

Bhagidari: Good Intention, Bad Implementation?

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Introduction

Good governance is not about running a government for five years but it is about reaching to the people cutting all the bureaucratic barriers. It is about the participation of citizens in governance. With a similar belief that Government must work in partnership with the people, the congress government initiated the concept of 'Bhagidari: The citizen – government partnership' in January 2000. Over the last three years the word 'Bhagidari' has become eponymous with Sheila Dixit, the Chief Minister of Delhi. The logo 'Bhagidari: citizen government partnership' and 'My Delhi: I care' has been all over Delhi, be it the newspapers, government functions or any other event. The government misses no opportunity to declare "Bhagidari" as a successful initiative. The quantum and intensity with which Bhagidari is being projected to the citizens of Delhi has generated lot of inquisitiveness among them. What is Bhagidari? Has Bhagidari been a right move in that direction? Has it delivered the promises it made to the citizens? This paper has tried to answer some of the questions, which pop up in our mind at the mention of the word 'Bhagidari'. Besides this we have also made an effort to look into the implementation aspects of Bhagidari. How true are the tall claims made by the government?

The Concept

Bhagidari literally means "collaborative partnership". The idea draws its inspiration from the philosophies of Mahatma Gandhi, our Father of the Nation and *Panchayati Raj* movements in our country. Bhagidari scheme envisages collaboration between citizens and the city administration for the improvement of the civic services.

"Bhagidari", the Citizen's Partnership in Governance -

- Is a means for facilitating city-wide changes in Delhi,
- Utilises processes and principles of multi-stakeholders (citizen groups, NGOs, the Government) collaboration,
- Aims to develop 'joint ownership' by the citizens and government of the change process.
- Facilitates people's participation in governance

The goals of Bhagidari concept are:

- Better service delivery to citizens;
- A clean, and green Delhi
- A "hassle-free" Delhi;
- Partnership and participation of citizens in governance
- The people of Delhi should treat Delhi as their own: "my Delhi: I care"

Under Bhagidari, various issues of general concern are taken up for discussion and are solved. In addition to the specific "citizenship & governance" issues taken up through the Bhagidari workshops, the total concept of "Bhagidari" includes several other aspects, like polio eradication, literacy, environment improvement etc.



How is Bhagidari Different from Earlier Initiatives?

There are clearly some difference between the traditional model of local self-governance and this model. Unlike earlier times, where people expected that the government should solve all their problems, Bhagidari is a movement from total dependence on the government officials to sharing the role of governance. Earlier, we would go to any government department with a complaint and expect that the government should solve it without caring for their problems. With Bhagidari things have changed. Rather than telling one's own point of view, Bhagidari involves understanding the perceptions of others, and also looking at each other's reality. It is all about understanding each other's constraints, appreciating the other's side strengths and then arriving at a consensus, which can be implemented. Thus the focus shifted from, passing on the responsibility to sharing the responsibilities. The Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) and Merchants and Traders Associations (MTAs) have now become an important part in the programme implementation.

That is Interesting, but how does Bhagidari work?

The whole Bhagidari scheme basically involves three things:

- Discussions of problems and arriving at consensus solutions
- Implementation of solutions
- Monitoring of implementation

The various steps involved are:

Step 1

Workshops with citizen groups are held where representatives of citizen groups (RWAs/MTAs) discuss the selected issues with officials of various departments participating in Bhagidari scheme. Each workshop of two and half day duration has the participants seated in a tablewise arrangement. Each table has 4 citizens (2 each from 2 citizen groups, viz. Residents Welfare Association or Market Traders Association) and 5-6 officials of Public Utility Departments. In a workshop around 30-35 such table arrangements are made. Each table group works on issues selected by the Design Team. The group discusses and builds consensus on solution of issue-based problems. Each stakeholders (including the citizen's) role and responsibilities are identified and committed.

Step 2

After the workshop, the RWA/MTA wise list of solutions is sent to concerned departments and Deputy commissioner (Revenue) offices. They hold regular meetings to implement and monitor solutions. The Area Officers ensure a fortnightly meeting with the RWAs of their areas. The District Officers of the public utilities monitor and co-ordinate the working of these Area Officers.

Step 3

Monthly reviews are taken by the Heads of Departments and the Deputy Commissioners. Quarterly reviews are also taken by the Chief Secretary and the Steering Committee headed by Chief Minister.

Departments/ autonomous bodies participating in Bhagidari scheme

1. Delhi Jal Board (DJB)
2. Delhi Vidyut Board (DVB)¹
3. Municipal Corporation of Delhi
4. Department of Environment and Forests (E&F)
5. Delhi Police (DP)
6. New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC)
7. Sales Tax Department
8. Weights and Measures Department
9. Industries Department

What Kinds of Issues are Taken in Bhagidari?

The issues taken up in Bhagidari are wide ranging. The issues are as small as collection of water and electricity bills to something like rainwater-harvesting scheme, which calls for expertise. For the MTAs the issues ranges from removal of Slums/ JJ clusters, encroachments on approach to sale of beverages, ice

¹ Delhi Vidyut Board has now been unbundled into five companies as a part of power sector reforms. The Generation Company and the Transmission Company are government owned whereas the three Distribution Companies are in private hands (two owned by BSES and one by Tata Power). The private distribution companies are also now participating in Bhagidari.

creams, mineral water bottles at MRP roads and pavements, etc. The issues generally are same for all the RWAs/MTAs. In Bhagidari workshops, individual issues are not taken up, rather the issues which are relevant for everyone are discussed. Individual issues are taken for discussion only at the District Commissioner meeting with the RWAs and the nodal officers of various participating agencies.

Funding of bhagidari scheme

There is no separate provision for funding. The only financial assistance RWAs/MTAs get under Bhagidari scheme is for the rainwater-harvesting scheme. Besides this there is also a provision to give some financial assistance of Rs 500 to Rs 2,000 to various RWAs/MTAs for publishing their newsletters on the activities of Bhagidari.

The Bhagidari Programme envisages voluntary participation of the citizens. Delhi Government provides institutional support by creating the 'Bhagidari Cell' in the Chief Minister's office and by designating the General Administration Department as the Nodal Department to provide financial and administrative support. The 'Bhagidari Cell' has been co-ordinating the activities covered under Bhagidari as well as in conducting workshops. There is also recognition and motivation award scheme for best maintained market and residential areas. The total cash component in this scheme is Rs 5 lac.

About Bhagidari - from the mouth of Bhagidars

From the list of 1100 odd Bhagidars given in the Bhagidari report, we randomly picked up 52 RWAs/MTAs and called them up. But out of 52, about 17 phone numbers were wrong or did not exist. But we did manage to talk to 35 of them. All of them appreciated the concept of Bhagidari but felt that it has not been able to live up to their expectations. Here is some of the feedback I received from them:

- Bhagidari is means to bring smaller thing into notice, which might escape government notice. But the idea dies at the workshop level only, after the refreshments are served. In spite of repeated reminders MCD has not taken any permanent step to remove the encroachment in his area.
- J R Kapur, member, *Old Rajinder Nagar RWA*
- Bhagidari workshops are wastage of money. There is no requirement of the workshops. The scheme should be made more result oriented. Even the visits and directions by higher officials do not make a difference as the work has to be done ultimately by the lower officials only. The power keeps getting transferred between various departments and the ultimate losers are the citizens.
-Raj Kishore Dimri, member, *Mayur Vihar, Phase -III, Pkt -IV RWA*
- Bhagidari is political in nature and is less practical. Only 33% of the discussed ideas are implemented.
- Kailash Pradhan, General Secretary, *Delhi Jan Kalyan Vikas Manch, Subzi Mandi*
- As it gives a platform to share the grievances with the government, I would give a rating of 5 on a scale of 10 to the idea of Bhagidari. But the success finally depends on the attitude of the officials.
- R C Jain, President, *Engineers State RWA*
- There is lot of political opposition to RWAs taking their complaints to Bhagidari cell and getting the work done.
- B P Shukla General Secretary, *Mohalla Sudhar Samiti, Yamuna Vihar*
- Idea is good but the implementation is only on paper. RWAs should be given financial assistance.
-A C Pathak, President, *Hauz Khas Apartment RWA*

- Bhagidari is the meeting point, but there is complete lack of accountability. Whatever little is achieved is more because of the personal rapport with the officials than Bhagidari. RWAs should be given some power to make the idea more meaningful.

-M G Gomar, President, *Vasant Vihar C Block RWA*

Critiques of Bhagidari

We wondered that why something so simple as Bhagidari can draw criticism from people. Nevertheless we decided to look at their viewpoint also and following are some of the grounds on which Bhagidari is criticised:

No Constitutional Basis

Gita Dewan, an architect living in Vasant Kunj, also echoed the similar sentiments albeit in a different way. She said, "Bhagidari scheme has given unlimited powers to the RWAs who are using it to cater to their illegal activities". She gave the example of Vasant Kunj where 35 borewells have been dug in the name of Bhagidari. She added that the whole Bhagidari scheme has no constitutional basis. How can a government so vehemently push the case of Bhagidari when it has no constitutional basis?

Way to Hide Government Inefficiency

"Bhagidari is being used by Delhi's chief minister, Sheila Dixit to cover every aspect of what administration handles very poorly: sanitation, power and water supply, law and order, everything. Certainly not because of lack of money, but lack of guts, ethics and efficiency," says Sudeep Chakravarti, senior editor, India today. He further adds that

Bhagidari empowers the RWAs with the illusion to take matters into our own hands while the inefficient government employees lay back, earn pay for even working less, and corner the glory. Bhagidari with the government can come only when the state becomes efficient.

Political Tool

Bhagidari has given a political platform for all those who aspire to join full time politics sooner or later. The phenomenal rise in the number of RWAs validates this fact. And this is one of the reasons of Bhagidari not being able to deliver its promises. Every colony now has two–three RWAs and they jostle among themselves for powers. Bhagidari has become a freewheeling mechanism to for elevating chosen Bhagidars above the law for illegal Bhagidari benefits like unplanned hospital or banned boring.

Distinction Between the Ruler and the Ruled is Blurred

Sanjay Kaul, President, Peoples' Action, an NGO says, "there is always a distinction between the government and citizens. We as a citizen are consumers of government administrative services, and therefore any step, which involves citizens' in decision process, is bound to blur that distinction and can lead to harmful consequences".

Bhagidari in Practice - Some Observations

We found this whole idea of Bhagidari interesting, so we decided to follow some of the ideas, which were being implemented under Bhagidari. We had mixed experiences. While the concept is working in some places, there are places where the citizens have no idea about it. What was conspicuous was the lack of awareness among public with regard to Bhagidari. We saw Bhagidari in action at three places: Garhi

Mandu near Yamuna Vihar, and Vasant Vihar and Panchsheel park in connection with the rainwater harvesting project.

Working status of various departments under Bhagidari as stated by RWAs²

Sample size 240 RWAs

S. No.	Department	Success	Failure
1.	Delhi Jal Board	74	26
2.	DVB/DISCOM	73	27
3.	MCD	40	60
4.	DDA	43	57
5.	Delhi Police	43	57
6.	Environment & forest	52	48
7.	NDMC	71	29

Yamuna Safai Abhiyaan or departmental get-together?

A big banner near *Tis Hazari* court caught my attention. It had the ubiquitous bhagidari logo and invited citizens, corporates, NGOs, RWAs, and MTAs to do *shramdaan* and make our Yamuna clean. This, I thought would be a good opportunity to see *Bhagidari* in practice. So I went to *Garhi Mandu* on 4 June to participate in the tree plantation drive. I reached the place at 7 in morning only to find a thin attendance. By 8:30 A.M., the place had a festive look: there were departmental officials, NCC cadets, school kids all wearing 'Save Yamuna' caps. Great! I thought. But the euphoria was soon over when I learnt that the crowds had not come voluntarily but were forced to come. The government has directed each department and the concerned agencies to send a fixed number of people at each place. Thus, at *Garhi Mandu* there were officials from Department Of Food Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs, Department of Irrigation and Flood Control, Department of Forests and Environment, Cadets from NCC and students from government schools. All of them were busy getting their attendance made and then it was all over. In the name of Yamuna cleaning there were symbolic photo sessions. There was just a single NGO named Social Action Foundation (SAF), but they too seem to have more political reasons to be there as the Chief Minister was supposed to come. The CM graced the place at around 10, got some photographs clicked, and interacted with a few. Then everyone moved to the refreshment table, officials discussed departmental gossips and the event was over by 11 A.M. Thus, another year passed, the government claimed to have done its bit but what about the Yamuna? It remained the same, dirty as ever. All in the name of Bhagidari, a Bhagidari without any public involvement! And the very next day Delhi Government comes out with advertisements in all the leading newspaper thanking the Delhites for their co-operation.

Rainwater harvesting: where is Bhagidari?

Under Bhagidari, one scheme on which lot of emphasis is being placed is rainwater harvesting. Considering the water scarcity that Delhi faces, this is certainly a step in the right direction. The curiosity to see Bhagidari in action took us to two RWAs where rainwater-harvesting project was being implemented under Bhagidari.

Rain water-harvesting project at Panchsheel Co-operative Housing Building Society

² Working report, Bhagidari, Phase-II, pp. 23-25

The project is working well but the fundamental question that still remains unanswered is the contribution of Bhagidari in such projects. The working is largely because of the efforts of local citizens. The capacity of the project is 20.19 lac litres in Panchsheel club and Panchsheel park, 2.24 lac litres in Panchsheel Montessori school and 1.83 lac litres in Panchsheel public school. The cost of the project is Rs 1.15 lac.

Rainwater harvesting at Vasant Vihar

The project became operational in the year 2002, again on the initiatives of the local residents. The only support it got from the Bhagidari program was financial assistance of 1.25 lac. The cost of the project was lot more than that and the residents pooled in the necessary resources. Out of 1.25 lac, only 1 lac was sanctioned and rest of the amount is still not paid. But a more pertinent question is about the sustainability of the project in economically backward areas. Government has to offer more than mere financial help to get this project going in those areas.

Suggestions



Area based approach

Bhagidari scheme only involves the citizens who have formed an RWA/MTA, but there is a large section of society, which is without them: people living in JJ clusters, or hawkers and sellers on the footpath. They too need to be involved in Bhagidari to give a correct meaning to the word Bhagidari. Therefore an area based approach is required encompassing all the citizens living in that area.

Power to RWAs/MTAs

Most of the RWA/MTA complain about the lack of power to implement the things. An RWA cannot punish someone who is throwing garbage on the road, etc. therefore some power should be given to the RWA/MTA to enforce the idea more practically.

More financial assistance to them

Many ideas discussed in the workshops cannot be implemented for the want of funds. For economically rich areas, this is no problem, but it certainly is a big hindrance for poor areas. The government should therefore ensure that financial constraints do not come in way of Bhagidari.

More involvement of private sector

The concept of Bhagidari should be widened to bring the private sector collaboration in governance. Government can pull itself out from many areas and pass on the baton to the private sector that can do the same job more efficiently. Starting from garbage collection to opening up of schools, there are many sectors where private sector is placed better in terms of giving results. It would be much better if the government can tap the expertise of private sector.

Steps to ensure the participation of junior and middle level officials

One of the chief reasons for the failure of Bhagidari to deliver its promises is the non-participation of junior and middle level officials. As they are the one who ultimately have to do the job, it becomes very important that they are adequately informed about the concept and working of the Bhagidari. They have to be made accountable for their actions and their long procedures involved in the implementation of various works have to be shortened by ensuring that the officials do not carry on with their laid back attitude.

Conclusion

Bhagidari scheme definitely an excellent idea towards better governance. Bhagidari means put people first, but there is more premium on unnecessary planning than on unglamorous implementation. The issue lacking in the whole approach is the enthusiasm to implement the discussed ideas. The success stories are not a true reflection of the actual working of the Bhagidari. But above that the most pertinent question is- would Bhagidari be continued even if BJP seizes power from Congress in the coming assembly elections? If it would not, then this whole thing loses its meaning and reduces to a mere political propaganda tool. An idea like Bhagidari can become a role model for other states for better governance, only if the idea is implemented in the spirit it is designed. Three years after the Bhagidari scheme some amount of serious introspection about its broader ramification is required.