Resettling Hierarchies :

Caste, Religion and the In-Situ Redevelopment of Kathputli Colony

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Course: MA (F) Sociology

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1. Abstract

This study looks at how caste, religion, and community roles change amid the long displacement of residents from Kathputli Colony to the Anand Parbat transit camp in Delhi. Kathputli Colony, home to puppeteers, folk musicians, dancers, magicians, and migrants from Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Bengal, is one of Delhi's most culturally diverse informal settlements. Its selection as the city's first major in-situ redevelopment project promised new vertical flats on the same land. This redevelopment represented formal recognition for communities that have long been excluded from urban citizenship.However, after fourteen years of waiting in the transit camp, residents face a social environment marked by uncertainty, pressure, and reliance on one another. The move from the open, community-centered space of Kathputli to the cramped, closely packed tin structures of Anand Parbat changes how people interact. Groups that have traditionally been separated by caste and religion now meet daily in narrow lanes, shared bathrooms, water lines, and market areas. While biases remain such as the discomfort some upper-caste Hindu families feel toward Bihari Muslim residents, economic needs force daily interactions. Street vending, shared sanitation, and irregular water supply become important areas of cooperation, showing how the struggle for survival alters social distances.These interactions reflect Abdou Maliq Simone's (Simone,2004)concept of "people as infrastructure," where social ties and mutual support make up for poor formal services. Joint family living arrangements also influence community life, as older parents spend time outside cramped rooms, unintentionally strengthening neighborhood connections. Residents' visions for the future mix hope and hierarchy. More privileged caste groups worry about living in mixed vertical spaces, while Muslim families aspire to dignity through private bathrooms and cleaner environments. Still, a shared desire to return to their land unites all groups. Overall, the transit camp becomes a lively space where hierarchy, cooperation, hope, and insecurity coexist. It provides insight into how redevelopment changes urban landscapes and everyday social interactions.

Keywords: Kathputli Colony; Transit Camp; In-Situ Redevelopment; Caste; Religion; Everyday Life; Informal Settlements; Social Hierarchies; People as Infrastructure

2. Methodological Framework

2.1 Literature Review

The works of literature and the theoretical framework within which we locate our study is an amalgamation of urban sociology, logics of urbanism, critical infrastructural studies and the studies of neo-liberal city development.

Scholars like David Harvey, Gautam Bhan, and Amita Baviskar who write about neo-liberal modes of urbanisation, state patterns and people's place in this process hae been important to establish the context of our study that takes place in a developmental time and space and represent the conjunction of community and national aspirations. At the most macro level, David Harvey's concept of "the right to the city" provides a foundational critique. Harvey (2008) argues this right is not merely a right of access to urban resources, but a collective right to fundamentally reshape the processes of urbanization. He links this to "accumulation by dispossession," a contemporary mechanism where capital surpluses are absorbed by dispossessing the public of their wealth, often through urban land grabs and property market speculation. In Delhi, slum redevelopment projects involve the clearing of "informal" settlements from high-value urban land is a form of dispossession that frees up territory for real estate capital, effectively denying the urban poor their right to the city in favor of speculative profit.

Gautam Bhan's work, particularly *In the Public's Interest* (2016), offers a crucial reframing. Bhan moves beyond the narrative of victimhood to analyze the political agency of the urban poor. He examines the legal and political battles over eviction and resettlement in Delhi, arguing that the poor have successfully fought to establish certain "governance logics" and "regimes of entitlement," most notably the principle of resettlement. Bhan shifts the focus from the moment of eviction to the ongoing struggle over the *terms* of resettlement—the size of the plot, the location, the eligibility—revealing this as a key terrain of political negotiation where a distinctly urban citizenship is being forged. Bhan elucidates the language through the state furthers its policies of urbanisation. He argues the language of illegality and informality isn't arbitrary and is

firstly produced as an important aspect of governing land and secondly is weaponised against the most vulnerable.

Emma Tarlo's, Usha Ramanathan's, and Veronique Dupont's work on urbanisation in Delhi and its historical trajectory have been fundamental in understanding migration patterns, ideologies of urbanization, and the processes through which people settle and become part of the city life. Their work traces the urban ideology from the inception of Delhi as the political capital of India to the challenges that neo-liberalism throws its way.

Against these macro-structural and discursive forces, ethnographic work provides a vital counter-narrative by centering the lived experience of slum dwellers. Janice Perlman's longitudinal ethnography of favelas in Rio de Janeiro, *The Myth of Marginality* (1976), remains profoundly relevant. Perlman debunked the notion that slum dwellers are socially and politically marginal, instead revealing them to be well-integrated into the urban economy and possessing rich social networks. Similarly, AbdouMaliq Simone's (Simone,2004) work on inner-city Johannesburg focuses on the social and economic improvisation that constitutes urban life for the poor. He describes the city as a platform of "people as infrastructure," where residents create systems of support, exchange, and survival through fluid and flexible relationships.

This process is intricately tied to the transformation of urban infrastructure, as detailed by Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin in their seminal work, *Splintering Urbanism* (2001). Graham and Marvin argue that infrastructure is social and integral to people's lived experiences. Thus, the use and access to resources become important sites of urban conflict and complementation. Handpumps, bathrooms, stairs, buildings, open spaces, and media networks thus become social artifacts that produce urban life.

2.2 Research Questions

How do caste and religion influence everyday interactions and social relations in the Anand Parbat transit camp?

How do caste and religion influence the spatial distribution of residents within the transit camp?

2.3 Methodology

Our research uses an ethnographic method based on long-term engagement with residents of the Anand Parbat transit camp. Former inhabitants of Kathputli Colony have lived there for over a decade during the redevelopment process. Ethnography allowed us to immerse ourselves in the daily life of the camp. It helped us understand how social hierarchies, especially those of caste, religion, and community, are reproduced, changed, or challenged in urban spaces that are transitioning. A key part of our fieldwork involved semi-structured interviews with 28 residents. They represented various caste groups, religious communities, job types, and regional backgrounds. We also used participant observation, informal talks in galis, communal areas, and vending spots, while closely observing the camp's layout.

The semi-structured interviews aimed to uncover how people understand their daily lives in the transit camp. We looked at their relationships across caste and religious lines and how they envision their futures in the promised vertical flats. We started the interviews by collecting basic demographic details like age, family structure, and occupation. This helped us recognize generational differences in viewpoints. Older residents often spoke nostalgically about Kathputli and the challenges of adjusting to new circumstances. In contrast, younger participants framed their hopes around education, mobility, and the chance for better living conditions in the future flats. Next, we asked questions about religious and caste identities. We encouraged participants to explain how their identity influenced their interactions in both Kathputli and Anand Parbat. To track the settlement's history, we asked respondents when and why their families came to Delhi and specifically how they ended up in Kathputli Colony. This led to stories of migration from Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Bengal, shaped by traditional occupations like puppetry, folk music, juggling, and wage labor. Participants described Kathputli Colony not just as their home but as a cultural center that sustained family livelihoods. We also asked them when they moved to Anand Parbat, noting the uneven timelines of relocation and different experiences of eviction, demolition, and dealings with authorities. We then focused on everyday life in Kathputli compared to Anand Parbat. We invited residents to describe their old homes, including the layouts, spaces for performances, and community clustering. We contrasted these descriptions with their current living conditions: steep hill slopes, cramped tin rooms, poor ventilation, irregular water supply, and a lack of private space. Asking them to compare the two

let us see how displacement changed not just the physical environment but also the social and cultural atmosphere. We also explored the delays and promises of redevelopment. Residents shared when they first learned about the redevelopment, when they hoped to return, and how often deadlines changed. Our interviews also examined if and how the community changed after relocation. We asked residents if they felt their social circles had grown, shrunk, or remained the same in the new space. A key part of our interviews focused on daily interactions among different caste and religious groups. We asked residents to describe whom they spoke to, whom they avoided, and how relationships were affected by street vending, water access, and shared washrooms. Respondents often mentioned how caste prejudices remained symbolically, yet practical needs- borrowing items, buying vegetables, waiting together in water lines, forced them to interact. We also looked into state and police involvement, asking when these authorities show up in the camp and under what conditions. Residents recounted surprise inspections, water disputes, NGO visits, and interactions with DDA officials during election periods, showing that the state's presence is irregular but strategic. Finally, we asked about aspirations and imagined futures. Participants considered whether they thought they could afford life in the new flats, including maintenance fees, electricity bills, and lift costs, and what they hoped their lives would be like.

2.4 Ethical Considerations

Our research in the Anand Parbat transit camp required careful attention to ethics. This was especially important because the community has faced many visits from reporters, videographers, NGOs, and researchers. Many residents expressed that they often feel watched and questioned without seeing any real changes in their lives. This history of being observed informed our approach to fieldwork.

At every step, we prioritized informed consent, transparency, and respect. We clearly introduced ourselves as students and explained the purpose of our research. We emphasized that participation was voluntary and that people could decline or stop at any time. We avoided recording conversations without explicit permission and often chose not to take photographs to protect privacy and prevent discomfort. Since the camp is a place of uncertainty, we were careful

not to raise expectations or suggest that our work could influence the DDA or speed up the redevelopment process. We also ensured confidentiality by not including names or identifying details, especially when participants shared sensitive experiences about caste, religion, conflict, or interactions with authorities.

We remained aware of the power differences between researchers and residents and tried to minimize intrusion by respecting their daily routines. We avoided visiting during water collection times, mealtimes, or moments of family pressure. Much of our time was spent in informal conversations, sitting in the lanes, accepting their hospitality, and trying to understand their daily lives without disrupting them. In all our interactions, we aimed to conduct research that was compassionate, respectful, and grounded in humility. We recognized the community's long history of being studied and represented by outsiders.

3. Introduction

In the heart of Delhi, behind busy roads and construction mess, there is a hill that was never supposed to support a city. Anand Parbat, a rough incline of stone and dust, now holds a dense cluster of tin shanties. These metal rooms are packed so tightly that the thin walls often shake when someone coughs next door. Clotheslines hang above like makeshift power lines; water drums sit at the entrances of rooms; and narrow footpaths made of stones are the only routes for movement. Simple in structure but significant in meaning, this transit camp has hosted thousands of families for more than fourteen years. It was meant to be temporary. Instead, it has turned into a waiting room for a future that hasn't yet come.

To understand Anand Parbat, one must start with Kathputli Colony. Its residents still talk about it with mixed feelings of nostalgia, anger, and longing. Established in the 1970s by traveling puppeteers from Rajasthan, known as *kathputliwalas* who performed folk stories with painted wooden dolls, Kathputli Colony became one of Delhi's most lively and culturally rich informal settlements. Over the years, it transformed into a living archive of India's performing arts. Magicians, acrobats, snake charmers, folk musicians, dhol players, fire dancers, and traditional healers all found their place here. Eventually, migrant workers from Maharashtra, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Bengal joined them, bringing their languages, beliefs, skills, and social worlds. Kathputli Colony became a patchwork, fractured, diverse, creative, and resilient.

Yet, despite its cultural importance, the colony also symbolizes Delhi's contradictions: a city that celebrates culture while displacing its creators; a metropolis that relies on informal work yet ignores it. In 2008, the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) partnered with Raheja Developers to select Kathputli Colony as the first in-situ slum redevelopment project in the city's history. The plan was groundbreaking: residents would receive legal titles to multi-storey flats built on the land they had lived on for decades. However, to build these flats, they first had to relocate to a transit camp at Anand Parbat. When the move was announced, many thought it would only last two or three years. Fourteen years later, promises have been changed so many times that hope now seems worn out. The transit camp, originally meant as a short-term space, now operates as a

neighborhood with its own hierarchies, routines, conflicts, and dreams. It is within this extended state of transition that we focus our research.

We selected this location because in-situ redevelopment is more than just urban policy, it is a social experiment. It poses questions: What happens when long-standing communities are uprooted but not resettled? How do people rebuild routines in spaces that are both physically unstable and socially unsettled? What happens to caste and religious boundaries when everyone is squeezed into narrow lanes and shared resources? How do people envision futures that the state keeps delaying? The transit camp provides a unique perspective to explore these questions. Unlike other places of displacement where communities disperse throughout the city, Anand Parbat maintains its population. The same puppeteers, musicians, dancers, and laborers who lived in Kathputli Colony now reside on the slopes of Anand Parbat. This demographic continuity allows us to study how social relationships change when the spatial structure that once kept them in place collapses. In Kathputli, communities often lived in clusters—Rajasthani families together, Muslim families in certain lanes, upper-caste groups in more regulated areas. The settlement's layout played a role in maintaining these divisions. However, the transit camp mixed everyone up. People were assigned plots on a hill regardless of caste, religion, or job. Old boundaries blurred not because prejudice vanished, but because living conditions forced interactions in ways that were previously avoidable.

At the same time, the camp appears to be filled with hopes for the future. Almost every conversation eventually turns to the promised flats in Kathputli Colony. People see them as escape routes, symbols of dignity, and markers of belonging. Some view them with anxiety: upper-caste Hindu families fear having “anyone” next door, worrying about influence and the breakdown of community boundaries. Muslim families picture them optimistically: private bathrooms, permanent structures, enclosed homes, less oversight. Yet, across all groups, there is a common desire to return to their land and restart life with some stability.

This combination of waiting, negotiating, imagining, and surviving makes Anand Parbat a fascinating research site. Transit camps often appear as footnotes in policy documents, temporary setups meant to support communities for a bit. But in reality, they become spaces for

understanding the urban poor's relationship with the state, their ways of resisting, their coexistence strategies, and their visions for the future. In the case of Kathputli, in-situ redevelopment was celebrated as a progressive model. However, its long, uncertain timeline reveals the gap between urban planning's promises and the day-to-day realities of those trying to live through the transition.

This paper, then, starts not with a policy statement but with a human one: in places where uncertainty is the norm, people do not just wait, they rebuild, rethink, and renegotiate their lives. By studying Anand Parbat, we aim to grasp not only what redevelopment does to a community but what a community does with redevelopment, how it adapts, endures, and imagines a future on a hill that was never meant to be home.

4. Kathputli Colony in the Urban Order of Delhi

The old was dying, the new was in preparation, and we were living in the in-between, when nothing was resolved, everything was potential. Everyone was trying to absorb, to imagine what the city – and their own lives – might become.

- Capital : A Portrait of 21st Century Delhi by Rana Dasgupta

It is hard to contain Delhi within the limited grasps of words and explanations of what makes it a city and how this city came into being. In their introduction to 'Delhi: Urban Space and Human Destinies', Dupont, Tarlo and Vidal (2000) discuss the historical trajectory of the city where it has served the site of temptations and aspirations of its rulers, made and remade into new forms. Be it the various Mughal capital cities on the land of Delhi as we know it now or Jawaharlal Nehru's speech from the Red Fort on the eve of Independence that purported to assign new meanings of an independent India to the city and its history, Delhi has been redefined multiple times. The tale of Delhi is like a fable with multiple versions, each equally true to its tellers. However a ruler's, an architect's or a planner's tale of Delhi tends to obscure the stories of its villages, its people, and their dreams and desires.

From an administrative vantage, the urban imagination of Delhi lends itself to its making into the political capital of the nation. Colonial remnants intersected with transformations brought about by partition and the new meanings attached to the city. Delhi found itself in the midst of great movements of political authority and people who came to settle in the city. In 1957, the Delhi Development Authority was established to lay down urban planning and ensure a legitimate vision for the city. This involved the making of new maps, categorisation of spaces that further led to a new vocabulary for reading the city, and developmental policies whose outlook grew from that of catering to a political centre to an international one. Meanwhile between 1950 and 1999, the population of Delhi grew by 14 million and in 2025, it reached over 34 million[1].

Millions of people came to settle in the city in search of better opportunities, jobs and lives. A promise of urbanisation, globalisation and progress pulls people in pursuit of their aspirations.

Mike Davis in ‘The Planet of Slums’ (2006) studies the prevalence of slums in urban centres, especially in the developing world, as a condition symptomatic of the urban order itself. One that is ideologically reflective of neoliberal policy and ethos of global aspirations and a movement of the state away from the public. Urbanisation requires populations but tends to fail above a certain limit. Davis explains that what is considered a result of bad planning and a responsibility of the poor is a facet of urbanisation in countries like India and South Africa where people through the practices of squatting and ‘encroachment’ come to inhabit the city. This squatting; this occupancy, is understood by Benjamin as a distinct form of political agency, a defense against absolute precarity.

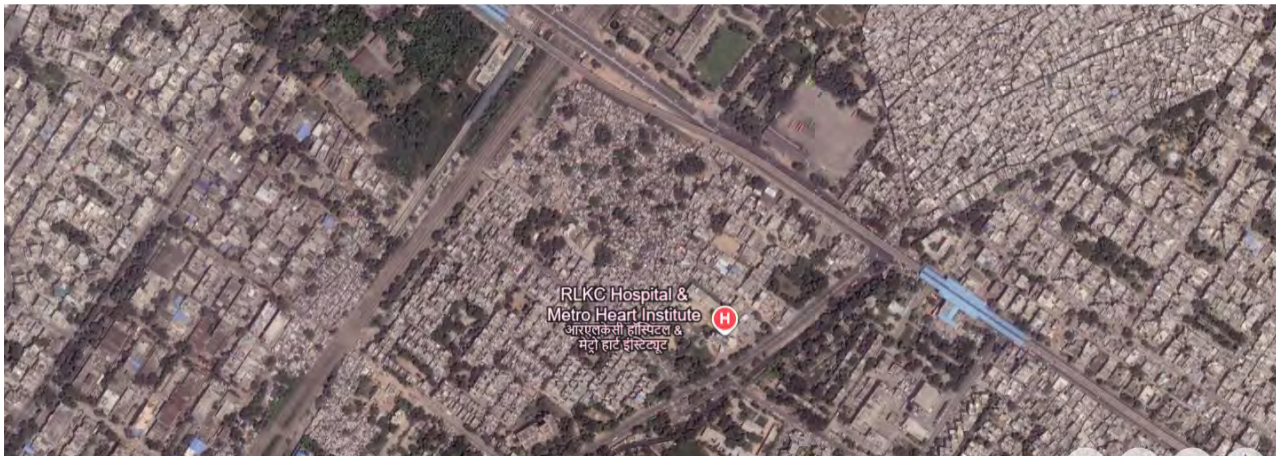
In the context of Delhi, slums are often referred to as jhuggi-jhopri colonies or Bastis, legally defined as informal settlements on public land and have been central to the project of urbanism. The urban order in contemporary times, in Davis’ terms, produces these slums due its inability to account for the population who reside in them, the most vulnerable and dispossessed in the city, on whose labour it runs. The state response to this situation in Delhi has been that of redevelopment and rehabilitation and first such began as early as the 1960s and heightened during the Emergency involving forced evictions, demolitions and violence. Slum development involved relocating the population to another, usually peripheral territories while the area is utilised for other purposes such as real estate projects. In recent times, slum redevelopment has been a public-private partnership where private firms are given land to redevelop for their own use on the condition of additional affordable housing for those displaced.

A group of Rajasthani folk artists along with other groups involved in the informal economy started settling down in a part of West Delhi known as Shadipur in the 1970s. In the subsequent years, the settlement expanded to different kinds of artists and workers from Kalandars and Snake-charmers to Drum Makers and Construction workers. The colony which came to be known as Kathputli, named after the Rajasthani puppeteers, belonged to many. It covered nearly 13 acres of Delhi and became a site of amalgamation of multiple cultural and linguistic groups along with that of contestation and conflict.

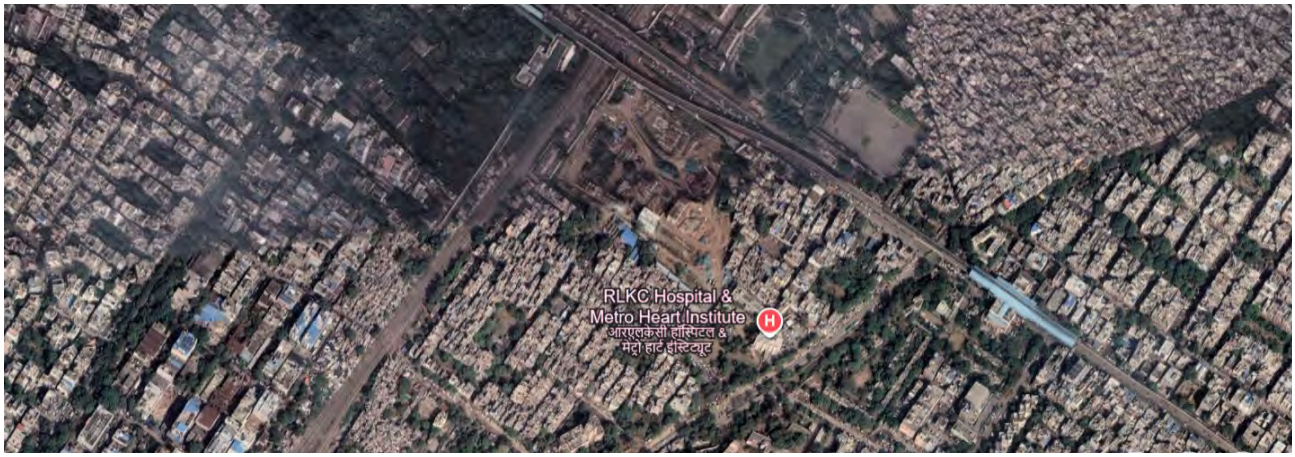
In the 1980s, two policies, the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) and the Rajiv Awas Yojana (RAY) evidence a major shift in the role of the state, from being a provider of housing and amenities to being an enabler through the promotion of public-private partnerships, the reliance on market mechanisms, and the use of land as a resource (Harvey 1989; Sengupta 2005; Dupont 2008). Following this, in 1986, the Delhi Development Authority started their project of redevelopment of Kathputli and it was in 2008 that the tender was awarded to Raheja developers to construct a skyscraper of luxury flats for the open market and affordable housing for the residents of Kathputli. However, the Raheja developers established a regime of eligibility which recognised 2800 EWS (Economically Weaker Sections) to be constructed and ensured relocation of those who could provide the proof of residence dated on or before 2011 to a transit camp 4-5 KMs away. People with proof of residence between 2011-2015 were relocated to Narela, on the outskirts of Delhi.

Kathputli slum redevelopment is Delhi's first in-situ project which means that it aims at relocation of its residence to the site it seeks to redevelop instead of relocation to a peripheral territory. The public-private partnership laid down the terms that a 15-storey building will be constructed for the residents of Kathputli and the rest of the land would be utilised to build 54 storey skyscrapers for the open market. Guatam Bhan in 'In the Public's Interest' (2016) argues that the juridical vocabulary of illegality/informality gives legitimacy to how the problem of urban poverty and dispossession is dealt with. With an imposed extra-legal status, residents of Kathputli currently exist in a space between the rule of law and its imposition or enforcement.

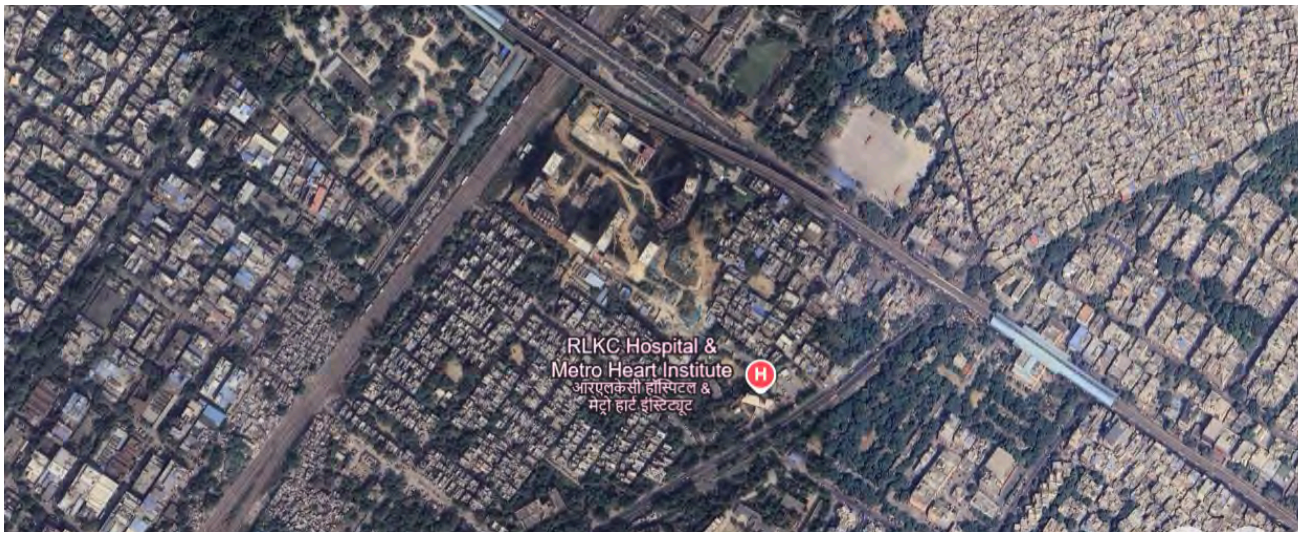
The residents of Kathputli were transferred to Anand Parbat transit camp. This transitional space looms in between a precarious permanency and a speculative temporariness as it has been 17 years since the promise of relocation was made to them. This space is transitional in many senses. It is one where people lead lives of transition- negotiating with substantial changes in their lived spaces, community relations, infrastructure, and livelihood.



Kathputli Colony, Shadipur, 2015 | source: Google Earth



Kathputli Colony, Shadipur, 2020 | source: Google Earth



Kathputli Colony, Shadipur, 2024 | source: Google Earth

5. Anand Parbat: The Transit Camp

Anand Parbat is a place where geography plays a significant role in shaping its layout. Built on a steep, uneven hill, it looks like an accidental city made of stone. Tin rooms cling to the slope, some supported by bricks and planks to adjust to the incline, and others are packed closely together, making the walls appear as one continuous sheet of metal. This transit camp has been home to residents of Kathputli Colony for more than fourteen years as they await a redevelopment project that promises to return them to new flats on their original land. What started as a temporary arrangement has turned into a long-term home in a state of uncertainty.

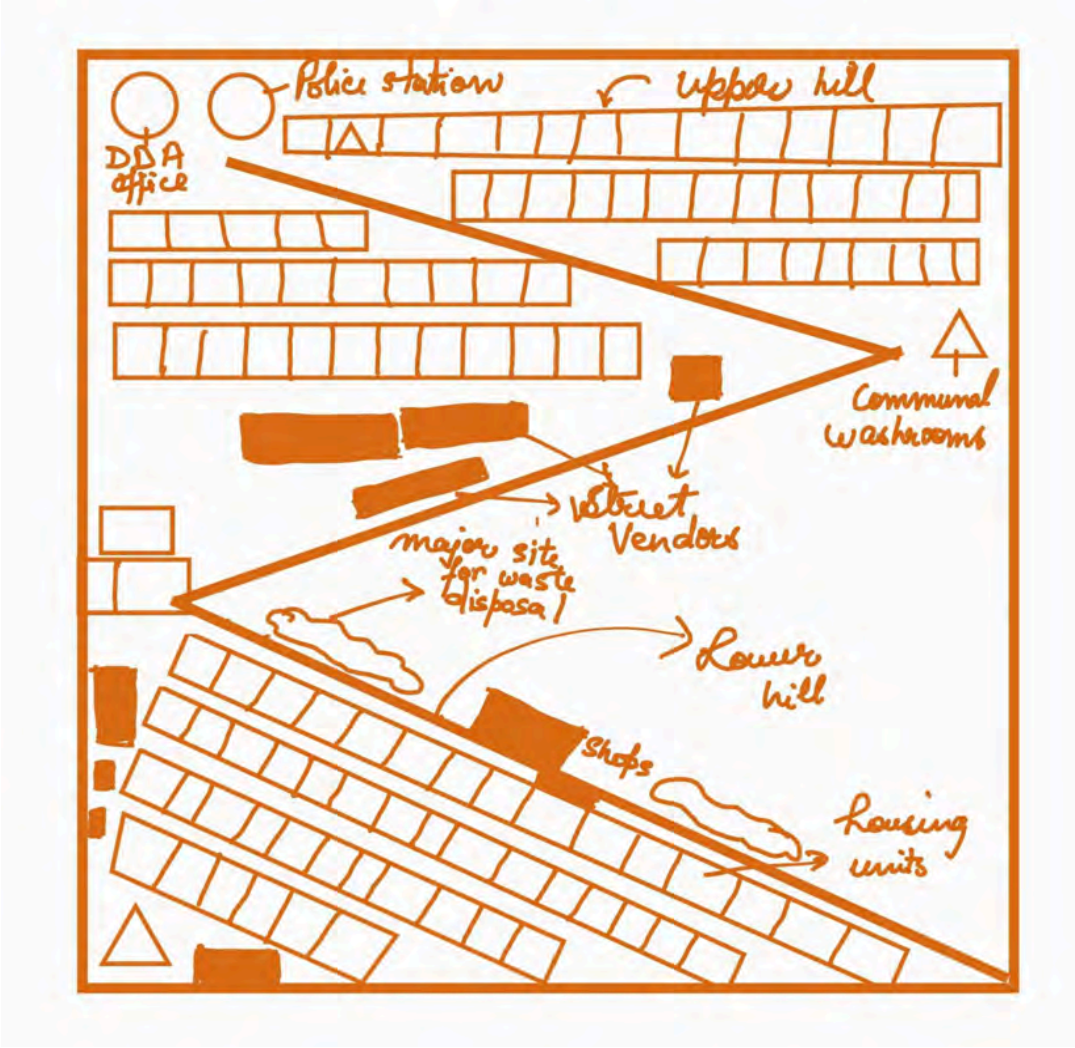


Fig 1. Rough Sketch of Anand Parbat

To understand the layout, one must first look at the hill. Unlike Kathputli Colony, which spreads horizontally across flat land, Anand Parbat is arranged vertically. The camp rises in layers, beginning at the lower slope near the main road, moving up to the middle ridge, and finally reaching the upper hill that overlooks the entire area. Each level affects life in different ways.

The lower hill is the most crowded. The main lane running through this section is easy to spot on the map; it acts as the camp's main thoroughfare. Rooms open directly onto it. Many families were placed here without the chance to choose their location, resulting in people from various regions and communities living closely together. Families who migrated from Maharashtra, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Bengal, and other states all share this tight space. Their placement was based on availability, and most residents had to accept whoever unit they were assigned during relocation. Consequently, the lower section turned into a mosaic of families with diverse languages, caste affiliations, religious identities, and job backgrounds.

The lack of opportunity to cluster with familiar groups, as they did in Kathputli Colony, has made the lower hill a site of daily interaction. The lanes are wide enough for constant movement. Street vendors set up stalls outside their rooms, selling goods that support the camp's economy. Children play on the pathways. Daily life spills into the lanes since the rooms are small with poor ventilation, turning the lower hill into a public living room for everyone.

As you move upward, the middle slope becomes narrower and more fragmented. The pathways twist sharply as they wind up the incline. Houses here have been built by leveling the ground below them, often using stones arranged like steps to create flat flooring. People sit on small platforms outside their rooms, sometimes adding makeshift tin roofs for shade. The middle slope acts as a transitional space, less busy than the lower level and not as isolated as the upper ridge.

At the top lies the upper hill, a distinct area with its own character. Families living here often mention the long climb as a daily challenge, yet they value the relative peace compared to the crowded lower slope. Notably, some puppet-making communities managed to settle together on this upper ridge. They negotiated during the relocation process to secure adjacent units, regaining a sense of clustering that resembled their earlier neighborhoods in Kathputli. Thus, the upper hill

reflects both physical distance and subtle social differences. While life is more difficult in terms of access, families here find greater familiarity and comfort in sharing their surroundings with people from their own community. Their platforms serve as gathering places where elders tell stories or observe the activity below. On the upper hill, we also see the DDA office as well as the police station symbolizing the state power residing at the top of the hill.

The hill not only influences settlement patterns but also affects the sharing of communal resources. The first washroom was built at the bottom of the slope, forcing those on the upper levels to climb down multiple times a day. Later, NGOs added more units at different levels.

The waste was mainly observed in the lower part of the hill, an abandoned, destroyed car was being used as the waste disposal site. This was just in front of the rooms of the ones residing at the lower hill, almost at the entrance of the hill. Thus, on the basis of our observation, pathways of the upper hill seemed way cleaner and taken care of than the lower hill which had a distinct smell due to the waste disposal on the roads.

Visibility is another defining feature of the camp's structure. The houses are tightly arranged, and entrances face each other, providing little privacy. Doors open into pathways, conversations can be heard across walls, and even family disputes play out in public view. This openness fosters a social atmosphere where everyone is aware of everyone else's routines. In many respects, life here is collective because the geography does not allow for solitude.

Overall, the layout of Anand Parbat shows a settlement shaped not just by displacement but by the demands of the hill. The incline physically separates people while also connecting them in new ways. Those on the lower hill live in proximity due to necessity, while those on the upper hill recreate old networks in a place that feels new. Across all levels, the hill serves as a quiet organizer of life, guiding movement, shaping interactions, and redefining the community's boundaries.

6. Day to day Interactions

6.1 Assertion of Cultural Identities

In a heterogenous space such as the Anand Parbat, one gets to see the myriad ways, rituals and processes through which people establish relationships with each other. The landscape is marked by continuities and discontinuities. The discontinuity between the present and the past marked by uprootment of homes and rooting them in a new space and the continuity of traditions and rituals, in newer forms. This continuity is practiced through various modes.

One such mode is language. As one enters Anand Parbat, the linguistic tongues heard help in distinguishing groups that have to co-exist in precarity. Many second and third generation families, having lived their entire lives in Delhi spoke in their native languages albeit most of them never got a chance to visit their ancestral homes. The diversity of the linguistic landscape of Anand Parbat is a soundscape of migration that comes to define and build the city of Delhi. Our respondents would switch between Hindi and their native tongues, Hindi to inform us of their lives and respond to the questions we asked and their native tongues to laugh and skirmish with their relatives and friends. In oscillating between the two languages, whatever was lost to translation is an absence that characterizes Anand Parbat where people resort to complaining as an assertion of what is due to them. Language is one medium through which the multiple others are demarcated by communities. Some other mediums include religious motifs, caste assertions, and occupational knowledge systems.

Symbols accentuate an otherwise arid space. Trees, pedestals, and common grounds are often used for religious purposes where various groups install make-shift temples, places of worship, and sacred objects. Each gali one traverses is an experience of spectating a change in symbolic representation of the different communities, their beliefs and identities. On the foothills of Anand Parbat, many walls carry the call of ‘Jai Bhim’ and paintings of Lord Buddha. While uphill, the picture is different with people invoking various regional deities.

Image: Homes on the foothill of Anand Parbat.

People wear their identities on sleeves, some have to due to their ostracization within the space while others do it proudly to assert a difference that carries the tone of superiority. Sonically as well, Anand Parbat, much like other densely populated areas of Delhi, presents a picture where the noises of children playing catch gets harmonised with Azan from the neighbouring Masjid. Various sounds and tonality shapes the soundscape of Anand Parbat, becoming reminiscent of the precarity of urban life for those who are socio-economically marginal. The cultural fabric isn't structured into neatly defined social compartments but instead presents a unique relationship with temporality. In the act of waiting for the final settlement into improved homes, people find and construct ways to keep their traditions afloat, often in tandem and opposition to others.

5.2 Communal Spaces and Resources

In Anand Parbat, communal spaces and shared resources are essential parts of life in the settlement. They shape how people interact and navigate the challenges of living on a steep hill. Unlike Kathputli Colony, where residents lived in clusters on flat land based on caste, religion, region, and occupation, Anand Parbat forces these groups into a steep area. Here, physical closeness and shared needs often override the boundaries that once defined social interactions.

The layout of the transit camp makes communal spaces hubs of cooperation, conflict, and ongoing negotiation.

Image- Vendors on the pathways

In Anand Parbat, communal spaces and shared resources are essential parts of life in the settlement. They shape how people interact and navigate the challenges of living on a steep hill. Unlike Kathputli Colony, where residents lived in clusters on flat land based on caste, religion, region, and occupation, Anand Parbat forces these groups into a steep area. Here, physical closeness and shared needs often override the boundaries that once defined social interactions. The layout of the transit camp makes communal spaces hubs of cooperation, conflict, and ongoing negotiation.

A visitor to the camp quickly notices that life spills outdoors. The rooms are often too small, cramped, and hot to contain daily activities. People naturally flow into the lanes. Women sit outside their rooms chopping vegetables or washing dishes. Children do homework on stools along the paths. Laundry hangs on ropes overhead, creating a temporary shelter. The lanes of Anand Parbat are not just pathways; they are extensions of homes and open stages where daily life unfolds. Because the houses are packed together, these lanes become shared spaces, prompting interactions through casual greetings, conversations, and routine chores.

These lanes hold special significance for joint families. Many older parents spend most of the day outside to give married children privacy indoors. The lanes become their preferred spots to rest, observe their surroundings, or talk with neighbors. Through these exchanges, elders play a key role in maintaining neighborhood connections. Their presence anchors social life within the camp and emphasizes that communal space is vital for emotional support as well as physical movement.

Street vending is another important aspect of community interaction. Residents depend on vending within the settlement, turning the lanes into both economic and social pathways. People sell vegetables, snacks, everyday goods, and essential items. Even when communities feel hesitant, like Hindu families being uncomfortable around Bihari Muslim vendors, basic needs prompt routine cooperation. Buyers and sellers interact daily, exchanging pleasantries, negotiating prices, and depending on each other. The settlement functions as a semi-closed economy where avoidance isn’t possible, and daily exchanges subtly change social boundaries.

Among the most shared and contested areas in the camp are the washrooms and water points. Initially, there was only one washroom at the bottom of the hill. Residents from the upper and middle slopes had to make the tiring trip down several times a day. Later, NGOs added more washrooms, but their distribution remained uneven and insufficient for the population. These washrooms serve families from various caste and religious backgrounds, making them unavoidable spaces for shared routines. Although tensions can arise over cleaning, usage, or waiting, residents must find a way to share these facilities. The washrooms thus become places

where the boundaries that defined social life in Kathputli are frequently crossed, albeit begrudgingly.

Water scarcity creates its own system of collective organization. Water supply is unpredictable, and residents often don't know when the taps will flow. When water does come, people rush to gather with buckets, drums, and containers. Waiting for water creates a social atmosphere driven by urgency rather than identity. During long waits, people chat, argue, laugh, share news, or express frustration. These water points become sites of cooperation, as neighbors assist each other with containers or notify one another when the supply starts. They also become important spaces for collective action. When water is delayed or insufficient, residents often unite and approach the Delhi Development Authority or NGO workers to demand better access. Water turns into not just a necessity but a common issue that motivates residents to come together across caste and religious lines.

This kind of social organization highlights AbdouMaliq Simone's (Simone, 2004) idea of people as infrastructure. In areas where formal infrastructure is weak or inconsistent, social relationships provide the foundation for the settlement. In Anand Parbat, people depend on one another for information, labor, emotional support, and sometimes even survival. The lanes, washrooms, and water taps are where this informal infrastructure is continually created. People help each other carry heavy buckets uphill, share food or tools, resolve disputes, and work together to maintain parts of the settlement. Social relations stand in for the inadequate physical infrastructure provided by the state.

However, communal spaces do not eliminate hierarchy entirely. Caste and religious beliefs still influence how people view one another. Some residents feel uncomfortable sharing washrooms after certain groups or worry about their children playing with neighbors from different backgrounds. Yet these feelings rarely lead to avoidance. The settlement's density and the need for shared resources force residents to interact. Many long-standing boundaries soften under daily pressures but do not completely vanish. Communal spaces become areas where hierarchy is quietly negotiated, resisted, or altered. The hill itself acts as a physical framework that shapes social life. Families on the upper slope often form tight clusters because they are physically

distanced from the constant activity on the lower slope. Some communities, as mentioned earlier, linked to occupations like puppet-making, secured nearby living spaces during relocation and recreated older neighborhood patterns higher up. Their terraces overlook the camp and often serve as informal gathering areas where children practice skills, women socialize, or elders relax in the evenings. In contrast, the lower slope features a much more diverse mix of residents who have been placed there without choice. This variety, combined with its accessibility, makes the lower hill the most socially vibrant area in the camp.

Throughout the hill, communal spaces extend beyond official resources to include informal gathering spots. A wide lane corner, a stone platform in front of a room, a shaded area by a water drum, or the foot of a staircase quickly becomes a meeting place. People come together to chat, wait for water, rest during the afternoon, or simply observe what's happening around them. These areas arise from practice rather than planning and become vital sites of community life.

In Anand Parbat, communal spaces and shared resources highlight the everyday activities that support life amid uncertainty. They show a world built not on formal infrastructure but on negotiation, cooperation, and resilience. The camp's steep layout, crowded housing, and close proximity create a social environment where people must rely on each other. The communal areas in Anand Parbat demonstrate how daily survival pushes people to cross boundaries, adapt, and form communities in ways that cannot be pre-planned but emerge through their everyday practices.

5.3 Imagined Future

Conversations about the future in the Anand Parbat transit camp often return to one topic: the promised vertical flats in Kathputli Colony. Even though more than fourteen years have passed since their relocation, the idea of going back to their land continues to shape the hopes and everyday discussions of residents. This imagined future is not a single dream. Instead, it consists of various desires, fears, and expectations influenced by caste, religion, class, and experiences in the transit camp.

For many residents, the future flat symbolizes an escape from the uncertainty and instability of camp life. Living in tin homes on a steep hill, dealing with irregular water supply, sharing washrooms, and cramped rooms makes daily life exhausting and stressful. The flat represents a sense of stability and dignity, a private space where daily routines no longer depend on the unpredictable conditions of the hill. Families express the hope of having a place they can lock and call their own. This shared dream is emphasized by the fact that every resident has paid a twenty-five thousand rupee down payment for the flat. That payment signifies not just a financial commitment but a moral claim: we have paid, so we deserve this home.

However, beyond this common longing, the vision of the future differs significantly among communities.

For more privileged caste groups, the vertical flat brings both hope and concern. Many upper caste Hindu families, particularly those who lived in more homogenous neighborhoods in old Kathputli Colony, express worries about who might live next door. In the transit camp, where forced proximity combines different communities, these residents often feel uneasy about their children interacting too freely with neighbors they view as “different.” When they think of the vertical flats, they worry their kids might develop “bad habits,” adopt undesirable speech, or be influenced by what they term “gande log,” or polluted people. These fears are not always openly discussed, but they come up in daily conversations. The shift to vertical living threatens the established social order that caste traditionally supports. In Kathputli Colony, neighborhoods often reflected social divisions. In a multi-storey building, those lines blur. There is no “upper caste lane” or “community section.” Doors simply stand next to one another. For these families, the imagined future involves navigating new social interactions they cannot fully control. Their hope for a better home is mixed with worries about moral order, their children's social lives, and the breakdown of familiar hierarchies.

In contrast, Muslim families with whom we interacted, see the vertical flats as spaces providing the safety, dignity, and privacy they have long been denied. In the transit camp, many Muslim households face both subtle and overt forms of exclusion, whether through reluctance to share washrooms, avoidance from upper caste Hindu families, or whispered suspicions. For them, the

vertical flat stands for not just a new home but a way to escape constant judgment. Their most common dream is to have an indoor washroom. The thought of not sharing facilities with multiple families, avoiding conflict or scrutiny at the tap or toilet, and managing daily routines privately is closely tied to their dignity. They envision a home where cleanliness, modesty, and independence can be maintained without outside interference. Even when acknowledging that social differences will persist, they believe the design of the flats will offer them a buffer, a boundary they can control for the first time in years.

For many Dalit and lower caste residents whom we interviewed, the hope for the future focuses on the possibility of upward mobility. They take pride in the prospect of owning a "pakka makan". They are hopeful that the new addresses on official documents will lead to better recognition. Some believe that a permanent flat may lessen discrimination or, at the very least, provide a sense of legitimacy absent in the transit camp, characterized by tin walls and fragile structures. Their view of the future centers more on the desire to be "settled," a term that comes up frequently in their discussions.

Despite these differences, the residents' collective longing is united by exhaustion. The steep hill, irregular water supply, shared bathrooms, cramped living quarters, bureaucratic uncertainties, shifting deadlines, and repeated promises from the DDA all frame daily life. For many, envisioning the flat helps them cope with the present. It serves as a mental goal that prevents frustration from turning into despair. This future is both personal and collective. It is shared in conversations at the water tap, gossip among women, children's artwork, late-night talks during power outages, and elders reminiscing about when they were first told their new homes would be "ready soon."

Most importantly, this imagined future shows that redevelopment is not just a physical change but also an emotional and social one. It reshapes hope. It stirs old hierarchies into new forms. It generates anxieties where there were none and creates aspirations that seemed unattainable before. As Gautam Bhan (Bhan, 2013) reminds us, redevelopment sites are where laws, aspirations, and social order connect. In Anand Parbat, people navigate that intersection daily,

envisioning futures that promise dignity, privacy, belonging, or control, depending on their position in the social fabric.

Yet, no matter how differently they imagine their future, almost all residents share one sentiment: they want to return to the land that was once theirs. They seek the security of a permanent home. They wish for the waiting to end. Above all, they hope to escape the hardship of the hill and rebuild their lives on solid ground.

7. Conclusion

Our study of Anand Parbat and the effects of displacement on private and public lives of its residents presents the site as a production of the process of urbanisation in Delhi. This site is dynamic and is established upon the dichotomies of legal/illegal, formal/informal, and the public/private purported by the urban order and within whose oppositions loom the residents of Anand Parbat. The social and economic improvisation that helps residents navigate the narrow, crowded lanes of Anand Parbat—the shared childcare, informal vending, cooperative water collection, and the role of elders as social anchors—creates a crucial, though often invisible, support system that keeps life going when formal systems fail. This social fabric is, however, under constant pressure.. The complex negotiation of caste and religious hierarchies reveals both the potential for transformation and the deep power of social divisions. The transit camp's layout, which brings together previously separated communities, does not eliminate biasYet, the necessity of daily survival—buying vegetables, sharing a water tap, or using a common path—forces a reluctant cooperation born out of closeness. Social boundaries become more fluid under the strain of basic needs, but they are still woven into future hopes, with privileged groups anxious about maintaining exclusivity.

In the end, the "imagined future" of the vertical flat serves as a strong, unifying, yet divisive force. It represents a shared dream of escaping the uncertainties of the hill, while also being a canvas for different social groups to cast their fears and hopes. In conclusion, Anand Parbat's story reflects the current urban situation in places like Delhi. It shows that slum redevelopment is not simply a technical fix for informality, but a deeply political process that reshapes space, society, and citizenship.

The transit camp, in its persistence, stops being a temporary holding area and becomes a battleground where the urban poor, caught between state promises and market demands, work hard to rebuild their lives. Anand Parbat and the in-site redevelopment of Kathputli Colony reflects a particular mode of urban development that produces spaces of ‘transition’ that

redefines temporality as experienced anxiously in reconciling with a displaced past and an uncertain future.

Endnotes

1. https://www.macrotrends.net/datasets/global-metrics/cities/21228/delhi/population

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