

Taking stock

Safety audits, says **Kalpana Viswanath**, are needed to map Delhi's areas of darkness.

What Delhi – with its top ranking in crimes against women among India's mega cities – needs is an objective assessment of the issue of safety; an assessment on which woman-friendly urban planning can be based.

Jagori, a Delhi-based women's resource centre, adapted the concept of safety audits (developed by the Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence Against Women and Children in Toronto, Canada) to understand what makes up "safety" in the city. The audit is a process of walking through an area and "auditing" it in terms of the factors that make it safe or unsafe.

Broadly, there are three sets of factors that affect the safety of a public space. One is the infrastructure, which includes lighting, the state of the pavements, how well trees are trimmed, whether there are dark corners etc. Another set of factors is the location of police booths, public telephones, or the presence of shops and other vendors. And third is the gen-

eral attitude and reaction of the public towards violence against women or any vulnerable group.

For example, a bustling marketplace can be seen as a safer space than a deserted area. Yet a crowded marketplace allows for the anonymity that makes sexual harassment easier to get away with. In such a situation, the attitude of people and their response to acts of violence play a role in making a space safe.

Jagori's audits in Delhi were carried out in residential areas, market places, the university, and railway and Metro stations. The findings from the audit mostly reinforce what many of us know by just living in this city. Take parks, for instance. Parks in or near residential areas are used by both men and women. Only, women tend to use them when there's still daylight. Parks in public areas are almost always male-dominated spaces – like the area above Palika Bazaar or at roundabouts. Lighting makes a big difference in

determining the safety and usage of a park, even in a residential area. For example, in the Saket audit we found a park that was well-occupied even after dark whereas another one, almost adjacent, was deserted.

Parking lots and subways are vulnerable spaces too, as dark entrances and exits make them difficult to use. The presence of people and vendors makes subways safer to use. In CP, the Janpath subway – unlike most other subways – was being used by women even at night because of the vendors who are regularly present. In some areas, the lack of vendors made women feel vulnerable about using the subway alone even during the daytime.

These are only some of the issues our audit threw up. Women need to – and have the right to – use and be safe in public spaces. It is possible to plan cities and public spaces in ways that address these issues and make spaces safe and accessible to all vulnerable groups. *Kalpana Viswanath is coordinator, Jagori.*

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|--|--------------------------|--|-------------------------|
| | Pvt Residences | | Bicycle Stand |
| | DDA Residences | | Rikshaw Stand |
| | Hutments | | RTV Stand |
| | Factories | | Cigarette shop |
| | Shops Markets | | Liquor shop |
| | Vendors | | Restaurant |
| | Educational Institutions | | Tea Shop |
| | Hostels | | Mother Dairy |
| | Parks | | STD PCO |
| | Green Area | | Internet Caf |
| | Agricultural Land | | ATM |
| | Commercial High-rise | | Toilet |
| | Residential High-rise | | Cinema Theater |
| | School | | Electricity Substation |
| | Police Station Booth | | Flood Light |
| | PCR Van | | Street Light |
| | Traffic Police Booth | | Well Lit |
| | Hospital | | Dark |
| | Ambulance | | Electricity Sub Station |
| | Temple | | Inner Road |
| | Mosque | | Main Road |
| | Church | | Pavements |
| | Gurdwara | | Broken Unpaved area |
| | Monument | | Garbage Dump |
| | Taxi Stand | | Man |
| | Bus Stand | | Woman |
| | Auto Stand | | Policeman |

