

**Sanctified Stones, Shifting Sagas:
Changes in Memory, Identity and Displacement due to
Mahakal Lok Temple Corridor, Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh.**

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Abstract:

This research is about the social, cultural, and financial effects of Mahakal Corridor construction and the residents of Nizamuddin Colony's displacement in Ujjain. The study, based on qualitative narratives, shows that the displacement broke the memory practices that had been there for a long time, due to which place-based identities got fractured, and thus the everyday social networks that formed communal life were destroyed. The residents said that the destruction of the streets, shrines, marketplaces, and neighbourhoods of their memories made these last ones homeless, while the relocation scattered their collective identity as "Nizamuddin wale." Besides that, economic insecurity became one of the primary consequences. Small vendors, home-based workers, and tenants suffered significant losses in their livelihoods and were inadequately compensated. Moreover, the testimonies unveiled major structural problems such as selective legality, incomplete surveys, and the impact of majority, religious interests on the deciding of the eviction process. By combining these local stories with the earlier literatures on displacement, cultural memory, heritage politics, and urban redevelopment, the paper argues that the mega projects such as Mahakal Corridor have the far reaching effects that are not visible from the

official narratives of development. The paper makes a case for the community, centred, more inclusive planning that appreciates the lived histories of the vulnerable urban populations.

Introduction:

Large-scale developmental projects of Indian cities are commonly decorated with a lot of promises regarding heritage revival, tourism, beautification, and economic growth. The Mahakal Corridor in Ujjain is an example of such a situation. This project is mostly praised as a stunning change of one of the most influential religious sites of India. The story of the residents of Nizamuddin Colony, the people of the area who lived around the temple, is entirely different if you take a deeper look. For them, such “development” meant evicting them from the houses in which they had lived for decades, thus losing their neighborhood, memories, identity, social networks, and the usual life that gave them a sense of belonging.

This investigation rests upon the basic idea that loss of housing due to displacement is not the only thing that happens. As Ankur Datta (2017) says, displacement is a continuous experience and not a single event, i.e., it stays with people even after they have moved to a different place. This is exactly what we found in Nizamuddin Colony. People said that the things that constituted their memories -lanes, shrines, shops, festival routes, and even the sound of the neighborhood- were changed overnight. One of the residents quoted the festivals around Mahakal "were our memories... Now those roads have been demolished. The memory is still there, but it has no place to stay". This is in line with Paul Connerton's opinion that memories depend on place. When the place is gone, memory becomes a kind of homeless and rootless.

Identity was one of the key issues that got lost. Many residents stated that their mohalla was the source of their identity. “We were known as Nizamuddin wale,” one of them said while explaining how the neighborhood name brought recognition, pride, and a feeling of being a part of a community. After displacement, this collective identity disappeared as the

community was scattered in different areas of the city. This is precisely what Gellert and Lynch (2003) define as “secondary displacement” – the emotional and social side of life that gets broken even after the physical move.

Moreover, the effect on trading was of a very high magnitude. Tea stalls, small shops, flower sellers, tailors working at home, and daily wage workers have all been deprived of their customer base after the relocation. A tea seller shared the story of how he was able to make a good profit before and after he was moved far away, “this has become my burden”. Several individuals claimed that the compensation money they received was nowhere near enough. Tenants were given nothing. Women who worked from home lost all their clients. This is consistent with Robinson’s framework of “impoverishment risks,” which shows that people become poorer due to development-induced displacement.

Besides these, the eviction causes, which were of a structural and political nature, also deeply affected the people. Most of the residents had papers like registry documents, electricity bills, Aadhaar, and ration cards. However, despite this, officials were labeling their houses as “illegal.” According to the stories told by people, “They didn’t check our papers... they didn’t even do a proper survey”. This brings us to Gautam Bhan’s point (2016), where he argues that illegality is not something that is there by nature - it is created by the state when it is convenient for big projects. That seems to have been the case in Ujjain as well. It was easy to carry out the eviction by labeling the colony as “encroachment” or “Waqf land issues.”

People, apart from their dwellings, also lost their cultural habitat. The disappearance of local shrines, dargahs, ritual spaces, and community gathering places is what people have been talking about. One of the residents said, “Our cultural life has been taken away” after the transition to the new place. This is supported by Grossmann's (2016) opinion that no amount of compensation

can replace the loss of culture. When a community is scattered and there are no everyday interactions, it becomes very difficult to maintain culture. The breaking up of markets, shared festivals, and neighborly visits, the whole lot has been dismantled.

One of the main issues that the people brought up was the religious majoritarian aspect of the project. As Kerstin Sigvardsson (2024) shows in the Gyanvapi–Kashi Vishwanath Corridor case, these grand temple projects with the support of the state tend to focus on the Hindu majority's interests while the minorities are being ignored. The Residents of Nizamuddin Colony expressed almost the same thing. According to them, their Muslim-majority neighborhood was “the first to face the axe,” and some of them even went as far as suggesting that being Muslim made their area look like an obstacle in the way of temple expansion. Many felt that when their homes were labeled as “illegal Waqf land,” and they were being targeted based on their identity. Apart from this, there were risks if someone opposed the eviction; people were afraid of being labeled as “anti-development” or “anti-temple.”

The scenario is also in agreement with Veysel Apaydin's(n.d) view that heritage is a matter of politics. He points out that what is kept and what is discarded is basically a message of who has the power. In Ujjain, the attempts to brand the city as a major pilgrimage and tourism destination for Hindus led to the disappearance of the histories and memories of the displaced communities. The usage of terms like heritage-washing (Colin Sterling) and modernization-led forgetting (Rachel King) makes it easier to understand why local everyday heritage was getting lost due to the Mahakal Corridor, while at the same time, it was producing a grand, tourist-friendly version of the city.

Essentially, all these events illustrate the core problem that this research is devoted to: the Mahakal Corridor project is the loss of people's memories, impinging on their recollecting, thus losing their identity, interfering with their cultural life, and destabilizing their economic condition; and the role of political pressure, structural loopholes, and majoritarian ideas in

forcibly evicting them. Simply put, we wanted to study the reality of the daily life of the displaced families, how relocation influenced their self-perception and their view of the community, what kind of compensation and the struggle for livelihood they faced, and in what manner the eviction process was dominated by the powerful. This study holds importance as their voices are drowned under such terms as "beautification" and "heritage," whereas it is they who carried the real cost. The rest of this paper walks through the literature referred to, the gap we found, our methodology, participants, and location, our findings, and, finally, what it all suggests about displacement as an experience for those communities living around big religious redevelopment projects.

Literature Reviews:

Kerstin Sigvardsson (2024), in her thesis on the Gyanvapi Mosque dispute during the Kashi Vishwanath Corridor development and construction, argues that BJP-led development projects align mostly with Hindutva ideology and lead to spatial violence against Muslim communities who are in the minority. The Media often portrays this as modernization, but in reality, it privileges only the dominant groups. Marginalized voices, their heritage and identity claims are mostly unheard and get erased. She also points out that the Gyanvapi site is now called a complex instead of a mosque and considered a part of archaeology, thus eroding Muslim collective memory and identity. In a way, national discourse is often formed by the dominant religious ideas and practices and neglects the others. In our study of the Mahakal Lok corridor project, similar patterns were found. The construction, displacement of muslim inhabitants and local flower vendors losing their business after the area was refashioned. In both these cases, the state government-led temple reconstruction projects privileged the dominant religious narratives at the expense of local communities' memory and identity. This reflects how large-scale religious projects promote spatial displacement and cultural erasure of certain minorities.

Veysel Apaydin(n.d), in his article on cultural memory and heritage, argues that heritage is not a fixed concept but a political and malleable process linked to power and identity. Destruction and

construction of heritage always generate new meanings for some, while it erases previously held meanings in the form of memory and identity of others. He refers to the works of many scholars, such as Rachel King, who shows that narratives of modernization often justify infrastructure that erases earlier ways of being, making the process of forgetting a necessity for development. Colin Sterling's concept of heritage-washing is also relevant because in heritage cities like Venice or Istanbul, rapid gentrification and tourism development convert and sideline vernacular cultures. The author discusses heritage as power, where every decision about what to preserve and what to demolish reflects social hierarchies; thus, heritage is always political. Here, one can say that the personal, which is one's religious domain, becomes political. In the case of the Mahakal Lok, we incorporated these insights, suggesting that the corridor is not just physical infrastructure but a transformation of the collective memory of the minority community dwelling there. Madhya Pradesh's framing of the holy city of Ujjain as a heritage tourism destination commodifies the city's sacred landscape, thereby suppressing the lived experiences and history of long-time residents. We could infer that unless local voices participate, such corridor constructions lead to a top-down heritage narrative of the dominant group, alongside identity and memory loss of those at the periphery.

When we consider the works of Datta (2017), Grossmann (2016) and Devakumar (2008) collectively, it becomes obvious that the three of them describe the feeling of displacement very vividly, particularly in tragic cases like the Mahakal Corridor in Ujjain. The written pieces of all three writers reveal that the loss of a home is never only about land or legal documents; it is about memory, identity, and the gradual disintegration of the familiar daily life.

Datta's (2017) concept fits best here. According to his argument, displacement should not be understood as a single event in which a population is forcibly removed - rather, it is a continuous state. Even after relocation, people keep feeling as if they are not fully settled and that they are in between the past and the present. He also insists on an idea of "return journeys" which, in his opinion, reflect the Ujjain experience at its best: even if one goes back to see the place that was his home, it doesn't feel like "home" anymore. The area has changed so much, both socially and

emotionally, that coming back only intensifies the feeling of loss. Datta (2017) also points out that displacement dissolves the small, seemingly insignificant relationships that bind neighbors together. This is very much the case in Ujjain, where, for the past several decades, Hindu and Muslim families have coexisted peacefully, and now their social worlds have been separated abruptly.

Grossmann (2016) brings in an additional important aspect. In her view, displacement is accompanied by two kinds of losses: the physical (homes, belongings, neighbourhoods) and the emotional (culture, routines, memories). Affected persons may be compensated, yet the payment seldom reflects the entirety of what has been lost. She mirrors the experience of the Ujjain community through her depiction of unremunerated or partially-paid restitution, particularly the situation of Muslim families who endured short, delayed, or even non-existent compensation. In essence, Grossmann (2016) is a step back, reminding us that the process of turning disrupted lives around is slow and difficult, and the emotional burden lingers long after the authority has completed its 'development' act and moved on.

Devakumar (2008) brings the Indian perspective to the argument and makes a case for the government frequently masking its harsh policy of evictions with development rhetoric. In such cases, like the Mahakal Corridor, the ideas of progress, beautification, and religious importance come forth to cover the downheartedness of the common people. To add, Devakumar (2008) points out that the most vulnerable groups-like minorities and informal sector workers, are the ones who bear the heaviest brunt of the problem. This is the exact point where Ujjain aligns with his argument: the Muslim households, among which some were forced out quickly, received less compensation, or got trapped in more bureaucratic hurdles.

Milligan (2003) refers to the association between identity and the areas where people live, which turns out to be quite close, even personal. She believes that displacement is, above all, uprooting from the emotions that one has for the place. And it is this emotional bond that, when it is navigated, people on the whole think that their very self-identity is getting less stable. We

overlook the streets, neighborhoods, and local customs that are familiar to us until one day, they cease to exist. People in similar situations frequently find themselves in a state of loss or confusion. What is more, Milligan gives the reason for the very strong nostalgia feeling in those groups of people who have experienced forced resettlement as a part of their identity; it is also a way of connecting their past and present. If one were to take Milligan's thoughts and relate them to the Mahakal Corridor, it would be obvious that quite a few of the residents, priests,

Shopkeepers and old neighborhood families are emotionally unsettled or overwhelmed by nostalgia. It not only affected their business when the small traditional lanes changed into big modern types of workspaces, but the physical spaces that had molded their identity, daily life, and community life were also taken away from them. In accordance with Milligan's theory, possibly a lot of people may now feel that they belong to the "old" Ujjain only and that the entire experience of the city before the redevelopment is what unites them now. Kaushal (2009), instead, introduces a political-economic angle when talking about the problem of displacement. She asserts that the developments tend to push the most vulnerable ones away and create different kinds of losses: loss of work, social connections, cultural practices, and even mental peace. When she talks about relocation, she also adds that it causes community fragmentation and loss of cultural identity if it is not properly planned and provision for people is not made. The emotional part of the matter is quite significant as well, stress, anger, and the feeling of losing places that are of a spiritual or ancestral nature. Taking a look at the events in Ujjain through the eyes of Kaushal, her point of view can lead to the understanding that such a revamp of a holy place can not only actually but quite dramatically result in the intensification of the feeling of loss of one's identity. To make the corridor, there were a lot of old residential areas, small vendors, shrines, and going back to the roots type places mostly removed without giving a fair amount of money or providing new homes. With the disappearance of these heirlooms of culture, the loss was not only that of the houses or shops, but it was, what is more, the loss of the symbolic places that were the city's cultural memory come alive.

Each of the two authors, through their own perspectives, sees the locals' reaction to the changes caused by the Mahakal Corridor. Comprehensible in a whole new way. At the individual level, people had to experience an identity crisis as their familiar places were taken away. At the community level, the risk that the community might be pushed to the margins and the emotional distress of the members were the outcomes that community groups faced. Apart from these, the memory loss, nostalgia, and even social difficulties among the displaced people of this project have been interwoven to constitute a complex whole.

Comparatively, Robinson(2003), alongside Gellert and Lynch(2003), one of the main things that stands out is the similarity in their argument regarding the social impact of large developmental projects, which is precisely what happened with the Mahakal Corridor in Ujjain. The whole set of authors' works, though differently, brings us to the realization that displacement is not just taking people from one place to another, but it is a move that changes their everyday life, memory, and identity.

At first, Robinson(2003) argues that the displacement of people because of development is not an accidental side effect of progress, but it is actually an inherent part of the very notion of state modernization. States frequently market these projects as being carried out for the "public good," however, it is actually the communities that live the closest to the areas which are being changed, that have to bear the most. The perspective is relevant to the Ujjain corridor . While the Mahakal Corridor was allegedly the cultural revival project, it was the people who had been living in the mohallas around for generations that were the ones getting thrown out, not only losing their homes and shops but also the local networks which had been the source of emotional and cultural significance for them.

Robinson (2003), through the impoverishment risks framework, details how deeply layered these different losses are that stem from being landless, homeless, experiencing social fragmentation, and cultural impoverishment. In Ujjain, these categories which before were only theoretical, have now come down to losing family heritage ledgers, destruction of neighbourhood temples,

and disbanding of community life that was mostly happening in the old city's narrow lanes. The author points out that not even the most generous cash compensation can regain the communal memory and identity that are stored in these places.

Beyond this, the authors Gellert and Lynch (2003) also bring into the discussion the point how such large-scale projects not only physically but also change the environment symbolically. They view these projects as a sort of "creative destruction" whereby on one hand they bring something grand but on the other hand, they destroy the old. This is exactly how the Mahakal Corridor works: the new grand, cleaned-up layout may be catching the eye of the visitors, but concurrently, it is erasing the layered historicity and the everyday sacredness which were the bases for the old city's people to find meaning.

They are particularly so that the distinction between primary displacement (forced eviction, demolition) and secondary displacement (loss of social ties, identity disruption, memory dislocation) is a significant aspect of their argument. In Ujjain, the first incidents were very quick and quite obvious; the next ones are progressing slowly as residents come to terms with the fact that the new land does not reflect their cultural rhythms or memories. Besides that, Gellert and Lynch (2003) suggest that one of the biggest factors behind these initiatives is "epistemic communities" - the planners, consultants and state actors who not only share the view regarding large-scale, modern aesthetics and technology solving the issues, but also, they are the ones facilitating these projects. This viewpoint barely takes into account the local people's experience, thus explaining why a large number of residents in Ujjain felt silenced and alienated during the redevelopment process.

As displacement can only be unfairly distributed, this is a point that both authors agree on. People with fewer resources – small vendors, informal residents, temple helpers- are the ones who end up losing the most. This is evident in the entire Mahakal Corridor, where these very groups were the ones that suffered the most significant losses.

Together, Robinson(2003) on one hand, and Gellert & Lynch (2003) on the other, offer a comprehensive and stimulating framework that helps one see the Mahakal Corridor beyond the mere urban beautification initiative. They take the view that this is a mega-project that has changed the hallowed space, disturbed the community memory, and affected the identity of those who were the fabric of the old city.

The examples of eviction in Delhi, specifically, which Gautam Bhan (2016) used, are very informative. In the aftermath of her research, one can discern that hostile formations do not cause very many incidents to arise suddenly but rather are the aftermath of their extension. In her investigation, she stresses that slums being characterized as illegal or encroaching areas is

not due to new settlements in these localities having been suddenly established, but since the government decides to manually change land records or enforce the regulations only in certain areas. Once a place is classified as illegal, it is very easy for the authorities to destroy it under the guise of development, improvement or heritage projects. Apart from this, the manner of such events is not identical-the worst consequences usually fall on the poorest people and minorities, whereas the rich neighborhoods are safe from any harm.

There are absolutely the same events happening in Nizamuddin Colony in Delhi and during the Mahakal corridor expansion in Ujjain, where we can notice that after being labelled as unauthorised and obstructive, long habitation and community spaces were taken away. It is the planning officials who are changing the status of the communities from legal to illegal that are responsible for this act, as the communities were already there, and the people were living in these areas long ago. In line with Bhan's view, eviction instances in these locations represent the manufacture by the state of the concept of illegality to provide a rationale for getting rid of evicting disadvantaged groups, and thus new cases follow the old pattern.

Besides this, there is more added to the theory of social memory by Paul Connerton (2016). He insists that common memory is not that much taken from books or archives, but rather it comes

from the places where people live and from their daily habits. The way you go to the restaurant on your favorite street, the local shrines, the community meetings, the rituals handed down from generations - all of this has memories. In the case that these factors are being removed, the minorities will go through what Connerton refers to as "structural amnesia," or loss of the places that serve as memory storage.

Regarding Nizamuddin Colony in Ujjain, besides homes and streets being destroyed, even the mosque has been demolished. More than just the removal of the physical structures, the frictions and relationships that people had through those rituals and routines have been broken. Daily prayers, festive meetings, mutually shared routines and neighbourhood socializing, all of them were left without a place to continue. Memory becomes fragile without these intimate spaces; people feel they are not connected to their personal histories. Thus, displacement ought not only to be considered as the loss of a house but also the loss of those places which form the basis of one's identity and social life.

Research Methodology:

A qualitative, exploratory research design was conducted to understand the people's experiences of displacement, memory, and identity loss in the Mahakal Lok Corridor construction project. The qualitative method is suitable for open-ended questions as it explores everyday problems. In particular, we tried to implement an ethnographic lens in the fieldwork, immersing ourselves in the area and daily interactions, using multiple qualitative techniques to build a rich account of socio-cultural life. We began with participant-observation involving daily activities of the residents in the locality by spending long hours on neighborhood streets and alleys, and informally talking to the people. We tried to document the scenes of the demolition drives through photography(see appendix) and their immediate aftermath, noting how residents reacted to the loss of their homes and religious place of worship. These fieldnotes recorded not just the behaviour of the ones displaced but the emotional tone of voice, gestures and silence. This sensory perception enriched the interpretation of identity and memory. We also try to balance

participation and observation by joining displaced families in meals or having tea and discussing with a shopkeeper while also remaining mindful of maintaining some observer distance. Through participant observation, our study captured how the same spaces are re-imagined as ruins and how memory is enacted (through the collection and preservation of bones of ancestors from Takiya Masjid premises), thus directly linking the sense of identity loss to the physical landscape.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with respondents in their homes, shops and local streets. An open-ended interview format guided free-flowing conversations to the themes of displacement history, memories of the area before the demolition, and changes to identity or belonging in the lives of those affected. All interviews were conducted in a photovoice format (with informed consent) and transcribed verbatim. Video recordings were also made to capture non-verbal cues and spatial context. The displaced residents described ancestral memories tied to the neighborhood or to the demolished mosque. We also took care to build a good rapport through empathic listening, which is crucial in trauma-informed research. We assured the participants that they could pause or stop at any time if they felt uncomfortable to share their experiences.

Our main goal was to capture how participants linked specific places like their demolished home or the Takiya Masjid to their family history and personal identity. The sampling method that we employed was a non-probability snowball sampling. One respondent gave us the contact information of the next respondent. For example, a tea seller introduced us to a social worker, who in turn gave us the contact of a lawyer dealing with cases of displaced people. For ethical reasons, we have maintained the anonymity of all our respondents. We tried to respect the cultural norms, gender interactions and religious practices and addressed any inadvertent biases that might have arisen. Lastly, we engaged in visual and spatial mapping to identify the common memoryscapes depicting how collective memory is embedded in local geography. The maps thus supplemented interviews by reinforcing narratives, for example, a local vendor spoke about selling flowers near a now-destroyed wall. Therefore, these visual methods (maps and site

photographs) provided us with concrete data on how identity and belonging are linked to physical spaces, aligning with our findings that memory and notion of home overlap into memoryscapes in displacement and demolition.

Area and Population of Study:

The area of our study was the neighbourhood parallel and opposite the Nandi Gate section, the areas adjacent to the Rudra Sagar Lake, the Nizamuddin colony and near the razed Takiya Masjid, along with Jaisinghpura and Ganesh Nagar colony. A total of 58 respondents were interviewed. Our sample reflects a heterogeneous population directly or indirectly affected by the redevelopment and reconstruction. This helped us to trace how a state-led heritage project reconfigures both material and symbolic dimensions of everyday life.

The interviewee pool consisted of 26 male participants aged between 20–70 years and 32 female participants aged between 16–60 years. This age variation reflected a broad generational spectrum. The older respondents articulated memories of the pre-corridor neighbourhood as a lived experience of intergenerational identity, whereas younger participants often interpreted displacement through the disrupted daily routines, occupational instability, and emergence of a precariat condition. Their oral histories demonstrated that memory is not only a recollection of the past but is socially embedded through which communities negotiate their loss and reimagine their identity and belonging. The respondents included flower vendors associated with local vendor unions, many of whom had historically occupied the temple premises as part of an informal yet culturally integral economy. The demolition or reallocation of their shops was seen by them as a loss not only of their livelihood but of spiritual and social identity.

Interviews with a lawyer and a social worker, who were directly involved in filing compensation and rehabilitation claims, highlighted the legal aspect. Their perspectives placed the displacement within broader structures of hierarchical institutional power, highlighting how the

loss of documentation, delays in compensation and differential treatment across religious lines. It tried to give attention to psychological trauma that takes place during these widespread demolition and relocation processes.

The remaining respondents were mainly residents of the Nizamuddin Colony, alongside shopkeepers, restaurant owners and an individual born and raised in Ujjain. Together, these diverse populations portray the dire human consequences of urban redevelopment projects, revealing how projects aimed for heritage enhancement tend to promote parallel processes of erosion, dislocation, and fragmentation of identity and memory.

Research Gap:

The redevelopment of the Mahakal Corridor, Ujjain, has been the talk of the town. But the number of actual studies that reveal the unvarnished truth is quite small. A majority of studies conceptualize the corridor as a high-end development project, a promoter of tourism, or a

1. Those Displaced Have Not Been Considered :

The documentation and press coverage of the project are full of positive statements, but they hardly pay any attention to the people living in the localities before the development of the corridor. These people had been a part of the community for a very long time, yet their voices are hardly visible in the dominant discourse. While doing our fieldwork, we encountered several people who had a demolition notice handed to them just two hours before their house was demolished. Vendors were told that they would get a new place to set up their shops, but they never received it. Some families even went through the trouble of gathering the bones of their ancestors from the ruins of the demolished graves. These deeply personal and emotional stories show that people were severely impacted, but they rarely feature in the main documents.

2. The Community's Voice Is Absent in Heritage Development:

Most of the research on heritage-based urban development focuses on the parts of the work related to planning, design, and government decisions. People's voices are the ones that are not there, and these are the voices of people who lived around the temple and used the spaces daily. We discovered during the fieldwork that the residents were hardly engaged in the consultation process. Many surveys were either not done or, if they were, the work was done very rapidly, and quite a few families, even though they had the necessary documents, found it difficult to receive the right compensation. Muslim residents were called "illegal occupants," which was the reason given for the area's clearance. This suggests that heritage project literature has a big gap in talking about people's voices, their concerns, and also their practices, which are mostly silent.

3. Insufficient Ethnographic Work on the Loss of Culture:

As a rule, the redevelopments announce that they are performed out of cultural considerations, but infamously, in the end, they demolish the very same culture. Current academic writing is not very effective in revealing these subtle cultural losses. During our research, people were informed that mosques, shrines, community spaces, worship routes, and even neighborhoods where Hindus and Muslims lived together for the last 50 years had been taken away. Small cultural worlds such as flower markets, tea shops, and local rituals were completely wiped out. These are losses that are emotional and symbolic and not just physical; however, they have not been explored from an ethnographic perspective.

4. The Intersection of Religion, Informality, and Displacement Is Not Explored :

The majority of studies treat displacement, informality, and religious redevelopment as separate problems. But in the case of Mahakal, these three are very much interrelated. Apart from that, the construction of the corridor has resulted in changes in religious spaces and has adversely affected the informal livelihoods of people like flower vendors, tea sellers, daily wage workers, and small shopkeepers. In addition, through the construction, political relationships and community identities have changed. Nevertheless, studies have not yet recognized the point that the

intersection of religion, informal work, and displacement is the place where they overlap most markedly.

5. Significant Discrepancy between Government Narratives and Reality:

Government narratives make the entire operation look like a rosy picture of a successful project where the beautification, development, and cultural pride aspects are given the main credit. However, the actual picture revealed by our fieldwork is completely at odds with this. It unveils the instances of sudden demolition, inadequate compensation, unresolved legal cases, and emotional pains due to the loss of homes and community spaces. The huge difference between the state's story and people's real experiences is a big research gap. Understanding this difference is crucial if we want to evaluate the project fairly.

Research Objectives:

This research aims to determine the degree to which the Mahakal Corridor initiative necessitated the removal of people living in Nizamuddin Colony from their homes and how their recollections, identities, cultural practices, and means of living have been transformed by this. Besides, it investigates the situation of the eviction, the reasons for which their homes were suddenly declared "illegal," the influence of politics and majoritarian interests during the operation, and how the break-up of the community caused by the relocation has impacted their social and daily lives. So, the research is basically a probe into the disconnect between the sparkling facelift of the city and the families who had to move out.

Findings:

We classified the responses and our analysis under five major categories, which have instances supporting each argument. They are as follows:

Memory:

The rucksacks of memory and of the residents' lives, told by resettled people from Ujjain, show how the Mahakal Corridor project has uprooted the sacred and personal memories of the residents. This kind of rupture is characterized by people's memory not being able to find a connection with the places that once sheltered them. One of the residents mentioned, "Ujjain festivals near Mahakal had a very special vibe. Things like these were our memories. Now those roads have been demolished. The memory is still there, but it has no place to stay." Urban sociology reminds us that memory depends on locality and is influenced by districts, going to places one knows, and different sensations. Upon the disappearance of these surroundings, memories become free from their physical references. Researchers call this the displacement of memory alongside the displacement of people.

Moreover, economic locations contain emotional and relational aspects just as well. Another respondent said, "My shop has been here for ages. I felt like all those years of connection disappeared after the work of the corridor." This instance points to the fact that relocation forcibly moves people from the place where they have social ties and routines, and thus, integration into the new environment ceases to be a continuation of the old one. The third story focuses on this aspect of the loss, "I was living in that house for more than 35 years. I felt as if those 35 years just went away." Here, the home is metaphorically an expression of identity, culture, and community. Its demolition scatters oneself and leaves one without a connection to their own past.

The Mahakal project has made memory something homeless and sorrowful for the people who were compelled to move out.

Identity:

The residents who were forced out due to the Mahakal Corridor project have lost their sense of self to show how dramatically their personal identities have transformed and, in numerous instances, have been reduced considerably. Identity from a sociological perspective is not a

characteristic of an individual; it is something that grows through one's relations with the place, community, work, and shared past. Mohallas in Ujjain were not only the social and cultural units that established human interactions but also the environments where identities and social statuses, along with friendships, got formed gradually and nurtured further. One resident even went as far as to say, "Our mohalla gave us our identity. In Ujjain, people recognized us by the area we came from, like 'Nizamuddin wale.' After being displaced, our identity vanished. Presently, we are just a bunch of people living at different places in the city with no common name." The quote above reflects the understanding that identity is shared and is also a geographical being influenced by the way others perceive us. The loss of the mohalla means that, in addition to losing a place where you stayed, you also lose the metaphorical framework that had been instrumental in people's identity.

Furthermore, the places where we work contribute a lot to the formation of our identities. To add on, it was said by the other resident, "My business was the source of my identity in Ujjain. People identified me by my name, work, and location. Everything changed when the colony was torn down. Now, without my shop and neighbors, I perceive that my identity as a local businessman has been depleted." This is an example of how professional identity depends on continuous interactions, relations with clients, and the notion of being in a familiar place. Once the shop is gone, so are those social ties that were the backbone of this role. The neighbourhood-based identity of the people comes strongly to the surface once again when hearing a statement of a resident, "For long, Nizamuddin Colony was a name that defined a feeling of being part of the group. The people were aware of our families, roots, and principles. Post-displacement, that community identity cracked. At present, though, living among strangers, we are still trying to establish our identity." Displacement interferes with the harmony of continuity of identity, which results in people having to redefine themselves in a congenial social setups. The shared identity, thus, which was handed down from one generation to another, becomes almost impossible to retain without the community space that used to support and nurture it.

The statement, "Today we are mere individuals and not a community. Our identity is fragmented," is an indication of the overall effects of displacement. Urban sociology asserts that these abrupt changes usually cause well-knit communities to break into isolated members, thus resulting in the weakening of collective identities as well as the rise of the feeling of unconnectedness. Conceiving oneself as "Nizamuddin wale" and thereby being in the spotlight to now being just one of the anonymous residents scattered across the city is an indication of the loss of communal identity capital, which is the shared history, recognition, and belonging linked to the colony. Thus, apart from changing the physical environment of Ujjain, the Mahakal Corridor project has, in fact, lessened the place-based, occupational, and communal identities that once provided a solid foundation for its displaced residents.

Economic Impacts:

The experiences of residents who were forced to move have revealed numerous economic difficulties that were caused by the Mahakal Corridor project as a result of insufficient compensation, disrupted livelihoods, and unjust distribution of resources. Displacement, as taught by urban sociology, is not only a matter of where people live but also has an impact on their financial safety, work habits, and access to markets. One tea seller illustrates the case by saying, "Before, I had a lot of customers due to the crowd, but now, after relocation, I have to go far with an unstable cart. This has become my burden." His experience depicts how a forced relocation situation escalates the costs of the day, decreases earnings, and eventually leads to economic displacement, a term which sociologists use to explain the collapse of the livelihood systems that happens even before people physically relocate.

Several testimonies emphasize the inadequacy of the compensation. "The things that they gave to us were not nearly enough to build a new house in Ujjain. We went backward economically," as one resident puts it. This clearly indicates the shortcomings of the state-controlled redevelopment strategy whereby compensation is dependent on bureaucratic estimates rather than the actual value of the houses and the long-term investments. Another resident adds, "They got it totally wrong when they evaluated. The only thing they counted was the construction, not the years of

work we put in to make it better. The compensation was unfair.” It signals how official evaluations can create disparities, some benefiting while others are disadvantaged by them. Women who used to work at home suffered in silence. A tailor says, “I was making clothes at home. I lost my customers and income. They gave us compensation, but nothing for the loss of our business.” It points to the issues of informal and gendered labor, which are often overlooked in rehabilitation policies.

The exorbitant land prices in Ujjain were like a nail in the coffin of the financial troubles. One of the residents points out, “It is common knowledge that land is costly here. We had to relocate to places that were far away, where we could afford to buy a piece of land.” It echoes the pattern whereby displaced families are forced to live on the outskirts of the city and, as a consequence, travel expenses increase while their access to markets, schools, and social networks is limited.

Among those heavily affected were tenants: “We as tenants got nothing. It caused us financial stress and pushed us into debt,” they express. The statement reveals a common failure in redevelopment policies, which is that the benefits go to property owners while tenants, who are the most vulnerable and are left without support. Small vendors suffered the harshest blow: “I have lost all my customers after the relocation. My income has decreased, and I have been facing expenses more than before,” they lament. The statement conveys the economic blow that follows from the loss of the established customer base, which is the main source of daily survival for them. All of these testimonies, when taken together, reveal the economic upheavals that were the result of the Mahakal project, which included provisions that were inadequate for compensation, the breaking up of the livelihood systems, and exclusionary rehabilitation practices.

Structural Loopholes:

Displaced residents' statements reveal the significant disparities and the outright failure of the process of eviction and compensation due to the Mahakal Corridor project. Their testimonies demonstrate how a state-led redevelopment can raise social inequality by practices like bureaucratic manipulation, the selective application of the law, and the exclusion of that part of

society which is most vulnerable. One resident exemplifies this bias in a very clear way: "Governments kept saying that our houses were on Waqf Board land and that they were not private properties. We had registry papers, Aadhaar cards, and electricity, water, and ration bills, but they still considered our houses illegal. It was as if they had already predetermined the outcome and were only looking for their reasons."

This is an example of what the social scientists call pre-determined decision-making, where authorities control the results before they do the due process and simultaneously apply legality selectively to weaken the residents' claims.

Throughout the whole narrative, the residents are constantly talking about how a correct survey was totally missing, which is an indication of the bureaucracy's negligence and the absence of clear-cut procedures: "We were living here with complete documents. Suddenly, officials declared our houses to be invalid structures. They did not do any proper survey. They did not check our papers; they did not measure our houses, nothing." The repetition of their assertion is aimed at showing the extent of the problem. The main point of this text is to uncover the manner in which redevelopment projects intentionally avoid verification steps that are required by law, thus depriving the residents of their right to be recognized and treated fairly.

The role of the powerful religious institutions is one of the most prominent structural factors. A resident shares, "The temple committee was the one that had the absolute power to decide not only which areas were going to be taken but also how quickly. The reason for the rapid clearance of our colony was their pressure; not only were the rules and documents ignored, but also our colony was cleared very quickly." This is an instance of the majority's power, where the interests of the temple committee overpower the procedural safeguards. This over-reliance on religious authority shows the link between religious authority and state power, which quite often ends up in the harm of the marginalized neighborhoods."

The residents also recount the times when they tried to silence the voices of their opponents. "When we protested, the government, by bringing their own supporters to the place, created an atmosphere of fake agreement. It seemed as if they were not paying any attention at all to the displacement issue. After that, most of us were so scared that we remained quiet." It also reveals that the displaced communities have limited access to real consultation and are more prone to harassment.

Another point that hints at the exclusion of the marginalized families is the sentence: "We, the marginalized families, were only given support by the Majlis Ittehad-e-Mohammad. The authorities, however, were not bothered by it. It was like they had already made up their minds that we were not the real residents." This implies that the efforts of civil society were dismissed and the state ignored the voices of the alternative, thus increasing social hierarchies and decreasing the level of accountability. Feeling "illegitimate" is a mirror for structural discrimination when the poorer communities can be more easily rejected in the redevelopment process."

Furthermore, people talked about worrying over serious law violations. "Not a single step under the Land Acquisition Act 2013 was observed. There was no good notice, no hearing, no social impact assessment, and no fair valuation. It looked as if the law was being enforced selectively for the corridor project." This direct statement reveals the systematic disregard for the legal safeguards. The selective enforcement of the law uncovers the existence of a dual legal system where development objectives have a higher priority over the rights of citizens, especially those who have less political influence. Overall, they convey the message that being uprooted from the Mahakal Corridor project was far more than just a technical operation; it was socially uneven and influenced by institutional power, legal inconsistency, and the marginalization of vulnerable communities.

Cultural Losses:

The array of experiences by those individuals whose homes were demolished for the project of the Mahakal Corridor expressly points to the fact, among other things, that, apart from the loss of their homes, the cultural degradation is the main losing aspect of the development of the Mahakal Corridor. On the one hand, from a sociological perspective, culture is profoundly linked to people's everyday life, socializing with the community, learning from the older generation, and sharing the sacred venues. The people's voices show how, by getting rid of the entire population, the very structure of culture is demolished; this is the very foundation that is overlooked most often when the topic of redevelopment is addressed. A resident expresses this particular facet of interruption in a very touching way: "Our festivals, prayers, and traditions met in this area... After being uprooted, everything seems out of reach. The core of our cultural life has been taken away." This person's statement is a perfect example of place-based cultural identity, which is the concept whereby culture-related activities acquire their value from being carried out in certain places. If those places are destroyed, the associated practices will hardly find their new context.

Religion-related landmarks played a major role in ensuring the persistence of culture. One more resident comments on this: "We had a small dargah and some local shrines where we prayed. When the corridor was being built, those places were gone. It seems as if our cultural bedrocks were taken along with our houses." What this essentially is about is the disappearance of those tiny but consecrated places that stabilize spiritual continuity, the history of one's family, and the general identity of which the losses go way beyond simply the physical removals.

Dislocation has been a complete break with the handing down of the traditions to the coming generations. A resident says, "In the past, children would learn our ways by simply looking at us. Children nowadays live far away from those customs. Our cultural transmission has suffered a serious blow." This corresponds to the sociological models of cultural socialization, where one's culture is organically absorbed through one's involvement in the day-to-day life of a close-knit community, which is a process that gets interrupted in the case of dispersed populations.

The markets and workplaces were also among the major factors essential to the cultural milieu. One shopkeeper says, "My shop was like threads of cultural fabric. The festive spirit has disappeared. There is no such cultural vibrancy in the new place." This sounds like an explanation of how marketplaces become the core of culture, shaping the rhythms of society, the traditions of festivity, and social relations.

The gradual disappearance of neighborhood culture is being repeatedly pointed out. One resident says, "We had a neighborhood culture full of life where everyone visited each other. After moving, that communal culture has faded away. People here don't even greet each other." This refers to the fall of community life, the level of daily interaction that was the foundation of solidarity, trust, and common values, the ties that can hardly be rebuilt in another setting.

A final comment sums up the extent of the loss: "Culture goes beyond just temples or monuments. It is deeply ingrained in the everyday life of individuals. By tearing down the community, they wiped out our daily cultural practices. What is left is tourist culture and not ours." This points out the struggle between the two sides – one being cultural heritage for tourists, and the other being lived heritage. The redevelopment was more for the visual spectacle and the aesthetic appeal of the city rather than for the genuine cultural systems of the residents. Thus, community culture was replaced with a theatricalized religious environment.

In sum, these personal accounts show that the Mahakal Corridor project did not merely change the physical layout of the city but also, in effect, changed people's cultural lives, tearing down the traditions, the sacred sites, and the communal ties that once had been the pillars of the society.

Majoritarian Religious Interests:

The testimonies of the displaced communities portray the Mahakal Corridor project as a mere facade of urban revitalization, unfolding as a majoritarian, religious, agenda-driven process. The merger of state power and the dominant religious identity to form a hegemonic alliance to decide

whose spaces and stories were saved and whose were destroyed is an important takeaway from this. Sociologically, it exemplifies how development can serve as a tool to deepen religious dominance, especially in cities like Ujjain with intricately interwoven sacred geographies. The first witness account brings this sidedness to the fore: “Everything was staged around the extension of the Mahakal temple, our Muslim-dominated neighborhood was the first to face the axe. It looked like one religious interest was above everything else; our lives were just ignored.” This points out how the developmental discourse can conceal the spatial discrimination happening underneath, thus, in this case, minority groups living near major Hindu pilgrimage sites are targeted for eviction in the name of beautification or development without having been properly informed.

Not only the bureaucratic accounts but also the local officials. “When they accused our houses of being illegal Waqf land, it seemed as if they wanted to marginalize us because we were a minority; any obstruction to the project, especially Muslim residences, had to be eliminated,” as the residents quote. This situation shows how the official establishment identification can be tweaked in different ways to pose a challenge to minorities' already existing rights to their spaces by branding them as unlawful squatters, thus diminishing their presence in the community. The justice system becomes weaponized for symbolic exclusion when legal frameworks turn into tools to fight against one another. Community members said, “The move was visibly and blatantly Hindu religious identity-centric. Our area, which consisted of a dargah and Muslim households, didn't match their vision. That is the reason they got rid of us to make way for the construction of a clean religious corridor.” The idea of spatial purification is well represented by this statement, where the main objective of urban renewal is to create a visually consistent religious environment for the twin purposes of tourism and pilgrimage, which involves the disappearance of the minority culture's presence. Their eviction was politically and aesthetically instrumentalized for the purpose of exhibiting Hindu-majoritarian sacred space. The Hindu-majoritarian discourse around the project served as an additional barrier between minority and majority populations. One local person remembers, “The very first argument against the project was that the opponents were 'anti-development'. Nevertheless, this action meant the

prioritization of one religion's space at the cost of our homes - how could we have opposed it and not been accused of disrespect towards the temple?" This is a case of the dominant group framing the opposition as illegitimate, thus its main thrust being that dissenters are from minority communities, which challenge displacement in connection with a dominant religious institution. The protest was socially discouraged and politically risky because of the temple's moral authority.

The last testimony sums up the whole process: "This program is an excellent example showing the collaboration between the state authority and the religious motives. Our forced evacuation was justified under the rubric of 'religious development'. Spirituality was used as a weapon to silence us." This is in accord with what sociologists term religio-state developmentalism. Such a pattern is characterized by development projects that are in tune with the cultural interests of the dominant religious faction, leading to the neglect of minority groups in the process.

Together, these stories demonstrate that the Mahakal Corridor undertaking was beyond just reshaping the urban physical environment; it was a vehicle for a majoritarian religious ideology, legitimized through the state apparatus and materialized through the stories that diminished the minority presence. The redevelopment acted as a social hierarchy reinforcement mechanism, changed the nature of sacred spaces, and scattered those whose identities conflicted with the dominant religious narrative of Ujjain, identified as the displaced people.

Conclusion:

Mahakal Corridor's construction has transformed Ujjain in various ways that are very much noticeable from afar; however, for the people living in Nizamuddin Colony, the changes that have left deep impacts on their lives are the ones that remain invisible. Through this study, the authors convey the message that the forced relocation not only demolished houses but also shattered the memories, relationships and way of life that had been cultivated for generations. Repeatedly, people claimed that the areas where they were brought up, prayed, worked and had celebrations are no more. Sure enough, their memories survive, but the places that are

inseparable from those memories no longer exist; thus, they have a feeling of nothingness and bereavement.

The loss of identity was chiefly the major consequences of the forced relocation. Earlier on, people took pride in calling themselves “Nizamuddin wale,” which was more than just a name; it was their collective history and belonging. After the demolition of the settlement, the households went in different directions throughout the city. Even though they now reside in different areas, they still live amongst unfamiliar people, whereas before they were surrounded by a community that used to give them recognition and support. The great majority of them said that this change made them feel deserted and that they did not know where their real home was anymore.

The monetary side of the matter was also not conveyed well in popular media. Shopkeepers were left without customers, tenants did not get a dime, and people working from home, most of whom were women, had their sources of income cut off. Most of the time, the pay that one received for their troubles was very minimal and unjust, so it was only a matter of time before many found themselves relocating to faraway places that barely fit their budgets. For a great number of people, making money has become an uphill task.

There were also several serious issues regarding the manner in which the eviction was done. The authorities considered that people with valid documents were “illegal.” They do not do or rush the surveys. A lot of them thought that the decisions had been taken long before they were consulted.

Last but not least, the loss of culture has been a very significant factor affecting the locals. The disappearance of local shrines, dargahs, festivals, and everyday neighbourly interactions, among others, is one of the losses that the people have had to grapple with. The common thread in all these is that none of them can be found anymore, as they have been replaced by religious spaces that are more tourist-friendly than resident-friendly.

Eventually, the city is the one that took the mahakal corridor and not the people, who lost the very foundation of their lives. Real development has to be there for the people who happen to live in those spaces, and it must also be about protecting their dignity, memories, and rights.

Limitations:

Several limitations of the methodology were noted. Firstly, time constraints, a two-week field period allowed only an overall idea of rapidly changing experiences post-demolition. A longer time period study would have helped us to capture longer-term memory loss and spatial transformation. Secondly, respondent hesitancy was also recorded. Some potential participants were reluctant to talk about traumatic events, especially in the presence of their family or strangers; therefore, multiple visits were needed to gain the trust of the respondents. Thirdly, sampling bias was recorded in snowball sampling as it depends on social networks, so some sub-groups, potential contacts may have been overlooked or missed. Fourth, there were challenges in accessing data, as official records and maps of the corridor project were not publicly available, and municipal authorities were difficult to reach. This limited the triangulation method of findings since not much government documentation could be obtained for cross-checking residents' accounts. Finally, the data collected were not generalizable beyond the local contexts, as this was an exploratory research study.

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Appendix:

A. Questionnaire for People Affected by the Temple Corridor Project-

Section A: Basic Information:

1. Can you share a few basic details about yourself?
(Name, gender, education, caste, religion, occupation)

Section B: About Your Displacement

2. When were you asked to leave or relocate because of the Temple Corridor Project?
3. In which year did you have to move?
4. Did you have legal papers to prove ownership of your house or property before you were displaced?

Section C: Compensation & Support

5. Did the authorities offer you any compensation?
6. How would you describe the compensation you got?
7. Were you given another house or land as part of rehabilitation?
8. Did you get any help to restart your livelihood?
9. Do you feel the rehabilitation process was fair?

Section D: Life After Displacement

10. How are your living conditions now compared to before you were displaced?
11. Have you faced any problems getting education, healthcare, work, or community support

after moving?

12. Are you still living in the same city?
13. Has your income changed since the displacement?

Section E: Your Views on the Corridor Project

14. Did you support the idea of the Temple Corridor Project when it started?
15. Do you think people from your community were properly included in the planning and decision-making?
16. Do you feel the authorities handled the construction and displacement process fairly?
17. What do you miss the most about your old place before the corridor project?
18. What do you think about how the new corridor is changing the city today?

B. Attached below are some of the images taken during the research project-



See



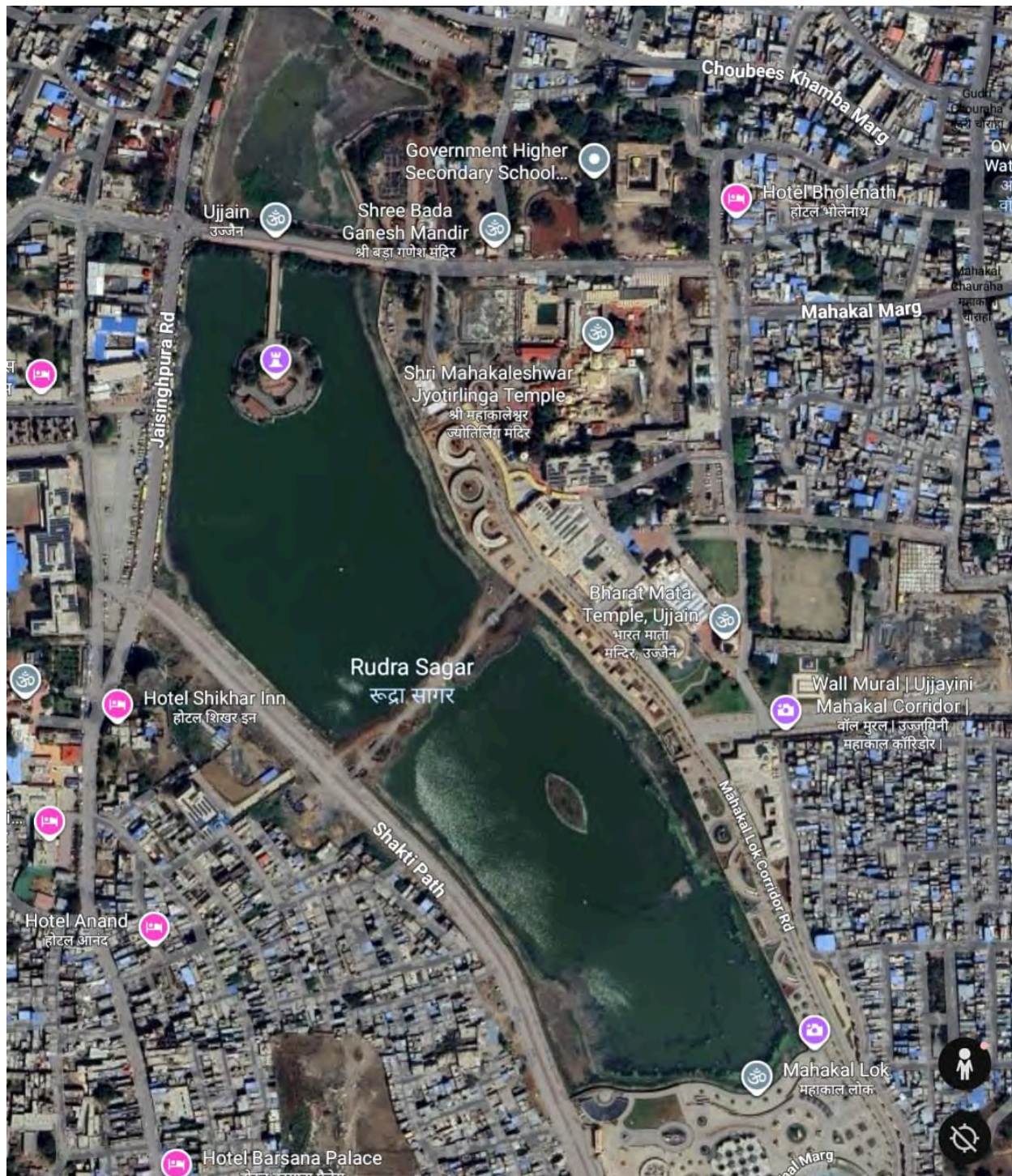


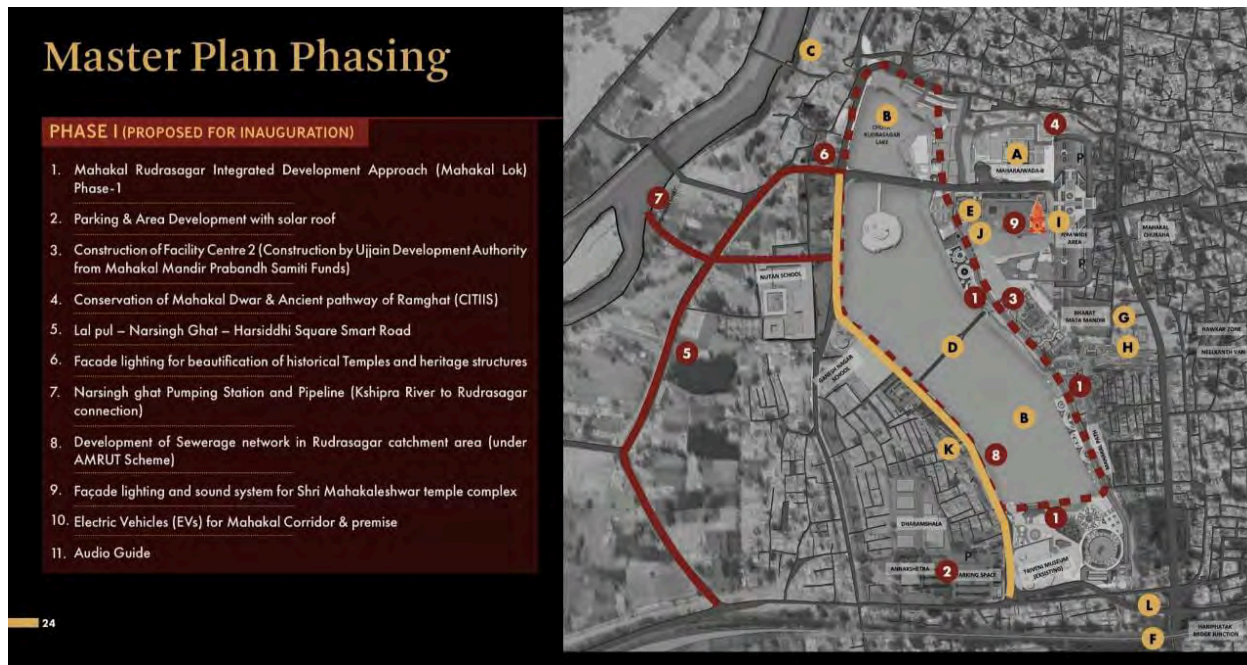












Images 1&2: Demolished houses beside the Mahakal Corridor

Images 3&4: Residents living under dire conditions

Image 5: The razed Takiya Masjid

Image 6: Displaced people left their numbers on their doors for others to contact them

Image 7: Some ramshackle houses remain alongside the rubble

Image 8: The Mahakal corridor road

Image 9: A collage showing the Shri Mahakaleshwar Temple and the Mahakal Lok Corridor

Image 10: Aerial view of the area where maximum demolition took place

Image 11: Aerial view of the Rudra Sagar Lake

Image 12: Numbered aerial view of the map showing the development in Phase 1 of the Mahakal

Lok Corridor Project.
