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SPACES OF INTERMEDIATION  
AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION:  
A STUDY OF KUSUMPUR PAHADI REDEVELOPMENT  
PROJECT 2019

FIELD-WORK GRANT, IAPI -2019

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## **Spaces of Intermediation and Political Participation: A Study of Kusumpur Pahadi Redevelopment Project 2019**

Naomi Prachi Hazarika

**Abstract:** With the aim to understand the nature of urban politics and spaces of intermediation in informal settlements in the face of a major infrastructural project in New Delhi, this article is a study of the recent “In-Situ Slum Redevelopment and Rehabilitation Policy in Public-Private Partnership 2019” adopted by the Delhi Development Authority. The first section of the article examines how the policy engages with the contours of state-citizen relations on paper. The second section identifies key actors and networks engaged in the process of mobilization in one of the 32 settlements that are slated to be redeveloped under this policy. I argue that this policy denies an interface between residents and the state during the implementation of a large infrastructural project and, moreover, seeks to ‘formalize’ the mode of political participation for residents of informal settlements to be redeveloped.

**Keywords:** Urban Politics, Urban India, Slum Redevelopment, State-Citizen Relations, Mobilization

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**Spaces of Intermediation and Political Participation: A study of Kusumpur Pahadi  
Redevelopment Project 2019**

*“..in recent times, the political victories won by subaltern groups inhabiting the ‘outside of capital’ have all been rural, and on the other hand, the political victories won by the elite or dominant groups living ‘inside’ capital have all been urban.” – Satish Deshpande (2013, p.50)*

Cities today are increasingly becoming the focus of research and inquiry as fast-paced urbanization processes bring along with it a range of effects including both development as well as stark inequalities. Cities are also home to a variety of groups that differ in socio-economic status which means that there are multiple ways in which urban politics is framed and the modes of such mobilizations are dependent on which group one belongs to. For example, as Fernandes (2003, p.2416) argues, a strong and assertive middle class identity is articulated both in public discourses as well as in a range of cultural and social forms such as in the development of new urban aesthetics as well as in the emergence of new civil society and community organizations thereby making a strong claim on urban politics. On the other hand, Chatterjee’s (2004) theorization of the difference between how the poor mobilize through the political society as opposed to the bourgeois space of the civil society, points towards the subaltern understanding of mobilization and resistance in urban politics. There is a significant amount of research on the particularities of the postcolonial state in India and what that means for urban politics, for example, Benjamin (2004, p.183) argues that policy and project implementation in cities is simultaneously shaped by lower level administrative procedures involving municipal corporations and local politics as well as higher-level master planning procedures and institutions. Recent literature on slum leaders (Auerbach, 2019) argue that there exists a patronage-based system between party workers and slum residents in demanding development from the state. Thus, urban politics is a dense field and is characterized by multiple actors, networks and interests that are complicated further with the way urban governance is structured.

When it comes to the question of urban politics and mobilization in the city of New Delhi, a lot of attention has been given to the question of how elite and middle class interests and imaginations have shaped urban policies and the trajectory of urban development in the city. Within this question, state-citizen relationship has been examined to shed light on the unequal nature of urban citizenship. For example, Ghertner (2011) argues that the *bhagidaari* policy of the Delhi Government, which called for public participation in urban governance, actually created a parallel governance mechanism which is divorced from the electoral process and allowed associations such as Resident Welfare Associations of private property owners privileged access to local government and state-level workers. By allotting power to these associations, the *bhagidaari* policy captured the space previously held by the poor to make claims through local state workers and reconfigured the urban state space.

Extending the argument made by Ghertner (2011), specifically in the context of New Delhi, I argue that the recent Slum Redevelopment and Rehabilitation Policy of New Delhi in a Public-Private Partnership model (ISSR 2019) stands to change the contours of state-citizen relationship through the denial of any interface between residents and the state during the implementation of this project. Moreover, the policy seeks to ‘formalize’ the mode of political participation through the creation of a ‘society’. Similar to the kind of re-spatialization of the local state that *bhagidaari* had led to, the Slum Redevelopment and Rehabilitation Policy in PPP model adopted by the Delhi Development Authority does not allow for a space where residents of the settlement can participate in the decision-making process of the redevelopment project- a departure from other slum redevelopment schemes adopted in Mumbai, Surat and Ahmedabad in the past. The only interface that the policy allows for in the course of its implementation is the creation of a ‘society’ with no mention of when such a society should be formed. As will be discussed in the following sections, such a drastic exclusion of a space wherein residents can be a part of the decision-making process during a major redevelopment policy raises important questions of available channels of political participation for the slum residents. Therefore, it is important to document the modes of mobilization that are available to the residents of the settlement and to address the larger question of public accountability especially for a community that is not only facing eviction and displacement but also the possible shrinking of the space available to negotiate with the state and for their demands.

Thus, this study aims to first ground the argument of the gentrification of state space in policy through an analysis of the In-Situ Slum Redevelopment and Rehabilitation Policy in Public-Private Partnership 2019 adopted by the Delhi Development Authority and then proceed to empirically study the spaces, networks and actors involved in the process of mobilization and demand articulation for a community in one settlement that is listed to be redeveloped under this policy.

### **In-Situ Slum Redevelopment and Rehabilitation on Public Private Partnership Model 2019**

India has embarked on a mission-mode to ensure housing for all by the year 2022. The Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Urban (Prime Minister's Housing Policy- Urban) introduced on the 1st of June 2015, marks one of the most ambitious projects of the country to provide affordable housing to the urban poor through various ways including in-situ slum rehabilitation and redevelopment, affordable housing in partnership, credit-linked subsidy scheme and beneficiary-led construction.

One of the four verticals of the 'Housing for All by 2022 Mission' under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Prime Minister's Housing Policy), is that of "In situ" Slum Redevelopment using "land as a resource" (PMAY: Scheme Guidelines, 2015, p. 2) with private participation for providing houses to eligible slum dwellers through the construction of high rise apartments where the slums are today.

In order to align state policy with the national housing mission, the Delhi Development Authority has adopted a policy called "In-Situ Slum Redevelopment and Rehabilitation on Public-Private Partnership model 2019 (ISSR)" with a vision to make the city of Delhi slum-free by 2022. Modelled on the Masterplan for Delhi 2021, the Policy states that each project shall have a maximum of 40% of the land reserved for remunerative purposes for the private developer involved while 60% of the land has to be used for in-situ redevelopment to rehabilitate slum dwellers.

The Policy clearly states that it aims to "...leverage the locked potential of land under slums to provide houses to eligible slum dwellers bringing them into the formal urban settlement" (p.2-3). Currently, the policy implementation process is active in two phases with a total of 32 Jhuggi-Jhopdi Clusters (slums) slated to be redeveloped and rehabilitated.

Kathputli Colony, a cluster located in west Delhi, is the first of the city's in-situ rehabilitation project where the process of redevelopment began almost a decade ago. Today, the construction of the new apartments in Kathputli Colony where the slum once stood is almost complete.

Slum redevelopment and rehabilitation schemes involving private developers are certainly not a new phenomenon in the context of India. In Mumbai, the Slum Redevelopment Schemes (SRS) were implemented as early as 1991 involving private developers in construction while the role of the government was only restricted to that of regulation (Mahadevia, 2018; Mukhija, 2001). Exactly a decade ago from now, in 2009, the national housing policy called 'Rajiv Awas Yojana (RAY)' allowed for slum redevelopment projects across the country based on a Public-Private Partnership model as and when required. So, what is different about the 'In-situ Slum Redevelopment/Rehabilitation Policy on PPP model' to be implemented in the city of New Delhi?

The primary difference between the range of slum redevelopment and rehabilitation policies that have been implemented in India in four major cities over the course of the last few decades and the policy adopted by the Delhi Development Authority is the *lack of the requisite space for actual engagement with and the participation of, the slum dwellers involved in the projects.*

**Table 1:** Differences in Slum Redevelopment Policy: Mumbai, Surat and Ahmedabad, Delhi

S.no.	Policy component	Mumbai	Surat and Ahmedabad	Delhi
1.	Identification of cluster for rehabilitation awareness programme	Slum Dwellers initiate for redevelopment by forming a society and identifying a Developer Entity.	Local Municipal Authorities identifies and notify clusters.	Local Municipal Authorities identifies and notify clusters.
2.	Forming of Co-operative	Yes	-	Consent of Slum Dwellers not required as per previous policy. (DUSIB Act)
3.	Inclusion of NGO (for awareness, education and management of funds for maintenance in future)	Yes	Yes	-
4.	Allotment Cost to beneficiary	Free	Free	Rs. 1,20,000 per unit

Source: Source: PMAY- 'Housing For All-Urban Scheme Guidelines (2015)', Government of India; 'In-situ Slum Redevelopment and Rehabilitation Policy (2019)', Delhi Development Authority.

For example, in the case of Mumbai, a private developer is allowed to propose a plan for redevelopment or rehabilitation of a particular slum area only when they have 70% written consent of the slum dwellers living in that area (Bhide, 2015). The policy in Mumbai allowed the space for slum dwellers to come together and form a ‘society’ in order to identify and initiate a redevelopment project with a private entity.

However, in Surat and Ahmedabad as well as in Delhi, all slum redevelopment projects involved are to be initiated by the local municipal bodies. Moreover, it is clearly mentioned in the policy document published by the Delhi Development Authority (2019), that “Consent of the Jhuggi-Jhopdi (slum) dwellers for ISSR (In-Situ slum redevelopment) is *not required* as per section 10 of the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board Act.”

Neither is there any space for the inhabitants of the area concerned to participate in the process of the implementation nor does their consent actually matter on paper. As shown in the table above (S.no.3, Table 1), another major difference is the inclusion of non-government organizations (NGO) in the policies governing slum redevelopment in Mumbai, Surat and Ahmedabad but there is no such provision in the case of Delhi. Although the policy to be implemented in Delhi mentions the following;

*“C. Role of DDA*

*xvi) Obtaining of prior consent of eligible slum beneficiaries will not be required for In-Situ Redevelopment/Rehabilitation in view of Section 10 of DUSIB Act. However, all eligible beneficiaries will be required to form a Society under the Societies Registration Act, 1860 and to provide structured interface between slum dwellers and DDA/Developer.”*

Even though there is an explicit acknowledgement of the need of a “structured interface” between the government and private developers on one hand and the slum dwellers on the other, there is no mention of *when* this society is to be formed- before the process of identifying the beneficiaries of the policy and the evictions taking place or after the construction and handing over of the newly constructed housing units. This is a crucial issue because it may mean that the people whose lives are directly involved in the process of policy implementation actually have *no say* in the way it unfurls. There is a clear lack of a space wherein negotiations, dialogue and discussions between the policy makers and the citizens can take place. A space which was present in Mumbai and even set the terms of such projects, but is absent in the case of Delhi.

Just as in the case of the *bhagidaari* policy where in the name of transparency and efficiency, an increasingly important role was allotted to Resident Welfare Associations by linking it with local state machinery- which meant that the space available for political participation for non-propertied citizens shrank and led to a gentrification of political participation that was once open to all. Similarly, with the exclusion of a space for negotiation or to stake a claim in decision making for residents of the informal settlements facing a redevelopment policy, we see a more blatant form of formalization of a previously ‘informal’ set of arrangement for political participation. As literature on political representation and claim-making in informal settlements point towards a range of intermediaries such as *pradhans*, contractors, Councillors, union activists, party workers and elected representatives, such a policy that superimposes a modernist concept of ‘society’ to replace previously dense networks of state-citizen relations might result in the loss of a space for political negotiation for residents of informal settlements.

Residents of informal settlements in cities of India are often theorized as using what is known as vernacular state spaces (Ghertner, 2011) and through political ‘fixing’ (Benjamin, 2004). As Benjamin (2004) writes, “Politicians and associations push local bureaucrats to act on these demands by using loopholes and a flexible interpretation of bureaucratic procedures” which make up the ‘porous’ bureaucracy that allows the poor to strategise and negotiate demands through a politics of ‘stealth’. This kind of political participation is directly linked to the electoral system through a mechanism that is often characterized as being ‘patronage’-based but simply means that since the majority of the poor vote while due to urban apathy, participation in voting by wealthier groups of people remains abysmally low (Ghertner, 2011).

The Tejendra Khanna Committee Report (2006) on ‘Un-Authorised Colonies, Jhuggi-Jhopdi Clusters and Resettlement Colonies’ says the following on intermediaries-

*“Institutional objectives are well-identified , there is, at the meso-level, a kind of a ‘grey zone’ with stakeholders having unclear powers such as slum pradhans; local brokers and middle men; NGOs; middle-income groups networks and lobbies and interest groups; the intermediate level of administrations, the judiciary and political networkers.(p.200)”*

Whether it means securing electricity, government water tankers or ensuring piped water lines, negotiations between residents of informal settlements and the state are largely successful and have often circumvented ordinary routes of governance.

Given this nature of negotiations within informal settlements, what would a policy that neglects the role of resident's participation in a large scale redevelopment policy mean for urban politics and democracy? How do communities mobilise and put forward their views while facing evictions and displacement? What are the ways in which residents come together and which channels do they use to participate in this process? These are some questions that act as the point of departure for fieldwork conducted in one such informal settlement that is slated to be evicted under the ISSR policy 2019.

### **Research Questions and Methodology**

Following the disjunction between literature on the role of intermediaries in informal settlements and the lack of the space for negotiations under the ISSR policy 2019, the second dimension of this study is based on fieldwork conducted in one of the 32 informal settlements slated to be redeveloped under the policy. Kusumpur Pahadi is an informal settlement that falls under the first phase of the policy implementation and has been surveyed to prepare a Detailed Project Report which will be followed by a bidding process to ascertain a private developer who would be willing to undertake the redevelopment project.

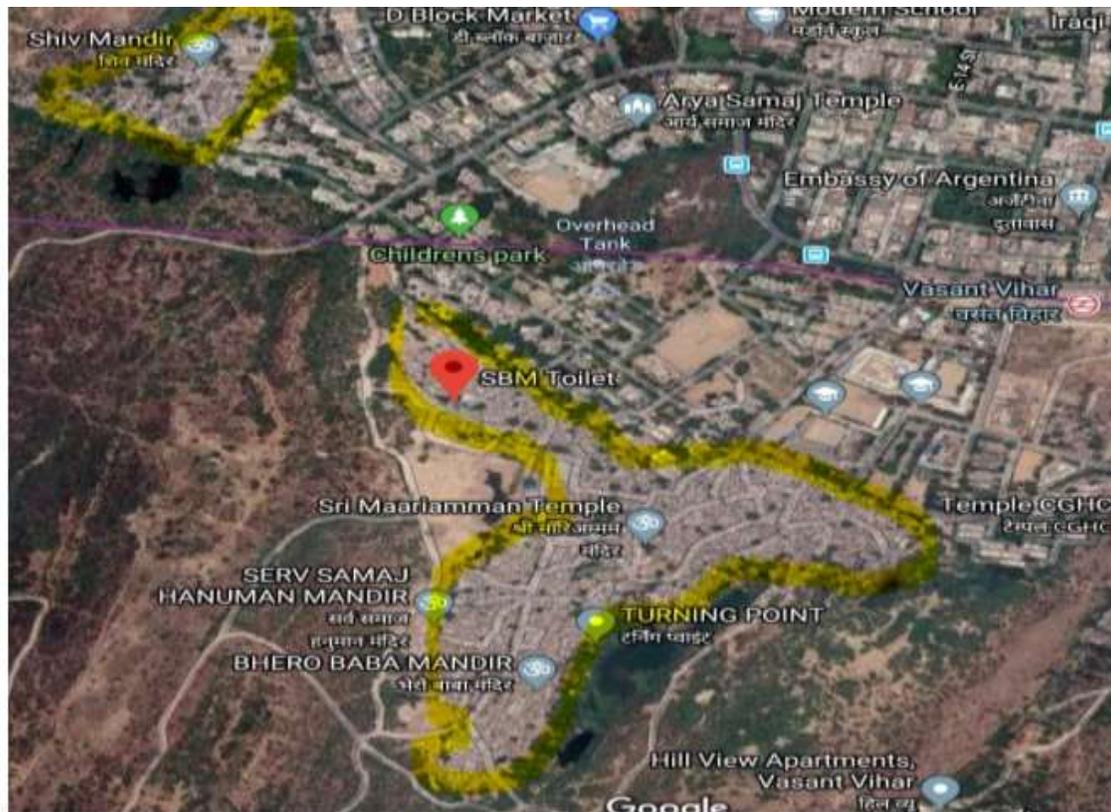
Fieldwork was carried out over a period of 4 months from October to December 2019. Initial field visits involved identifying key local leaders and community members who were actively mobilizing against the redevelopment project. After the identification of actors of intermediation, in-depth interviews were conducted with all stakeholders from community members to the Pradhan as well as Delhi Development Authority officials and local Non-Governmental Organisations based in the settlement.

The major question guiding the second half of this research project was twofold; firstly, who are the actors and associations involved in mediating between agents of the state and residents and what is the nature of networks that exist between them? Secondly, what are the modes of mobilization, resistance and demand articulation that can be seen on ground with regard to the redevelopment policy?

### ***Kusumpur Pahadi***

Kusumpur Pahadi is a notified Jhuggi-Jhopdi Cluster (JJC) and a Census Town located in the residential area of Vasant Vihar of New Delhi spread over a large area of 17,3251 square meters. The settlement is situated on land that is owned by the Delhi Development Authority. The word ‘Pahadi’ or ‘Pahari’ in the name of this settlement is because it is located on a ridge of the Aravali mountains and is slightly elevated. The settlement is surrounded by posh gated residential enclaves on one side and the DLF malls on the other. According to the report on Census Towns in New Delhi (2011), Kusumpur has reported the lowest literacy rate in the city at 72.68%.

Map 1: Kusumpur Pahadi Slum Cluster, 2019



Source: ‘Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana In-Situ Slum Redevelopment- PPT’ (2019), DDA

On record, the settlement is referred to as ‘Kusum Pur (Census Town)’ in census documents and as ‘Kusum Pur Block B Vasant Vihar’ by the Delhi Development Authority. However, internally, the settlement is divided into five blocks from A to E with pockets of members of the same caste and occupation living together.

The houses in the settlement have been incrementally built as evident from the number of two-storied and three-storied buildings. While most houses are permanent and *pucca* in nature, the condition of the houses are poor in some pockets of the settlement. Basic services such as water is provided by tankers of the Delhi Jal Board and through hand pumps constructed in certain parts of the settlement. Since the settlement is classified as Jhuggi-Jhopdi Cluster, the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board has provided infrastructural services such as Community Toilet Centers (CTC) in the area.

Kusumpur is home to over 17, 028 people (Census of India, 2011) and has the largest percentage of Scheduled Caste population ‘urban agglomeration’ constituents of New Delhi comprising of 58.49% of the total population of the settlement (Census of India-NCT of Delhi, 2011). According to Rahul (2010), residents belong to five major castes in Kusumpur Pahadi, namely- Valmiki, Raigar, Khatik, Bairwa and Od.

Table 2: Castes in Kusumpur Pahadi

Caste	Region	Traditional Occupation
Valmiki	Haryana, Uttar Pradesh	Scavenging, Sweeping, Pig Breeding, Labour
Raigar	Rajasthan	Show making, Leather Tanning, Agriculture
Khatik	Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh	Leather Dying, Pig and Goat Rearing, Meat Selling, Vegetable and Fruit Selling
Bairwa	Rajasthan	Agriculture and Domestication of Animals
Od	Rajasthan	Labourers, Donkey Breeding

Source: Rahul (2010)

Numerically, the population of members of the caste group Valmiki are the highest in the settlement and most of the male members work as *safai karamcharis*. The settlement is made up of migrants who came to the city in the 1960s when there was a demand for construction workers in that area. Previous studies on Kusumpur suggest that the building contractors bought workers from the neighboring states of Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar (Shah, 2002). However, the population in this settlement is highly heterogeneous in both social and economic terms.

A large number of caste associations exist in Kusumpur Pahadi and these are largely centered in and around temples and places of worship built inside the settlement. For example, the temple of the Valmiki community has their own association and meets regularly to organize religious functions and to celebrate festivals. As per my fieldwork, these associations do not have a political aspect and are restricted to socio-cultural activities only.

Table 3: Caste Associations in Kusumpur Pahadi

Association	Location	Region of Origin
Khatik Samaj	Block E	Uttar Pradesh
Valmiki Samaj	Block A and C	Haryana, Uttar Pradesh
Bairwa Samaj	Block E	Rajasthan
Raigar Samaj	Block E	Rajasthan
Od Samaj	Block E	Rajasthan

Source: Rahul (2010), updated by author in 2019

### **Networks of Negotiation**

Once the ISSR policy 2019 was passed by the Delhi Development Authority, Kusumpur Pahadi was as part of the first phase of active consideration. On the 25<sup>th</sup> of August 2019, the first notice was put up in the settlement by the DDA which notified the residents about the survey that will be conducted over the next few months leading up to the construction of high-rise buildings in the area. Around the same time, officials from DDA also addressed a group of people in the community hall built by DUSIB inside the settlement and informed them about the nuances of the policy. However, this session, according to the residents, was informative in nature and did not involve any participation from the community.

Through a bidding process, a private developer was hired by the DDA to conduct the survey and prepare the Detailed Project Report. Over the next two months, between September and October 2019, the survey was completed in phases. The surveying involved counting and marking each house as well as taking count of the number of households. In a meeting with the Pradhan, the DDA officials have assured that the construction of the high rise buildings will commence in the month of April or May 2020.

In the initial phase of surveying, residents were cooperating with the survey staff and getting their houses numbered. If there were any issues with documentation, residents approached the Pradhan and he intervened to ensure that they obtain the necessary documents and make sure that the survey team registers their name on their follow-up visits.

It is important to note here that surveys are very common in informal settlements across cities in India. The constant bid for regularization or redevelopment projects of informal settlements means that multiple surveys are conducted over a period of time. Residents are also very used to obtaining documentation and keeping a strict record of identification documents such as Aadhar Card and Voter ID cards. Frequent drives are held within the camp for the same and is facilitated with the help of the local Pradhan. In conversations with the Pradhan, it was clear that a major aspect of becoming a leader of the settlement was how efficient he was in facilitating the documentation process through his contacts within the local government and municipal authorities.

In the following section, two different kinds of actors of intermediation will be discussed along with the different ways in which they interact with state machinery and with residents of the settlement with regard to the policy.

### **Pradhan: The Local Leader**

Rajiv Singh has been the locally elected Pradhan of Kusumpur Pahadi for almost 20 years now. He was first elected as the Pradhan in the year 1998 and has consecutively won all elections up till now. Every morning when the water pipeline and hand pumps around the settlement supply water, Mr. Singh can be seen making rounds across the settlement to ensure everyone gets their share of water in blue plastic containers. In conversations with him about the settlement and his leadership, he often attributed his success in the Pradhan elections to his efficiency in ensuring the supply basic civic amenities in the settlement such as water and food through the ration card system.

In order for any slum leader to either establish or maintain their position within the settlement, it was crucial that they ensured the facilitation of obtaining documentation when required. This process is colloquially known as “*Tempo bharna*” literally translates into filling up of a vehicle called a tempo to ferry the residents from one municipal office to the other to obtain documentation. Therefore, the more tempos one could fill, the better the chances of legitimizing one’s role as a leader within the settlement. Mr. Singh proudly claims that he has managed to fill up the most

amount of tempos and has hence, earned the support of the residents in the settlement for two decades. Although, Mr. Singh is the main elected Pradhan, there are other pradhans as well who are in various pockets of the settlement and cater to 10-15 households within the vicinity. Unlike in the case of Singh, these pradhans are not elected and are sometimes also party workers affiliated to a political party. The role of these pradhans is the same as Singh in terms of obtaining documentation or filling up tempos, but their reach is to a lesser number of households as opposed to the settlement-wide support that Singh has.

Before the first notice was put up regarding the ISSR policy involving the redevelopment of Ksumpur, Singh was contacted by the DDA officials in-charge of the area to be briefed about the policy. In his own words, the meeting was about informing him that a team of surveyors will be visiting the settlement and that in case they face any issue within the settlement in the process of surveying that he should intervene and help them. Singh insisted that instead of any major clarification regarding the nuances of the policy such as questions of allotment or if everyone will be accommodated within the new apartments were not answered by the DDA officials. His role, as described by him, was to ensure the smooth functioning of the surveying process in the settlement.

During the survey, one of the households with two families came to him when the surveyors only registered one house for both the families during the survey. This meant that both families would have to share the flat that will be allotted to them in the new buildings. Singh mentions how he helped with this problem by approaching the DDA officials and explaining the matter to them. The DDA officials in turn told him that the only way they can ensure that the families get two houses would be if they can produce any documentation that proved that the families were estranged and/or not related. Singh then accompanied a family member of that household to make affidavits and produce certificates in order to establish this claim. By the time the next phase of the survey took place, the household had the documentation to be counted as two separate units. However, as understood from conversations with the residents, it is important here to note that this kind of patronage is not extended to each individual in the settlement. Moreover, the patronage system works both ways since DDA officials also extend favours and suggest non-legal routes that circumvent the typical bureaucratic process to Singh in order for him to accomplish his tasks.

For example, in this case, the specific knowledge of how one can count a house as two households instead was given to Singh by the DDA officials themselves.

Kusumpur, according to Singh, has been through 3 major waves of surveys conducted by DDA and DUSIB in the name of redevelopment and rehabilitation projects. The fact that these repeated surveys did not yield to anything and no such project was carried out to fruition, has convinced Singh that the ISSR policy 2019 as well not amount to much. However, if it were to be carried out eventually, which meant that the entire settlement will be grazed to the ground in order for the apartments to be built, Singh expresses his helplessness as he says, “*Kya hum yeh sabh rok bhi sakte hain?*” (Translation- Can we stop all of this anyway?).

In one of the follow up interviews with Singh, he mentions how the he worries that if incase the project were to go through that there will be major resistance from some residents in the settlement. On being asked why, he replied that even though most of the people in the settlement are willing to shift to a better place or to an apartment complex, that there are individuals with vested interests who would thwart the redevelopment project. Singh believes that a section of the population who have done well economically within the settlement through investment in shops and businesses are unwilling to leave their houses behind for just one room in an apartment complex.

In terms of an actor of intermediation, Singh steps in when legal-bureaucratic issues such as procuring documentation needs his intervention but takes a step back when asked about the risks of this redevelopment policy and its repercussions. Singh repeatedly mentions that he is afraid of being thrown in a jail for opposing this policy and argues that if the Central Government could impose Art. 370 in Jammu and Kashmir, there is no point of resistance from a “mere slum cluster”.

### ***Kusumpur Ekta Manch: An urban social movement?***

Around the time when the community was briefed about the policy by DDA officials, a few individuals got together to form what is now known as the *Kusumpur Ekta Manch*- led by a lawyer and an activist associated with the women’s wing of Communist Party of India (Marxist), All India Democratic Women’s Association or AIDWA. Jyoti, the Vice-President of Delhi State wing of All India Democratic Women’s Association, leads a community of women within the settlement that meets regularly to discuss issues such as policies effecting their livelihoods and to conduct educational programs on maternal healthcare.

A majority of the NGOs working within the settlement such as the Rotary, are associated with Jyoti's work as a community leader. She is also in-charge of allotting bookings for the community hall within the settlement for weddings and meetings which helps her maintain these alliances and social networks. Jyoti holds the position of Vice President of the Kusumpur Ekta Manch.

Satwinder Yadav, a lawyer by profession, practices in the District Court of Saket and has previously been involved in issues within the settlement that require legal aid.

Yadav is the president of Kusumpur Ekta Manch. Kusumpur Ekta Manch came in opposition to the proposed redevelopment project and has been working in various ways to stop the project from taking place. During the first month of fieldwork, the Kusumpur Ekta Manch began their movement by writing to the political representatives of the area such as the current Member of Parliament of the constituency of Mehrauli where the settlement falls under. Over the next couple of months, a variety of methods were used by this group to thwart the proposed project.

In interviews with both Jyoti and Yadav, they explained how they went from door to door in the settlement to apprise people of the nuances of the policy. They conducted community meetings to share information regarding the policy with residents and collected money for legal actions to be taken. After the letters to the political actors did not yield any results, the organization started filing Right to Information documents with concerned authorities such as the DDA and DUSIB. The primary line of argument, as explained by Yadav, is to denotify Kusumpur as a slum cluster which would automatically remove the settlement from the redevelopment project.

The Manch believes that the settlement has always been a village and thus, should be categorized as an 'Urban Village' as opposed to a "Jhuggi-Jhopdi Cluster". Yadav is now in the process of preparing a legal case against the concerned authorities over the categorization of the settlement. The evidence that they are providing to support this claim are documents from the Tehsil office that have mentioned the settlement as a village in the past. Moreover, with regular elections for a Pradhan and involvement Municipal Corporation authorities within the settlement, Yadav claims that his case for the denotification of the area as a slum cluster stands a credible chance at winning if the case is filed.

However, Yadav and his associates share the same skepticism as the Pradhan when it comes to the actual implementation of the redevelopment project. This is the reason why the Kusumpur Ekta Manch were not going to file a legal case until the February elections of the Delhi State Assembly are over because they think that the project will not follow through once the elections were done. Even though this skepticism is deep-rooted in the kind of local politics that the settlement has seen over past unsuccessful projects to redevelop, the Kusumpura Ekta Manch is ready with its documents to file the legal case if the need arises.

As part of the movement, members of the Ekta Manch visited the transit camp where residents of Kathputli Colony reside who are awaiting the allotment of their flats. The members came back with a report on the sub-standard living conditions of the transit camp and held meeting with residents in Kusumpur to share their findings. The report contained evidence of widespread diseases in the transit camp and the eventual years along delay in the allotment of houses.

However, it is important here to note that there is a clear difference of opinion when it comes to local leaders or organizations such as Kusumpur Ekta Manch versus the residents of the settlement. During our interviews, the members of the Manch mentioned that they did not enjoy popular support from the residents. On further investigations and interviews with residents, this claim was verified as people were mostly in favour of the redevelopment project. Even though there was a sizeable amount of doubt if this project would eventually even take place, residents wanted the apartments to be built so that their current living conditions improve.

The Kusumpur Ekta Manch is led by two individuals who are educated and have close links with civil society organizations and the legal apparatus. In this case, the question of the representation of demands of the residents needs to be considered because the movement does not enjoy popular support but still has the capacity to derail the redevelopment project. Through filing RTIs and legal cases, the Kusumpur Ekta Manch is using what is known as a tactic of “stalling” (Bhan, 2019). The politics of stalling entails a “range of actions that seek to quickly block, interrupt, derail or slow down specific projects” (Bhan, 2019).

This mode of resistance is often the final resort when other modes of action such as discussion and negotiation are not possible. In this case, as the policy itself has removed any option for discussion, the only method left is that of stalling. Stalling in itself is a political practice, as Bhan argues, for it works as a “crucial intermediate political tactic” that buys time to minimize damage and prepare

alternate action on one hand and may work as a way to forcefully open up a public debate or the possibility of negotiation on the other.

Stalling is also indicative of and a by-product of, the shrinking and the gentrification of state space in urban governance. When people are not able to make their claims within the democratic process, such as in the case of the policy taking away the requirement of consent of residents, thereby excluding them, the only option left is to attempt to bypass the project itself. Thus, the stalling of development and redevelopment projects, as a political practice, is an essential part of the postcolonial state itself and the way urban transformations are taking place in New Delhi.

### **Conclusion**

Kathputli Colony, the first colony in New Delhi to be redeveloped before this policy was finalized, has seen a decade-long period of mobilization, displacement and is yet to be allotted the newly constructed homes. Dupont and Saharan (2013) argue that in the case of Kathputli Colony, the involvement of NGOs and role played by them may have in fact curbed the residents' capacity for self-mobilization. On the same lines, De Wit and Berner (2009) show us how rather than being vehicles of empowerment and change, Community-Based Organizations and their leadership often block progress through controlling or capturing benefits that are for the poor and misuse them for their own private interests. In this particular instance where there seems to be a shrinking of the space available for negotiation for residents on one hand and the variegated interests of a civil society-led team of intermediaries- how do representative claims find their space and voice in the context of informal settlements?

A part of this problem is related to the way direct democratic processes are framed in the governance of Indian cities- the framework of "Union-State-Municipal" may be one of the reasons why the current system of representative claim-making does not work well. Why is that the residents of Kusumpur cannot hold their current Member of Parliament or the Member of Legislative Assembly accountable to the repercussions of a major redevelopment policy? Part of the answer lies in the complexities of power sharing in the specific context of New Delhi- the DDA, a central government body, owns a majority of the land in the city and is constantly coming up with new masterplans and projects with no direct accountability system with the elected leaders of the constituencies. Therefore, there is a need to strengthen local democratic processes especially in the case of the urban margins such as for informal settlements because circumventing the

‘standard’ route for representation through intermediaries is a risky game to play- it may sometimes work for the most vulnerable and may not otherwise. In this case, therefore, one such policy recommendation can be to strengthen the accountability of the existing system of Councillors within wards of the municipalities which may work as a better mechanism to articulate representative demands.

In conclusion, the findings of the study reveal the disjuncture between the claims made by an urban social movement as well as an elected leader (pradhan) and the voices of residents. In interviews with the residents who were not aligned with the Kusumpur Ekta Manch, people responded positively to the redevelopment project. Some residents thought of formal housing as a way to successfully claim welfare as they mentioned how having these apartments would also mean that basic services and welfare would also be ensured by the government. Moreover, a majority of the residents that I interacted with cited the upgradation of the space through the construction of high rise apartment- and clearing of garbage as major reasons why they viewed the redevelopment policy favourably. Even though the residents were skeptical about the execution of the policy, they mentioned that such project might uplift their current living standards. However, their claims towards securing welfare and development through this project was less of an assertion of their ‘right to the city’ as much as it is an implicit understanding that current policies were geared towards creating a ‘world-class’ city. For example, a resident mentioned how the slum stood out in the midst of the posh residential enclaves that it is surrounded by and needed this redevelopment project. However, none of these views as expressed by the residents, whether in favour or against the project, can be voiced or addressed because there is no active feedback mechanism in this policy. The promise of the creation of a ‘society’ does not cater to the most critical phase of this policy which is its implementation. Thus, the policy very deliberately disallows any space for residents to be involved in a move that will severely affect their lives.

In conclusion, urban policies and governance need to revisit the framework of decentralization to prevent the embourgeoisement of state spaces (Brenner, 2004) that allow for the interests of the privileged few to be captured within governance and decision-making processes. Instead, policies have to create and maintain the spaces of negotiation, mobilization and demand-articulation for residents of informal settlements so as to not leave behind democracy in the name of development.

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