Every scheme a mirage

The benefits of government-run welfare schemes don’t reach the city’s Muslims. The community is also denied adequate public services

Maria Akram | TNN

Whenever a welfare scheme is announced for Muslims, there is much carping about vote-bank politics, populism and ‘favouritism’, although the supposed benefits hardly reach the community. Forget benefiting, most poor Muslims are unaware of the schemes inaugurated in their name. For instance, only 49% of the eligible Muslim population avails of the ‘secular’ Midday Meal Scheme.

“People do not benefit from these schemes as they lack awareness and local leaders are not interested in informing them of their rights,” said Zafar Mehmood, a school teacher and resident of Jaffrabad. That’s indeed the case in Seelampur, where TOI found people unaware of entitlements under National Maternity and Laadli schemes.

“Most of us do not have enough documents to avail of the schemes. Government officials demand one identity proof or another,” said Shahnaz Begum. She claims to have lived in the same shanty in New Seelampur for more than 40 years but does not have a domicile certificate. “They turn us away although we have Aadhaar and voter cards and get electricity bills in our name. My husband is out of work and we want a BPL card but can’t get one without a domicile certificate.”

Only 49% of the eligible Muslim population avails of the ‘secular’ midday meal scheme, while only 19% of the city’s eligible Muslims receive the National Old Age Pension

Fehmida, who does Zardozi embroidery, earns only Rs 900 a month for completing three pieces a week, each one of which sells for around Rs 10,000. “We work daily and sometimes all night,” said Fehmida. Her daughters work with her but aren’t paid separately. “Women in the unorganized sector get no benefits and only a few hundred rupees for working 17 hours daily, on average,” said Mehmood, who works with All India Democratic Women’s Association (AIDWA).

Only 19% of the city’s eligible Muslim population receives the National Old Age Pension. “If Muslims become confident enough to avail of these benefits, they will no more be the ‘vote-bank’ for some political parties,” said Mehmood.

A study by Civil Society Network for the Institute of Objective Studies shows that other civic amenities, such as community centres, playgrounds and fire stations aren’t sufficient or situated very far. “The government’s development engines seem to have stalled on the border of Muslim-majority areas. How come there are few facilities near our houses as compared to other parts of Delhi? People say a lot of development took place in Sandeep Dikshit’s East Delhi constituency. True, but the Okhla area was completely neglected,” said Akhlaq Ahmad of Jamia Nagar.

Residents of the North East constituency say they were left out of development plans. “Except for a foot overbridge, no other project was taken up in the area during Commonwealth Games,” said Mohd Shiraz of Seemapuri.

Concluded
Feeling thirsty and powerless

Most Muslim-majority areas in Delhi continue to be plagued by water and power woes

Maria Akram | TNN

Water shortage affects everyone in Delhi, but Muslims, many of whom live in unplanned areas, are especially hard hit. A survey by the Institute of Objective Studies shows 44% of the community in the capital does not have access to piped supply and has to buy water. Even the rest have to contend with erratic timings, with a two-hour supply being considered a luxury.

“All the areas neighbouring Jamia Nagar, such as New Friends Colony, get water from the Sonia Vihar pipeline, but we need to buy water from tankers,” said Nida Hasan, a resident of Jauhari Farm and student of Jamia Millia Islamia University.

Some wards like Abul Fazal Enclave that have existed for 25 years still don’t have piped supply. “Requests to our MLA and councillors for getting pipelines have gone unheeded,” said Mohd Shoaib, a resident.

In New Seelampur, which gets piped supply, drinking water gets contaminated from open drains. “The project (to cover drains) started way back in 2008. However, after the Commonwealth Games, the work never resumed. While covering the drain, they had blocked water and sewer pipelines. Now, our taps remain dry,” said Najma Begum, a resident. In the Jama Masjid area, water wasn’t an issue till a few years ago but with increasing population and scarcity, people have started boring wells illegally.

Unlike water, the supply of power is largely satisfactory in these areas. All houses have a connection and 78% of the people say the voltage is steady and outages rare. But in Seemapuri, many residents said power theft is rampant. “Without this kind of theft, many would be living in the dark,” said Shehzad Ahmad, a resident of Mustafabad.

“Power theft is a major issue in areas like Seelampur, Seemapuri and Jama Masjid. But Okhla is relatively better. However, 22% of the people are unhappy with the electricity supply, and most of them live in this area,” said a researcher of Civil Network Society, the group that conducted the study for Institute of Objective Studies.

Tomorrow: Welfare schemes and civic facilities
Failed by govt and schools

Schools are in short supply in the city's Muslim-majority areas. Not only has the govt let them down, private schools turn away eligible Muslim children on the flimsiest of grounds.

Education is the key to leadership, and the backwardness of Muslims demonstrates a lack of it. The enrolment of Muslim girls in schools has declined, but backwardness alone is not to blame as the availability and accessibility of both public and private schools are inadequate. Many Muslim parents have reported facing discrimination and visible hostility from teachers and school authorities while trying to seek admission for children.

The dismal condition of government and municipal schools is no secret, so some Muslim parents opt for madrasas over schools. "The teachers remain absent and the quality of education is poor. It's better for children to attend madrasas as these days they also impart (modern) education and students can get placed as translators in Gulf countries," said Shariq Khan, a resident of Seelampur. The Babul-Uloom Madrasa that has more than 180 students is a few kilometres away from his residence.

A study by the Institute of Objective Studies shows how Muslim children whose parents meet criteria of income, proximity and educational background were denied admission on flimsy grounds in formal schools. In 2012, social activist Abdul Khalilq used RTI to collect information about the number of Muslim children enrolled in nursery in Delhi's private schools. "The bias was clear. Of the 92 schools that provided information, 17 admitted only one Muslim child each and around 20 had no Muslim student that year. The other schools had only five or six students each," he said.

The study claims that one reason for the high college dropout rate among Muslims is that they study in nearby areas, and don't get to mix with children from other communities at the school level. College delivers a culture shock. However, enthusiasm for good English-medium secular education is strong in the middle-class Muslim residents of these areas.

Kacha Khajuri, a Gujar-dominated colony, Kacha Khajuri is almost entirely a Muslim area and does not have a Delhi government school. Its children attend school on the other side, where children from madrasas or Muslim neighborhood schools have no access to proper infrastructure, and are placed in makeshift and overcrowded classrooms. In Okhla and Zakir Nagar wards, people allege their children are asked whether they have been a terrorist, live next door to one, of if their father knows a member of Indian Mujahideen. "It's really disturbing when parents come complaining about such questions, but with whom can they take it up when profiling of children from this area is so common," said Amnastype Khan, AAP worker and resident of Bata House.

There are some success stories too. For instance, after the surprising transformation of Sarvodaya Kanya Vidyalaya-2, Zeenat Mahal, a century-old Urdu-medium school for girls, parents no longer need to look for schools outside their area. Until a few years ago, the school ranked among the 200 worst-performing government schools in Delhi with its pass percentage around 50%. But in 2008, its pass rate was 100% and it topped among non-Rajkiya Pratibha Vikas Vidyalayas (RPVV), standing fifth among all government schools. The good work continues.

Tomorrow: Water & electricity
Minority at major disadvantage

Muslim-majority areas in Delhi are getting stepmotherly treatment from the civic agencies. They figure low down in development plans and the budgets allocated for them are minimal.

Marla Akram | TNN

What is common between Jama Masjid, Batla House, Hazir Rani, Seemaipur and Kharuj, apart from a predominantly Muslim population? They lack civic facilities, are congested and development has always been slow in coming to them. The density of population is usually very high.

MINORITY REPORT

Pushing up real estate prices. Still, many Muslims continue to settle in them as they find it difficult to rent or buy a house in other parts of the city. Since horizontal expansion of the localities is no longer possible, they are going vertical.

Because of the space constraint, the number of schools, water supply and sanitation are inadequate in these areas. Add to it civic apathy, and the localities fare poorly in terms of most development indicators. Still, more than 85% of the people interviewed in these areas said they chose to live there despite the poor infrastructure as they "feel protected" living within the community, while 21% chose the areas for affordability.

A study by the Institute of Objective Studies in seven wards—Chauhan Bangar, Jaffrabad, Mustafabad, Jama Masjid, Qasabpara, Zakir Nagar and Okhla (all with a Muslim councillor)—and four other localities, in mixed wards, looked at the pattern of fund allocation and actual expenditure by various government agencies. While banks, ration shops, Mother Dairy outlets and healthcare should be available within the neighbourhood, in 72% of cases they lie at a distance of 5 km. No new government school has been established in these wards in the past five years. There is a water crisis across Delhi but it is acute in the areas surveyed where 44% of the people do not have access to tap water. Those who have water connections complain that the water is unfit for drinking.

The data also shows that these areas were left out of the various development and recreation projects taken up in the year 2012-13. Works were started in 214 unauthorized colonies—none of them from the Muslim-majority list. MLAs and councillors, however, say there are many restrictions on carrying out work in slums and unauthorized colonies. But even a service like sanitation, on which there is no restriction, is crumbling.

A STORY OF CIVIC NEGLECT

The city's Muslim-majority areas remain underdeveloped and the civic bodies are not doing enough to change the picture.

LOCALITIES

- **Population**
- **% Muslim**

1. Chauhan Bangar: 82,474 (75%)
2. Jaffrabad: 82,474 (70%)
3. Mustafabad: 58,012 (75%)
4. Jama Masjid: 91,353 (95%)
5. Qasabpara: 62,676 (70%)
6. Zakir Nagar & Okhla: 1,25,935 (75%)

REASONS FOR LIVING IN THESE AREAS

- **Community**: 59%
- **Affordability**: 23%
- **Relatives**: 12%
- **Near workplace**: 8%

MANA CONCERNS

- **Road repair**: 30%
- **Sewer repair**: 20%
- **Water supply**: 15%

Tomorrow: Sanitation

DISTANCE TO FACILITIES FROM HOME

- **< 1 km**
- **1 - 3 km**
- **> 3 km**

Bank
Post office
Ration shop
Primary school
Aanganwadi/Balwadi
Mother Dairy
Bus stop
Medical centre
Metro feeder bus service
Police station
Community centre
Gas agency
Public park
Trapped in filth, disease & neglect

There is hardly any sanitation infrastructure in Muslim-majority areas, and even that is poorly maintained. Most areas have overflowing drains, some have even started burning garbage.

Marla Akram | IIN

For four years, the space behind Hoor Banu’s shanty in New Seelampur has not been cleared. Time has tormented her to the filth and stench from the spread of garbage, and experience has taught her not to expect anything better. Residents say their representatives, from the councillor to the MP, only pass the buck. “Our councillor, Shaila Begum, chooses to stay in purdah,” a resident told TOI with more than a trace of sarcasm.

Overflowing drains in the area breed mosquitoes, and dengue and malaria are widespread. Mohd Suood, who lost his three-year-old son to dengue in 2010, is resigned to his fate. “People die here and the ‘dirty’ tag attached to Muslims is right, as most of us live in such unhygienic conditions.”

Conditions are even more insanitary in Seelampur, which has a high concentration of Muslim residents. There, people have started burning garbage to get rid of it. Even the main road is divided by a ribbon of garbage. “We lead a dirty, dangerous and degraded life. By inhaling this toxic air, many of us die very young,” said Mohd Bilal, a ragpicker. There is just one mobile toilet on the main road for the hundreds of people who live nearby and even it is in disrepair. Now people sleep on the iron planks. In the Jama Masjid area, where Muslims make up 95% of the population, there is only one drain which is seldom cleared out. The sewage system is inadequate, and it backflows during the rains. A tourist magnet and street food hub, the Jama Masjid area has more than 380 eateries, none of which has a proper waste disposal system. “Recently one pipe was replaced but even that isn’t helping as the load is too much. Buildings are going vertical and sanitation remains a huge problem,” said Jalaluddin.

A study by the Institute of Objective Studies shows that 63% of the area does not have a sewerage line. While Old Delhi isn’t planned, Okhla, considered the new Old Delhi, is hardly better. Its unauthorized colonies on the Yamuna riverbed face the same problems. Their drainage and sewerage are poor, and garbage dumped on the streets compounds the problem. While public toilets don’t exist, the study shows that 88% of the households have toilet facilities, thanks to the efforts of residents.

But since the area has been developed, the only system remaining is manual. “We pay water bills that include sewage charges. But there is no sewage system in the area. The system is collapsing but nobody raises a voice against it as our own leaders have stopped looking after us,” said Jibril Ahmad, a resident.

Tomorrow: Education