

## Spatial Politics

# Sociality, Transparency, and Ideas of Community in Delhi and Gurgaon

Sanjay Srivastava\*

### Introduction

This chapter seeks to explore certain ideas around corruption, transparency, and community as they emanate from two different socioeconomic contexts. The first of these concerns the middle-class locality of what I will call New Gurgaon. In particular, my focus is on the privately developed DLF City—built by the Delhi Land and Finance (DLF) company—located in the district of Gurgaon that borders Delhi. Gurgaon is in the state of Haryana, located immediately south of the national capital, and a part of the National Capital Region (NCR). According to one report, the areas falling under the recently (2008) constituted Municipal Corporation of Gurgaon (MCG) (that includes DLF City as well as several other privately developed residential enclaves) contains around 1.2 million persons. However, residents' groups (known locally as the residents' welfare associations or RWAs) dispute this estimate, claiming the true figure to be closer to 2 million. RWAs suggested that the actual figure had been suppressed so that the “corrupt” corporation did not have to provision for the actual number of residents.

The second context of my discussion is the now demolished slum locality of Nangla Matchi (“Nangla”) that, till 2006, lay on the western banks of

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the Yamuna river that flows through Delhi. The locality, established in the late 1970s, was demolished between 2006 and 2007 to make way for an urban “beautification” program connected to the preparation for the 2010 Commonwealth Games.

My aim in this discussion is to think about some of the key aspects of urbanization and what they tell us about ideas of citizenship, relations with the state, and notions of community across different class fractions. The ideas that link the two quite different socioeconomic contexts I will discuss here are those of “transparency,” corruption, faking, and morality.

With regard to the discussion that concerns DLF City, I will work on my discussion through a specific concept that I refer to as “post-nationalism.” This concept, I suggest, illuminates crucial contexts of new forms of urbanism in India as well as changing relationships between the state and middle-class citizens. It also, I further argue, allows us an entry into understanding ideas regarding corruption and transparency among specific class fractions.

Before I get to post-nationalism, however, it is important to historicize the social and political landscape of the NCR in order to locate the processes of its sociopolitical present as a *specific* case of urbanism. That is to say, that while urbanization may be a “planetary”<sup>1</sup> phenomenon, discussions based around “modular” urbanism provide little purchase on the trajectories on the lives of cities as spaces produced through *unique* combinations of historical processes. The broader theoretical framework I wish to deploy—post-nationalism—requires a detour through the materiality of recent history: those multiple operations by citizens, private capital, and the state that have direct bearing on the making of natural topographies into social ones; that juncture where “land” becomes place and opens itself to the kinds of theorizations I seek to discuss.

## Land into Place

The tangled skein of the colonial politics of land provides the first rung of the story through which we might seek to understand the specificity of the NCR. The colonial government established the Delhi Improvement Trust (DIT) in 1937 in order to “de-congest” parts of the old, walled city. As a consequence, the DIT promulgated the Delhi-Ajmeri Gate Slum Clearance Scheme in 1938. Beyond its putative mandate of “slum clearance,” the founding of the DIT set in motion a series of bureaucratic and political operations on land whose social consequences continue to resonate in the postcolonial present. The most significant of these is the absolute monopoly over land-related activities

granted to the trust. The background to the DIT's monopolistic powers lay in the control the state exercised over vast tracts of *nazul* lands, namely, "the Delhi Crown lands denoting property which has descended to Government either as successor of former Government or by escheat, in absence of heirs to legal owners."<sup>2</sup>

The legal fiction of *nazul* lands served, in effect, to consolidate colonial control of land through prohibiting all private real estate activity, unless routed through the trust. The Land Acquisition Act of 1894 (amended twice before it was replaced with a new law in 2013)<sup>3</sup> was a fundamental legal tool deployed by the DIT to consolidate its power and lock out private players. The trust was superseded by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) in 1957; however, the postcolonial nation-state was not about to overturn the power over land enjoyed by the DDA's predecessor. For, the ordinance of 1955 that led to the establishment of the new authority incorporated just as sweeping a vision of state control over land as that put in place by the colonial government. In the DDA's wake, the state established itself "as the sole agency legally authorized to develop and dispose off land [and] ... left little, or no role for the private land developer."<sup>4</sup>

The historic nature of the state as a land monopolist<sup>5</sup> in the city-state of Delhi has had specific consequences in a region—Delhi and the broader NCR—where the mixture of party-political activity, private capital maneuvering and assertions by citizens' rights groups has produced a prolix urban landscape. Most specifically, as I will discuss in the next section on "post-nationalism," it concerns—what might be referred to as—a "restructuring" of the state in terms of its historical relationship to different class fractions as well as private capital. And the politics of urban spaces is at the heart of this state of play.

I will now briefly reflect upon one other contiguous context to build the case for the specificity of the Delhi region (a term I invoke as a synonym to the NCR), before moving on to the main arguments of this chapter. It further lays the groundwork for the discussion of the later sections.

Given the historic hold of the state over land within Delhi, two specific processes are of particular import: the rise of direct negotiations between the state and the city's residents in order to garner particular rights over land and the efflorescence of private real estate activity just beyond the borders of the city into other parts of the NCR beyond Delhi. I will discuss the former here while detailing the latter in a separate section since it forms a crucial part of the discussion of this chapter.

The rise of middle-class citizens' rights groups, their keenness to engage the state on a variety of urban issues and the alacrity with which the state seeks to not only respond but also actively encourage the relationship, forms one of the most striking aspects of the politics of urbanism in Delhi. A particularly salient example of this is the *bhagidari* ("Cooperation") scheme introduced by the Congress in Delhi under erstwhile Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit. Initiated in 2001 (and terminated in 2013 when the party lost power), the program brought together representatives of RWAs, market traders' associations (MTAs), and key government officials at periodically organized workshops as well as regular monthly meetings. The meetings and workshops were intended to reimagine the city as a space of cooperative endeavor, one where "citizens" play an active role in formulating and implementing urban policies, and the state responds through "transparent" mechanisms of urban governance.<sup>6</sup>

Though the program was imagined as a decentralization of urban governance, the grounds for *bhagidari* were actually prepared through the overweening reach of the state over matters of land. It is for this reason that the state—as I discuss in the next section—has become very significant, if not the exclusive, focus of a restructuring such that relatively powerful urban bodies (such as those that represent middle-class residents) seek not only to gain new access to it but also deny access to others. Hence, under the *bhagidari* scheme—participation within which was limited to RWAs that were registered with the registrar of cooperatives—one of the most consistent demands was to forcefully demolish localities inhabited by the poor and to relocate these to the edges of the city. A significant background to the new relationship between middle-class citizens and the state is the concurrently changing relationship between private capital and both the previous entities. In the next section, I provide a more detailed discussion of this relationship—which is new in as much as the Nehruvian postcolonial nation-state explicitly defined its most significant role as association with the nation's marginalized citizens—and the consequences for urban policy.

It is the historically sequestered nature of the state—segregated from the functioning of various markets—that, I suggest, is the context of the current tumult where the nature of the state and its *legitimate* role in issues of social and economic justice are sought to be changed *along* with attempts to force it to engage with the market. That is to say that, ironically, it is the lack of past experience with the market that is the grounds for the rejection of the state *in toto*. These peculiarities, writ large upon the physical and symbolic terrains of Delhi NCR make the region a study in the *specifics* of the relationships

between the state, private capital, and citizens. It is this aspect that the next section seeks to theorize through the notion of post-nationalism.

## Post-Nationalism

Through “post-nationalism,” I seek to focus upon the changing nature of the relationship between citizens and the state in order to present the relationship as a complex site of new attitudes toward consumption and private capital.

The term does *not* mean to imply that the nation-state is insignificant as a context of analysis or that we now live in a (what has been referred to as a) “post-patriotic” age where the most significant units of analysis are certain “postnational social formations”<sup>7</sup>—such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs)—that putatively problematize nationalist and statist perspectives. Further, my deployment is also different from another recent usage where it is used as an exhortation to develop thinking beyond the nation-state.<sup>8</sup> Post-nationalism, as deployed here, is the articulation of the nationalist emotion with the robust desires engendered through *new practices of consumerism and their associated cultures of privatization and individuation*. The term seeks to capture the “national” emotion at a time *beyond* the era of classic nationalism that came at the end of colonial rule. The “post” in post-nationalism refers not to the end of nationalism, but to its life when it enters into *explicit* dialogue with ideas of privatization of erstwhile public-funded activities and consumerism as a way of life.

A fruitful way of approaching the topic—and providing concrete illustrative examples—is through a brief exploration of the contemporary politics of urban spaces in Delhi. In 1999, soon after being elected to office, Delhi’s erstwhile Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit “called for an active participation of Residents Welfare Associations in governance.” The rationale for this was the “failure” of “civic agencies” to carry out their normal tasks. The chief minister’s secretary noted that the call to actively involve RWAs in urban governance heralded a new era, marking as it did “the first step towards a responsive management of the city.”<sup>9</sup> Positing a distinction between the state and the community, the secretary further noted that the “failure” of “civic agencies”—including their corrupt practices—meant that “it’s really time for the community to be given direct control of managing the affairs of the city.”<sup>10</sup> Subsequently, the government decided to “empower” RWAs to “take certain decisions on their own.” It was proposed that they be given control over the management of resources such as parks, community halls, parking places, sanitation facilities,

and local roads. A more direct relationship between the state and RWAs was also mooted through the idea of joint surveys of “encroached” land—that is, land that had been “illegally” occupied, usually by slum-dwellers—with the possibility that all illegal structures would “then be demolished in a non-discriminatory manner.” Finally, it was proposed that RWAs be allowed to impose fines on government agencies which failed to carry out their assigned tasks.

In 2005, the Delhi state government announced that it would raise the electricity tariff by 10 percent. The Delhi Residents Welfare Association Joint Front (RWAJF) was formed in the same year in order to protest against the measure. The front consisted of 195 separate member RWAs from around the city. The increase in power rates for domestic consumers was the second one since the state-owned electricity body was “unbundled” in June 2002 as part of power sector “reforms.” As a result, three privately owned companies secured contracts for electricity distribution.<sup>11</sup>

There was vigorous protest over the price rise and, in addition to the RWAJF, NGOs, such as People’s Action, and another group known as Campaign Against Power Tariff Hike joined the campaign. Individual RWAs asked their members to refuse payment of the extra amount, while the RWAJF lobbied the government and organized citywide protests. The protests gained wide coverage in both the print and electronic media, and, echoing Gandhian anti-colonial strategies, the organizers were reported to have deployed “the ideas of ‘civil disobedience’ and ‘people’s power.’”<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the parallels sought to be drawn between the Gandhian anti-colonial movement and the present times were even more explicit with the convener of the RWAJF referring to the protests as “non-violent *Satyagraha*.”<sup>13</sup> *Satyagrah*, made up of two words *satya* (truth) and *agrah* (insistence), was used by Mahatma Gandhi to refer nonviolent resistance in his struggle against colonial rule. Eventually, the Delhi government backed down and the price rise was shelved. According to Sanjay Kaul, president of the People’s Action NGO, the success of the protest heralded the making of a “middle-class revolution.”<sup>14</sup> Kaul is one of many who had rediscovered and deployed anti-colonial vocabulary on behalf of the “people” at a time when the colonial era itself had become part of the sphere of mass consumption. In the wake of the 2011 anti-corruption movement led by social worker Anna Hazare, *yoga guru* Swami Ramdev invoked “Gandhi in calling for a ‘*satyagrah* against corruption.’”<sup>15</sup>

The circulation of the ideas of “civil disobedience,” *satyagrah*, and “revolution” and the consolidation of the notion of a “people” contesting the state occur

in a context that might be called post-national. By this, I mean a situation where the original moral frisson of these terms—provided by anti-colonial sentiment—no longer holds. Indeed, in an era of post-Nehruvian economic liberalization characterized by consumerist modernity,<sup>16</sup> the moral universe of the anti-colonial struggle is no longer part of popular public discourse. At a time of post-nationalism, the “colonial ambience” is, in fact, an important part of popular marketing strategies.

Within this new context, the earlier emphases on the ethics of “saving” and delayed gratification for the “national good”<sup>17</sup>—that were indispensable ideological accompaniments to “civil disobedience” and *satyagrah* and also sought to foreground the significance of production of industrial goods and capacities that characterized the Nehruvian era—do not find any resonance in contemporary popular discourses on the role of the state. As I have noted earlier, the term post-national does *not* mean to imply that the nation-state is insignificant as a context of analysis. Rather, it refers to the new ways in which the nation-state relates to capital and the contexts within which it relates to different fractions of citizens. Hence, for example, in relation to the changing relationship between the state and the middle classes, the actions of the RWAs indicate an era of the “gentrification” and “re-spatialization” of the state<sup>18</sup> such that the consumer-citizen becomes the key focus of policy debates. This is a significant shift from the ideologies of the Nehruvian-era developmentalist state that succeeded the colonial one, with the poor as its key focus.<sup>19</sup>

A brief comment is required regarding my use of the term post-nationalism, given that there is another that has wide currency and might be said to describe the same set of social and economic circumstances. This is “neo-liberalism.”<sup>20</sup> While I cannot dwell on this aspect in any great detail, the key point I wish to make is that this term “is unable to account for the specific *national* histories that transform into postnational ones.”<sup>21</sup> As well, its deployment assumes that there is a “universal neoliberal moment”<sup>22</sup> that allows for a “global” view. As Terry Flew points out, the

debate about neoliberalism as *one of a number of competing ideas about the organization of capitalist economies and societies* has been largely overwhelmed by those arguments that present neoliberalism as the ascendant ideology of global capitalism, so that the world is seen as being, or becoming, more and more neoliberal in its institutional structure and policy choices.<sup>23</sup>

My use of “post-nationalism” seeks to avoid the “too-easy application of models of capitalism and neoliberalism that obscure the variety of local

experience.”<sup>24</sup> In particular, the term seeks to capture the nuances of local histories—of capital and its cultural and economic fields—that are specific to the region by virtue of the necessary jaggedness of the every day in different parts of the world.

Particularized regional histories apart, there are other reasons too why we should be wary of “global” histories of capitalism that do not account for the analytical limitations of the term. A great deal “of the usage of the term,” Flew also suggests, “is intellectually unsustainable, particularly where it functions as an all-purpose denunciatory category or where it is simply invoked as ‘the way things are’”<sup>25</sup> and that “it largely functions as a rhetorical trope, where the meaning is already known to those who would be interested in the topic in question.”<sup>26</sup>

A significant aspect of the post-national moment in India is the process of rethinking the state<sup>27</sup> such that it is increasingly imagined as a “friend” of the *middle classes*. The postcolonial state in India has most significantly been imagined as a benefactor of the poor, with “development” as its most significant policy focus. Indeed, the development focus of the state has been a defining feature of perceptions of postcoloniality itself.<sup>28</sup> The developmentalist state has also been perceived as anti-consumption. The RWA activities such as those discussed earlier have become sites for the reformulation of these historically well-entrenched notions of the state and its relationships with different class fractions. These neighborhood and city-level activities unfold in tandem with the broad national thrust toward “de-regulating” the economy,<sup>29</sup> including a shrinking public sector and easy loans for consumer purchases. It is this that I refer to as characteristic of post-nationalism.

One of the most significant ways in which the post-national moment resonates within the politics of urban space concerns the repositioning of the language of anti-colonial nationalism from the national sphere to the suburban one. This, in turn, also indexes the move from the idea of the “national” family to the nuclear (gated) one, and, the translation of the notion of nationalist solidarity to (middle) class solidarity. And though I am unable to discuss it fully here, there is also in all this, a process of redefinition of the idea of the “ordinary person.” That is, as the nature of the state changes from a developmentalist to a post-developmental one, the idea of the most natural subject of the state—the ordinary person—is also undergoing change. The discussion that follows builds upon a great deal of recent scholarship that has outlined the connection between the growth of “new middle-classes,” the consolidation of cultures of consumerism, and the making of new selves in the non-Western world.<sup>30</sup>



## Creating DLF City: State Control to Consumerist Utopia

The DLF company was established in 1946 by a civil servant, Chaudhury Raghvendra Singh. By the mid-1950s, the DLF corporation had developed around 22 new suburbs in Delhi. The key aspect of DLF's business strategy was its ability to both surmount as well as manipulate the extraordinary layers of land and planning regulations instituted by the colonial state and later, the postcolonial one. The *soi-disant* dreams of an alternative spatial modernity—marked by advertisements that showed swimming pools and buxom beauties, lakes and carefree couples, flower-bedecked roads, and their patrician crowds—came to end, however, in 1957. For, following a highly critical report of an inquiry into the functioning of the DIT published in 1951, the postcolonial state established the DDA in 1957. The new Authority, as noted earlier, became a land monopolist.

On April 21, 1980, the DLF corporation gained the first license for acquiring around 170 acres of land in the village of Chakkarpur in Gurgaon district. Work on developing the site as a residential and commercial locality started soon after.<sup>31</sup> From the early 1980s, then, the company began to acquire land in Gurgaon and by the mid-1980s, it had accumulated some 3,500 acres—much of it on credit, with promises to pay later—and was ready to transform the rural hinterland into, as its publicity later proclaimed, the “Millennium City.”

Within a period of some three decades, fields of green have turned into spaces of global commerce and habitation, in turn fueled by changes in the Indian economy since the mid-1990s. One of the most significant of these—spurred by new urbanism and constituting a fundamental stimulant to consumerist activity—has been the rapid expansion of the private banking sector and the relative ease of obtaining home loans. Aggressive market forays by both state owned and new private entrants (including foreign banks) sought to target “young and highly educated professionals who began their careers through the 1980s, [but] could not afford to own their own homes.”<sup>32</sup>

As this section suggests, contemporary, private real estate developments in India are a prime site for the making of the citizen-consumer. And that the current phase of middle-class “activism,” in the shape of RWAs, also owes much to urban spatial transformations initiated by companies such as DLF, which gained ground in the wake of economic liberalization policies put in train by the Congress party through its New Industrial Policy in 1991.

## Spaces of Consumerism

Gated communities such as those in Gurgaon are being constructed across several Indian cities, and such topographical transformations are accompanied by broader discursive shifts regarding family life, state, nation, and citizenship.<sup>33</sup> That is to say, the spatial transformations that characterize new urbanism are also contexts of discourses about a new self. In this case, ideas of the entrepreneurial self<sup>34</sup>—ensconced within spaces made by entrepreneurial urbanism—help to consolidate attitudes toward consumerism as self-making. In this context, gated communities in India have also created specific relationships that cohere around what might be called “the morality of the market.”<sup>35</sup> Post-nationalism, where the relationship between the state and the middle classes is undergoing change and new discourses about the morality of the market are, of course, linked contexts.

In order to illustrate the specificity of the present, it may be useful to refer to a counterpoint to my discussion. This can be found by contrasting the mammoth urban transformations currently underway in the contexts described above with another similar experiment during the mid-twentieth century, namely, the construction of “steel towns” by the postcolonial state. A comparison between contemporary—private—spatial transformations and mid-twentieth century state-sponsored ones points to significant shifts in the imagination that conjures the “ideal” citizen and his/her relationship with the state. It also tells us something about the changing nature of thinking on consumerism and self-making.

From the late 1950s, the Indian state undertook construction of a number of industrial townships in different—usually economically underdeveloped—areas of the country that were intended to be “exemplary national spaces of the new India.”<sup>36</sup> Located within the larger framework of centralized economic development (most significantly manifested through the Soviet-inspired Five-Year Plans for economic development), the townships were the state’s attempts at *postcolonial* modernity where the modern citizen would work and live in an environment that “proclaimed the birth of the sovereign nation.”<sup>37</sup>

Most significantly, the postcolonial nationalist project of producing modern citizens within steel towns related to external spaces—such as town planning, streetscape, and design of shopping spaces—through which residents were expected to pass through. Surrounded by well-delineated areas for industrial activity, “shops, schools, parks, and entertainment centres,”<sup>38</sup> the citizen was to absorb the spatial geometry, transforming it into personal discipline across

a number of areas of social life such as democratic engagement, secular belief, and industrial work practice. Discourses of transformation surrounding the contemporary gated community, on the other hand, shift the focus to internal spaces. So, gated communities are presented as effecting transformations that significantly relate to *domestic* (kitchens, dining areas, bedrooms, and so on) aspects of urban living. Intimate spaces are more directly addressed, locating, as it were, the domestic sphere as the indispensable grounds for the making of a global Indian modernity. The internal life of the household is one that is populated by goods and commodities, and it is these that are imagined to determine contemporary subjectivity. So, whereas steel towns established relationships between the individual and the nation-state through seeking to locate the former within the symbolic and concrete infrastructure of the latter, gated enclaves produce relationships between individuals and commodities. In this way, the public exhibition of intimate spaces indexes an era where contemporary dreams of modernity are inextricably linked to cultures of consumerism. Hence, gated enclaves posit a model of *post-national* citizenship that constitutes a particular gloss on the relationship between the state and its citizens in the backdrop of transnational consumerist modernity.

## Post-National Citizens and the Morality of the Market

The gathering belief in the morality of the market relates to the idea that the state is inherently corrupt and that an incorruptible middle-class community—the “ordinary” people—can only be produced through the processes of capital. I would like to illustrate this through reference to a context where private capital actively produces its own citizens—consumer-citizens—such that the idea that there exist separate and autonomous spheres of the state, citizens, and capital becomes untenable. What we are left with, in fact, is a “simulacra”<sup>39</sup> of separate spheres.

Despite official regulations, the process of handing over privately developed localities in Gurgaon to the MCG has been slow and erratic, and many aspects of their functioning continue to be in the hands of the companies that built them. This is a context for the relationship between citizens (in the shape of RWAs), the state, and the private capital, DLF.

In 1996, some residents of DLF City combined to form the Qutub Enclave Residents’ Welfare Association (QERWA). One of its most consistent demands had been that, as per official regulations, the DLF corporation hands over its townships to the government. The QERWA mounted a considerable agitation

over this issue. It filed court cases, petitioned the government, and even put up candidates—without success—in state assembly elections. In the early 2000s, another RWA—known as the DLF City RWA—appeared on the scene. This is an umbrella body which claims affiliation from many individual RWAs in DLF City. An office holder of the QERWA (the older body) described the situation to me as follows:

DLF did not want to hand over its townships to the government and the government is not interested either: for as long as DLF has control, it can arbitrarily continue to use the land within its areas as it pleases by changing original planning agreements. So, it can build a commercial building on a plot that was earlier indicated on planning documents as a community centre or a medical dispensary. The government does not wish to change anything because of the massive amounts of under the table money that it gets from private developers. If these localities were to be handed over to the Municipal Corporation of Gurgaon, it would be more difficult to make money. It is easier to make money from the private sector.

The DLF City RWA (the new body) was, in fact, created by the DLF corporation to counter what it perceived to be an association of residents (the QERWA) that was hostile to its interests. The DLF-sponsored RWA has a comfortable air-conditioned office in the same building as many of DLF's corporate offices in DLF City. A QERWA office holder told me that in the early 2000s, DLF initiated moves that led the Haryana government appointing an administrator to oversee its affairs and that it currently lies dormant. The DLF-sponsored association, on the other hand, appears to be flourishing. It is headed by retired corporate executive and primarily acts (as the head told me) "as a bridge between DLF and the residents of DLF City." The DLF corporation has, in this way, reconfigured the relationship between the state and the market in order to produce a non-state version of the civic sphere, which, simultaneously, grows out of the collaboration with the state; it has created its own citizens' group—and a private citizenry—through sponsoring the DLF City RWA. This too is an aspect of post-national urbanism where the idea and the body of the active citizen is produced not through political processes and debates over rights and responsibilities, but through a relationship between the state, the corporate sector, and urban real estate markets.

In recent years, the state has tried to exert in its "stateness"<sup>40</sup> through the formation of the MCG in 2008, and this aspect forms the final rung of this story on the relationship between the state, citizens, and private capital in a time

of post-nationalism and consumerist modernity. In many of its own areas, the MCG is not able to levy any house tax as, through a confusing and complicated arrangement, private developers have not handed over ownership of their localities to the state.<sup>41</sup> Here, companies such as DLF levy a “maintenance” charge upon residents of “their” areas, and residents refuse to pay the state any house tax. An official of the DLF City RWA (which is sponsored by the DLF corporation) informed me that residents do not want the MCG to “take over” the private townships as there was far greater trust in the administrative abilities of the private sector than the state. The state government, he added, is “corrupt and corruptible.” And, he said, DLF has an interest in looking after its older localities since it is building new township and wants to maintain “brand equity,” not wanting its existing product to be sullied through poor state administration. That is why, he added, DLF will continue to carefully tend to its already constructed townships rather than risk shoddy state and corrupt activity in urban maintenance.

### To Fake Is to Make: Duplicity, Intimacy, and Community

This section presents a discussion on a part of the NCR that is dramatically different than described earlier. It seeks to present another, quite different, model of relationships between corruption, ideas of community, and the state. I do this in order to foreground the multiple narratives of contemporary urban life that—in this case through the trope of corruption—say something about older as well as emerging forms of urban sociality.

During the period of my fieldwork at the *basti* (slum) of Nangla Matchi (“Nangla”), situated on the western banks of the Yamuna river in central Delhi, everyone wanted identity (ID) cards. For the urban poor, proof of identity is necessary for access to a variety of goods and services that are provided by the state. However, in order to obtain an official ID card of any kind, one needs to provide evidence of permanent or long-term residence in the city, a particularly difficult task for a population whose life strategies are tied to passage and movement. The effort that is required to secure appropriate documents is not only surrounded by anxieties and apprehensions but also relates to specific strategies of making the acquisitions.

I would like to focus here upon the ways in which senses of community, neighborliness, and trust permeated the acts and narratives of faking and corruption at Nangla. These include ideas of *tariqa* or etiquette or protocol and the necessity of exploiting one’s own in order to provide care against the

arbitrary callousness of outsiders. At Nangla too, just as in DLF City, the state is perceived as corrupt and arbitrary. However, here, the strategies of dealing with the situation are dramatically different and produce different narratives.

### *Tariqa and Norms*

One day as I sat around the local mosque with Shahid Ansari, a Nangla resident in his seventies, several people carrying different pieces of paper approached him to ask about their “case.” These included “cases” concerning the issue of ration cards, voter’s identity cards, “Below Poverty Line” (BPL) cards, and several other kinds of documents. One man was accompanied by Raj Kumar, a low-level government official of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), who was in charge of various government schemes in the locality. The man wanted Ansari to put his signature on an application form. Raj Kumar also urged Ansari to sign the document. But Ansari exclaimed, “come later—illegal work can’t be done in broad daylight!” “Illegal” has an interesting position here: it is publicly mentioned as such, and is allocated a particular time for when it can be carried out, rather than rejected out of hand as beyond the pale. However, more significantly, though it is a regular part of life at Nangla, it is also a potentially dangerous activity: if caught, counterfeiting can incur a wide range of serious penalties. Acts of counterfeiting involve an entire chain of participants—middle men, procurers, information-gatherers, transferees of “originals,” and beneficiaries, for example—and carry risks of disrupting closely established links within neighborhoods and settlements. Hence, the most admired members of the community are those—such as Ansari—who possess the capacity to do “illegal work” in a proper manner, minimizing or eliminating the risk of damage to community life. But not only this, the “proper” conduct of “illegal work” also ensures the life of the community: it is the grounds upon which everyday life—food, education, health, employment, and residence—is based.

Soon after the above episode, Ansari was approached by a young woman who asked about her “form” that she had asked Ansari to complete. “I’ll take back my twenty rupees,” she said, “unless I get the card immediately.” Ansari turned to me and said that he was deeply offended by these comments. Then, addressing the woman, he told her that her “work” would not now be done since “even though we are neighbours, you don’t trust me to do your illegal work properly!” A friend of Ansari joined the discussion and told me that this was all *bachpana* (childishness): “Look at all the effort that goes into getting

all this work done,” he said, “and all these people can talk about is rupees twenty-thirty.” “What about all those young men,” he continued, pointing to a group of locals, “who are helping to verify and fill up the forms. They are educated, their parents have spent huge amounts in educating them, yet they give of their time freely.” Another man now approached our group and asked Ansari to help him fill in the identity application form. “Go to that other place,” he was ordered, meaning the house of a local leader of a rival faction to that of Ansari’s. A bystander offered to complete the form. “Let’s see you if you can!” Ansari shouted. An elderly man sitting next to us now spoke up: “You don’t only need education but also a *tariqa* [method, etiquette]. After all, the engineer makes the plan, but it’s an illiterate *mazdoor* [laborer] who executes it. You need *tariqa*!” Ansari then turned to the supplicant: “There are forty-five columns to be filled up,” he said, “miss a single one and the form is invalidated!” The government, according to Ansari, has a *gupt* (secret) system of coding and the slightest mistake in filling up a form could mean permanent denial of housing and other rights. The man quietly withdrew.

Why does one need *tariqa* to be corrupt in a corrupt world? *Tariqa* and trust make a community in the face of arbitrary and apparently secret rules and regulations that must be engaged with on their own terms. *Tariqa* and trust ensure that even though the well-being of the community depends on mimicking the arbitrariness and dishonesty of the state, this does not translate into the community becoming *like* the state. But how does *tariqa* ensure that corruption at the local level ensure that the community does not become like the state? Let me explain through another example.

### *Neighbors with the Kindest Cuts*

I met Mohammad Islam in 2008 through Nangla resident Rakesh Kumar. Mohammad Islam was Rakesh’s friend and had lived at Nangla Matchi before it was demolished. Following government policy, he had been allotted an alternative plot of land in the locality of Savda Ghevda but did not move there as he did not have the funds to build a house. Savda Ghevda is on the northern border of Delhi and approximately 40 kilometers away from the Nangla Matchi area. Rakesh had developed a flourishing real estate business once he moved to Savda Ghevda.

Islam told me that Rakesh had lent him INR 40,000 for treatment of a serious illness and had told him that he could return it whenever he was able. However, after some months, he realized that he would not be able to pay

Rakesh back the money, so he offered him his Savda Ghevda plot as payment in kind. Rakesh, Islam added, told him that he would “take” the land, and that whenever Islam had the money, he could return it and take back “his” property. Since Islam was unable to sign his name, he put his thumb impressions on “some papers,” handing over the land to Rakesh. The land did not legally belong to Rakesh, and under government regulations, it was a criminal offense to sell it. However, given the latter’s experience as a real estate dealer, he drew up a fake “agreement” between Islam and himself stating that the former had borrowed money from him and had offered his land as collateral. Then, sometime later, Rakesh obtained all of Islam’s documents that proved his ownership of the land and altered this information, inserting his own name instead. This was done with Islam’s knowledge: “I have complete trust in him,” Islam repeated several times to me. A few months later, Islam told Rakesh that, given the ongoing expenditure on his medication and his general state of penury, he was now certain that he would not be able to pay back the money and hence, Rakesh should consider the Savda Ghevda land his own.

Rakesh told me that he always tried to convince ex-Nangla residents not to sell their land, even if it meant some hardship in the short term, such as having to commute long distances to their work and disruption in their children’s schooling, and that “if they held on for a while, things would get better.” However, if they were going to sell, Rakesh said, “they might as well sell to someone like me who they can trust, I will never betray them.” Having “sold” the land to Rakesh, Mohammad Islam’s troubles multiplied. He was forced to live about two hours from his place of work in an “unauthorized” settlement, having to change three buses to and from work. Sometime later, he borrowed money on the informal market to buy a plot of land near where he now lives but lost it all as it turned out that the real estate agent had actually sold off government land. And yet, Islam could hardly stop singing Rakesh’s praises. “I can’t tell you how kind Rakesh has been to me,” he told me. “He is one of the kindest people I know.”

Islam’s take on his miseries is instructive. Rakesh exploited his neighbor’s extremely vulnerable economic condition to purloin his sole asset, exposing him to further exploitation and ongoing wretchedness. And yet, Rakesh’s “trustworthy” operations in the counterfeit real estate market—that appear to have left Islam permanently disadvantaged—struck Islam as a deepening of neighborly bonds and a fulfillment of community obligations; to be made predictably wretched by one’s “own” is, nevertheless, deliverance from the arbitrary havoc of outsiders. Islam’s comfort in the depredation of intimates leads us, once again, to the question of norms.



At the heart of Islam's attitude toward Rakesh is his belief that unlike "outsiders," Rakesh's exploitative behavior is based upon certain norms and the etiquette of neighborliness, which, in turn, will secure a degraded package of "benefits" that may not otherwise be forthcoming. These are the norms of community life in a hostile and arbitrary urban environment. Indeed, the range of strategies utilized by the urban poor when dealing with the state—pretending to have political and bureaucratic as well as underworld connections, for example—are expressions of their understanding of the arbitrariness of the state. Under such conditions of life, it is imperative to rely upon those who would convert the capricious economies of faking and counterfeiting into some minimal advantage through the bedrock of neighborliness and community feeling. Indeed, the cultures of faking make community possible.

The state, the understanding goes, has no norms and this is evidenced by the arbitrariness of its procedures that its subjects encounter: secret and, hence, inscrutable. But even as one counters the state through mimicked procedures, it is important to not become the state, to remain of "the people," and that requires *tariqa*, etiquette. It is here also that particular kinds of neighborly bonds take shape when neighbors "help" each other, in the manner that Rakesh sought to assist Mohammad Islam by transferring the latter's property in his own name thorough counterfeit means. It was his duty; it is preferable to be preyed upon by one's own rather than be left to the mercies of the depredatory state. In the former case, the bonds of intimacy are strengthened as well as ensuring a result in one's favor.

## Conclusion

This chapter has focused upon the specificity of the contexts in which people reflect upon ideas regarding community through the notions of corruption and transparency; it has sought to reflect upon local circumstances that—though located in the crucible of capital—cannot be captured through generalized theories of capitalism. Both DLF's residents and those of Nangla Matchi think the state to be corrupt. However, in the former case, the idea of the honorable (and honest) community is linked to producing community life and citizenry through the processes of the market. This, in principle at least, does away with the idea of different social and political categories and contexts that interrogate each other. The question which then remains is this: if private capital produces categories of citizens, then how does one differentiate between private and public interests? And how does one define the concept of corruption?

In Nangla Matchi, on the other hand, the perceived corruption of the state produces a chain of localized illegalities, which are seen to strengthen community bonds, and the most admired are those who have the *tariqa* to guide the community through proper application of the illegalities. Here, the “community” interrogates the state, mimics it, and yet does not become it. We require “local” histories of capital, rather than succumb to the seductions of “global” analyses that might derive from usage of the term “neo-liberal” in order to more carefully interrogate relationships between broader socioeconomic processes and the quotidian procedures of urban existence. So, while the residents of Nangla Matchi are subject to vigorous processes of contemporary capital—land transfer from the poor to the well-off, for example—they do not themselves, in turn, convert into the “enterprising” subject of neoliberalism.<sup>42</sup> However, the residents of DLF City display behavior that might more reasonably be said to approximate entrepreneurialism as a way of life; long-standing histories of local lives and the manner in which they articulate with broader processes (those of capital and the “capitalization” of the state, say) have a great deal to tell us about the tumult of the present.

Through the trope of “corruption,” my key aim in this chapter has been to explore the making of community life in the city as it emerges out of changing relations between the state, private capital, and “citizens.” These relations form the crucible within which urban lives are being transformed. For an anthropologist, they also point to ways in which large-scale processes and entities—“capital,” “the state”—might become sites of ethnographic inquiries regarding the quotidian city.

## Notes

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