The Story of My House: and many others in Delhi

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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This dissertation examines the emergence of 'builder floors'; a new housing type that has proliferated across residential neighborhoods in Delhi, India in recent decades. Drawing on case studies, interviews, spatial documentation, archival research, and personal reflections, I trace how the phenomenon of builder floors intersects with, and makes legible, the economic, social, and morphological transformations of Delhi's middle-class neighborhoods. Builder floors, as architectural type, draw on precedents of elite private dwellings such as *haveli*s and *kothi*s while offering upward mobility to the middle class. As multistoried buildings, they have drastically altered ground floor sociality, connection to greenery, feelings of privacy and security, and wider social relationships in neighborhoods. Builder floors have also reconfigured social relations within households: for instance, the return of joint family living alongside the hyper-privatization of individual spaces; the emergence of new forms of neighborliness and issues of management of common areas within buildings. As stilted buildings with parking on the ground, they have further prioritized automobile use and contributed to a growing parking crisis in Delhi.

However, most crucially, following Karen Barad's (2007) 'agential realism', the study of builder floors helps bring together seemingly disparate urban processes and disciplinary 'lenses' that have been critical to Delhi and its development since India's independence; specifically, the changing relationship between land and property, housing mobility and

migration of the middle class, the establishment of automobility, speculative capital and real estate, and the evolving conception of 'home'. The research takes a post-qualitative approach with concepts from new materialism and posthumanist philosophy and deploys 'plugging in' as a method (Jackson & Mazzei, 2023) that dissolves rigid boundaries between theory, data, and analysis. In doing so, my research engages with a wide range of disciplines and bodies of literature, tantamount to a thickening of 'fields', where the empirical and the theoretical, the material and the discursive, are juxtaposed without privileging either. Rather than presenting a comprehensive model of Delhi's urbanism, this dissertation offers partial, embodied narratives that speak to broader processes while remaining grounded in lived experience. The dissertation itself takes the form of an assemblage – following Deleuze and Guattari (1987) – with each chapter acting as a plateau generating its own intensity while connecting to others like a 'rhizome'.

Ultimately, this dissertation illuminates how interventions in housing, mobility, or infrastructure inevitably reshape other domains in complex ways, calling for more integrated planning approaches. It highlights the fundamentally entangled nature of the economic mobility of Delhi's middle classes, the evolution of its land-property regime, the workings of speculative capital, and changing domestic imaginaries. Builder floors, I argue, have emerged through multiple 'parallel *becomings*' that reinforce and make each other legible. The significance of this research, in foregrounding the builder floor, lies in the connections it makes between homeownership and a land-property regime; between car ownership and 'automobility'; between house form and class relations; between statecraft and speculative capital.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

qualitative inquiry.

I also owe a debt of gratitude to my mentors in Delhi. Mr. Sudhir Vohra is a goldmine of inside knowledge when it comes to matters of urban law, planning histories and bureaucratic systems across India, and specifically Delhi. Mr. Ashok Lall gave me an opportunity to discover sustainable mobility and community engagement through the *Aapki Sadak* project, for which I will be forever indebted to him. I am grateful for the unflinching support and care from my friends Kellum Tate Jones and Jacob, Mary Cartee, Samuel Thornton, Joseph Moore, Abigail Leeder and the rest of the gang at Rehearsals for Life. A special thanks to my emotional support twin - Bhavya Chitranshi.

This thesis would not exist without the unwavering and constant support of my parents Professor KV Bhanu Murthy and K Sarada Murthy, who are also my first participants in this study. Thank you to my parents-in-law Rajeev and Vandana Arora for always cheering me on. And finally, this entire journey would not have been possible without my partner Dr. Vanicka Arora. We embarked on a strange and challenging journey of pursuing our PhDs together across multiple continents. It is her intelligence, courage, humor and vision that I often draw upon, especially when my own reserves run low. Our shared curiosity and propensity for academic conversation, as well as the built environment, has regularly fed into this piece of research. She has sifted through the primordial versions of this work, helped me clear the fog, make cogent and accessible arguments. I can only hope to be the rising academic star that she is.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAJ   Anand Aptay and Jhabvala

CGHS/CHBS   Cooperative Group Housing and Cooperative House Building Societies

CPR   Centre for Policy Research

CPWD   Central Public Works Department

CR Park   Chittaranjan Park

DDA   Delhi Development Authority

DIT   Delhi Improvement Trust

DLF   Delhi Land and Finance

DUEIIP   Delhi Urban Environment and Infrastructure Improvement Project

ECS   Equivalent Car Space

EoDB   Ease of Doing Business

EPCA   Environment Pollution (Prevention & Control) Authority for the National Capital Region

FAR   Floor Area Ratio

GPRA   General Pool Residential Accommodation

IPT   Intermediate Para Transit

MCD   Municipal Corporation of Delhi

MIG   Middle-Income Group Housing

MPD   Masterplan for Delhi

NCR   National Capital Region

NCRPB	National Capital Region Planning Board
NMT	non-motorised transport
NHAI	National Highway Authority of India
NOIDA	New Okhla Industrial Development Authority
OBS	Online Building Sanction
PIL	Public Interest Litigation
POA	Power of Attorney
PPMP	parking management plans
RERA	Real Estate Regulatory Act / Authority
RWA	Resident Welfare Association
TOD	Transit-Oriented Development
UAC	Unauthorized Colony
URJA	United Residents Joint Action
UTTIPEC	Unified Traffic and Transportation Infrastructure (Planning & Engineering) Centre

GLOSSARY

Term	Description
abadi	a term often used to describe a rural location, typically a settlement in a rural environment, or informally as a town or city.
baithak	Sitting-hall
bangaldaar	Bengal-roofed
bangla	bungalow
baniya	is a mercantile caste. Traditionally, the main occupations of the community are merchants, bankers, moneylenders, and owners of commercial enterprises.
barsati	A small dwelling built on top of a home in Delhi, India, typically with a large terrace. The word *barsati* comes from the Hindi word barsaat, which means "rain".
chowk	courtyard
colony	A colloquial term applied to neighborhoods of varying sizes, either informally settled or planned for the resettlement of communities or groups. These became common parlance since colonial times, often referring to British planned settlements around existing indigenous formations.
Delhiite	A colloquial term used for an inhabitant of Delhi.
Dilliwallahs	The term used to refer to the original inhabitants of Delhi, as opposed to the newer migrants or 'Delhiites'.
diwankhana	A reception hall or a room in a traditional haveli where men conducted business.
haveli	A mansion type with inward-looking courtyards (*chowk*s) most prevalent in precolonial north India. Typically a few stories tall, varying in scale depending on status of occupant from noblemen and feudal landlords to merchants.

gully	A narrow lane.
Jats	Pastoral and agrarian communities.
Kayasth	A dominant Hindu caste in India.
kothi	Refers commonly to a large free-standing dwelling. The *kothi* is a mansion with hybrid East-West spatial characteristics", that was succeeded by "the bungalow, which replaced the *kothi* in the nineteenth century as the epitome of British colonial domesticity" (Sharma, 2019)
lal dora	Literally translates as 'red thread'. It was first used in 1908, when the land revenue department used to tie a 'red thread' (*lal dora*) around the village to differentiate the settlement (*abadi*) from the agricultural land.
murdana	The space in a *haveli* designated for men.
mistri	Traditional master craftsmen or skilled laborer.
mohalla	Neighbourhood or urban quarter.
Nabob	Nabob is a term specifically ascribed to "acculturated [or *Mughal*ized] European mercenaries who served a variety of rulers in the north of the subcontinent" during the 18th century. The word itself is "an Anglicized version of the local appellation *nawab*."
nazul	Land and properties formerly belonging to the Mughal rulers which was transferred to the colonial government.
pol	Similar to *mohalla*s, these were tight formations of havelis in Ahmedabad, Gujarat that would share common facilities and fortify themselves with gates.
tajurba	experience
verandah	A roofed, open-air porch or hallway that is attached to the exterior of a building.
zanana	The space in a *haveli* designated for women.

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will introduce 'builder floors' in Delhi, India (Figure 1); an emergent housing phenomenon that has profoundly transformed the city's residential landscape over recent decades. Rather than presenting a linear historical account or policy analysis, I aim to weave together multiple narratives that expose the complex entanglements between urban processes, built form, and socioeconomic forces that have shaped Delhi's development trajectory. By focusing on builder floors as a 'diffractive lens', this research seeks to illuminate broader dynamics of housing mobility, property speculation, automobility, and evolving conceptions of 'home' that have been central to Delhi's post-independence urban story.

Crucially, this research does not claim to present a comprehensive or generalizable model of Delhi's urbanism. Instead, it offers partial, embodied truths (Ahmed, 1999) that emerge from specific stories of individuals, families, and buildings. These narratives are woven together to form what Deleuze and Guattari (1986) call a "collective enunciation" - a polyphonic account that speaks to broader urban processes while remaining grounded in lived experience. By foregrounding the incremental, informal, and speculative nature of much of Delhi's residential development, this work aims to complicate dominant narratives of urban transformation and reveal the complex negotiations between policy, market forces, and everyday spatial practices that shape the city.

The opening section of this chapter will present the formidable challenge of narrativizing Delhi. Drawing on the work of a wide range of scholars and briefly introducing the empirical and conceptual terrain covered across the dissertation, this section identifies key gaps in the telling of stories of middle class and post-independence histories of planned neighborhoods. In this context, I find that any attempt to narrativize Delhi must grapple with its inherent contradictions, acknowledge the limitations of singular perspectives, and embrace the city's fundamentally pluralistic nature.

The second section introduces builder floors as a significant, yet under-explored phenomenon in Delhi's urban fabric. These structures, typically four- or five-story residential buildings with raised first floors and ground-level parking, embody a complex interplay of factors including middle-class aspirations, real estate speculation, and evolving urban

policies. The section goes on to contextualize the research questions or lines of inquiry that the dissertation hopes to address.

Finally, a section on methodology not only presents the various data gathering techniques used during the research, but also situates them within a post-qualitative framework which imparts structure to the overall dissertation. Methodologically, this dissertation adopts a post qualitative approach that moves beyond conventional case study and grounded theory methods. Drawing on concepts from new materialism and posthumanist philosophy, I employ what Jackson and Mazzei (2023) call "plugging in" - an experimental mode of inquiry that dissolves rigid boundaries between theory, data, and analysis. This allows for more fluid engagement with diverse sources including interviews, spatial documentation, policy archives, personal reflections, and theoretical texts. By attending to the emergent and entangled nature of urban phenomena, I aim to produce "diffractive" readings (Barad, 2007) that generate new insights through the juxtaposition of empirical and conceptual materials. Following this I briefly describe what the reader might expect in each chapter, outlining the major arguments and the narrative flow of each.
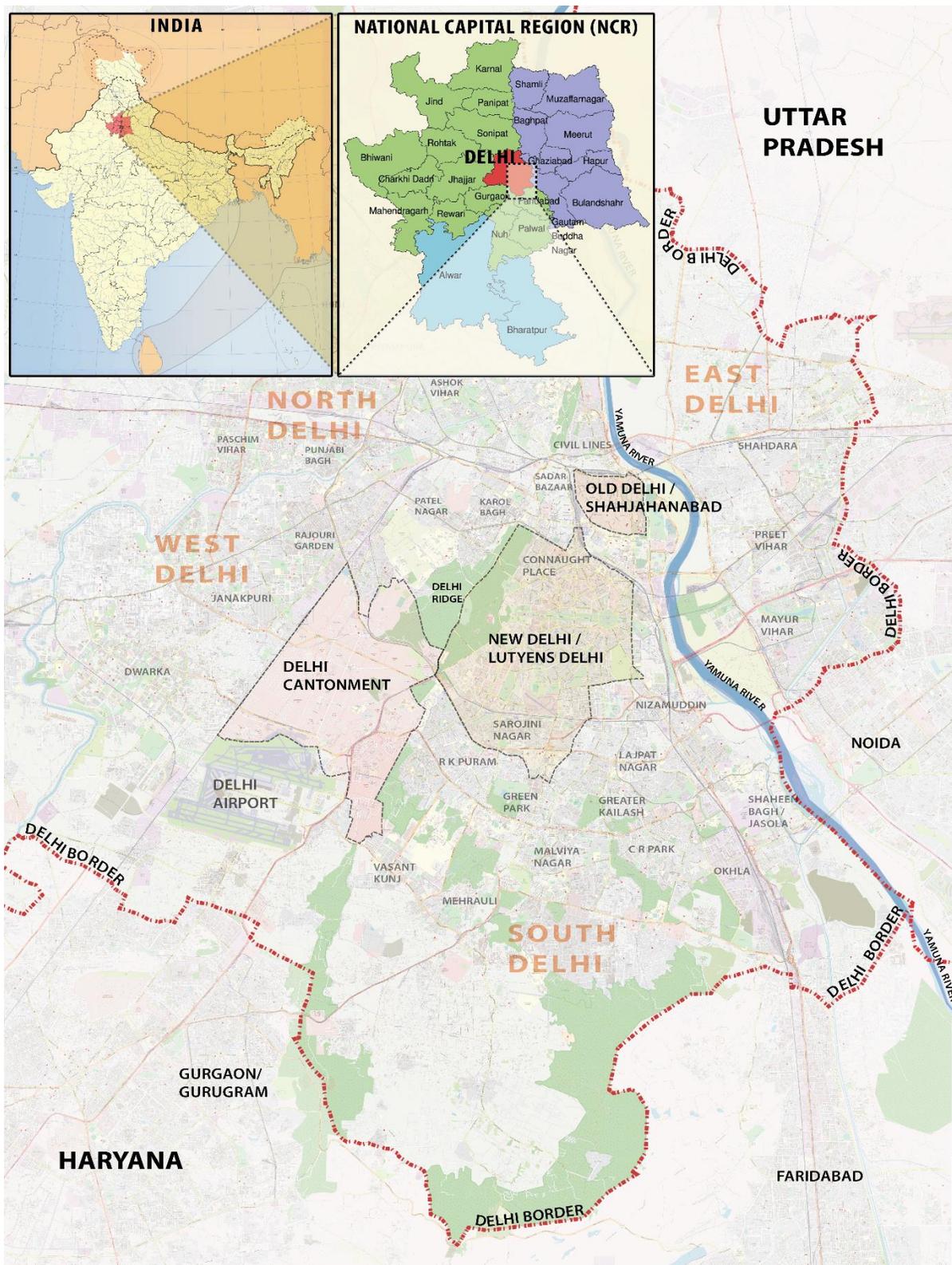
Figure 1 Map of the urban area of Delhi showing significant neighborhoods/settlements. INSETS: Location of the National Capital Region (NCR) in India and Delhi within the NCR.

Narrativizing Delhi – and this dissertation

Yet Delhi's universes are ripe for the plucking (or writing about). Where is the three-generation Delhi Kayasth novel, for instance, with its beginnings in a haveli in the Chelpuri mohalla, with a middle section in Civil Lines and a triumphant end as a top government official in Lodi Estate? If the defining moment of today's Delhi was Partition (and few will disagree with that), despite the flowering of Indian authors writing in English in recent decades, the fictionalized refugee saga, tracking the terrible journey from Lahore, the early years of adversity in Malviya Nagar, and ending in a farmhouse in Chhatarpur, is still unwritten.

(Sengupta, 2008, p. 7)

Given that Delhi (Fig. 1) has been called a 'Colossus' (Chakravorty & Sircar, 2021) and the 'City Improbable' (K. Singh, 2004), there is a largely held belief about its inscrutability, both loved and loathed (Dasgupta, 2014) by its residents and academic narrators alike. As Vidal, Tarlo, and Dupont admit, reporting on the historical development of Delhi can make narrators feel a range of emotions, "from deep frustration and concern to occasional bursts of optimism" (V. Dupont et al., 2000, p. 25). Consequently, the most daunting task for this project has been to narrativize Delhi's history, diversity, size, ever-changing landscape, and rapid growth, especially given that it has been thoroughly researched in many aspects already. From historical scholarship on colonial Delhi and as the capital of a freshly independent nation (V. Dupont et al., 2000; Frykenberg, 1994; Gupta, 1981; Hosagrahar, 2012), to contemporary analyses of its neighborhoods, communal, class and development politics (Baviskar, 2020; Ghertner, 2015; Pati, 2022; Srivastava, 2014a; R. Sundaram, 2009), there is an overwhelming pressure to do justice to Delhi and its 'story'.

One of the recurring themes across existing scholarly analyses on Delhi is a focus on its heterogeneity. Ranging from its fragmentary histories of successive capital cities that make up the metropolis, to the class, caste, religion, occupation demographic diversity that characterize its resident population, much has been written on the multiplicity of Delhi. Dupont et al. (2000) for instance draw from broad comprehensive narratives of Delhi's

chronology, juxtaposed with fine-grained engagements with different peripheries and margins that make up the city; ranging from the spatial margins of Delhi's peri-urban areas and its informal settlements. They emphasize the impossibility of drawing together a singular portrait of the city without necessarily suppressing multiple contradictory narratives.

Substantial research into Delhi's urbanization processes has tended to focus on the critical role of informality in shaping the city's urban fabric. For instance, Baviskar (2020) critiques the ways in which informal settlements and the urban poor are marginalized by elite-driven environmental policies, highlighting the persistent tension between social justice and urban beautification efforts. Sanjay Srivastava (2014) has described the interconnectedness of urban life across class divides looking at how settlements coexist and interact with gated communities. Dupont et al. (2000) emphasize how informal sectors, particularly through economic intermediaries and squatter settlements, are essential to understanding the dynamics of the city's development and its residents' adaptation strategies. Across literature, informality is presented not as an anomaly but as a vital, albeit marginalized, component of Delhi's urban evolution, revealing the city's inherent contradictions between the formal ambitions of a "world-class" city and the lived realities of its inhabitants.

The emergence of the middle class in Delhi as an urbanizing political force, with increasing agency, has been a focal point in recent work, with scholars examining its complex role in shaping the city's socio-spatial dynamics. Srivastava (2014) highlights how the middle class negotiates its identity through consumerism and spatial strategies, particularly through an increased emphasis on creating gated residential communities. Baviskar has argued that while the middle class advocates environmental reforms, such as pollution control, this advocacy is always restricted; prioritizing self-interest, while increasingly marginalizing the urban poor. This selective environmentalism often results in the displacement of informal settlers and reinforces socio-economic inequalities. Meanwhile, Sengupta has discussed how state policies have facilitated middle-class growth, with urban colonies, parks, and social spaces reflecting a collective aspiration for upward mobility and modern living at the cost of reinforcing the stark spatial divides in the city. The middle class in Delhi is always

presented as navigating a dual role—driving modernization and urban development while simultaneously reinforcing socio-spatial inequalities. Their influence is both direct, through political engagement and environmental advocacy, and indirect, through the shaping of consumerist and residential patterns.

Yet there are gaps in the telling of post-independence and late 20th century histories of Delhi and its built environment, specifically with regards to planned **plotted**[1] **colonies**[2] and the **middle class**[3]. Both these terms have deep historical genealogies that have evolved materially and discursively over the course of the 20th century and are, at times, more colloquially applicable than technically accurate.

On the one hand, given the increasing securitization and gating of inner-city neighborhoods, as well as the widening gap between the elite residents and the working class within such gated enclaves, the term 'colony' might be more practically applicable now than ever before. On the other hand, while describing themselves, my research participants insisted on identifying themselves as 'middle class', despite their elite social status, their purchasing power in a metropolitan economy, and the fact that they own land in the capital city. And owing to such strong self-identification the term has more generally come to signify an upwardly mobile class of people that have invariably accumulated wealth over generations, often own property within the inner-city neighborhoods of Delhi and may, realistically, be considered the urban elite. And though I will elaborate on what it means to identify as 'middle class' in later chapters, I will continue to use the term provisionally and for narrative

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[1] The term "plotting" may be used in India to describe the process of formal survey and subdivision known in the USA as "platting." A plat map typically shows the division of a new neighborhood into various private lots or parcels, as well as areas set aside for streets, parks, school sites, utility easements, etc. In the case of post-independence planning in India, this type of spatial planning was almost exclusively termed "plotted development".

[2] A colloquial term applied to neighborhoods of varying sizes, either informally settled or planned for the resettlement of communities or groups. These became common parlance since colonial times, often referring to British planned settlements around existing indigenous formations.

[3] While deploying the term middle class throughout this dissertation, the reader should be keenly aware that the statistical limits of the term describe a different class of people in India, with significantly lower household income. This recent news article speaks to the ever-widening gap and income disparities between classes: https://indianexpress.com/article/india/income-of-poorest-fifth-plunged-53-in-5-yrs-those-at-top-surged-7738426/

effect across this dissertation, precisely as a way to emphasize the historical and discursive construction of the middle class and its incongruity with academic discourse.

A significant proportion of urban scholarship on Delhi draws attention towards informal settlements and plights of the urban poor, such as dispossession and displacement through the deployment of eminent domain, evictions, enclosure, and even gentrification (Bhan, 2016; Routray, 2022), or towards the aestheticization and securitization of elite enclaves by the civil society (Baviskar, 2020; Ghertner, 2012). This scholarship has been instrumental in highlighting the neoliberal development politics, the class and communal conflicts that shape contemporary Delhi, and explain the inequalities across geographies. However, the dynamics of house building and home ownership that propelled middle class homeowners into gaining political and economic power, and have fueled the real estate and construction industry, have been somewhat underexplored.

Dominant narratives on the informal proliferation of Delhi's morphology and property markets (Pati, 2022), have also not sufficiently explored the incremental densification, commercialization, and informalization of planned plotted neighborhoods, specifically through the incremental transformation of individual homes. While 'elite informality' (Roy, 2009) is powerful in explaining and situating informal practices of the landowning elite, as well as, the state's informal tactics in the production of inequalities, it falls short of exploring the incremental nature of upward mobility. Similarly, 'bourgeois environmentalism' (Baviskar, 2020) effectively links civil society action and judicial urbanism (Bhan, 2016; Bhuwania, 2018) to the power wielded by the urban elite, but grants the landowning class with an a priori status, missing out on the historical entanglements of the middle class, speculative capital, and the built environment, that produce civic power. Instead, through this dissertation, I intend to show that these entanglements developed gradually over time, and are indicative of the parallel '*becomings*' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) of homeowners, their neighborhoods, the markets and agents that capitalize on their growth and densification, and larger urban development politics.

On the other hand, an attention on the peripheral urban/rural extensions and the development of townships and satellite cities project a specific narrative of speculative

capital within the city and the building construction industry, that misses out on the intricate links between small-scale builders, land developers and financiers that bankroll everything from individual houses in South Delhi's posh colonies to large townships in Noida and Gurgaon[4]. As one of my participants highlighted, "capital moves and shifts, to wherever it is most profitable". As such, a deeper, more historical look at the emergence of both residential property markets and the middle class, is needed, to explain present-day development politics and the relationship between the city and its hinterland[5].

Another critical aspect that is overlooked within dominant narratives of urbanism, is the role of automobility, specifically its rise to prominence within the Indian metropolis, in shaping the much of the residential fabric, and in influencing citywide transport and landuse priorities over the decades since independence (Gopakumar, 2020; Sheller & Urry, 2000; Urry, 1999). And while several scholars have brought attention to the relationship between landuse and automobility (Joshi et al., 2016), or 'cities as movement economies' (Hillier, 1996), in shaping urban form, stationary vehicles and parking beg deeper investigation as the driver for development policies that have transformed neighborhoods (Spurling, 2018a). This is especially relevant in the case of Delhi, where a rampant parking crisis has gripped the residents' and media attention in the recent past, eliciting drastic measures for parking management from the authorities, that have in turn exacerbated the growth and densification of neighborhoods.

And though I argue in this dissertation for a closer look at larger urban processes such as migration, single-family housing, mobility, and property markets, that have shaped planned plotted colonies, what happens within these colonies has also had a reciprocal impact on the overall development trajectory of Delhi. The densification and vertical growth of planned plotted colonies, their parking crises, the real estate pressures they are under, have shaped

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[4] Planned satellite towns of Delhi extending into neighboring states that were intended to absorb much of the residential expansion after the projected saturation of Delhi.

[5] According to Narayani Gupta, 'hinterland' in the historical context of Delhi's spatial expansion since colonial interventions began, refers to "an area roughly seven miles in radius around Shahjahanabad." (1994, p. 138) This, as she explains is based on "the average distance a man could travel with a cart-load of goods in a day..." (1994, p. 144)

residential construction markets across the National Capital Region[6] (NCR) and have heavily influenced the mobility profile of the city spurring debates around car dependence. The gating and increasing securitization of these colonies challenge the rights, labor practices, and accessibility of the urban poor, putting a strain on the already tenuous relationship between the working class and elite. And the recent trends of densification and sub-division of property within these colonies have far-reaching consequences for urban retrofitting, and the future of new housing models such as Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) (Cervero, 2013; Phani Kumar et al., 2020).

According to Abdoumaliq Simone, "urbanization conventionally denotes a thickening of fields, an assemblage of increasingly heterogeneous elements into more complicated collectives" (2020, p. 69). Building on this proposition, any account of urbanization is similarly a thickening of 'fields', in terms of disciplinary discourses, theories of urbanism, and empirical evidence of practices. It is my objective in this dissertation to juxtapose the empirical and the theoretical, the material and the discursive, without privileging either. As such, the literature I draw on is diverse and helps to bolster my arguments both theoretically and empirically by offering historical and argumentative evidence.

This research is empirically situated within the domain of urban scholarship on Delhi and its postcolonial development history, and for its empirical substantiation I will draw on the work of several scholars such as Narayani Gupta, Veronique Dupont, Jyoti Hosagrahar, Anthony King, Amita Baviskar, Asher Ghertner, Pilar Maria Guerrieri, Sushmita Pati, Jyoti Pandey Sharma, Sanjay Srivastava, Ravi Sundaram, Anne Waldrop, Llerena Guiu Searle, among others. Meanwhile, each chapter also engages with a 'field' and body of knowledge with its own set of conversations. These, I will independently engage with in a format that Lisa Mazzei and Alicia Jackson call "*plugging in*" (2023) – such as the concepts of 'migration and belonging' in Chapter 3 from Sara Ahmed (1999); the notion of 'home' in Chapter 5 following

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[6] The National Capital Region (NCR) is a planning region around the National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi. It includes Delhi and several districts surrounding it from the states of Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan.

critical geographers Alison Blunt and Robyn M. Dowling (2022); or the concept of 'automobility' in Chapter 6 (Gopakumar, 2020; Sheller & Urry, 2000; Urry, 1999).

Returning to the issue of narrativizing Delhi, this dissertation, therefore, does not attempt to explain in any generalized sense, the urbanism of Delhi, or in any way present a systematic or holistic model for its development history or future. Instead, having observed a specific phenomenon, an emergent housing type, I will tell stories of individuals and families, their migration and mobility, their aspirations and actions, that approximate a 'collective enunciation' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986) relatable to many, and that present 'partial and embodied truths' (Ahmed, 1999) about Delhi's history and trigger speculations about its future. Consequently, this dissertation is an attempt at piecing together, the socioeconomic, geographic, historical, and inter-generational conditions of the emergence of a new housing type. One that, I believe, brings together urban processes that have been critical to Delhi and its development since independence; specifically, the changing relationship between land and property, housing mobility and migration of the middle class, the establishment of automobility, speculative capital and real estate, and the evolving conception of 'home'.

Builder Floors – an emergent phenomenon

The phenomenon/building type that I have observed over the course of my doctoral research, and is the central concern of this dissertation, is colloquially called 'builder floor(s)'. The term 'builder floors' is broadly used today to describe a four- or five-story residential building, where the first living floor is raised on stilts, such that the ground floor can be given over entirely to parking and service use. The term, however, also describes the arrangement behind its financing and construction. Typically, in such projects, a builder either purchases land from, collaborates with, or buys-out an 'undivided' share of the property from an existing homeowner, in exchange for investing their own capital to cover the costs of construction and build the property. The newly built four- or five- story structure

is then vertically subdivided, with the builder often receiving one of the floors, which have been made into individual dwelling units (Murthy, 2023, p. 58).

These properties offer more privacy, most modern amenities, and customization options to their elite residents compared to traditional apartment buildings, an aspect many of my participants emphasized. Each floor is typically owned by a different individual or family, providing a sense of ownership and exclusivity. Builder floors in plotted colonies can range from simple two-bedroom units to luxurious penthouses with private terraces and elevators. However, builder floors have also helped transform neighborhoods once characterized by single-family homes into informally and incrementally developed apartment complexes (Figure 2). As might be expected, this also increases the local demand for parking, sewage, electricity, and other services, putting a strain on the already overburdened infrastructure in such colonies.

Figure 2 Typical transformation of plotted neighborhoods. Single-story houses (LEFT) being converted into builder floors (RIGHT).

In the recent past builder floors have been prolific and have significantly transformed, not just planned colonies, but the built environment of Delhi as a whole. A brief survey of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi's (MCD) 'Citizen Search' Dashboard data shows that over 26,000 building sanction (permit) plans have been released/issued for residential plotted development since the Online Building Sanction (OBS) process began in 2011, of which nearly 1,000 cases were processed in 2023 alone. If we follow the typical builder floor model, this means that in most cases a single-family home is being transformed into 3-4 dwelling units, amounting to approximately 100,000 housing units (or 75,000 new units) over the past decade or so. This does not account for all the houses built outside the OBS process. This is a significantly larger number than the most ambitious government schemes to deliver new housing. For instance, the largest comprehensive development scheme since the 2010 Commonwealth Games Housing has been the General Pool Residential Accommodation (GPRA), approved in 2016, being developed across 7 sites[7] in Delhi. With an outlay of INR 32,835 crore, the scheme promises to deliver 25,667 dwelling units in all.

Of course, both these statistics pale in comparison with the number of housing units produced informally. For instance, according to the Delhi Development Authority's (DDA) own estimates "only 53% (excluding squatter housing)" of all residential development in the city is institutional or planned (Delhi Development Authority, 2007, p. 18). Similarly, drawing on a study by the Delhi Urban Environment and Infrastructure Improvement Project (DUEIIP), the Centre for Policy Research (CPR) estimated that "only 23.7 per cent of the city's population [reside] in what are designated as 'Planned Colonies'"(Centre for Policy Research, 2015, p. 6). According to another study, the number of unauthorized colonies (UACs) — which the DDA defines as "residential areas where no permission of (the) concerned agency has been obtained for approval of layout plan and/or building plan" — had increased from 118 in 1961 to nearly 1,800 by 2012. (Zimmer, 2012, p. 90) Essentially, as I have pointed out elsewhere, unregulated settlements account for a far greater

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[7] Including Sarojini Nagar, Nauroji Nagar, Kasturba Nagar, Netaji Nagar, Srinivaspuri, Mohammadpur and Thyagraj Nagar, where existing government employee's housing colonies are being razed and redeveloped.

percentage of housing in the city, when compared with planned neighborhoods. (Murthy, 2023, p. 51)

However, this is not the focus of this dissertation. My point here is that, even discounting the sizable contributions made by the so-called informal sector in meeting the overwhelming housing demand in the city, incremental, organically developed (yet legally built) housing driven by individual interests and financed through small-scale builders, sufficiently overshadows the most ambitious government housing schemes. Given these statistics, much of the housing being produced in the city looks very different than the fast-paced, high-rise, global transit metropolis, that the big -infrastructure and -investment driven political imaginary would have us believe.

As prolific as it has become, the builder floor has still to feature among the residential types officially acknowledged by the planners of the city (somewhere between plotted residential and group housing), or in architectural design studios at the academy that often feature gated group housing societies and even Transit-Oriented Developments (TODs). If it is ubiquitous now, it is only because people, both property owners and speculative builders have made it a reality, not the state or its planning machinery, nor experts and academic pontification. It is 'common knowledge' that the left-over sum of money, after subtracting the construction costs, from the sale of one of the floors to the builder, is a way for the builder to offload their 'black money' (K. Sundaram & Pandit, 1976) - a kind of money laundering system. It is 'understood', that in the process of maximizing floor space and number of bedrooms, often bye laws are violated. It is also common for the stilt floor to accommodate servant quarters for maids and drivers or a small shop at times, even though the stilt is strictly meant for parking only. The combined vehicle count for such buildings is often far more than may be accommodated within the stilt floor, thereby 'forcing' people to park their surplus vehicles on the street. Yet from an aesthetic perspective, these buildings 'look' legitimate, unlike the informal settlements of the city. The underlying land and street patterns of such planned neighborhoods camouflage the extent to which they are informal. With the prolific development of builder floors, neighborhoods of single-family dwelling units have been gradually transforming into what are effectively group housing societies with

woefully lacking infrastructure and utility services. The so-called parking crisis does not seem to abate in the face of the builder floor revolution and its machine of (re)production only creates more demand rather than mitigate its consequences. Most neighborhood streets are now bereft of a ground floor or front porch, given over entirely to parking and service use. Where there used be chance encounters, conversations, and social interaction between residents of colonies, there exists a liminal space occupied by service workers, guards, and other temporary residents that constitute a new social life of the street; one that intimidates the elite residents, incentivizing further capital and resource investment into security and segregation.

As an introductory explanation and as a starting point for a discussion around the emergence of builder floors, I offer the following diagram. In the typical plotted colony, the emergence of builder floors follows, and is closely linked to, several specific historical processes broadly summarized below (Figure 3):
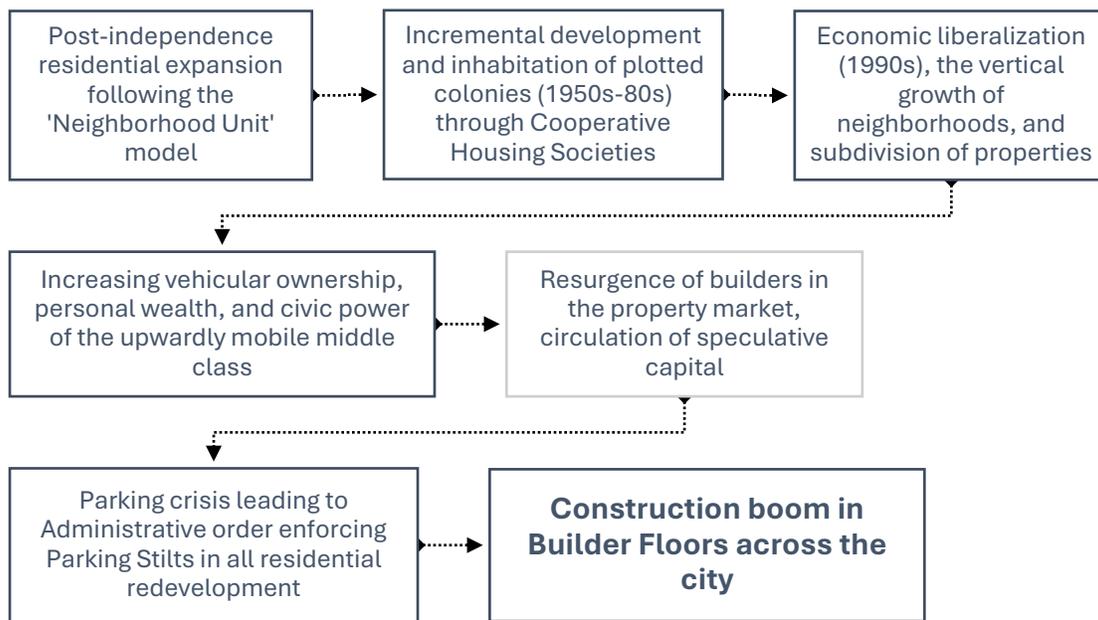
Figure 3 Rudimentary sequence of events leading up to the emergence of builder floors.

However, any account that claims to trace the evolution of this housing type must contend with intersecting processes, and parallel emergences, that may only be read in conjunction with each other. For instance, though much of my research focuses on builder floors in plotted planned colonies, there have been precedents, antecedents, and variations of these

in every other category of colony in Delhi, especially, urban villages and UACs. In many of these other cases, multistoried housing goes beyond the neat and clean subdivision I have described above, offering complex tenancy and tenure arrangements to migrant workers, manufacturing units, and new families in the city, such as room rentals, partial floor sales, etc. Similarly, the role of the stilted floor shifts, depending on the geographic location of the building and the effective control of the state in enforcing land use regulations. The diagram below (Figure 4) shows one such case, where multiple tenants, users, and tenure arrangements occupy the same building.
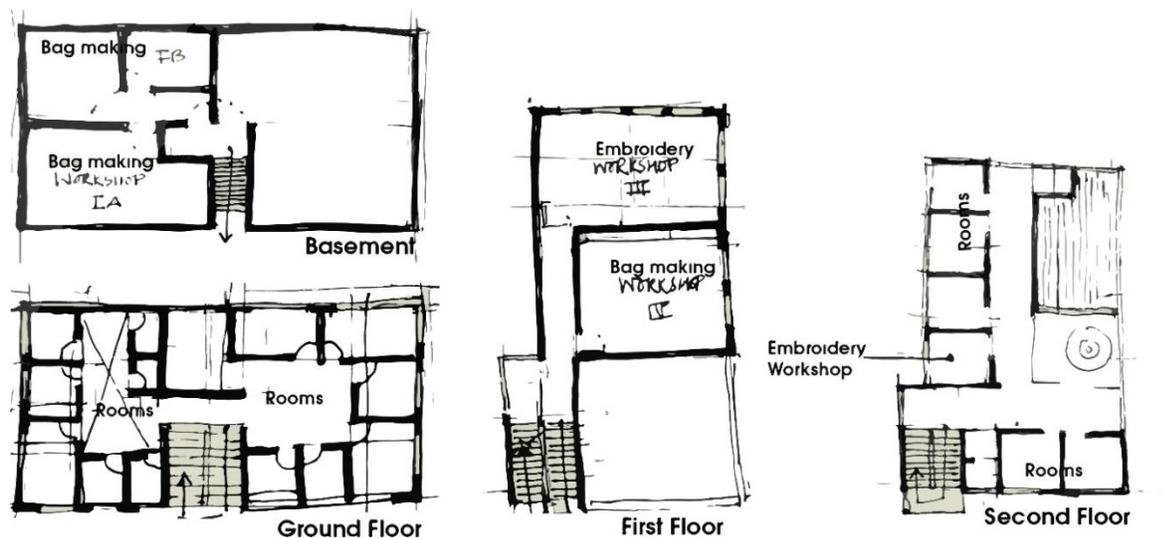
Figure 4 Floor plans of a typical mixed-use building in Khirki Village (urban village in South Delhi), documented as part of a seminar course I taught in 2015.

Research Questions

For the purposes of immediate comprehension, the diagram shown on the previous page necessarily simplifies and sequentializes the emergence of builder floors, linking it to specific historical events beyond the control of individuals, in a unilineal causal chain. However, I believe, it also obfuscates the complex and parallel emergence of multiple phenomena/processes that shape the built fabric of neighborhoods, the lives of its residents, and planning/policy responses to development in the city. In this vein, builder floors are not simply the resultant of a singular chain of events, but rather have emerged at

the intersections of urban processes with longer trajectories, and as one of their repercussions and catalysts.

As a study of emergent phenomena, this dissertation therefore seeks to present parallel narratives of urban processes that reinforce and make each other legible, without making claims of unilineal causality or beginning and endings. In keeping with this approach, my research questions for this enquiry do not follow a causal logic and are not deterministic. I ask, instead, how things and processes are related, how progression in one makes another more visible or potent within the urban milieu. Therefore, my research questions reflect the emergent nature of this and other associated phenomena:

What urban processes are made legible through the study of builder floors?

There are, of course, a number of secondary questions that emerge out of the same central inquiry:

- *How have histories of migration, economic and housing mobility, of the middle class in the city, supported the emergence of builder floors?*
- *How has the relationship between residential property and land ownership evolved since the introduction of single-family subdivisions and plotted neighborhoods?*
- *What is the relationship between the rise in prominence of builders, speculative capital, and real estate market regulation?*
- *How have the lifestyles and aspirations of middle-class families shaped and been shaped by the evolving conception of 'home'?*
- *How has automobile dependency and the present parking crisis in the city taken root?*

The chapters that follow will substantiate and explore different aspects of the emergence of builder floors, each demonstrating its entanglements with larger urban processes that both create the conditions for its emergence and are impacted by it. However, like many stories, this dissertation begins from a personal perspective. Therefore, Chapter 2 of this dissertation will follow the Story of my House, which provides the personal context for this dissertation and explains my own motivations for this research, beginning with the story of

my own childhood home. It also presents a simple starting point for this inquiry, which will subsequently be complicated through each chapter that follows.

The following section in this chapter, however, offers a guide to reading the rest of the dissertation. I propose that the writing of this dissertation, its reading, the fieldwork and methods involved in data collection, are all part of the same relational continuity.

Methodology - and some notes on Post Qualitative Inquiry

These are practices in which some entity is being sliced, colored, probed, talked about, measured, counted, cut out, countered by walking, or prevented. Which entity? A slightly different one each time. ***Attending to enactment rather than knowledge has an important effect: what we think of as a single object may appear to be more than one.*** *All the examples in this book concern atherosclerosis. But a plaque cut out of an atherosclerotic artery is not the same entity as the problem a patient with atherosclerosis talks about in the consulting room, even though they are both called by the same name. The loss of blood pressure over a stenosis is not the same thing as the loss of blood vessel lumen that radiologists make visible on their X-ray pictures.*

(Mol, 2002, p. vii)

Agential realism and why it must be intersectional

Over the course of this research, I have found that the phenomenon of builder floors and their emergence is similar to the study of atherosclerosis, that Annemarie Mol - in her book, *The Body Multiple* (2002) - is describing in the quote above. Much like the various 'entities' that atherosclerosis 'may appear as', the endeavor to define builder floors has also produced a loose agglomeration of results. Ranging from typological features such as the vertical subdivision of dwelling units, the presence of parking stilts, and snap aesthetic judgements about their 'tiered cake-like' appearance, to their peculiar economic model and 'anything that a builder builds', have all been used to characterize builder floors by my

participants. The more I insisted on triangulating a set of defining features, a finite tracing of their origin story, the more it evaded capture. Following Mol's suggestion, I eventually decided to shift my focus to the 'enactment' of my research and what it produced, instead. This shift in focus - the optical metaphor here being crucial – proved productive, generative, of further research, such that it allowed me to 'read' other urban processes 'through' the phenomenon – much like a diffractive pattern.

A diffractive reading method as Karen Barad suggests, in her book Meeting the Universe Halfway (2007), is useful in "reading insights through one another [and] in attending to and responding to the details and specificities of relations of difference" (Barad, 2007, p. 71). According to Barad, diffraction is unlike reflexive or reflective critique, where 'reflective', as far as optics are concerned, is mainly a deflection and deferment of meaning[8], while critique is "all too often not a deconstructive practice … but a destructive practice meant to dismiss, to turn aside, to put someone or something down…". Instead, following Donna Haraway, she calls for "reading diffractively for patterns of differences **that make a difference**… the sense of it being suggestive, creative and visionary" (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012, p. 49). Here she makes an ethical argument for positive critique, that can (and always does) change the world that we are entangled with. 'Agential realism'[9] – another term she uses - understood this way questions the possibility of 'distanced' research and calls to the front, the ethical responsibility of the researcher in the enactment of research itself.

Barad explains further:

> *Diffraction, understood using quantum physics, is not just a matter of interference, but of entanglement, an ethico-onto-epistemological matter. This difference is very important. It underlines the fact that **knowing is a direct material engagement, a cutting together-apart**, where cuts do violence but also open up and rework the agential conditions of possibility. **There is not this knowing from a distance.***

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[8] Différance here is a coinage which combines 'difference and 'deferment', and is that attribute of language, by which meaning is generated because of a word's difference from other words in a signifying system, and at the same time, meaning is inevitably and infinitely deferred or postponed. For more read: Jacques Derrida, "Différance," in Margins of Philosophy, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 13.

[9] To read further on *agential realism* and *intra-action* coined by Karen Barad refer to 'Posthumanist Performativity' by Elisa Fiore in the Posthuman Glossary (Braidotti & Hlavajova, 2018)

Instead of there being a separation of subject and object, there is an entanglement of subject and object, which is called the "phenomenon."

<div align="right">(Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012, p. 50)</div>

In this sense, the triumvirate of researcher, object, apparatus are always already entangled, and research is not about 'using' one or the other 'lens' to debunk or corroborate one version of reality and validate another from a transcendent position. Instead, every act of research and the apparatuses used for that research transform the studied 'object' – make 'agential cuts' through it – to produce multiplicities entangled with each other and with the researcher and apparatus.

These 'agential cuts', then, produce new entities, albeit entangled with the object being studied, the apparatus, and the researcher. This is also what Mol is referring to in the quote above. Much like how, "a plaque cut out of an atherosclerotic artery is not the same entity as the problem a patient with atherosclerosis talks about in the consulting room" (Mol, 2002, p. vii), builder floors are not the same entity when studied through different disciplinary apparatuses. Depending on the 'lens' used – urban history (of Delhi in particular), urban studies, architectural typology, development studies, housing studies, mobility studies, cultural studies, or postcolonial studies – different entities are produced. Builder floors as the culmination of private dwellings following the bungalow-*kothi*-floor typological evolution, are not the same entity as the parking stilts under them and their relationship to the growing parking crisis within colonies and the city at large.

However, since "knowing is a direct material engagement, a cutting **together-apart**", according to Barad, these so-called different entities produced by making disciplinary cuts, also bring these seemingly diverse disciplines into conversation and extends knowledge across all of them. And so, "diffraction allows you to study both the nature of the apparatus and also the object", which includes our devices for measurement as well as ourselves (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012, p. 52). The following sections will elaborate on the instruments and methods for data collection that I have used during the course of this research while keeping in mind that the 'data', the instruments, and I, have all transformed through the research itself.

What comes 'after method'? And what are the methods I have used?

This dissertation does not make claims on any unified theory for the explanation of the emergence of builder floors. Nor does it come up with answers to solve major issues with regards to Delhi's development and environment as a consequence or fallout of builder floors, which impacts multiple disciplinary domains. It is, instead, an attempt at weaving together narratives that both, expose and produce new entanglements between these disciplines. Such a method, then, necessitates not just a radical mix of data collection, but also an approach that prioritizes intersectionality above all else. I will first elaborate on the logistics of data collection and the specific instruments I employed for identifying, recruiting, interviewing and observing. Then I will contextualize these within the framework of post qualitative enquiry (Lather, 2013; Lather & St. Pierre, 2013; St. Pierre, 2013) and what that means for this dissertation and its chapter structure.

My fieldwork involved collecting ethnographic data through semi-structured interviews and participant observation, as well as conducting spatial mapping and building documentation. The fieldwork itself was planned through four phases. Two were about establishing the contextual parameters and historical background around builder floors mainly through secondary sources, while the other two were about engaging directly with and investigating an appropriate selection of case studies. And while there was originally a sense of chronological ordering across the secondary and primary data collection phases, in practice, the process was more cyclical and iterative than strictly sequential. The secondary data I collected involved archival study as well, specifically the text from relevant acts, laws, court cases, and policy documents that helped substantiate the discursive context. Of course, a plethora of media reports, newspaper articles and op-eds informed my secondary research as well, but those will be referenced throughout the dissertation as needed. A brief list of the archives I have referred to are as follows:

- **Significant acts, laws, and policy documents:** Societies Registration Act (1860); The Co-Operative Societies Act (1912); The Delhi Co-Operative Societies Act (1972 - amended 2003); The Transfer of Property Act (1882); The Real Estate Regulatory Act (2016); the Delhi Master Plans (1962, 2001, 2021, 2041-draft); Administrative Order

(No. J-20011 /12/77-LII, dated 14th February 1992 – hitherto called the *Freehold Order*); 'the parking stilt' Administrative Order (No. CE(B)/2011/D-79, dated 27th April 2011 – hitherto called the *Parking Stilt Order*); Delhi Maintenance and Management of Parking Places Rules (2019); National Urban Transport Policy (2014).

- **Relevant court cases:** Delhi High Court Writ Petition (C) No.4598/2010 - Sh. P.K. Chatterjee and Ors. [Others] v. Union of India and Ors.; Supreme Court Writ Petition 13029/1985 – Sh. M.C. Mehta v. Union of India and Ors. (both available via the online case history database of the respective courts)

- **Municipal records:** Building activity monitored by the MCD, permits granted, and under review, have been digitized and made publicly available since 2015, as part of their Ease of Doing Business (EoDB) reforms (https://mcdonline.nic.in/eodb/).

The case study research entailed recruitment of participants through an online (and mobile-based) broad interest survey (Figure 5). The survey asked participants to identify the type of residential building they reside in, their reasons for choosing either plotted or group housing, if they have recently undergone redevelopment, and whether they dealt with builders or architects during the process, among other questions. Of the 151 responses received, approximately 60 responses yielded complete data, which I will discuss in a later chapter. However, in order to recruit participants for my study and essentially help disseminate the survey, I sought the support of the United Residents Joint Action (URJA), a non-profit association of around 1500 Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) across Delhi. Their network is widespread and proved to be effective in reaching out to a large base of homeowners across the city. Through this phase I identified the specific building cases to document and sought consent for participation, from the respective homeowners. I interviewed a total of 23 participants, both individually and collectively (at times other family members sat in on interviews and added to the discussion), mainly divided into three groups – homeowners, builders, and experts. While I recruited experts through the previously existing professional networks I have in Delhi, I made contact with builders mainly through the homeowners I interviewed.

Figure 5 Screenshot of the welcome screen for the online interest survey distributed to recruit participants for the study. The text is bilingual (English and Hindi) throughout the survey and was mainly distributed via WhatsApp, a commonly used messaging platform in India.

The interviews themselves were semi-structured and open-ended, focused more on building rapport with my participants and coaxing them to open-up as much as possible. In the case of homeowners, I asked them about their life-histories, inter-generational migrations, material conditions and economic mobility, as well as their relationship with cars and transportation in the city, their engagement with their neighbors and the neighborhood environment, etc. Builders, on the other hand, were asked about their personal journeys to become builders, their business development, operational, and organizational models, and their views on the larger real estate and residential construction market. Finally, the questions I asked experts varied depending on their expertise, though I also asked them several questions about their views on the emergence of builder floors and development in the city, in general. While some of the experts I interviewed chose not to remain anonymous and spoke from their official position and title – Mr. Ashok Bhattacharjee

(Transport and Planning Consultant + Former Director of UTTIPEC[10]), Dr. Anumita Roychowdhury (Executive Director of Research and Advocacy, Centre for Science and Environment), Mriganka Saxena (Architect and Urban Designer and Founding Partner, Habitat Tectonics - Architecture & Urbanism + Former Senior Consultant at UTTIPEC) – a few of the others I spoke with decided to remain anonymous.

Building-level documentation: In addition to interviewing homeowners, I documented the floor layouts and official building sanction (permit) drawings, of their previous residence and the buildings they are currently residing in. This analysis was intended to trace transformations at the scale of the individual plot, based on available and recreated maps of the building as it is now, and it once was. I also asked homeowners and their families about design choices, use of spaces, changes in family structure, involvement of architect/builder, material and aesthetic choices, financial considerations, peer and cultural influences, to produce thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) of domestic life before and within builder floors.

But somewhere in the middle of interviews and with each set of building drawings that were produced, the sense of each story being a 'case study' seemed inadequate and unjust. During some interviews there was a longer discussion about the childhood home of the participant, some focused on their inter-generational migration, while others brought up completely new concerns with life in builder floors. The story of my own house and those of others felt more like a loose agglomeration of stories, rather than a 'set of cases' with pre-defined parameters ready for comparison. Not every story spoke to the same set of 'aspects' about domestic and neighborhood life, development woes, financial concerns. Instead, each story had a uniqueness, each brought something different to the metaphorical table, while still bleeding into other stories, inducing connections, breeding familiarity and solidarity across families and situations.

Before undertaking fieldwork, I had proposed to follow an interpretivist framework that combined the case study method with grounded theory. According to Halaweh, Fidler and

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[10] Unified Traffic and Transportation Infrastructure (Planning & Engineering) Centre within the DDA

McRobb (2008), this is possible since "the chief characteristic of case study research is the specification of the boundary and the scope of the research cases and the unit of analysis ...[which is] compatible with the grounded theory concept of theoretical sampling". Additionally, within such an approach, "the criterion for selection of the cases and the unit of analysis in the case study is relevance, and theoretical sampling serves to seek in-depth information from the cases, and to discover and develop the concepts and theories" (2008, p. 7). This approach, then, is contingent on the synchronicity between the 'unit of analysis' (or criteria) of the case studies and the emerging 'conceptual categories' or 'themes' within grounded theory. Moreover, both methods aim for generalizability as a feature of the output of research.

However, as I focused more on the specificity of each narrative, attended to the organic intensities within each story and the emphasis placed by each participant at different parts of their telling, I questioned the primacy of voice and meaning in conventional qualitative research. Often, therefore, in an attempt to impart conceptual consistency, and to allow room for comparative analysis later, the researcher in conventional (humanist) qualitative research sacrifices the present and curtails potential lines of flight that might emerge during the enactment of the interview. Lisa Mazzei, in her paper '*A voice without organs*: interviewing in posthumanist research' (2013) addresses this precise problem. Following Deleuze and Guattari's 'body without organs' in 'Anti-Oedipus: capitalism and schizophrenia' (1983), Mazzei develops the concept of a 'voice without organs'. Here, Mazzei builds on posthumanist and post-qualitative research to move beyond the notion of a thinking subject as a "bounded organism, the body, of the humanist subject... [to] a posthumanist body that exists in a complex network of human and nonhuman forces" (Mazzei, 2013, p. 734). This allows one to think of the 'voice' in an interview as both unbound from a specific thinking humanist subject, but also the interview as a fully *embodied* experience, where the "researcher-data-participants-theory-analysis" (Mazzei, 2013, p. 732) is itself an emergent voice (without organs).

Such an approach accounts for the always-present entanglements between the triumvirate of researcher, object, apparatus, following Barad's agential realism. Blurring these artificial

boundaries also attends to the problems within conventional qualitative research. For instance, in his book 'Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods', Robert K. Yin admits that within case study research the "boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident" (Yin, 2018, pp. 45–46). Similarly, according to Yin, there are situations where "there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide design, data collection, and analysis...another result relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion" (Yin, 2018, pp. 45–46). Essentially, there is a constant struggle within conventional qualitative research to look for sequence, rigor, and triangulation. In posthumanist and post-qualitative research, on the other hand, there is no sequence (theory first or data first) and rigor does not amount to triangulation. There is, instead, an emphasis on emergence, diffraction, and production. Instead of defining a phenomenon and asking, 'what it is?', we ask, 'what else is there?' and 'what is being produced?'

Moving beyond an 'inductive-deductive method', where concepts lead to themes, which under repeated scrutiny and testing in the field, eventually *tend* towards theory (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Halaweh et al., 2008), post-qualitative inquiry simultaneously engages data, analysis, and theory. While Corbin and Strauss suggest that it is okay if "literature directs the theoretical sampling, and is helpful for theoretical sensitivity" (Halaweh et al., 2008, p. 4), post-qualitative inquiry assumes an emergent causality where neither is privileged or comes before the other. In terms of method, this means that each method cuts across other methods such as interview data, field notes, drawings of the spatial observations, secondary and empirical sources, analysis, and even 'theory'.

In 2011, Elizabeth A. St. Pierre wrote a chapter in The SAGE handbook of qualitative research (4th Edition), where she used the term post qualitative research to "mark what [she saw] as the impossibility of an intersection between conventional humanist qualitative methodology and 'the posts'" (Pierre, 2014, p. 3). This impossibility was born out of the increasingly restrictive and regimentalized political economy of 'scientifically based research' within the social sciences that could not contend with the various 'post'

theoretical frameworks such as "Foucault's archaeology, genealogy, and power-knowledge reading; Deleuze and Guattari's 'rhizoanalysis' and 'schizoanalysis'; Derrida's affirmative deconstruction; Lyotard's 'paralogy'" (Pierre, 2014, p. 3). Similarly, in After Method (2004), John Law critiques traditional social science methods for failing to capture complex, messy realities. He argues for broader, more flexible methodologies that embrace ambiguity and multiplicity and proposes new forms of knowing through embodiment, emotionality, and situated inquiry.

Therefore, to attend to the myriad possibilities for knowledge production that theories have to offer and to allow multiple readings of 'reality' to co-exist, the boundaries between theory and data, subject and object, material and discourse need to be dissolved. Posthumanism and the 'ontological turn' offers such a possibility. Within such a framework, it is no longer necessary for a 'theory to be applied' to a data set to 'explain' an 'empirically observed reality'. Epistemology is thus not alienated from ontology. But simultaneous engagement with theory, data, and analysis is easier said than done. Alecia Jackson and Lisa Mazzei – in *Thinking with Theory in Qualitative Research* (2023) – provide a practical guide to achieve this, or more precisely, to practice an experimental, speculative and productive method which follows such an emergent onto-epistemology. Jackson and Mazzei call this 'plugging in', where they "position plugging in as an emergence of 'thought in the act.' Plugging in is a production of the new: the assemblage in formation. This is a dramatic, profound shift from social science knowledge with its hierarchical, empirical demands for recognizable representation to an ontology in which experimentation is privileged" (2023, p. 2).

In contravention to the conventional sequence of humanist qualitative research, Mazzei and Jackson engage *with* philosophical texts alongside interview excerpts – what they call 'performative accounts' – and their own insights, to *do* things. "Cassandra's and Sera's (their participants') accounts of life and the theorists' philosophical concepts encountered each other in a 'bloc of becoming' to co-constitute the outside of thought" (2023, p. 4). These performative acts of becoming-thought – since they are always in the middle of changing – constitute a relational text with the continuous desire to 'plug-in' to other texts, other thinkings and doings. This, of course, as Jackson and Mazzei emphasize follows the

concept of the 'literary machine' by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their book, *A Thousand Plateaus: capitalism and schizophrenia* (1987).

> *There is no difference between what a book talks about and how it is made. Therefore, a book also has no object. As an assemblage, a book has only itself, in connection with other assemblages ...We will ask what it functions with, in connection ...A book exists only through the outside and on the outside. A book itself is a little machine...*

(Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 4)

This dissertation is then, similarly a "between-book" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2023). Not only in its chapter structure that plugs in different bodies of literature, interview excerpts, personal reflections, drawings, field notes, etc., but also in that the seeming 'object' of this dissertation – the builder floors – are an assemblage themselves, a machine, a go-between other assemblages.

The field and myself

> *One cannot "be" either a cell or molecule - or a woman, colonized person, laborer, and so on - if one intends to see and see from these positions critically. "Being" is much more problematic and contingent. Also, one cannot relocate in any possible vantage point without being accountable for that movement.*

(Haraway, 1988, p. 585)

The question of positionality is central to narrativization and storytelling, in general and in this dissertation, especially where the position of the researcher is entangled with the social and material reality of what they are studying. Due to my own roots within the 'middle-class' community of North Delhi, my professional and academic networks, my entanglement with property owners and builders in plotted colonies, and their affiliated Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs), this research is in many senses, an auto-ethnography of my life-world – particularly highlighted in Chapter 2: The Story of my House. Builder floors themselves are very well-known colloquially and most of my participants and scores others who I encountered throughout the duration of my fieldwork were confident in their opinions, interpretations and synopses about the emergence and impacts of builder floors. My typical

middle-class upbringing in a plotted colony, my immersion in the development politics and the cultural milieu, put me in an emic position even before I began fieldwork. As a researcher, this - I felt, initially - also put me at a disadvantage in terms of the lack of distance I felt from the 'field' and my resultant 'bias'.

Corrine Glesne, in her book 'Becoming qualitative researchers: an introduction' (1999), interrogates the origins of qualitative research, specifically the positionality of the researcher herself. According to Glesne, 'fieldwork' – as we now know it – originated in the 1920s with the Chicago School, when sociologists such as "Robert Park and Ernest Burgess... began applying participant-observation techniques to the study of groups within their own culture" (Glesne, 1999, p. 7). However, even before sociologists used it to study cultures, anthropologists such as Bronislaw Malinowski had already established 'ethnography' as a legitimized form of cultural study. "[Malinowski] carried out long-term fieldwork (which he called ethnography) in New Guinea and the Trobriand Islands between 1914 and 1918. Typically, anthropologists sought to study a group of people who lived in a culture that was remote and *quite different* [emphasis added] from their own" (Glesne, 1999, p. 7). Early practitioners of ethnography, thus, considered themselves 'outside observers', and despite best efforts at immersive accounts over long periods, the work of anthropologists such as Malinowski was received problematically by the people he was describing (Erickson, 2018, p. 92). More recent efforts at mitigating the asymmetrical power relations between the researcher and researched, and in consciously addressing "the personal standpoints, the positionality" of researchers stemming from feminist critique (Erickson, 2018, p. 102), techniques such as 'auto-ethnography' came to be. Yet, most of these techniques continue to operate purely within the domain of epistemology, rather than engaging with ontology seriously.

Classical anthropological conceptions of ethnography and fieldwork, thus, necessitate a separation between epistemology and ontology. Philosophically speaking, this entails an abstraction from, or a stratification of, what Deleuze and Guattari would call 'immanence' (1987) – or what Henri Bergson would call 'pure duration' (1991 - original text 1896). Both Deleuze and Guattari, and Bergson, are arguing against dualist conceptions of the world and

all its knowledge: a transcendental ontology which necessitates positions and conditions of 'outside' and 'inside'. They argue against metaphysics that emphasize 'distance' between the observed phenomenon and the transcendent position that an observer may occupy. Pure duration, for Bergson is thus the totality of lived reality (1991, p. 205). Thus, post positive epistemology, much of which still drives qualitative research, necessitates etic or emic positions, separates categories such as researcher, participant, informant, etc.

This approach also leads to the consequent bounding of the 'field' in and as distinct space-time. These acts constitute both space-time(s) and bodies, as arborified[11] forms, discrete from each other. Ethnography, then, typically entails studying cultures originating elsewhere that must be studied by outside researchers through immersion in the field (as if they were distanced from each other), with the assistance of informants who are inside the culture being studied. These stratifications then also inform the ways in which academic inquiry is structured. The logistics of research produce 'academic space', 'domestic space', 'writing space', and 'research field' as abstract and arbitrary delineations of space-times, imposed for purposes of convenience, mitigating researcher bias, and regimentalizing labor within the academy.

These space-times, seemingly independent, always located elsewhere, are however, ontologically part of the same immanence: a 'fieldwork duration', as I will explain. In 'Matter and Memory' (1991), Bergson argues that any analysis of 'duration' necessarily spatializes it, as the verb 'to analyze' implies a cutting into parts. Similarly, when time is conceived of as having periods or moments of discrete passing, when we count it, we spatialize it. We unfold it, lay it out in front of us as a map in abstract Euclidean space. Pure duration, on the other hand, is a qualitative multiplicity, immeasurable, non-discrete, and non-quantifiable. The abstract spaces, of and around conventional research and the 'field', are then, not impenetrable or a priori, laid out neatly and distinctly in numerical space, but perpetually interpenetrating, entangled, and becoming ontologically, irrespective of the epistemic imperatives of the academy.

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[11] Read more on this and the rhizome in (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987)

As a corollary, when conducting fieldwork, the researcher and the researched, are transported to a space-time, governed and bounded by rules of historiography, research ethics, and disciplinary concerns (sociological, political, anthropological, etc.). They are both supplanted from pure duration, and emplaced in the 'field', where (and when), practices, behaviors, networks, and environments, are instrumentalized for the purposes of documentation. Even in autoethnographic accounts, self-reflections and field notes carry greater weight when documented 'during' fieldwork and 'in' the field. In this 'field', events are meant to be sequentialized, narrativized, and bounded, such that descriptions of other phenomena around the subject(s) of study can become context or background. Matters of 'scope', quantities of data collected (interviews, etc.), enumeration of variables, necessitate a before and after of the study, and detract from the entangled nature of emergent phenomena and their study.

In this dissertation, then, I hope to challenge such conceptions of the field and its discreteness. The following excerpt from my field notes exemplifies my approach to the larger dissertation and the problem I pose of temporality and researcher 'distance':

> *I could begin to talk about builder floors by academically laying out the historical 'context' and the policy 'background' of their emergence, through an episodic recounting of events that have shaped the development of builder floors in Delhi, India. The vast residential expansion of Delhi in the 1950s through 70s, based on single-family subdivisions, that set neighborhoods on this teleological trajectory of development. The liberalization of India's economy in the 1990s, that spurred the real estate market, allowing people to speculate on their properties, incentivizing the growth of neighborhoods. The 2006 building 'sealing drive', that attempted to curb haphazard growth of residential and commercial properties in the city, only to concretize the role of builders as the only competent agents of ground-up development. How the 2011 parking stilt order that sought to control the rampant parking crisis in neighborhoods, in turn incentivized higher levels of vehicle ownership and even more growth. My research could also draw on the individual accounts of my research participants, where the development of these houses may*

be narrativized as a sequence of separate instantiations, each pertaining to their own personal and inter-generational histories.

Conversely, I could also begin the story from the time I started my fieldwork in 2021. I could start the story from 2011, when my parents' home, my childhood home, developed structural damage due to the construction of one of these things next door. I could even begin to remember my first impressions of builders as ruthless real-estate-grabbing agents, who bought out development rights all around our neighborhood, even when I was a child. Or perhaps, the story starts with speculations about (memories of) the future and the teleological end of this development 'trajectory'. About how quaint single-family-home neighborhoods are doomed to continue to densify, grow taller, beyond their infrastructural limits, and eventually perish or become slums under real estate pressures.

Each 'narrative device' laid out flat like a temporal map of the subject of my research. Background/context, interview data, personal interest, all separate strands of my investigation, each pertaining to different space-times and 'timescales'.

But it is not just a question of epistemology, an unbiased telling of 'real-world' events (even personal experiences) that I 'found and documented in the field'. Seemingly disparate events, decisions, movements, share the same space-time ontologically. The growing presence of builders and their operations in middle-class neighborhoods, my decision to pursue a PhD, the pandemic's impact on interviews, the housing predicament of my generation of young professionals in Delhi, are all interpenetrating to produce this fieldwork-time. A rhythm-becoming-apparatus, that cuts across and brings together multiple space-times, subjects/objects, events, to form and re-form the body of the field, while simultaneously narrativizing or fleshing in, my encounters with the field.

Chapterization and Narrative Structure

A plateau is always in the middle, not at the beginning or the end. A rhizome is made of plateaus. Gregory Bateson uses the word "plateau" to designate something very

special: a continuous, self-vibrating region of intensities whose development avoids any orientation toward a culmination point or external end.

... For example, a book composed of chapters has culmination and termination points. What takes place in a book composed instead of plateaus that communicate with one another across microfissures, as in a brain? We call a "plateau" any multiplicity connected to other multiplicities by superficial underground stems in such a way as to form or extend a rhizome. We are writing this book as a rhizome. It is composed of plateaus.

(Deleuze & Guattari, 1987)

Unlike Deleuze and Guattari's 'chapter structure', I cannot claim that this dissertation can be picked from anywhere and related to any other part of itself. However, it is intended to be read keeping in mind the parallel construction of each chapter. For instance, while Chapter 2 – The Story of My House might seem like an overview of the 'entire' story providing a meta narrative through an autoethnographic account, it also acts as a reference or guide – a chapter the reader might return to repeatedly to refresh their memory about tiny details or to remember why they are reading this dissertation in the first place. But similar to a thousand plateaus, each chapter also produces multiple connections that are related, if not entangled, with other chapters.

Chapter 2 presents a deeply personal account of the transformation of my childhood home in Vaishali Enclave, Delhi, into builder floors - a transition that mirrors the broader evolution of Delhi's residential landscape. Through my family's story of acquiring land through a teacher's cooperative society in the 1970s, building a single-story home, and eventually being compelled to redevelop it into builder floors in 2015, I trace the complex intersections of middle-class aspirations, changing development norms, and evolving market forces. The chapter uses this narrative to illuminate several key themes: the shift from cooperative housing societies to market-driven development, the gradual accumulation of wealth and property rights by the middle class, the impact of legislative changes such as the 1992 Freehold Order and 2011 Parking Stilt Order, and the changing nature of social life and security in planned colonies. Through fine-grained observations that bring together

discussions of speculative capital and shifting markets, planning regulations, and draw these into conversation with my lived experience, the chapter contextualizes broader transformations in Delhi's urban fabric, setting up the deeper explorations that follow in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 3 examines two crucial processes that created the conditions for builder floors to emerge in Delhi: the migration patterns of the middle class since Independence, and the evolution of land ownership and residential property regimes through plotted colonies. Through four detailed case studies of different families and communities - ranging from an old Daryaganj resident watching his neighborhood transform, to a Muslim builder describing patterns of community concentration, to Bengali migrants establishing themselves in South Delhi, to a family leaving the commercialized chaos of Karol Bagh for Gurgaon - I demonstrate how migration and mobility in Delhi are shaped by multiple factors beyond simple economic considerations. The chapter traces how the post-Partition refugee crisis, coupled with colonial planning legacies and American concepts like Clarence Perry's 'neighborhood unit', led to the widespread adoption of plotted colonies as Delhi's dominant residential form. This housing type, delivered through cooperative societies, became the primary vehicle for middle-class aspirations of homeownership. I argue that these processes - migration patterns, land ownership regimes, and the rise of plotted colonies - are mutually reinforcing "parallel becomings" that transformed both Delhi's built environment and the economic and social position of its middle class, setting the stage for the eventual emergence of builder floors.

Chapter 4 examines the emergence of builders and speculative capital in Delhi's residential construction market, with particular attention to how builders have carved out a distinct professional niche between architects, developers, and contractors. Drawing on interviews with both homeowners and builders, I demonstrate how builders evolved from being simple contractors to becoming key players in property development through their unique business model of exchanging construction costs for property ownership rights. The chapter traces how economic liberalization and state policies created conditions for builders to thrive, particularly as middle-class homeowners found themselves unable to finance

reconstruction of their properties independently. I show how builders operate through informal networks and personal relationships, distinguishing themselves from both corporate developers and formal professionals like architects. Their success depends on building trust, managing local networks, and navigating complex regulatory systems. I argue that rather than seeing builders as simply predatory actors (though some homeowners describe them as such), we should understand them as emerging alongside broader transformations in Delhi's real estate market, where the state has shifted from being a housing provider to a facilitator of private development, and homeowners have evolved from self-builders to property speculators.

Chapter 5 examines how builder floors reflect and shape evolving notions of 'home' among Delhi's middle class, linking contemporary spatial configurations to historical dwelling types while revealing new social dynamics. Through careful analysis of traditional housing forms like *haveli*s, colonial bungalows, and post-independence housing types, I demonstrate how certain spatial and social features persist in builder floors - from servant quarters to aspirations for privacy and independence - even as others are lost, like verandahs and communal spaces. Drawing on survey data and detailed case studies of families' experiences, I show how builder floors enable both increased privatization (with each family member retreating to their own space) and, paradoxically, new forms of joint family living through vertical stacking of units. The chapter reveals how this housing type reflects broader class dynamics in contemporary Delhi, with enhanced security measures and technological amenities creating insulated domestic spaces that further separate middle-class residents from neighborhood life and working-class service providers. This transformation of domestic space parallels changes in middle-class lifestyles and aspirations, even as certain traditional hierarchies and social relations endure in new forms.

Chapter 6 examines how Delhi's 'parking crisis' emerged from the intersection of post-independence planning decisions, rising middle-class automobile ownership, and the proliferation of builder floors. Through interviews with homeowners, builders, and transportation experts, I demonstrate how this crisis reflects an ontological conflict between two opposing views: a supply-driven perspective that sees the problem as

insufficient parking space, and a demand-management approach that views parking itself as consuming valuable urban land. I argue that the state's response to this crisis - particularly the 2011 mandatory stilt parking order - has paradoxically worsened the situation by incentivizing more builder floors and thus bringing more cars into already dense neighborhoods. The chapter reveals how infrastructure development in Delhi has prioritized high-speed arterial roads and 'world-class' projects over neighborhood-level interventions, reflecting the state's moral ambiguity in claiming commitment to sustainable mobility while actually advancing a neoliberal agenda. This dichotomy is further complicated by resistance from middle-class residents and RWAs to parking demand management measures like pricing, creating a deadlock where cars both enable and restrict mobility in the city.

The dissertation concludes with Chapter 7, "Speculations - Housing Futures of Delhi," which explores possible future trajectories for builder floors and residential development in Delhi. This forward-looking analysis examines challenges of aging buildings, trust between residents, and redevelopment rights, while considering potential for further vertical expansion, plot consolidation, and commercial adaptation. The chapter reflects on the study's methodological approach using assemblage theory to understand builder floors, offering provisional conclusions about housing mobility, capital transformation, domestic space evolution, and infrastructure-mobility challenges.

CHAPTER 2

THE STORY OF MY HOUSE

In 2010, my parents' home in Delhi, the home I grew up in, developed major structural cracks due to ground settlement under its foundations, induced by the construction of a trench for the builder floors next door (Figure 1). A brief investigation by a structural engineer concluded that either the house needed extensive structural repairs or would need to be rebuilt. After deliberating for nearly seven years, and exploring several alternatives for retrofit/redevelopment, as a family, we decided to succumb to the dominant market solution: that of builder floors. The diagram shown (Figure 2) below visually summarizes this sequence of events.

Figure 6 Ongoing construction site for builder floors in South Delhi. Typical condition where the trench dug out in one property causes sheer forces (shown in red) to act on the adjacent buildings.

1982 - 2010
My childhood home. Most houses in the neighbourhood were the same

2010 - 2016
Structural damage caused by the construction of builder floors next door

SETTLEMENT

2016 - 2017
Building site surrounded by protective scaffolding as construction proceeds

2017 ONWARDS
My parents' new house with three other families
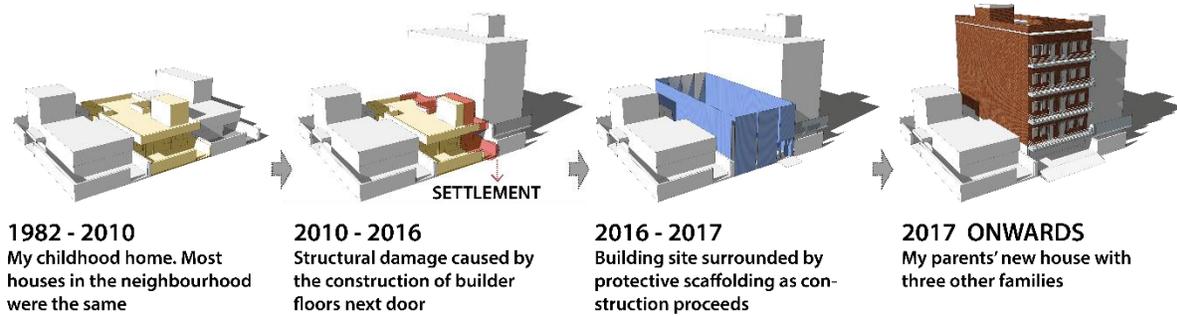
Figure 7 Chronology of events through which my single-story childhood home was converted into five-storied builder floors.

This chapter presents one case of the transformation of single-family homes into builder floors in Delhi. While the case presented is personal to me and my family, it is a relatively common occurrence in Delhi and has been echoed by several of my participants, constituting a shared experience across middle-class families in the city. This autoethnographic account draws mainly on a series of interviews with my mother and reflections on my personal experiences through the process of converting our single-story home into builder floors with several twists along the way. This case also presents a somewhat simplified narrative, a starting point, for the exploration of a phenomenon that is otherwise far more complex, both in its emergence and its repercussions.

The Quintessential Single-family Home

Mother [Interview excerpt1, 2019]:

> I was not very happy, because I was very comfortable in my niche, my in-laws' house. And I think they were also very comfortable with this whole setup of us being there. I think everything was going quite smoothly when there was, not really an altercation, but a kind of comment when my husband's elder brother got transferred back to the city. And there was some talk saying that we had been getting the advantage of support from in-laws and therefore being able to do my job and children being looked after very well with the in-laws, and so on... This comment sort of led to things where we then decided that, alright, if someone else wants to, you know, take our place in that house... with my husband's elder brother and his family moving in, there wouldn't

be space. So, we decided to move away to our own house, in another locality, which

we had built by then and was ready for us to move in.

My father grew up in government officer's housing for much of his childhood, along with four other siblings, since my grandfather worked at the Defense Ministry, Government of India. Initially their family lived in a spacious Bungalow[12] in Park Lane, part of Lutyens' Delhi, with sufficient rooms for a joint family, housekeeping staff, a cook, and other support staff. However, after my grandfather retired from government service, they moved into an apartment within the Mayapuri Middle-Income Group Housing[13] (MIG) built by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) in West Delhi, which was significantly smaller and not fit for a large family. And though by the time most of my father's siblings had moved away from Delhi and started their own families, my parents continued to live with my grandparents for mutual support. However, considering the sentiments expressed by other family members and partly due to their own desire to start out independently as a nuclear unit, my parents eventually moved out of the apartment. Working towards this goal, my father applied for membership to the Delhi University Teacher's Housing Cooperative House Building Society in 1979, which had recently opened 11 new vacancies. Given that both my parents were lecturers at Delhi University, he was eligible to apply and won his membership through a lottery system from a pool of applicants, a system common to most society memberships at the time. He was eventually allocated a 270 square yards (sq.yds) plot with a perpetual sub-lease agreement[14] within the same year.

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[12] Read more on the specific Bungalow type in (Desai et al., 2016; King, 1995)

[13] Following the vast land acquisition by the Delhi Development Authority in the 1950s, parts of West, South and East Delhi were developed into public housing estates, distributed, and apportioned based on income groups. These were made available for leasehold purchases through a public auction system, commonly referred to as a 'lottery system'.

[14] A system of land allocation for individual plots for self-built housing prevalent in the early decades after India's independence. First individuals needed to become members of a Cooperative Group Housing Society or House Building Society (CGHS/CHBS) based on their institutional, communal or other affiliation, with the promoters of the Society. Following which, once the Society had successfully leased, and been allocated, an appropriate land parcel by the government (land owning agency), individual members could either enter a lottery or be automatically allotted a plot to purchase at a fixed rate.

The society itself was established in 1958 with approximately 230 members initially, all teachers in Delhi University, and after negotiating with the DDA for nearly a decade, was eventually allocated a 27-acre land parcel in Pitampura, Northwest Delhi (Figure 8), on which to develop a plotted colony in accordance with the Delhi Co-operative Societies Rules (1950) and was later named Vaishali Enclave. Vaishali Enclave was conceptualized, planned, and developed over 20 years with infrastructure development through most of the 1960s, the layout plan (Figure 8) approved in 1972 by DDA, until eventually the Delhi Municipal Corporation adopted the common areas, internal roads, and utilities in 1984.

The colony offered two plot sizes only (270 and 300 sq.yds), and these were distributed among the members of the society through a lottery drawing. The cost of lease agreements for each plot was based on a standard government rate of INR 50 per sq.yds, which amounted to INR 13,500 for a 270 sq.yds plot. Since my father had joined the society at a later date, he had to pay a premium on the amount and ended up paying INR 47,000 in all, for the land. Despite its affordability in present day terms, my father took loans from family and a housing loan from the Life Insurance Corporation of India[15] to help pay for the land and construction costs of the new house (details in the table below).

Figure 8 Location of Vaishali Enclave in Delhi. RIGHT: Layout of Vaishali Enclave.

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[15] A multinational public sector life insurance company that offered home loans to individuals.

ITEM	COSTS (Indian National Rupees - INR)
Savings (loan and withdrawal from Provident Fund[16])	62,000
Housing loan from the LIC	55,000
Family Loan	50,000
Cost of Land/Plot	47,000
Construction Cost	120,000
TOTAL COST OF HOUSE	**167,000**
Household Income	2,000 per month

Table 1 Housebuilding costs for my father in 1981.

Since all residential land was 'sold' at the same fixed rate, the outright purchase/free-hold ownership was not a possibility for most homeowners, and due to the peripheral location of these colonies, the cost of land was relatively nominal, allowing my parents, with their modest government salaries, to enter the housing market. A condition shared amongst several young professionals of the generation. And though my parents were, strictly speaking, much younger to the first wave of plot owners after independence (following chapters will clarify), they shared a similar experience of homeownership compared to several of my research participants.

The house itself was built with brick masonry load-bearing walls, supporting reinforced concrete beams and slabs. My father had overseen every aspect of its construction and design, and the only professionals involved in its realization were a building permit / sanction 'agent' and a structural engineer who designed the foundations, beams, and slabs for the house. In accordance with the prevalent bye laws at the time, the layout (Figure 9) accommodated two bedrooms, a drawing room, a living cum dining room, two bathrooms, a kitchen, and a pantry/storage room with water supply. Each room had access to natural light and external ventilation owing to the two interior courtyards, and an overhang in the front verandah with a 6 feet cantilevered canopy.

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[16] A Provident Fund (PF) is a savings and retirement fund in India typically for salaried employees including employer contribution, more commonly available in government jobs.
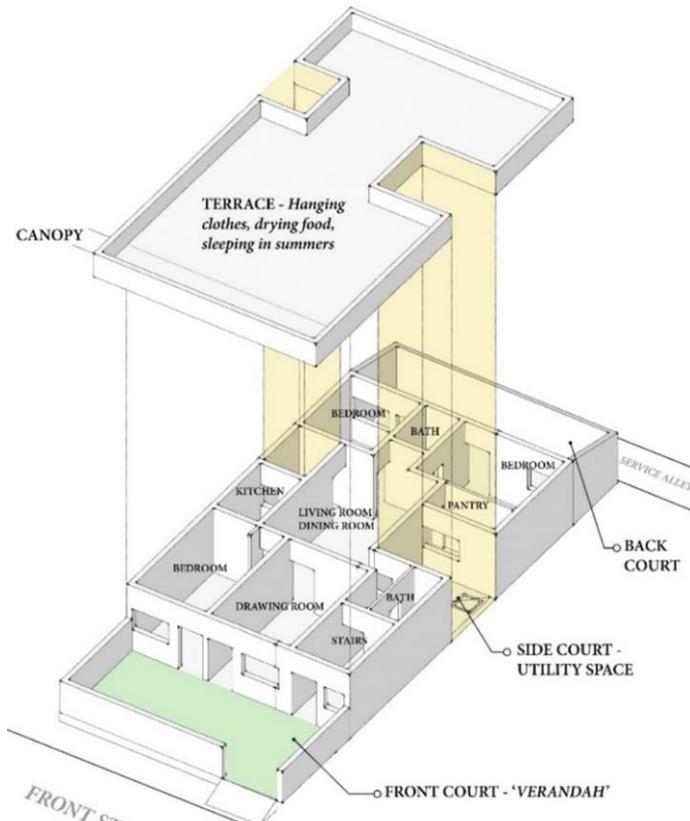
Figure 9 Layout and photographs of the original house.

This became my childhood home, the quintessential, plotted, single-family home, part of the post-independence residential expansion of Delhi. After an initial chaotic period of refugee resettlement by the Ministry of Rehabilitation in 'evacuee property'[17], refugee camps and temporary shelters (V. N. Datta, 1994, p. 290), a significant proportion of long-term housing provision in Delhi was based on the adoption of plotted neighborhoods. Sanjeev Vidyarthi (2010a) describes how Clarence Perry's conception of a "comprehensive physical planning instrument for designing self-contained residential neighborhoods in the 1920s" (p. 261), became the ideal for residential planning in newly independent nations. Deployed in India by émigré architects such as Albert Mayer and Otto Koenigsberger (Baweja, 2014), this new form of spatial planning was fundamentally different from other historically prevalent residential development.

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[17] This refers to the large number of abandoned properties left behind by Indian Muslims fleeing from Delhi during the ensuing chaos after Partition. Most of these properties existed in Shahjahanabad and were either illegally occupied or officially allotted to the incoming refugees over the course of several years after 1947.

In the decades after independence, plotted development, delivered through co-operative societies, was the least resource-intensive method through which the government met the overwhelming housing demand in Delhi, given the exponential population growth and a limited capacity for building public housing/apartments. And though this narrative is complicated by the fact that the first Masterplan for Delhi (MPD) in 1962 suggested the development of individual plots as "two storeyed buildings... plus an optional provision of *barsati* floor[18] at the top" (Delhi Development Authority, 1962, p. 56), and stated that, "number of dwelling units on a plot will be reckoned the same as the number of floors [up to two]" (p. 55), this was scarcely followed in practice. Most plotted development in the city, in actuality, began as single-family houses, which was acknowledged by MPD 2001, stating: "*Surveys and studies have indicated that plotted development for a long time remained only single storey built* [emphasis added] and that group housing in the city has had a very marginal intensive use of land." (Delhi Development Authority, 1990, p. 114)

Alongside the vast acquisition of land for residential development by the DDA through the 1960s and 70s, and the allocation of land parcels to CGHS/CHBSs to plan plotted colonies, there was an emphasis to promote the migration of the middle-class into these newly developed single-family zones. And though, older forms of housing continued to persist (such as the *haveli*) in places such as Shahjahanabad and urban villages, or bungalows in the case of Lutyens' Delhi and Civil Lines, much of the new housing was primarily produced in the form of plotted residential types (row, semi-detached or detached).

Essentially, for a middle-class family, this was fast becoming the most common form of housing mobility. New migrants to the city, either after partition, or from within the country after independence, were increasingly frustrated with the erratic rental market in the older parts of the city and sought stability and inter-generational housing security through the

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[18] *Barsati* is a Hindi term used to describe a "covered space on the terrace used for shelter during rains" (MPD, 1962); *Mamti* is similarly another Hindi term used to describe a "A cabin like structure with a covering roof over a staircase and its landing built to enclose only the stairs for the purpose of providing protection from weather but normally not used for human habitation". The distinction between the two is clear under law, the former meant for the habitation of a third family for instance, and the latter meant purely for protection from the elements, but in practice this distinction has been blurred through rampant violations over the decades.

acquisition of plots, which were relatively affordable. Older residents of the city were similarly beginning to move out of ancestral homes and joint family setups, to establish their own nuclear family units. The single-family home was aspirational, promoted by the government and private speculative developers alike, as Sundaram (2009, p. 64) shows through a newspaper advertisement from the 1950s (Figure 10).
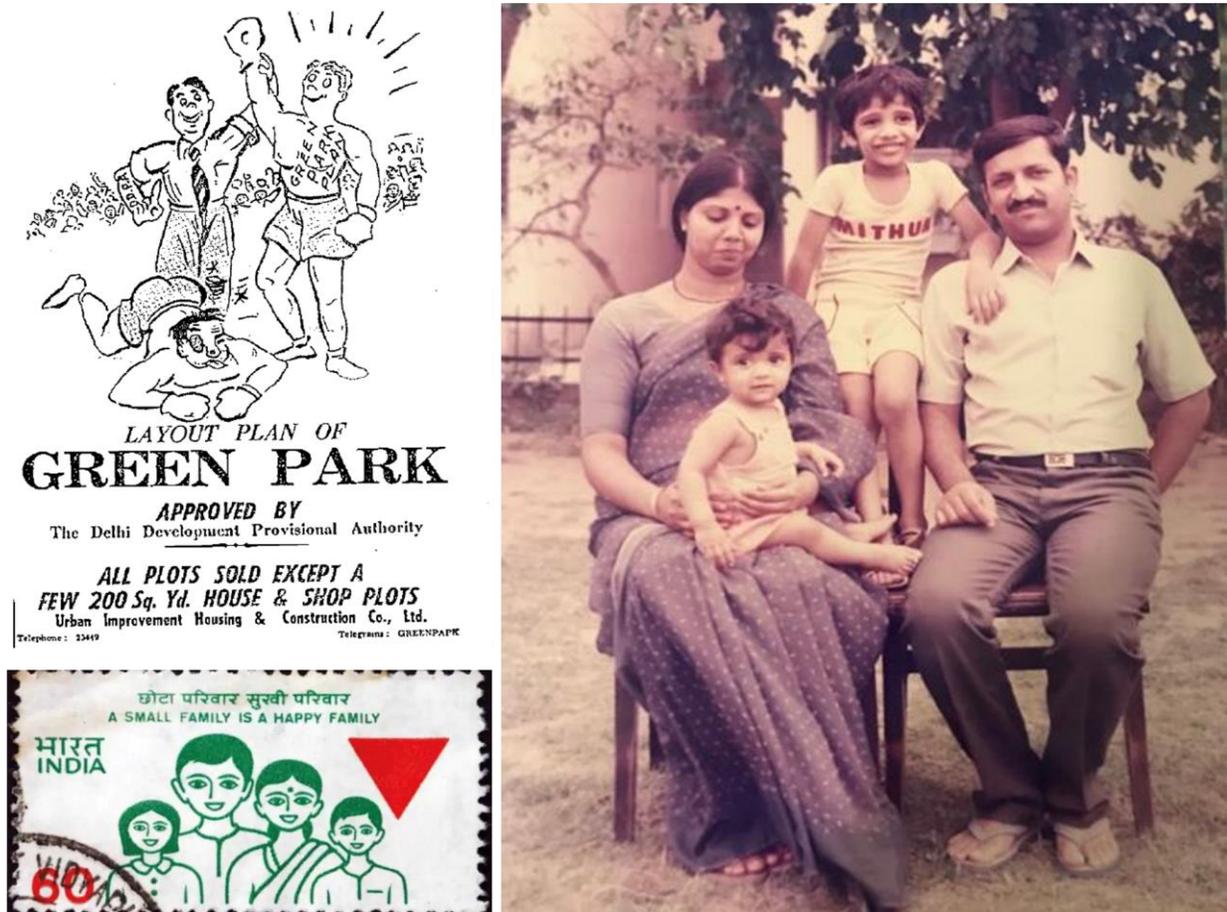
Figure 10 TOP LEFT: A newspaper advert for new plots in South Delhi; BOTTOM LEFT: Postage stamp promoting the family planning programme; RIGHT: My parents with their two children.

The promotion of single-family homes was also closely linked with the 'neo-Malthusian' promotion of the small nuclear family through various government family planning programs, such as the '*Hum do Hamare Do*' campaign (Appleton, 2019), an effort to limit population growth through birth control. Though, perhaps beyond the scope of this dissertation, there is a critical conversation to be had about the stark difference in the government's tactics for family planning vis-à-vis the middle-class and the urban poor. As scholars (V. Dupont et al., 2000; R. Sundaram, 2009) have pointed out, during the

Emergency[19], the urban poor and informal settlers, faced several unjust and coercive state practices including forced sterilizations as conditions for receiving legal tenure and housing. Nonetheless, speculative developers and the government alike promoted the move towards single-family homes using a multitude of tactics.

Social Life in a Plotted Colony

Mother [Interview excerpt2, 2019]:

> *... for many years after shifting, every single weekend, every single festival, every single puja, we would go back to my in-laws' place and celebrate it there rather than here separately. That was that strong a bond and my children would love going back to their grandparents' house... in a sense that was their home.*
>
> *... it took me a long while to get used to the locality. I didn't know anybody, and it took me some time to make friends. ...But there were quite a few families who belonged to the teaching community in Delhi University. So, it was it was good... that helped us a lot in settling in into the colony.*
>
> *My immediate next-door neighbors were very supportive. They were a Bengali family who were tenants in that house ... so, if I was late coming back from college, and my children would come back from school, they could go and at least sit in the neighbor's house, get fed, be looked after till I got back.*

The intention behind the formation of co-operative societies and single-family neighborhoods, was the creation of spontaneous communities, based on a 'non-sectarian order' (Windsor Liscombe, 2006), that would mitigate the communal strife after partition and prevent ghettoization in the early decades after independence. These planned communities were intended to be fully self-sufficient, with recreational facilities, schools, parks and tot lots, shopping centers, and a convenient circulatory system. But beyond social infrastructure, the intent was to foster a kind of environment where "vigorous health,

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[19] The Emergency in India was a 21-month period from 1975 to 1977 when Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had a state of emergency declared across the country.

a rich social life, civic efficiency, and a progressive community consciousness would spontaneously develop and permanently flourish" (Vidyarthi, 2010a).

However, since the inhabitation of Vaishali Enclave happened gradually over decades, the emergence of the kind of close-knit community I remember from my childhood did not happen quite as spontaneously as planners intended. For my parents, their early social relationships within the colony scarcely depended on a shared profession and workplace (Delhi University). Family and kinship networks remained strong, at least for my mother. Since leaving her in-laws' home, my mother sought the support of our elderly neighbors and relied on them for many of the roles her in-laws would play, such as child-minding. And though my mother recalls awkward exchanges with colleagues around the neighborhood parks, her description of our Bengali neighbor 'aunty' divulges a much closer bond. On the other hand, while my mother's early experience in Vaishali Enclave was more isolating, my own childhood memories of the neighborhood are filled with activities and a thriving social life (Figure 11). I had friends living in houses up and down our street. I remember playing *'gully'* cricket on the street in front of our house since there were hardly any parked cars or vehicular traffic, and during festivals such as Holi or Diwali, we would occupy the street for the better half of the day, either playing with colors or exploding fir ecrackers.
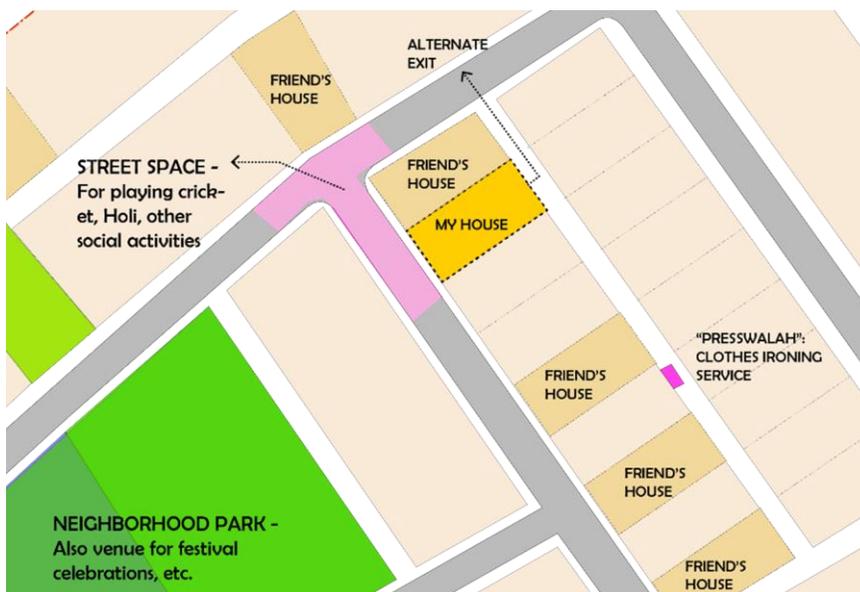
Figure 11 Immediate surroundings of my home, indicating my social network and activities.

Mother [Interview excerpt3, 2019]:

> ...*moving into your own house and setting it up with full time jobs. Along with two children going to school and starting my M.Phil at JNU [Jawaharlal Nehru University] meant that it was a blur, it was hectic round of you know routine, which was a grind every day, get up in the morning, rush around, get the children ready, send them off to school, get ready yourself...*

Given the stresses of being early-career academics, with my father doing his PhD and my mother her M.Phil, alongside full-time employment, the early years of settling in are a blur to my mother. It was physically taxing and financially hard for my parents. For instance, initially we did not have beds and would all sleep in the same room on a set of mattresses on the floor under a ceiling fan. We did not have any form of air conditioning or running hot water for the first few years. And while the support of our neighbors was appreciated, my parents still felt the need to augment household finances, for everyday expenses and to pay back loans, by renting out a portion of our home to tenants between 1982 and 1986 (Figure 12). This was a common occurrence amongst middle-class homeowners in the city and is corroborated by many of my research participants.
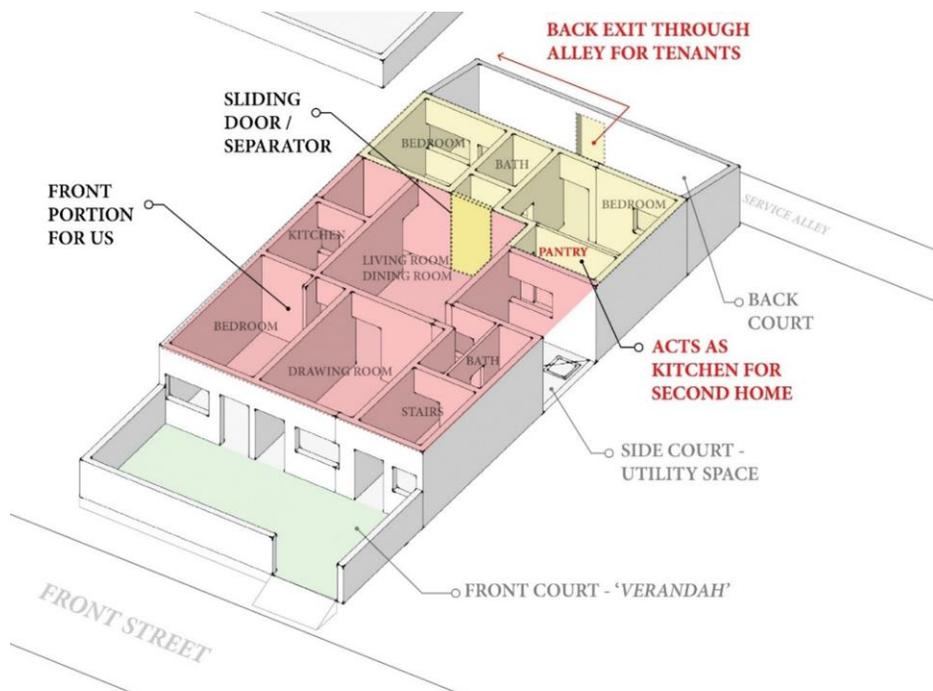
Figure 12 Temporary subdivision of property for renting. The front portion highlighted in red belonged to our family, and the back portion highlighted in yellow was rented out.

In a later chapter, I will dive further into what this means for the evolution of middle-class homeowners, their rising economic power, and their changing role in the real estate industry. At this point, however, it is sufficient to highlight that upward mobility for middle-class professionals such as my parents was a gradual process. Each step in their journey, from joint family living and reliance on parents/ancestral property, to becoming homeowners, to landlords, and eventually real estate agents, not only acted as a catalyst for upward mobility, but also impacted their attitude towards neighborhood space, its social life and securitization, ultimately distancing them from working class. The independence of owning a single-family home within a plotted colony came at a price. It offered land and property ownership to the new upwardly mobile class of professionals in the city and gave them the ability to secure a future for themselves and their children in a rapidly urbanizing Delhi and an increasingly unaffordable and uncertain housing market. On the other hand, the rising purchasing power and civic purchase of this class also enabled plotted colonies to grow denser and more vertical, particularly after India's economic liberalization in 1991[20]. All through the 1990s and early 2000s I remember the rapid densification of Vaishali Enclave, as houses grew taller with more floors, and parked cars filled the streets. Where it used to be safe and convenient to play *gully* cricket, it became an increasingly hazardous and cumbersome experience involving complaints from neighbors and a decreasing turnout among friends. Similarly, where once the streets were practically devoid of cars, allowing chance encounters with neighbors over the boundary wall (Fig 8), there were disputes erupting over on-street parking space as single-family homes started turning into buildings with multiple dwelling units.

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[20] The economic liberalization in India refers to the series of policy changes aimed at opening up the country's economy to the world, with the objective of making it more market-oriented and consumption-driven. The reform process had significant effects on the Indian economy, leading to an increase in foreign investment and a shift towards a more services-oriented economy.
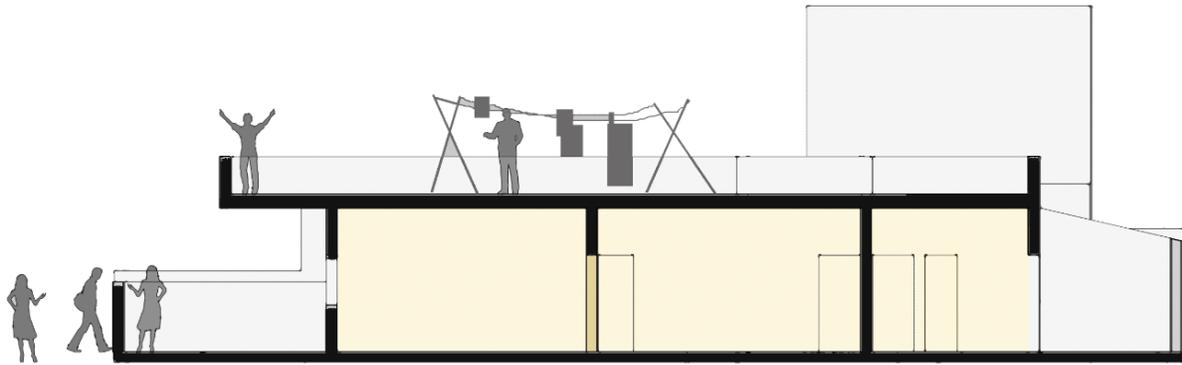
Figure 13 Section of our single-storey house showing the front and back yards, as well as the relationship with the street, with a low boundary wall. Even the terrace space was actively used for clothes drying and other activities and had a close relationship with the street as well.

Growth, Densification and the Inevitable

Our family got their first car in 1988 (Figure 14), and though it was not the first car on our street, the number of vehicles grew rapidly in the decades that followed. There was also a two-wheeler at home (Figure 14), which was the main mode of commute for my father to East Delhi where his college was. My mother, on the other hand, used public transport (initially bus, then the Metro[21]) to commute. The car was mainly used for family outings and weekend visits to my grandparents' house. Initially, my elder brother and I were ferried to school by bus, but as my brother entered medical school, he demanded his own mode of travel and was granted a motorbike by our parents. Eventually both my brother and I left home for higher education and never returned, but in the many other cases on our street, the second generation continued to live in the same house or built another floor for their own family, while adding vehicles to the premises.

This was a common sight in Vaishali Enclave. Typically, each household along the street had at least one car (if not more) and perhaps one or two two-wheelers. And though some cars,

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[21] The Delhi Metro is a mass rapid transit (MRT) system which serves Delhi and its adjoining satellite cities. With a total length of 350.42 kilometers (217.74 miles), it is India's largest and busiest metro rail system with over 4,300 trips daily. Construction began in 1998, and the first elevated section (Shahdara to Tis Hazari), the Red Line, opened on 25 December 2002, which is what my mother used for her commute.

such as our Maruti Omni, had a short enough wheelbase to fit within our front setback/*verandah* (as may be seen in the section in Figure 13) which acted partly as a driveway, many other cars along the street ended being parked outside the houses. Some other houses still had lawns instead of paved verandahs, or had more than one car, or had shorter setbacks after redeveloping the property. All these seemingly different conditions, based on individual decisions made by each homeowner, continued to foster the takeover of street space by parked cars.

Figure 14 LEFT: Out first car; a Maruti Omni, 1988. RIGHT: One of our two-wheelers in our verandah.

Changes in the mobility profile of the neighborhood were accompanied by rapid changes to the built environment, as many houses in the colony built additional floors, to rent out or sell, or to accommodate the families of the next generation. Much of this was enabled by the government's decision to facilitate 'leasehold' to 'freehold' conversions for most property in the city. According to an Administrative Order (No. J-20011 /12/77-LII, dated 14th February 1992 – hitherto called the Freehold Order) by the Ministry of Urban Development, several categories of residential property were allowed/encouraged to convert their tenure status from leasehold to freehold. This meant that homeowners who were previously tied to a sublease agreement with the government, as was the case with most property, could pay conversion charges (which were nominal in relation to the land value) and gain outright ownership of their property. For many residents in Vaishali Enclave and other colonies, this

enabled them to build higher, subdivide their property for intergenerational use or distribute as inheritance, or capitalize on their land by selling the property or parts of it.

Another factor that catalyzed the sale and purchase of residential property before, and even after the Freehold Order, was the 'Power of Attorney Sales'[22] method. Typically, any legal transfer of 'immovable property or instrument' under *The Transfer of Property Act*, 1882, has two major steps; a) a lawful transaction between two (competent) parties and, b) the registration of said property (under the name of the new owner) with the appropriate Registrar or Sub-Registrar, under the *Indian Registration Act*, 1908. While the ability to freely exchange property was facilitated by the Freehold Order, the registration of these properties with relevant authorities is a tedious, time-consuming, and often fraught process. Thus, several property deals sought to sidestep the issue by exchanging money on the basis of a General Power of Attorney (POA) which effectively empowered the buyer to have full authority over the property in perpetuity, including the right to sell.

This practice, however, also led to several informal and extra-legal practices in the exchange of property. For instance, there were rumors in our colony that 'businesspeople' were buying out property by paying significantly higher rates than the 'circle rates'[23] issued by the Revenue Department, much of it paid as an untaxed lumpsum, or in 'black'[24], a common

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[22] The Power of Attorney Sales' as a method of property transfer was evolved by lawyers and document writers in Delhi, initially to overcome certain restrictions on transfer of flats built by the DDA. Within this system the allottee/holder of the flat, on receiving the agreed consideration, would deliver the possession of the flat to the purchaser and execute the following documents:(a) An Agreement of sale confirming the terms of the sale, delivery of possession and payment of full consideration and undertaking to execute any document when required in future. (b) An Irrevocable General Power of Attorney in favor of the purchaser or his nominee authorizing him to manage, deal with and dispose of the property without reference to the vendor. (c) A will bequeathing the property to the purchaser as safeguard against the consequences of death of the vendor before transfer. This method of sale and purchase was not restricted to DDA property alone, and swiftly became the default mode of transfer of property for all freehold properties.

[23] Circle Rates are the minimum value assigned by the state to instruments (immovable property) in much of North India. It is intended as a guide to buyers who want to purchase land or property, to ensure they pay fair value for a given property. Circle rates also affect the amount the buyer has to pay as stamp duty and registration fee. In Delhi, circle rates are issued by the Revenue Department, Government of the National Capital Territory of Delhi, under sections 27 and 47A of the Indian Stamp Act, 1899 and under the provisions of rule 4 of the Delhi Stamp (Prevention of Under-valuation of Instruments) Rules, 2008.

[24] In India, black money is income and other sources of revenue, on which taxes have not been paid. The term is also often used to describe capital that is either circulating within the 'black market', earned through illicit practices, or unaccounted for within the economy.

illicit practice in the real estate market (Dasgupta, 2014; A. Kumar, 2017). Offering a proportion of the consideration (price) in black, also enabled buyers to undervalue the property on paper (based on circle rates) and pay a lower amount as stamp duty and registration fee to the government. This is despite the "the vastly expanded the opportunities of taking out home loans" (Srivastava, 2014b, p. 134).

Irrespective of the change in tenure status brought about by the Freehold Order, or the mode of transaction, the rising economic power of the landowning class had already ushered in a real estate boom in plotted colonies since the mid-1980s, as most of them were fully occupied and thriving by the time. During the 1990s, two houses on the opposite side of our street were sold to and rebuilt by 'businesspeople', as my parents and other neighbors called them. This is my first memory of the changing demographic profile of the colony. Up until then all our neighbors were either teachers themselves or were renting from teachers who had moved elsewhere. Through the decades that followed, however, several properties in the colony were either sold off to buyers outside the teaching community, or to builders who could speculate on the skyrocketing real estate prices across the area in general. This was particularly significant given that outside of Vaishali Enclave, much of Northwest Delhi was occupied by merchants and trading communities, such as the *baniyas*[25], who had moved from older parts of the city. Cooperative societies with strict membership criteria that led to cohesive communities, were starting to transform as free exchange of property enabled people to move-in and -out, thereby diversifying the demographics. And while this transformative period of building and property exchange promoted an intermingling of populations hitherto segregated based on membership to cooperative societies, it also signaled a consolidation of class status and furthered disparities between those who could afford to participate in the real estate market and those who could not.

The heightened building activity also supported the rise of builders, and the circulation of speculative capital within plotted colonies. In contrast to the first wave of house building,

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[25] *Bania* (also spelled Baniya, Banya, Vaniya, Vani, Vania and Vanya) is a mercantile caste mainly from Indian states of Gujarat and Rajasthan, with strong diasporic communities in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Maharashtra and other northern states. Traditionally, the main occupations of the community are merchants, bankers, moneylenders, and owners of commercial enterprises. ('Bania (Caste)', 2024)

where new landowners such as my parents essentially built houses by themselves, now owners increasingly opted to rely on the full suite of services offered by builders. For instance, for our first house, my father had designed the layout himself, only seeking structural input from an engineer friend, and the help of a building permit 'agent' for necessary approvals. He oversaw the actual building activity himself with separate lumpsum contracts for labor and materials. This was also made possible due to the simplicity of the project; a single-storey house. However, with iterative changes to the development norms for plotted residential buildings (see table below) under each of the Masterplans of Delhi (MPD) since 1962, the construction project of a residential building grew in scale and complexity. And even as Ground Coverage and Floor Area Ratio (Built-up area) were enhanced, with each iteration, the minimum front and rear setbacks shrunk, emphasizing the need for efficient use of footprint and maximizing floor space.

Table 2 Building control norms for Residential (Plotted) development under each iteration of the Master Plan for Delhi.

Sl. No.	Area of Plot (sq.yds/sq. m)	Max. Ground Coverage %	FAR (Floor Area Ratio)	Max. No. of DUs	Maximum Building Height (Meters)
MASTERPLAN 1962					
1	Upto 300 sq. yds.	60	-	Number of dwelling units on a plot will be the same as number of floors permissible	-
2	300 to 600 sq. yds.	50	-		-
3	600 to 1200 sq. yds.	40	-		-
4	Above 1200 sq. yds.	33.33	-		-
MASTERPLAN 2001					
1	Below 32	75	150	1	8
2	Above 32 to 50	75	150	2	8
3	Above 50 to 100	66	180	3	12.5
4	Above 100 to 250	60	160	3	12.5
5	Above 250 to 500	50	140	3(4) [#]	12.5
6	Above 500 to 1000	40	100	5(7) [#]	12.5
7	Above 1000 to 1500	33.33	83	5(7) [#]	12.5
8	Above 1500 to 2250	33.33	83	7(10) [#]	12.5
9	Above 2250 to 3000	33.33	83	9(13) [#]	12.5
10	Above 3000 to3750	33.33	83	11(16) [#]	12.5
11	Above 3750	33.33	83	13(19) [#]	12.5
MASTERPLAN 2021					
1	Below 32	90*	350	3	The maximum height of the building in all plots shall be 15 metres
2	Above 32 to 50	90*	350	3	
3	Above 50 to 100	90*	350	4	
4	Above 100 to 250	75**	300**	4	
5	Above 250 to 750	75	225	6	
6	Above 750 to 1000	50	150	9	

7	Above 1000 to 1500	40	120	9	
8	Above 1500 to 2250	40	120	12	
9	Above 2250 to 3000	40	120	15	
10	Above 3000 to3750	40	120	18	
11	Above 3750	40	120	21	
MASTERPLAN 2041 [DRAFT]					
1	Up to 50	90*	350	3	15m (without stilt) 17.5m (with stilt)
2	Above 50 to 100	90*	350	4	
3	Above 100 to 250	75**	300**	4	
4	Above 250 to 500	75	225	6	
5	Above 500 to 750	60	225	6	Subject to clearance from Fire Dept. for individual plot
6	Above 750 to 1000	50	200	9	
7	Above 1000 to 1500	50	200	9	
8	Above 1500 to 2250	50	200	12	
9	Above 2250 to 3000	50	200	15	
10	Above 3000 to3750	50	200	18	
11	Above 3750	50	200	21	
NOTES	*100% ground coverage shall be eligible for regularization of construction, already existing as on 22.09.06 on payment of charges as notified. **100% ground coverage and 350 FAR shall be eligible for regularization of construction already existing as on 22.09.06 on payment of charges as per the notification, in respect plot size between 100 to 175 sqm.				
	# In case of residential plots above 250 sqm facing 24m and above road, and where already 3 storeys and a *barsati* was permitted; (a) the FAR shall be increased by the maximum ground floor coverage (b) maximum height shall be less than 15m and (c) the number of dwelling units shall be as given in the brackets.				

The rise in scale and complexity of the residential construction project, most crucially, meant that many homeowners in Vaishali Enclave and other plotted colonies started employing the services of builders to rebuild their homes, making them taller, heavier, and with deeper foundations. This was also supported by the rising desire to extract maximum real estate value from the land asset held by the now elite class residents. Additionally, the incremental enhancement of the number of allowable dwelling units per plot also meant that each residential redevelopment project became a multilateral transaction with multiple prospective buyers. This was yet another task better handled by builders who had links with real estate agents and property/estate lawyers and were aware of the current market trends, thus, best placed to organize multilateral property transactions.

Eventually in 2010, due to the building activity next door, our family home suffered major structural damage due to differential settlement of the foundation along most of the West

wall (Figure 15). The damage also rendered the house uninhabitable, as the main sewage line became compromised, and the staircase access to the roof became unstable.
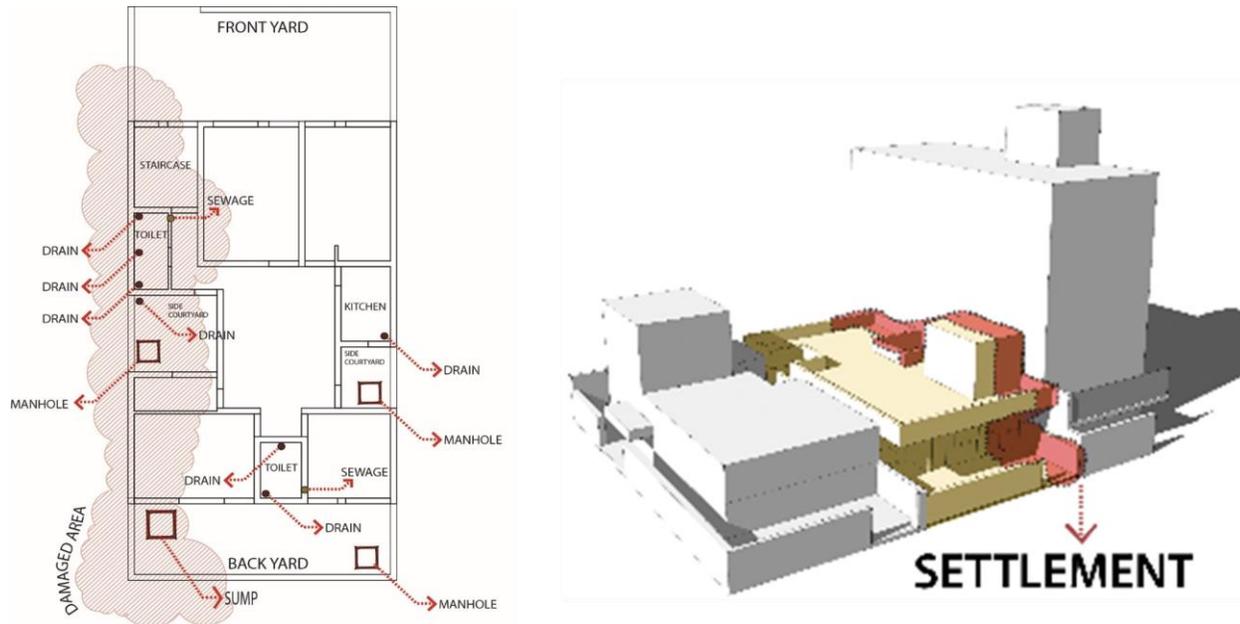
Figure 15 LEFT: Layout of our house showing the extent of damage. RIGHT: House in context with the builder floors next door.

As the licensed architect in the family, it fell to me to investigate the building permit/sanction process and produce designs for the renovation of the building, since our priority was to rescue the current structure, rather than build anew. As per the rules under the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), this form of redevelopment is known as an "additions/alterations" process. While 'fresh' residential construction must follow the prevalent development norms under the current version of the MPD, the additions/alterations model sought to maintain status quo with limited enhancement of the FAR or Ground Coverage of the property. It is also important to point out here, the distinction between the roles of the DDA and MPD versus the MCD in the case of residential construction. While it is the purview of the DDA to regularly revise the law in terms of development norms published within each iteration of the MPD, it is the role of the municipal agency, in this case the MCD, to enforce those norms, and to monitor all construction projects for their adherence to code.

Unlike fresh development, the additions/alterations process entailed minimum state approval, so long as a structural engineer certified the proposed structure. By 2013 I had

prepared a few different designs that would not only reconstruct much of the western portion of the house, but also proposed adding a partial second floor (Fig 16), that was surprisingly allowable within the norms, as long as the design met the minimum parking/Equivalent Car Space[26] (ECS) requirements under the current development norms. However, given the complexities of structurally reinforcing partially collapsing load bearing brick walls, and my father's propensity towards maximizing floor space, my parents reached the conclusion that a renovation would prove to be too expensive. My own enthusiasm as an architect for a sensitive retrofit with exposed structural ties and beams, and reorganization of spaces for a more open plan, were at odds with my father's pragmatic approach towards the (re)building of his house. Given that he was the client, my father's decision prevailed, and the next plan was to redevelop the site, following the 'fresh residential (plotted) building' permit process.

Figure 16 Proposed designs under the additions/alterations model.

Going into the permit process, I was made aware of the new Online Building Sanction (OBS) process under the MCD's larger Ease of Doing Business (EoDB) reforms, made available for individual residential development projects since 2011. Under this new streamlined process, homeowners could avoid submitting tedious paperwork and physical blueprints to

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[26] Though the term is first seen briefly, and only in relation to office/commercial development, within MPD 1962, it was MPD 2001 that officially set the first standards for minimum ECS requirements for residential development, in response to the growing automobile ownership in the city.

local MCD offices, cut-out a large portion of the redundant bureaucracy (and perhaps even the potential for corruption) and potentially receive building permits in a much shorter timeframe. Every application must, however, be certified by an architect and a structural engineer, both empaneled with the MCD, and accompanied with a set of digital drawings submitted via a specific software application and workflow. The OBS software automatically checks for compliance with development norms and generates a sanction report which would subsequently be ratified by the Assistant and Executive Engineers in-charge of the district, and the sanction would be approved. In theory, despite issues with the procedure and despite delays by the department, a deemed sanction could be received within 31 days. In terms of municipal reforms this is a significant improvement from a system that had been fraught with inefficiency, corruption, and informal arrangements between property owners, real estate agents, MCD engineers and other middlemen.

However, soon after I empaneled myself with the MCD and began the building sanction process (with a similar design as the previous iteration), we ran into several obstacles. The most significant of these was the automated check for a stilted parking floor within the software. The design we proposed at the time was compliant in every other aspect under the prevalent development norms, but the software insisted on the addition of a stilt floor stating "Stilt is mandate for plot area between 100 to 1000 sq.m." Before the existence of the software, while it was still mandatory under the MPD development norms, to accommodate the appropriate ECS based on the total floor area within the premises, it was up to the architect or owner to determine where on the premises and in what form these would be accommodated.

The step to make a stilt floor mandatory in all applications and to embed it into an automated software protocol, as I later learnt, was instituted through an Administrative Order championed by the Lieutenant Governor of Delhi, and issued by the Chief Engineer (Building), MCD, in April 2011 [hitherto known as the Stilt Order] (Figure 17). Ostensibly, this was in response to mounting political pressure to take action to mitigate the growing parking crisis in the city. As on-street parking in neighborhoods grew to unmanageable levels, this was seen as a step that would enhance the parking capacity within properties, thereby

taking cars off the streets. However, there was, and still is, little evidence to suggest that such a step would indeed succeed in encouraging residents to park their cars within their premises, let alone solve the citywide parking crisis. More importantly, given that it was not officially adopted by/incorporated within the relevant sections of the MPD, there was significant confusion about its legal status.

MUNICIPAL CORPORATION OF DELHI
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER (BUILDING)
9TH FLOOR, CIVIC CENTRE, MINTO ROAD
NEW DELHI - 110 002

No.CE(B)/2011/D-79   Dated 27.04.2011

CIRCULAR

INCLUSION OF PROVISION OF MANDATORY STILT FOR THE RESIDENTIAL PLOT MEASURING UPTO 1000 SQUARE METER

To ensure the parking of vehicles within the premises, it has been decided to make the provision of stilt mandatory for the residential plot measuring 100 square meter and above up to 1000 square meter including notified roads. Henceforth,

Figure 17 Clipping from the 2011 Administrative Order enforcing the inclusion of a stilt floor in all residential plotted development.

As a result, given our determination to avoid building a five-story structure, and steer clear of builders, we sought legal advice and were made aware of several ongoing court cases regarding the same issue. We decided to file a fresh petition (*W.P.(C) 8122/2013*) with the Delhi High Court to be allowed to bypass the OBS process and be granted special permission to rebuild our house without a stilt, given of course, that we satisfy all other building code requirements. After spending two years in and out of the court, while my parents temporarily moved out to rental accommodation due to safety concerns with the damaged property, the case was merged with a larger writ petition (*Writ Petition (C) No.4598/2010—Sh. P.K. Chatterjee and Ors.*, Ongoing). However, despite strong evidence presented against the legal standing of the Stilt Order and a summary judgement in 2014 by the court to urge relevant competent authorities (DDA and MCD) to reevaluate the issue, the

mandatory requirement of stilt floors in all residential development still stands. As a result, the options to partially reconstruct our house, or build a two-story house on the same plot without a stilt, were rendered unavailable to us.

Eventually after battling with the authorities and carefully weighing our options, we finally settled on the most financially viable, and perhaps, the only available alternative; that of builder floors. And though my parents were disappointed with this outcome initially, upon the advice of several neighbors and after hearing from other friends and acquaintances, they started to warm up to the idea of builder floors, especially given its significant financial advantages over rebuilding ourselves. The following table summarizes some of the key aspects of the finances we took into consideration while making the decision:

Table 3 Financial considerations in choosing various options for the redevelopment of my parents' home.

ITEM	COST (in INR)
Life Savings	30,00,000
Maximum Potential Home Loan	50,00,000
MAXIMUM AVAILABLE CAPITAL (if my parents decided to build themselves)	80,00,000
Average Price of Land in Delhi (approx.)	7,207 (per sq.ft)
Average Sale Price of 1 Builder Floor	4,00,00,000 – 8,00,00,000
OPTIONS CONSIDERED	
Addition/Alteration Model	45,00,000
Fresh Two-storey House with stilt built with personal finances	90,00,000
Builder Floors (standard contract): Resulting in "Undivided Share" of Property 1 Floor to Builder (sold to new owner) – 25%; 3 Floors for my parents – 75%	
Sale price for 1 Floor (approx.)	4,50,00,000
Cost of construction (four floors + stilt floor)	1,20,00,000
Profit share for parents	80,00,000
Speculative margin/net profit for builder	2,50,00,000

The table above shows the vast difference between choosing to rebuild oneself and opting for builder floors. Beyond the fact that the addition/alteration model was unavailable to us, it would have cost my parents INR 45,00,000, of which they only had INR 30,00,000 as personal life savings, forcing them to get a loan, which my parents were not keen on. Similarly, the option to build a two-story house with a stilt was beyond my parents' financial

capabilities, a condition shared by many of my participants, who did not have the means to build a multi-story structure using their savings alone. More importantly, according to my father, choosing to drain all financial resources only to get a three-story structure with only two habitable floors would not maximize the economic potential of the land, and yield no returns on the investment.

On the other hand, in the builder floors option, all of the construction costs would be covered by the builder, and an additional sum of INR 80,00,000 would be paid to my parents as their share of the profit from the venture. While the builder himself would walk away with a profit of INR 2,50,00,000. The capital benefit of this model (for all parties involved) far outstripped any desire my parents had to maintain full ownership of their land. The table below compares the development norms across the various options we considered over the years and serves as an important reminder of the journey my parents took to arrive at the most viable and perhaps only available option to rebuild their home.

Table 4 Comparative table showing the vast difference between each development option on the same plot.

Original House		Addition/Alteration Option		Builder Floors (present)	
AREA CALCULATIONS [PLOT AREA – 270 sq.yds]					
Ground Coverage	60% [Max.] 1462 sq.ft (1452 actual)	Ground Coverage	60% [Max.] 1462 sq.ft	Ground Coverage	75% [Max.] 1830 sq.ft
		Built-up Area	2336 sq.ft	Built-up Area	7320 sq.ft
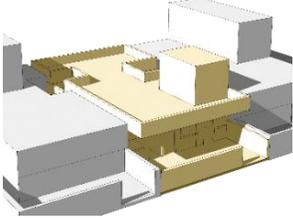
NO PARKING REQUIREMENT	PARKING	2.17 ECS (1 per 100sq.m)	PARKING	6.8 ECS (1 per 100sq.m)
🚗 ACTUAL	🚗 🚗	PROPOSED	🚗 🚗 🚗 🚗 🚗 🚗 🚗 ACTUAL	

Living in a Builder Floor

By the end of 2015, not only were my parents convinced that we had exhausted all other possibilities, but they were also excited at the prospect of remaining financially comfortable with the builder floors option, especially so close to retirement. There were other factors that helped convince my parents of the benefits of builder floors. One, that the hassle of building a house would be completely taken off of them; two, that the profit they would make out of this venture could be used to further assist and support their children who were starting out their own families; and three, most importantly this meant that while my parents would inhabit one of the three floors they would come to own, they would be free to sell or rent the remaining two, or possibly retain both in the hope that their sons might one day live in the same building with their families. The last of these factors is crucial to understanding the intergenerational logic of builder floors in several cases, as corroborated by many of my participants. This option enabled parents of the '*Hum do Hamare Do*' generation to secure the housing needs of their two children and their families, a serendipitous outcome of the four-way subdivision of property – one floor given away to the builder, one for themselves, and two for their children.

Of course, it was irrelevant to my parents, that like many other cases in the colony, their children had moved elsewhere, or had plans to settle abroad, and had no intention of living with their parents. In most such cases, the aging 'empty nesters' in the neighborhood rented out or sold their additional floors to other young upwardly mobile families, further diversifying the demographic of the locality. But beyond the changing demographic of the

neighborhood, the subdivision of property has given rise to several new issues regarding social interaction among neighbors, cooperative building management, and crucially, parking. In later chapters I will further unpack the various fallouts of builder floors on the neighborhood, for parking, and wider class and social relations. For now, it is sufficed to say that builder floors have been instrumental in the transition of single-family homes to de facto apartment buildings, crucially, without the requisite neighborhood-level infrastructure of group housing.

One instance that highlights the differences between plotted colonies and contemporary group housing is the case of attempted robbery that occurred at my parents' newly built house in 2019, during one of my preliminary fieldwork visits to Delhi. The following account is an excerpt from my field notes on the incident:

> *There was an attempted robbery in the building today. At 8:53 PM, my father receives a phone call from a local handy man asking him to come down to the front of the building immediately, as there had been a robbery attempt. My father rushes downstairs to find a group of people standing around an e-rickshaw, loaded with three batteries, an inverter unit, and a small puja box. Three of these people are neighborhood security guards, one is a local handy man, and one is an e-rickshaw driver, allegedly caught in the act of robbery. Private security guards and house-help from the building across the street are also watching as events unfold. One security guard is taking photos of the vehicle with the loot, while the other is asking my father if the items belong to our building. My father recognizes one of the batteries as our own and starts speculating which of the other batteries belong to the other residents in the building. The inverters for all the floors along with the batteries are kept in the vertical circulation core of the building in the space between the staircase and the elevator (Figure 18). As the door to the staircase and elevator core usually remains open during daytime, the thief was able to unplug and steal the equipment once inside the main gate and past the video doorbell.*

> *Most importantly for me, however, was the role played by the entry sequence, the morphological configuration, and the effective thresholds of the building in the*

sequence of events. There seem to be three effective thresholds of the building. The first is the main entrance to the property/parking stilt, with an eight-feet-tall gate with an embedded pedestrian door which is unlocked via the video doorbell system (Threshold 1 in Figure 18). The second is the door at the bottom of the vertical circulation core or the staircase room, as it is referred to (Threshold 2 in Figure 18). And the third is the front door of each floor as it meets the landing for the staircase and elevator (Threshold 3 in Figure 18). Any visitor to the building must first be buzzed in via the pedestrian door at the front gate, after which they enter through the staircase room's typically open door, and then make their way to the front door of each residence. The equipment that was stolen was beyond the first two thresholds and was accessed with relative ease, given that the front gate may be scaled, and the staircase room door is usually kept open during the day. My mother expressed her discomfort with the practice of keeping the second threshold open but given that other tenants in the building had many visitors during the day, and several car drivers/chauffeurs and house help who work in the building would hang around in the stilted parking floor, she had acquiesced over time. She exclaimed, "at least there were some eyes around the parking floor most of the day, so it doesn't feel too unsafe. However, in light of this event, everyone in the building has to cooperate, and make sure that the staircase room door is kept closed at all times."

The threshold of the home, the one that feels like the last point of effective control, becomes the front door on the landing of each of the habitable floors, instead of the ground floor entry to the premises from the street, as was the case when the property was a single dwelling, single-story house, prior to redevelopment into builder floors. Therefore, the parking floor effectively becomes an extension of the semi-public space of the street, where vehicles, drivers, house help, and other non-residents interact. On the other hand, the colony gates and their security protocols, limit pedestrian and vehicular access, extend the semi-private domain of homeowners to the edges of the neighborhood, bringing everything including the (legally) public right-

of-way of neighborhood streets under the surveillance and control of middle-class/elite residents and their security apparatuses.
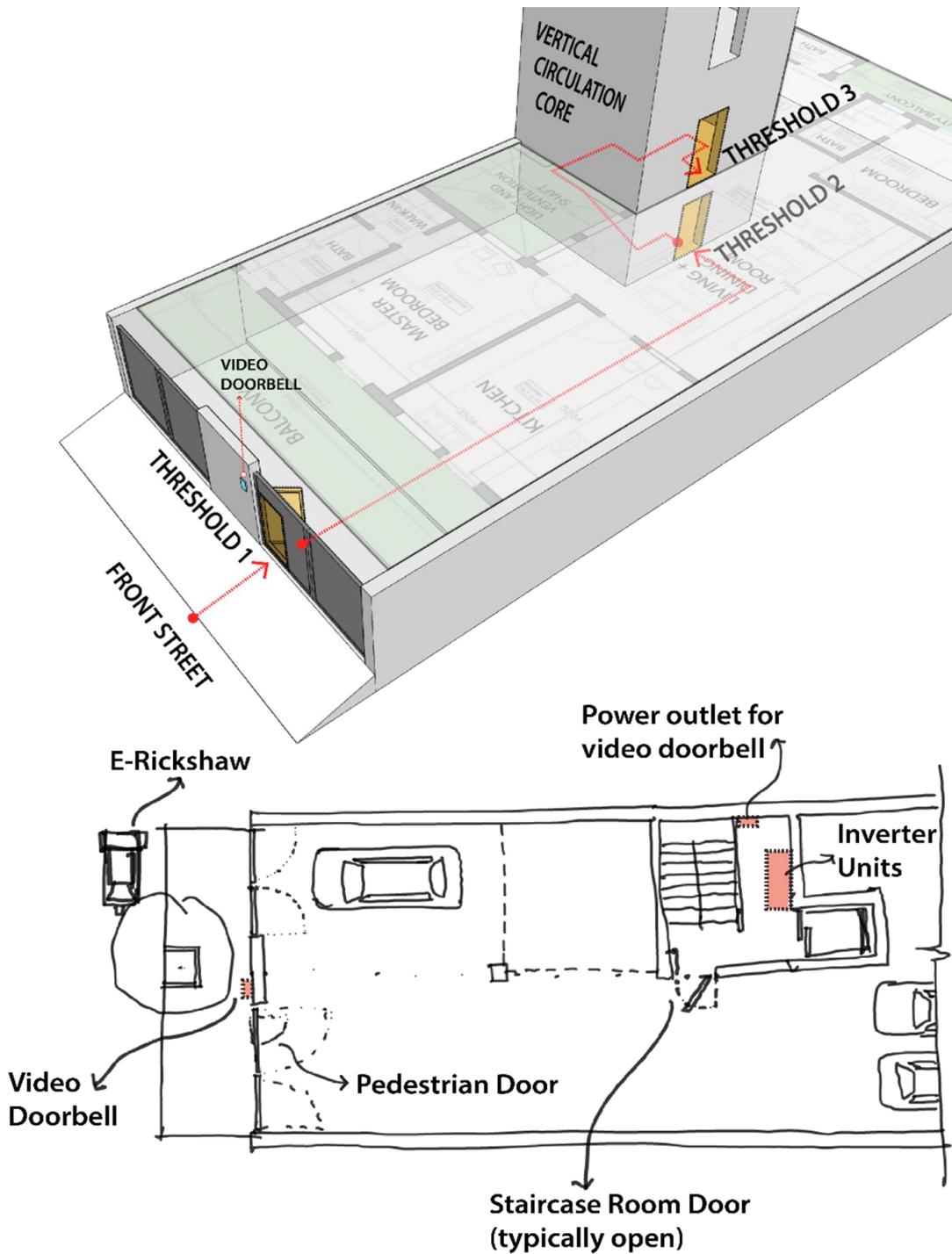
Figure 18 TOP: Diagram highlighting the various thresholds in the building and the sequence of access. BOTTOM: Sketch showing the location of the inverter units and the power outlet for the video doorbell which was switched off for the robbery.

The use of an e-rickshaw in the attempted robbery prompts some questions about the mobility futures of Delhi, and the increasing exclusion of public transport and Intermediate Para Transit[27] (IPT) in middle-class colonies. Supplementing the role played by cycle rickshaws in many ways, the e-rickshaw has recently become the answer to many first/last mile connectivity problems in the city. Given the expansion of the Delhi Metro and the volume of passengers handled by mass transit, the demand for higher capacity IPT has resulted in the four- to six-seater e-rickshaws. Unlike the humble cycle rickshaw that seats two (and is slower), these vehicles usually ply along the main roads shuttling between major public transit stations with multiple passengers sharing a portion of the hire fare, and occasionally pick up the lone passenger for door-to-door drop-offs. Perhaps one of the most crucial differences between cycle rickshaws and e-rickshaws is that the latter are registered vehicles with license plates, as opposed to the prolific informal economy (and illicit practices) around cycle rickshaws, their management and ownership (Samanta, 2016; Sood, 2012; Xia, 2020).

This also means that in matters of public opinion, e-rickshaws ensure increased surveillance of rural migrant workers and their access to gated colonies. Elsewhere, I have also elaborated on the rampant prejudice against cycle rickshaws - often called 'nuisance vehicles' (Murthy & Sur, 2022, p. 9). And while e-rickshaws are a sign of technological progress and a step towards greater accountability within the informal sector, they continue to signify unwanted social elements. In the eyes of middle-class colony residents, the expanded features of an e-rickshaw, such as more storage space, engine capacity, the lack of noise, and speed make it the perfect getaway vehicle to transport heavy cargo. There is also speculation about why instances of 'battery theft have been rising lately':

> *The homeowner also tells me that he thinks the e-rickshaw makes sense since it uses the same kind of battery that is used in home inverters. In fact, this could explain the serial robberies. It feels like there might be a black market for batteries for e-rickshaw*

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[27] A type of transportation services that supplement fixed-route mass transit by providing individualized rides without fixed routes or timetables. In Indian cities, this role is typically played by cycle-rickshaws, auto-rickshaws, tuk-tuks, etc.

drivers, who rent vehicles from larger firms, but must procure batteries themselves. An informal economy around the exchange of batteries could explain the correlation between the rise in robberies and the rise in e-rickshaw population in recent times.

Other facts about the case, including the patrolling system of the colony security guards, the checking of vehicles at the entry points to the colony and other protocols have become typical of most elite class colonies in the city. However, unlike group housing or apartment complexes, common areas such as roads and parking stilts are, in this case, not privately or centrally managed and maintained, and therefore harder to control. And while Vaishali Enclave is relatively small compared to several other plotted colonies, and arguably with a better managed security team, there is a broadly held belief about the superior security features of modern townships and group housing in places like Gurugram and NOIDA. Of course, the gating of plotted colonies has a longer history (Baviskar, 2020; Ghertner, 2012), related to communal strife around the Emergency and the 1984 riots, and certainly precede builder floors. However, the increasing separation of habitable floors from the ground in builder floors - a feature of modern and exclusive multi-story house design, as Srivastava points out (2014b, p. 141) - have seemingly enabled an increased paranoia about the lack of security in plotted colonies, a condition that adds to the exclusionary attitude of their residents. It is also indicative of the changing spheres of public and private space, and the regimentalization of access across various thresholds, all but eliminating chance encounters and informal exchanges. The issue of securitization and gating is central to discussions about class and the ever-increasing divide between the upwardly mobile elite residents of these gated plotted colonies, and the informal working-class they seek to keep out of their colonies, and we will return to this matter in Chapter 5 - The Evolving Typology of the Home.

Returning to the issue of this dissertation, this chapter offered an introduction to the complex phenomenon of builder floors and their emergence through personal storytelling. But as Karen Barad and other posthumanist thinkers would suggest, 'we start this story in the middle' (Barad, 2007). This chapter is, therefore, an attempt to start – as with rhizomes, according to Deleuze and Guattari (1987) – from multiple entry points at once. In each of the

following chapters, I will follow different rabbit holes of inquiry – each a *doing* that produces new avenues of inquiry and engages with different disciplinary assemblages. From the movement of families and communities to the movement of capital, and from the evolution of home to the future of planning, this dissertation traverses seemingly vast distances and temporalities, and divergent trajectories. But in the end, it is still about the experiences of people, their stories, in an effort to return control of the narrative of Delhi's development back to its people.

CHAPTER 3

MIGRATION AND MOBILITY OF THE MIDDLE CLASS

There are several urban processes that have fostered the conditions for the rise of builder floors in Delhi. Some follow longer trajectories within the development history of the city, while others have accelerated this trend in the recent past. This chapter will primarily focus on two such processes; migration patterns of the middle class within and to the city since India's independence; and the evolution of a land ownership and residential property regime over the latter half of the 20th century that evolved following the dissemination of single-family subdivisions or 'plotted colonies', as they are known in India. Both these processes, especially as they pertain to the middle class, make legible, evolving priorities and aspirations of homeowners in the city, as well as choices made available to them over the decades. Migration histories help to contextualize the reasons for the movement of the middle class spatially and temporally across Delhi, whether through individual choice or through the force of historical events. While the emergence of a land-property regime building on the private ownership of property - following colonial experiments with speculative development - helps establish the predominance of plotted development in Delhi, which in turn has supported the proliferation of exclusive builder floors.

Both these processes are also interrelated as the migration of middle-class populations to Delhi and their settlement patterns within the city also offer insights into the vertical growth, densification, and commercialization of plotted colonies during the decades after independence. And while these processes are partially responsible for the emergence of builder floors, the latter part of the chapter also highlights ways in which the emergence of builder floors in turn, advanced the economic mobility of the middle class, transforming their stake and role in the development of the city - from homeowners to landlords to real estate actors. I argue that these processes are emergent formations that mutually support and reinforce each other, as parallel *becomings*, whereby the mobility of homeowners in the city is inextricably tied into the transformations of the built environment and land-property regime. In a later chapter I also discuss how this relates to the circulation of speculative capital in the residential construction industry of the city.

In the first section of the chapter, I will discuss the historical conditions leading up to and in the aftermath of India's independence and Partition from Pakistan. This is crucial to

understand the tremendous pressures for housing demand and entrepreneurial growth in the city, as well as the initial factors in the movement and settlement patterns of different demographic groups across Delhi's geography. Following the historical narrative in this section, the emergence of plotted colonies is linked back to colonial experiments with plotted development and the influence of American concepts of community development and the 'neighborhood unit' (Perry, 1929). These precedents set the stage for the post-independence roll-out of plotted colonies which become a major driver for the residential expansion into Delhi's hinterland and a crucial reason for the flight of the middle class from inner city neighborhoods and their alienation from traditional forms of land ownership/occupation.

The second section zooms-in to look at a few cases of individual, inter-generational, and communal migration among my research participants, that help to further complicate the structure-agency dichotomy. Each case brings to light both 'push' and 'pull' factors in the movement of people and the role of privilege and disenfranchisement in their mobility and immobility. The cases presented are qualitatively diverse to reflect the highly diverse experiences and manifestations of these processes across families, communities, and localities. Therefore, my attempt at piecing together this narrative and in describing the migration pattern and mobility of individuals and families, are mere illustrations of 'partial truths,' never quite aspiring to an exhaustive or complete account of the city per se. Nonetheless, an analysis of these cases reveals some interesting truths about the diverse nature and form of 'gentrification,' the ubiquity and preponderance of plotted development in the city, and its hegemonic relationship with real estate.

Post-independence History of Migration and Settlement

Following India's independence from British rule in 1947, and its Partition with Pakistan, Delhi recorded a tremendous spike in its population. Over a single census period (1941-51), Delhi's population grew over 106%. According to the historian V. N. Datta, "with Partition, some 47.5 lakhs (4.75 million) refugees migrated to India. Of these, 4,95,391

came to Delhi" (1994, p. 287). However, migration to Delhi had also steadily, and somewhat rapidly, been growing in the decades before independence, most of which was in search of employment. The following table from Datta (1994, p. 288) shows the steadily increasing decadal growth of Delhi's population and the spike in decadal growth following Partition [1951 – highlighted, emphasis added].

Table 5 Population growth in Delhi Area from 1901 to 1971. Source: (Datta, 1994, p.288).

Population Growth in Delhi Area from 1901 to 1971[3]

Year	Persons	Decade variation	Percentage decade variation	Male	Female
1901	4,05,819	—	—	2,17,921	1,87,898
1911	4,13,851	+8,032	1.98	2,30,865	1,82,986
1921	4,88,452	+74,601	+18.03	2,81,777	2,06,675
1931	6,36,246	+1,47,794	+30.26	3,69,497	2,66,749
1941	9,17,939	+2,81,693	+44.30	5,35,236	3,82,703
1951	17,44,072	+8,26,133	+90.00	9,86,538	7,57,534
1961	26,58,612	+9,14,540	+52.44	14,89,378	11,69,234
1971	40,65,698	+14,07,086	+52.92	22,57,515	18,08,183

Ever since the migration of the administrative and political capital of British India from Calcutta (presently Kolkata) to Delhi in 1911, most central government jobs were migrated, bringing many Bengali[28] civil and government workers and other professionals from across the country to the city. Meanwhile, Delhi had already been growing steadily as a commercial hub for grain and textiles following the introduction of railways in 1860 (Gupta, 1981; Hosagrahar, 2012), and migrants from all over the country also came here to seek

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[28] *Bengalis* (Bengali: বাঙ্গালী, বাঙালি [baŋgali, baŋali]), also rendered as endonym Bangalee, are an Indo-Aryan ethnolinguistic group originating from and culturally affiliated with the Bengal region of South Asia. The population is divided between the sovereign country of Bangladesh and the Indian regions of West Bengal, Tripura, Barak Valley, Goalpara, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and parts of Meghalaya, Manipur and Jharkhand. Most speak Bengali, a language from the Indo-Aryan language family.

entrepreneurial success. Partition refugees, specifically Punjabi[29] refugees, according to Datta, arrived in Delhi in stages and in groups, after temporarily settling in "east Panjab and Uttar Pradesh" (V. N. Datta, 1994, p. 289). Also given that many of them came from a business background and had urban roots, Delhi became the ideal destination for the entrepreneurial spirit of Punjabi migrants, who have come to be synonymous with Delhi's ambitious and upwardly mobile middle class. Such sentiments have been echoed over the decades with respect to Punjabi entrepreneurs and their impact on the increasing commercialization and real-estate success of urban Delhi (Sengupta, 2008; P. K. Varma, 2007). For instance, as part of a series of articles in the Economic Times called 'Independence Day,' Sarahbeth George writes, "...much of the Delhi you notice today is the result of the sweat and spirit of refugee entrepreneurs" (George, 2023).

Figure 19 With the tragic legacy of an uncertain future, a young refugee sits on the walls of Purana Qila, transformed into a vast refugee camp in Delhi. Source: BBC News Archives.
http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/spl/hi/pop_ups/06/south_asia_india0s_partition/html

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[29] The word Panjab is spelled differently by different authors. The contemporary spelling of the Indian state north of Delhi is Punjab. The term Panjabi or Punjabi refers to the ethno-linguistic group belonging to the region that once spread across present-day India and Pakistan. Thus, 'east Panjab', as mentioned by the author, refers to the portion of Panjab that fell under Indian territory.

Given the rapidly expanding population of the city after independence, the two primary concerns at the time were housing and employment. While Delhi offered opportunities for employment as discussed above, shelter and housing posed severe challenges in the chaos after Partition. Datta, in his essay, describes the dire living conditions of the early refugees, often seeking refuge in public buildings, on open ground, and in religious buildings (V. N. Datta, 1994, p. 289). The symbolic Partition photograph of a 'distraught boy' sitting on the over the ruins of a fort (Fig. 1) shows a vast refugee camp set up inside the walls of Purana Qila, or 'Old Fort', towards the south of Shahjahanabad and east of New Delhi. But perhaps the strongest symbol of the forced migration of refugees and the changing demographic profile of Delhi after Partition were 'evacuated' properties - homes that were once occupied by Muslim inhabitants but had been abandoned as they fled the city and the country. As the Hindustan Times article 'The decade that changed Delhi' points out, "the Muslim share of the population plunged from 33 percent to less than 6 percent." (Alluri & Bhatia, 2010) Many refugees forcibly occupied these evacuated properties, and many others squatted illegally on any space they could find. Forced to come up with emergency measures to handle the housing and shelter crisis, the Government of India established the Ministry of Rehabilitation in 1947 with the primary aim of facilitating temporary shelter and resettlement. The following passage by Datta details the early efforts by the Ministry of Rehabilitation:

> *"By December 1950, three lakhs of refugees had been housed (1,90,000 in evacuated houses and 1,00,000 in the new constructions). Besides these, 1,100 plots were allotted to displaced persons who then built their own houses. The rest, temporarily put up in makeshift tenements, still had to be accommodated. By the end of 1951, 529 one-roomed, 3,398 two-roomed, 257 single-storey and 166 double-storey three-roomed houses; 11,159 single-roomed tenements; 1,518 shops and stalls; and 593 shops-cum-residences bad been completed. Another 88 two-roomed and 19 three-roomed houses, and 8,456 tenements were then under construction."*

(Datta, 1994, pp. 290–291)

However, the post-Partition chaos was not simply a crisis of increased housing and infrastructure demand. It was a time of intense social and communal turmoil and shifting demographics - old '*Dilliwallah*s' being challenged by new migrants, or Delhiites as they are often called. The massive influx of Hindu and Punjabi refugees and internal migrants was beset by the counter migration of Muslims and the ongoing forced displacement of agrarian communities. Villages dotting the hinterland surrounding Shahjahanabad had long since been the target of colonial expansion plans. Under the 1894 Land Acquisition Act, purportedly for the proper development of suburbs and New Delhi following the shift of capital in 1911, several pastoral and agrarian communities such as *Jat*s, were displaced without adequate compensation (Gupta, 1981; Hosagrahar, 2012; N. Singh & Islamuddin, 2017). This form of dispossession by state forces did not stop even after the British left, as eminent domain laws continued to be used by Indian administrators well into the latter half of the 20th century.

> *"During the British period about 40 villages were incorporated within the urban limits of Delhi. Since independence, their number has risen to 185. The Land Acquisition Act of 1894 has served throughout as the legal instrument to enlarge urban space at the cost of agricultural landholdings and village commons."*

(V. Dupont et al., 2000, p. 80)

Sushmita Pati's (2022) contribution to the historical development of urban villages, their deliberate exemption from formal planning, and their resultant role in supporting new migrants, as well as the larger rental market of Delhi is crucial in this context[30]. As Pati elaborates in her book, the formal planning system excluded these villages by enclosing them within the confines of their own *abadi*[31] areas and exempting them from generally

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[30] For further explication of the historical dispossession of village land also see:
S. Pati, "The Productive Fuzziness of Land Documents: The State and Processes of Accumulation in Urban Villages of Delhi," Contributions to Indian Sociology, Vol.53 No.2 (2019), pp.249–71, https://doi.org/10.1177/0069966719836884.

[31] "The term Lal Dora was first used in 1908 to define the habitation (*abadi*) land of a village. The land revenue department used to tie a 'red thread' (*lal dora*) around the village extension area to differentiate this land from the agricultural land. During land acquisition, this demarcation was held steady, and the state acquired only the land outside the *lal dora*, which was the agricultural land." (Pati, 2015, p. 19)

applicable building bye laws via a 1963 circular, adopting a 'hands-off' approach towards development in urban villages. Ironically, these 'urban' villages, once incorporated into Delhi's planning limits, continued to provide affordable accommodation to rural and low-income migrant workers (M. Kumar, 2015, pp. 127–128) by building vertically and subdividing properties into multiple dwelling units (many such properties resemble early iterations of builder floors) within the confines of their *lal dora*. For instance, urban villages like Munirka, Shahpur Jat, Zamrudpur, Masjid Moth, that are otherwise surrounded by 'posh' South Delhi colonies, offer relatively affordable real estate and rental accommodation in the area.

Despite losing their cultivable land to government seizure, urban villages have fostered trade, manufacture, and low-rent commercial development, promoting a mix of uses precisely due to their 'exempt' status. They are in many ways the backbone of Delhi's rapid population and commercial growth and regulate the rental market that is otherwise too unaffordable. And though the study of urban villages is important to understand the history of spatial injustice and informal modes of spatial production in the city (Murthy, 2023), there is another reason why it is relevant to the present discussion. The displacement of such communities is also inextricably linked to the ways in which specific ethno-linguistic, communal and caste-based groups were driven to recede into specific settlement patterns within the city, in pockets that are pepper-potted across its geography, giving birth to Delhi's peculiar communal landscape. This has also impacted the relationship between pockets of older settlements, such as villages, and the newly developing colonies. As Pilar Maria Guerrieri points out, "people from the villages, for example, sought employment and offered auxiliary services to the nearby colony dwellers rather than, as hitherto, ploughing the fields" (Guerrieri, 2018, p. 59).

Nonetheless, over the period of a decade or so, Delhi's hinterland — outside of New Delhi, Shahjahanabad and a few other British enclaves in the North — transformed rapidly to accommodate refugees, new migrants, and displaced communities. The Hindustan Times article 'The decade that changed Delhi' (Alluri & Bhatia, 2010) also offers a cartographic

comparison between 1942 and 1956 Delhi, showing the key areas of spatial expansion (Figure 20). According to Pilar Maria Guerrieri:

> *"In one year, 20 colonies were planned, occupying a total of 3,000 acres of land. Among the refugee neighbourhoods built immediately aft er the war were: Rajendra Nagar, Patel Nagar (East and West), Malkaganj, Kingsway Camp, Vijaya Nagar, Nizamuddin, Nizamuddin Ext., Jangpura, Jangpura neighbourhood, Lajpat Nagar (East and West), Kalkaji, Malviya Nagar, Bharat Nagar, Tilak Nagar, Purana Kila, Kotla Firozshah, Azadpur, Regharpura, Anguri Bagh, and Purdah Garden."*

(Guerrieri, 2018, p. 121)
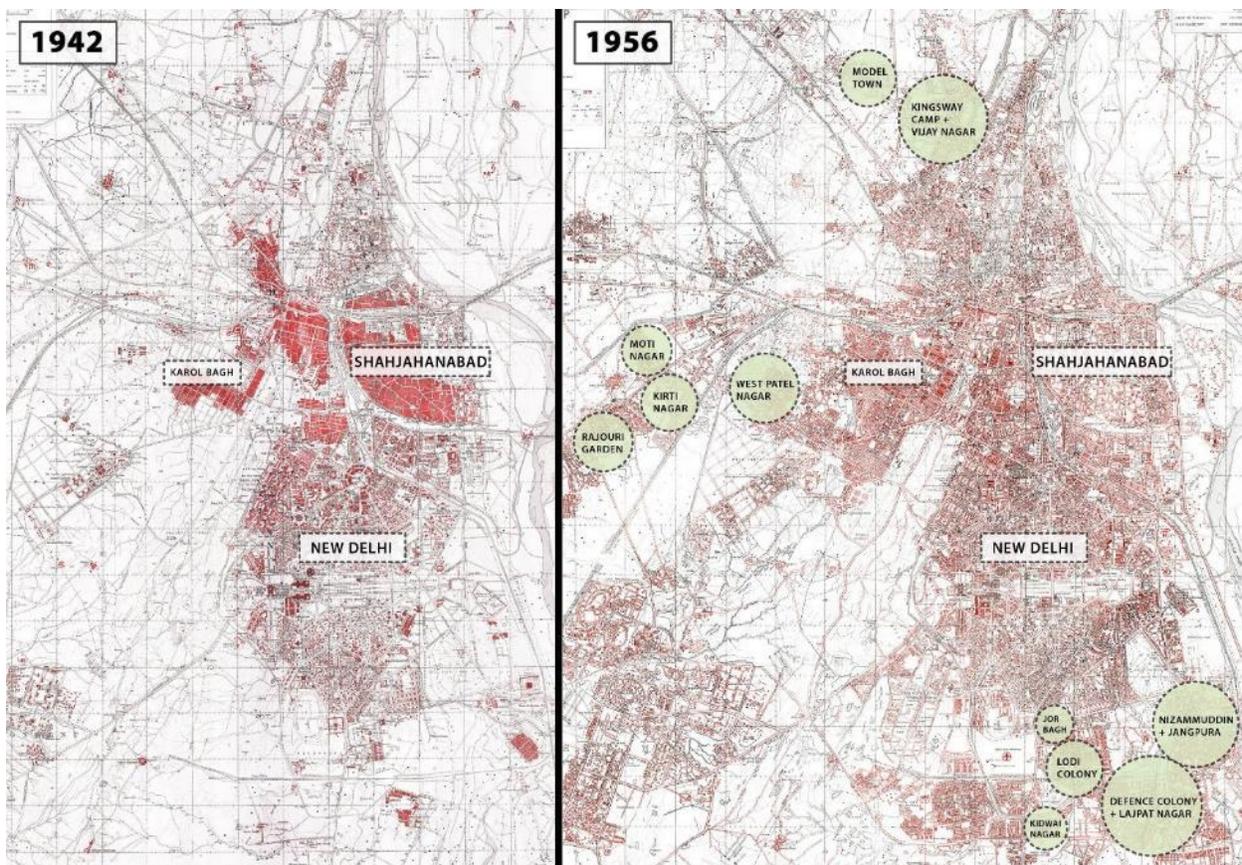
Figure 20 Spatial Expansion of Delhi before and after independence. Adapted from maps presented in (Alluri & Bhatia, 2010). [Map does not include the resettlement colonies in East Delhi, such as Shahdara, which has been an established municipality since 1931]

In cases such as Kingsway Camp (North Delhi), the term camp refers to a temporary refugee shelter that soon became a thriving settlement. On the other hand, areas such as Lajpat Nagar (Southeast Delhi) started off as plotted colonies with small single-family allotments,

but soon became thriving mixed-use areas eventually overrun with commercial activity. In the case of Lajpat Nagar this commercial activity may also be attributed to the predominantly Punjabi demographic of the area, with their much-touted entrepreneurial prowess, who capitalized on the excellent connectivity (with the Ring Road that came later) and the subsequent establishment of other South Delhi colonies. While Nizammuddin and Jangpura (Southeast Delhi) were existing old settlements that expanded with the arrival of new migrants, and in the case of Nizammuddin, housed a significant proportion of the Muslim community pushed out of Shahjahanabad.

Figure 21 Delhi Urban Area projected development plan. (Delhi Development Authority, 1962)

As mentioned before, with the augmentation of central government offices, Delhi also became a hub for young professionals and civil servants who first rented accommodation in older, central neighborhoods (such as Karol Bagh), but later built their own houses in the expanding South, Northeast and Northwest Delhi, mostly consisting of emerging plotted colonies and new housing estates. Increasingly, what might be termed the core of Delhi saw a reduction in residential density, even as 'peripheral' areas at the time started growing rapidly; what Dupont calls a "centrifugal pattern of urban growth" (V. Dupont, 2000, p. 231). This pattern of urban expansion was also reflected in the first official Masterplan of Delhi (MPD) in 1962 (Delhi Development Authority, 1962), as shown in the projected 'Delhi Urban Area' development plan shown above (Figure 21).

Plotted Colonies and the Emergence of a Land-Property Regime

The planning and eventual urbanization of vast tracts of Delhi's hinterland (to the extent that Fig. 2 shows) also entailed a major restructuring of land ownership and use and its assimilation into Delhi's urbanizable limits, at a scale that had never been attempted before. In fact, prior to its consolidation under a single masterplan, Delhi's development had been fragmented and divided across various jurisdictions, with widely contrasting approaches applied to the 'indigenous' city (Shahjahanabad) and colonial settlements (Civil Lines, Cantonment, and later New Delhi). The Delhi Improvement Trust (DIT) was established in 1936 with the express purpose of introducing modern 'rational planning' to the indigenous city. However, according to Hosagrahar, it was often proclaimed that, "'rationally' planned neighborhoods based on 'scientific' calculations regarding density with predictable lots, designs, and uses were not possible in the walled city or even in the spontaneous and rapidly growing enclaves just outside the walls" (2012, p. 144).

Efforts to consolidate and comprehensively plan and integrate the two 'cities' between the 1930s and 1950s were fraught with piecemeal interventions - such as the planning of the

Western Extension Area, or the consolidation of *nazul*[32] properties (Hosagrahar, 2012; Mehra, 2013). After independence, however, there was a concerted effort to centralize urban development under the aegis of a single authority. This led to the formulation of the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) with its vast planning purview and sweeping land acquisitions, as well as the first Master Plan of the country in 1962 (V. Dupont, 2004, p. 160), which superseded the Interim General Plan for Greater Delhi (Town and Country Planning Organization, 1956). As a result:

> *"By 1961, Delhi expanded to 326.55 km^2 with a decennial growth rate of about 62% in response to the planning interventions following the enactment of the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) Act, 1957."*

(Ahmad et al., 2013, pp. 644)

Beyond the sheer overarching power of the DDA, the model(s) of planning and land development it adopted were rooted in, and may be traced back to, several 'modern' interventions, forms of knowledge and technology transfer by the colonial government and by American planners from the late 19th to the middle of the 20th century.

Systems of land survey, titling, and acquisition by the British negotiated with and transformed pre-existing land occupation, revenue, and ownership models, to produce what Jyoti Hosagrahar (2012) terms "indigenous modernities". Fordist planning principles introduced by Western planners bolstered by experiments in planning new towns were enshrined in documents such as the MPD 1962. American community development models, such as Clarence Perry's ideal 'neighborhood unit' (Perry, 1929), were powerful planning ideas that shaped a generation of town planners (Banerjee & Baer, 1984; Vidyarthi, 2010b). This then became one of the primary modes of residential development, further changing the relationship between dwelling and property, enforcing the concept of single-family homes.

The segregation of the indigenous city from the colonial settlements had, for a time, kept the two cities apart. However, with the expansion and development of extramural areas these

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[32] Land and properties formerly belonging to the Mughal rulers which was transferred to the colonial government. However, this process was complex and entailed

worlds started colliding and the boundaries between them blurred. Jyoti Hosagrahar (2012), for instance, closely follows several colonial interventions within Shahjahanabad and outside its walls through the latter half of the 19th and early 20th centuries, highlighting the introduction of modern urban planning, the development of modern infrastructure, and the resultant changes in land and property relationships. Early forms of plotting for residential and private use ranged from the redevelopment of the Southeast portion of the Walled City, as in the case of Daryaganj, and other speculative expansions outside the walled city, such as Clarkegunj – a case I have explored elsewhere in detail (Murthy, 2023) (Figure 22).
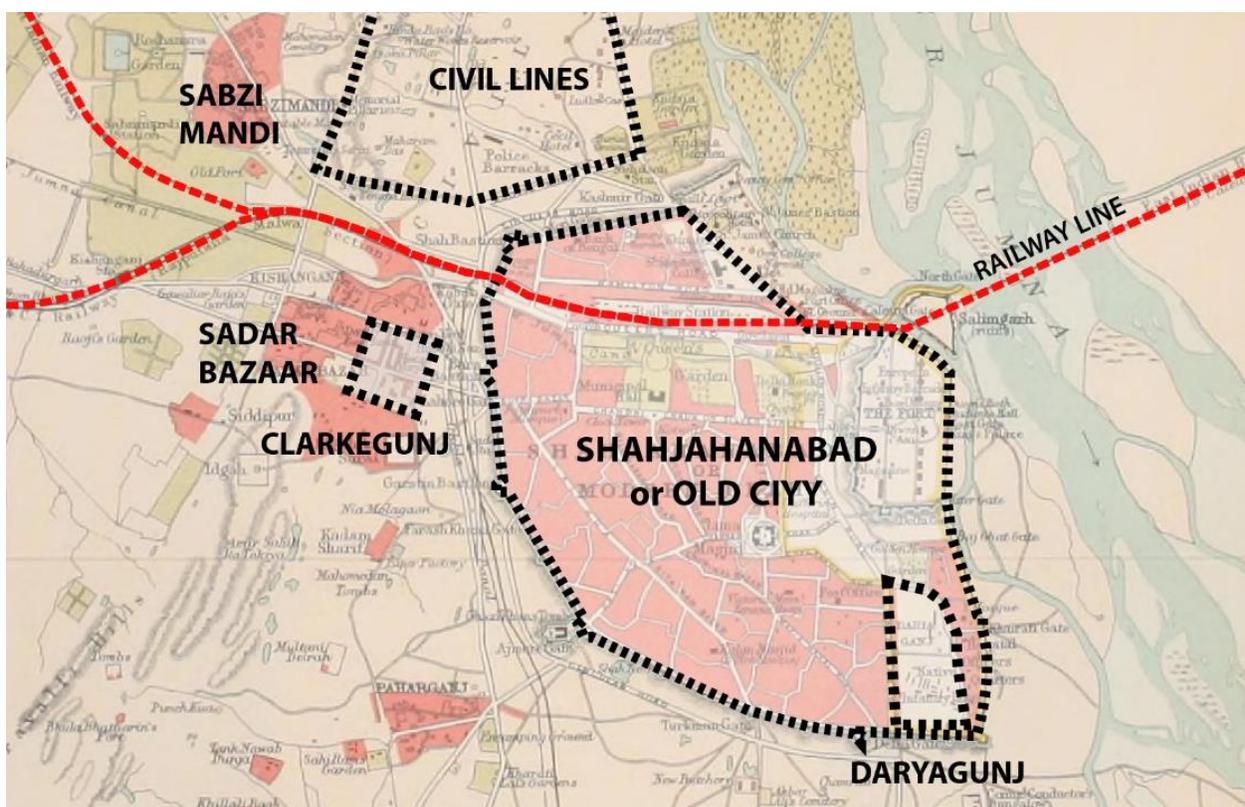
Figure 22 1911 map of Shahjahanabad and the beginnings of modern Delhi, showing early suburbs and the new planned areas. Source: Wikipedia, John Murray, distributed under a CC-BY 2.0 license.

After the failure of the Revolt of 1857, the southeast corner of Shahjahanabad, known as Daryaganj was occupied by the British military as part of security measures to prevent future uprisings. This was eventually vacated in 1908, as the cantonment was moved to the Ridge (Gupta, 1981, pp. 57–58). In 1916, it was decided "that the plots in this erstwhile Cantonment property would be acquired and sold for shops and residences, and a large

number reserved for schools" (Gupta, 1981, p. 192). Most of these residences were given as endowments to "European subordinates" and the nationalist elite (Spear, 1937, p. 44).
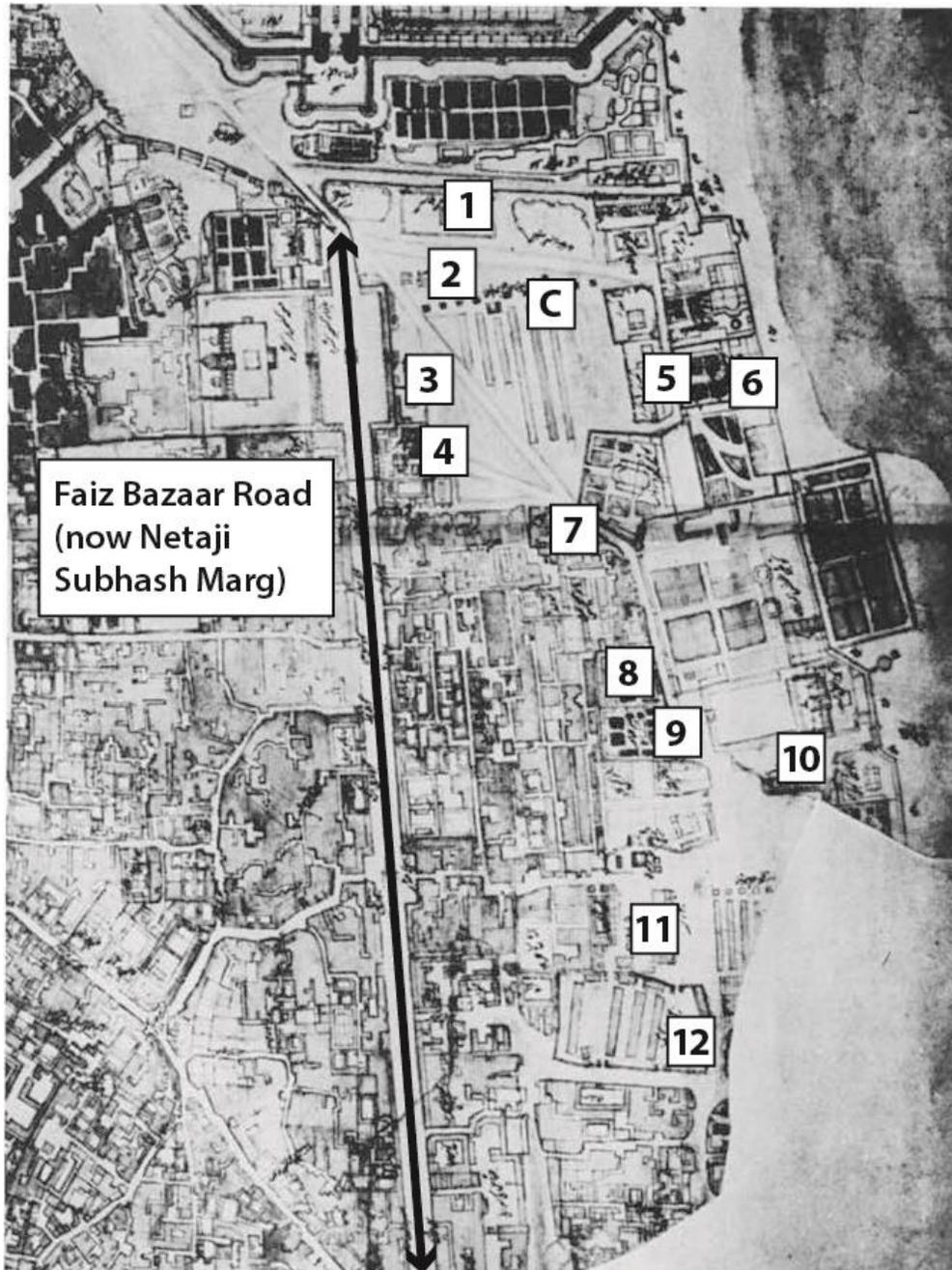
C Chownee Daryaganj
   (Daryaganj Cantonment)
1 Christian church
2 Hospital
3 Dak bungalow
4 Godown

5 Bungalows (three)
6 House of Padre Thomson
7 Surgeon's bungalow
8 Bungalow

9 Bungalow James ? sahib
10 Hospital
11 Sergeant's (?) or
   Surgeon's (?) bungalow
12 B (?) Company Barracks
   (Original captions in Urdu)

Figure 23 Section of a "more detailed indigenous plan of Shahjahanabad (perhaps under European supervision)".
Source: (King, 2007, p. 190)

Narayani Gupta goes on to describe the conditions of Daryaganj following its restructuring:

> *"When Daryaganj was evacuated by the troops …there was little hope that its sale would bring in profits. It was described as a kind of backwater, away from the business centre. It remained a sparsely-built up area; in the 1920s there were still only the twenty-four 'kothis' which had been the officers' houses. Plots were allotted generously to schools, and houses and plots sold very cheaply to private individuals, mostly professionals (lawyers, doctors, college teachers). Some houses were constructed by these new owners, especially to meet the demands of the Durbar of 1911 [the transfer of the national capital]. Many kayasths and some Bengalis (like Dr B. C. Sen and the lawyer A. C. Bose) moved out from the crowded and expensive Chandni Chowk."*

(Gupta, 1981, pp. 57–58)

The stark contrast between the urban morphology west and east of Faiz Bazaar Road (now Netaji Subhash Marg) as shown in Figure 23, highlights the extent of the intrusion of colonial planning into the preexisting patterns of the Old City. These land ownership models also signaled a departure from prevalent housing types; from the joint-family haveli type and other rural housing types to modern bungalows, and the *'kothi'* (Pandey Sharma, 2023).

Meanwhile, there was a rising dependence on modern rational planning in the development of new towns and urban extensions since the 1930s and 40s (Baweja, 2014; Guerrieri, 2018; Mehra, 2013). Several émigré architects residing in India had already begun designing new towns and urban extensions such as Bhubaneswar (Figure 24), Mysore and Jamshedpur under Otto Koenigsberger. Similarly, Albert Mayer worked with Le Corbusier for the design of Chandigarh and was invited to consult along with other planners from the Ford Foundation in the drafting of MPD 1962. This was also the most prolific period for the 'Architect-Town Planner' - a designation common for trained architects as consultants to newly established planning authorities with almost no formal training in urban or town planning. Indian architects were also inclined to study abroad and train under notable modern architects such as Walter Gropius, Mendelsohn, and Frank Lloyd Wright. And though this new generation of nation builders went on to design some iconic examples of

modern architecture, their urban planning approaches and concepts were remarkably uniform. As Guerrieri puts it, "...their foreign educational foundation undoubtedly influenced the way in which they conceived architecture, and affected their choice of reference models in planning" (2018, p. 43). "Eventually the neighborhood unit became the preeminent planning model for designing new neighborhoods [irrespective of the cultural context]" (Banerjee & Baer, 1984, p. 3).
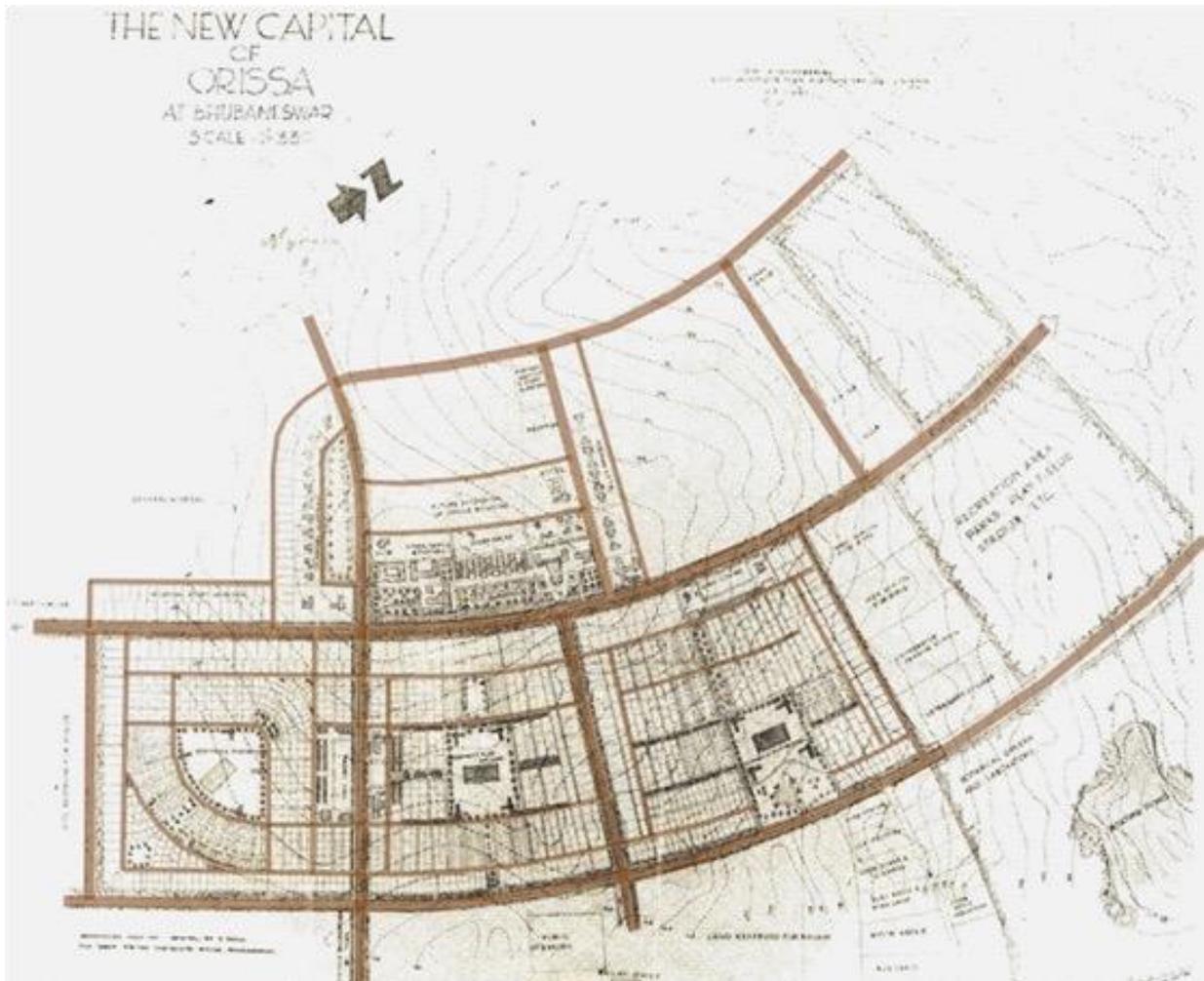
Figure 24 'Company Towns' Otto Koenigsberger: Neighbourhood Planning for Bhubaneswar. 1948.

Sanjeev Vidyarthi has made valuable contributions to study of the 'neighborhood unit', specifically as conceived by Clarence Perry (1929), and its migration to India (Vidyarthi, 2010b, 2010a). He describes how Perry's conception of a "comprehensive physical planning instrument for designing self-contained residential neighborhoods in the 1920s" (p. 261),

became the ideal for residential planning in newly independent nations. Deployed in India by émigré architects such as Albert Mayer and Otto Koenigsberger (Baweja, 2014), this new form of spatial planning was fundamentally different from other historically prevalent residential development. Each plot meant to house a single nuclear family in a single storied

structure; and a neighborhood designed to fulfil their needs with schools, community centers, parks, and shopping centers (Figure 25).

The 'neighborhood unit' thus became the default residential planning model, whether it was for refugee resettlement colonies, or newly planned plotted colonies. "Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, resettlement colonies were built with access to basic services... [and]
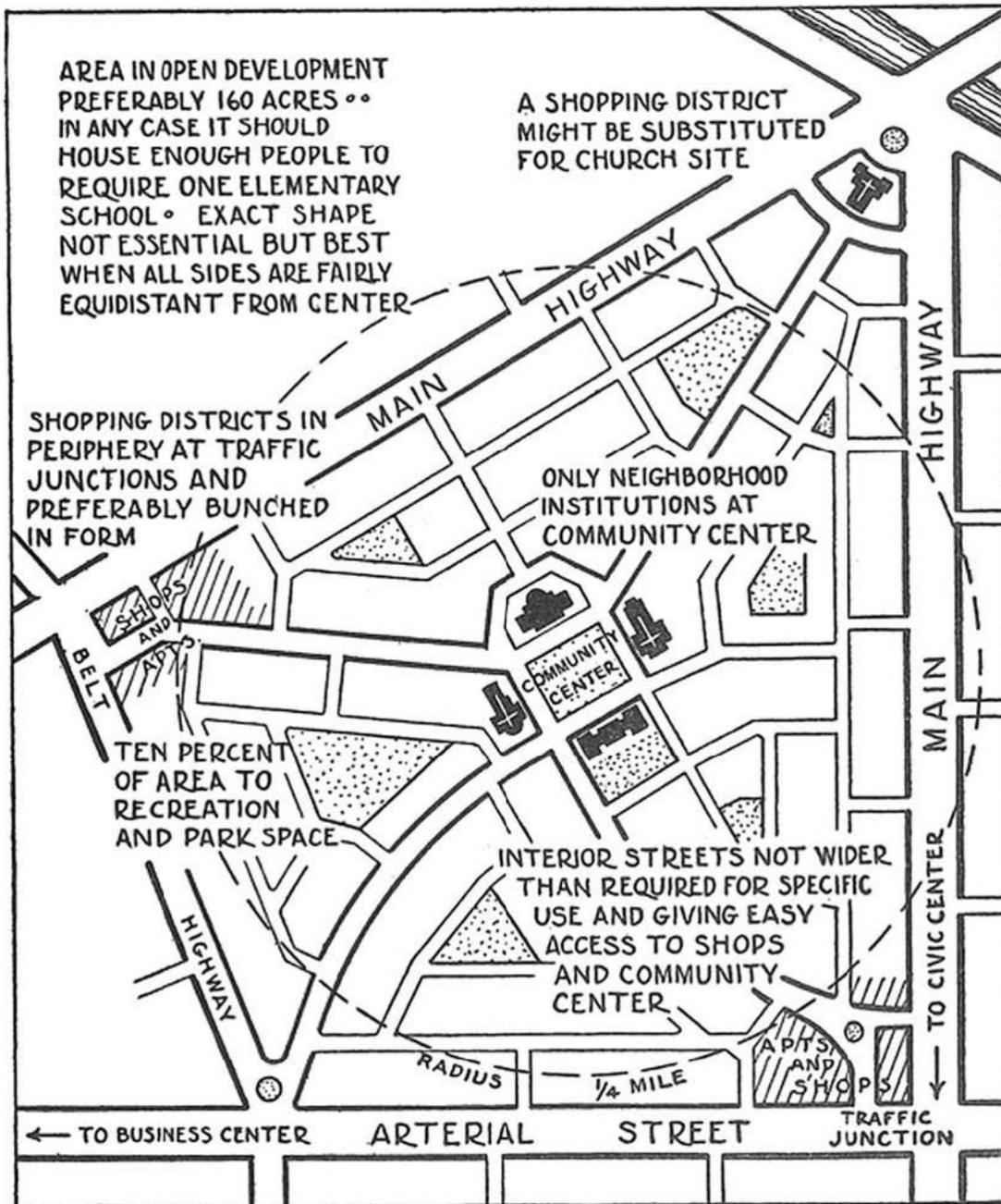
Figure 25 Clarence Perry's neighborhood unit concept. Source: Perry, C. 1929. Regional Survey of New York and its Environs, Vol. VII, p. 88.

spaces [dwelling units] up to 80 square meters with long-term lease of up to 99 years" (Ahmad et al., 2013, pp. 644–645). In the case of refugee resettlement colonies, the design standards were extremely frugal, as an important study documented in 1957 (Bopegamage, 1957), though I will discuss the details of the house types discussed within the study in a later chapter. Several colonies were also developed privately, Delhi Land & Finance being one of the key players in this regard. "For example, in 1956, to the government housing, both the State and the Union Government gave away large sums of money as loans and grants to encourage private house-building activity'. Greater Kailash Colony, Jor Bagh Colony, Golf Links Colony, Defence Colony, Rana Pratap Bagh Colony, and Friends Colony were prime examples" (Guerrieri, 2018, p. 123). "Frequently, the government only planned the streets and divided a given area into plots, leaving the houses to be built by their prospective owners" (Guerrieri, 2018, p. 117).

It has been noted that the massive housing demand in the first decade or so since Delhi's independence was scarcely met by state-built formal housing (Bhan, 2013; V. Dupont et al., 2000; Pati, 2022). These conditions led to the state rolling out vast tracts of housing in the form of single-family subdivisions with the help of membership-based cooperative house building societies or cooperative group housing societies (CHBS/CGHS). Initially these colonies were deployed through a leasehold system, where the government would lease developable land to a CGHS, which would then lease out individual plots to members of the cooperative. Development of basic civil infrastructure was in the hands of the development authority (DDA in most cases), and private developers such as Delhi Land and Finance (DLF) in South and Northwest Delhi. Eventually the utilities and public roads within these colonies were transferred to the Municipal Corporation of Delhi.

For the first few decades after independence much of the added population continued to live in Central Delhi (Karol Bagh, Daryaganj, among others), as families gradually acquired plots for building their own house through the DDA's auction scheme, or through

membership with a CGHS. By the 1970s, 82 Cooperative Housing, Cooperative Group Housing and Cooperative House Building Societies were registered within Delhi (Figure 26).
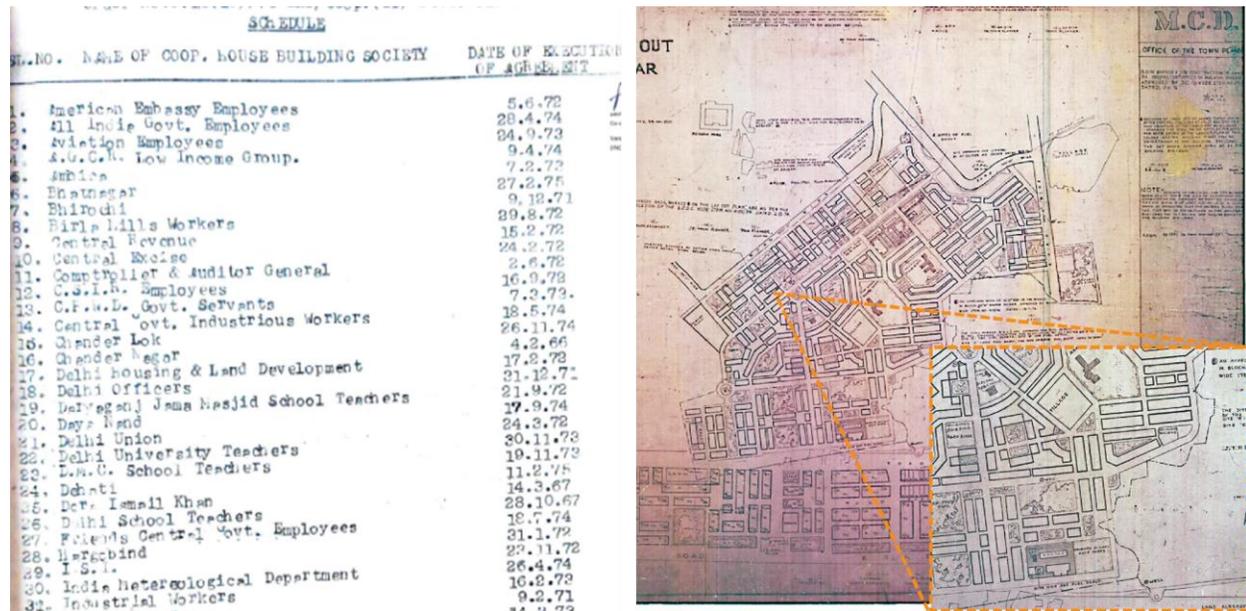
Figure 26 LEFT: List of registered cooperative housing building societies approved by the Registrar of Societies in Delhi. RIGHT: Layout plan of typical South Delhi residential neighborhood (Malviya Nagar). SOURCE: Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) Town Planning Department.

The role of cooperative societies is crucial in this regard, and in many ways unique to Delhi. As Sukumar notes:

> *"Cooperatives are most effective in Mumbai - they are used for a wide range of activities (self-help housing, group credit, women's cooperatives, slum-dweller's cooperatives, etc.) and serve a wide range of income groups, from low to high income. In Chennai, housing cooperatives are predominantly housing finance cooperatives that serve middle income households; they serve low-income households to some extent (especially in rural areas). **In New Delhi, they are predominantly Cooperative Group Housing Societies that serve high and middle-income households**..."*

> (Sukumar, 2001, p. 148)

Cooperatives in Delhi saw a major uptick after independence, for land development as plot holders' societies, and were primarily constituted for the production of group housing, construction, and service provision, typically catering to formal sector employees.

The strategic spatial expansion of Delhi's urban area under the Fordist planning regime following independence included the articulation and segregation of land uses, specifically the 'pushing out' of residential use zones away from commercial, industrial and employment centers. A significant mode of housing production within these residential zones was based on the formation of cooperative societies. These societies enabled the prefiguration of neighborhoods by bringing together groups of people with a common employer or other shared association and allowed them to facilitate their own housing needs under the aegis of a housing society. And since the land on which most of these were planned and developed was relatively cheap (or acquired through eminent domain), this made plots for building houses relatively affordable to the middle class. It facilitated the construction of single-family homes that gave many upwardly mobile professionals an alternative to renting in older neighborhoods or living in government flats. The development of these colonies also pushed the boundaries of urban Delhi, moving the middle class further away from the center.

Personal Choices and Force of History: Case Studies in Migration

According to Mimi Sheller, the "politics and power relations of (im)mobilities" — where "'(im)mobilities' is meant to signal that mobility and immobility are always connected, relational, and codependent" — are what define our current predicament with regards to mobility justice. Everything from "...the politics of accessibility, transport, urbanization, infrastructure, borders, and climate" may be thought of in terms of uneven (im)mobilities across different scales (Sheller, 2018, p. 2). The intersectional study of mobility entails a view that considers both structural and historical forces, as well as individual choice and privilege. This is line with Sara Ahmed's characterization of these movements as "...mediated and touched by broader relationships of social antagonism... [and] involve complex and contradictory relationships to social privilege and marginality" (Ahmed, 1999, p. 342).

The story of middle-class migration to and within Delhi after India's Partition, is also one of marginalization and dispossession, as much as it is of privilege and upward mobility. Additionally, in the case of post-independence (and post-Partition) Delhi, individual and communal narratives of migration, of moving home and establishing a new one, do not simply end with the migration of refugees to Delhi. In fact, as is the case with many of my participants, their inter-generational journey across Delhi only began with their arrival in Delhi. Conversely, for many others, the arrival of refugees meant an unsettling of generations of movement-free existence, thereby starting new movements. Beyond the physical movement of bodies, migration, and the search for a home, is both a collective act of memory and identity formation, and a deeply individual narrative of estrangement and belonging. Periods of communal strife during the Emergency from 1975-77, the Anti-Sikh Riots in 1984 following the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, and the Maliana Kaand in 1987, exacerbated the estrangement of communities and segregated neighborhoods. As one of my Muslim participants suggested, ongoing communal violence and systematic marginalization over the decades since independence have resulted in a fundamental mistrust amongst the Muslim community such that, "they tend to recede into areas with their own."

On the other hand, the economic liberalization of India in the 1990s empowered the socially hegemonic and upwardly mobile, and ironically led to the densification and commercialization of older neighborhoods. As was the case with another participant, it was a matter of choice and the desire for a more comfortable life away from the commercialized logjam of the city. This form of reverse gentrification 'pushed out' those with the privilege to do so, to newer, more exclusive housing options in satellite towns such as Gurgaon and NOIDA (New Okhla Industrial Development Authority), even as other forms of 'gentrification' (Ghertner, 2014) displaced the urban poor and other disenfranchised communities within Delhi. The map shown below (Figure 27) broadly annotates the movement trajectories of the cases described in this section, drawing on the interviews I conducted with four of my participants. Each color corresponds to a journey that was either taken individually, intergenerationally, or a description of the movement pattern of a community or group.
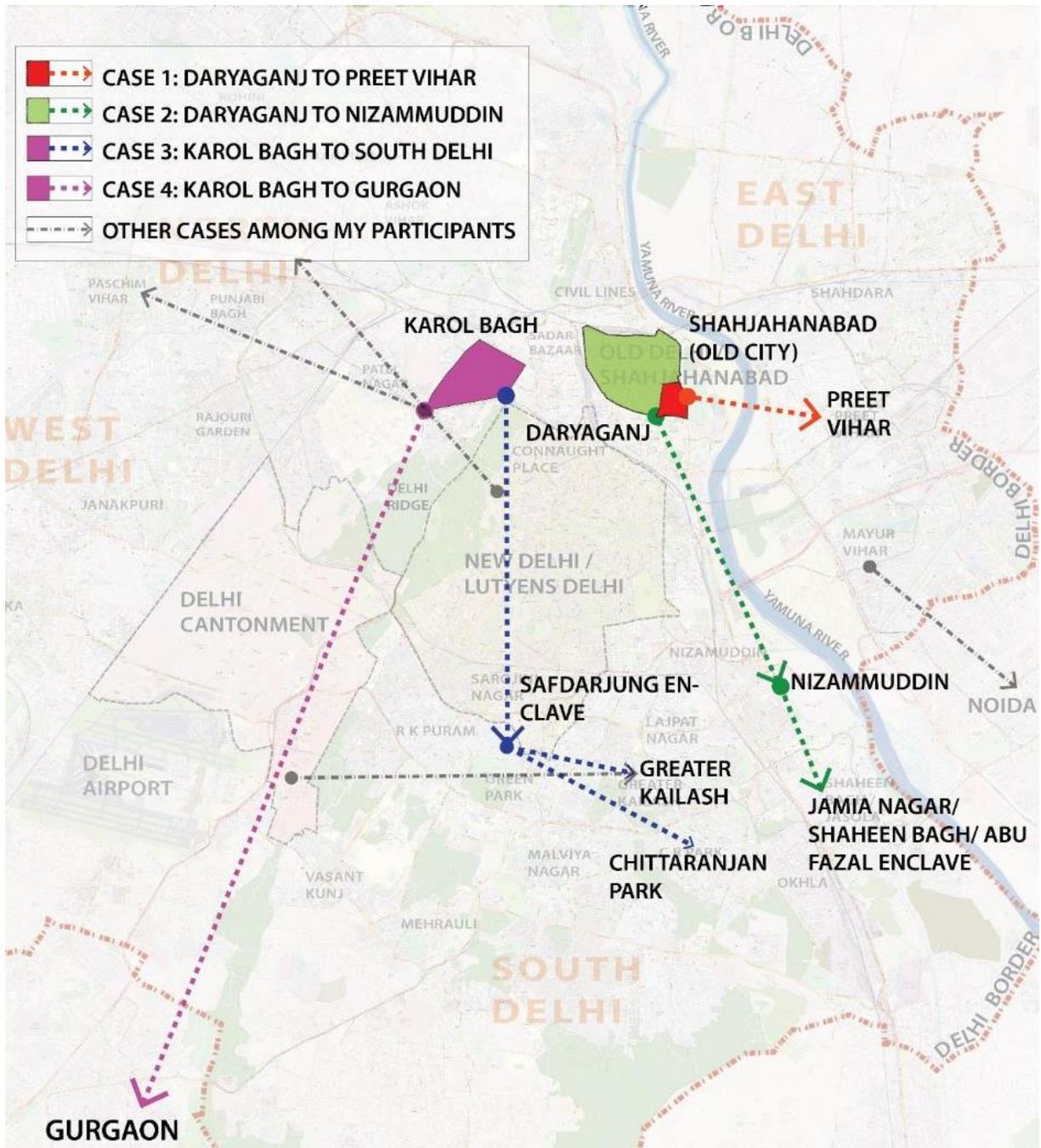
Figure 27 Case studies in intergenerational and communal migration across Delhi.

Case 1: Daryaganj

Earlier, there were mostly residential areas here. And we even used to play on the streets with all my friends, cricket or badminton. Nowadays no one can play on the streets, because there is very little residential area left. Whatever remains, has been

converted into multi storied buildings by making builder floors, and all the floors have been commercialized, or illegally commercialized. In general, there are only three categories, three types of commerce coming into this area: one, publishers, second, photocopier machine repair and selling, and third, offices.

Because of stilt parking more floors are developing and there is congestion of traffic. People have built some offices or residences on some floor. Earlier in Daryaganj there used to be only first and second floors. Nowadays they're going up to six to seven floors. They [internal courtyards] are disappearing because the builder is more concerned with the covered area, so that they can sell it better for residential or commercial purposes.
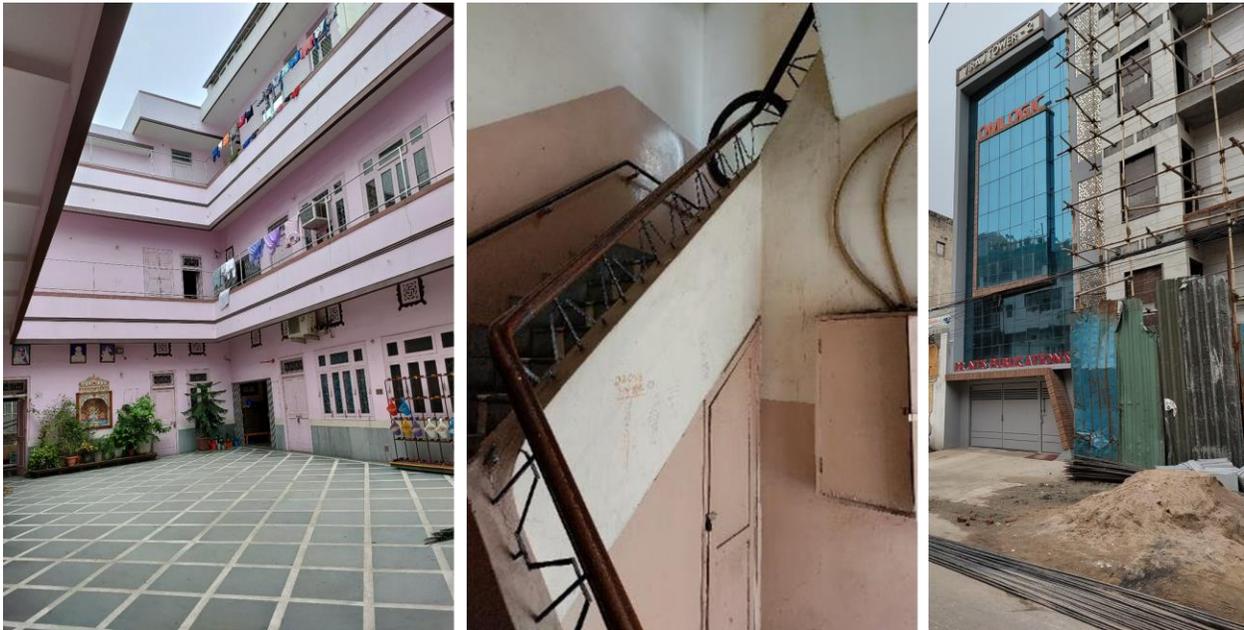
Figure 28 LEFT+MIDDLE: Mr. Agarwal's ancestral home with a central courtyard. RIGHT: Redeveloped commercial buildings along Ansari Road (see Figure 29).

The excerpts presented above are from an interview I conducted with a resident of Daryaganj (East/New), who I will call Mr. Agarwal for the purpose of this dissertation. Mr. Agarwal belongs to a Hindu/Jain family that has lived in Daryaganj for over five generations. A fact he proudly stated to me as he showed me his family photographs going back some fifty years, as well as a framed photograph of 'Dar-us-Salam' — Dr. Mukhtar Ahmed Ansari's '*kothi*' at No.1 Ansari Road — a part of local heritage that symbolized the glorious past of Daryaganj

for Mr. Agarwal. Unlike the palatial residences and single-story Anglo-Indian *kothi*s that existed in New Daryaganj earlier, the building where the interview was being held was a 'traditional' haveli (even though it was built in the 1940s) with a central courtyard open to sky from the second floor onward and an art deco style staircase and details[33] (Figure 28). Unlike many of his neighbors (Figure 28) Mr. Agarwal had not succumbed to the market pressure to include commercial units within the building to extract rent, or to rebuild under the new stilt parking mandate to gain more floor area. In fact, to avoid building a stilt parking in the process of redeveloping his historic ancestral property, Mr. Agarwal had gone to court claiming that his proposed intervention was filed with the authorities before April 2010, when the Parking Stilt Order was brought into effect.

And though Mr. Agarwal lamented the rapid and unfavorable changes to the built fabric along Ansari Road in the last 20 years or so, he was simultaneously unsettled by demographic changes to the area, and a different kind of 'gentrification':

> *There is a lot of difference between old Daryaganj and new Daryaganj (Figure 29). Earlier, in old Daryaganj, there used to be a larger Muslim population, and in the new, there was an entire Hindu population. Nowadays, what is happening is that they are moving from old Daryaganj to new Daryaganj, because from their perspective, new Daryaganj is a 'South' property, it is a good property for residents. Now, in Daryaganj also a (more modern crowd is coming in), and the Hindus and Jains are selling property, and going far away because of monetary considerations.*
>
> *…I will tell you the reason for this. See, earlier there used to be a joint family system. Now, everybody has to move out because of the scarcity of space in the house. If there are four or five brothers living in a single house, and each of them marries and has children, the family has to find space and settle things amongst them. Because of the growing family needs, they try to sell the house and get their individual share*

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[33] Art Deco style *kothi*s or havelis are peculiar and specific to the architectural heritage of Daryaganj. For more information and an exhaustive visual library on what architects Geetanjali Sayal and Prashansa Sachdeva call 'desi deco' visit: https://sarsonkekhet.in/
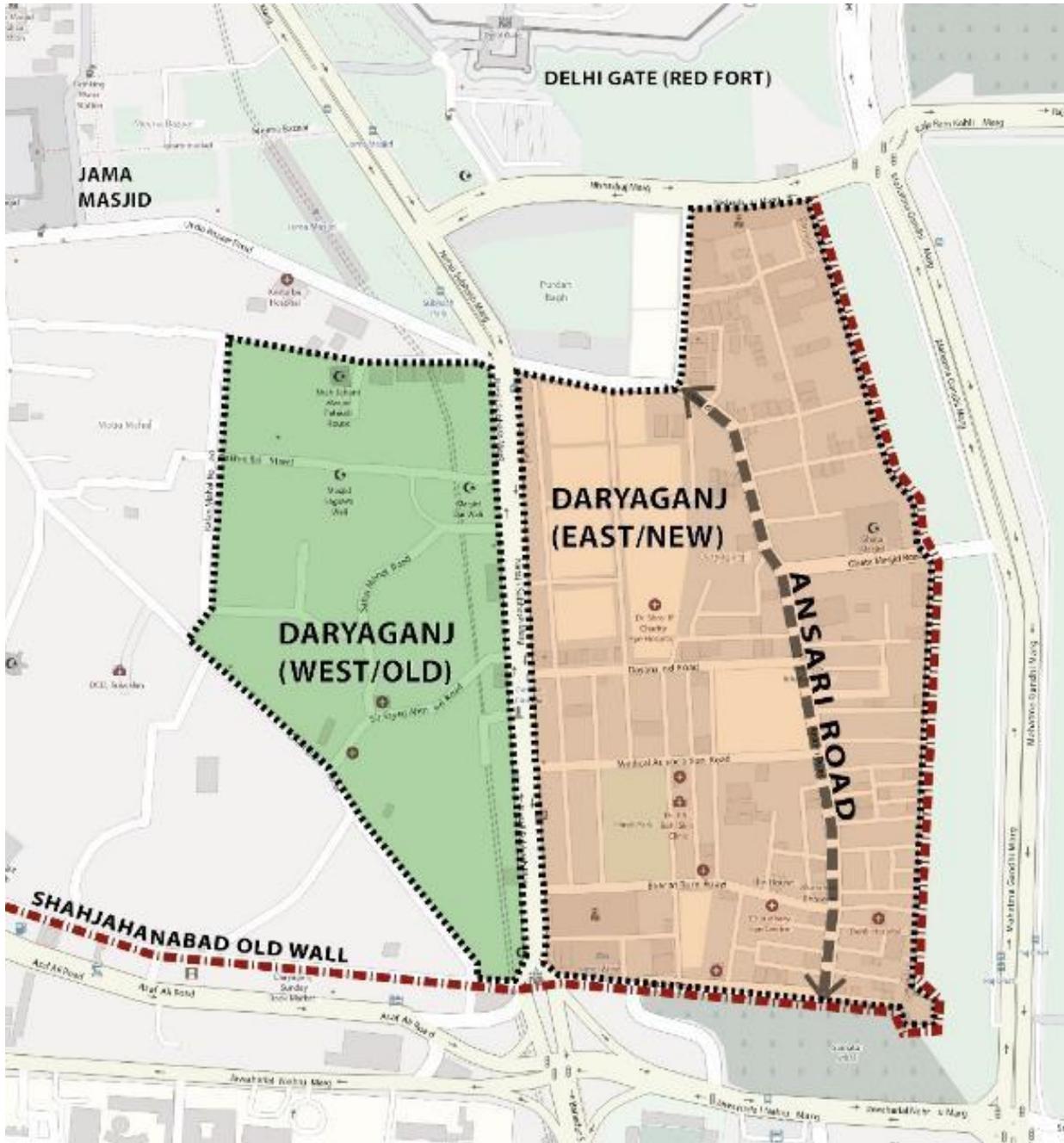
and move to different parts of Delhi. Most of the people in from Daryaganj moved to Preet Vihar in Noida.

Mr. Agarwal's allusion to 'South property' warrants deeper consideration. During the 1960s-70s, when plots were beginning to be made available in the newly developed plotted

colonies in South Delhi (such as Greater Kailash, Green Park, Safdarjung Enclave), it was considered undesirable to venture so far away from 'Delhi'. Given the low occupancy rates in these colonies and their distance from the bustling heart of Delhi, their limited public transportation access, many also felt it was unsafe. Such was the experience for several of my participants, whose parents or grandparents had purchased plots in South Delhi but did not construct houses there till the 1980s. However, at some point during the late 1970s and 1980s South Delhi became a runaway success, especially with upwardly mobile professionals, till eventually it gained the reputation of being a 'posh' area of Delhi. This is why, ostensibly, Mr. Agarwal made a sweeping reference to more desirable housing locations as "South property".

Mr. Agarwal's notion of the once-pristine Daryaganj and hitherto intrusions into its demographic profile and built environment are not simply a fault of the 'invading' 'Mohammedans' [pejorative]. His words are also tinged with feelings of betrayal from his own kind who either continue to violate the traditional aesthetic and residential character of the area by building multistoried monstrosities or have turned their backs on the neighborhood by building comfortable new homes in East Delhi. He further blamed the government and corruption within the bureaucracy for letting commercial uses go unchecked in the newly built stilt floors and other rampant building violations.

The following case, however, presents a somewhat contrasting account of Muslim migration across the city.

Case 2: Nizammuddin West

> There are really not many predominantly Muslim pockets in Delhi, as it is. Starting from Old Delhi, Nizamuddin, Jangpura, Jamia Nagar, Taimoor Nagar, etc.... essentially southeast areas. But even these areas are quite mixed, with large non-Muslim populations as well. Other than a few much older Muslim pockets like Chirag Dilli, Hauz Rani, Mehrauli, Hauz Khas, etc. These are, however, mostly urban villages, abadi/lal dora areas.

> One of the key moments [for the migration of the Muslim community in Delhi] is around 1976, when there were a lot of demolitions in Old Delhi, surrounding Jama

Masjid and Turkman Gate. A lot of people were displaced and resettled in areas like Trilokpuri [East Delhi], Inderlok [Noth-west Delhi]. In so many areas of Delhi it is hard for Muslims to rent or buy property. Then, over the years, there were some instances of communal riots, not so much in Delhi, but in surrounding states, like in 1987 in Uttar Pradesh there was the Maliana Kaand (massacre)[34]. *As a result, there has been a growing sense among this community that "we don't get justice!" Which is why they tend to recede into areas with their own, like Nizamuddin, Shaheen Bagh, etc., where it is easier to get property and feel safe.*

But this is also true of other communities, as I have experienced. For instance, there used to be so many non-Muslim families living around us in Nizamuddin, but they all shifted out over the decades. Nizamuddin West, for instance, originally had 250 kothis, that were allotted by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, back then, to refugees from Pakistan. Now only around 40 of those original allottees remain.

Mr. Ali, a local builder who mainly operates in Jamia Nagar, Abu Fazal Enclave, and other adjacent areas, lives with his extended family in Nizammuddin (See Fig. 3). Since his older brother passed, and his sister moved back from the UK, they have all been living together in their ancestral home, including their father and Mr. Ali's own family of a wife and two children. Though he did not fully divulge his family's ancestry and origins, it was important for him to point out that unlike many other Muslims who are newer migrants to the city from Uttar Pradesh and further away, his family has always been in Delhi. More specifically, his ancestral home in Nizammuddin goes back three generations before him. And though Mr. Ali was hesitant at first to talk about issues of migration, he was quick to correct me about some of the significant historical events that have shaped Muslim migration across the city. It was important to him to impress upon me his decades worth of '*tajurbā*' or experience in observing and supporting the local Muslim community.

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[34] As many as 72 Muslims were killed, and hundreds injured, in Maliana on the outskirts of Meerut in Uttar Pradesh on May 23, 1987 – The Hindu. https://frontline.thehindu.com/the-nation/acquittal-of-1987-maliana-massacre-accused-a-travesty-of-justice/article66737639.ece#:~:text=In%20the%20backyard%20of%20Madrassa,Pradesh%20on%20May%2023%2C%201987

According to Deleuze and Guattari, "the three characteristics of minor literature are the detteritorialization of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation." (1986, p. 18) Precisely since "minor literature is completely different [than major literatures]... its cramped space forces each individual intrigue to connect immediately to politics" (1986, p. 17). It does not wait to gather momentum, constitute caucuses, or organize protests, as its mere utterance is already political. Additionally, given that "in a minor literature, there are no possibilities for an individuated enunciation... [each instance] constitutes a common action" (1986, p. 17). In Mr. Ali's case, even though he spoke merely from his own experience, his enunciations were both political and collective. As the interview progressed, he was emboldened to speak his mind about the several instances of communal violence and spatial injustice inflicted upon the Muslim community. He was able to characterize for me the class variations – and consequently the real estate value of property – across different Muslim localities. And though he spoke of identity politics, regional migration patterns, and collective experience, in the end, as a builder he was most confident about his analysis of the neoliberal logics of the residential market.

> Most people that moved out did so to capitalize on the exponential growth in real estate value of Nizammuddin – as properties there can go for up to INR 10 crores [100 million]. The thinking was "I can get a property of approximately INR 2 crores [20 million] in NOIDA and use the rest to invest and grow my portfolio". Also, quite a few Muslim families have poor documentation of their properties – conveyance deeds, title, etc. – are average earners, so they gravitate towards unauthorized colonies, where this is not an issue. But overall, the market is biased against Muslim buyers. There have been some communal factors, but the logics of the market are still dominant. These decisions are mainly driven by profit and investment.

> Families with aspirations for a better life – children's education being a key factor – moved out of Old Delhi, to areas like Nizamuddin initially, like our ancestral home. But around the 1980s a lot of families even moved out of there, since it was getting congested – to areas like Jamia Nagar, etc. Though a number of the houses in these

areas [Abu Fazal Enclave/Jamia Nagar/Shaheen Bagh - See Fig.3 for locations] were built for investment purposes, mainly by the Muslim community. Land was quite cheap around here then, like INR 100 per Gaj[35], which they thought would grow to around INR 200 to 500 per Gaj. For instance, we don't live here either, even though I've built so many buildings around here. But for many fresh migrants to the city, Nizammuddin is too unaffordable. On average it is INR 3-4 Crore [30-40 million] for a flat/floor in Nizammuddin, while here they can get a floor for INR 40 lakhs [4 million] or so. For a lower budget, this area has flats ranging between INR 10 lakhs [1 million] and INR 2 crores [20 million].

The economic analysis presented by Mr. Ali above sketches out a map, a hierarchical pattern, or a housing ladder, that is analogous of the mobility of middle-income residents of Delhi. His analysis also loosely ascribes a relative temporality to their housing mobility. A resultant of the keen sense and understanding shared by builders and other actors with long-term experience of the real-estate landscape in their respective localities. 'Fresh migrants,' 'old (landed) families' (perhaps with property inheritance disputes), 'growing families,' all have their place on a spatial and temporal spectrum, that despite being complex can be gauged - and even be predicted - in terms of property prices and other market dynamics.

Beyond the specifics of land and property rates, the above excerpt also divulges a central fixation shared by most who operate in the real-estate space in Delhi. It is certainly a compulsion shared between the builder and many of the homeowners I interviewed. The basic unit of property development, market analysis, and middle-class housing is typically a 'plot' in the case of Delhi. Even when referring to 'flats', Mr. Ali was mainly talking about floors built within plotted properties. In the context of urban villages and UACs the flexibility of a privately-owned 'plot' allows for endless subdivision and vertical growth of property. This has allowed builders and property owners to 'freely' develop plots, repurpose them for

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[35] *Gaj* also spelt as Guz is a standard unit of measurement in Hindi for square yard, approximately equal to 9 square feet.

commercial activity, or a group of flats for sale or rent, or small-scale warehouses and factories, as the market demands.

Case 3: Safdarjung Enclave

My parents are both originally from East Bengal (which became East Pakistan[36] after Partition), so all their ancestral property, etc., was all there, all that was left behind. There was absolutely nothing in Calcutta. So, when my father first came to Delhi because of his job, they were in a rented flat[37], of course, at the time. A lot of the Bengali community lived in Karol Bagh, as did many other communities, typically renting. And over the years as the rent kept going up, my parents thought, "why don't we just build our own?"

So, they had to think of building something, and there were a lot of people like my father... a lot of Bengalis. Eventually they went to visit the auction, you know the DDA auction, which happened on Sundays. And eventually he was successful in getting a plot in Safdarjung Enclave, and incidentally my father-in-law got it around the same time from in GK [Greater Kailash] which was being developed by DLF.

At the time C.R. Park [Chittaranjan Park][38] wasn't developed much and in fact there weren't many takers for the plots there as it was still considered back of the beyond. One of our neighbors in Karol Bagh was actually one of the first people to build their house in C.R. Park, and when he built it, there was only one other built house on their lane. And before they shifted in, there was a burglary in that other house... the only

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[36] East Pakistan was the eastern province of Pakistan between 1955 and 1971, covering the territory of the modern country of Bangladesh. The province was restructured and renamed from East Bengal, which, in modern times, is split between India and Bangladesh.

[37] In this case, my research participant - Mrs. Ghosh - was referring to a portion of a kothi or plotted house. In fact, for several of my participants, the term 'flat' was fungible with builder floors or *barsati*, not necessarily meaning apartments in multistoried group housing complexes.

[38] In 1954, several government officers and migrants from the erstwhile East Bengal, who were displaced after Partition, lobbied to be granted a residential neighborhood. As a result, C.R. Park was established in the early 1960s and initially titled EPDP (East Pakistan Displaced Persons) Colony. In the 1980s it was renamed after the *deshbandhu* (a Bengali term for patriot) Chittaranjan Das. It is now considered one of the posh localities in South Delhi and home to a large Bengali community. It is known for its Kolkata-style street-food stalls, Bengali cuisine, fish markets, temples (notably the Kali Bari), cultural centers, and hosts many Bengali festivals and cultural events including the famous Durga Puja.

other house on his street. And everybody in Karol Bagh was like "Shudhir da why do want to go there? Why don't you just stay here and rent it out." In fact, later on a lot of people wanted my father to shift or build another house in C.R. Park, but one couldn't have membership of two Cooperative Societies at the same time. Neither did we have the money for another house. [See Figure 27 for locations]

For a while after independence Delhi's rental housing market was haphazard and inadequate to support the influx of migrants. Owing to the large refugee migration and the counter migration of Muslims, Old Delhi properties were caught up in squatting disputes and title negotiations. Outside of Old Delhi/Shahjahanabad and the colonial settlements of Lutyens Delhi and Civil Lines in North Delhi, there were few established neighborhoods. Despite the Ministry of Rehabilitation's efforts at keeping up with the housing demand, private rental accommodation within these neighborhoods had to take on the deficit. The bulk of such accommodation was to be found in colonies such as Karol Bagh (and Western Extension Area outside of Shahjahanabad) or Lajpat Nagar, which was one of the earliest permanent refugee resettlement colonies (South Delhi).

Karol Bagh, being the older and more established neighborhood, had several houses built up to two or two and a half stories. The 'half-story' *barsati*[39] (Figure 30) - a common feature among early plotted colonies - is usually equipped with two to three rooms, a bathroom, and a pantry[40]. This was typically meant to house an extended family unit, or used as servants' quarters, or as was the case with Mrs. Ghosh's family, rented out to fresh migrants and starter families. And though the first Masterplan for Delhi (MPD) in 1962 acknowledged this form of development and officially recognized the term, defining plotted development as "two storeyed buildings... plus an optional provision of *barsati* floor at the top" (Delhi

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[39] *Barsati* is a Hindi term used to describe a "covered space on the terrace used for shelter during rains" (MPD, 1962); *Mamti* is similarly another Hindi term used to describe a "A cabin like structure with a covering roof over a staircase and its landing built to enclose only the stairs for the purpose of providing protection from weather but normally not used for human habitation". Though the distinction between the two is clear under law, the former meant for the habitation of a third family for instance, and the latter meant purely for protection from the elements, in practice this distinction is often blurred through rampant violations.
[40] This continues to be a stipulation under building bye laws to officially avoid the designation of a 'habitable floor'. Though in practice, after receiving building approval, the pantry is often used as a kitchen anyway, making the *barsati* usable as a fully functional dwelling unit.

Development Authority, 1962, p. 56), it also expressly forbade the use of the *barsati* as an independent dwelling unit stating "the number of dwelling units on a plot will be reckoned the same as the number of floors [up to two]" (p. 55). This, however, was scarcely followed in practice. Ultimately, unlike apartments that were typically government owned or allotted under a leasehold tenure, privately built *kothi*s had the flexibility to accommodate different configurations of dwelling units and provided an opportunity for homeowners to augment
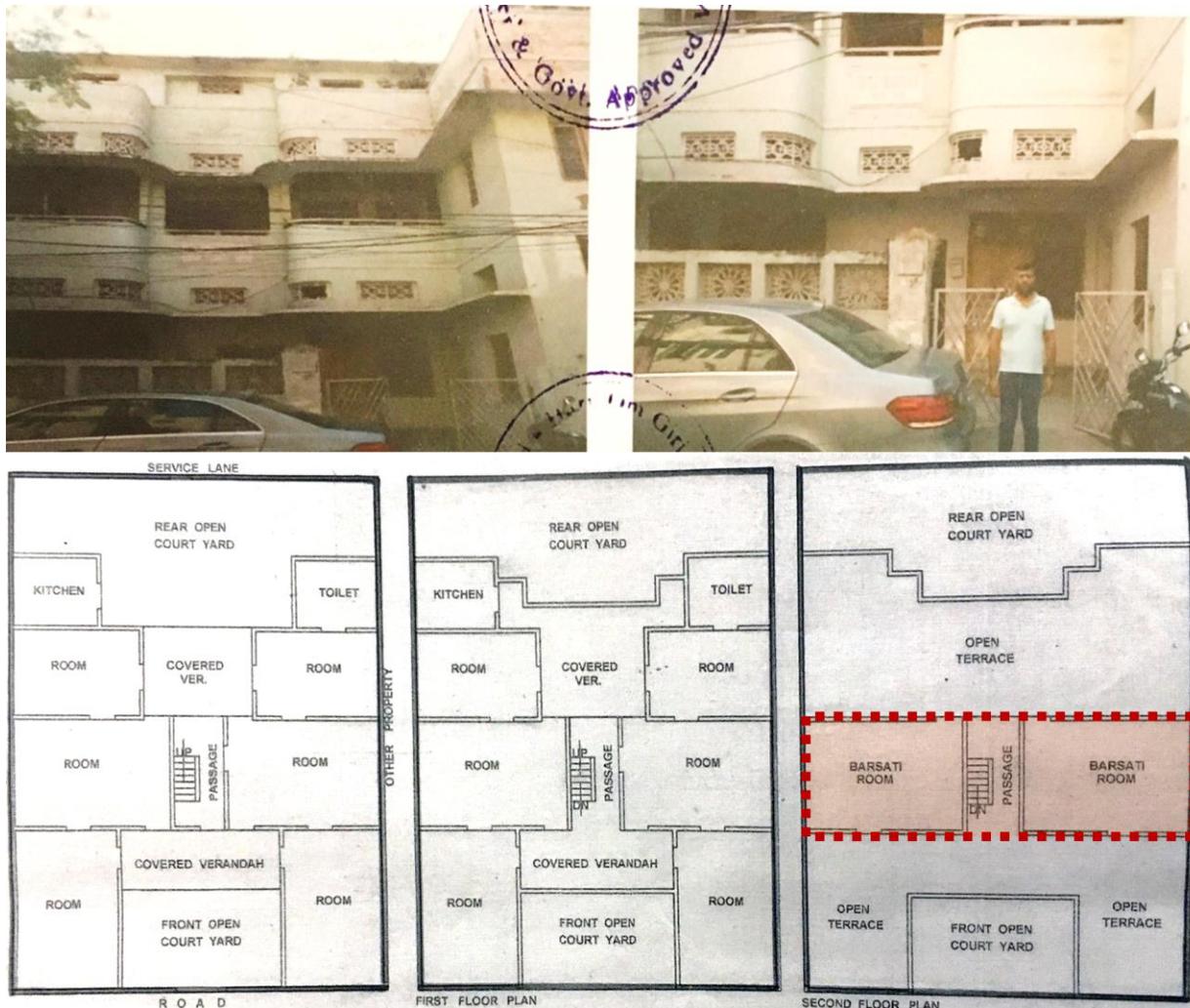
Figure 30 TOP: Photographs of a two and a half story traditional kothi in Karol Bagh. BOTTOM: Floor plans (not to scale) of a kothi highlighting the barsati floor.

their household income through rent collection. This further popularized privately owned *kothi*s as the standard to beat for middle class housing.

Mrs. Ghosh's description of her life in Karol Bagh during her youth was rather sporadic and impersonal, since she had left Delhi to pursue higher education in West Bengal. Instead,

much of her narrative around her parents' decision to build their house was framed within the context of her impression of the community and peer pressure felt by her parents. Mrs. Ghosh described to me a period in the 1960s when several different migrant communities from across the country resided in Karol Bagh as tenants, often in a *barsati*. According to her, however, the fluctuating rental market and arbitrary tenancy practices in Karol Bagh consistently drove away upwardly mobile professionals, who decided to (and could afford to) build homes of their own. These migrations, according to her, were mostly towards the newly developing plotted colonies in South Delhi, which despite being the "back of beyond," showed promise as an emerging part of town.

> *My father built the house, and it was completed in 1971 and we moved there immediately. But within two months, I was married, so I shifted out to my in-laws', which was in GK.*
>
> *My [marital] family consisted of my parents-in-law, and my husband and all the three brothers, and they had one sister. Now my mother-in-law died soon afterwards. And in the course of the years, we lived there, my husband's elder brother died of cancer and his younger brother died in an accident. And his sister got married in between. But when the two sons died, my father-in-law shifted to Kolkata, where he had a small house and some relatives. When leaving he wanted everybody to have a share of the property. But he was not confident... you know what happens in 'these kinds of situations.' So, he sold the house and divided the shares himself. That time that money would have fetched a flat. Meanwhile, my sister-in-law's father also had a house in C.R. Park (where we are now), you know a builder floor, where one floor of it was kept as her share. So, she moved here.*
>
> *It just so happened that my mother had died, and my father was alone, and it made more sense for me to shift in with him so that I could look after him – which I was doing anyway, running up and down [between Safdarjung Enclave and GK]. So that is why we [our nuclear unit] shifted back in 1993 and out of GK, but still remained in South Delhi, close to C.R. Park and the larger Bengali community here.*

At the time of this interview Mrs. Ghosh was temporarily staying with her sister-in-law in a builder floor in C.R. Park, while her property in Safdarjung Enclave was being redeveloped into builder floors. Her decision to rebuild her house was, in part, bolstered by the convenience of having close relatives living in the immediate vicinity of Safdarjung Enclave (C.R. Park and GK). Despite the fact that her husband was living in Moscow (for work) and her son had moved to Bangalore (with his own family), she felt she had sufficient support in the South Delhi area to undertake such an onerous task. And though for Mrs. Ghosh, the decision to remain within South Delhi may have been influenced by her proximity to community and kinship networks, it is not the only factor at play here. Property prices and the larger real estate value of South Delhi is consistently higher across localities such as GK, Safdarjung Enclave, Vasant Vihar, Defence Colony, compared to most other parts of Delhi. This means that properties across South Delhi colonies are scarcely worth exchanging against properties in other parts of the city, perhaps maintaining a sort of real estate bubble within which properties are exchanged, thereby perpetuating the 'posh' reputation of South Delhi.

On the one hand Mrs. Ghosh is content with living out her life within South Delhi, refusing, for instance, to consider moving to Kolkata – "what do I have there? Nothing!" On the other hand, others who are similarly privileged, endowed with ancestral wealth or have sufficiently climbed the economic ladder, might have a contrasting experience of urban Delhi. Instead of finding reasons to stay, they might feel 'pushed out' of the city.

CASE 4: Karol Bagh

Earlier Karol Bagh was good. It was a decent neighborhood. Then the changes started happening. First the hotels came, then the mobile guys came. I think it became one of the largest mobile accessories and peripherals market in India or Asia or something. It really started commercializing and the area degraded a lot.

I used to cycle around for errands, tuition classes, etc. My social circle was mostly school based in South Delhi, but around the house it was mostly tuition classes or just my street, like five seven kids around my house. First, I think our local park went down, and when I was in 11th- 12th grade, the hotels started coming in. By the time I

went for undergraduate, the neighborhood was dead or dying down. Many hotels had already come in, and few friends remained. People moved out and families reduced. And people started shifting, moving away to areas like South Delhi and Gurgaon. Now everyone I knew in childhood is no longer there. Pretty much, I don't think anyone we know, or any of our relatives, are in Karol Bagh anymore. At this point, Karol Bagh isn't even a plotted colony. It is too commercialized. Now here (in group housing in Gurugram) there are a lot of additional amenities, like security, centralized infrastructure, secure parking, etc.

For Mr. Mehra, his childhood home in Karol Bagh was symbolic of a specific idea of Delhi. A walkable, convivial neighborhood environment, the ability to freely play in the streets, the ability to ride a bicycle to do chores, were all qualities of a Karol Bagh that no longer exists. Even though his family are merchants by trade and parts of their ancestral home were often used to store or process goods for selling, the level of commercial activity within the neighborhood at large was acceptable and non-disruptive. The house itself (typologically identical to the one shown in Fig. 6) was large enough to support their extended family across three generations and often also tenants in the *barsati*. However, after liberalization in the 1990s and as property prices in Karol Bagh started skyrocketing, commercial uses within the hitherto residential area grew in density and prominence, transforming the built environment significantly. The demands of commercial uses such as hotels, and large retail stores forced many properties to subdivide, retrofit and even redevelop entirely. As Mr. Mehra describes it, with each wave of commercialization, the residential character of Karol Bagh kept eroding, forcing several residents to cash out and leave for a more comfortable lifestyle. Besides, as Mr. Mehra's mother suggested – "so many of the younger generation have left the family business and are occupied in corporate jobs. It is easier for them to be nearer the employment centers in Gurgaon and NOIDA, etc."

In the end, what makes South Delhi a 'posh' area, or North Delhi dominated by b*aniya*[41] and Punjabi businesspeople, or East Delhi a low-income area, is perhaps too complex to map.

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[41] *Bania* (also spelled Baniya, Banija, Banya, Vaniya, Vani, Vania and Vanya) is a mercantile caste mainly from the Indian states of Gujarat and Rajasthan, with strong diasporic communities in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya

But the cases presented above prompt us to look beyond unilineal explanations of 'class' mobility and migration. Despite being a cosmopolitan city of migrants, many of the movements in Delhi are driven by communal, caste and religious factors. And middle class plotted colonies are not immune to such social dynamics beyond the neoliberal logics of real estate and property markets, as the next chapter will highlight. These multifaceted, 'push' and 'pull' factors, these spaces of intensities and lines of movement (borrowing a few terms from Deleuze and Guattari) across Delhi's landscape are what precisely generate other movements making each other more legible – the circulation of speculative capital, the accretion of mass transit and arterial development, the congregation of commerce, and the gentrification of neighborhoods, among others.

Pradesh, West Bengal, Maharashtra (mainly Mumbai) and other northern states. In the case of Delhi many among this community were the original inhabitants of Shahjahanabad and other older neighborhoods around it. Over the decades, as commercial activity flourished in the Old City many chose to move their residences elsewhere while continuing to operate their businesses through the Old City.

CHAPTER 4

BUILDERS AND SPECULATIVE CAPITAL

From the movement of people to the movement of capital, this chapter interrogates the historical 'roles' that the market, the state, and 'professionals' have played in the production of the built environment of Delhi. The chapter will also show how careful consideration of these changing roles is key to understanding what 'market conditions' and 'governance environment' eventually fostered the emergence of builders and builder floors. It interrogates the nature of professional work within built environment production through a closer look at what constitutes the practice of a builder and his[42] business, modes of operation, and persona. Data from the interviews I conducted follow two parallel narratives here - one from the perspective of homeowners that have dealt personally with builders and characterize them variously from predators to trustworthy businessmen; and the other from the perspective of builders as they talk about their personal journeys, operational logistics, and business development, as well as their views on the real estate industry and how speculative capital flows in the city.

The first section of this chapter follows how both speculative land developers as well as a growing association with private property set the stage for the upwardly mobile middle class. While previous chapters have already discussed state-led planning and housing efforts, such as through urban extensions outside Shahjahanabad, refugee resettlement and housing provision through the Ministry of Rehabilitation, the role of private capital in housebuilding needs to be explored further. In this regard, Delhi Land & Finance (DLF) is discussed as one of the major actors in private speculative development of plotted colonies after independence. Interactions of DLF and other developers or 'colonisers' (as they were initially called) with the state machinery shed light on the parallel world-building of private capital and state-led infrastructure development. Given the socialist values of the Indian state in the early years after independence and the demand for mass housing, private colonies stood out and were in many ways opposed to the egalitarian values of the state. The rhetoric of luxury, security and privacy peddled by developers further shaped the

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[42] Here the explicit reference to male identifying builders is key. Throughout my recruitment phase and research with several builders, homeowners, and professionals in Delhi, I never came across any female identifying builders. And though this certainly does not mean that there are no women builders in the city, it draws attention to the male dominated nature of this industry.

aspirations and values of the upwardly mobile classes who became the first generation of homeowners in the city.

In the next section, the changing role of architects and the changing attitudes of the state towards real estate and urban development are also briefly discussed. Colonial concerns for the quality of public architecture led to the initiation of architectural education and art historical scholarship in India, nearly alongside developments in England. Thus began the divide between the public and private production of the built environment. Employed and supported by a fledgling state, engineers and the first generation of architects played the role of nation-builders after independence by continuing to mainly produce public architecture while building houses only for a select elite clientele. However, with the liberalization of markets and India's participation in global financial markets, the real estate priorities of the state have transformed significantly – changing its role from a provider, to regulator, to speculator. Meanwhile, architects continue to operate in the fuzzy boundaries between professional code of ethics and what the market demands of them.

The final section draws on interview excerpts to develop a character sketch of what a builder is and what he does. While some homeowners describe the ways in which builders took advantage of their naivety revealing their predatory nature – i.e., grabbing their 'roof rights', eluding accountability for the damages they cause during construction, etc. – others describe the close attention builders pay to building personal relationships with clients. On the other hand, builders' own descriptions of the way they build business and what makes good practice, go to show how they have carved out a distinct space for their services. The builders' narratives also help to both differentiate their practice from big developers, contractors and architects, while connecting it to the larger circulation of speculative capital in the city through other services they often offer, such as moneylending, underwriting and promotion. Here, the specific relationship between the scale of a builder operation – organizational structure and size, word-of-mouth business development – is juxtaposed against big investment capital (the kind deployed in township developments on the peripheries of Delhi, and in state redevelopment schemes).

Throughout the chapter, certain key events are discussed such as liberalization in the 1990s, the 2006 'sealing drive', the rise of residential townships in Delhi's satellite towns in the early 2000s, the development of the Commonwealth Games Village in 2010, economic Demonetization in 2016, and the pandemic, that have all crucially impacted the industry as a whole. These events have all shaped business and labor practices, organizational structure and institutional priorities of both the public and private sector in urban development. But perhaps the most crucial event in this regard has been the enactment of the Real Estate Regulatory Act + Authority (RERA). Introduced as an overarching legislation to monitor and regulate the real estate sector, RERA was mainly intended to protect the rights of consumers against the predatory practices of developers. However, the wording of the law also allowed small-scale builders to exploit loopholes within it to continue their practice while avoiding state scrutiny.

Some Notes on Social Roles and Becoming

There is a high degree of fungibility and confusion within the professional landscape of Delhi's residential construction industry, especially when it comes to builder floors. Many of my participants could not fully distinguish between the role of an architect versus a builder and were most confused about the differences (if any) between **'developers'** and **'builders'**. In practice, in a typical plotted redevelopment project involving a builder, it is hard to pinpoint each individual professional involved and their strict job description. In the case of my parents' property redevelopment, the builder we collaborated with was often accompanied by an **'architect'** who rarely offered design advice, avoided any explanations about where he graduated from, and did not seem to be registered with the Council of Architecture[43]. But we were assured that he was qualified to sign-off on any legal

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[43] The Council of Architecture (COA) was constituted under the Architects Act in 1972. Any person desirous of carrying on the profession of 'Architect' must have registered himself with COA. The registration also entitles a person to use the title and style of Architect. The title and style of architect can also be used by a firm of architects, of which all partners are registered with COA. Limited Companies, Private/Public Companies, societies and other juridical persons are **not entitled** to use the title and style of architect nor are they entitled to practice the profession of architecture. Read more at: https://www.coa.gov.in/

requirements for the building sanction process (typically also called a sanctioning architect in the industry). In addition, the builder consulted a **'title / property lawyer'** whose job it was to look over the chain of titles and deeds and confirm the legality of the agreement before construction began, and the exchange of property and mutation of assets once the constructed building was split into four floors or apartments, each with an 'undivided share'[44] of the land. The builder also hired various **contractors** under labor, material, or lumpsum contracts for different aspects of construction. The only person on the payroll of the builder was a **'site supervisor'** who spent most of his time (with his family) on the building site in a small shack made out of corrugated sheet.

During my interviews I found that there are cases (especially larger projects in South Delhi) where bankrolling the project and circulating liquid capital through its duration could also involve other actors such as **moneylenders** and **underwriters** (those who 'back' loans with other assets). Sarani Khatua, in her article 'The Role of Small Promoters in Kolkata's Housing Transformation' talks about a slightly different, yet builder-like actor called the **'promoter'** in the case of Kolkata in West Bengal (Khatua, 2021). Yet in the context of large township developments in the NCR, promoters typically mean a company under whose banner the project is being marketed and that is often different from the developers (that are typically large corporations, as opposed to the threadbare operations that builders run). Llerena Guiu Searle, in Landscapes of Accumulation (2016), offers insight into even more actors within the larger ecology of real estate development including "fund managers, analysts, marketers, brochure designers, brokers, bankers, consultants with international property firms, and others" (Searle, 2016, p. 8).

Essentially, the ecology of professionals within residential construction in contemporary Delhi is highly diverse and complex. Rather than a simple duality between architect

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Also this news article clarifies the background of the long ongoing battle for the jurisdiction and mandate of the Council of Architects and the purview of the Architects Act 1972: <u>Times of India</u> (Choudhary, 2020)

[44] "Undivided share grants each **co-owner** a right to the entire property. This means that no single owner can claim ownership over any specific part of the property exclusively. Instead, each owner's share is abstract and relates to the property as a whole. This concept is crucial in situations where dividing a property physically is either impossible or impractical, such as in apartment buildings, family estates", etc. (Zoltan Properties, 2024), subject to '**Section 44**. Transfer by one co-owner' of *The Transfer of Property Act*, 1882.

designed houses and "self-build" in the conventional sense (Cohen, 2015; Holston, 1991; Turner & Fichter, 1972), a multitude of actors play fungible roles in the production of residential architecture - specifically middle-class housing outside the group housing typology or large gated townships in the satellite towns of the NCR. Such high levels of specialization and articulation in the contemporary residential construction industry is a testament to the extent to which the middle class have evolved, as well as the quantum of capital that actually circulates within this sector. Among my participants, there are many who built their first house without any professional assistance, yet most builder floors I encountered were built with some level of professional input. What has changed over the years is the complexity and scale of the house (re)building project, the real estate value of 'freehold' property in Delhi[45], as well as what is considered the most valuable kind of 'professional' help. And accordingly, those who participate in this phenomenon have all changed their roles to suit the demands of this prolific industry.

For instance, contractors who conventionally received payments for services rendered and materials provided, often acquire property themselves for speculative development, becoming builders. Builders that operate on a small scale today, as actors embedded within local networks and relying on word of mouth and interpersonal relationships, may perhaps become corporate developers on a larger scale tomorrow. While the state started out as the primary 'provider' of housing and employment, with the advent of liberalization, it started to play the role of a 'facilitator' or 'enforcer', and eventually to an active real estate 'developer'. Similarly, architects started out as 'nation-builders' and 'elite professionals' hired by the state or private individuals, but with the rise of builders and turnkey[46] firms, also play the role of '*sanctioneers*' (or people who mainly give their professional stamp of approval to projects). And homeowners, like Chapter 2 emphasized, have gone from being 'builders' (of their own homes) to 'landlords' to 'real estate actors'. I argue, once again, that these parallel

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[45] I have already discussed the vast gap between 'Circle rates' and market rates of properties and the role played by Stamp duties and 'black money' in perpetuating this slippage, in Chapter 2 – The Story of my House.

[46] A turnkey firm is typically a company that undertakes design-build contracts where they are employed to plan, design and build a project or an infrastructure and do any other necessary development to make it functional or 'ready to use' at an agreed price and by a fixed date.

becomings are emergent and interconnected. It matters not here, relatively speaking, *who* the formal professionals are, or even what their specific purview is, but *how* they *become* (Figure 31).
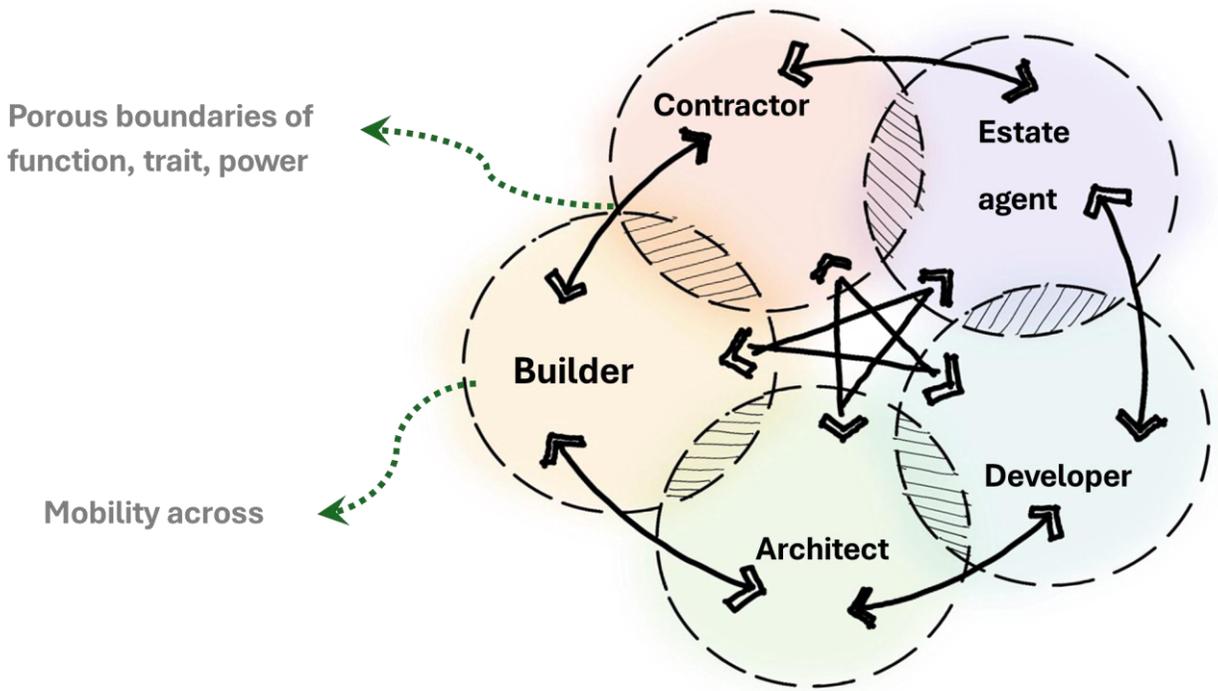
Figure 31 Sketch showing the fungibility and mobility across 'professionals' involved in the residential construction industry in Delhi.

Eliot Freidson, widely considered one of the key thinkers on 'professionalism', bases the (social) role of professions on the 'ideal-typical' model following Max Weber's 'bureaucracy' and Adam Smith's 'free market' – essentially systems under which work in a functioning society might be organized (Freidson, 2013). There have been several perspectives on the sociology of professions such as the 'traits approach' which ascribes a set of defining characteristics to each profession; or the functionalist approach that follows Emile Durkheim's 'organic' notions of a society where every form of work contributes to the overall machinery of society; or more power and conflict-based approaches that draw on a Marxist framework and focus on the levels of 'closure' or market control that professions can exert (Dingwall, 2016). And while each approach has a lot to offer in terms of an explanation for the existence/emergence/role of builders and their relationship to other built environment

'professionals', such analysis remains outside the scope of this dissertation. Here, I am simply paying close attention to my observations from the field and presenting stories from my participants that say something about their journey and hint at patterns about the changes in the conventional roles, played not just by professionals, but also the state and capital. In this sense, following from Deleuze and Guattari, I hope to replace the "Heideggerian ontology of being-in-the-world with a more Deleuzian notion of becoming-in-the world" (Dovey, 2010, p. 6).

Colonisers and the Upwardly Mobile Classes

Sanjay Srivastava, in his book Entangled Urbanism (2014b), offers an extensive account of how speculative capital in the National Capital Region (NCR) brings together diverse entities in the production of the neoliberal urban landscape. Paying close attention to middlemen, builders and developers, Srivastava critically analyzes the production of some of the most recent new building types such as shopping malls and gated communities (including townships in Delhi satellite cities such as Gurgaon). Srivastava emplaces this analysis in a historical context, tracing the rise of private interests in urban development, the role played by the state in fostering it, and class politics that have resulted in the marginalization of the urban poor and the informal city. Similar to Asher Ghertner's 'rule by aesthetics' (2015) and Amita Baviskar's 'bourgeois environmentalism' (2020), Srivastava imbues the middle class with the power to enforce legality and illegality in urban spaces, reflecting an emergent elite consciousness that manifests in new forms of residence, consumption, and leisure.

However, as the previous chapter highlighted (and the next chapter will elaborate), the agency and power of the middle class did not grow concurrently with state power. In fact, for most of the first few decades after independence, the middle class had little coercive agency over policy or legislation and could not even own land owing to the socialist outlook of the state. The state, on the other hand, wielded significant power, which it used to acquire vast tracts of the hinterland outside the existing cities of Delhi. Just prior to independence and before the emergence of the DDA, land acquisition and development by the government

was mainly under the aegis of the Delhi Improvement Trust (DIT). According to Ravi Sundaram, in his book Pirate Modernity, in an effort to properly stitch the disparate old and new parts (Shahjahanabad and Lutyens Delhi) of the city, the DIT implemented several city expansion schemes (2009, p. 33). Land was mainly acquired through the compulsory purchase of *Nazul* lands in 1937, when the DIT was constituted.

At the same time land was also being acquired by private speculators such as Delhi Land and Finance (DLF) and a handful of other developers – or colonisers as they were initially called – such as "Hindustan Colonisers and the Modern Delhi Corporation" (Srivastava, 2014b, p. 10). Though there is debate about whether key government officials were complicit in enabling developers, but the fact remains that even as early as the 1940s and 1950s, private developers like DLF were competing with state-built schemes and cooperative housing societies. This is corroborated by other scholars. For instance, Ashish Bose notes that 1955–59 was "a period of boom for private land development companies and house construction" and that DLF developed "large parts of middle-class Delhi on as much as 5,800 acres" (Mehra, 2013, pp. 369–370).

However, relationships between government development agencies and private developers remained tense for a while. According to Guerrieri, "a debate ensued as to whether house and settlement development should remain under exclusive public control or be left to private enterprise", fueling these tensions (Guerrieri, 2018, p. 60). As a result, there were several demands made of private developers by DIT, who was the major landowning and governance body at the time. Colonisers could only obtain permission to construct across DIT's town expansions by committing to develop public infrastructure as well. Additionally, they were required to transfer the land designated for roads, public spaces, and parks to DIT at no cost after construction, along with a fee per square yard. Despite these hurdles – and a concerted effort by the Delhi Colonisers Association to resist these laws - by "1949, DLF had already established some of the earliest residential colonies in Delhi, including Krishna Nagar in East Delhi" (Srivastava, 2014b, pp. 8–9).

Meanwhile, land and property were already being commodified as the 'intermediate classes' grew both in number and economic power. For instance, Anish Vanaik in his book

chapter 'Landlords, Tenants, and Real Estate Firms' talks about the changing nature of property ownership and upward mobility through the 1920s-1940s (2019). Drawing on data from the Hindustan Times (an English-language newspaper) archive, Vanaik enumerates and aggregates patterns within property ownership and tenancy through newspaper advertisements for property rentals and sales. Overall, Vanaik observed that despite the official support of cooperative housing societies, new real estate firms made stronger contributions to "the property segment of the local economy" (2019, p. 90). This is both telling in terms of the rise of speculative developers, as well as the property-centric intermediate classes who saw property as an investment even in pre-independence Delhi. And as the previous two chapters highlighted, this preoccupation with private property – and the 'plot' in particular – as commodity and asset is one of the key pillars of contemporary real estate markets, eventually forming the basis for the practice of builders, just as land acquisition and ownership became the basis of state power under the DDA after independence.

As plotted colonies grew, so did the class difference between the various types. Private colonies stood in stark contrast to the state-provided refugee resettlement and group housing colonies. In order to compete with government-built housing and capture the social imaginary of the rising middle class, developers such as DLF drew on "a curious mixture of American and British stylistic references" (Srivastava, 2014b, p. 8). The following excerpt and image (Figure 32) from Srivastava's book epitomize the way DLF framed their new developments:

> Figure I.1 shows a DLF advertisement from 1956 for some of its key projects in Delhi... A man-about-town preens near a fountain in North-West Delhi, an insouciant young couple goes boating in North Delhi, a Hollywood starlet-like figure prepares to descend into a swimming-pool in West Delhi, an 'Oxford' don welcomes a schoolboy in South Delhi, and a prosperous elderly couple surveys manicured domains in Central-South Delhi.
>
> (Srivastava, 2014b, pp. 8–9)
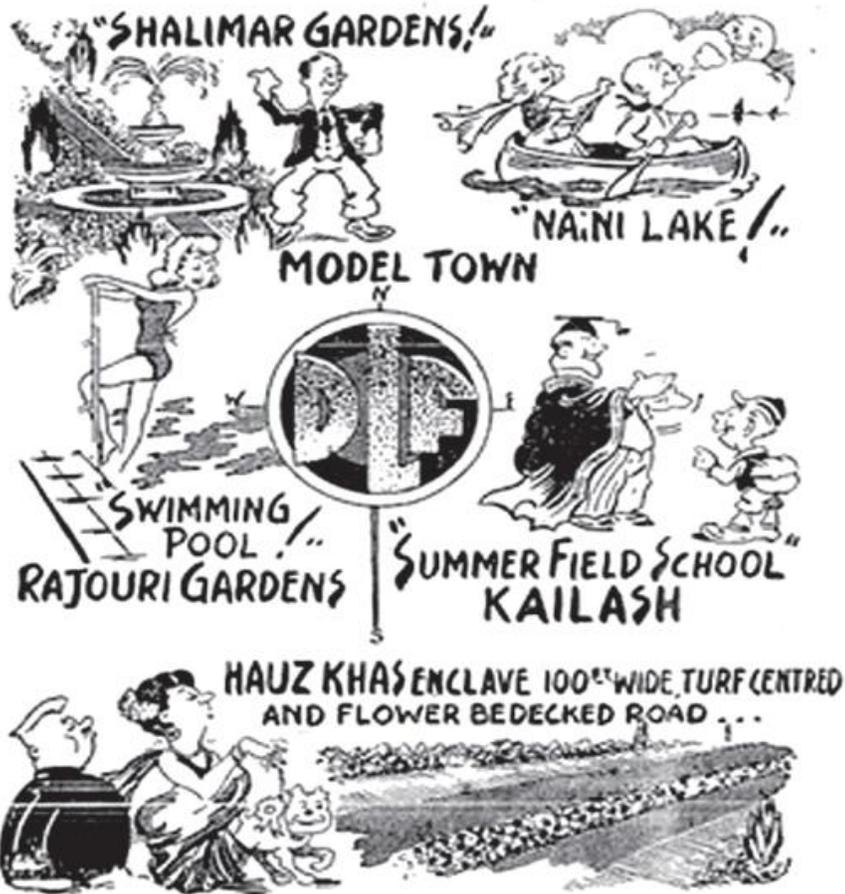
132

Figure 32 "Figure I.1 Advertisement for DLF, 1956 Source: Delhi State Archives." (Srivastava, 2014, pp. 8–9)

Essentially, just as with the spectrum of middle classes and refugees, plotted colonies too had a class hierarchy that depended on the level of infrastructure provision, size of plot/house, amenities on offer, and geographic favorability. Most notoriously this meant a divide between East Delhi and the other urban extensions (especially the posh South Delhi) where private developers planned colonies appealing to the aspirations of the upwardly mobile and formerly wealthy. For instance, as Ranjana Sengupta relates in her book 'Delhi Metropolitan: The Making of An Unlikely City' (2008), landed refugees from urban Pakistan

133

had been accustomed to higher standard of living and found the conditions in parts of East Delhi less than acceptable:

> *Ajeet Caur, writer and activist, grew up in a sprawling house in Lahore's Chamberlain Road. Her father was a doctor with a flourishing practice; her mother's father was a large landowner in Gujranwalla... Theirs was a whole, settled, comfortable world; the reality of Partition for Ajeet Caur's family, like so many others, took them unawares... In Delhi, Ajeet Caur's father refused a plot in Nizamuddin as her mother was disturbed by both the open scrub on one side of the colony and the smell of blood from the meat shops of the bustee [colloquial word for village] on the other. They decided on West Patel Nagar, which was cleaner, more open and had, at that time, what she described as 'only some small yellow houses'. They built a house, they settled down, but they missed the life in Lahore.*

<div align="right">(Sengupta, 2008, pp. 74–75)</div>

These geographical variations only grew as rampant land speculation exacerbated the notoriety or popularity of certain areas in the city and targeted colonies to those demographics. Ravi Sundaram elaborates on this in the context of the 1962 Master Plan review undertaken by the Town and Country Planning Organization a decade after it was published. The authors of the review found that "not only had the proximity of work and residence not worked out as had been hoped in the plan, but the spatial segregation of the city was moving rapidly, with affluent districts in the south and poorer districts in the east" (R. Sundaram, 2009, p. 63). Essentially, all through the 20th century the elitism and property-centric attitude of the middle class grew alongside the success of speculative ventures that captured the imagination of this rising class. It placed great value on the ownership of large single-family homes and locational hierarchies that translated into the boom in the real estate sector decades later.

The Public Architect and the Speculative State

Several of the posh private colonies were designed by well-known architect/town planners which gave them an edge in marketing and prestige value. For instance, many of DLF's iconic colonies - including Rajouri Garden Extension and Punjabi Bagh (North Delhi), South Extension Part 1 and 2, Greater Kailash Part 1 and 2 (South Delhi) - were designed by Anand Aptay and Jhabvala[47] (AAJ); one of the first post-independence Indian architectural firms of Delhi. And while trained (and often well-known) architects mostly participated in large, public, nation-building projects such as institutional buildings, they continued to cater to the elite in the domain of residence design. For instance, in their first year of practice, AAJ undertook 92 residence design projects out of a total of 142. In the previous chapter the roles of Otto Koenigsberger and Albert Mayer were discussed as émigré architects who were the pioneers of modern neighborhood planning. Other foreign architects in India similarly held important consulting positions in various planning departments, such as Joseph Allen Stein, Edward D. Stone, and Karl M. von Heinz. But they also designed several residences in newly minted colonies across Delhi. Heinz, for instance, was known for his Art Deco houses in South Extension and Greater Kailash. On the other hand, Indian architects initially studied architecture at the J.J. School of Art in Bombay, and several of them went to train abroad under notable modern architects[48] (Guerrieri, 2018).

Of course, the recognition of foreign architectural training within the profession began with the very origins of architectural education in India. William Glover in his chapter titled 'Making Indian Modern Architects' (Rajagopalan & Desai, 2012) gives an excellent account of the emergence of architecture as a profession during colonial times in India. During the mid to late 19th century, much of the public architecture was designed by colonial engineers,

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[47] Cyrus Jhabvala enrolled at the prestigious JJ School of Art (though he never completed his degree), apprenticed and became an Associate of the RIBA (Royal Institute of British Architects) in 1948, and is to this day revered as one of greatest teachers of architecture at Delhi's School of Planning and Architecture. For more on Jhabvala read: https://www.cshjhabvala.com/about.

[48] Achyut P. Kanvinde studied at Harvard before returning to Delhi after Independence to open his own studio; Habib Rahman studied in the US with Walther Gropius before he became Chief Architect of the Central Public Works Department (CPWD) in 1953; Piloo Modi was with Erich Mendelsohn in the US, and Mansingh M. Rana trained with Frank Lloyd Wright.

while most private dwellings were built by traditional builders and master craftsmen or *mistri*. Architectural historians and critics at once valorized the local, historical, culturally specific, architecture of builders, even as they criticized colonial engineers for their lack of aesthetic appreciation – for instance Rudyard Kipling's criticism of CPWD (Central Public Works Department) bungalows as 'bungaloathsome' (Rajagopalan & Desai, 2012, p. 32). This led to a movement for architectural education (both In England and India), which sought to formalize the discipline of architecture, distinct from preexisting building trades and against traditional forms of vernacular production. In many senses this was also at the root of bifurcation between informal and formal production of housing.

Master craftsmen or *mistri* were a category of skilled labor mostly available to the elite who built sprawling *haveli*s and *kothi*s, but the vast majority of new homeowners in Delhi after independence had to build their own house with little to no professional input. But this was also possible since the scale of these new private dwellings was much smaller and less complicated, as the next chapter will show, in the case of refugee tenements for instance. As Desai et al point out, "the adoption of the bungalow thus, not only brought a new house form into the indigenous Indian world but also a new pattern of home ownership" (2016, p. 74). The repurposing of existing single-family private dwellings and their down-scaling not only made them accessible to the masses (see Chapter 5: The Evolving Typology of The Home), but also impacted the house construction labor market.

On the one hand, traditional builders and various craftsmen that held highly specialized roles within the indigenous housebuilding industry saw a decline in the demand for highly specialized building crafts and masonry techniques - also since simple reinforced concrete construction (RCC) was being adopted en masse. For instance, the in-situ terrazzo flooring (Figure 33) in my childhood home was only available (and still in demand) because of traditional skilled labor still active at the time – even though as my father said, "it was the costliest part of construction at the time". On the other hand, because of the sheer scale at which houses were being built, it consolidated the construction industry and its labor at the foundational level and opened up the market for unskilled workers. This proved beneficial for the scores of new migrants to the city and offered entrepreneurial opportunities for

refugees who were skilled and had experience in the trades. For instance, one of the builders I interviewed came from a long line of commercial contractors and had established networks with material suppliers and labor contractors – a network that proved valuable in making his builder franchise a success.

Figure 33 Piece of terrazzo flooring from my childhood home; example of an increasingly diminishing form of highly skilled labor.

Meanwhile, after a few decades of furious nation-building and land acquisition, the state's own housing assets were starting to face dereliction and depreciating real estate value (see reference to the Central Government's proposal for General Pool Residential Accommodation; GPRA in Chapter 1: Introduction). As a result, the state's approach towards housing production have gradually turned towards real estate speculation, with the liberalization of markets and India's participation in global capital.

> … *the images of massive urban real estate megaprojects expressed something about the desires of powerful people to move beyond incremental change and to seek instead to wipe the slate clean, to completely revolutionize the process of city building.*

Meanwhile, the civil society obsession with the pursuit of a 'world-class' aesthetic in city-building (V. D. N. Dupont, 2011; Ghertner, 2015; Roy & Ong, 2011) has also been well documented. And in this pursuit, the middle classes, once galvanized into a 'homogeneous' consumer, are able to wield their newfound purchasing power and political cache to sterilize their environment by mobilizing the bureaucracy and courts alike (Bhuwania, 2018). This form of "bourgeois environmentalism" (Baviskar, 2020) can range from the banning of cycle rickshaws and street vendors[49] from within gated enclaves to the scale of affecting the demolition of slums (Ghertner, 2012). The 'story' of a global metropolis is thus, sold and bought equally by the state, market players, and the aspirational 'professional class' (Searle, 2013). The fabrication of this story entails multilateral narratives. One where international investors are convinced of the existence of a rising consumer class with Western tastes living in dual-income nuclear families, while Indian audiences are sold a 'global' lifestyle in the glitz and glamor of high-rise, high-end, and gated residential complexes.

Thus, there is a growing recognition that a nexus between speculative capital, a powerful civil society and a 'world-class' rhetoric, has been developing and taking root within the development politics of Delhi. Initially (during the 1980s-90s) such politics resulted in the gating and securitization of existing posh colonies within Delhi, and the meteoric rise of gated complexes and township developments in Delhi's satellite cities such as Gurgaon, Faridabad and NOIDA. Here the state mainly played the role of a facilitator, somehow still acting in the interest of public good – against polluting industries or master plan violations or encroachments on public land – while leaving real estate development in the hands of developers or private individuals. However, the development of the Commonwealth Games Village in 2010 set a precedent for inner-city restructuring where the government took the lead in monetizing land for its own benefit, rather than act as a passive player in a developer-

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[49] It was our experience during community engagement carried out for Aapki Sadak that on several occasions Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) in Malviya Nagar have attempted to deny access to cycle-based vehicles on the pretext that the 'lock-nuts' on their wheels scratch the sides of parked cars while plying on the relatively narrow streets.

led estate market. Following Shatkin's analysis, the state, in many ways, precisely because of its entanglement with global capital, is 'forced' to monetize urban land, the only real asset it has, especially in a city like Delhi where vast land acquisition after independence has left government agencies with a significant land bank. As Shatkin elaborates, the government does so through one or more of the following tactics — "by selling state land, by using powers of compulsory acquisition to acquire land and lease it to private developers, by reclaiming land, by forming various forms of public-private partnerships in land development..." (Shatkin, 2017, p. xiii).

In this neoliberal context, "investors worked to enroll Indian developers as local intermediaries who could negotiate local politics and regulations in order to make Indian land and buildings into standardized products that could be traded abroad" (Searle, 2016, p. 4). However, such an analysis of the real estate market continually positions the state and market actors as separate and monolithic entities either at odds or in cahoots. Their entanglements, the messiness of the everyday practices of the state and market, and the various scales at which both governments and market actors operate are better revealed when one looks at housebuilding. As my own research has revealed, private developers, individual homeowners, as well as the state, all participate as fervently, if not equally in the neoliberal circulation of speculative capital. In Chapter 2 I spoke about how my own parents enjoyed both the convenience of outsourcing house (re)building to a builder, as well as the savings they made by using their own land asset as collateral. What I did not elaborate on was the 'extra cash' that my parents (and most others in this process) receive from builders in exchange for the undivided share of one floor. As Srivastava points out, despite the ease with which home loans can now be procured by homeowners:

> ...the purchase of properties still requires access to the unregulated 'black' market, for it is common practice that in transactions involving a 'second-hand' property (that is, not from the builder, but from a subsequent owner), the buyer must pay anywhere from 40 to 50 per cent of the total sale price in cash. This is the amount that is not shown on official papers in order to avoid payment of stamp duty by the purchaser and the capital gains tax by the seller.

In the case of one of my participants, the extra 'consideration' (as it is called and labelled in the agreement with the builder) that was paid came in two different forms. One was a plot in the DLF planned 'upcoming area' in North Delhi (though peripheral) called Kundli (Figure 34), and the second as a cash payment which they chose to receive in instalments. This is by no means an isolated case. In fact, on the contrary, this is typical, as many of my participants
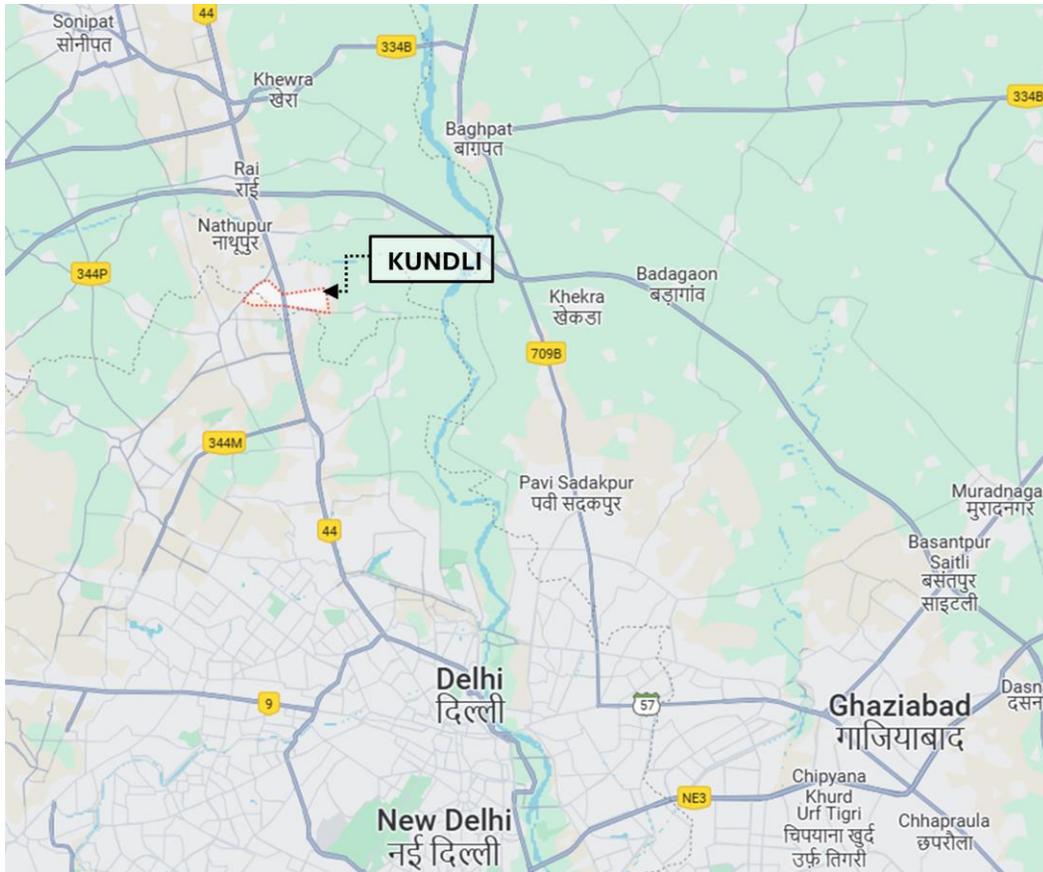
corroborated.

Such a system locks in all parties in any transaction into a vicious cycle of investment in property and a growing portfolio that must then be circulated in order for the capital to grow. Meanwhile, as I have mentioned in previous chapters, the single-family home itself has evolved from a symbol of freedom for nuclear families, to an income-generator with tenancies and commercial development, and eventually a collateral asset for building speculative capital as builder floors.

Figure 34 Location of Kundli relative to the rest of Delhi.

Building Trust and Capital

The builders I interviewed came from a variety of ethnic, communal, professional, and economic backgrounds, but they all had one thing in common – they all started out in a different line of work initially. Professionally, of the 6 builders I interviewed, two had been commercial contractors before, one had retired as a civil contractor for the public works department, one was and still is an entrepreneur of a successful chain of pharmacies across NCR, one is a postgraduate engineering graduate, and one was (sometimes still is) a real estate agent. And while their different backgrounds are not surprising as such, it is important to note that for many within this 'newfound' profession, the 'recent' real estate boom[50] was a crucial turning point. Some of my participants claimed that builders have been in operation since the 1980s, while others suggested that it wasn't just a period, but several small events that made up the right 'market conditions' and 'governance environment' within which builders could flourish.

For instance, several suggested that the 2006 'sealing drive' by the MCD – prompted by a Supreme Court ruling as part of the M C Mehta Case (*Writ Petition 13029/1985*) against rampant commercial activity in residential areas in March 2006 (Bijin Jose, 2018; Legal Correspondent, 2007; PTI, 2006) – created some of the conditions for builders to participate in the redevelopment of properties in a more organized manner. Before the 2006 sealing drive, middle-class colonies had been commercializing and growing haphazardly with little oversight, but these changes remained piecemeal and mostly undertaken by property owners themselves. However, under the fear of having their property sealed (literally locked up) by the MCD, many property owners decided to consult/collaborate with builders who were able to navigate the complex and demanding bureaucratic machinery, 'grease the right palms', and could even find solutions that fell into certain legal loopholes. An example of the latter is the addition of pantries without wet areas or sinks to new top floors / *barsati* in existing houses. This move allowed property owners to create an extra (illegal) dwelling unit

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[50] Though dates vary across different accounts, there is broad consensus that there was an uptick in, migration, commerce, production all through the 1980s and 90s as is corroborated by the Master Plan for 2001 (Delhi Development Authority, 1990) and Ravi Sundaram in Pirate Modernity (2009, p. 81).

while still technically following MPD stipulations that only recognize a dwelling unit as one with a working kitchen[51].

Essentially, as I highlighted in Chapter 2 – The Story of My House, the period of vertical growth and densification in colonies through the 1980s and the boom after liberalization, made the house (re)building project far more complex and fraught (given the bureaucratic machinery involved). This was something common across most of the homeowners I interviewed, who either related lengthy stories about how their parents or themselves were stretched thin, trying to oversee labor and manage finances even as they were busy with full-time employment elsewhere. Therefore, just as soon as these single-storey houses started expanding vertically – to accommodate an expanding family, or to rent out additional floors and gain some revenue – builders started getting involved in their extension or redevelopment. However, as the stories in this section will show, the role, status, and perception of what a builder *is*, and what *he does*, is itself mutable and has changed over the years, in part also due to the absolute volume of speculative capital that now flows through inner-city residential colonies in Delhi, that make it a lucrative business.

Mr. Joshi (Homeowner – Paschim Vihar):

> *This house of ours was built in 1980. After my father and mother passed away in the early 2000s, we wanted to make some changes in this house to improve our living conditions. Both my brothers stay abroad and had no interest in Delhi. But they also had a share in the house as they also inherited the property. So, if this house had to be divided into three, I did not have enough money to make this conversion by myself. Due to this and because we needed the money, we spoke to a builder.*
>
> *Till that time, we had no idea about a builder floor. We only knew that one could take a bank loan and construct a house. What we call the floor system now, was not there at that time. Also, in our colony, till then no one had constructed according to this model. So, I talked to a builder, and he recommended that we should sell the **'roof***

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[51] Refer to the development norms table in Chapter 2 to see the myriad caveats under 'Max. No. of DUs' between MPD 2001 and 2021.

rights'[52] *of our house to him, and he will construct a floor on it and sell that floor. Accordingly, we sold our roof rights and got some money for it. My brothers were ok with this three-way division, in which each of us got an equal share. We also had to go through the process of making our portion freehold and the top portion was to be mutated (title transfer). The builder took on the cost for all this process and included it in the money that he gave us.*

When my mother passed away, and the mutation had to be obtained for this house, we needed to get an NOC [No Objection Certificate] from the Society. When we approached the President of the colony for the NOC, he started asking us the details of what we were thinking and planning ahead for the house. Then he suggested the name of this builder. Actually, he did not say 'builder', he only mentioned his name, Mr. Sethi, and said that his son had started doing construction work, so he could help in making our house too. For us, this information was like a lifeline. At the time we thought he would be the best person for the job, because he would get all our jobs done in one go, including the NOC from the Society. But thinking back, the President of the colony, who had the job of looking after the welfare of the whole society, took advantage of his position and planted his own friend as a builder.

There was a great deal of inconvenience, with construction going on at the top. When there was watering on top, the water would seep down to our house. Like a railway platform, we were shifting to different rooms in the house from the back to the front, and ultimately, for a few months, when it became too uncomfortable, we went and stayed in a friend's house. **He was a scoundrel**. *He really used us to his own advantage. We compare him with what builders are doing nowadays, and we can see the difference. The flooring in our house was old, so we thought it should be redone while construction was ongoing in the house. In today's times, the builder would get it done on his own, but back then, he charged us for this also.*

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[52] Development rights to build additional floors with absolute ownership of any and all extra floor area thus developed. This practice, though rampant, was mainly carried out through the sale of a General Power of Attorney (See Chapter 2) and not strictly legal till courts allowed the separate sale and registration of independent floors (Express News Service, 2011).

*When we talk of a profession, there is always the matter of professional ethics. For example, a doctor must take an oath before he starts to practice. All professionals are bound by an oath. It is a different matter that not everyone follows the oath, and some get into malpractice, but an oath is administered. But there is no such ethics for a builder because he is **not a professional**. He is **just a man with a lot of money, or a goon with some henchmen**, who started this as a business and formed a nexus with the relevant people. There is no authority which has a hold over them or can regulate them. The Corporation [MCD] or the DDA can do it, but they lack the motivation, because they are getting money from them, they are also involved, they form a part of the nexus.*

In the example above **word-of-mouth networks and local connections** are the key to business development for builders. As are kinship and familial networks, as this case shows. The requirement of an NOC for the redevelopment of one's property is also contingent upon social capital in many cases and particularly relevant in colonies that started out as cooperative societies with membership-based ownership. But Mr. Joshi's account also reveals some of the chaotic aspects of these early days of the builder market. In my own experience, and those of others that I interviewed, builders would often cold call or directly approach homeowners to ask if they wanted to redevelop or earn some cash by selling their roof rights. This earned them a reputation for being predatory. In the case of the homeowners across the street from our house the harassment reached a point where, according to their son, they "were forced to accept the builder's offer". Mr. Joshi emphasized the predatory nature of builders, not only adept at coercing homeowners, municipal agencies and building contractors, but also a "major reason for the emergence of builder floors across the city". Given that his daughter is an architect, and owing to his experience with builders, he insisted that the unethical practices and lack of accountability amongst builders is due to the lack of a code of conduct or ethics for this relatively new profession.

Mrs. Ghosh (Homeowner – Safdarjung Enclave):

> Firstly, this person [the current builder] is an **educated person, he's polished**. He took me to see one of his built houses and that property belonged to a family friend of ours, a Bengali person as it turns out. And this person, you know, welcomed him so warmly and she spoke to him so familiarly that I could see they were on very good terms. Like in front of me she asked him to get something fixed in the building and he was immediately agreeable. I mean their house has been built for quite a few years now, but they seemed to still be in touch and on very good terms. That was a good sign, because I think there is no builder who would continue to do odd jobs so many years after construction is completed.
>
> There were of course other builders we talked to. In fact, the first builder we spoke with was a **Marwari** and he was a **slick talker** and all. He gave us his spiel that you know, this much money, etc., but "we should sign quick". So much so that he wanted to fly to Kolkata where my sister lives to have her sign off on her part of the agreement. Then we got a little wary of his, you know, overeager attitude.
>
> This one is none of that, a very nice and very **polite fellow**. In any case, soon after, my son did all the talking with the builder, even though he lives in Bangalore.

Mrs. Ghosh's experience with builders is contingent upon two things. Firstly, relative to Mr. Joshi's experience from 15 years before, the builder industry has become more organized and well-established, i.e., it has become more commonplace and socially acceptable for homeowners to engage with them. Secondly, Mrs. Ghosh's property in South Delhi has a significantly higher real estate value than Mr. Joshi's in Paschim Vihar, North Delhi. As a result, the builders who approached Mrs. Ghosh were wary of appearing predatory and keener to impress upon her their professional integrity and track record. Essentially, looking at the two cases, it appears that both the development rights of homeowners, as well as the success of local builder firms is not simply up to a 'free market' system with purely financial logics. Becoming a builder is a **deeply social and cultural** exercise, one where the builder's interpersonal skills, social networks, and persona are key.

In fact, so is their cultural and ethnic background, caste and appearance (as Mrs. Ghosh's offhand comment about the *Marwari*[53] builder also suggests). Contrary to Louis Wirth's (1938) socially distant and transactional nature of urban social relationships, entrepreneurial success in Delhi, is equally dependent on cultural relatability and kinship networks. This also manifests in the way that builders' business development proceeds. For instance, some of the builders I interviewed vaguely spoke about the territorial distribution and fuzzy jurisdiction of builders across the city. Though it is not strict, and competition is good to a certain degree, most localities can only support a certain number of builders. And these territorial negotiations between builders are often heavily dependent on their local social capital. As Mr. Ali (see Chapter 3: Migration and Mobility of the Middle Class for interview excerpt), a builder I interviewed in Abu Fazal Enclave mentioned, "we tend to stick with our own…Muslim builders typically operate in the same areas."

Mr. Bansal (Builder – North Delhi):

Earlier people bought plots because they were cheap and construction cost was also low. So, a small businessperson or a salaried person could invest his savings to buy a house or even build one. But salaries or business incomes did not grow as fast as land prices and construction costs. So, it no longer was possible to take out money from salary or business income to build a house. And because the [construction] cost is also high, he would rather not incur it but pass it on to a builder. Apart from cost, an ordinary person cannot build on his own because of too many government complications in regulations and approvals.

If we built a house for 'A', he gives the reference of his friend 'B' who wants to now build his house. He gives that person's contact number and advises us to get in touch or he gets in touch with us. This is one of the ways we get work. Either way, we fix up meetings and go on. We then discuss the finances and other aspects, and the contract is drawn up. We then take possession of the house, get the plan passed

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[53] The *Marwari* or *Marwadi* (Devanagari: मारवाड़ी) are an Indo-Aryan ethno-linguistic group that originate from the Marwar region of Rajasthan, India. Known for their business acumen, the community is usually associated with trade and finance. ('Marwari People', 2024)

[building permit], the house is demolished, and construction happens. This whole process takes about a year and a half.

*There are registered builders under RERA who work under it. But **builders like us are not registered**. If we get registered, we must deal with the compliances, taxes, the increased costs, the white/black issues [capital costs], and so on. It will impact the total cost of the floor as well. Suppose today, a floor of a certain size costs two and a half crores, it will escalate to three crores. Today, we just sit in our office and work by ourselves, but if we must deal with compliances and other things, we would have to maintain an office staff at the back end. Now **we manage about ten people**. All the different contractors, like the plumbing, electrical, PoP [Plaster of Paris] or the AC contractor and so on. But **if we employ all the people, we will have to manage maybe five hundred or a thousand people**. All the time, we will be dealing with their attendance, we can forget about growth. We do not want to do this. It is better to have contractors, give them the work on a particular project, explain the work to them and that is it.*

*… [as a contractor] we would be **working under someone else**, one step down, as an employee, although not like a job. One is answerable to the other person, in terms of timeline, pricing or designing or any other thing. That is not acceptable to us. There is also the question of margin. One will only earn 5, or 10 or 15% of profit being a contractor. Now that we are a builder, **we choose our profit margin**, whether it is ten or twenty percent. Therefore, we chose not to work in this contracting position, we wanted to do our own work.*

*We have started working not only in Pitampura, but also in Gurgaon, we may also expand to Noida. Instead of doing multistoried projects, we would like to expand in the builder floor model. **Instead of making five buildings of twenty stories each, we would prefer to make the same four-story buildings but make twenty such buildings**. There is one more reason for this. When we take on 200, 300 or 400 square yard plots, we are able to complete the project in about one and a half years, from the construction of the building to the sale of floors. One finishes and we start with the*

147

*new. In multi-service work, there is no limit on the time, it may take five, ten, fifteen or even twenty years. **One gets stuck**. Even in the case of DLF, it probably does not happen that 100% of the projects or houses get sold, even till the last. One gets stuck. By the time the last one gets sold, it may take years and by then, the old ones develop problems or start needing repairs or alterations, so there is no getting out of the project.*

*My interest today is not to become a DLF or Amrapali [corporate developer], but to be a builder and expand, making small houses, but more of them. Even the big developers, say for instance DLF in Gurgaon are nowadays turning towards builder floors (Fig. 4). So if these big multistoried builder firms are coming into this model, then why do we need to look towards their model? Also, I feel often due to some environmental issues, or legal battle, **big projects get stalled** and it is a huge loss. But in our work, even if one building work stops, for some reason, it affects only four floors. Other projects can still continue. It is not a problem.*

As Mr. Bansal explains it, most of his clients could not afford to redevelop their property on their own. And after years of operating as a contractor he decided to shift into the builder business precisely because he saw an opportunity around him and within his existing social milieu. He made it very clear to me that he "does not chase clients". Essentially, according to him the demand is constant and the niche clearly demarcated. And since the market is replete with labor and material suppliers, he doesn't have to employ any staff which allows him to keep his overheads to a minimum. This business model is most prevalent across the builders I interviewed and came across throughout my fieldwork.

The other thing my interview with Mr. Bansal clarified was the uniqueness of this line of work and the way it makes money, compared to most other 'professionals' in the industry. The emergence of builder floors is inextricably linked to the emergence of the builder in the city, who may be differentiated from **property agents, contractors and even developers**. Unlike property or estate agents, the builder is not dependent on third party transactions for commissions. Unlike the contractor, they do not just receive payments for services rendered and materials provided. Contemporary builders are entities that invest capital in

the form of construction costs in exchange for a share in property ownership **that ultimately grows their own property portfolio**. And in a market where real estate has more investment potential and monetary value than liquid capital, the builder model is financially the most profitable. And as he rightly points out, the builder floor model has become so popular that DLF and a few other developers have started **reinvesting in their own colonies** by converting single-story houses (still under their ownership) into ready-to-buy independent floors (Figure 35).
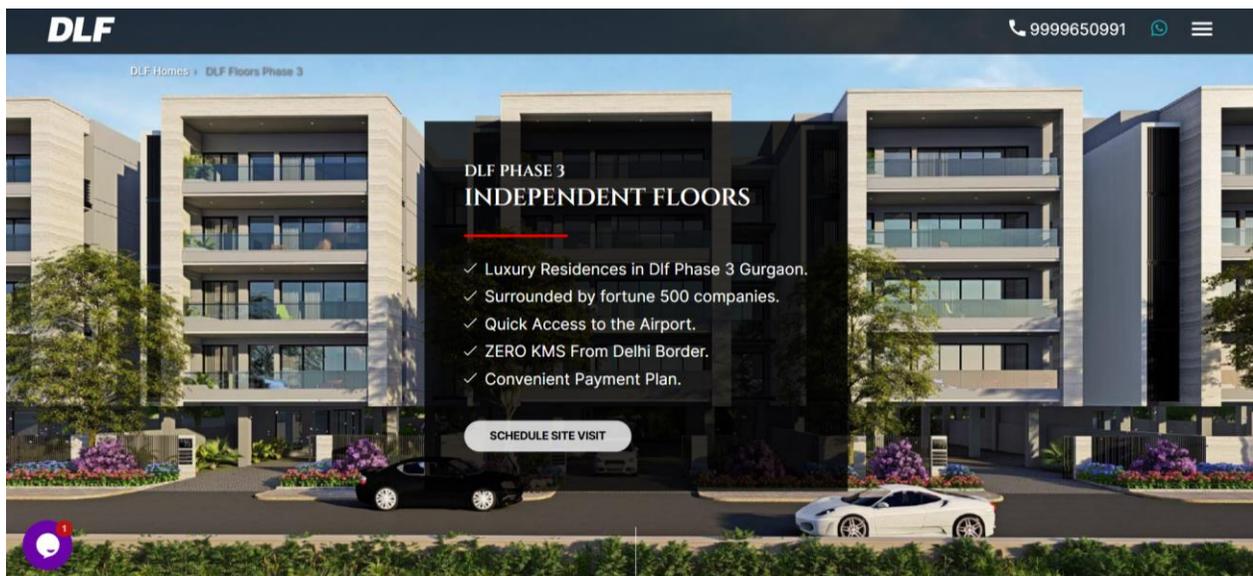
Figure 35 Webpage from dlfhomes.co.in that advertises 'independent floors'. Source: https://www.dlfhomes.co.in/dlf-floors-phase-3-gurgaon/ (Homes, n.d.)

Additionally, while they are popularly confused, builders and developers have very distinct business models, organizational structures, modes of operation and even visions for the future of their practice. Unlike corporate developers, as Mr. Bansal points out, the builder is not bound to the many bureaucratic, legal, and even temporal liabilities that companies like DLF face. Mr. Bansal's comments were also a tongue-in-cheek reference to Supertech, a company that filed for solvency following a series of land disputes and consumer lawsuits (Bora, 2024). However, the speculative capital that flows through the builder franchise might not be as unrelated to large townships and developers as one might think.

Mr. Malik (Builder – South Delhi):

*I started my career as a Pharmacist. In the year 2000 I developed my own property, through a builder. Friends around me were actually more into this business, because plotted colonies were mushrooming at the time. I was surrounded by builders, and **initially I started by funding them**. They will pay me monthly interest, they were putting that money in construction or collaborating with owners. After that, as it happened **I started underwriting** and **brokering** also. Because **once you're in real estate, these are all associated – funding [bankrolling], underwriting, trading, and assisting in conducting sales and purchase.***

*In my case, it was hardly 5% [of contracts] through brokers and 95% people approached me directly for collaboration. You see, they have to have trust in you. You approach them, they don't know you, you have not delivered earlier. So that **trust building** is very difficult. I did a project in Kailash Colony. There it was through a broker. So, he introduced me to a client, then I showed them my delivered projects. And three years after Kailash Colony, I had delivered say 15-16 projects. I just tell any new client to inspect my delivered projects, and they talk to the people living there, then they talk good about you. That way my goodwill and my relationship with the client remain strong.*

The pandemic definitely caused some setbacks. I had three projects in different localities that got stalled because of lockdown... Cash flow wasn't really the problem, though stalled projects is never a good thing. No the real problem was labor. Those who could had already fled to their village and the ones who stayed back never came to work. Then there were stays[54] on construction activity across NCR, even due to pollution control board.

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[54] Following an affidavit by the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF), the Supreme Court re-imposed a ban, first imposed in 2019, on construction activities in Delhi and the national capital region (NCR) in view of the worsening air quality. (Press Trust of India, 2021)

While the builder industry is relatively immune to fluctuations in financial markets, partly due to the consistent rise in property values, it did face significant issues during the labor shortage through the pandemic lockdowns. This is also partly due to the ad hoc nature of their contractual arrangements with contractors, material suppliers and other entities, that are themselves completely at the mercy of day laborers and unskilled or semi-skilled migrant workers. In Mr. Malik's case, remaining nimble, diversifying his entrepreneurial portfolio, and being flexible across 'professional' boundaries, was key to keeping his business running. At the time of the interview Mr. Malik had three stalled projects (mainly due to the pandemic as he said), but his pharmacy business was thriving as he had just started supplying medicines to hospitals and clinics as well. He also claimed that he **used his capital flow to bankroll much larger townships in the wider NCR**.

This way even though most builders might choose to incrementally develop small properties, their participation in the larger circulation of speculative capital for urban development remains unquestionable. Government oversight of builders is minimal, since most of the attention in the private building sector is drawn by big corporate developers such as DLF, Unitech, Supertech, Parvsnath, etc. Of course, the real estate sector itself has only recently started stabilizing after the 'wild west' conditions of the early 2000s boom. One landmark legislation towards this goal has been the *Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act* 2016 (RERA). All through the 2010s several consumer cases were filed with different courts across the NCR by individuals against developers who promised to deliver move-in ready apartments (typically in the peripheral areas of the NCR) but possessions were delayed for years, with several projects and corporations declaring insolvency altogether (Bora, 2024; Dhawan, 2018).

However, the wording and specific sections under RERA leave a few sizeable loopholes for builders to exploit. One clause in particular pertains to the scale of a project under which said project need not be registered with RERA:

> *EXCEPTION TO REGISTRATION OF PROJECT:*
>
> *(2) Notwithstanding anything contained in sub-section (1), no registration of the real estate project shall be required—*

*(a) where the **area of land proposed to be developed does not exceed five hundred square meters** or **the number of apartments proposed to be developed does not exceed eight** inclusive of all phases*

(Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act, 2016)

And though there are cases where the consolidation of plots leads to the development of more than 8 apartments, or where the overall size of the plot exceeds 500 square meters (mostly only in South Delhi), this is typically not the case. This way builders remain outside the purview of RERA and continue to operate without government oversight. However, some builders - and perhaps some plot owners as well – are in favour of a more organized industry. For instance, 'Prithu Homes' (Figure 36) is essentially a builder but has decided to present itself as a corporate entity, boasting of a "Team of Professionals, in an Unorganized Industry", as opposed to the employee-free model that Mr. Bansal is so proud of. Whether this is a model that will catch on remains firmly in the domain of speculation (which I will pick up in Chapter 7: Speculations - Housing Futures of Delhi).
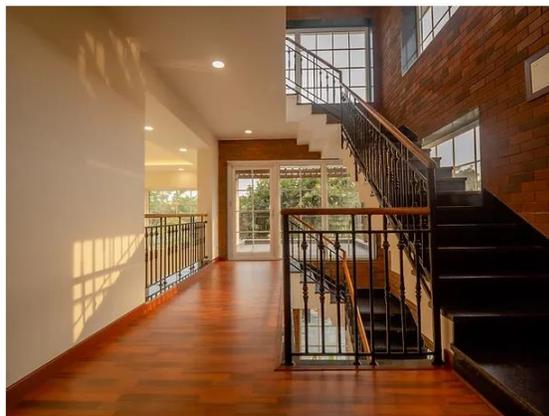
Turnkey Service

Hassle-free construction for your dream home (independent floors or villas) for:
- Owners in Delhi NCR looking to build on their vacant residential plots
- Owners in Delhi NCR looking to demolish and rebuild their homes

Know more

Plot Collaboration Service

Choose Prithu as your collaboration partner. Under this service, we design and build new homes for clients at our own cost in exchange for a floor(s) in the newly built home.

Know more

Figure 36 Home page for Prithu Homes. Source: https://www.prithu.in/

CHAPTER 5

THE EVOLVING TYPOLOGY OF THE HOME

This chapter builds on the proposition that there are strong entanglements between contemporary idea(l)s of 'home' and the architectural or spatial attributes of private dwellings. Idea(l)s of home have evolved alongside the upward mobility of the middle class in Delhi and draw on both abstract notions of home such as belonging, family, freedom, security, comfort (Figure 37), as well as tangible morphological features of private dwellings that may be traced genealogically. While these notions of home transcend class, caste, access, they have historically (and globally) had a strong association with home ownership and the middle class. In other words, the very concept of 'home' is inextricably tied to the privilege of those who can indulge in buying one. As Blunt and Dowling, in their seminal book 'Home', suggest, "ownership is termed 'home ownership' rather than 'house ownership', signaling that ownership is synonymous with home" (Blunt & Dowling, 2022, p. 96).

Figure 37 'What does home mean to you?' Responses from third-year undergraduate students taking 'Geographies of Home' at Queen Mary University of London in 2020/21. Source: Created by Deepti Prasad. (Blunt & Dowling, 2022, p. 2)

In terms of architectural typology, there are several attributes of contemporary builder floors that draw on – and become a part of the continuum of – traditional dwelling types such as the *haveli*, the colonial bungalow, the *kothi,* as well as post-independence housing types such as refugee tenements and government quarters (group housing). Studying these historical dwelling types provides the social, cultural, discursive and morphological context within which the vocabulary of private dwellings has evolved. Specific morphological features such as verandahs and servant quarters, and colloquialisms such as *kothi,* hold specific positions within the legacy of private dwellings in Delhi and continue to inform the rubric against which contemporary dwellings are assessed.

The first section discusses the rise and fall and legacies of traditional housing types. The historical context developed in this section will help situate the desires of the middle class and how these historic types continue to inform contemporary private dwellings. Despite the decline of *haveli*s themselves, and the relegation of the Old City to overwhelming commercialization, the legacy of havelis in contemporary Delhi remains; the desire to maintain the semblance of a joint family and to conduct business at one's home. Similarly, though technically bungalows and *kothi*s may only be found in select areas of Delhi and remain out of reach of the average middle-class consumer, their linguistic appropriation (the words *bangla* and *kothi*) transcends architectural typology and allows their translation into contemporary parlance, often referring to plotted houses and even builder floors.

The section that follows describes the most prevalent and available options for middle class residents/migrants after independence, namely, tenements and quarters. These are discussed within the context of the role of architects, the government and self-build practices. With the emergence of plotted colonies, the ability to own your own home and the freedom to customize one's private living space is juxtaposed against the social and security benefits of group housing. This leads up to the next section, that builds on the online/mobile recruitment survey that I disseminated at the start of fieldwork. As mentioned previously, the answers from the survey are not meant to indicate aggregated/statistically significant patterns among homeowners in Delhi. Instead, they demonstrate vectors of inquiry that

became guidelines for me to ask specific questions during interviews with selected participants.

The final section in this chapter thickens the description of life before and after builder floors in contemporary Delhi, as I 'plug-in' various concepts of home such as loss, gain, privacy, security, home-work into interview excerpts and building drawings. These examples shed light on the ways in which builder floors have restructured internal and external spatial and social relationships. For instance, the role of the 'verandah' (and terrace) and its ultimate disappearance, the relationship to trees (both within and outside the premises of the property), the segregation and return of work and commerce within the private dwelling, and the individuation and hyper-privatization of internal spaces even as some versions of joint families are making a comeback. On the other hand, builder floors are also producing new relations of exteriority, such as a new kind of 'neighborliness' or transactional relationship between different residents of the building based on the management of common areas and facilities; the increasing use of technology-based security measures in addition to guards leading to even more inward-looking buildings; interactions with daily wage workers in plotted colonies associated with this type (maids, chauffeurs, security guards) that have consequences for the changing landscape of play for children and its relationship to the use/disuse of neighborhood parks.

Some Notes on Typology

> ...*in investigating the origins of the bungalow in India, and later development in Britain, North America, Australia, Africa and Europe, it is about the historical forces – economic, political, social, cultural, ideological – which, in producing the bungalow, have also shaped much of the modern world: colonialism, industrialisation, capitalism and socialism, urbanisation and suburbanisation, and the emergence of a global economy and culture.*

> (King, 1995, p. viii)

In Rafael Moneo's article On Typology (1978), the author traces the discourse around the term from Quatremere de Quincy to Aldo Rossi. According to Moneo, distinguished from vernacular traditions, the evolution of typology in architectural history took several turns; from the naturalistic, formal structure underlying type, as conceived by Quincy; to the composition based early functionalism of Durand; to the Beaux Arts and Avant Garde that rejected previous approaches in favor of form-space as primary elements; to the modernist functionalist prototypes; and a return to the traditional city in the 1960s by Saverio Muratori and others. Even though in architecture discourse (and art history scholarship), the term itself has evolved from its origins in the early 19th century, it has mostly signified a search for abstract principles or rules as 'generators of form' - a disabling obsession with formalism, as David Gissen's critique of Swiss art historian Heinrich Wolfflin suggests (2022).

Even as scholars looked beyond the immediacy of the object – and into the past, such as the 'traditional city' in Anthony Vidler's (1977) proposition – for explanations of type and form, there continued to be a focus on determinism (cultural, environmental, technological, cosmological, etc.). Urban morphologists, for instance M.R.G Conzen, drew on evidence from historic town plans, their street configuration, plot patterns, and building footprints to evidence the evolution of type (Whitehand et al., 2009). Fred Kniffen's work on documenting Louisiana House Types (1936) brought attention to ways in which cultural needs, response to climate, and construction technologies shape type – similar to the generators of form as proposed by Amos Rapoport (1969). Despite the diversity in approaches on typology, most approaches look at the formal structure of types as it relates to the urban field outside and morphological logics within, to either determine its origins or identify its generators.

Adopting a different perspective instead, in the Culture of Building (2006), Howard Davis offers a critique of the architectural history canon as "a descendent of nineteenth century German art-historical scholarship" and calls for architecture to concern itself with the larger, "complex, **collective phenomenon**." Davis believes that all buildings are in fact part of a complex system of building cultures, and that "the product of the building culture is the built world **as a whole**" (2006, p. 8). Following such an approach, the study of type necessitates a look at the larger production of the built environment. Consequently, it is not

about the distinct trajectory or emergence of 'a' type or *how,* it alone, is produced; rather it is about co-production, the parallel emergence of type and the ecology surrounding it. In a similar vein, Aldo Rossi in The Architecture of the City (1984), sees typology more as an apparatus or instrument. For Rossi, unlike a set of first principles, a design method, an ideal model, or a recognizable form, typology serves to study the skeleton that is the city and its morphology. Following these approaches, I invoke type and typology as means to study parallel phenomena.

Additionally, across this chapter I deploy the word 'type' as a material-discursive enactment, rather than an enclosure of meaning, or hard definition of any building or structure. For instance, as King suggests in his tongue in cheek way, "a bungalow is defined as a dwelling form known [simply] by the term 'bungalow'" (1995, p. 1). This is not to say that any architectural type does not have characteristics or traits, or that it is entirely fungible with any other type. But, I believe, what King is highlighting here is how labels are not ends in themselves but starting points for productive inquiry. Therefore, in this chapter, each 'definition' is used provisionally, such that it attaches itself to the next, transforming both in the process. This is especially crucial in understanding the translation of *kothi* into common contemporary parlance. Or for that matter the continued use of the colloquialism 'bangla' – ostensibly an adaptation of bungalow. Both these terms are used widely to refer to upper middle-class homes in general, initially applied to private detached houses (Desai et al., 2016, p. 74), but presently even to builder floors. Effectively, I use the various labels as 'apparatuses' to cut together-apart (following Barad's agential realism) the *phenomena* of contemporary private dwellings in Delhi.

This approach is closer to what Karen Barad calls 'diffractive reading' (see Chapter 1 – section on Methodology). As discussed earlier, in post-qualitative inquiry, instead of defining a phenomenon and asking, 'what it is?', we ask, 'what else is there?' and 'what is being produced?' Such a conception of type takes into account its deterritorialization and reterritorialization in form, meaning and use as well. Instead of asking how builder floors are different from plotted housing, bungalows, *haveli*s and *kothi*s, this chapter focuses on what has endured? What transcends 'type'? Going back to the quote by Anthony King in the

beginning of this sub-section, in investigating the 'origins' of builder floors in Delhi, I have found instead the persistent desires of the upwardly mobile, the historic forces that produce and perpetuate those desires, and how these desires continue to shape domestic spaces and private dwellings in Delhi.

'Traditional' Private Living

In following Delhi's somewhat popular and well-documented 'traditional' housing types, one is met with *haveli*s of Shahjahanabad (Hosagrahar, 2012; Tillotson, 1994), bungalows of Lutyens Delhi (King, 1995), and even *kothi*s (Sharma, 2019). Scholars and historians have mostly been able to trace their, at times, complex genealogy, the cultural milieu within which they were popularized, and ways in which their morphological characteristics reflect the sociability and lifestyles of their inhabitants. These house types varied in scale depending on the class and status of their inhabitants, but were, for the most part, large dwellings belonging to the elite classes.

Historian Sarah Tillotson, in her book *Indian Mansions: A Social History of the Haveli* (1994), categorizes the *haveli* as a mansion type with inward-looking courtyards called *chowk*s, that was most prevalent in precolonial north India. Typically, a few stories tall, there are several variations of the *haveli*, depending on the status of their occupant from noblemen and feudal landlords to merchants. Given that they were mostly built within urban settings, they are often densely packed together and form tight urban structures or neighborhood-like formations – a fact noted by many of the traveler accounts Tillotson refers to in her book. These tight formations were strictly caste-, class-, occupation-, and kinship-based clusters of *haveli*s that would share common facilities and even fortify themselves with gates in street-like configurations, such as *mohalla*s (in Shahjahanabad) or *pol*s (in Ahmedabad, Gujarat) which offered protection against countryside pillagers, rival merchant clans, noblemen's armies, etc. (Tillotson, 1994, p. 5).

Functionally, other than a few rooms such as prayer rooms, kitchens, bathrooms and lavatories, most other rooms in a *haveli* were flexible. The traditional haveli also had

designated rooms where the men conducted business, such as reception halls or *diwankhana*s and sitting halls or *baithak*s. The central courtyard (at times more than one as shown in Fig. 1), or *chowk*, acted as an ordering system with most rooms facing it, and regulated both the microclimate and the movement of people across the haveli. It was also a multipurpose space facilitating activities that took advantage of its indoor-outdoor condition, and often included trees. Of course, the large number of spaces and overall scale of a *haveli* necessitated a large household and a commensurate number of staff for its upkeep and functioning. Consequently – and most relevant to this dissertation – most havelis housed large joint families. For instance, "A large haveli, such as Haldia House in Jaipur, might hold two hundred family members; and the haveli of a wealthy man might provide a home to his poorer relations" (Tillotson, 1994, p. 32). However, as both Tillotson and Priya Jaikumar point out, *haveli*s were also based on a strict social order and hierarchy that reflected in their spatial arrangement, such as the segregation of women and men (*zanana* and *murdana*) and segregation of masters and servants (often slaves).

And though the material fabric of *haveli*s has remained remarkably intact over the centuries, with the advent of modern colonial planning and with the willful neglect of old towns by British administrators, *haveli*s have seen a tremendous decline. This happened even as the commercial success of places such as Shahjahanabad (as discussed in Chapter 3) pushed havelis to accommodate commercial and industrial function, perhaps at the cost of their residential function. Given their large flexible spaces, havelis were/are capable of accommodating various functions beyond a typical dwelling unit – a fact that made them suitable as mixed-use factories, warehouses, commercial units, offices, etc. For instance, during a research project in Ajmer, Rajasthan, I documented a haveli that housed a fully functional textile mill with multiple looms spread across various rooms, with some on-site accommodation for staff (Figure 38). Eventually, as Jaikumar suggests, "havelis lost their ability to function as efficient domiciles for the elite with the decline of the Mughal empire in North India, under which a hierarchical, patriarchal system of aristocratic patronage and indirect landownership once flourished, to be replaced by indigenous bureaucratic elites and subservient princely states suited to British imperialism" (2017, p. 223).
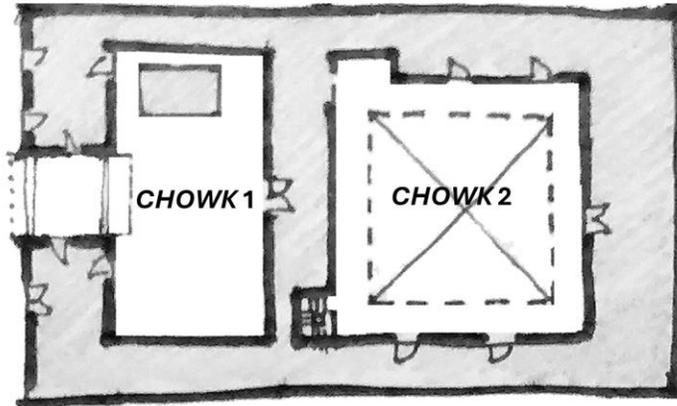
Figure 39 Haveli in Ajmer, Rajasthan with a working textile mill. LEFT: Internal courtyard (Chowk 2). TOP RIGHT: Machine loom in one of the rooms on the second floor. BOTTOM RIGHT: Rough layout of the haveli (sketched on site).

Figure 38 Haveli in Daryaganj set to be demolished and replaced with builder floors. LEFT: External Facade. RIGHT: Central courtyard covered over, leaving only a skylight.

161

Meanwhile, Shahjahanabad's commercial success – which was in no small part related to the adaptability of havelis – was used against it by colonial administrators (and certainly Indian planners after independence) to malign and abandon it. As Narayani Gupta notes, "above all, the commercialization of urban space mired Shahjahanabad in squalor and pollution" (1981, p. xv), leading to its designation as a 'slum' within the MPD 1962 (Guerrieri, 2018, p. 78). This also resulted in the abandonment of several such properties (Figure 39). Simultaneously, an aspirational association with massive colonial bungalows that were being built in the Civil Lines (See Chapter 3: Migration and Mobility of the Middle Class) for colonial officers and later in New Delhi, set a new standard of private living for the rising middle-class residents of the city. Bungalows, as Anthony D. King defines them, are "in this context... understood as a separate, single-storey, single-household dwelling... a form of dwelling, usually owned by its inhabitants... [and] is also a 'modern' form of dwelling for a 'Western type' nuclear family, or in some cases only one generation of it, in contrast to the more 'traditional' dwelling forms" (1995, p. 3). According to King (also corroborated by Desai et al., 2016), despite having humble origins as a form of adaptation of a traditional 'Bengal-roofed' (*bangaldaar*) rural dwelling, the colonial bungalow grew to become a detached house type emplaced within a sprawling plot, typically allotted to high-ranking government officials and elites, both during the colonial period and after independence. I have elsewhere pointed out how this "set the precedent" for the kind of private living that the upwardly mobile middle class aspired towards (Murthy, 2023, p. 55). This is corroborated by King in his book Colonial Urban Development (2007) as well. Here, King describes in meticulous detail, how the luxurious living standards of colonial officers, their litany of servants, their leisurely afternoon teas, and sprawling residences in Civil Lines and the Cantonment were instrumental in shaping the aspirations of the emerging urban middle classes in Shahjahanabad:

> "...*there grew up an increasingly substantial middle-class whose residential expectations were determined partly by the norms of the rural-based elites living in the city (the so-called 'landed gentry') and partly by the technoeconomic possibilities prevailing in the cities themselves.*"

Meanwhile, the "post-uprising [1857]" built environment of Delhi had started to embrace modern infrastructure and "products of east-west cultural entanglement" (Sharma, 2023, p. 13) such as the bungalow and the *kothi,* as Daryaganj was transformed and planned extramural development began. A new regime of Anglo-Indian built environment was taking root – what Jyoti Pandey Sharma, in her book '*Colonialism, Uprising and the Urban Transformation of Nineteenth-Century Delhi*', calls the "Residency-Church-Bungalow-Kothi combine" (Sharma, 2023, p. 13). Unlike the *haveli*s within the walls of Shahjahanabad, these new types offered many modern luxuries that made them popular dwelling types. Many aspired to live in sprawling houses surrounded by greenery and be the lord of their own piece of land. Of course, such properties were neither available nor possible within the confines of the ever-burgeoning Shahjahanabad. Additionally, as King suggests above, owning such a property was not simply a matter of siting - it was also a matter of status. Bungalows could not simply be bought or acquired. Most were unavailable to Indians, reserved only for colonial officers and select nobility.

This was already the case with the nabobi[55] *kothi,* as Sharma describes in her article, '*Sociability in Eighteenth-Century Colonial India: The Nabob, the Nabobian Kothi, and the Pursuit of Leisure*' (2019). The article defines the *kothi* as a "mansion with hybrid East-West spatial characteristics," that was succeeded by "the bungalow, which replaced the kothi in the nineteenth century as the epitome of British colonial domesticity" (Sharma, 2019, p. 8). Though, according to Sharma, the type was seemingly 'replaced' and remains understudied in scholarship on colonial histories, the term - or more precisely the word *kothi* - is both widely used and commonly understood in contemporary parlance. Sharma also emphasizes that "the Nabobian household was centered on the nabob as head of a family that typically comprised his *bibi*s [wives], their offspring, and several servants" (Sharma, 2019, p. 10). This is a condition common to most precolonial and colonial private dwelling

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[55] Nabob is a term specifically ascribed to "acculturated [or *Mughal*ized] European mercenaries who served a variety of rulers in the north of the subcontinent" during the 18th century. The word itself is "an Anglicized version of the local appellation *nawab*" (Sharma, 2019, p. 8)

types. I argue here that the patriarchal, caste, and class systems through which most historically elite forms of private dwellings endured, found their way into language and have transcended the original built form types. This is particularly true of language used by house help and the urban working class who often refer to any upper middle-class home as '*bangla*' or '*kothi*'.

And though in terms of morphological characteristics and style, both the bungalow or the *kothi* might be distinguished as separate types, their strongest commonality is the fact that they typically refer to detached, "freestanding, ex-urban dwelling(s)", which in the nineteenth century were "usually considered to be of one storey" (Desai et al., 2016, p. 3). In the sections that follow, I will argue that despite efforts by the government to provide refugee resettlement and government employee housing in the form of group housing, a few key factors have strengthened middle-class aspirations for standalone private dwellings that harken back to the qualities of *kothi*s and bungalows. Single-family homes and plotted development have thus brought the luxuries of nineteenth century private dwellings to a much wider population, even as these seemingly anachronistic relationships across types have perpetuated similar gender, social, and class roles.

Private Living for the Masses

As discussed in previous chapters, housing provision was chaotic in the early years after independence. While the Ministry of Rehabilitation struggled to put together refugee resettlement colonies (such as Kingsway Camp) to move people out of temporary shelters like Purana Qila, more permanent housing solutions entailed the establishment of colonies (See Chapter 3: Migration and Mobility of the Middle Class). Typically, these new colonies were either planned as plotted colonies meant to accommodate self-built homes or in the form of group housing for government employees built by the Central Public Works Department (CPWD). In terms of space standards, both the self-build 'tenements' by refugees, and most of the government-built 'quarters,' were modest, given that they were meant for the masses.

In a sociological study done in 1957, A. Bopegamage noted that most housing in Delhi at the time was "congested and overcrowded" (Bopegamage, 1957, p. 68). This was due to both the new refugee populations but also new demand for government employees' housing, as in 1956 they accounted for about "40 per cent of the population of Delhi" (Town Planning Organization, Interim General Plan for Greater Delhi, p. 14). In refugee resettlement colonies, the new residents built their own homes as Bopegamage goes on to describe below:

> ... there are two types of houses in the colonies... small one-floor tenement houses and one or two storey tenement houses... a tenement house consists of a single room of size 14' 3" x 10' with a verandah of size 14' 3" x 7' 3". In the other group a house has two rooms measuring 12' x 10' each, with a small front yard and also a backyard... The size and pattern of each type of these houses are more or less uniform in every colony. In one and two-storey tenement house types there are three rooms on each floor of a building with a separate bath and also a lavatory.

(Bopegamage, 1957, p. 83)

Meanwhile, government employees were allotted 'quarters'– as these were called – or flats in low-rise group housing schemes, and some of the earliest included Sarojini Nagar Colony, Rama Krishna Puram (R K Puram) Colony, Vinay Nagar Colony. Government quarters were clustered together hierarchically based on the designation of the employees and were accordingly designed, ranging from Type I for clerks up to Type 8 for senior officials such as directors. Despite technically being group housing, most such government quarters were only two storeys tall and typically contained verandahs, front gardens, and balconies on the upper floor (Figure 40). The quarters were typically designed and executed by the CPWD, led by engineers, but were sometimes "signed [off] by famous architects, such as Joglekar and Rahman for the Type 2 houses in RK Puram Colony" (Guerrieri, 2018, p. 120). Though higher tier houses included separate dining rooms and gardens, "lower category houses, type 1, were small, comprising of simply an entrance-kitchen and a bedroom" (Guerrieri, 2018, p. 119).

Figure 40 "LEFT: Sector 12, RK Puram, RIGHT: RBI [Reserve Bank of India] Quarters, Sarojini Nagar" SOURCE: https://architexturez.net/doc/az-cf-186385 PHOTO CREDITS: Randhir Singh.

Even though in terms of space standards, both the refugee tenements and government quarters (at least up to Type IV) were frugal, there were key distinctions between the two that are significant in the context of this research. Firstly, tenement houses were incrementally built by their plot owners. This meant that unlike the standardized 'CPWD style' modernism (Figure 40) in the case of government quarters, tenements had the potential to *become* proper plotted houses – perhaps even *kothi*s - given enough time and resources, and offered the freedom of choice for finishes, expanding layout (to some extent), etc. Bopegamage's study noted a number of these adaptations even in the early years of their development:

> *The occupants of each [tenement] have turned the front courtyard to lawns and small flower-gardens... These double-room tenement houses were built to accommodate one family only. But in some there dwell one or two more families, mostly those of relatives together... In some areas of this colony people hailing from the same village live together in a group of houses.*

(Bopegamage, 1957, p. 84)

Secondly, tenements were highly adaptable in terms of building use, ownership and tenancy models. This is especially crucial in the context of the "entrepreneurial spirit" of the Punjabi migrant (See Chapter 3: Migration and Mobility of the Middle Class). Many homeowners

rented out upper floors and *barsati*s to other families (See) and had shops on the ground floor. Bopegamage's study already noted how much of the existing building stock in the city was mixed-use and typically accommodated commercial or small processing units on the ground floor with residences above (Fig. 5). The shop/house, of course, is a common feature of most traditional Asian cities as Howard Davis describes in his book Living Over the Store (2012). Davis demonstrates this through the example of adaptations to havelis in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. Over time even large havelis meant for elite families transformed, by separating the 'outside' where there "may be a shop at the ground floor, with a staircase beside it leading to rental apartments above" and the "family house, with privacy maintained on the inside" (Davis, 2012, p. 47).

In some parts of Old Delhi the workshops of the people and their places of residence are not separated. Those people who do business in the shops shown here reside upstairs. Note the conditions of houses and the roaming stray cattle. This picture is from Kashmeri Gate.

Figure 41 "Plate VIII (b)" (Bopegamage, 1957, p. 172).

However, the role that post-independence refugee resettlement colonies played in translating traditional mixed-use typology to modern Delhi cannot be understated here. In part due to their self-build model, the tenements effectively acted as a bridge between the heavily commercialized and congested Old City (Shahjahanabad) and the demands of new migrants that needed both housing and entrepreneurial opportunities. Many such colonies have flourished as commercial/mixed use hubs over the decades. During *Aapki Sadak*[56] – an action-research project I coordinated – we conducted a building use survey in a typical plotted colony in South Delhi and found a high density of mixed-use activity along

STREET	HOUSE	ENTRY	FLOORS	USE
BLOCK H-14, MALVIYA NAGAR	H-14/16	SIDE	G+2	House
	H-14/15	FRONT	G+1	Unused
	H-14/14	FRONT	Empty plot	
	H-14/13	FRONT	G+3	House
	H-14/12	FRONT	G+2	Shop + entry
	H-14/11	FRONT	G+3	Shop (Shreeram dental care) + entry
	H-14/10	FRONT	G+3	Shop (Chunnilal and sons) + entry
	H-14/9	FRONT	G+2	Shop (Kathuria photo studio) + entry
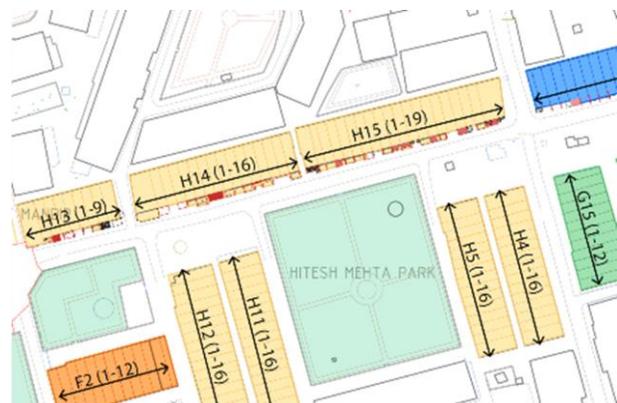
neighborhood streets including a mix of office spaces and commercial units (Figure 42). With the addition of commerce within what were initially planned as residential zones Delhi became a runaway success, further fueling the real estate 'boom.' As previous chapter pointed out, land speculation was rampant in the 1950 and 60s, including by the DDA, and housebuilding was the key driver. Scaling down the private dwelling allowed for its wide dissemination and adoption by even entry-level middle-class households. As Guerrieri

Figure 42 Sample from Household Mapping Survey conducted in 2015 for Aapki Sadak project.

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[56] *Aapki Sadak* (translated as 'your street') was a community engagement led, public realm, pedestrian and cycling accessibility improvement project in South Delhi. Between 2012 and 2015, the project involved public meetings and group discussions with members of local Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) and over 600 neighborhood residents, raising issues and strategies for improving pedestrian and cycling conditions, street parking, drainage, and public space safety. The aim of the project was to devise a series of practical solutions for improved pedestrian and NMT accessibility within the precinct, through rigorous community engagement, detailed mapping surveys, and technical design support. Led by Ashok B. Lall Architects, other firms involved were Innovative Transport Solutions (iTrans), Oasis Design Incorporated, Sandeep Gandhi Architects, Aastha Chauhan, and Mriganka Saxena (HTAU), and was supported by Shakti Sustainable Energy Foundation (a subsidiary of the ClimateWorks Foundation).

points out, "With India's Independence a revival or return to the traditional courtyard house did not occur; there was rather a transition from the large 'bungalow plot' to the more modest 'house plot.' The general tendency, testified by magazines, was to build single-family, one or two-storeyed houses" (Guerrieri, 2018, p. 124). While Bopegamage noted that most families dwelling in refugee colonies were middle-income households (1957, p. 84).

Several scholars have compared bungalows to the modern day plotted house (Desai et al., 2016; Guerrieri, 2018; Tillotson, 1994), in terms of their aspirational association and typological similarities. Tillotson also states that this association extended to the attraction held by the nuclear family - "the nuclear family held a double attraction for the new generation of independent India. Fashionably modern and Western, it also brought a freedom which came increasingly valued in a climate of change and opportunity". She goes on to state that, "today, living in a haveli is not fashionable: the smart places to live are modern suburban 'colonies'" (Tillotson, 1994, pp. 144–145). However, as the previous chapter showed, not all plotted houses were built the same. There were significant differences in the space standards afforded by different tiers within the 'middle class(es)'. For the more well-to-do upper middle-class families, South Delhi plotted colonies offered more luxurious options. As Guerrieri describes below:

> *Significant examples of these [upper-middle class, architect-designed homes] are the houses of Kamla Rani Krishan Mohan and Sardarni Inderjit Kaur in Defence Colony, designed by the Architects Associated Studio in 1960 and Mrs Malti Singh's bungalow in Friends Colony, designed by Karl Malte Von Heinz in 1961. In both these cases, in contrast to the havelis, all the rooms have a specific function: there is a kitchen and rooms for servants which are detached from the main building; on the ground floor, there is a living room, dining room, office, a guest-room, and a garage for the car; on the first floor, are family bedrooms. They differ in the size of the garden: smaller in the first, larger in the second.*

(Guerrieri, 2018, p. 124-125)

Between the luxurious standards of the detached plotted house and the flexibility and commercial opportunities afforded by even the smallest refugee tenement, there single-

family home captured the social imaginary, and material needs of the upwardly mobile middle class. However, as I iterated in Chapter 2 and 3, the process of housebuilding took up to several decades in the case of some families. Even as they bought plots through public auction, private purchase, or government allotment, the move to build a home require time and resources, as well as a faith in the future success of the colony they invested in. As such, for some – and as an example later will highlight - this also meant a transition from living in stable and socially thriving government quarters, to somewhat isolated and sparsely developed plotted colonies. However, this feeling of isolation was rapidly overcome with the growth, densification, and commercialization of plotted colonies since the 1980s. Essentially, for residents of contemporary Delhi, there is a persistent comparison that is drawn between group housing and plotted colonies, which in some ways became part of my initial inquiry to find out why builder floors became popular. The following section will shed some light on the broad areas of inquiry that form the basis of these comparisons, such as, privacy, independence/choice, security, parking, and so on.

Housing Choice: Online/Mobile Survey Results

As part of my preliminary fieldwork, I disseminated an online/mobile survey with the help of the United Residents Joint Action (URJA), a non-profit with a membership of approximately 1500 Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) of Delhi. The survey asked participants to identify the type of residential building they reside in, their reasons for choosing either plotted or group housing, if they have recently undergone redevelopment, dealt with builders or architects, among other questions. Of course, the idea of 'choice' here is prefaced with the historical and structural conditions that determine access and availability to different housing types, that have been discussed in previous sections and chapters. Of the 151 responses received, approximately 60 responses yielded complete data. The questions asked were based on a flowchart as shown below.
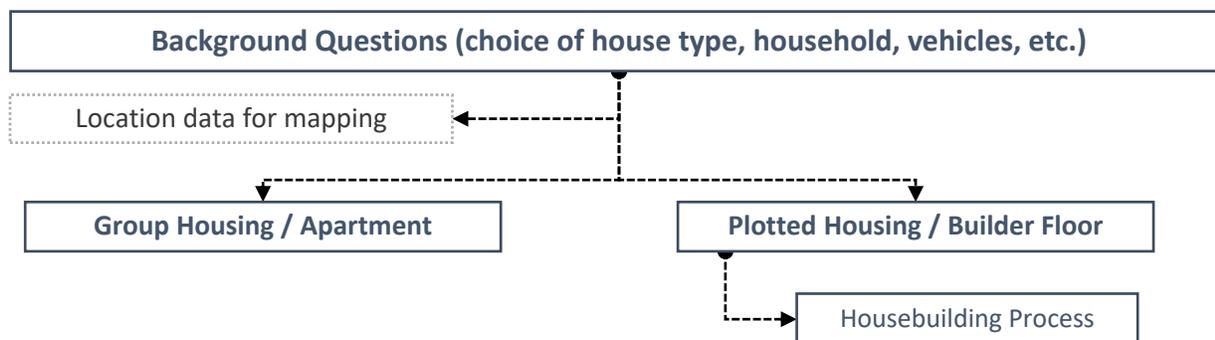
Table 6 Flowchart of questions within the online/mobile survey.

The following tables offer an abridged version of the major findings from the survey, starting with the background questions:

Table 7 SURVEY RESPONSES: Q1 - What kind of accommodation do you currently live in?

Q1 - What kind of accommodation do you currently live in?			
Number	**Answer**	**Percentage**	**Count**
1	Owned OR Rented flat in Group Housing Society	25	15
2	Rented floor (builder floor) in Plotted Colony	**8.33**	5
3	Own house or floor (builder floor) in Plotted Colony	**55**	33
4	Other* (Please describe below)	11.67	7
	TOTAL	100	60

* 5 of the 7 'Other' responses were also in fact Plotted houses, where the respondents were unable to navigate the survey properly.

Question 1 was the base determinant for the flow of the rest of the survey. And though this data is not statistically representative or significant in its aggregate form, given the overall scale of Delhi, it was still intriguing to find out that nearly **three-fourths** of the respondents lived in plotted colonies, either in independent houses or builder floors.

Table 8 SURVEY RESPONSES: Q2 - How many vehicles do you own?

Q2 - How many vehicles do you own?			
Minimum	**Maximum**	**Mean**	**Count**
1.00	5.00	2.20	60

Q3 - Could you describe your household situation? For example, "I have a wife and two children, and my mother lives with us. We also have a full-time house maid, etc.	
Number	**Answer**
1	A total of four plus one full-time help.
2	I have a wife with two children and a dog. We have a full-time maid.
3	Mother, husband, wife & two daughters.
4	We are three people living in our house, me, my husband and my daughter. It's a 2 BHK [bedroom, hall, kitchen] builder floor.
5	Living with my two kids & their respective families. Total 8 members.
6	I live with my parents. My elder brother and his wife and child are currently living in Bangalore due to an office project and will be back in a year or so. We love hosting family gatherings. We have a part-time maid.
7	3 Members
8	We are a family of 5. 1 Senior citizen. 4 Adults.
9	Yes, we are four members. Me, my husband, and two boys.
10	We are a couple with 2 kids (both under three years). My mother-in-law lives with us, and we have a temporary live in nanny due to covid.
11	My husband and I live here. We don't have a live-in help.
12	I have a father, mother and a married brother with a kid!!!
13	I live with my mother, brother and grandmother. My father lives in a different city due to work. We also have a cat. A full-time maid lives with us as well.
14	Wife, me, driver, cook, maid.
15	Myself, Son and his wife.
16	I live with my wife, 2 adult kids, a housekeeper and a dog
17	I have a wife and 2 children with part-time domestic help
18	We are 5 members in our family and we have house help.
19	I have a wife and 2 college going sons
20	Wife and one son
21	I have a wife and one daughter living at home. All domestic help come & go away after work. One car belongs to me and one to my daughter. Both my neighbors [on other floors in the same building] have two cars each!
22	It's me my wife and 2 children.... Daughter married son stays with us till his job is in Delhi
23	Wife and three daughters
24	*मैं मेरी पत्नी और दो बेटे हैं दोनों पढ़ रहे हैं* (translation: "It's me my husband and two sons who are studying")
25	Family of four Members
26	I have a wife and a mother.

27	I have two children, mother, uncle, brother, sister-in-law & sister all in the same house
28	4 members
29	I reside in a joint family with my wife, children and parents where my brother's family visits daily who is residing in a separate floor nearby, my building is an old one and I may go for a reconstruction.
The results from this question produced the following word cloud:	

The answers to the question above generated diverse answers, though it clarified the role that domestic help play in the functioning of middle-class homes in Delhi today. It corroborated what is informally taken for granted amongst middle-class families, something that forms a crucial part of the everyday life of private dwellings and is a part of the privilege and legacy of traditional private dwelling types such as *haveli*s and *kothi*s, albeit on a much smaller scale. The responses also complicate the idea of the nuclear family, allowing room for different configurations of 'family' to occupy similar housing types. As a corollary, this line of inquiry has far-reaching consequences for the study of 'servant quarters' in modern housing types – even though this remained outside the scope of my present research. During my fieldwork, I came across several other instances of 'family' that both reinforce the 'model' four-member nuclear family, as well as challenge such pre-conceived notions. However, it is worth mentioning here that of the 29 responses, 16 refer

specifically to a four-member or two-children household, which somewhat reinforces the *"Hum Do Hamare Do"* rhetoric (See [Chapter 2: The Story of My House](#)).

Table 10 SURVEY RESPONSES: Q4 - Which part of Delhi do you live in?

Q4 - Which part of Delhi do you live in? - Click on the map to drop location pin [Heat map result below]
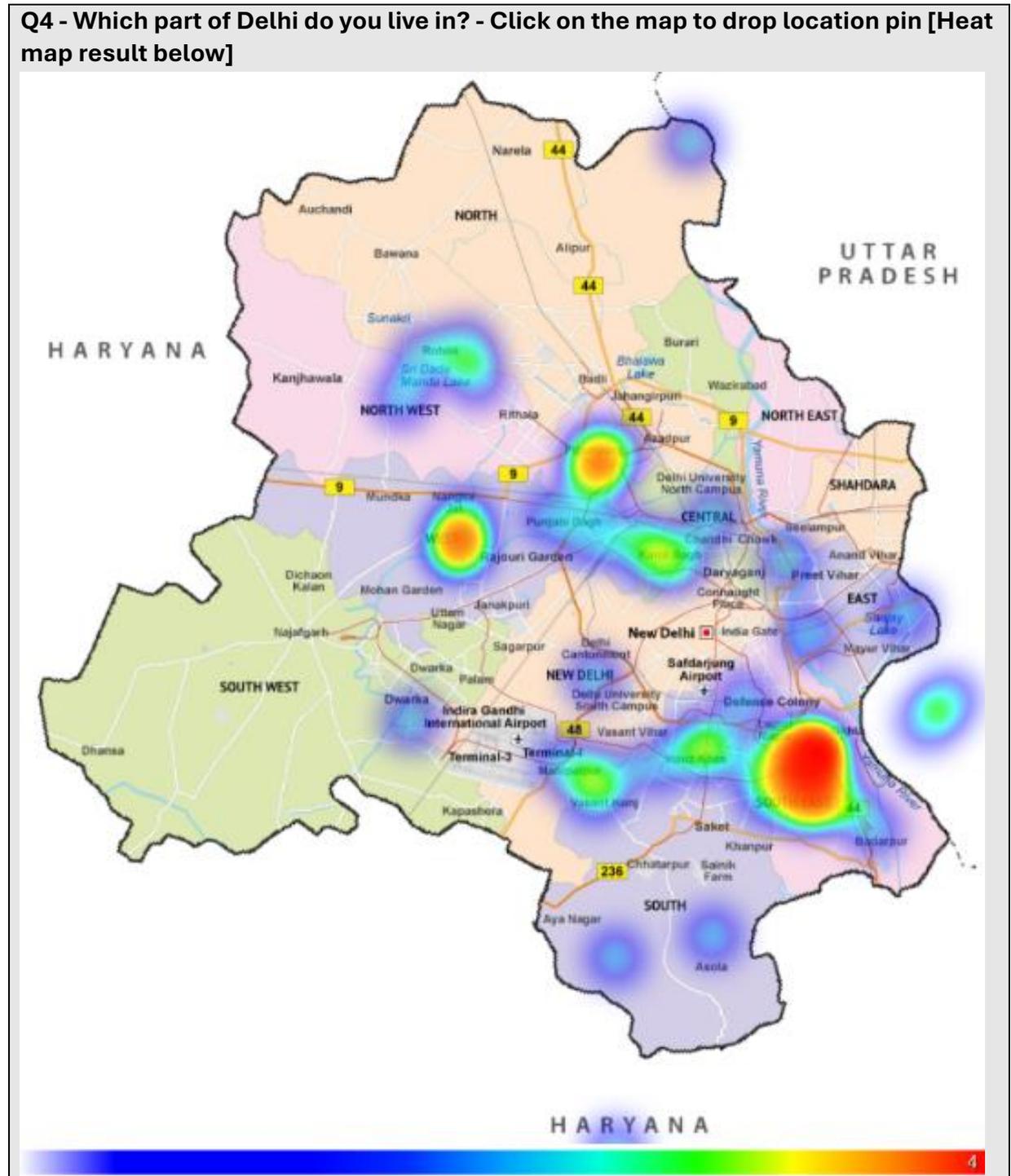
Group Housing / apartment:

Table 11 SURVEY RESPONSES: Q5 - Why did you choose a flat in a society instead of a plotted house or independent floor (builder floor)?

Q5 - Why did you choose a flat in a society instead of a plotted house or independent floor (builder floor)?	
Number	**Answer**
1	My father chose.
2	Necessity and convenience. We moved out of a plotted colony due to some changing extended family dynamics, so we needed a new house. **My mother works with the government** and was **allotted a house at a fraction of what it would've otherwise cost to either buy or rent here**. It just happens to be in a group housing with towers. Kind of a special case.
3	**Gated communities** [*new townships or group housing in satellite towns of Delhi, typically*] are **better in terms of security and facilities** like supermarkets, beauty parlours, pharmacy shops, fruits and vegetables, dry cleaning, various sports facilities like squash, TT, tennis, basketball, swimming pool, badminton court all within the complex. **There's a double-layer security** which prevents any outsider from coming into your apartment without your approval.
4	Less dense and **better parking**
5	It has its own benefits, like **security, parking and maintenance** of surroundings.
6	Better **infrastructure, facilities and dedicated parking**
7	Feeling of neighbourhood, safety for kids.
8	*क्योंकि शुरू से ही हम फ्लैट में रहते आए हैं इसमें आदत बनी हुई है* (translation: "Because since the beginning we have been living in a flat, and so we are habituated to it")
9	It's DDA FLAT. So, it's a Planned Colony and has Maximum Facilities
10	Safety
The results from this question produced the following word cloud:	

For many respondents the feeling of security and added infrastructure such as centralized utilities, sports, and recreational facilities, as well as designated parking spaces were the key difference between the two categories. However, it is important to note that in many cases the respondents are referring to private group housing complexes or, townships typically situated in satellite towns outside Delhi, and not the more traditional, government-built / DDA apartment complexes within Delhi. The older group housing complexes within Delhi are rarely equipped with the level of added facilities that newer gated townships offer and in cases have poorer levels of 'gated' security than plotted colonies. Another aspect of note here is that apartments in general took longer to be made available for freehold conversion in Delhi, and in many colonies, are still under the ownership of government agencies or other institutional employers. This means that in most cases housing allotted to employees is typically in the form of apartments or quarters, at a fraction of the cost of plotted housing.

Plotted Housing / builder floor:

Why did you choose an independent floor (builder floor) instead of a flat in a society?	
Number	**Answer**
1	Independent plots are very costly. So, a floor is the only affordable option in colonies now.
2	The ground coverage is good, and the specifications of construction are better than any group housing. Personal space instead of living with herd.
3	Convenience / Independence
The results from this question produced the following word cloud:	

NOTE: Given that only three respondents filled out the text box question here, the word cloud generated is not indicative of any aggregate data. However, as mentioned previously, the words and phrases gleaned from this survey data have been useful in giving direction to the interview questions and vectors of inquiry I followed up on later.

More specifically, the ideas of 'independence,' 'privacy,' and better specification stuck with me as I entered the interview phase of my fieldwork. The next set of questions were asked of people who answered "Own house or floor (builder floor) in Plotted Colony" to Question 1:

Table 12 SURVEY RESPONSES: Questions about housebuilding

Have you built or are planning to build your property?			
Number	Answer	Percentage	Count
1	Yes	**60**	21
2	No	20	7
3	Can't Say	20	7
	TOTAL	100	35
Did you, or will you, engage a builder in the process?			
Number	Answer	Percentage	Count
1	Yes	**57.89**	11
2	No	36.84	7
3	Can't Say	5.26	1
Did you or the builder engage an architect in the process?			
1	Yes	**84.21**	16
2	No	10.53	2
3	Can't Say	5.26	1
	TOTAL	100	19

Overall, the answers to the last three questions seem to confirm that builder floors are an ongoing phenomenon, and that there does seem to be a 'construction boom' in the residential sector. They also seem to confirm that the project of redeveloping the plotted house has become sufficient of an undertaking such that both builders and architects are required for it – or at the very least this is common practice now. During interviews, I asked follow-up questions within this line of inquiry, and found that for most of my participants, the engagement of an architect was a luxury only affordable by the elite who own independent houses, or *kothi*s. However, contracting a builder is something anyone rarely questions these days. In most cases that I came across, builders made most of the

executive decisions about the aesthetics and layout of the building, only showing a few options to clients and often only employing an 'architect' for the purposes of securing building permits. The images shown below (Figure 43) are options presented to my parents by the builder before redevelopment. Only one of these options was prepared by the 'architect' hired by the builder. Eventually, I rejected both options and prepared the final scheme, but this is rare.

Figure 43 Two options shown to my parents for their approval by the builder.

Loss, Gain, Hyper-privacy, and Class Relations

Philippe Panerai, Jean Castex and Jean-Charles Depaule in 'Urban Forms: The Death and Life of the Urban Block' describe 19th century Paris following its restructuring under George Eugene Haussmann, as it became a "'bourgeoise city' par excellence" (2012, p. 1). Haussmann's interventions drastically transformed the city and had profound impacts on the relationship between public and private space, especially in the modernization of the urban block and dwelling. With the standardization in the methods of plot subdivision (and their consolidation) and the vertical growth of buildings, the role of courtyards and interior open spaces changed. With restrictions in the nature of mixed-use activity in the interiors of the 'haussmannien' block, there was a segregation of uses and practices that redefined public and private space. These changes in the built environment coincided with the exacerbation of class differences and rise of the bourgeoisie, as well as the introduction of codes that crystallized the functional and social structure of modern middle-class living. The hitherto flexible domestic space was transformed, with a greater degree of functional specificity and a formal structure:

> *Private family life happened in clearly defined places, in rooms with specific denominations as the more generic terms such as 'salle', 'chambre' and room were replaced by 'dining room', 'bedroom' etc. These terms also referred to the social relations that were allowed to take place in the spaces – from private to formal functions.*

(Panerai et al., 2012, p. 126)

For Panerai et al. these changes signify both a rise of modern bourgeoise living, but also a loss of many traditional characteristics of pre-haussmannien Paris, especially in working class districts. According to the authors, the pre-haussmannien block "was the place for a range of activities including those connected with work and exchange, which were superimposed and co-existed" (Panerai et al., 2012, p. 128). However, as public space was formalized and stark distinctions were made between the 'front and back of block', the

179

informality and diversity of uses were curtailed. Privacy and prestige became significant features of modern homes. As in the case of specialization of labor in modern industry, the modern private dwelling set new standards for the specialization and segregation of spaces, social practice, and class relations. But as the authors emphasize, these changes were concurrent – social and spatial order were simultaneously transformed, reinforcing each other in the process of emergence.

Despite having little in common culturally with 19th century Paris, the emergence of builder floors has similarly affected new changes to the residential built environment of Delhi and manifests the societal priorities of contemporary middle class. I argue here that the themes of *loss, gain, independence, spatial articulation, privacy* and *homework* resonate across this temporal divide, as the examples in this section will show. For many of my participants the shift to builder floors signifies the loss of a frugal, more flexible lifestyle despite gaining more material comforts and a larger home. The lack of spatial features such as terraces and verandahs in builder floors exacerbate the feeling of loss. On the other hand, homeowners' aspirations for privacy and having complete autonomy over their 'plot and property' are rooted in the now-universal values of a capitalist, consumerist society.

As Blunt and Dowling suggest:

> *...home is also an idea and an imaginary that is imbued with feelings. These may be feelings of belonging, desire, and intimacy, but also violence, fear, and alienation... These feelings, ideas, and imaginaries are intrinsically spatial. Home is thereby a spatial imaginary: a set of intersecting and variable ideas and feelings, which are related to context, and which construct and connect places and extend across co-existing spaces and scales.*

(Blunt & Dowling, 2022, p. 9)

Yet there are differences still that question the unilineal march of modernity in Delhi's case. Not all features of contemporary builder floors (and middle-class dwellings in general) are a resultant of the modernization of private dwellings. Some aspects of builder floors borrow from, revive, and even perpetuate the legacy of traditionally elite dwelling types such as *haveli*s and *kothi*s. For instance, not only do 'servant quarters' continue to exist to this day,

but are augmented by the myriad new working-class jobs that builder floors foster, such as full-time (live-in) maids, chauffeurs, security guards, etc. Even as family units get more nucleated, with each member receding into separate rooms, some builder floors show a return to joint family living. And despite the master plans looking to eliminate commerce from plotted colonies, for many this has simply meant a changing relationship with commerce and work, rather than its disappearance.

Mr. Joshi (Homeowner – Paschim Vihar):

Since all the houses were exactly the same, there was no discrimination because there was no way to distinguish who was of what status. People got together in joy and sorrow, and in festivals. This was the advantage of staying there. Here, in these colonies, we have become more restricted to our own houses.

But in government quarters, because everyone was of the same standard, there was also monotony. All the houses were exactly the same, all the quarters had the same layout, so everyone followed the same pattern of drawing room furniture or décor. When we shifted to this new house, we enjoyed doing things differently. It was an advantage and a source of joy. Initially we felt isolated because there were virtually no neighbors, there was no one to meet or talk to. But on the other hand, we started feeling a sense of independence, a feeling of liberation that we could live the way we wanted. We could be different from others if we wanted to.

There were two trees in front of our house, one was lemon and the other was 'karonda' (Figure 44). The 'karonda' had small white and red fruit, which used to give us all a lot of pleasure, even the children. The lemons on the lemon tree likewise used to delight us all. The children used to check on the fruit and used to be incredibly happy seeing them. The trees were special to us because they were bought by my elder brother who got them from the principal of an agricultural college. When the builder got involved and said that because of a wall coming up there, the trees would have to be cut. We were not ready to do that. We persuaded the builder not to completely cut down the trees, only trim them, so that after construction was over

and the wall got built, they would grow again. He agreed to it, but when the construction began, this was not adhered to, and the trees were destroyed.
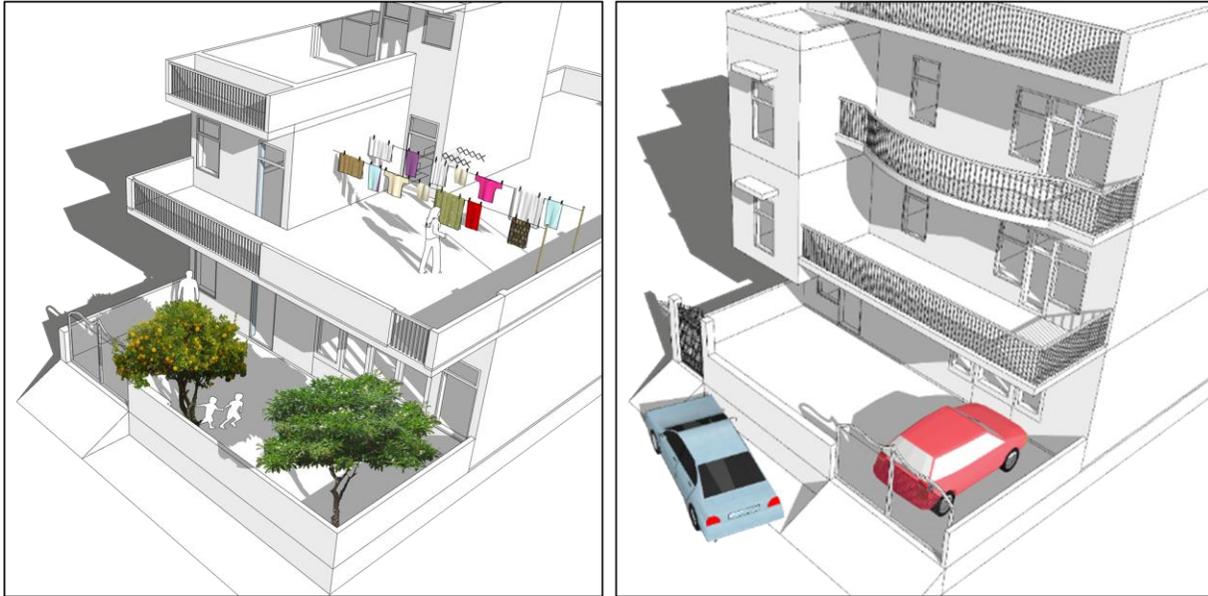
Figure 44 LEFT: Mr. Joshi's single-storey house with an active terrace and trees in the verandah. RIGHT: The house after the builder added two floors above, where the trees disappeared along with Mr. Joshi's access to a terrace.

Mr. Joshi's comparative account of life in government quarters versus a plotted house is by no means an isolated experience. Several participants recall the frugal living conditions and social cohesion in the colonies they grew up in with fondness. However, it was important for Mr. Joshi to emphasize both the pros and cons of living in plotted colonies as compared with life in group housing. As Chapter 3: Migration and Mobility of the Middle Class highlighted, most people look to justify their story of inter-generational migration in terms that are understood and accepted by others who are themselves neoliberal, upwardly mobile subjects.

In the previous chapter I had discussed the conditions in which Mr. Joshi rebuilt this property and his trials with the builder. This account exemplifies the complex feelings of loss associated with redevelopment that many of my participants related. But these feelings of loss are mitigated by the sense of gain and value-addition that builder floors offer. The neoliberal logics of an extended floor area, more number of rooms, enhanced material assets compel middle-class homeowners to reconcile their feelings of loss, as the next few examples will show.

Ms. Saxena (Homeowner/Entrepreneur – East of Kailash):

*...my parents need their own floor, and my sister and her family, and of course there's us [husband, wife, two children] ... and with the change in lifestyle now, we definitely need **at least four to five bedrooms**, because the **kids need different bedrooms because of their, you know, different choices and all of that**. We also need a different drawing room and a separate living room, one for the guests, one for everyday use... the kitchen obviously needs to be bigger (Figure 45). So, I mean, the **space requirements** have changed, which are not available in group housing but are very easily doable in a large kind of plotted development, where you can take a floor, or two floors, based on your requirements.*

*And the biggest reason for moving to this colony was because as architects we were allowed to build our offices within the same premises. So, we wanted to have a place where we have our office and the residence in the same building. That way we don't waste any time commuting. Only from the **point of view of, you know, security, I would say that group housing is better**.*

In new townships and group housing they have dedicated sports facilities and spaces exclusively for children...They used to do that in this neighborhood too in the parks, but for some reason, they don't now anymore, because, you know, the social lifestyle has changed now. These days we take kids to sports complexes and enroll them in sports academies, rather than letting them play in the streets. Anyway, with the number of cars on the street and parking everywhere, there's no room to play on the street. Besides, there are also a lot of 'helping community' [working class people] who are using neighborhood parks these days. So, it's like, not safe for people to just you know... like, earlier you would probably go take a stroll in the morning or evening, but a lot of people don't want to do that anymore.

Ms. Saxena lives with her family in a multistoried builder floor, but their family retains complete ownership of the entire building. They recently redeveloped their property and have customized it according to their family's needs. Given that the patriarch of the family (Ms. Saxena's father) is the head of a turnkey infrastructure design and construction

practice, and both his daughters are part of the firm, the entire building has been designed as both a joint family residence, as well as a mid-sized office building across two floors (with a capacity of approximately 35-40 employees). The circulation cores and access from the parking stilt have been segregated (Figure 45) such that the ground and first office floors have a separate entrance and reception. The layouts maximize floor space and take advantage of the maximum permissible building limits, leaving no room for internal courtyards (other than two light shafts).

Figure 45 Floor layouts for Ms. Saxena's family residence cum office building.

A significant aspect, as Ms. Saxena related to me, of running a successful practice in the 'highly competitive' construction industry is to maintain good working relations with clients and to socialize well. This, in Ms. Saxena's case, also means that they often host parties with up to 50 attendees. Often this also entails employing a valet service – which according to

her is now a niche, but commonly available service for parties in elite colonies. This also means, as I observed, that the front of the building is almost always occupied with on-street parking, with periods of over-extended double- and even triple-parked vehicles.

However, more importantly, throughout her interview there was emphasis on the building's self-sufficiency. According to her, the building could fulfill nearly every need and desire the family could have. In fact, in many ways that was the entire purpose of the redevelopment project. And again, this is not an isolated instance. This is also reflected in the addition of home-based staff or workers in contemporary middle- to upper middle-class households, even beyond Delhi. For instance, "one agency registered 162,000 new au pairs [nannies] globally in 2011, reflecting a doubling in a six-year period" (Blunt & Dowling, 2022, p. 100). This also means that the builder floor typology not only allows for the further expansion of private domestic space, but that this happens at the cost of furthering the class divide and the insulation of the private dwelling from the social space of the neighborhood. Or as Ms. Saxena was hinting, middle-class residents don't want their children to play in parks that are now occupied by service workers.

Simultaneously, the floor-wise stacking of dwelling units has allowed families to remain nucleated while also enjoying the benefits of living in a 'joint family'. In the words of another participant, "this allows the grandparents to be more involved in the lives of their children and grandchildren." This is also related to the inter-generational capital accumulation in the form of property. Unlike early cooperative societies (as mentioned in) where entry into the housing market was relatively affordable, current generations of middle-class professionals find that buying a house is nearly impossible. Consequently, nuclear families find it harder to start out on their own, and instead rely on the conversion of existing parental property into multiple dwelling units reinforcing a joint family system.

Ms. Chadha and Parents (Homeowner/Entrepreneur – Greater Kailash II):

> ***Father:*** *I worked in banking at the time, and we moved to Bombay for that. In those days the Bank would generally either provide you with a house or allow you to lease, which would typically be an apartment. So, in Bombay we lived in a wonderful apartment. I mean it was spacious, it [the complex] had all the amenities you could*

*think of, even back then you know. We had a lot of great things there in Bombay. Here it's different, **but we're getting more** in many ways.*

*<u>**Mother:**</u> There are of course, pluses and minuses everywhere. For instance, there it was so nice to just walk out and find greenery and big open spaces. Here he asks me to take a walk, and you know it's not very nice. When I'm with my other daughter in the US, I go out for a walk two-three times a day. Parks are always much better in apartment complexes. Parking, on the other hand, is so bad. So many places I see people don't actually park in their stilt space. **They use it for other purposes**.*

*<u>**Ms. Chadha:**</u> There was a courtyard in our previous house... it was a strange space with a sink and a refrigerator, and it had an iron staircase connecting to the upper floor... but it was very nostalgic for me because it used to be flooded with light and was in many ways the most active part of the house. So, internal light was very important to me, and we've tried to **recreate that feeling and the courtyard space** in this design as well... you know, keep that quality (Figure 46). Essentially it was very important to, I think all of us, that we maintain a degree of autonomy in the design process, and as architects a source of pride that in the end, we did not produce a cookie-cutter, builder floor-like building (Figure 47). I mean just look around us. That's why, even though it was costly, we maintained full ownership of the building and were able to accommodate our practice within the same building.*

The two cases presented above are both examples where homeowners managed to maintain complete ownership of their property and did not enter into an agreement with a builder. Instead, relying on their savings and expertise as architects / turnkey firms, these families avoided the compromise. However, these are also examples where the 'family business' was a key source of capital investment that enabled them maintain control over their land asset and its financial value. In many ways this model is similar to the *haveli*s where merchants conducted their family business out of their residence and several members of the family contributed, sustaining the joint family system. This also makes such buildings socially insulated, increasing their sense of privacy and security, as they don't have to share their building with strangers.

STILT FLOOR
(with parking, servant quarters, facilities, and storage)

GROUND FLOOR
(with architect's office)

THIRD/TYPICAL FLOOR
(with residence)

SERVANT QUARTERS + FACILITIES FOR STAFF

COURTYARD

COURTYARD

BALCONY

COURTYARD

KITCHEN

BALCONY

Figure 46 Floor layouts for Ms. Chadha's family residence cum office building. INSET: 3D view of courtyard space with walkway at the office floor.

187
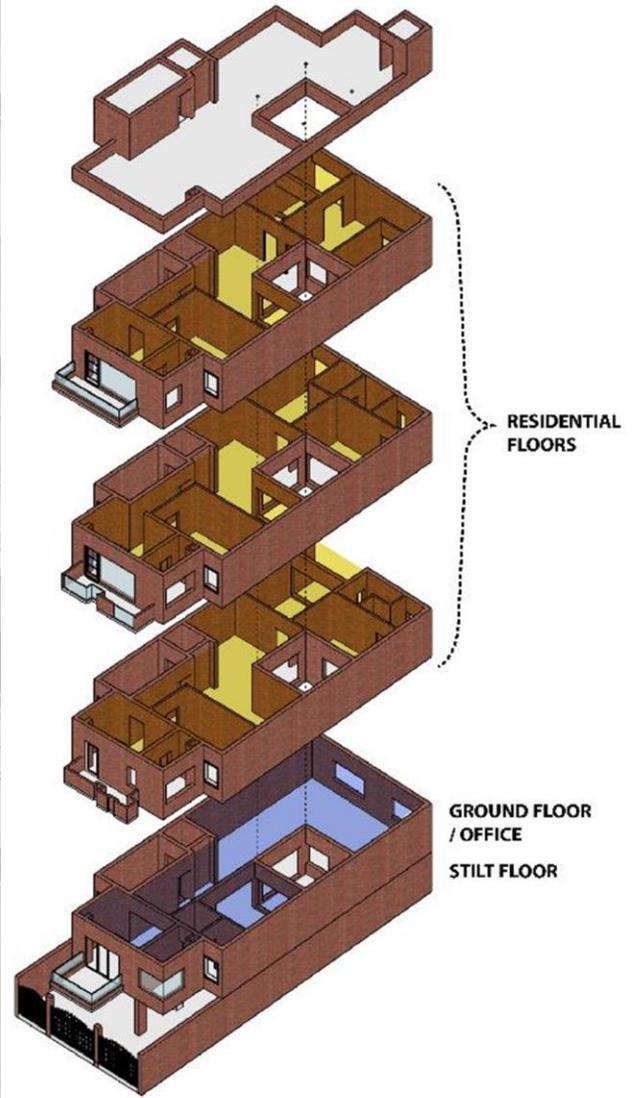
Figure 47 LEFT: Front elevation of the Chadha residence compared with the builder floor next door. RIGHT: Exploded axonometric of the building showing division of uses.

Mr. Arora (Homeowner – Inder Enclave):

> *Earlier we just had a drawing room where we're sitting right now... kitchen was next to this in the front of the house, and two rooms at the back, that's it. There was also a small study in the* barsati*, which was used by everyone... we put our first family computer there. And really, all the rooms were everyone's, no one had their own room. Earlier, my parents had one room to sleep in and the rest of us siblings [me and my sisters] were all in one room – nothing like these days when everyone needs their*

188

'own' room. And later, when I got married and our parents passed away, we had that room, I think... and my sisters had married and moved away.

Earlier we also used to watch the same TV programs, and the family ate meals together. Nowadays, everyone wants to watch their own thing in their own room. Our subscription to Netflix allows multiple screens, so my daughter watches her shows, my son watches cricket by himself or sometimes with me, and my wife also likes to watch by herself. So, every room has a separate smart TV with Netflix on it. My son often likes to prepare his own snack and go back to his room.

Unlike the previous two examples, Mr. Arora's home was redeveloped as builder floors, where he maintains ownership of only two floors out of the four. And though the previous cases indicated a return to a joint family system, this case highlights a movement towards further nucleation of the family unit. The desire for privacy here extends beyond the nuclear unit to each individual within the family. The expanded floor space of builder floors allows for more rooms to be accommodated, and with access to cheap wi-fi, electronics and on-demand services, the social distance between family members is widened.

CHAPTER 6

AUTOMOBILITY & THE CONSTITUTION OF A PARKING CRISIS

Delhi's urban planning has focused on the large-scale deployment of plotted colonies and the construction of high-speed corridors for the movement of automobiles since independence. This has resulted in the incentivization of an automobile culture that took hold of generations of the upwardly mobile middle class, particularly since liberalization in the 1990s. Per capita car ownership has skyrocketed, and neighborhoods have denser. Neighborhood streets, though planned for automobile use, lack sidewalks and designated parking spaces, leading to the overwhelming occupation of street space by parking. Personal automobiles, once a symbol of independence, economic status, and efficient high-speed mobility, have ironically contributed towards the immobility of neighborhood residents. The latest policy intervention (the Parking Stilt Order – See earlier chapters) to manage the problem, aimed to force residents to park vehicles within their premises. Ironically, however, this has also contributed to the emergence of builder floors, bringing in more cars. As a result, news reports about parking feuds and road rage incidents among neighbors have erupted in the past decade or so – leading to the use of the term **'parking crisis'** across media narratives and by policy (Figure 48) (Pandit & Suri, 2007; Patriot Bureau, 2019; Press Trust of India, 2019; V. Varma & Vyawahare, 2013).

In this chapter I will draw on field observations, interviews with homeowners and builders, but also parking and transportation policy experts who have opted not to remain anonymous. This is partly due to the fact most of these experts are well known within their field and may be easily identified based on their opinions alone, but also that their designation/position within various organizations are precisely the venues they speak from. The chapter addresses two major aspects of the present parking crisis. Firstly, as it relates to the historical emergence of **'automobility'** (Gopakumar, 2020; Hannam et al., 2006; Sheller & Urry, 2000) – *a spatial, cultural, social and political orientation towards automobiles*. Secondly, what it says about the state's real estate ambitions and infrastructure priorities even when faced with the plight of existing colonies. Ultimately, the problem is rooted in what I believe to be irreconcilable **ontological differences** between supply-driven and demand-driven approaches towards mitigating 'automobility'.

Figure 48 Various news articles reporting on the parking crisis in Delhi.

The first section of this chapter will situate the latest (and most forward-thinking) legislation and policies that link urban development with sustainable transport, with the historical discourse around sustainable mobility – specifically the prioritization of walking and non-motorized transport (NMT). I argue here that transport planning has focused on infrastructure-heavy interventions such as mass transit and high-speed arterial corridors including flyovers and underpasses, over small-scale neighborhood-oriented interventions that reconnect residents with low carbon modes of travel. Similarly, in a bid to show the state's commitment towards the principles of Transit-Oriented Development (TOD), comprehensive (re)development projects along arterial routes and around mass transit nodes are being planned and implemented. However, these efforts at showcasing TOD principles are more demonstrative of the state's real estate ambitions than real climate action. Essentially, the imperative for low carbon transitions and sustainable urban development in both mobility planning and housing, have been co-opted and subsumed by a neoliberal agenda that serves to bolster the economic gains of speculative real estate development.

This pattern, I argue, is also related to the dichotomous relationship between Central Government agencies, such as the Delhi Development Authority (DDA), Central Public

Works Department (CPWD), or the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI), and Delhi's own urban local bodies, such as the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) or local political formations such as Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) and Merchants and Traders Associations (MTAs). The Central Government, having accrued vast land holdings in the nation's capital over the decades, wields immense power and control over the development trajectory of the city as a whole. This is especially true in a neoliberal real estate market where land becomes a powerful asset. Meanwhile, the only sources of revenue for urban local bodies such as the MCD are taxes and their own meager land holdings in the form of community centers, multi-storey car parks, etc., while they are still burdened with the expenditure of maintaining utility infrastructure within existing colonies.

This conflict is also reflected in the state's contradictory practices in developing highway infrastructure, parking solutions, and focus on high-speed transport, which views infrastructure development through an asset mentality. As a result, the issue of parking is approached more from a 'capacity enhancement' (supply-driven) perspective than 'demand management' with a focus on the construction of more multi-storey parking structures rather than pricing on-street spaces within colonies, for instance. Building on the critique of others, I have elsewhere pointed out that such failure to plan for – or more accurately, the 'planned failure' of (Bhan, 2013) – the informal proliferation of existing neighborhoods has consistently exposed the fraught morality of the state in holding itself accountable (Murthy, 2023; Roy, 2009). Instead, the neoliberal state has continued to disinvest in and 'roll-back' from small-scale, locally embedded infrastructure improvement, while continuing to invest heavily in large and glamorous infrastructure-building.

Some Notes on Automobility

The present discourse around 'automobility' might be generally ascribed to Mimi Sheller and John Urry from an essay they wrote called 'The City and the Car' in 2000, though the term itself existed before (2000). However, the adverse impacts of automobiles and automobile-centric planning and culture on modern society and the built environment have been well

documented by scholars and thinkers across several disciplines since the 1960s, including early criticism by architects and urban designers – though this was mainly restricted to the criticism of European and American cities and suburbia. For instance, Leon Krier's famous illustrations such as the one shown below (Figure 49) or his writings on the industrial city and suburbia in 'Rational Architecture: The Reconstruction of the European City' are highly effective in communicating the message in a succinct and accessible manner (Vidler et al., 1978). Or Donald Appleyard's (a professor of Urban Design at University of California, Berkeley) study in 1969 correlated the intensity of automobile traffic with the 'livability' of residential streets in San Francisco and revealed that people living on a street with 'heavy traffic' had only a third as many social connections as those on a streets with light traffic (Appleyard et al., 1981).

Figure 49 Illustrations by Leon Krier emphasizing the various problems associated with zoning and automobile-centric planning. LEFT: [original caption] "Not the car but the suburban home is the deadly weapon; Daily suburban mortar fire against city centers". RIGHT: [original caption] "The industrial city is DECOMPOSED into zones".

In its present iteration, automobility forms a part of a much larger discourse around mobilities in general, or the 'mobilities turn' in sociology, that marks a shift in the social sciences focusing on the movement and flow of people, ideas, practices, technologies, even vectors, on vastly different scales from the microbial to the global (Sheller, 2017). Moreover, even within the larger scholarship on automobility, scholars have only recently started drawing on a wider disciplinary gamut, such as anthropology (Chelcea & Iancu, 2015), or paying attention to rapidly growing automobile markets and the global South (Gopakumar, 2020, 2022). For instance, in their article 'An Anthropology of Parking: Infrastructures of Automobility, Work, and Circulation', Liviu Chelcea and Ioana Iancu

explore the role of self-appointed parking attendants (*parcagii*) in Bucharest, Romania. The article approaches the study of automobility from the perspective of informal economies surrounding parking and advocates for the importance of studying stationary vehicles as opposed to a focus on movement. On the other hand, Govind Gopakumar's work situates the meteoric rise of automobility within the Indian context – specifically India's tech capital Bangalore, in South India – as it relates to the complex bureaucratic, political, economic and cultural forces within urban development and policy.

And though there is some emerging anthropological and social scholarship on parking in general (Kurnicki, 2020), there is a gap in literature when it comes to the relationships between specific spatial planning typologies (like single-family subdivisions), local streets/inner-city streets, and parking. Nicola Spurling at the University of Lancaster, UK has contributed to this space with her study of 'new towns' (specifically Stevenage, Hertfordshire) and their struggles with parking, as per capita ownership of cars in the UK mushroomed (2018b, 2020). However, the intensity of such issues in exploding cities such as Delhi, remains under-researched. This is particularly significant considering most cars in cities like Delhi, are parked inside neighborhoods, and not on major arterial roads. A discussion around the automobility in rapidly urbanizing markets must therefore, turn its gaze and discourse, away from traffic congestion and traffic flow on major roads, the conflicts between public transport and private vehicles, to focus on the relationship between incrementally densifying neighborhoods and parking. In the case of Delhi, much of what I describe here is linked to how the upwardly mobile middle-class have transformed right alongside the changing transportation profile of the city, and the morphology of its residential fabric.

The Master Plan and Transit-Oriented Development

> *20.1.1 Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) is an innovative urban paradigm that involves leveraging existing and upcoming public transit infrastructure and*

*associated large number of users, **to ensure sustainable mobility and optimize utilisation of land** through compact mixed-use development.*

*20.1.2 A TOD approach in Delhi will help in bringing people and jobs closer to mass transit and lead to much needed integration of land use and transport in the city. It will result in compact, walkable, mixed-use developments **within influence zones of transit stations**. This is a critical paradigm shift that can potentially improve public transit ridership, **reduce vehicular congestion**, and reduce greenhouse emissions and pollution in the long term.*

*20.1.3 TOD is also an important strategy for **unlocking the latent economic potential and land values** in the city. It will facilitate the **development/regeneration of select nodes/areas** in the city through planned intensification of uses and activities, infusion of new infrastructure and improvements in the public realm. This will also allow the city to **capitalise on the large-scale investments being made into public transit infrastructure - Metro Rail, Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS)**, etc., by facilitating the improvement of old housing stock in addition to creation of new housing stock and economic centres around strategically located transit nodes and **opening up opportunities for value capture**.*

<div align="right">(Delhi Development Authority, 2021, p. 624 [PART II—SEC. 3(ii)])</div>

The excerpt shown above [emphasis added in bold] has been drawn from Chapter 20, titled "Transit Oriented Development", of the draft Master Plan for Delhi-2041 (MPD-2041). While the language in the first paragraph clearly emphasizes the role of compact mixed-use development in fostering sustainable mobility, the subsequent paragraphs offer more morally ambiguous rationale for TOD. In paragraph 20.1.2, the emphasis on development around transit stations and the 'reduction of vehicular congestion' betray the state's real interest and long-time obsession with high-speed transport infrastructure (Reddy, 1994). Drawing on several sources (Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, 2022; Panda et al., 2022; Tiwari et al., 2008), I have elsewhere pointed to the detrimental impact of high-speed travel on slow-moving vehicles and pedestrians (Murthy & Sur, 2022, p. 7). While the third

paragraph emphasizes the economic benefits of TOD and its strong affinity with big infrastructure development and investment potential. Nonetheless, the overall language in the newest iteration of the Master Plan is proof that sustainable development and mobility experts, and their decades of lobbying and advocacy[57], have finally made an impact on the most powerful urban planning document of Delhi.

Sustainable transport and its relationship with land use and urban development have been recognized within policy for several decades now. The 1988 report by the National Commission on Urbanisation explicitly connected transportation policy with urban form, stating that "an urban transportation system can be developed optimally only when transport and land use planning are examined together" (C.M. Correa et al., 1988, p. 18). More recently, a series of Public Interest Litigations (PILs) filed with the Supreme Court by Delhi-based lawyer M.C. Mehta (*Writ Petition 13029/1985 – Sh. M.C. Mehta v. Union of India and Ors.*, Ongoing), have had a significant impact on the seriousness with which environmental issues – including air quality, polluting industries, automobile emissions, etc. - are taken up by planning agencies, especially on the directions of the Supreme Court. This resulted in the institution of the **Environment Pollution (Prevention & Control) Authority** for the National Capital Region (EPCA), which monitors the progress made by various planning and implementation bodies in pursuance of the Supreme Court's orders[58]. Meanwhile, experts have repeatedly linked environmental sustainability with low-carbon travel (Carroli & Guaralda, 2017; Jain & Tiwari, 2016; Joshi et al., 2016), and lobbied for its adoption in policy. The National Urban Transport Policy (Ministry of Urban Development, 2014), first drafted in 2006 and then revised in 2014, is proof of such sustained advocacy, as it recognizes the priority that needs to be given to walking and NMT in pursuing low-carbon development goals. Which is why the incorporation of a dedicated chapter on TOD within

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[57] A set of committed organizations have notably been involved in this sustained advocacy - including, The Transport Research and Injury Prevention Programme (TRIPP) at the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi, the Centre for Science & Environment (CSE), Clean Air Asia, Centre for Green Mobility, Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (ITDP), and EMBARQ, a part of the World Resources Institute (WRI), among others.

[58] EPCA was setup as a Central Government constituted committee for the National Capital Region vide Gazette Notification SO 93 (E) dated 29.1.1998 in compliance with the Hon'ble Supreme Court order dated January 7, 1998 in W.P. 13029 / 1985.

the MPD is in itself an achievement worthy of recognition, and a significant departure from the automobile-centric vision of the first MPD in 1962 (V. Dupont, 2000; Mehra, 2013; Vidyarthi, 2010a).

Now in its fourth iteration (1962, 2001, 2021, and 2041), the MPD has been the most potent legal instrument in shaping the development trajectory of the city in terms of housing, transport, and infrastructure planning. In terms of the range of its purview, the document establishes the proposed urbanizable limits of Delhi (in coordination with the National Capital Region Planning Board - NCRPB) and its land use distribution, down to the development control norms that determine the legality of individual plots of land. The document itself supersedes all other relevant planning directives, issued by any other agencies such as municipal authorities, road owning agencies, public works departments, etc. Its massive influence over the city is also backed by the 67,354.88 acres (272.5 km^2) of land owned and controlled by its publishers – the Delhi Development Authority (DDA).

Despite the attention brought towards sustainable mobility, both spatial planning practices of the state and the aspirations of the upwardly mobile middle classes have continued to harbor an automobile-centric vision of the city.

Car Ownership and Builder Floors

Meanwhile, the lack of automobile infrastructure on neighborhood streets was inconsequential initially, as unlike the US, where such neighborhoods were conceived within an increasingly automobile-oriented society, post-independence India did not have nearly the same levels of per capita automobile ownership (Murthy & Sur, 2022). Even though Delhi's post-independence (1947) numbers suggest that it hasn't always been so dependent on the automobile, economic liberalization since the 1990s has significantly spurred car ownership levels (Figure 50). However, as previous chapters have illustrated, the vertical growth and overall densification of colonies happened alongside a rise in the purchasing power – as well as car ownership levels - of the upwardly mobile middle class of Delhi. As Datta shows, "from 1965-66 to 2005-06, the number of registered cars and jeeps

have increased by more than 47 folds, while population rose about 5 fold only" (S. Datta, 2010, p. 5).
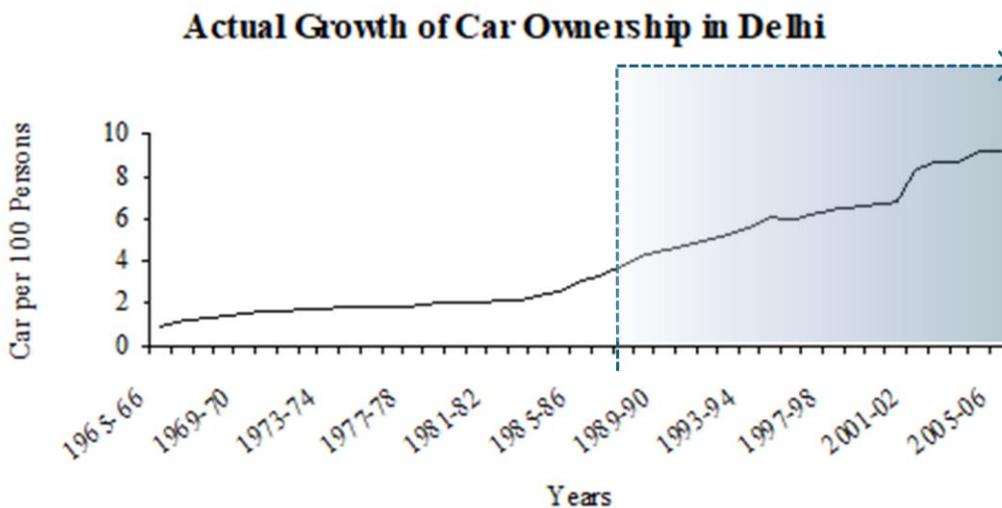
Figure 50 Car ownership trend in Delhi, 1965-2005 [Emphasis added to show impact of economic liberalization since the 1990s]. (Datta, 2010).

As a result, families that once owned either two-wheelers, or rode the bus to get around, aspired to own cars and were gradually able to afford them. One of my research participants described their changing family circumstances as follows:

Mr. Mishra (Homeowner – North Delhi):

> *...mostly everyone was the same. We were staying in a government flat; my father owned a scooter, and we would go to nearby places by cycle. But for studying and later for work, we would travel by DTC [Delhi Transport Corporation] buses. In Delhi this was virtually the only mode of transport. When we shifted, my father still owned only a scooter but when our position improved, we graduated from cycle to motorcycle. After a few years [in the early 2000s], we bought a car, first an old car and then a new one.*

This trend is common across most of my participants, often coinciding with their ability to buy out the government lease and convert their property to freehold. Homes that were meant for single families, thus, gradually transformed into multi-unit buildings, bringing in more cars into colonies beyond the 'per capita' rise as shown above (Figure 4). This, of course, as Table 1 shows, is also consistent with the rise in the 'Maximum Number of

Dwelling Units' permissible on each plot between MPD 2001 and 2021 norms. And though the rapid rise in per capita automobile ownership is similar across urbanizing post-colonial cities, as Gopakumar (2020, 2022) points out particularly in the case of India, what I wish to highlight here is its entanglements with the specific development trajectory of colonies in Delhi and an upwardly mobile class of homeowners.

Datta notes, that today, "cities [Delhi in particular] are also confronting severe problem of traffic congestion and parking space due to uncontrolled growth of car ownership" (S. Datta, 2010, p. 3). The ensuing 'parking crisis' in Delhi, as it is often dubbed by the media (Pandit & Suri, 2007; Patriot Bureau, 2019; Press Trust of India, 2019; V. Varma & Vyawahare, 2013), has then received significant attention from policy makers and even the Supreme Court. On several occasions, EPCA also noted the relationship between private vehicles and the parking crisis, within its reports to the Court. Report No. 9:

> *It is not surprising that the current parking crisis is blamed on the increasing number of private vehicles in the city. Private vehicles constitute a whooping 94 per cent of the total registered vehicles in Delhi as on March 31, 2004. Percentage share of other categories of vehicles are insignificant... Such a huge share of private vehicles in the total registered vehicular fleet of Delhi obviously exerts tremendous pressure on the limited parking space available in the city.*

> (Environment Pollution (Prevention & Control) Authority, 2004, pp. 3–4)

The report goes on to staunchly criticize the government's laxity in issuing parking norms for commercial activity within residential areas. In fact, it states that the "misuse of mixed land-use policy is leading to densification of residential sites and compounding the problem" (2004, p. 4). Citing MPD bye laws, the report attributes the commercialization and densification of residential areas to both, the increasing relaxations within policy and a general lack of enforcement.

As shown in Chapter 2, in 2011, the MCD issued the Parking Stilt Order [No.CE(B)/2011/D-79] mandating the inclusion of a 'stilt' floor dedicated to parking in all new proposals for the redevelopment of individual residential properties. The order was issued as an emergency measure to address the growing parking crisis, its intent being to ensure that all private

vehicles could be parked within the premises of their owners rather than on the street. However, arguably, the provision of a mandatory floor for parking has only incentivized further redevelopment of single-storey properties into taller buildings with more dwelling units – in other words, it has made builder floors more prolific – as one of my participants Mr. Bansal, a builder in North Delhi, suggests below.

Mr. Bansal (Builder – North Delhi):

> *Ever since this [parking stilts] concept started, the sale of builder floors and the construction of builder floors increased tremendously. Before this trend, prior to 2010 or 2011, builder floors were not so common. The reason for this is that with the construction of four dwelling units, with four households occupying them, there was greater need for parking space for their cars. If stilt parking was not constructed, where would all these cars be parked? These cars would then be parked on the streets. People would be wary of not finding proper parking space for their cars with no space on the narrow streets and would therefore not be ready to go for buying property at such places. But with parking being provided inside the premises, it became an attractive proposition because the cars would be safely inside. With this, builder floors became very popular and started to flourish more.*

However, the addition of a stilt floor meant that construction costs for any typical[59] middle-class property in the city grew by approximately 12-15% (see Chapter 2 – The Story of my House), as was the case with my parents' property. For my parents the estimated cost of reconstructing a single dwelling unit on the same property with a single additional floor was no longer viable, given their personal finances and savings. Which made the alternative to collaborate with a builder to develop multiple dwelling units on the same property, an attractive, and perhaps, the only viable proposition. The specific financial pre-conditions for

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[59] I am keenly aware that there are significant differences and diversity across family situations/desires, levels of financial mobility, and access to liquid capital, that mitigate my claims to the word 'typical'. It is not my intention here to generalize this narrative across Delhi (even among my own participants and case studies). Instead, I offer this table as a relatable, yet concrete example of how, arguably, the growing purchasing power (and consequently car ownership) of the middle-class still pales in comparison to the real estate values and construction costs in Delhi.

the widespread adoption of the builder floor model, were met when the market prices for construction, average savings rates among homeowners, real estate rates, all converged to incentivize individual homeowners to take the leap.

The Emergence of a Crisis

Despite – and as discussed above, perhaps partly due to – the introduction of parking stilts, the parking conditions in neighborhoods remain dire. Homeowners often park their cars during daytime on the street in front of their property. In several cases, the actual number of cars owned (in any given building) exceeds the space available for parking under the stilts. Additionally, in elite neighborhoods, cars with chauffeurs are often double-parked, ready to leave at moment's notice, as shown below (Figure 51).

Figure 51 Typical parking conditions in many colonies of Delhi. On-street parking is often a major issue on the internal roads of colonies where pedestrians and other NMT users lack accessibility.

The excerpt that follows is from one of my interviews with a resident (Mr. Sharma) of an elite South Delhi colony, who details the lengths to which residents will go to, to defend 'their' parking space.

Mr. Sharma (Homeowner – South Delhi):

The problem is that I will protect my parking space from all corners. I will have notices which say, 'tires will be punctured!'

Our neighbor has a bamboo barricade, which he places as soon as he moves his cars out. In fact, he parks on the other side of the road and puts a barricade up and the motorcycles on this side. So, the defense of the parking space has become I think one of the causes of internecine warfare in neighborhoods ... the defense of your car parking space is like a full-time job for most residents.

We are lucky to have a college opposite us which means that the boundary wall of that college is 'available' for parking. So, in order to facilitate other neighbors or visitors who could use that space we were trying to park two cars in front of our own house, which meant that my bonnet was six inches overlapping the neighbor's gate. Not even his gate, the gate post. At about nine o'clock at night I get a very brusque, ring on the doorbell and it was the police. The neighbor had called the police to complain that my car had been parked in front of his house, to ask me to remove my car.

We can drive the streets, but we don't have anywhere to stop...Not in the neighborhoods because the neighborhoods haven't been planned for cars. There is no space to build car parking, any attempt by the state and there has been a very interesting attempt by the state now to rationalize car parking policy... they proposed that the only way to control the rampant usage of cars is to charge for parking... Then they said that we will provide one parking space per unit on the road. Any additional parking space in the colony will be charged. It could be charged monthly, or it could be charged daily. So they were basically trying to get people, particularly people who had built their stilt parking and were still occupying space outside their unit because the number of stilt parking

spaces met statutory norms but did not meet actual requirements. This has met with such opposition. Although it is a very, very sensible idea to say you park in front of your house if you have space for one car only have one car. You know the edges of parks, which are not your property, or the edges of institutions or colleges or schools should be public parking and could be monetized. If you wish to park there, on a monthly basis, please pay a monthly thing and that spot will be designated for your house. But I mean it would have made meant some control over this thing, but it was shot down at every point by every RWA [Residents Welfare Association].

The builder, Mr. Bansal, went on to elaborate on how the vertical growth of colonies and the rise in total dwelling units is an issue beyond parking.

Mr. Bansal (Builder – North Delhi):

…the street continues to be the same narrow one. Earlier that street would have about 20 cars plying on it but now it would have to accommodate a hundred. With stilt parking, we have increased the parking in the building, no doubt, but we have not increased the other infrastructure like for example sewage… there are recurrent problems of sewage getting blocked, drains getting jammed… a persistent problem which the general public is facing is that of sewage and rainwater drainage. That is really a big issue!

The sewers are the same from twenty years ago. At that time if 5000 people stayed in the colony, now, with families expanding, or more families staying in the colony with builder floors, that number has doubled to 10,000. It is the same sewer for 10,000 people. The Delhi Jal Board and NDPL [North Delhi Power Limited, presently Tata Power Delhi Distribution Limited] have improved their services, but overall, the condition of utilities is getting worse. It is all under pressure as colonies grow."

Essentially colonies are presently faced with varying degrees of infrastructure crises with regards to sewage, storm-water drainage, water supply, electrification, and of course parking. In response to the EPCA reports, in 2006, the Supreme Court directed all relevant

government agencies to submit traffic management strategies and plans. However, as infrastructure and utility maintenance within existing colonies lies within the jurisdiction of municipal bodies, the brunt of parking management for the city (and its colonies) fell to the MCD. Meanwhile, the DDA and other government agencies with large land holdings must only contend with issues arising within their own 'plots'.

Going back to the TOD chapter in MPD-2041 (See sub-section 1 of this chapter) – "*[TOD] can potentially improve public transit ridership, reduce vehicular congestion, and reduce greenhouse emissions and pollution*" (Delhi Development Authority, 2021) – we can see how this rhetoric can also be deployed to promote the faster movement of vehicles, despite claiming a commitment towards decarbonization. In the case of traffic management and mobility planning this entails establishing an uneasy and ambiguous relationship between vehicular emissions and traffic congestion. All the while, however, as the following interview excerpt will emphasize, there is a need to spend capital on infrastructure development such that further capital may be attracted. Much like the shining GPRA complex, highway and road infrastructure are considered part of the world-class city building 'project'. A project, as Ghertner describes, entails shifting public finances away from "education, public housing, health care, and food subsidies toward highly visible infrastructure works such as the Delhi Metro Rail; more than fifty new flyovers; two new toll roads to Delhi's posh satellite cities; and the Commonwealth Games Village" (2015, p. 11)

Mr. Ashok Bhattacharjee is presently an Urban Planning /Transport Planning Consultant, but he retired as Director (Planning) of the Unified Traffic and Transportation Infrastructure (Planning & Engineering) Centre (UTTIPEC) within DDA. UTTIPEC was established via a Gazette Notification vide S.O. No.1903(E) dated 31.07.08. According to the notification "all transportation projects/transport engineering solutions in Delhi by any agency having road engineering/infrastructure implication would require clearance of UTTIPEC". With such an overarching purview and mandate – and primarily under the leadership of Mr. Bhattacharjee – UTTIPEC has been the forerunner in creating forward-thinking transport policies and technical documents, such as Street Design Guidelines (2010), Transit-Oriented Development: Policy and Implementation Framework (2010), travel demand management

checklists, parking policy frameworks, among many others. However, in my interview with Mr. Bhattacharjee, he expressed a growing concern for the disregard that implementing agencies showed towards policies and guidelines in general.

Mr. Bhattacharjee (Transport Planning Consultant - Delhi):

> The implementation of TOD principles has faced challenges - the focus of many development projects, even government projects, remains on **increasing road capacity and accommodating private vehicles rather than prioritizing public transit, walking, and cycling**.

> Whether it is city level or national level, we have to spend money on highways. In each year a budget is allocated. **Now, if you can't spend that amount of money, you find out areas where you can spend... that is why everything is given to NHAI** [National Highway Authority of India]. Every Ring Road and other arterial roads, all infrastructure given to NHAI, rather than municipal authority. **Because the focus is more on getting congestion-free**, and there is space, **you keep on increasing lanes, road width,** etc... and after 2014, just double or triple speed **they've made flyovers**. No matter how they're built, they must be delivered.

> Now the problem is colonies... people - those who cannot afford also - are buying cars. However, these cars ultimately must return home. **They don't stay somewhere in multi-level parking or something - they come back home!** People don't have the parking inside, so they park on the road, footpath, wherever they find space. Parking wherever they like. They're fighting and killing each other over parking.

Despite UTTIPEC's commendable efforts in establishing benchmarks and providing guidelines for more public transport and NMT-friendly street design, as well as having the legal mandate to approve road design proposals across Delhi, as Mr. Bhattacharjee explains, the ultimate push remains towards faster movement of automobiles and high-speed, congestion-free transit. Since NHAI is typically in charge of inter-city highways, their approach to road design is similarly geared towards the exclusion of slow-moving traffic and

achieving efficient flow. Therefore, the incremental transfer of road management (and ownership) of major arterial roads in Delhi to NHAI is worrisome to Mr. Bhattacharjee. Finally, he criticizes the present 'capacity-enhancement' approach to parking in the city. According to him, while off-site multi-level parking facilities have their role to play in commercial areas and other heavy-traffic venues, the majority of cars 'return home' to colonies where the internal streets are already at their limit. Therefore, without more demand management measures or without dynamic pricing, according to him, the issue of parking will continue to grow.

Ontological Crisis – Supply and Demand

The Centre for Science and Environment and subsequently, EPCA, in the context of the M.C Mehta case (Bhuwania, 2018), have proposed several restraint and demand management measures since the early 2000s. Aside from proposing and successfully implementing strategies against air pollution in the transportation sector, these agencies have specifically sought to address parking in the city. The latest of these is the "Delhi Maintenance and Management of Parking Places Rules, 2019" (Transport Department, 2019), reinforced with new language introduced within the Delhi Master Plan, 2021 (Delhi Development Authority, 2007). The primary purpose behind these new documents is to make parking a fairly-priced commodity, as opposed to its current conception as a free amenity (mainly enjoyed by the elite – car owners and homeowners). By charging a premium for parking spaces in high-demand locations, enforcing the removal of on-street parking within neighborhoods, and introducing dynamic parking rates, they intend to disincentivize car use and encourage a modal shift to public transport.

The new Parking Rules have a strong legal mandate and have been piloted[60] across a few colonies such as Lajpat Nagar, Krishna Nagar, Kamla Nagar, mainly under the leadership of the MCD. However, as several experts that I interviewed insisted, it is a hard-fought battle against Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) within colonies and Merchants and Traders Associations (MTAs) in commercial areas, political representatives and lobbyists, who are adamant against the pricing of on-street parking, especially within colonies. Instead, capacity-enhancement measures such as the construction of multi-level parking structures and the installation of smart meters for pricing parking within commercial areas have been far more successful.

Even beyond Delhi, there is a widespread acknowledgement of the issue of fair pricing within residential areas, at least amongst policy circles. But unlike the Delhi Parking Rules, not all major cities have adopted such strong measures. In the case of Bangalore, Gopakumar describes the situation as follows (Gopakumar, 2020, p. 162-163):

> *Given its explosive growth, parking of vehicles is a particularly problematic issue in the city. The clamor for an effective solution to parking woes is frequently voiced in the media. Much of the popular discourse is dominated by the absence of adequate spaces to park their vehicles. This is in spite of the fact that parking a vehicle (when a space is to be had) in the core of the city is quite an inexpensive affair and in the face of resistance from commercial and real estate interests, the city government has been markedly reluctant to frame a parking policy that will make users pay for leaving their vehicles on the road.*

As a result, often talks between citizen groups (bourgeois lobbyists) and mobility experts break down when it comes to looking for solutions to the parking crisis, or even what equitable distribution of street space looks like. For instance, during *Aapki Sadak*, (see

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[60] These pilots were carried out test area-wide parking strategies called Parking Management Area Plans (PMAPs). "PMAP is an area level plan prepared by any local body which includes the demarcation of all types of parking spaces for all mode as well as essential street amenities as per MPD-2021 provisions. This includes on-street, off-street (Parking spaces demarcated in parking lots lying outside rights-of-way), and multi-level parking facilities, vending zones, multi-modal integration facilities, green open spaces along with the allied traffic and pedestrian/ NMT circulation plans, signage plans and pricing strategy." (Transport Department, 2019, pp. 4–5)

Chapter 5 – sub-section 'Private Living for the Masses') residents opposed suggestions for designing dedicated cycle tracks, especially if these came at the cost of on-street parking space. Even though most residents agreed that cycling has environmental benefits, they emphasized their inability to cycle due to the absence of road space and accessibility, as well as the inhospitable air quality and weather of Delhi. (Murthy & Sur, 2022, p.19) Similarly, Dr. Anumita Roychowdhury, one of my participants and an expert consultant with the Centre for Science and Environment, relates her experience with parking lobbyists, in public and government consultations, held during the framing of the Delhi Parking Rules.

Anumita Roychowdhury (Executive Director, Centre for Science and Environment):

> ...*parking is something that can make or break governments, and there has been huge, huge resistance. I mean throughout, the whole idea of pricing parking, or to say that, you know, we need to do a parking area management plan, that we need to restrain parking, not put parking everywhere. And I still remember the whole idea, that how dare you don't give me a parking right at the doorstep of my house. You know, this is, I mean, there's a huge public reaction against this. So, and because there's a public reaction against it. And when I say public it means the car-owning community, and that obviously influences the politicians as well. In fact, I remember when the after the parking rules were drafted. There were actually affidavits from the Delhi government and also BJP [Bharatiya Janata Party] counsellors in MCD etc., who were all were dead against touching parking in residential areas. So, resistance is huge, enormous, and particularly to pricing.*

While individual homeowners, neighborhood RWAs, municipal agencies, and most development authorities, have focused on the supply/facilitation of more parking spaces, sustainable transport experts and a forward-looking policy ecosystem continue to advocate for a more demand-management-driven approach. As Dr. Roychowdhury goes on, there is a stark contrast in the conception of the 'crisis' when viewed from the perspective of car owners and sustainable development advocates, respectively.

*See the whole idea about the parking crisis, the way it was originally perceived, I think if you're looking at the crisis from the **supply-driven perspective**, then **the crisis is that "I'm not getting parking where I need to get parking"**. Okay, so today, in commercial areas wherever we go, the parking areas are chock-a-block. It over-spills on surrounding areas, or during night in residential areas, where the inner lanes of the residential areas also become chock-a-block with no space, even for emergency vehicles... So, one is "I'm not getting my parking space."*

*...we did some number crunching of the total number of cars that are registered every year, and the demand for additional land that it creates for parking, it works out to be 430 football fields a year in a city like Delhi. **That gives you a sense of another kind of crisis**...if parking demand has already taken away nearly 10% of Delhi's urban land. Okay. And on top of that if Delhi's road network has taken away another 23% that means, **1/3 of Delhi has already been given over, only for vehicle movement and parking... that's the other, expanded interpretation of what the crisis is.***

Most forward-looking policies presently, and in their language, are evidence of the growing recognition of this 'other' kind of crisis, at least within enlightened policy and expert networks. However, both these crises, the supply-driven and the demand-driven, are ontologically opposed. It is not simply a matter of epistemological interpretation. One hopes to realize a Delhi where there is sufficient parking for everyone who wishes to own a car, while the other hopes to produce a sustainable city which disincentivizes parking, and by extension private automobiles, through restraint measures and fair pricing. These ontologically opposed positions produce fundamentally different cities.

On the one hand, private vehicles deserve to be accommodated and respected from the perspective of middle-class residents, whose upward mobility has been hard-earned, and the crisis is one of insufficient supply. On the other hand, from the perspective of sustainable development advocates, the battle against automobility is being lost at an alarming rate, and the parking crisis puts the right to the city and the future of our planet at

stake. Meanwhile, the informal, and indeed illegal, occupation of neighborhood street space by cars, and the prolific growth of builder floors, has trapped 'middle-class' residents in a vicious cycle that fosters the growth of cars. Consequently, the mobility and immobility of cars and residents of the city, and public discourse on the crisis itself, are equally caught in a logjam, a material-discursive formation of their own making.

I argue here that this ontological crisis finds its basis in the political economy surrounding land ownership, governance power, and the moral ambiguity of the state. Large land-owning government agencies such as the DDA are mostly concerned with the overall 'world-class' outlook of the city and with their own land parcels within the city. Since the implementation of freehold tenure and the transference of utility infrastructure and public areas to the MCD, DDA has relinquished control and ownership of most colonies in Delhi over the decades. Similarly, the non-arterial and internal roads of colonies have been relegated to business-as-usual growth with minimal oversight, while agencies such as NHAI take control over the primary routes of the city. Consequently, it is easier and more visible for the state to build infrastructure within the controlled confines of arterial corridors and large self-owned land parcels, rather than investing in sustained and incremental action within the areas of the city outside their control. As Ghertner writes, "one sees few slums in Delhi while traveling its main streets, creating the sense, among slum and nonslum residents alike, that slums are anomalies, aberrations from the visual and legal norm" (2015, p. 142). And as the parking and infrastructure crisis - in even the poshest colonies of Delhi – grows, it is hard to look away from a fraught future. A future where the fractures in the city become entrenched and etched into its very fabric – shiny, high-speed transit corridors, dotted with high-rise high-end complexes, that hide the view to the crisis ridden colonies behind.

Meanwhile, despite the sustainability rhetoric that the state deploys to justify further investment in comprehensive redevelopment schemes or 'smart' infrastructure, there is a growing recognition of the duplicitousness of such endeavors. TOD principles mean nothing if the focus remains on developing elite gated complexes; environment friendly technologies are pointless if the construction of such complexes entail the large-scale felling of trees; the decarbonization of public transport emissions become ineffectual if transport planning

continues to expand capacity through road widening, flyovers and hard shoulders. In the end, what brings the morality of the state most into question is the allegiances it claims and the allegiances it honors. While it claims positive climate action by drafting and adopting several forward-thinking policies, rules and guidelines, its practices support a different narrative. In reality, the state honors a neoliberal agenda and speculative capital that feeds the vision of a world-class city, rather than the plight of its citizens.

CHAPTER 7

SPECULATIONS: HOUSING FUTURES OF DELHI

This dissertation has examined the 'phenomenon' of builder floors in Delhi as a 'diffractive' apparatus to understand broader urban processes that have shaped the city's development trajectory since India's independence (with specters of colonial pasts). Rather than presenting a narrative of its origins, or a simplistic genealogy of builder floors as a contemporary housing typology or market response to density demands, this research has demonstrated how they 'make legible' the entanglement of multiple historical, social, communal, intergenerational, economic and spatial transformations that have fundamentally reshaped Delhi's residential landscape. In a sense, this study of builder floors shows that there is no higher-level ordering principle for Delhi's urbanism. Urban processes, instead, are 'immanent' to each other – following Deleuze and Guattari's 'plane of immanence' (1987) – always acting on and through each other.

The emergence of builder floors cannot be understood in isolation from the migration patterns and housing mobility of Delhi's middle class. As demonstrated through personal narratives and case studies, the movement of different communities across the city - whether driven by historical events like India's Partition, economic aspirations, or communal factors - created specific settlement patterns that laid the groundwork for future transformations. Whether middle-class families made the transition from joint families living in *haveli*s and *kothi*s, or from frugal refugee tenements and government quarters, they equally found a new, quintessentially 'Delhi' dwelling, in the form of the single-family home in plotted colonies. This not only marked a crucial shift in their housing preferences and the spatial organization of the modern family, but also enunciated a growing preoccupation with private property and the house 'plot'.

And while the state was focused on growing its own land bank and property portfolio through land acquisitions, speculative capital sought its own goals through the incremental growth, densification and commercialization of colonies. The builder franchise, though seemingly predatory, eventually molded (and was shaped by) the market and homeowners to equally participate in the neoliberal real estate utopia, that is Delhi. However, participation in this 'booming' sector has also come with consequences both for the built environment at large and for individual homeowners. Becoming real estate actors themselves, homeowners

often find themselves lamenting the loss of innocence and a simple life, better social integration and greener surroundings, while being comforted by their material gains and housing security for future generations. On the other hand, as a parking (and infrastructure) crisis has taken hold of residential colonies across the city, stilted floors offer little and temporary respite from a fundamentally flawed approach towards parking management in the city. And in keeping with its investor-friendly attitude towards infrastructure and urban development, the state continues to focus on supply-driven approaches that are ontologically opposed to the demand management measures advocated by sustainable mobility and policy experts.

However, this study also points to several lines of inquiry that were beyond its present scope. The following set of research questions, then, may be taken up in my own future research, or form part of larger interrogations. Most importantly these set of questions expand the inquiry beyond 'middle-class' navel gazing, drawing from posthumanism and more-than-human concerns:

- How has the market for service workers changed with the advent of builder floors? Consequently, what new labor and class relations are being produced/normalized?
- How has daily life within the public realm (streets, parks) of plotted colonies changed?
- What new entanglements with more-than-human species – specifically dogs (pets and stray), garden lizards, monkeys – are being produced?

In the next sections, I offer some speculations on some of the many futures of builder floors in Delhi. During my field visits, I also came across several 'outliers' across the city – buildings that did not quite fit the typical model of builder floors. My own family's experience offers some insight into shifting ideas about family and neighbourhood and how these notions may influence the design and habitation of the builder floor in the near and distant future.

Living in Builder Floors (as they age)

The robbery incident I related in Chapter 2 still weighs heavily on my parents and they often feel insecure in their own home. In fact this is a widespread feeling amongst my

participants and 'middle-class' homeowners in the city at large, as corroborated by several scholars (Baviskar, 2020; Ghertner, 2012; Waldrop, 2004). As class disparities grow and new residents continue to flood into existing colonies, the lack of trust in these (formerly) tight-knit communities (at least within cooperative societies) is becoming tangible. As a result, most builder floors come equipped with a complete grill cage at the back of the plot, as shown below (Figure 52).

Figure 52 LEFT: Back of plot 'grill cage' at my parents' new builder floor. RIGHT: Grill above stilt floor. This is also placed at the top floor to block roof access through the courtyard.

But the loss of trust in one's neighborhood is not restricted to the new residents of the colony. As floors in these new buildings are bought, sold and even independently registered (Express News Service, 2011), dealing with other residents in the same building is a mixed bag. While people like Mr. Arora (see chapter 5) are quite satisfied with the other tenants/owners in their building, Mr. Joshi has had a difficult time negotiating with his building residents on maintenance issues, the improvement of security measures, etc., as the following account shows.

Mr. Joshi (Homeowner – Paschim Vihar):

I will tell you about a couple of problems which arose in our building. The outer portion of our building is made of Dholpur stone, and that too, excessively big slabs of the stone. All the mezzanine floors have been constructed with these big slabs of stone. Initially it was okay, but one day, one slab broke off and fell. Thankfully, it fell during the night, if it had been daytime, someone may have got badly hurt.   Our iron gate broke with the impact, it was such a heavy slab of stone. We got quite worried about what to do about this problem. It was not really our problem, because we were on the ground floor, and it was not our slab. But we had to make adjustments and find a solution to the problem, because this was our daily passage. We got all the heavy slabs removed, got the entire area cemented and got it repainted in the same color scheme. We got this done on one side. Even now, the smaller stones on the other side have not been removed. Even recently, during the monsoon, one stone from there fell and luckily, it did not fall on our car. So now we are parking our car on the other side, and we only keep some flowerpots on this side.

We split the cost three ways. As I said, I could have insisted that it had nothing to do with me and I could have refused to pay for any part of it. But we agreed to pay one third. There are some problems, as I mentioned, but one advantage is that it [stone] does not get dirty and so it does require much cleaning or whitewashing. Even at the back, we have got iron grills for each floor, due to security reasons. Each floor has its separate grill, which each family then maintains. Whoever wants to get their house whitewashed or cleaned, does so independently.

When we got the security gates and locks, it was a separate issue. The expenses were mounting up because there was also talk about security cameras. But it was proving to be awfully expensive. For us, it was not needed, because we could easily see the whole front verandah and the gate from inside our house. Even for the upstairs people, if a person stands a bit to the side, the camera does not catch the image. So, finally we dropped the idea of security cameras.

A major techno-legal aspect of the future of builder floors is how residents will negotiate future redevelopment of their property in light of **'roof rights' and 'undivided share'**. While the concept of roof rights, typically sold through powers of attorney (see chapter 2), has come under government scrutiny several times (Pandit, 2013), in unauthorized colonies and urban villages it is still a common mode of sale and purchase of property. On the other hand, owning an undivided share of a builder property (typically 25%) significantly curtails one's development rights. Many of my participants cited several instances where obtaining a No Objection Certificate (NOC), to develop or alter the property, from other residents of the building has led to legal disputes. Effectively, homeowners who once owned a single-family home and enjoyed the freedom to incrementally grow their house, add extensions, or even redevelop altogether, are struggling with the loss of autonomy over their property.

Additionally, given that builder floors have a propensity for employing more and more specialized staff – maids, guards, chauffeurs, etc. – it raises significant questions about the impacts on public space within middle-class colonies. The stilt floor as it bleeds into the street and neighborhood parks (at least as reported to me) are increasingly occupied by these part-time and full-time workers. This already creates class tensions between the elite homeowners and the working-class folk who need to spend their workday in these gated enclaves. While I briefly addressed this in [Chapter 5 (subsection Loss, Gain, Hyper-privacy, and Class Relations)](#), such a line of inquiry must learn from the experiences of the workers – perhaps a direction for future research.

Further Vertical Subdivision

Of late, there has been near-viral media coverage of Mukesh Ambani's 400,000-square-foot, 27-storey and $1-2 billion USD 'mansion' (though an over-extension of the type) in South Mumbai (*Antilia House*, 2023; Insider, 2019). With reportedly, 6 floors of parking garages, spa, exercise center, Jacuzzi, several pools, a yoga studio, and a dance studio, 3 helipads, a 'snow room', and several other amenities, it is the complete house (Figure 53).

Figure 53 'Antilia'- Mukesh Ambani's mansion in South Mumbai. Source: AD Insider (2023).

We have seen that each iteration of the MPD, without fail, has managed to enhance the maximum building height and permissible number of floors for (plotted) residential buildings (see table in Chapter 2: The Story of My House). Initially the ceiling for this vertical growth was limited to staircase accessibility, or walk-ups, as they are known. However, with the seamless addition of elevators in builder floors, there is a possibility that sky is the limit, especially as real estate values of these plots will, in all likelihood, continue to rise. Will this mean that builder floors continue to add new floors until yield points are reached / what are the limits of vertical expansion?

Consolidation of Plots

Though this already happening to some extent, typically initiated by builders (Figure 55) or individual property owners (Figure 56), the latest TOD guidelines also incentivize consolidation of plots within the 'influence zones' of transit hubs under its Land Pooling policy (Delhi Development Authority, 2021). The following diagram (Figure 54) shows the two ways in which plots may be consolidated.
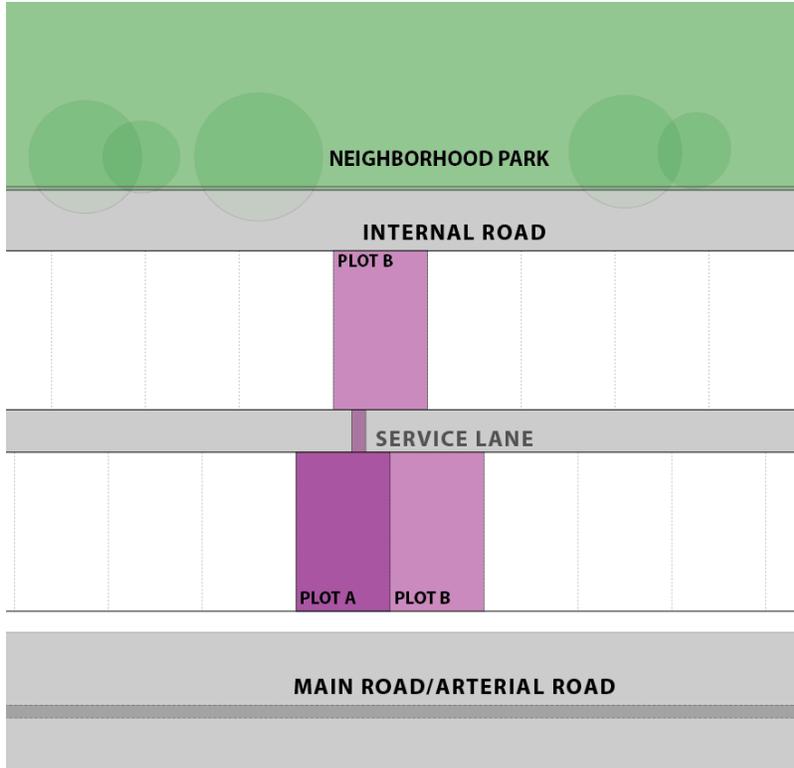
Figure 55 Two different configurations for the consolidation of plots.

Figure 54 Plots consolidated along the main road in Greater Kailash, South Delhi.

PROPOSED BRIDGE
CONNECTING THE GROUND
FLOOR OF BOTH PROPERTIES

SERVICE LANE

PLAN AT GROUND FLOOR LEVEL C28
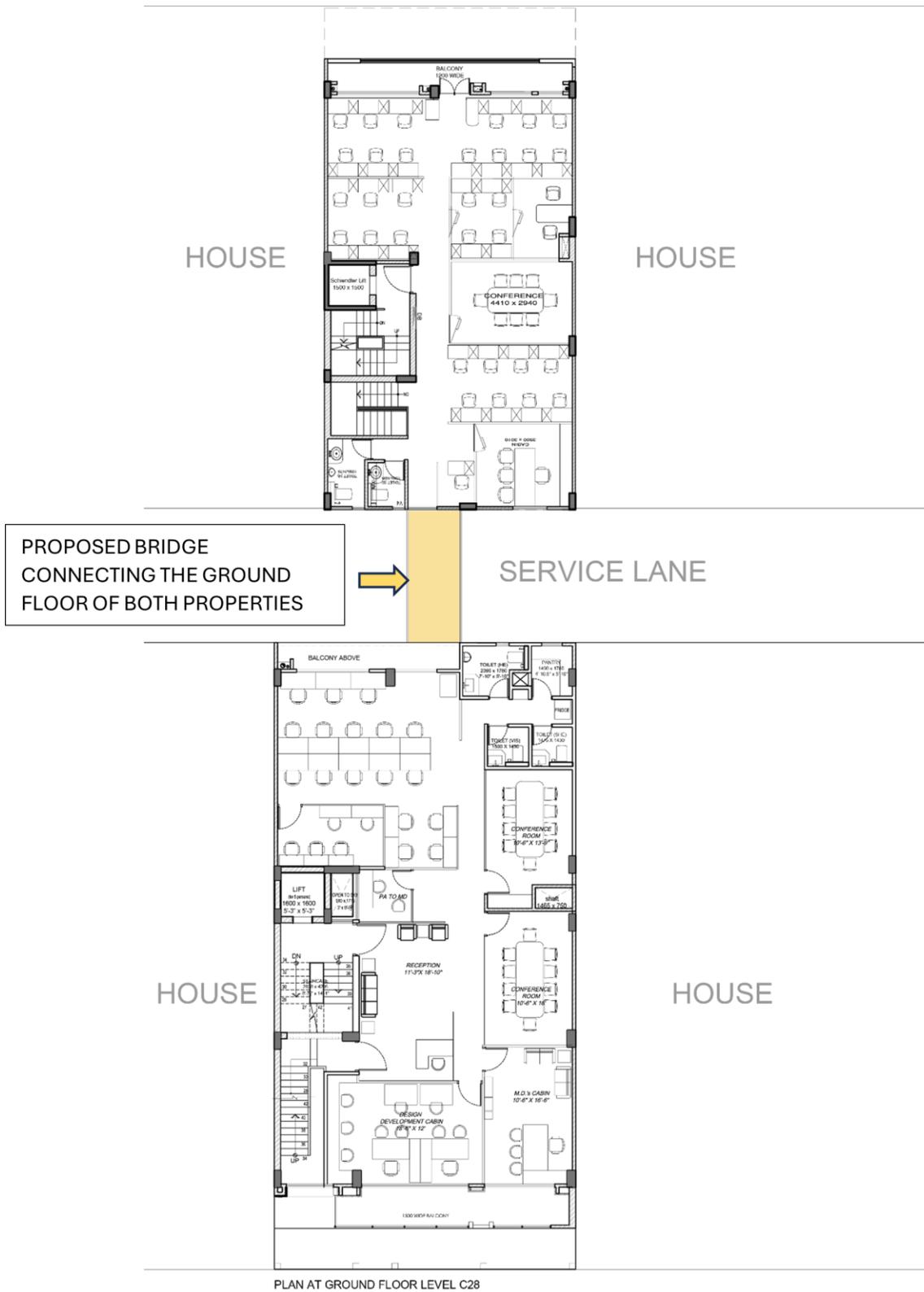
Figure 56 Back-to-back plots under the same ownership in South Delhi. The property owners plan to build a 'bridge' across the service lane to integrate the two buildings.

Commercial Retrofit and Subdivision

As many of my participants reported, and through my own observations in the field, it became clear that the current laws that deem the stilt floor to be 'uninhabitable' (hence the 1.8 metre height restriction) are not an accurate reflection of on-the-ground reality. As Mr. Agarwal reported, he is surrounded by properties that blatantly violate the law and use the stilt floor space for commerce. Many builder floors in posh colonies accommodate servant quarters within the stilt floor. And in the following example, the property owner rented out the stilt floor as an automobile showroom to circumvent the law. Such innovative adaptations to the law are not uncommon and, in fact, are the expected outcome in the long run. It is also, perhaps, possible that property owners incrementally add internal walls, rent out partial floors, etc. What are the limits of subdivision?

Figure 57 Boutique hotel with an automobile showroom on the ground floor in Lajpat Nagar. Source: Project Architect (anonymous).

Final Reflections: Reading as Assemblage

The telling of these stories (and my own) has been anything but a straightforward '(re)presentation' of facts. My emic position as a member of Delhi's middle class significantly influenced the research process. Having experienced the transformation of my own childhood home into builder floors, I found myself uniquely situated to be moved by the complex decisions and emotions involved in such transitions. But rather than get bogged down with feelings of inadequacy as I was unable to 'distance' myself from the field, this personal experience shaped my interview approach and analysis in ways that proved methodologically productive. For instance, when interviewing homeowners about their experiences with builders, shared understanding of the process often led to deeper discussions about the financial and social implications of rebuilding. The field research challenged conventional boundaries between data collection and analysis. Each interview informed subsequent ones through an iterative process that revealed new connections and patterns. As a result, I often found myself going beyond my slated questions/prompts to chase new lines of flight. Adopting a post qualitative approach opened my eyes to new possibilities, reframed my research questions, and reordered my priorities.

Several significant methodological challenges also emerged during the research. Despite a shared class background with many participants, power dynamics remained complex. Builders were often guarded about certain aspects of their business practices, while homeowners sometimes hesitated to discuss financial details, especially when it came to discussing the exchange of 'black money' or illicit practices, otherwise common in the industry. These tensions required careful negotiation while maintaining research integrity. There were instances, and entire interviews, where I opted to stop recording altogether due to the sensitive nature of the conversation. Yet I must also acknowledge the privilege I enjoyed while conducting fieldwork. I am Hindu, middle class and male – in other words a typical 'Delhi Boy' – and as such I had unrestricted access to most spaces, people, and networks. My past experience as an urban designer and educator, as well as my rigorous

engagement with middle-class residents during *Aapki Sadak* (see previous chapters) were vital in recruiting homeowners and experts alike.

I return now to a quote from '*A Thousand Plateaus: capitalism and schizophrenia*':

> *... a book composed of chapters has culmination and termination points. What takes place in a book composed instead of plateaus that communicate with one another across microfissures, as in a brain? We call a "plateau" any multiplicity connected to other multiplicities by superficial underground stems in such a way as to form or extend a rhizome. We are writing this book as a rhizome. It is composed of plateaus*

(Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 2)

In defining assemblage, Manuel De Landa (2016) disambiguates meanings of the term as deployed in literature following Deleuze and Guattari's proposition. He distinguishes the English definition of *assemblage* from the French '*agencement*', a word that "refers to the **action of matching or fitting together** a set of components (agencer), **as well as to the result** of such an action: an ensemble of parts that mesh together well" (De Landa, 2016, p. 1). An assemblage is made up of heterogeneous parts including human and non-human actors, their individual actions and movements, historical accidents, structural forces, incipient tendencies – both nouns and verbs. Assemblages demonstrate territoriality and an ability to 'deterritorialize' and 'reterritorialize' parts in unpredictable yet discernible ways, much like a rhizome, and are thus in a constant state of *becoming*. However, these movements are not teleological in their concert, nor deterministic in any structural-functional sense. There may be new beginnings, shifting alliances, dead ends. Though assemblages might interact with other assemblages, they maintain a certain degree of cohesiveness making them different than their counterparts.

I propose that builder floors are assemblages. Far from their stable conception as a defined type, the builder floor demonstrates dynamism and movement, behaving as an intermediary between several recognizable predecessors and an uncertain, changeable future. But this analogy is not simply about morphological characteristics, nor the arborified genealogy/constitution of builder floors themselves. As Abdoumaliq Simone suggests, "urbanization conventionally denotes a thickening of fields, an assemblage of increasingly

heterogeneous elements into more complicated collectives" (2020, p. 69). Builder floors enact precisely such a thickening of fields – where questions of migration, capital circulation, domestic space, and infrastructure converge to reshape the residential landscape of contemporary Delhi. This dissertation has aimed to illuminate these processes through what Jackson and Mazzei (2023) call "plugging in" - an experimental mode of inquiry that dissolves rigid boundaries between theory, data, and analysis. Rather than seeking definitive explanations, it has traced the multiple, entangled processes through which builder floors have emerged and continue to transform Delhi's urban fabric. In doing so, it contributes to broader conversations about housing, planning, and social change in India's rapidly evolving cities.

The research ultimately suggests that addressing Delhi's urban challenges requires moving beyond siloed approaches to housing, mobility, or infrastructure provision. The case of builder floors demonstrates how these domains are fundamentally interconnected - how interventions in one area inevitably reshape others in both intended and unintended ways. This calls for more integrated approaches to urban planning and development that can better account for the complex entanglements between migration, capital, space, and infrastructure in the contemporary city. Crucially, this research has highlighted how builder floors have emerged through what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) call 'parallel *becomings*' - where multiple processes reinforce and make each other legible. The economic mobility of the middle class, the evolution of Delhi's land-property regime, the circulation of speculative capital, and changing conceptions of home have developed in tandem rather than in linear sequence. As Barad suggests through her concept of 'agential realism', these processes are entangled rather than merely correlated (Barad, 2007).

More importantly, however, this literary machine, this assemblage, brings me (the researcher, the Delhi Boy), the 'field', my participants, and the select audience this book might have, together – into our own rhizomatic relationship of *becoming*. I *become* researcher, only by producing this manuscript, just like the builder floor *becomes* 'central' to the issue of parking in the city, through and because of this piece of writing. Equally, in studying assemblages there are no definitive starting points. Which is precisely why this

chapter is not a conclusion, just as there is no separate methodology chapter or why literature 'review' is more a mechanical component of each chapter. Each entry point into this dissertation is thus just as viable and it is my hope that much like the plateaus, each chapter within this dissertation generates enough energy so as to propel the reader onto the next/previous plateau.

Though I am reticent to draw what might be termed as final conclusions, there are some provisional thoughts that I believe provide a degree of closure to an otherwise open-ended dissertation and what might seem like an endless stream of small observations:

On Housing Mobility and Uneven Geographies: While there is significant scholarship about the living conditions and migration patterns of post-Partition refugees, the sheer scale of Delhi and its migrant population defies any categorical account of its settlement pattern. In fact, any attempt to 'geographically fix' communities, classes, ethnic groups, religious and communal constituencies seem impossible and counter intuitive. And though plotted colonies exist everywhere and post-independence urban planning and zoning (outside of Shajhanabad and Lutyens Delhi) was relatively uniform, Delhi's urban and social fabric is far from uniform. It is these very patterned and uneven geographies that continue to inform the spatial segregation and marginalization of groups, the commercial success of selected areas, the real estate and social capital of certain colonies, the practice of builders and even the expectations of homeowners.

On the Transformation of Capital and Property Relations: Builder floors represent a new model of property development that emerged from the particular conditions of Delhi's plotted colonies. The evolution from refugee resettlement to cooperative housing societies to builder floors traces a path where construction costs are increasingly converted into ownership stakes, enabling both builders and homeowners to participate in real estate speculation. The emergence of builders as distinct actors - different from both corporate developers and traditional contractors - reflects broader shifts in how capital circulates through Delhi's housing market. Their success is deeply tied to their ability to navigate social networks, bureaucratic requirements, and local real estate markets through what one participant called "building trust and capital." This model has proven particularly suited to

Delhi's real estate dynamics where property has more investment potential than liquid capital.

On the Evolution of Domestic Space: Builder floors both respond to and reshape the domestic spatial arrangements and social relations of historically prevalent dwelling types of Delhi's. While enabling some aspects of joint family living through vertical stacking of units, they simultaneously promote new forms of privacy and segregation through specialized spaces and separate entrances. The mandatory stilt parking requirement has fundamentally altered the relationship between buildings and streets, eliminating traditional elements like verandahs that once fostered neighborhood interaction. These changes reflect broader shifts in how middle-class Delhi residents conceive of and create home - shifts that have been influenced by both migrant aspirations and changing family structures. This is particularly evident in how different communities have adapted the builder floor model to their specific needs - from multi-generational Muslim families in Nizamuddin to upwardly mobile professionals with home-offices in South Delhi.

On the Infrastructure-Mobility Nexus: The parking crisis reveals how builder floors are both symptom and catalyst of Delhi's automobility challenges, which themselves are deeply connected to patterns of middle-class consumption and neoliberal statecraft. While land use and transport integration and transit oriented development (Cervero, 2013; Joshi et al., 2017) have been recognized as the way forward for both sustainable urban development and mobility planning, in their present manifestation, they are more a reflection of the state's real estate ambitions and big infrastructure priorities. This nexus of investor-friendly neoliberal development of infrastructure with high-speed mobility planning has locked the state and its practices into a vicious cycle of capacity enhancement. And thus the emergent crisis is one which questions the very fundamentals of urban planning – whether to plan for the continual expansion of infrastructure or enact more demand management measures and curb rampant consumption.

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