



Learning to move on: Women at a shelter home in Karol Bagh. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

MUNEEF KHAN  
NEW DELHI

Three years since she was abandoned by her husband, Anita Mourya, 30, has come a long way from a being a homeless mother of two to a self-dependent woman earning for her family and planning a future for them.

Her biggest support in this journey has been a shelter home for women in Karol Bagh, which not only provided her a roof and food but also gave her the confidence to rebuild her life from scratch. Regular counselling and skill training sessions at the shelter home, managed by Aashray Adhikar Abhiyan – an organisation working towards the betterment of homeless people since 2000 – helped Ms. Mourya step out and earn and save for her family. “I am working hard to educate my children and provide them a home they can call their own,” said Ms. Mourya while discussing her future plans.

While the sight at the Karol Bagh centre gives hope and relief, the picture is far from similar at several other shelters for women run by the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB).

Caretakers and managers at most of the shelters for homeless women visited by *The Hindu* agreed that while the number of such facilities are few, the challenges there go beyond just providing food, beds and washrooms.

#### ‘Underestimated’ figures

According to the last census (2011), Delhi had 46,724 homeless people. However, Sanjay Kumar, co-director, Aashray Adhikar Abhiyan, said the number is “close to 1,00,000”. He added that there are at least “10,000” homeless women in Delhi and the total number of shelters might be limited in comparison to the figure.

Out of more than 200 DUSIB shelters, only 20 are dedicated to women and 25 are marked for families, according to DUSIB member Bipin Rai, who emphasised that these shelters were set up according to the demand.

# Need for a home that heals

Sunita, who looks after a 50-bed facility at Nizamuddin, said women who came seeking refuge in the recent weeks left within two to four days as regular counselling sessions were not held.

“We have tried to provide salon skill training to the women but very few show interest and it is hard to convince them. Some end up leaving the facility despite being providing with all basic amenities,” she said, adding that there was a gap in communication which could be bridged by providing regular counselling.

Chitrarekha, who manages a recovery shelter for women in Kabir Basti, said while regular counselling was provided at the facility, which houses women suffering from depression and other mental ailments, the need for skill-based training was lacking.

“In 2020, we had a livelihood project through which homeless women were trained to take up jobs and earn for themselves. Fifty women were able to find jobs through this but the project was not renewed because of some funding issues. Counselling and regular exercise help calm these individuals, who are generally very hostile, but skill training can actually help them get jobs and not remain homeless,” she said.

Rashmi Singh, Special Secretary-cum-Director, Department of Women and Child Development, said while the concept of night shelters had come up as a temporary measure, the rehabilitation plans were de-

Caretakers at shelters for homeless women in the city say their challenges go beyond providing basic amenities as the inmates need regular counselling and skill training

veloped over the years but they were not standardised across the board.

“We have a holistic approach where we also provide vocational training because the aim is to also work on their behavioural skills and to help them earn a livelihood. The need for caregivers at shelters to provide emotional and social support is crucial because the homeless have to be brought out of their state of misery,” said Mr. Sanjay Kumar.

#### Varying objectives

Responding to these observations, Mr. Rai said there is variation in the nature of each shelter, citing the example of the shelter at Kabir Basti which focuses on improving the condition of mentally ill women.

“Each shelter is different from the other. At Nizamuddin, we were providing training which had led to jobs but there have been disruptions due to the pandemic. DUSIB focuses on providing shelter and facilities but other areas such as health will require the respective departments to step in. I agree that there is room for improvement and whether it is a rehabilitation process for slums or shelter, it requires a holistic approach,” said Mr. Rai.

According to Mr. Kumar, a fresh census of the homeless should be conducted as their number in Delhi is heavily underestimated. He added, “Even in the 2011 Census, 9,240 women were counted to be on the streets. Activists said a proper methodology was not followed and the number was underestimated... We are far behind in creating basic services and facilities for the protection of homeless women.”