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Selected Publications and Conferences:

- **Co-edited Book: *The STRUCTURE: Works of Mahendra Raj.* Edited by Vandini Mehta, Rohit Raj Mehndiratta, Ariel Huber. Published by Park Books, Zurich, 2016; Book Events held at India, Europe, USA. March-Oct 2016**
- **7ICCH, "An Engineer in the Middle East", Lisbon, Portugal July 2021**
- **RC21 ISA, "Village Urbanism: Infiltrating spaces of Delhi's unplanned expansion", Delhi, 2019**
- **Aquimemoria 5, "Heritage in Crisis: The Case of Delhi", Salvador, Brazil. Nov 2017.**
- **RGS-IBG Conference: "Infiltrating Urbanism: the case of Aya Nagar" Exeter, UK, Sept 2015**
- **AAG: "Urban Conversions: FarmHouse developments in the city of Delhi", San Francisco, USA. Apr 2007**
- **IASTE Conference: "Imaging the (un)real: Space in Bollywood Films", Bangkok, Thailand. Dec 2006**



Prof. (Dr.) Mandeep Singh is presently Head Industrial Design Department and has been Head Architecture (2014-15 & 18-19), Dean of Studies (2015-17), Head Urban Design (2011-14) Head Industrial Design (2005-10), apart from being a full-time faculty at the School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi since 1986. In addition to teaching, guiding design and research projects for 35 years, Prof. Singh is currently serving in several committees set up by the Government of India. He is a Member of Delhi Urban Arts Commission, Advisor to Association of Indian Universities (AIU), Advisor to Competition Commission of India (CCI), Member of Project Steering Committee (PSC) for 'Developing Energy Efficient Building Material Directory', Bureau of Energy Efficiency, Professional Advisor for National War Memorial, Ministry of Defence, Advisor and Member, Governing Council, NID Haryana, Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Jury Member in the Committee for National War Museum, Ministry of Defence, and Member of Expert Committee for selection of tableaux for Republic Day Parade, Ministry of Defence.

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Karol Bagh & Western Extension: the other new Delhi

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Abstract

Karol Bagh is a vibrant residential neighbourhood of Delhi, thronging with businesses, wholesale markets, warehouses, hotels and great street food. Delhites know it as a refugee colony which got populated post-partition and first time visitors will be daunted by its chaotic and overcrowded streets and bazaars. It is, however, interesting to note that Karol Bagh and Western Extension was developed at the same time as the Imperial Capital of 'New' Delhi was being planned and built. Setup as an "Improvement Scheme" by the DIT (Delhi Improvement Trust) to respond to the overcrowding of the walled city of Delhi in the early 1900s with contemporaneous ideologies of 'improvement' and 'planning', this area's development tells a story quite contrary to the making of the grand Imperial Delhi -built for the British and Europeans. One of the *other* New Delhi- built for its local native population. Unravelling the gap between intention and execution, this paper raise two questions: First, how did categorisation of land become a means of controlling it? Second, what are the techniques of governance that facilitate the spatial production of difference and inequity. This paper engages in a critical reading, and decoding of archival records, communication and data from the that time period as evidence for analysing intent vis-a-vis

execution. This methodology is used to uncover how ideologies can justify completely inverse priorities and spatial outcomes as in the case of Karol Bagh-Western Extensions and Imperial New Delhi- both built in the same time period and in adjacent areas. Investigating such specific urban histories, I believe, will help re-examine and historicise the ways in which inequity is created and maintained in our cities even today.

Keywords: *Urban History, Delhi, Colonial Ideology, Improvements, Karol Bagh-Western Extension*

Introduction

'The major metropolis in almost every newly-industrialising nation is not a single unified city, but in fact, two quite different cities, physically juxtaposed but architecturally and socially distinct...(these) dual cities have usually been a legacy from the colonial past...'⁴

In the years after 1911, Delhi saw a frenzy of building activity and growth. The decision of shifting of the British Imperial Capital from Calcutta to Delhi and Delhi also emerging as an important railway junction were two key reasons for this. In a matter of just 50 years, the population of the city doubled to 3,47,592 in 1931⁵, with a steep rise particularly at the turn of the century. The city attracted labour for the building of the new Capital and the many new converging railway lines made it a commercial hub. Traders, merchants, administrators and industrialists migrated to Delhias it grew in political and commercial importance. These migrations created new geographies for the colonised - characterised by the

⁴ Janet Abu-Loghod, *Tale of two Cities: The origins of Modern Cairo, 1965*

⁵ *Delhi Gazetteer, 1912*

manner they lived and worked, by the amount of land they occupied and by the density of occupation.

Karol Bagh-Western Extension was one such urban landscape planned as an extension to the already congested city of Shahjahanabad, to accommodate the expected growth the city was bound to attract as a Capital. But unlike the grandiose plans for New Delhi, it was planned and executed with a constant worry of strain on funds- despite an active urban municipality and collection of heavy taxes and octroi by the colonial government for over a century. The narrative of lack of funds to provide even basic services to this rapidly expanding city of the natives contrasted acutely with the detailed plans and budget allocations for a city that was going to be inhabited almost exclusively by British and Europeans and a handful of their princely Indian allies. The *planned* population density of Karol Bagh was over 100 people per acre vs that of New Delhi of under 3 per acre.

The two themes used to present this argument through archival evidence are- First the control of land that was achieved through a mix of outright annexation, re-categorization of land titles and tenures and creating laws to acquisition for public purpose. And secondly, how colonial narrative of seeming benevolence through 'improving' the natives and the Improvement Trusts were techniques of governance that produced a landscape of difference and inequity.

Control through suburban Lands

The early 1900s revealed a rise in land value around cities in all larger cities across India (like Calcutta, Bombay and Chennai) and the British colonisers realised the potential of this latent value that could be capitalised. Even though the suburban population

1857 became 'Crown property'. For ease of control, it was declared that Crown lands that fall within Delhi Municipal limits would subsequently all be called Nazul⁸. In 1874 when the population of the city was just over a lakh and a half, these lands did not have much value⁹ and their management handed over to the Municipal Committee. In 1874 the municipal collections in revenue or rents from these Nazul lands was a meagre Rs10,600 annually¹⁰, even though we see in this 1884 map, the area covered was quite large.

By the turn of the century, in the next 30 years, things changed dramatically. The government realised the need to capitalise on the potential profits from these vast tracts of Nazul lands which were found to be in a messy administrative state. There were multiple ownerships, irregularities in leases and rents, *maufis* and encroachments, none or incomplete maps and plans. Having learnt from other Provinces that unoccupied sites near larger towns tend to increase greatly in value and it was 'inadvisable to give powers of such lands to municipal councils', Deputy Commissioner Delhi, Mr Humphrey, commissioned a survey of the crown lands under Mr R B Whitehead.¹¹

Almost all records had been destroyed in the 1857 Revolt and when in 1908 Mr R.B. Whitehead was commissioned to take stock

⁸ Land outside Municipal limits under other State departments like Railways or Irrigation etc were called Government land and those not administered by any state Departments were called Rural Nazul. Whitehead, R.B., Report on the Administration of the Delhi Crown Lands, 1908, Delhi Archives

⁹ Hume, op.cit.

¹⁰ Hume, op cit.

This had grown to Rs 4 lakhs from just leasing of land in 1931. (Kataria, Dinesh. Planning Shahjahanabad: 1910s-1930s, Social Scientist, Vol 47 July Aug 2019)

¹¹ Whitehead, R.B., Report on the Administration of the Delhi Crown Lands, 1908, Delhi Archives

of the Crown lands, the Report had to be pieced together from incomplete records found with local *Patwaris* and whatever was still available in the North Western Province offices. While these messy records were blamed on the mismanagement of the Municipality, something which was repeated in many reports and official communication over the decades to follow, it is useful to investigate the multiple tenancies and ownerships on these lands that were given the blanket category of 'Nazul' and claimed as Crown property after the Revolt.

Multiple ownerships, encroachments and 'squatters'

After the Revolt of 1857 or what was called the Mutiny by the British, Delhi was cleaned out of all its population by the British to teach the mutineers a lesson. They were dispossessed off their properties and only those who could prove their allegiance to the British were allowed to re-enter the walled city¹². In addition one-third of the city was cleared up of its built structures, particularly around the Fort which was now occupied by the military. Many people who managed to escape settled on the western suburbs of the city where the Grand Trunk Road as a major artery on the West towards Kabul and the NW Province already had settlements, markets like the Subzi Mandi and *serias*¹³.

Before the British arrived in Delhi, the Moghul rulers had given the lands outside the medieval city to their main allies- like the Nawabs of Jhajjar, Loharu and Rajas of Ballabgarh and Kishengarh. On these estates there were many villages with their *abadi*¹⁴, agricultural, forest, grazing and other lands (including lands under the control of mosques and shrines, *waqf*). Officially,

¹² Gupta, N; 1981

¹³ Serai is rest house or lodge for travellers

¹⁴ Abadi is the main village habitation

entire surrounding village lands of Jahan Numa and Khandrat Kalan were assigned to the King of Delhi in 1803, but after the 1857 Revolt they were confiscated and taken under the ownership of the Crown, and when handed to the municipality for administration in 1874 they were called Nazul.

These uniform categories assigned to them administratively, however, were not necessarily a ground reality. Besides the historic diversity tenures of land, and land categories, there were also settlements that had come up post the Revolt, for British military needs. Troops had been posted at various places within the walls and outside the City to maintain order. Outside the city these were located in Jahan Numah, near the old Idgah towards the western side of the City. Located in a desolate spot on the ridge the Cantonment Magistrate, Major Trevelyan (not be confused with Mr C E Trevelyan¹⁵) found it was necessary to form a market and invited shopkeepers for the daily needs of the soldiers. They were allowed plots to settle on 'Government waste land' to the east of Pahari Dhiraj.¹⁶ "It is certain that the colony will remain here forever. In case the Sadar Bazar is removed from this place or if a road is made through it, no compensation will be paid. No one will be allowed to sell shop to anyone else."¹⁷ Whitehead's Report on the Administration of the Crown Lands in 1908 refers to these people who were officially allotted

¹⁵ In 1931 C E Trevelyan, Secretary to the Resident of Delhi, who later became Governor of Madras, sold plots for the Government in an area that was then known as Travelyangung. Hume, AP, 1935

¹⁶ Whitehead, R.B., Report on the Administration of the Delhi Crown Lands, 1908, Delhi Archives, pg 16

Major Treveyan issued a proclamation on September 29th, 1858, translated from urdu/ Persian states the, Government to permit building of pakka or kachcha shops on the land of Sadar Bazar, which is close to Pahari Dhiraj outside the Lahori Gate, on plots 15 feet by 30 feet for Rs 5 for single and Rs 10 for double plots with a rent of one Anna per 100 sq ft.

¹⁷ Proclamation of Major Trevalyan in September 1858, quoted in Whitehead (1908), *ibid*.

land and paid rents for 50 years supporting the British Troops - as 'Major Trevelyan's *squatters*'- taking away in a swift sweep of the word 'squatter'- their right on land.

Records of settlements created by British officers like Trevelyan and Major Trevelyan's 'squatters', including pre-British land ownerships, show a history of land ownership in the Nazul lands was complicated not only by the pre-British arrangements but even after it fell into British control, that were recorded and executed through the various 'Settlement Reports'. For instance Whitehead mentions that the Settlement Report of 1864 shows the Government to be the owner of all lands in Jahan Numah and Khandrat Kalan¹⁸, which was not clearly so. It was an assertion- not a fact- as is evident in 1876 when Mr Leslie Smith, Assistant Commissioner's enquiry of rural and urban Delhi by the Settlement Department in connection with the *maufi* tenures states,

"It is directed that the propriety right of the Government should be asserted in each case, and recorded in the Settlement papers, that a suitable rent should be fixed and in cases where Government right is not accepted the holder should be ejected."¹⁹

Whitehead's report also mentions that, "A large amount of landed property in this neighbourhood was sold by the Deputy Commissioner after the Mutiny, but many purchasers had subsequently added enormously to their holdings by encroachment. The occupants of Khandrat were mostly squatters and had no good title to land."²⁰ Khandrat Kalan was later the

¹⁸ Whitehead, 1908; *ibid.* pg 10

¹⁹ (*emphasis mine*)

²⁰ Whitehead, 1908; *ibid.* pg 17

area on which New Delhi was built. While it was already clear that disputes and titles of land were a messy affair, increase in land value and the possible lost income by the Imperial Government was at the heart of this assertion on lands. By 1902, the value of land in the western suburbs had gone up by 400% in Sadar Bazar, 400% in Paharganj and 300% in Sabzi Mandi²¹.

Even though Khandrat Kalan is talked of as waste lands with the ruins of older Delhis, in a comment in their Report on the quality of the land chosen for New Delhi states, "(the proposed site) consists of good land most of which is in continual use for agricultural purposes...The committee has twice seen the ground under a smiling expanse of crops and feel the confidence in the good quality of the soil for the purpose of gardens, parks and arboriculture generally."²²

Surveying and recording of land can be very powerful means of control. The messy land records in India that we often encounter even today, (particularly around cities) have an interesting history in such contradictory and authoritative policies of the British colonisers though framed under seemingly liberal ideology and land laws. This section attempted to unravel parts of the Nazul land category that was used in multiple ways to claim authority and later ownership rights on land which had a very diverse mix of histories, uses and ownerships, particularly those that later become the western extensions and the new Capital.

²¹ *Whitehead, 1908; ibid. pg 32*

²² *Swinton, Brodie and Lutyens, Final Report of the Delhi Town Planning Committee, July 1913*

'Improvements', land acquisition and profit-making

The Improvement Trust came to Delhi quite late despite many calls by British officers and Indians too. After more than 2-3 decades of being introduced in other parts of the country where they turned out to be expensive given the constant fund shortage that was projected even though over 3 million Sterling Pounds were annually taken away in profits from India²³

Originally the Western Extension was part of the Imperial Capital Project. But later the Secretary of State sanctioned it to be treated as separate and managed locally. It would be administered by Delhi Municipality under a separate account head. As land values rose, certain kinds of Improvement projects were found to make good profits (see table below), and sharing that with the Municipality would reduce the gains of the Imperial Government. Taking it a step further it was decided to take all Nazul lands, revenues and Improvement schemes away from the Municipality and in 1925 these were given to the Deputy Commissioner, blaming the Municipality for its incompetent management so far. The truth was that no agency had done any improvements in the Nazul areas and this was acknowledged even in Whitehead's Report²⁴. Despite the Chief Commissioner's proposal to provide water supply and drainage to the Western Extension, nothing had been done till 1931. A sub-committee in 1931, considering expansion proposals noted that Karol Bagh or Western Extension is yet unfortunately devoid of water supply or drainage. The Chief Commissioner is quoted in Hume's report that the "melancholy history of the Western Extension colonies created by the

²³ *Tharoor Shashi, An era of Darkness, Aleph Press, 2017*

²⁴ *Whitehead, 1908*

government in 1913 and still lacking the most ordinary amenities of life."²⁵

ROAD	Grant from Govt. upto 1936	Income received by Govt. upto 1936	Profit by upto
Burn Bastion	1,22,000	8,06,155	6,84,155
Garstin Bastion	2,50,000	5,82,083	3,32,083
Jhandewala	47,404	1,27,199	79,795
Idgah	1,13,279	27,529	-85,750
Idgah Extension	7,200	-	-7,200
Mundhewala	2,46,032	13,611	-2,32,361
Total	7,85,915	15,56,657	7,70,722

Figure: Government Profits from Improvement Schemes upto 1936, Hume Report, 1936

The tussle between the Government and the Municipality continued for over a decade more until a Bombay Court judgement that stated in another case that, "while legally a municipality could not compel Government as estate owner to supply particular services, neither could the Government compel the Municipality to provide the necessary money." Based on this the Government agreed that in the case of Western Extensions it would incur the cost of basic services, but capped it to a maximum of 10 lakh. This, however, was only adequate for the existing inhabited area of Western Extension and another 13 lakh was required for the new additions.

²⁵ Hume, 1935; pg 10

On the other hand, large scale acquisition of land was an immediate priority for the building of the New Capital. Considering the need to connect the new Capital in the South to the Civil Lines in the North with appropriate roads, one of the main problems highlighted was the need to cross the current suburbs of Paharganj with a population of more than 15000 which was considered too large to displace without discontent and more importantly very large costs. It was clear that these were inhabited by poor classes and also space for expansion of the old city had to be in the west of the city. An acquisition policy was drawn out - cheap acquisition of land and then control on future acquisitions to reduce cost of the project.

For this all land was classified and assessed based on its future market value. Class I and II for official buildings and residence were classified unproductive land and Class III and IV meant for the Zamindars, and rich Indian classes was considered 'productive'. Craddock proposed the latter two classes be sold at Rs 300 and Rs 2500 per acre. One month later Beadon had increased this to 1000 and 10,000 per acre respectively!²⁶ The Western Extensions that were originally made for the poor classes was later marked for Class III and IV for receipt of higher returns.

Land acquisition and development costs in the New Capital area were however not compromised or justified by profits earned. Some of the expenses incurred only in the first three years of its planning between 1911-1914 were: Rs 47 lakhs on the cost of acquisition and 1.7 lakhs in the salaries paid for this work.²⁷ The expense of the entire work for New Delhi was estimated at a

²⁶ Kataria, Dinesh. *Planning Shahjahanabad: 1910s-1930s*, Social Scientist, Vol 47 July Aug 2019, pg70

²⁷ *Proceedings of the Imperial Delhi Committee, September 1914*, pg 7

whooping 5 million pound sterling, in this report of 1914 with only the annual establishment (administrative) expenses being Rs 9 lakh.²⁸

The New Capital was built unencumbered by meagre discussions of profits or investment constraints. Instead a ten square mile area was built with generous 300 feet wide roads lined with wide green avenues. The romantic imagery of being built amidst 'ancient ruins' (while actually displacing many living villages and agricultural lands), with every detail planned with precision like water supply with multiple alternative sources, a water-borne sewerage system, even an elaborate arboriculture plan for forests and gardens generously watered by bypassing the needs of the many in the old city and its extensions. It was a city meant for 20,000 people only, with no room for the poor, not even the Indian clerks employed in this new city. They were left to their means to find room in the already congested Old City.²⁹ Despite the congestion of the Old City and to keep it polluted, unsanitary population and space at bay large open, green, buffer areas were planned between the two cities for adequate segregation on the south side and the railways acquired land on the immediate west of the wall.

With such a generous budget one would have imagined at least some would be diverted to making the inhabitants and growing migrants population needed to run an already congested city. After two decades, in 1935, A.P. Hume was commissioned to Report on the Congestion of Delhi. That showed an immediate excess population of 1,00,000 people and probable increase of 133,000 in the next 15 years. It recommended possibility of

²⁸ *ibid.* pg 20

²⁹ *Legg, Stephen, 2007; Quoted by Kataria, 2019*

housing and shops for 41000 in the 416 acres available on vacant government land and further acquisition of 1100 acres for the 106,000 people (a planned density of 100/ acre). It also highlighted the importance of addressing the slum clearance and re-accommodation problem to ameliorate insanitary conditions. This Report finally led to the formation of the Delhi Improvement Trust only in 1936.³⁰ Unfortunately, the solutions and work done by the Trust remained piecemeal and far from adequate. As these archival records have shown projects were considered and chosen and executed when their financial success was possible, not really for improvement of the 'lives of the people of Delhi'.

Conclusion

Ideas of improvement that came 40 years too late even after recorded warnings from British officers for the urgent need to decongesting the city, planning new neighbourhoods for its poor and resettling slums dwellers, that were not paid heed to until they made financially profitable sense to the Imperial Government. It is often said how we have strong institutions even today because of the legacy of British rule, but if we look carefully at the archival records presented in this paper, the lapses and the starkly different treatment of natives and Europeans reveal an urban space that is the ironic opposite of its stated benevolent intentions- of improving the lives of its people. The reality however on unravelling this history of the tussle between the Imperial Government and Municipality, land acquisition and annexation through seemingly liberal laws and in the interest of creating value, had quite the opposite impact. Narratives of helping the natives and improving their lives were but

³⁰ *Origins of the Trust, in the Administration Report of the Delhi Improvement Trust for years 1937-1939, Finance Dept. File 1(31), 1940, NAI*

euphemisms of capitalising on land value through its acquisition and control.

Karol Bagh and Western Extension even today are an overcrowded under-serviced area with some hidden examples of housing and commercial enclaves of rich art deco and colonial architecture of the middle and upper class that belie its surrounding. But that is not because of the burden of population influx post-partition as many know, nor only due to the mismanagement or lack of funds of the post-independence administration. It is due to the historic disinterest in providing for the poor classes since the last 100 years and the policies and ideologies instituted then, that continue today in our independent nation still ill-equipped to provide for the poor but very capable to create large-budget and mega-scale designs to support the upper classes in the name of public good. Can we learn from such histories and face the drawbacks of the lingering colonial patterns, that maintaining the 'difference' between the powerful and the poor even today, so we may be able to truly *Design for All*?

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