)<sup>125</sup>”.

What surprised me was how these two groups didn't work together even though the issues they raised were very similar; in fact the two groups hated each other! Joint Front alleges Sanjay Kaul, head of People's Action to use RWAs in Delhi to further his 'political agenda' while he is not even a resident of Delhi<sup>126</sup>. Kaul blames instead Joint Front as being “CM's henchmen and *bhagidari* loyalists [since the Joint Front President had been an important player in the *Bhagidari* program]. He is also very critical of the *Bhagidari* program and says that not only is it a 'means for the government to disown its responsibilities, but also designed to blunt the RWAs and keep them from criticizing the government'<sup>127</sup>. He blamed members in the Joint Front for having close ties with the Congress Government because of which they avoided direct confrontation with the government<sup>128</sup>.

An important characteristic of both these organizations is that neither have any formal affiliations with political parties, as is typical of civil society groups in India (Harriss, 2005b and Chatterjee, 2004). People's Action is however clearly a political advocacy group. The mechanisms of protests that People's Action uses are reminiscent of an opposition party as opposed to Joint Front that seeks to involvement in government decision making as one of the 'partners'. The sub-groups in People's Action are structured around different population groups and institutions, like students, NGOs and RWAs<sup>129</sup> unlike Joint Front that are structured around issues like planning and gender. While the membership of both organizations comprises mostly of professionals, the (RWA) membership of Joint Front is about half that of People's Action and mostly from RWAs in South Delhi, a relatively well

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<sup>124</sup> “RWAs reject DERC's new initiative to test meters”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, September 09, 2005

<sup>125</sup> “Power tariff issue may derail *Bhagidari* system”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi,, August 23, 2005

<sup>126</sup> Kaul is a resident of Gurgaon, a suburb of Delhi

Personal interview with Pankaj Aggarwal, Secretary Joint Front [Delhi, February 2007]

<sup>127</sup> “Delhi's angry Middle Class”, *Civil Society*, New Delhi, September/ October 2005

<sup>128</sup> One of the Joint Front directors was a close friend of Rajiv Gandhi, former Prime Minister and Congress Party Chief, the party currently in power in Delhi.

<sup>129</sup> For example, United Residents Joint Action (URJA) group in People's Action comprised exclusively of RWAs. 'United Students', is a youth group and New Delhi People's Alliance (NDPA) was created as a larger pressure group comprising of NGOs, RWAs and Market and Trade bodies and unions.

off part of the city. People's Action has membership from all parts of the city. It is also important to note that the head of People's Action has had experience in politics indirectly as the Public Relations consultant for a prominent politician Pramod Mahajan who was a Union Minister in the previous BJP led government. Joint Front represents the more traditional 'watch-dog' role of the civil society: monitoring and checking actions of government while remaining 'apolitical'.

People's Action, though also a self-appointed monitoring body, seeks to participate in governance by becoming a part of it, the rationale being that 'it is up to the middle-class to clean up the "dirty politics of this country"<sup>130</sup>.' People's Action organized Resident Welfare Associations of Gurgaon to form the 'Gurgaon Resident's Party' to contest the Gurgaon Assembly Elections in 2004. In Delhi, the organization mobilized RWAs to contest Municipal Elections in March 2007. While the activities of RWA umbrella organizations are similar, they are fragmented in their ideology with respect to 'formal politics':

"A large number of representatives of the RWAs have suddenly started harbouring political ambitions. They feel that if instead of the Councilors and MLAs, their own people get elected they would be in a better position to resolve people's problems. This is the reason why the RWA movement has got divided into pro and anti-Government groups," a senior member of the RWAs remarked<sup>131</sup>."

This is a new and interesting development. Researchers studying neighborhood associations and the middle-class in India have often pointed towards the social and cultural visibility of this class, especially in recent years after the economic reforms, while emphasizing its rather dormant role in the political sphere (Harriss, 2006, Fernandes, 2006). This is probably beginning to change now. The next chapter will discuss the more direct role of middle class neighborhood associations in local politics. I also try to understand 'who' among the array of RWAs in Delhi is joining formal politics and why.

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<sup>130</sup> Personal interview with Sanjay Kaul, President People's Action [Delhi, December 2006]

<sup>131</sup> "Power tariff issue may derail Bhagidari system", *The Hindu*, New Delhi, August 23, 2005

## Chapter 5

# Middle Class Activism and Local Politics

In the previous chapter I argued that factions in RWAs in Delhi reflect a change in the traditional ‘apolitical’ role of middle class in India. In this chapter I try to understand ‘who’ within the array of neighborhood associations in the city decided to join formal politics. I also explore the ‘indirect’ means through which neighborhood associations influence formal politics by influencing the behavior of local political representatives. I argue that policies on decentralization adopted by the Government of Delhi and the Municipal Corporation of Delhi have been instrumental in this change.

In the last chapter I had discussed how contrary to common perception, Resident Welfare Associations in Delhi are fragmented in their political ideology: While one umbrella group chose to remain a critic of the government from ‘outside’, another mobilized RWAs to contest local elections. This is interesting also because the middle class in India is traditionally characterized by its distance from formal electoral politics. While the outcomes of RWA activism discussed in Chapter 4 also have political consequences, this chapter concentrates on the impact of Resident Welfare Associations on Local Municipal Politics, both through direct and indirect means. By direct means, I refer to participation of RWAs in local elections even though they are independent of any formal party affiliations. By indirect I refer to influence of RWAs on the behavior of local political representatives.

### 5.1 RWAs and Electoral Politics

People’s Action and its affiliate groups were the main organizations that mobilized RWAs to enter politics. People’s Action describes itself as a “lobby group for middle-class interests since ‘vote-bank politics’<sup>132</sup> has marginalized the middle class. The rationale behind

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<sup>132</sup> Votebank politics is the practice of creating and maintaining votebanks [loyal bloc of voters from a single community, who consistently back a certain candidate or political formation in democratic elections] through divisive policies. As this brand of politics encourages voters to vote on the basis of narrow communal considerations, often against their better judgment, it is considered inimical to democracy.

encouraging the middle class to contest elections was that it believed that it was up to the middle class to “clean up the dirty politics in the country<sup>133</sup>”. Although Delhi is the first large city in India where neighborhood associations contested local elections, People’s Action had had prior experience in conducting a voter registration campaign in a suburban town of Delhi called Gurgaon. The organization was also the instrumental in forming the organizing RWAs in Gurgaon to form the ‘Gurgaon Resident’s Party’ to contest the Assembly Elections in 2004. People’s Action was able to draw on its experience from Gurgaon for the MCD elections in Delhi in 2007. Further, the head of People’s Action had had indirect experience in politics as the Public Relations consultant for a prominent politician (Prمود Mahajan) who was a Union Minister in the previous BJP led government.

The process of preparing for the Municipal Elections began with constitution of Resident Ward Committees. This eleven member committee comprised of RWAs and influential persons in the ward. They were then registered with the Secretariat at People’s Action that managed the entire campaign. The main task of the Ward Committee was to invite applications for candidature from the ward, scrutinize the applicants, conduct a primary election and declare a consensus candidate. The candidate was then put up for possible ‘adoption’ by any of the main political parties. While People’s Action itself is not affiliated with any of the political parties, it did allow for RWA candidates or candidates chosen by RWAs to join major political parties. Their rationale behind this decision was that they claimed that they wanted “clean and effective candidates” from the respective wards, irrespective of political affiliations<sup>134</sup>. People’s Action saw its role as an ‘independent observer to ensure transparency and fairness’ in the process. Sectors 11, 16 and 17 of Rohini (one of the two wards I studied) were the first to have created Resident Ward Committees<sup>135</sup>.

People’s Action along with one of its affiliate organizations New Delhi People’s Action also started a process of mobilizing middle class residents to vote for the MCD elections. By the end of this process about 250 RWAs came together to contest the Municipal Elections in 21 wards. A related development that further encouraged RWAs to participate in elections was the new delineation of ward boundaries according to population size. The number of MCD wards increased from 132 to 272 ahead of the Municipal

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<sup>133</sup> Personal interview with Sanjay Kaul, President People’s Action [Delhi, December 2006]

<sup>134</sup> “RWAs’ decision to fight polls worrying parties”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, 28th January 29, 2007

<sup>135</sup> “RWAs gear up for participation in polls”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, February 02, 2007 and “Candidates backed by RWAs intensify campaigning” *The Hindu*, New Delhi, March 23, 2007

Elections based on a population of roughly fifty thousand people. In many cases this delineation created wards that comprised of middle class housing colonies, all of which had strong RWAs. RWAs however did not win any seats in the elections.

Although Resident Welfare Associations contesting for local elections was a new development in Delhi, a more important factor that determined election outcomes was the issue of sealing of commercial establishments and Master Plan implementation (see section 4.3). Many unauthorized commercial properties were ultimately regularized by the Master Plan while the Congress Party was still in power, but the protests and violence that led to those changes in regulation worked against the government. It was observed that anti-incumbency vote went largely in favor of the Bharatiya Janata Party that also led it to win the 2007 MCD elections.

There are still some interesting trends that we observe from the election results. First, RWA candidates took the third position in five wards with a total of 5% of the total aggregate votes. Second, as compared with other independent candidates, RWAs candidates did better<sup>136</sup>. Third, middle class participation in wards where RWAs contested was higher than other comparable wards and than previous years<sup>137</sup>. It may not be possible to speculate on the significance of these trends, but the process through which development were shaped could unfold some interesting insights into the political behavior of RWAs.

## 5.2 Political Typology of RWAs

The broad reason that RWAs and organizations like People's Action and URJA cite for middle class associations entering politics is the desire to change the clientelistic nature of politics in India that had marginalized the middle class. But all RWAs are middle class in nature; yet all are not contesting elections. In fact the other large RWA umbrella organization, Joint Front, is very critical of this development. The following statement made by the President of Joint Front reflects their disapproval:

“If RWAs start contesting elections, what would be the difference between us and the political parties? Our job is to assist residents in sorting out local problems and that is our only scope of functioning. Getting into politics would only dismantle the unity of

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<sup>136</sup> “RWAs make significant presence”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, April 09, 2007

<sup>137</sup> “RWA candidates fared well in polls”, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, April 20, 2007

RWAs. Similar attempts have failed in Gurgaon, and RWAs doing so would only become another political front<sup>138</sup>

So why did some RWAs contest elections while others did not? In order to answer this question, it might be useful to study the relationship between RWAs and political representatives. I observed that this relationship is not the same across different neighborhoods. Most RWAs and councilors can not get along at all, some do not like each other but work together anyway, while a few have learned to become friends. I would classify RWAs into three categories respectively: adversarial, antagonistic cooperation and politically savvy. But before I describe the three types of RWAs, it is important to understand the external developments that have shaped the dynamics of the relationship between political representatives and RWAs in recent years.

The most significant change in governance in the last five years has been through policies on decentralization by both the Delhi and Central Government. Intervention by the Delhi government with the Bhagidari program, a form of decentralization, led to a significant increase in the level of interaction between RWAs and political representatives (see section 3.2.2). At another level, the MCD has been pushing for greater decentralization in its own administration in recent years. The councilors and MLAs have traditionally been provided with constituency funds to spend for development related work in their respective wards. In the last five years, the Councilor Local Development Fund amount has been incrementally increased from US\$85,000 (35 lakhs INR) in 2002 to about US\$250,000 (1 crore INR) in 2006. Political representatives enjoy a considerable level of discretion in allocation of that amount. Although the MCD continues to be a primarily technocratic organization and governance in Delhi is still very centralized (see section 3.2.3), Municipal councilors and MLAs have acquired greater executive powers in their areas through this financial devolution<sup>139</sup>. The increase in funds has resulted in councilors being able to invest in some capital investments and not just minor maintenance works. These two developments have reinforced the interaction and tension between political representatives

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<sup>138</sup> "Politicos face local resistance in MCD polls", *The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, January 28, 2007

<sup>139</sup> The MCD has two branches: Executive and Deliberative. The 'Executive Wing' is the technocratic part of the organization that comprises of civil servant [Commissioner, Additional Commissioner, Heads of Departments, Deputy Commissioners and Administrative Officers]. The 'Deliberative Wing' comprises of the Mayor and Statutory Committees and Sub-Committees comprising of elected Councilors. As in most Indian cities, the 'Executive Wing' in MCD has more administrative and decision making powers than the deliberative wing.

and RWAs. RWAs have as a result become more demanding of local political representatives in recent years.

### 5.2.1 Adversarial

In most planned neighborhoods in Delhi there is a bitter relationship between RWAs and local political representatives. Because of the administrative mechanisms introduced by the Bhagidari program (most importantly creation of 'Bhagidari Cells' and 'Nodal Officers'), a parallel system of governance has begun to emerge (see section 3.2.3). This had in a way eliminated the role of political representatives as a medium between resident and government officials. Most political representatives, councilors as well as Members of Legislative Assembly (MLAs), feel that Bhagidari is encroaching into their area of operation and hence feel threatened. A professor of planning who has been studying RWAs for the last few years told me that the relationship between RWAs and political representatives is so bitter that they [councilors] would not even pick up their cell phones if they know that RWAs were calling<sup>140</sup>.

I would describe most of the RWAs I interviewed in the North Delhi ward as sharing an adversarial relationship with their councilors. This ward comprises of middle class residents (both traders and professionals) and some slum settlements. Both the councilor and MLA in the ward belong to the BJP Party that has traditionally attracted middle class trader votes. The RWAs I interviewed, however, were professionals (median household income of US\$400-500 per month). The main reason for conflict between local political representatives and RWAs in this ward was regarding budget expenditure decisions. RWAs blamed the councilor and MLA of corruption and nepotism and felt that the government should transfer funds directly to RWAs for development work in their neighborhoods rather than channeling it through political representatives. It is interesting to observe that Joint Front, on the other hand, had opposed a Government of Delhi proposal that would have allotted 30% of the property tax to RWAs for civil duties<sup>141</sup>. RWAs in this ward complained that since the both the councilor and the MLA belonged to the business (*baniya*) community, a disproportionate share of the budget went into neighborhoods of traders. They also said

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<sup>140</sup> Personal interview with Prof. Sridharan, Department of Urban Planning, School of Planning and Architecture [January, 2007]

<sup>141</sup> "The best future for RWAs is as urban panchayats", *Civil Society*, New Delhi, September/ October 2005

that the political representatives favored the trader caste while issuing contracts for construction works in the ward. These RWAs that I interviewed were affiliated with People's Action<sup>142</sup>. They were also the first RWAs in Delhi to register for local MCD elections.

As discussed earlier, the administrative mechanisms created by Bhagidari translated into RWAs being able to influence political representatives through the executive wing of the MCD. I observed an interesting development in this ward. RWAs told me that the councilor had created 'fake RWAs' that would invalidate the complaints made by RWAs in their neighborhoods. This was possible because there is no separate legislation that guides the membership guidelines for RWAs. RWAs are registered under the Societies Registration Act of 1860 that also applies to civic associations of all kinds (including NGOs and Community Based Organizations). Any seven individuals according to this Act can form an RWA. While the 'Bhagidari Cell' in MCD and the Delhi Government allowed RWAs to lodge complaints against government officials and political representatives, RWAs created by the councilor were able to find a way around this mechanism. The councilor, on the other hand, believed that RWAs were undemocratic and undermined him who is elected by the mandate of the people. He also blamed RWAs for trying to 'blackmail' him through the Bhagidari program<sup>143</sup>.

What is intrinsic to this shift in the power balance between RWAs and councilors in this ward is the assumption that neighborhood associations access political representatives for problem solving. This is different from RWAs in the South Delhi ward where some of the RWAs did not even know their local councilor prior to the Bhagidari workshops. The tension between RWAs and political representatives has further intensified with greater financial powers of MLAs and councilors enjoy now.

### **5.2.2 Antagonistic Cooperation**

Some RWAs and councilor in the South Delhi ward do not like each other (for similar reasons described in the North Delhi ward), but work together anyway. This was surprising. The neighborhood I describe here is one of the most prime residential properties in the city, and possibly also the country. The area was developed in 1972 for retired civil servants. Back then, it lay in the outskirts of the city. Since most of the residents at the time

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<sup>142</sup> Personal interview with RWAs of Rohini Sectors 17, 11, 14, 12 [Delhi, January, February, 2007]

<sup>143</sup> Telephonic interview with councilor of Ward 33 [Delhi, February, 2007]

were civil servants, they used their informal networks within public agencies for delivery of services and infrastructure. The period from 1985 onwards saw an increase in land values in the area. Many of the original residents sold their properties to businessmen. The density in the neighborhood increased. Many private schools and foreign embassies moved to the neighborhood, which further shot up property values. The RWA in the neighborhood described their job as making sure that the area remains ‘the top colony in Delhi; the aim is not to ensure minimal, but optimum services<sup>144</sup>’. The councilor in the ward is a resident of the Munirka Urban Village and belongs to an economically backward caste (Scheduled Caste<sup>145</sup>). Most of his voters are from the village and slum and resettlement colonies in the ward. He contested local elections for the first time in 2004 with a Congress Party ticket and won, probably because of anti-incumbency.

In order to ensure that the neighborhood gets these optimal services, the RWA in this neighborhood uses own internal funds (annual fee collected from residents), services by private corporations who have businesses in the neighborhood as Corporate Social Responsibility (for example, maintenance of public parks, back lanes, sponsoring public events etc), and government officials and political representative in government agencies. But what distinguishes this RWA is its access to the top bureaucracy and political leadership in government agencies. Most of the residents in this neighborhood do not vote. In fact the RWA met with the councilor for the first time during a Bhagidari workshop. But local political representatives were often accessed indirectly through high level government officials in the MCD or senior Congress party politicians in the Delhi Government. This was perhaps the main cause of tension between the councilor and the RWA. Since the Councilor Local Development Funds had increased in the last few years, the RWAs needed these funds for development work. The councilor on the other hand did not want to displease his superiors in the agency (since the executive wing in the MCD continues to be stronger than the deliberative wing) and the Party. While describing the relationship with the local councilor, the RWA President of the neighborhood said, “Of course he [councilor] is unhappy; I can call his boss and he will have to bend”.

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<sup>144</sup> Personal interview with RWA Vasant Vihar [Delhi, February, 2007]

<sup>145</sup> A third of the municipal seats are reserved for Scheduled Caste/ Scheduled Tribe [ST/SC] candidates. This seat during the election year was reserved for ST/ SCs

The second cause of tension was the RWA's demands to evict informal settlements/businesses from public spaces in the neighborhood. This includes hawkers selling food products on the streets, local laundry vendors [*dhobiwala*] in pavements, newspaper vendors etc. The RWA described encroachments as a nexus between 'illegal squatters, the councilor and local police'. It is interesting to observe that the RWA in this neighborhood is affiliated with Joint Front, the main RWA umbrella organization that approached the Courts for action against unauthorized commercial establishments. This RWA was in fact one of its founding members. The councilor, however, saw their demand about slum eviction as something that would hurt his constituency. Responding to my question about informal settlements, he said, "I have to take care of all people in my constituency; I am a poor people's man<sup>146</sup>".

### 5.2.3 The Political Savvy RWA

RWAs and councilors at best manage to get along somehow, as observed above, but a symbiotic relationship between the two is rare. I had spent a few days observing the councilor in the South Delhi ward (he showed me around his ward, allowed me to sit in his meeting with constituents, political advisors, government officials...I basically followed him around all day for a few days!). A television news channel came to interview him once. The interview was set within a public meeting; the public included slum residents in the ward, his political supporters, the opposition and representatives of RWAs. This was surprising because such meetings are usually not attended by middle class associations. I was even more surprised by the open public support of the RWA in television. Later I interviewed the RWA.

This neighborhood was similar with respect to occupations and income characteristics to other neighborhoods in the South Delhi ward (with a median income of US\$850- 1450 per month) but what distinguished this neighborhood was its history of association with political representatives. Many of the development works done within and outside the neighborhood were because of the support of politicians. This allowed the RWA to charge a much lower fee to its residents (US\$10 as opposed to US\$60 annually in a comparable neighborhood). While it is true that this neighborhood always had networks with

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<sup>146</sup> He was referring to that fact that most of the ward residents who vote for him in local elections happen to be poor.

politicians, but these networks were often with high level politicians at the Delhi Government or at the Central Government level. The reason that the RWA in this neighborhood is now working with the councilor was because the councilor in recent years has more financial powers to influence development work.

I was surprised that RWA members in the neighborhood encouraged residents to vote for the councilor in local elections. It is important to note that much of the population in this ward is middle class and the councilor is looking to expand his support base beyond the limited slum/regularized settlements in the ward. For this purpose, he conducts development work in both slum settlements and middle class neighborhoods. For example, he invested on sanitation, schools and other basic facilities in the urban villages and slum settlements in the ward but also funded waste-water treatment plants, developed ornamental gardens and upgraded roads and other infrastructure in middle-class neighborhoods. Secondly, since most middle class residents do not participate in political rallies and elections, he used signage (with his name) on all development work that he conducted in the ward as a means to market himself.

### **5.3 Which RWAs joined politics and why? What did the others do?**

The relationship between RWAs and political representatives point to the motivation behind some RWAs to contest local elections. RWA in the elite neighborhood (5.2.2) is able to control the councilor indirectly through its high networks in government agencies. The behavior of RWA in this neighborhood with respect to informal settlements is consistent with the argument about neighborhood associations and urban public space put forth by Fernandes (2006) and Chatterjee (2004). Most of the residents in the neighborhood are employed in large multinational firms and organizations, many being the some of the richest people in the city. The goal of the RWA (and residents) was therefore also to make the neighborhood more exclusionary and free of any visible signs of poverty.

The third case (of the politically savvy RWA) is an exception but points towards the changing demographic characteristics of the South Delhi ward. Because of its location, the ward is currently going through gentrification and the slum and low income residents are now being replaced by middle class residents, most of who do not vote. Investing in middle class neighborhood is a means for the councilor to expand his voter base. The neighborhood sees the councilor as a source of funds since policies on decentralization has given more

financial powers to local political representatives. The RWAs in the North Delhi ward, however, neither enjoy the high networks in government agencies, and nor are able to exert direct control over local politicians because of caste/class affiliations or.

The political typology of RWAs suggests that RWAs with pre-existing networks with government agencies are more likely to remain apolitical. These networks could be at the top (with senior bureaucrats and politicians), as observed in elite neighborhoods, that these associations leverage for service delivery and in influencing local political representatives indirectly. Members of such associations are more likely to assume the traditional 'watch-dog' role of 'civil society'. 'Direct' networks between the middle class and local political representatives exist based on caste and occupation (in neighborhoods with strong trading communities). This is reminiscent of networks between residents and politicians observed in informal settlements. Neighborhood associations without these social networks seek to become part of the government machinery through formal electoral channels<sup>147</sup>. Interestingly, these neighborhood associations, like the ones involved in activism through umbrella organizations, also comprise of professionals. Activism by neighborhood associations at the city level was an important contributing factor in this mobilization. Another factor has been decentralization of governance, devolution of financial and decision making powers to local political representatives, which makes participation in local politics more significant than before.

While some RWAs are influencing local electoral politics directly by contesting elections, others are able to influence the behavior of local political representatives as observed in both neighborhoods in the South Delhi ward. This has been an outcome of policies on decentralization that have made local political representatives more powerful in one hand and also facilitated greater interaction between citizen groups and political representatives. During the same period, mobilization of RWAs at the city level through umbrella organizations like the Joint Front and People's Action made RWAs very powerful in influencing government decisions. This had some impact in their roles at the local ward level as well. Although the bargaining power of RWAs is a function of pre-existing networks of RWAs and government officials in the respective agencies, I observed that all RWAs had

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<sup>147</sup> The other RWAs that contested municipal elections are from neighborhoods like Vishnu Garden, Bindapur, Shalimar Bagh, Rajendra Nagar, Dwarka and North Delhi which had very similar demographic characteristics as the North Delhi ward that I studied. This seems to suggest that my argument about RWA networks in Government agencies and RWA participation in local elections could have external validity.

become more demanding of Local Area Development Funds across all neighborhoods. This is reflected in changes in public expenditure patterns at the ward level. For example, the expenditure on middle class neighborhoods in the South Delhi ward has increased from US\$88,000 (36 lakh INR) in 2002-03 to US\$112 (46 INR) in 2006-07. In the North Delhi ward, it increased from US\$144 (59 lakhs INR) to US\$181 (74 lakhs INR) in the same period. This is a percentage increase in 45% and 73% in just five years (Refer Annex 2).

**Table 5.1 Ward Characteristic vs. Political Outcomes in Elections**

Ward	Population Characteristics	Main voter group	Voter Turnout Rate* (MCD Elections)	Outcome on Ward Expenditure	Political Outcome in 2007 Elections
South Delhi (Ward 16)	Middle-High income professionals. Some slum settlements	Slum residents	1997: 23.5% (BJP) 2002: 32.5% (Congress)	Greater expenditure on middle class neighborhoods	Same. Some middle class residents begin to vote (BJP wins)
North Delhi (Ward 33)	Middle income professionals. Traders. Some slum settlements	Traders and Slum Residents	1997: 37% (BJP) 2002: 43.6% (BJP)	No major change in pattern	RWAs contest MCD elections (BJP wins)

\*Source: State Election Commission, Delhi

#### 5.4 RWAs and the Urban Poor

**Urban Space:** The first major impact of neighborhood associations on the urban poor is spatial, as reflected by slum eviction in large Indian cities. This argument is based on the literature on ‘globalizing cities and the middle class’ that describe neighborhood associations as hegemonic institutions that seek to redefine the use of urban public spaces by dislocating the urban poor from close to their visual proximity. I observed this development in certain elite neighborhoods in Delhi (see section 4.1).

**Public Expenditure:** As discussed earlier, RWAs have become more demanding of ward level development funds by local political representatives (municipal councilors). In mega-cities like Delhi, where millions of dollars are pumped in for large infrastructure project especially in recent years, the councilor’s fund constitutes a minuscule proportion of the city budget. But this could have significant impact on service delivery for the urban poor because political representatives are the primary means through which the urban poor access the State. In the two wards that I studied, I observed that while decentralization has given

greater financial powers to local political representative, middle class neighborhoods have taken up a larger share of this increase in resources (See Annex 2)

**Bhagidari:** Another outcome of the rise of RWAs is that the focus of Bhagidari has now been shifted to other sectors like education and health, and most recently on informal settlements. This is an interesting development because the reasons why *Bhagidari* was restricted to the middle class planned parts of the city still hold. This program was conceptualized in the summer of 2006 and detailed guidelines for implementation were been worked out by November 2006. Another NGO (that specializes in working on low-income/squatter communities) was commissioned to work out the implementation strategy.

There are two reasons on why the program is implemented one. The first is to shift the focus away from RWAs that in recent years have become very critical of the government. Second, working in slum is more complex than in planned areas. The experience with RWAs, which is perhaps more manageable, would have allowed these institutions to learn and hence make government officials better prepared for this more challenging task. More importantly, the program is timed right before the assembly elections in 2008. It is interesting to note that the program was publicized in a big way months before the last election.

The program is designed to start with 20 pilot projects. The focus in the first phase would be on resettlement colonies because land titles are not disputed here. The idea is to improve educational and vocational training institutions and health centers in order to improve the quality of life and employment potential in these neighborhoods. Phase II would be to figure out a way to resettle existing unauthorized colonies through partnering with local community institutions<sup>148</sup>. The slums selected for the program are either towards the outskirts of the city where relocation is not imminent or are planned to be relocated soon.

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<sup>148</sup> Interview with Mr. Yadav, Special Secretary to Chief Minister [Chief Minister's Office, Delhi, July 2006]

## Chapter 6

# Concluding thoughts...

In this chapter seeks to answer research questions introduced at the beginning of the thesis. I try to understand the factors behind the implementation of the *Bhagidari* program and the resultant (unintended) political impacts. I explore how middle-class neighborhood associations are beginning to influence public policy both through direct and indirect means and identify the external factors that have been instrumental in this change. I also speculate on what these developments could mean for the future of Indian cities.

I had asked four questions at the beginning of this research. The first question was about *Bhagidari*, a Government of Delhi program that institutionalized citizen government participation in governance through neighborhood associations or Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs). I was interested to find out the reasons why the program was implemented and its (unintended) political impacts behind image of success that *Bhagidari* has come to embody. The second question related to the rise in power of Resident Welfare Associations. I was interested in the factors that led to collective action by RWAs and the ways in which they influenced public policy outcomes. The third question was about advent of RWAs into formal politics. Within the array of RWAs in Delhi, I wanted to find out who were contesting for local elections. The last question was about the contextual factors that have influenced these developments: *Bhagidari* as well the rise of RWAs. I will lay down the contextual variables (question four) before I begin to answer the first three questions.

### 6.1 The Contextual Variables

**What are the other contextual factors that have influenced these developments: *Bhagidari* and the Rise of RWAs?**

The roots of changes in government policies like *Bhagidari* and the rise of neighborhood associations lies in Economic Reforms Policy that the Government of India instituted in early nineties. There were two defining characteristics of these reforms: one, lesser government control [**liberalization and privatization**] and two, opening up of the

economy to foreign capital [**globalization**]. These reforms have had important implications on the governance and socio-economic characteristics of metropolitan cities.

On the public policy side majority of the investment, especially foreign investment, is now concentrated in **mega-cities** like Mumbai, Delhi and Bangalore. The urban policy as a result has become more pro-growth reflected by the investments in large infrastructure projects in metro-cities, as opposed to policies targeted at 'de-congesting' cities in the 70s and 80s. This is reflected in huge investments in infrastructure in cities to create conditions for foreign investment and production for the global market. The 'National Urban Renewal Mission', a US\$1350 Million national urban development program on infrastructure upgradation, for example is a reflection of this change. Secondly, due to the structural reform policies [**decentralization**] adopted by the Federal and State governments, which some argue is an extension of the economic reform policy (Kundu, 2003), there have been changes in the way cities are now governed. Although the Central Government continues to maintain significant control over large cities because their impact on macroeconomic growth, local governments have assumed more decision making and financial powers in recent years. City governments are now expected to generate own resources to finance urban development. A parallel development is **privatization of service delivery** on grounds of greater efficiency and accountability. There is now a greater focus on service delivery models that are based on cost-recovery in an effort to cut on government subsidies.

On the socio-economic side, the reforms have led to rapid economic growth in the last fifteen years. It has been argued that the gains of this growth have been differentially distributed. While the overall size of the middle class (and hence the markets) has increased, there has been an exponential **growth in incomes** in sections of the middle class - the professional and the managerial class that is connected to agents of global capital. Neighborhood associations too are principally middle class in nature. Another outcome of economic liberalization had been growth in the mass **media**, both print and electronic (in contrast to one State owned channel earlier). Competition between television channels and newspapers has led to localization in media and given space for discourse on city level public policies and politics.

The economic reforms and the changes it brought about in governance and society set the contextual framework for this thesis. I have tried to establish a relationship between **middle-class activism**, exemplified by the rise in neighborhood associations, and local

politics in mega-cities using the case of Delhi. Delhi makes for an interesting study not only because it embodies the larger socio-economic changes that are transforming urban India, but also because of radical changes that have been instituted in the governance of the city in an effort to make it more **responsive** to citizens. This was done through institutionalization of citizen participation in governance through a program called *Bhagidari*. The partners include neighborhood associations in the middle-class 'planned' parts of the city.

The distinction between 'planned' and 'informal' is key to understanding the variation in state-society relationship across different fragments of the city. Partha Chatterjee (2005) draws a distinction between the '**political society**' and the '**civil society**' in India. Civil society, he argues, is founded on 'popular sovereignty and grants equal rights to citizens' (as tax-payers). Political society is the 'line connecting populations to governmental agencies pursuing multiple policies of security and welfare' (as voters). He argues that "politics is often the only resource in a system which many deny the benefits of policy decisions or legal remedies to the poor". Voting patterns for local municipal elections in Delhi support this theoretical argument indicating that poor residents see political representatives as the main channel for making their voices heard (Baud, Sridharan, Pfeffer, 2006). Harriss too in his study of civic associations in Delhi observes that urban poor most commonly address problem-solving through mediation by political parties while the middle-class is more active in associational life like Resident Welfare Associations (Harriss, 2005a). The middle class, according to Chatterjee's definition, forms part of the civil society. It accesses the State primarily through the channels of the judiciary and bureaucracy, as opposed formal electoral politics.

## **6.2 *Bhagidari* and its Impacts**

**What have been the reasons behind the implementation of the *Bhagidari* programs and the (unintended) political impacts after it was implemented?**

**Implementation of *Bhagidari*:** The *Bhagidari* program is radical in the sense that such an initiative to institutionalize citizen-government participation [by a government agency] had never been tried at a large scale in any Indian city before. The reason why the program could be implemented was because it gained support from both senior political leaders and bureaucrats. The support from bureaucrats is explained by the fact that *Bhagidari*

is credited to be the brainchild of a senior civil servant in the Delhi Government. But there are many programs that policy analysts and civil servants recommend that are unable to find political support. The reason why the Chief Minister adopted *Bhagidari* may be explained by the unique **institutional environment of Delhi**. Being the Capital city, Delhi is dominated by Federal Government institutions. The limited decision making power in the capital is shared amongst political representatives from three levels of government (Central, State and Municipal) which provides very little political space for another level of government that could involve citizens. *Bhagidari* institutionalized citizen participation at the level of the neighborhood without changing any formal political structures. Hence it was in a way able to fill a space that formal policies on decentralization like the 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act instituted by the Center were not able to do so. More importantly, *Bhagidari* was a most visible means for the Chief Minister to publicize the workings of her government and hence exert its presence in the city. This gains even more significance since *Bhagidari* was implemented when the major opposition party, BJP, was in power at the Central Government.

The program is credited with improving government responsiveness and service delivery as reflected by the number of national and international awards that it has received. This perception of success has influenced policies on governance at both state and national levels in India and led to launching of similar programs. While the program does reflect how city governments are becoming more responsive to citizens, the political implications of the program have not been very well understood. The political implications correspond to the program's impact on government officials, political representatives and Resident Welfare Associations.

**Government Officials:** The heterogeneity in government officials across and within agencies results in different levels of responsiveness. Officials from government agencies under the Delhi government responded to the program better because administrative mechanisms like special '*Bhagidari* Cells' that were tied to the Chief Minister's Office. This was not possible in agencies accountable directly to the Central Government. Secondly, the program faced resistance from officials from Central Government agencies like the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) and Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) who were senior to their counterparts in the Delhi Government. It is however important not to draw any causal links between responsiveness of government agencies in *Bhagidari* and agency

performance (as measured by citizen perception). I observed that a most agencies with single tasks tend to have a better perception. Secondly, agencies involved with more important roles in development and maintenance work and greater levels of interaction with RWAs tended to do poorly in perception surveys, even though some of the sectors they worked in seem to have improved. The second important distinction in responsiveness is between different levels of government officials. Evaluation studies on *Bhagidari* conclude that mid-level officials are less inclined to be involved in the program (GoI, 2003). Lack of awareness of the program is cited as the most important reason behind it. This is true to an extent, but I observed that degree of interaction between different kind of government officials and RWAs is possibly a more useful explanation. High-level officials like department heads are mostly involved in administrative responsibilities that do not require much interaction with citizens and lower level staff primarily works on the field. *Bhagidari* was an added burden on mid-level officials who had to go out of their way to meet with RWAs in addition to fieldwork and administrative work.

**Political Representatives:** Although the program was implemented without making any formal changes in the political power structures in the city and the Congress Party was in power at both the State and Municipal level, *Bhagidari* led to a tug of war between the Delhi Government and councilors from the MCD. This was because local political representatives saw *Bhagidari* as an 'indirect means' that the Chief Minister was employing to intrude into their political space. The administrative mechanisms that the program introduced put RWAs in direct contact with government officials thus creating a parallel system of governance that undermined local elected politicians. This also led to friction between political representatives and RWAs. The program was however instrumental in bringing middle class neighborhood association and local politicians (MCD councilors and Members of Legislative Assembly) to the same forum, sometimes for the first time.

### 6.3 Rise of Resident Welfare Associations

**What are the factors that led to collective action by Resident Welfare Associations and how did they influence public policy outcomes?**

**Dominant Explanation:** The recent body of literature on the rise of middle class in India focuses on the impact neighborhood associations on the use of urban public space.

Fernandes argues that the newness of the middle class, as an outcome of economic growth, is marked by its 'social and cultural visibility'. The middle class acts as the primary agent of the **globalizing city** and nation that 'seeks to reproduce a clear socio-spatial separation from groups such as street vendors and squatters'. Neighborhood associations, she argues, is a mechanism through which this separation is achieved as reflected by slum evictions in a number of large Indian cities. Chatterjee ties this development to economic liberalization and argues that it is a result 'circulation of images of global cities through cinema, television, and the internet as well as through the India middle classes' far greater access to international travel'. The main impact of this mobilization, according to this theory, is on the use of **urban public space**. I observe that while this argument is true for elite neighborhood associations in Delhi, perhaps a greater impact of middle class activism has been on public policy outcomes in the city.

**Middle Class Activism:** By Middle Class Activism, I refer to large scale mobilization by RWAs that was geared towards changing public policy decisions towards its favor. The middle class in India is active in associations but mobilization by these associations is rare. Two RWA umbrella organizations, Joint Front and People's Action were at the forefront of this mobilization in Delhi. I refer to three cases that exemplify activism by RWAs. In the first case, RWAs protested against the increase in electricity user-charges after the privatization of the Delhi Electricity Board (DVB). The role of the media as a means for creating support for the protest and also as a medium to bargain with the government agencies was crucial in this case. This led to Government of Delhi to revert to the old electricity rates. The second case involves protests against a World Bank recommendation to privatize the city's water utility agency (DJB). Although this protest was mostly led by NGOs and social activists (who have mostly concentrated on the poor), RWA support for the protest led the Delhi Government to withdraw from the project. The third case involves protest against regularization of 'unauthorized' commercial establishments in the city by the Master Plan. This development led to tension between RWAs and the trader community in the city who owned the unauthorized shops. This case reveals that although RWAs are prominent in most middle class parts of the city, including ones the inhabited by the business community, RWA Activism by is primarily led by professionals. It is also an example of 'judiciary' as one of the most important channels that which the middle class uses to control the State by invoking discourses of citizen' rights and public interest. This is

not only because of its knowledge of the law and access to resources, but also because law is at times the only course for the middle class because it is outnumbered by the more politically active community of traders and the urban poor. This may be because the occupations of traders and the poor are not always based on the same structures of legality as the professional class.

**Factors behind Activism:** Three important factors contributed to mobilization by Resident Welfare Associations. First, all RWAs that led the protests are tied by a single class identity. All RWAs are middle class in nature, but the RWAs that led the protest are also part of the professional class. Many of their activities are not only defined by their interests, but also against other social groups. Second, a trend that runs across most cases is that this activism has been triggered by some form of privatization of service delivery which resulted in (or was believed to result in) increase in user charges. RWA activism is hence a reaction against changes in modes of service delivery from a subsidy-based model whose beneficiaries, it has been argued (in South Asia), were most often the middle class. Third, *Bhagidari* has been instrumental in bringing RWAs under one umbrella as the prime representatives of 'civil society'. The media focus on RWAs too was a byproduct of the publicity campaign of the *Bhagidari* program, which has been an important reason behind the program's implementation.

**Fragmented Middle Class:** Middle Class Activism is explained as a response to the impotence of the middle class in the 'political sphere' as it begins to devote its energies to activism in 'civil society' (Harriss, 2000b). I observed that the 'apolitical' nature of the middle class is beginning to change now. This is reflected in the difference in ideologies of the two largest groups of RWA umbrella organizations that developed in the city as a consequence of the 'power hike protest'. Even though both had similar opinion on public policy issues and used similar mechanisms for protest, one group assumed the traditional 'watch-dog' of the State role of civil society; another developed into a 'political advocacy' group. The later also mobilized neighborhood associations to contest municipal elections. This was the first such development in any large city in India.

## 6.4 Resident Welfare Associations and Formal Politics

### Why are some RWAs contesting local elections while others are not?

**Political Typology of RWAs:** The answer to this question possibly lies in the relationship between RWAs and political representatives that varies across different wards. An important factor that has shaped this relationship has been policies on decentralization by both the Delhi and Central Government. Intervention by the Delhi government with the *Bhagidari* program led to a significant increase in the level of interaction between RWAs and political representatives. Decentralization in the MCD has led to greater financial devolution to local political representatives. These developments have made RWAs more demanding of local councilors. I observed three main

that most RWAs and councilors can not get along, some do not like each other but work together anyway, while a few have learned to become friends. I have classified them into three categories respectively: adversarial, antagonistic cooperation and politically savvy.

**Who joined politics?** Neighborhood associations with pre-existing networks with government agencies are more likely to remain apolitical. These networks could be at the top (with senior bureaucrats and politicians), as observed in elite neighborhoods, that these associations leverage for service delivery and in influencing local political representatives indirectly. Members of such associations are more likely to assume the traditional 'watch-dog' role of 'civil society'. I observe 'direct' networks between the middle class and local political representatives exist based on caste and occupation (in neighborhoods with strong trading communities). This is reminiscent of networks between residents and politicians observed in informal settlements. Neighborhood associations without these social networks seek to become part of the government machinery through formal electoral channels. Interestingly, these neighborhood associations, like the ones involved in activism through umbrella organizations, also comprise of professionals. Activism by neighborhood associations at the city level was an important contributing factor in this mobilization. Another factor has been decentralization of governance, devolution of financial and decision making powers to local political representatives, which makes participation in local politics more significant than before.

**RWAs and Urban Poor:** Neighborhood associations affect formal politics 'indirectly' by influencing the behavior of local political representatives. This is reflected by greater public spending on middle-class neighborhoods in recent years, since the start of

*Bhagidari* and developments surrounding the program. Policies on decentralization instituted by both the Federal and State Governments have been instrumental in this change. Interestingly, this observation however holds greater significance for those neighborhood associations that are more likely to be 'apolitical': those that do not have affiliation to any of the political parties but control their representatives through 'high networks'. This could have important consequences for service delivery for informal settlements because political representatives are the primary means through which the urban poor access the State. A positive externality could be extension of the *Bhagidari* program to informal settlements. This is partly a result of experience that Government of Delhi and other government agencies gathered after working with middle class citizen groups for seven years. More importantly, it is a means for the government to shift its focus from citizen groups that have turned against it, while continuing to be associated with a high-profile program that won it political support previously. The focus of this new program would however be on regularized and resettlement colonies where land tenure or legality is not in question.

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Mr. Yadav, Special Secretary to Chief Minister [Chief Minister's Office, Delhi, July 2006]

Ms. Achala Singh, Deputy Commissioner North Delhi [Delhi, August 2006]

Kiron Wadhwa, President and CEO ACORD [Delhi, February 2007]

Professor George Koreth, Chairman Board of Governors, ACORD [Delhi, February 2007]

Prof. Sridharan, School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi [Delhi, December 2006]

Lalit Batra, Independent Researcher [New Delhi, January 2007]

Professor Amitabh Kundu, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi [Delhi, June, 2006]

Sanjay Kaul, President People's Action [Delhi, December 2006]

Mr. Pramod Chawla, Chair United Residents Joint Action (URJA) [Delhi, July 2006]

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Pradhans of JJ Cluster, Resettlement Colony and Unauthorized colonies of Rohini Sector 17 [Delhi, February 2007]

Facilitators from the Center for Urban and Regional Excellence (CURE) [Delhi, February 2007]

## ANNEX 1

### Questionnaires<sup>149</sup>

#### 1(a): Questionnaire for Resident Welfare Associations

##### Member Information:

1. Name:
2. Office Position/Area:
3. Occupation:
4. Age:
5. Educational qualifications:
6. How long have you served as an officer?
7. Contact Information:

##### Neighborhood characteristics:

1. Population:
2. Main occupation:
3. Income Range:
4. Tenure Status:
5. Renter/ Owners:
6. When was colony built?
7. How old is RWA?
8. Why was it set up?

##### RWA Elections and Membership:

1. How are nominations made?
2. Criteria for nomination:
3. How many nominations for (how many) office positions?
4. In case of voting, how many residents show up?
5. Background/ Occupation of other members:
6. Why join RWA? (incentive)
7. How long do they stay in office?
8. Have new people been interested to nominate themselves as members?
9. New RWAs after Bhagidari?
10. Who do they represent?
11. Is the RWA a member of an federation of RWAs/ umbrella org?
  - a. If so, which one?
  - b. Since when?
  - c. Why did it join?
  - d. What is their role?
  - e. Activities participated in:
12. How many RWAs in the ward?

##### Functions:

###### *Before Bhagidari (post 2000):*

1. Main roles and responsibility:
2. Main types of complaints?

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<sup>149</sup> These questionnaires were meant as a tool to guide interviewing and not designed with the purpose of statistical analysis

3. Biggest achievements:
  - a. Issue:
  - b. Method used for solution:
  - c. Number of meetings/ visits?
  - d. Time taken to solve:
  - e. Breakthrough:
4. Examples of development projects and maintenance:
  - a. Who did residents approach in case of water problems?
  - b. How were complaints processed?
5. Who did residents contact to register complaints? RWAs or councilor?
6. What was the role of political representatives?
  - a. Councilor:
  - b. MLA
  - c. MP
7. Biggest barriers/ challenges:
8. Issue:
  - a. Method used:
  - b. Why it didn't work?
  - c. Lesson learnt during problem solving: what works?
9. Did you know officials in MCD/ DDA/ Delhi government earlier?
  - a. If so, how?

***Post-Bhagidari (2000 onwards)***

1. Have any new responsibilities been added?  
(eg. collecting bills?)
2. What is the process of registering complaints now?
3. Who do residents approach?
4. How many times has the RWA complained to Bhagidari Cell?
  - a. What reasons?
5. Main works since 2000?
6. (slum evictions/ removal of encroachments/ hawkers)
7. Has the colony undertaken any works under bhagidari (parks, rainwater harvesting etc)?
  - a. Who took the initiative?
  - b. What was the agency's role?
  - c. Did residents arrange finance for this?
  - d. What was the councilor's role?
8. What is the role of local MLA/ councilor? Has the interaction changed? Cooperating now?
9. Main achievements on Bhagidari?
10. Drawbacks?

**Service delivery:**

Has there been an improvement in services after Bhagidari?

Which services?

	Responsible Agency	Reasons for improvement
Water supply		
Solid waste management		
Parks		
Sewage		
Roads		
Security		
Electricity		

## 1(b): Questionnaire for Slum Settlements

### Head Information:

1. Name:
2. Occupation:
3. Age:
4. Educational qualifications:
5. How long have you served as pradhan?
6. Contact Information:

### Settlement characteristics:

1. Population:
2. Main occupation:
3. Income Range:
4. When was the settlement built?
5. Where did the people come from?
6. Legal status:
  - a. Ration Card
  - b. Other documentation
7. Main issues:

### Membership/ Elections:

1. Main roles and responsibility:
2. Number of hrs spent per week on cluster work?
3. Criteria to become a pradhan
4. How do residents decide on who will become pradhan?
5. Are there any nominations and voting?
6. How many people show up?
7. Why did you choose to take up this position?
8. How long is the pradhan in office?
9. How do they decide to change?

### Functions/ Relationship with political representative:

10. Main roles and responsibility:
11. Does s\he know any politicians? How? Did s\he know them before becoming pradhan?
12. Affiliations with a political party?
13. Examples of development projects and maintenance:
  - a. Who did residents approach in case of water problems?
  - b. How were complaints processed?
14. Who do residents contact to register complaints? Political representative or government departments?
15. Main types of complaints?
16. Biggest achievements:
  - a. Issue:
  - b. Method used for solution:
  - c. Number of meetings/ visits?
  - d. Time taken to solve:
  - e. Breakthrough:
17. How often do residents go themselves? How often does pradhan?
  - a. What issues does pradhan represent?
18. What was the role of political representatives?
  - a. Councilor:

- b. MLA
  - c. MP
19. Biggest barriers/ challenges:
20. Issue:
- a. Method used:
  - b. Why it didn't work?
  - c. Lesson learnt during problem solving: what works?

**Service delivery:**

	Responsible Agency	Reasons for improvement
Water supply		
Solid waste management		
Parks		
Sewage		
Roads		
Security		
Electricity		

**Opinion on issues**

1. Are you aware of Bhagidari?
  - a. What is your opinion?
2. What do you think of RWAs in the area?
3. Are you aware of a new Bhagidari program for slum areas?

## 1(c): Questionnaire for Political Representatives:

### Personal Information:

1. Name:
2. Age:
3. Ward:
4. Educational qualifications:
5. How long have you been serving in this office?
6. How long have you been in active politics?
7. Which party?
8. Why did you join politics? Why this party?
9. Occupation before:
10. Type of seat [General/ SC/ST/ Women]
11. Contact Information:

### Ward characteristics:

1. Population:
2. Number of colonies:
  - a. Names/ characteristic/ tenure status/ renters, owners?
3. Type of facilities in the ward
4. History of the ward
5. How many RWAs in the ward?
6. How many set up after Bhagidari?

### Functions and Elections:

1. Main responsibilities
2. Number of site visits
3. Focus of work:
4. Main supporters:
5. Voting pattern by colony?
6. Has the focus shifted/ diversified
7. Amount allotted for the ward. Sources?
8. Amount allotted through councilor/ MLA fund
9. How much of that was spent?
10. Main works carried out during your tenure (by area and year)
11. Aware of 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment and ward committees
12. Aware of Local Area Planning

### Relationship with residents and RWAs:

1. Interaction with RWAs:
  - Do they contact him/ her?
  - If so, how often?
  - For what purposes?
  - Has the nature of interaction changed? More cooperative/ familiar now?
  - How and why?
  - Works carried out in colonies with RWAs
  - Has the interaction with RWAs changed after Bhagidari?
  - Has interaction with residents in colonies with RWAs changed?
2. Are there any colonies (not slums) without RWAs?
  - If so, what kind are these?
  - How do they voice their demands?

3. Which are the strong RWAs in the ward? What makes them powerful?
4. Agreements and disagreements with RWAs
5. What is the nature of interaction with slum dwellers?
  - How often do they contact him/ her?
  - Who contact? Pradhan? People?
  - What purposes?
  - Works carried out in slum areas:
6. New works planned in the ward?
  - Who's idea/ initiative
  - Where will funding come from?

**Opinion on issues**

1. RWA federations and RWAs standing for coming elections
2. RWAs providing services (as per MCD statement in 2004)

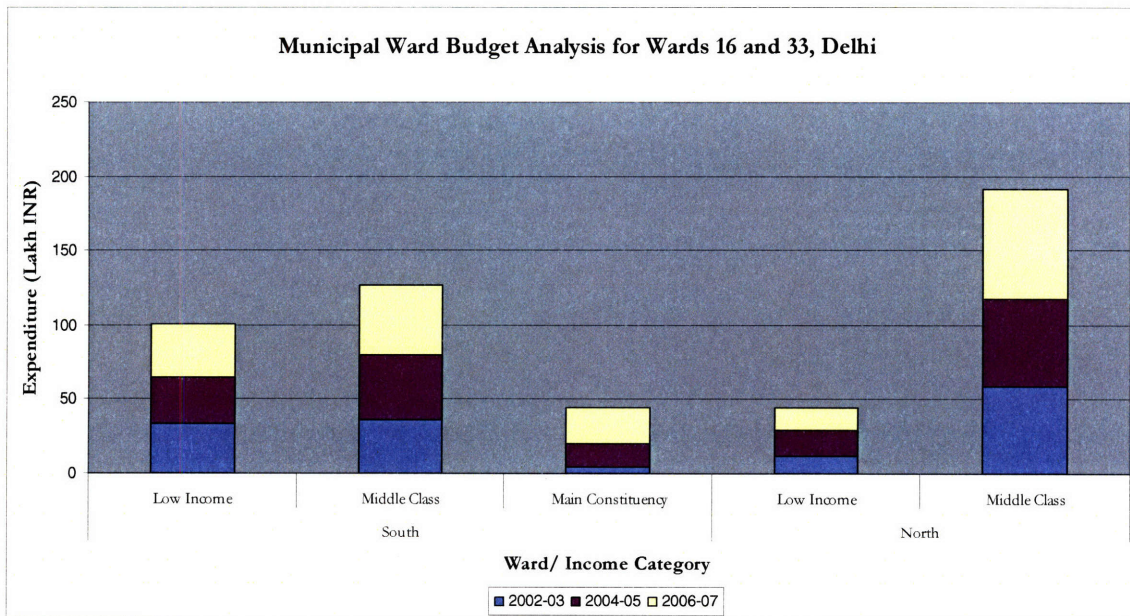
## ANNEX 2 Municipal Budget Analysis

### Municipal Ward Budget Analysis for Wards 16 and 33, Delhi

		Lakh (INR)	2002-03	2004-05	2006-07*
<b>Ward 16 (South)</b>	Low Income	Amount	33.83	30.52	36.62
		% of Total	48.4	41.0	44.2
	Middle Class	Amount	36.11	44	46.22
		% of Total	51.6	59.0	55.8
	Main Constituency	Amount	3.92	16	24.96
		% of Total	5.6	21.5	30.1
<b>Ward 33 (North)</b>	Low Income	Amount	11.92	17.8	14.78
		% of Total	16.8	23.3	16.7
	Middle Class	Amount	59.05	58.7	73.59
		% of Total	83.2	76.7	83.3

Source: Office of the Chief Engineer, Municipal Corporation of Delhi  
\*Election year

**Note on Methodology:** The above data is extracted from Ward Level Municipal Budgets for Delhi for two the two wards where I conducted fieldwork. I classify expenditure in different areas in the ward as ‘middle class’ and ‘low income’ neighborhoods based on my knowledge of the wards. Since I am more familiar with the South Delhi ward, I have been able to create a sub-category of ‘Low Income’ as ‘Main Constituency’. This is the area where the councilor belongs to and his main supporters live.



Source: Office of the Chief Engineer, Municipal Corporation of Delhi