

## Celebrating Women's Day in Bawana

It was a bright morning and the JAGORI team set out to Bawana to celebrate International Women's Day. This was a special day also as we celebrated 100 years of women's struggles for their rights all over the globe. Preparations for the celebration had started a day earlier itself with some of us, especially Sarita and Neetu, making placards, putting together banners, selecting songs for the occasion while also packing a *dholak* and *dafli* for the occasion.

We then set out for a march through the community with **Sajha Manch** joining us mid-way. About 50 women joined us with a loudspeaker and the slogans began aloud:

*Nari mukti zindabad!,  
Mahila ekta zindabad!,  
Padhai ka haq le ke rehenge!,  
Ration card le ke rahenge!,  
Meri behne mange azaadi!,  
Hum le ke rahenge azaadi!,*

All of us proceeded to the Jhanda chowk for the next phase of celebrations.

Though it was early March, the weather felt like mid-May. The sight of a white tent against a clear blue sky provided seeming relief from the heat. A stage had been set up with banners of the participating organizations, **JAGORI** and **Sanjha Manch**, put up as backdrop of the stage. Banners with JAGORI slogans were put up on either sides of the stage.

The girls of Bawana took the stage with *Par lagaa liye hain humne, ab pinjare mein kaun baithega*. A few women who were sitting stood up to leave and said: "*Sab samajh liya humne,*" meaning the freedom being advocated through the song was going to lead to their daughters asking for freedom from domestic life (gender division of labor). Sarita told the audience about the Centenary Celebrations of International Women's Day. The audience comprising of men, women and children clapped after the song and Sarita's short note on Women's Day. The loudest claps, however, were for the three women who spoke about the problems they were facing in day-to-day life. The first speaker was very angry with the rise in food prices and how this situation had disturbed their family budget. The second speaker was angered by the living conditions in Bawana, mainly the lack of sanitary conditions. The third speaker complained about the behaviour of ration shop owners in the area.

After these animated speeches, a 10 year-old girl took the stage. She narrated the story told by a *madari*, comparing the life of a female and male monkey. The reference to the gender division of labor and how this stops women from taking part in public life was all to clear.

By now there were 200 men, women and children watching the Celebration. The next program was a *nukkad natak* by Mehak Group. The story was how an irresponsible husband and father (drinking and gambling) jeopardised the future of his family. The dress code of the actors was black pants/salwar and purple shirts/kameez and looked attractive and apt for the occasion. The crowd had gone up by another 100 people. The people clapped after the show. Members of Sajha Manch then asked people to hold hands and stand together in solidarity for a few minutes.

