

Book Review

DELHI CITIZENS' HANDBOOK: GOVERNMENT TO CITIZEN SERVICES

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Annabhula J. C. Bose*

The study of citizenship is not only topical but also a large, variegated, ever-changing subject. The truth in this regard is that there is no consensus on the idea of citizenship in terms of rights and duties, feelings, status, identities, etc. and for large numbers of people throughout the world the idea of citizenship is still hollow and empty and meaningless, deprived as they are of virtually all of its amenities (Heater, 2002). In this milieu, it is very heartening that the Centre for Civil Society as an NGO involved in bringing about social change through public policy, has taken initiative to bring out this study that gives the reader the empirical flavour about amenities to the Delhi citizens.

In other words, this study is about the state of governance in India's capital city with regard to eight areas, viz., administration, education, food and civil supplies, housing infrastructure, labour and employment, public healthcare, public transport and women safety, and finally water and sewage. All the key findings on all these fronts inform the reader of the pathetic, shameful and shameless situations in Delhi and the policy recommendations made are worth noting and loudly thinking about. After all, we must know: What do politicians do? What do economic advisors do? What do ombudsmen do? And what do citizens do? This study helps in finding out answers directly or indirectly.

This study was the result of six weeks of tireless work, dedication, and enthusiasm of 24 interns selected by the Centre for Civil Society (CCS) in New Delhi under its flagship summer internship programme, which has got the support from the Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung für die Freiheit. These 24 authors hail from a variety of backgrounds – International Relations, Political Science, Economics, Literature, Business/Management, Sociology, and Engineering – from top colleges in India and abroad. They spent hours out in the field, speaking to key stakeholders in water, sanitation, education, healthcare, sitting in PDS ration shops, mohalla clinics, visiting

* Associate Professor, Department of Economics, Shri Ram College of Commerce, University of Delhi, Delhi. E mail: ajc.bose@srcc.du.ac.in

schools, transport offices and night shelters, sitting with security guards and construction workers, interviewing government officials, academicians and sector experts. These researchers were ably supported by numerous guides and all the people involved in bringing out this study deserve congratulations beyond words.

In the first paper, Implementation and Outreach of the e-District Delhi Project under the National e-Governance Plan, the researchers analyse the online application procedure at Sub Divisional Magistrate (SDM) offices to assess the extent to which the e-District Project has been able to reach its envisioned goals. The paper examines the reasons for the success and failure of the project, and recommends policy changes.

In the second paper, Accessibility, Inclusivity and Efficiency of Provisions under Section 12(1)(c) of the Right to Education Act 2010, the researchers find that despite the Right to Education (RTE) Act 2010 mandate of 25% reservation in private unaided schools for students from Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) and disadvantaged groups, social inclusivity continues to remain a challenge today. This paper examines private unaided schools across Delhi to gauge the level of social inclusivity as mandated under the RTE.

In the third paper, Effectiveness of the Public Distribution System and efficacy of Fair Price Shops, it has been found that Delhi's Public Distribution System (PDS), a scheme to sell subsidised food beneficiaries through Fair Price Shops (FPS), is abound by leakages. The inefficacy of the scheme poses a significant threat to food security in the capital. The paper surveys the leakages along with the feasibility of the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) scheme suggested as a measure for blocking said leakages.

In the fourth paper, Availability of Affordable Housing to the Urban Poor in Delhi by the Government, the researchers examine the various problems associated with the provision of affordable housing, by explicating the very concept of affordable housing and all that it entails in context of national-level policies, schemes carried out by governmental and autonomous authorities in Delhi, and the efforts made by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA).

In the fifth paper, Implementation and Effectiveness of the Minimum Wages Act, the researchers including the student Ruchi Avtar of the Economics Department of Shri Ram College of Commerce, investigate the implementation of the 37% hike in minimum wages enacted recently by the Delhi Government. Security guards and

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construction workers, who form a part of the informal sector, which is vulnerable to exploitation and non-payment of minimum wages, have been interviewed for the same.

In *Quality and Accessibility of Public Healthcare Facilities* like Government Hospitals and Mohalla Clinics, which is the sixth paper, it is pointed out that the World Health Organisation (WHO) underscores 'quality' and 'accessibility' as the two key elements of a good healthcare system. In this context, the researchers examine the extent to which Delhi Government hospitals and mohalla clinics provide convenient entry into the healthcare system whilst ensuring proper services to patients.

In the seventh paper, *Challenges Faced by Women Service Providers in the Transport Industry*, it is found that women conductors and drivers within the Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC), at present, face major challenges due to the absence of a formal policy for safety and security at the workplace, inefficiency of existing grievance redressal mechanisms, and a lack of appropriate infrastructure.

In *Effectiveness of Pollution Control and Wastewater Management Systems*, which is the eighth and final paper, addressing the alarming levels of pollution in River Yamuna, the researchers review the limitations of following a centralised approach to cleaning up the river and instead, suggest a de-centralised sewage and wastewater management system as a sustainable solution to the problem.

Needless to say, there should be more and more studies like this by young researchers in different parts of India so as to highlight the concrete problems faced by the citizens in order to find out concrete solutions without getting bogged down with ideological quibbles that intellectuals usually tend to do or the rhetoric of leftist, rightist, centrist and other type of politicians who more often than not end up doing nothing worthwhile to the citizens who vote for them. CCS should widely disseminate the findings and policy recommendations of this study and replicate such studies by enrolling students and scholars of universities and research institutions elsewhere in India.

Reference

Heater, Derek (2002), *What is Citizenship?*, Polity Press, UK.