

Delhi during Pre-Independence and Post-Independence: Its Formation and Tension

*Ravi Shankar

Ph.D Scholar at Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi (India)

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Corresponding Author

Email: shankar.ravi100[at]gmail.com

ABSTRACT

It is not unusual to lose sight of multiple sites of tension during any phase of city's formation and transformation. A study of Delhi's emergence as a capital city gives adequate space to locate some of these areas of tension. This article takes particular view of this aspect by probing the role of tension which lay at the background. The present paper uncovers a part of the background to demonstrate as to what happened to the large number of underprivileged when the restructuring of Delhi became synonymous with the search for beautiful urban meant for few rather than many.

1. Introduction

The aspect which often comes to notice in abundance is the tremendous amount of energy and a fairly large share of attention paid towards spatial planning of the city. What is often lost in this course of space development is attention to the social tension and other side effects which result from such grand measure. 'The psychological, humanistic and semiotic approaches to the landscape focus upon the perception and experience of landscaping and its existential meaning. The results are rarely mapped.¹ Since Delhi was chosen to be a new capital of British Empire, it called for fresh spatial planning not only from administrative point of view but also from aesthetic angle. Such appeal is not unprecedented. Even during Durbar organization in 1876, aesthetic point of view remained indispensable which is evident from the over-emphasized heed to pompous nature of show. However, such short term grand celebrations and long term spatial planning took toll on large number of people. Moreover, such plans took precedence over pre-existing and traditional patterns. Consequently, large number of local people as well as the traditional patterns suffered from new plan in considerable measure.

Although this paper brings to surface an antagonistic equation, a closer examination also points to instances where adaptive models were considered. This inclination towards adaptive model is indicative of a dialectical movement where formation and dissolution of tension is apparent which needs to be seen with particular respect to the people especially people from margins. The study of social tension draws on Lefebvrian method regarded as 'the regressive-progressive method whereby description of a situation is undertaken at minute level. This approach takes the researcher to the past to understand the present'.² It is important to bear in mind that the city does

not only belong to agencies which govern its relationship with various aspects but it also belongs to forces which fall under the category regarded as the governed. And both sides, that is, the governing and the governed embody the city. In regard to the study of regardless tendency for spatial change, at least passing reference to triggers of change are necessary to acknowledge those forces at work in brief because they set in and accelerated the pace for new orders and social tension. It would, therefore, be unfair to lose sight of triggering factors. For instance 'introduction of railways in 1867, decision regarding arrangement of Durbar for Her/His majesty in 1876 and 1911, electrification in 1902, beginning of tram services in 1905, measures to beautify and expand the city, move towards establishments of hospitals and some other civic amenities attributed to phenomenal change and tension.'³ 'It took about eighteen years of strenuous labor for completion of Delhi as a capital and inauguration took place on February 11th, 1931.'⁴

2. Shift of Capital and Sites of Tension

The decision of the Colonial Government regarding shift of capital from Calcutta to Delhi set in the process and pace in direction towards greater degree of change because it required space suitable for the capital's administrative purposes. This momentum was thus onset of fresh layer of urbanization. Following the transfer of capital from Calcutta to Delhi, massive construction activities like road making, office buildings, leveling, stone-cutting, gardening went on to become integral part of spatial re-ordering. In this regard, it is worth taking view of prevalent tension. 'The relocation of core from Calcutta to Delhi and arrangement of Durbars marked a great transition and provided big stimulus to the process of urbanization of Delhi. In other words, need for road space and administrative buildings also called for phenomenal transformation of landscape in

¹ Marc Antrop, 'From Holistic landscape synthesis to Transdisciplinary Landscape Management', in *From Landscape Research to Landscape Planning: Aspects of Integration, Education and Application*. (Eds.) Barbel Tress, Gunther Tress, Gary Fry and Paul Opdam. (Netherlands: Springer, 2006). p.41.

² Remi Hess, 'Henri Lefebvre: A Praxis of What is Possible', in *Understanding the City: Henri Lefebvre and Urban Studies*, Gulcin

Erdi-Lelandasi, (Ed.), (New Castle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014)

³ This is summed up understanding of a few aspects from Narayani Gupta's *Delhi Between Two Empires 1803-1931: Society, Government and Urban Society* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998).

⁴ R.C. Arora, *Delhi The Imperial City (A Guide for Tourists & Visitors)*. (New Delhi: The Federal Trade Press, 1953) p.16.

Delhi. The need went far beyond functional aspect and shift of place also demanded planning of gardens and lawns. The whole envisaged scheme of Delhi did not materialize in straightforward manner. Rather it led to prolonged debate and discussion which involved Viceroy Hardinge, Edwin Lutyens⁵, Herbert Baker and other authorities regarding the layout of Delhi for making Delhi suitable for the capital of Empire. The tension between the governing agencies and the governed could not be ruled out in the view such changes. However, such area of tension could not gain adequate attention amid foregoing heated debate among administrative and bureaucratic functionaries. An acute focus on landscape aestheticization⁶ led to displacement of inhabitants which needs to be treated as 'spatial exclusion'⁷ and therefore it necessitated rehabilitation of those displaced due to beginning of institutionalized development in the form of government establishments⁸. The Inhabitants were mostly part of the governed whereas those whose needs were considered were mostly part of the governing. A study of ordering of space in regard to Delhi shows that it also came to determine the relation between the Governing and the Governed.

3. Delhi during Post Colonial Time

The large plan had already laid the foundation for the Delhi. But the city is not frozen category. A city undergoes reflection even though it fails in addressing the key concerns. The same could be observed in case of Delhi. Its contemporary shape owes a great deal to the Colonial era. The framework of the municipal body had already been conceived during 19th century. The post-colonial also marked continuity of the pre-existing framework. Since city experiences growth in terms of population and structures, it needs more attention. Given this need of attention, Delhi Development Authority was created in 1957.⁹ The 'Master Plan'¹⁰ was then conceived of 1962 in order to move further. Later on, more Master plans were formulated with the hope of addressing the issues which could not be addressed in previous plans. Nevertheless, the key issue, that is, grievances of the people displaced and the people on margins could hardly occupy the centre place. Thus, post-colonial phase seemed to have remained stuck with the continuity. The grievance of common people constitutes a site where latent tension has kept brewing. Even though the more the State tried to mark departure from the previous problems, the more it ended up adhering to the continuity. Inclusive and accommodative departures are yet to be seen.

4. Conclusion

In brief, Delhi, during pre-independence and post-independence, underwent several changes after it was chosen as a site of Capital. Although planners debated and discussed various aspects at great length yet they, instead of looking for solution from within the existing materials, seemed to look elsewhere for model which resulted in apparent disregard for the likely social tension. The displacement of people, being one among several undesirable outcomes, social tension found manifestation in long term problem in the form of legacy which the administration during post colonial time seemed to have imbibed without serious investigation. What perpetuates to this date is the tendency of aesthetic primacy which overtakes functional and practical aspects of spatial planning. Mostly it is the poor, as a result of this overarching tendency, who fall at the receiving end. Despite critical investigation, the functional element cannot be said to be non-existent altogether. The secondary order of space came to be inhabited by the disadvantageous groups of people who received inadequate attention and redressal. Thus the continuity seemed to have subdued discontinuity over a long period of time.

⁵ Lutyens and Herbert were friends but their friendship came to an end because of their differences in regard to layout for Delhi. Lutyen was known for his dislikes towards Indian taste and pattern. Source: <https://thewire.in/history/friendship-faltered-raisina-hill>.

⁶ The term borrowed from Carl Ratner's *Macro Cultural Psychology: A Political Philosophy of Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012) p.390

⁷ Ibid, p391.

⁸ Private letters of Viceroy Hardinge 1911-1912

⁹ https://dda.org.in/about_us/about_dda.htm

¹⁰ https://dda.org.in/tendernotices_docs/jan15/DDA%20Annual%20Report_%2018%20November_2014%20FINAL.pdf. P.7.