

## SHIFTING URBAN REDEVELOPMENT POLICIES AND THE ASPIRATIONS FOR A SLUM FREE INDIA: EXPERIENCES OF URBAN POOR IN DELHI

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**Abstract:** The last two decades have witnessed momentous shifts in the policies of urban development in India. For instance, the earlier policies of ‘slum removal’, ‘slum relocation’, and ‘slum resettlement’ have, in theory, been remodelled as in-situ redevelopment and in-situ up gradation. This shift corresponds to similar policy changes in many other countries of the global south, notably in Latin America, South Asia and Africa which underwent transition to a neo-liberal model of urban redevelopment. This shift was largely guided by the dominant international discourse advocating the ‘formalising of informal’ and ‘legalising of illegal’. With respect to the housing for urban poor, it translates into providing them with security of tenure and ownership rights. In India, the ‘Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission’ (JNNURM) was launched by the UPA government as a key driver to push the neo-liberal agenda of creating slum free cities in 2009 which was reintroduced by the NDA government in 2014, with a new nomenclature, the ‘Smart City Mission’. In 2008, a flagship housing scheme, viz., the Rajiv Ratn Awas Yojna (RRAY) was pre-launched under the aegis of JNNURM with the explicit purpose of rehabilitating the slum dwellers in Delhi. Based on a long ethnographic study and ‘right to the city’ perspective (Harvey, 1982 and Lefebvre 1991), my paper narrates the experiences of the beneficiaries of this housing scheme, resettled at Bawana Industrial District on the North West periphery of Delhi. It also, revisits Delhi’s slum rehabilitation policy timeline to contextualise these experiences in a state sponsored neoliberal urban regime. The paper, thus, deconstructs the ‘myth’ of rehabilitation in the urban planning and policy discourse.

### INTRODUCTION

The last two decades have witnessed momentous shifts in the policies of urban development in India. For instance, the earlier policies of ‘slum removal’, ‘slum relocation’, and ‘slum resettlement’ have, in theory, been remodelled as in-situ redevelopment and in-situ up gradation. This shift corresponds to similar policy changes in many other countries of the global south, notably in Latin America, South Asia and Africa which underwent transition to a neo-liberal model of urban redevelopment. This shift was largely guided by the dominant international discourse advocating the ‘formalising of informal’ and ‘legalising of illegal’. With respect to the housing for urban poor, it translates into providing them with security of tenure and ownership rights. In India, the ‘Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission’ (JNNURM) was launched by the UPA government as a key driver to push the neo-liberal agenda of creating slum free cities in 2009 which was reintroduced by the NDA government in 2014, with a new nomenclature, the ‘Smart City Mission’. In 2008, a flagship housing scheme, viz., the Rajiv Ratn Awas Yojna (RRAY) was pre-launched under the aegis of JNNURM with the explicit purpose

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of rehabilitating the slum dwellers in Delhi. Based on a long ethnographic study and ‘right to the city’ perspective (Harvey, 1982 and Lefebvre 1991), my paper narrates the experiences of the beneficiaries of this housing scheme, resettled at Bawana Industrial District on the North West periphery of Delhi. It also, revisits Delhi’s slum rehabilitation policy timeline to contextualise these experiences in a state sponsored neoliberal urban regime. The paper, thus, deconstructs the ‘myth’ of rehabilitation in the urban planning and policy discourse.

### **THE CONTEXT: PLANNING FAILURE AND EMERGENCE OF SLUMS**

The trauma of partition of India brought a huge influx of refugees to Delhi. The demographic history of Delhi reveals that the population of Delhi doubled in the five years following partition<sup>1</sup>. A gigantic challenge of providing housing and commercial space to these refugees loomed large before the new government. The Improvement Trust and the Municipal Body of Delhi were not equipped to face this challenge. During the years immediately preceding India’s independence, these refugees occupied all the open spaces, parks, railway station etc. and lived in relief camps. Their number kept on growing and there were no employment opportunities either. Squatters began to grow at that time. This was the condition in not just Delhi, but in many other parts of the country as well. In response to this huge demographic and economic crisis, the union government of India passed a Slum Improvement and Clearance Act in 1956. It also established a planning body, the Delhi Development Authority or DDA through another act called DDA Act 1957 and entrusted it with the task of planning, building and regulating the modern Delhi.

The DDA prepared the First Master Plan of Delhi (MPD, hence forth) in 1962 with the assistance of Ford Foundation experts. This was a phase of massive construction of buildings, residential colonies, markets, offices, banks, colleges, schools, hospitals, institutions and roads. Significantly, the first MPD had stipulated that 25% of all residential land was to be reserved for housing the urban poor. However, DDA, failed abysmally in its task by focusing exclusively on building residential colonies and infrastructure for the middle and the upper classes. It conveniently overlooked the need to provide housing to the vast numbers of migrant labourers who were brought from neighbouring states (provinces) by the contractors for the making of Delhi. This in-migrating labour was initially made to live on or near the site of construction in hutments or *Jhuggi Jhopris*. As this labour grew, labour camps were established which later turned into JJ clusters and slums. So the poor labourers’ were completely excluded from the planning process and the capital became a site of stark socio-spatial inequalities<sup>2</sup>.

The question arises- *why did the government fail to construct houses for the urban poor?* The reason was that India’s development discourse and practice at that time had a decided anti-urban bias. India was supposed to be residing in its villages

while housing for urban poor was not a priority of the government. Besides, urban poverty was taken to be a consequence of rural poverty.

As most of the slums were located on land owned by DDA, it would not be incorrect to infer that these slums arose as “planned illegalities” (Bhan, 2013) or as a manifestation of what Solomon Benjamin (1996) calls “occupancy urbanism”. Another researcher, Ghertner (2015), too, observes that this does not constitute an act of “squatting”, as it is commonly depicted. The continued survival of slums could be explained as an outcome of the negotiable boundaries between the formal plans and their municipal implementation, which were frequently exploited by the local politicians for vote bank politics. It is common knowledge now, that most of the slums were deliberately settled by private labour contractors during late 1960s to late 80s with a tacit approval of regulatory authorities. Chakrabarti puts it as “T[t]hus a complex pattern of urban form has emerged, in which the ‘informal’ and the ‘illegal’ have developed an intricate and organic relationship with the ‘formal’ and the ‘legal’ system” (2001: 1)<sup>3</sup>.

These urban negotiations also paved the way for the emergence of what is referred to as “informal urbanisation”. As Robert Rocco and Jan Van Ballegoijen in the context of Sao Paulo, write:

“...informal urbanisation is not a pragmatic solution for the lack of formal housing in developing countries, but the sign of non-inclusive political systems. Informality can therefore be seen as the expression of exclusion from the rule of law and the protection it offers to citizens” (2019: un).

### **STATE’S RESPONSE AND URBAN POLICY TIMELINE**

I would now, like to briefly follow Delhi’s urban policy timeline to understand the response of state, planners and policy makers to the presence of slums and the huge scarcity<sup>4</sup> in housing for the poor? In 1956, as already mentioned, a beginning was made at the policy level with the enactment of - 1956, Slum Areas (Improvement and Clearance) Act which was enacted by parliament to notify slums (i.e. officially recognize the slums), for the provisions of basic services.

In 1960, a Jhuggi -Jhopri / JJ Removal Scheme was launched in Delhi for the residents of JJ colonies. As per this scheme, each squatter family that was found to be eligible, based on the cut-off date of arrival in the city would be given a plot of 80 sq. meters at a relocated site. They were given 99 years lease on their plots. Between 1961 and 1977, a total of 47 resettlement colonies were developed. Most of them were on the periphery of the city without any basic services.

The other slums which were not notified and the slum dwellers who did not meet the criteria of cut off dates continued to face evictions, demolitions, and lived in the fear of the bulldozer. Interestingly, the cut off dates kept getting extended and the size of plot kept getting smaller. Eventually, the 99 year lease benefit was

also withdrawn and instead a license was given for 10 years. It was no surprise that gradually these resettlement colonies turned into veritable slums.

It was in 1992, that a three pronged strategy was adopted to take care of slums and squatters to rehabilitate them. The three components were: relocation, *in situ* up-gradation and environmental improvement of slums (Dupont, 2014). This shift corresponded to similar policy changes in many other countries of the global south, notably in Latin American, Asia and Africa, which were also experiencing neoliberal urban reforms. The international development discourse, steered by the UN Habitat and World Bank advocated the principle of formalizing the informal settlements by providing security of tenure and ownership rights to urban poor.

With respect to **housing policies**, there was an attempt

- i) to make housing policies more market friendly ;
- ii) to engage civil society and its institutions i.e institutional pluralism;
- iii) to redefine the role of government as an “enabler” from being a “provider”.

This three pronged urban policy was adopted in 1992 by Delhi Government. The first aspect of this policy was that the relocation was now carried out “with housing” on an alternative site, unlike the earlier JJ Removal scheme whereby the eligible poor were given plots. The second aspect of *in situ* up-gradation involved re-planning and modifying the existing JJ dwelling units through self-help, provided the land owning agency did not require the land in the near future. Those who did not fall in the above two categories, would receive civic amenities and basic services. The land they occupied was, in any case, not strategically located to be of use for any development purpose.

On its face, this policy appeared to be very generous to the poor. But in effect, it did not offer them any protection, firstly because all landowning agencies wanted to get back their land. Secondly, the clause of “public purpose” remained a powerful legal instrument to remove the slums. It was in the name of “public purpose” that all the subsequent urban spatial changes were made including beautification and creation of world class infrastructure. The court rulings also abetted this “public purpose” which excluded poor from bourgeois planning. Now, more than ever, the presence of slums was perceived as a nuisance and it was considered imperative to relocate them out of sight. These new relocation sites were even farther than the sites of earlier resettlement colonies. In neoliberal parlance, there was respatialisation of urban space so that the prime land at the centre could be freed for redevelopment and city could be aestheticized and made slum free (Lefebvre, 1992).

### **JNUURM and neoliberal urban redevelopment**

The consequent socio-spatial inequalities have got amplified in the past two decades, more specifically since 2003, when Delhi won the bid to host Commonwealth Games, 2010. As is well known, mega-sporting spectacles like Olympics and other

international games are occasions and opportunities for the city councils across the globe to infuse economic growth into the city. The government of Delhi, too, introduced massive urban reforms in the areas of taxation, land acquisition and urban governance with a view to forge public-private partnerships and make Delhi a slum free, world class city (Dupont, 2011). JNNURM<sup>5</sup> was clearly an instrument to facilitate this aspiration by clearing the city of its slums and JJ clusters by providing them housing on the borders of the city. It was a very large scale project of urban renewal launched by the UPA Government of India in December 2005. A grant of 20 billion US \$s was set aside under this mission for large scale urban infrastructural transformations. Governance reforms were also unleashed in many selected cities across India. Delhi was the first city to have adopted this mission. Although, the JNNURM received a lot of adverse publicity from the media and critical scrutiny of researchers and advocacy groups, it is beyond the scope of this paper to assess its successes or failures in its entirety. My focus, instead, is on one of the premium housing schemes that was launched under this programme in Delhi, viz., Rajiv Awas Yojna ( RAY).

Rajiv Ratn Awas Yojana (RRAY) was a part of the JNNURM that the Government of National Capital Territory (GNCT) of Delhi launched in 2007 to relocate the urban poor who were evicted prior to the Commonwealth Games, 2010. The eligibility cut-off date was December 31, 1998. However it has been subsequently revised many times. The scheme was inaugurated in 2010, when the first phase of houses became ready for occupation. Under this scheme the GNCT of Delhi in partnership with private sector constructed subsidised low cost mass housing on various locations on the periphery of the city. Later this scheme was extended to many other cities under the title, RAY.

In the official policy discourse, Rajiv Awas Yojna (RAY) was launched with a view to create a Slum Free India by the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan. The founding planning principles that formed the guidelines of RAY were recognition of slums and slum dwellers as equal citizens, recognising their right to the city, repealing the policy of cut-off dates for recognition of beneficiaries, integration of slum development projects with the city development plans, reservation of 25% of city land for housing of urban poor, construction of low cost subsidised mass housing on a PPP model, in-situ development where the land owning agencies share the cost of redevelopment, and provision of easy low interest loans to the slum dwellers to contribute their share of the cost, and most importantly, according property rights to the urban poor to give them a security of tenure ( RAY Guidelines, 2011). On paper, these principles looked quite credible but the ground reality was very different as observed during my field work.

Government of NCT of Delhi gave the task of constructing houses for urban poor to Delhi State Industrial and Infrastructural Development Corporation (DSIIDC) and Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB) in year 2006 under

JNNURM. A total of 19 projects were sanctioned, all of which were to be executed by these agencies. Only one project was awarded to DDA under this scheme. The total cost of these projects was Rs. 4065 crores.

As per the JNNURM guidelines, these houses were to be built using low cost technologies and the estimated cost of each dwelling unit was approximately Rs. 3 lakhs and 34 thousand. Of this amount, the central government's share was Rs. 1,19,000, Delhi government's share was Rs. 62,000, land owning agency's contribution was 93 thousand, and an amount of Rs 60,000 was to be contributed by the beneficiary who had to be rehabilitated by relocation to these newly constructed houses. However, beneficiary's contribution was later revised along with the revision in the cut-off date. To pay this amount, the Union Bank of India was roped in to provide loans to these allottees. The loan was to be repaid within 15 years. Till then, the houses were to be allotted on lease hold basis. As of now, 13,820 houses have been constructed, while approximately another 50,000 remain to be constructed. But only 585 houses have been allotted in Bawana Industrial Area by 2014. These houses were of two categories- the first category houses were for the industrial workers working in industries which were moved out of Delhi as per Supreme Court's order in *MC Mehta vs. Union of India*. The second category comprised of houses for the residents of those JJ clusters which were demolished prior to 2010.

The implementation status showed no adherence to the principles of RAY. The following section of the paper draws from ethnographic insights based on multiple spells of field work in Bawana Industrial area during 2010 to 2012, 2013-14, and 2018. Under scrutiny are the issues of security of tenure and ownership rights as tools of rehabilitation of the poor.

### **The ethnography of missing beneficiaries**

My field work was conducted with the residents of the BLOCK CD-X of RAY DSIDC complex. There are 1184 flats, built in four stories but so far, only one third are occupied. The houses are made up of red bricks and look very aesthetically designed from outside. But according to residents, they shake not just at the time of an earthquake but also whenever some heavy vehicle passes on the broken pot-holed streets outside. To a casual onlooker, it may appear that jhuggi jhopri residents couldn't have got a better deal, living as they are in *pucca* brick flats compared to their earlier makeshift structures. But a closer scrutiny and visit inside these dwellings revealed otherwise. The construction is unsafe, as there is no iron or concrete beam that supports the structure. It also leaks every time it rains. The maximum size of the dwelling is 25 square meters of carpet area, highly inadequate space, even, for a nuclear family. No care has been taken to make these flats disable friendly. One resident reported that his son was disabled and his flat was on the fourth floor. He had requested the Delhi Shelter Board to allot him a ground floor

flat. But his request was declined because according to the authorities, the flats were allotted through a lottery draw and could not be changed.

The residents face many challenges, the biggest being the access to livelihood. The residents, reported that they had been evicted from five different locations in Delhi. These locations were:

1. Arjun Das Camp
2. Shiv Camp
3. Bengali Market JJ cluster
4. Moti bagh, Netaji Nagar
5. Karampura.

These inhabitants have lost their livelihoods and not all of them can be accommodated in the neighbouring industries. It is noteworthy that although the total number of industrial plots in Bawana are 20,617 of which one third are vacant. Most of the industries make cheap rubber slippers and rubber goods with raw plastic grains which are very hazardous from the health point of view. They prefer to employ, young boys and young men who work for almost 18 hours and many a times sleep within the factory premises. On a visit to one factory, a young boy of 18 years informed me that he had not stepped out of the factory for more than ten days. The industrial workers like him are recent migrants to the city while their families live in the villages of UP and Bihar. They do not live in the houses to save on rent. That is why, the category-I flats which are for the industrial workers, are lying vacant with only 5 percent occupancy, which too is mostly on rent. The actual beneficiaries are missing.

Those living in category II, i.e. those evicted from JJ clusters and now residing in Block –CD-X, are mostly under employed. Even on a working day, during the daytime, I was able to talk to most of the male residents and children because these males were out of work, children were out of school. These men and young boys got seasonal and occasional work in some marriage events as waiters or sometimes worked as informal labour.

The building of the school, nearby, was ready but the school was not in operation. The nearest school is almost more than 5 kms away. The nearest bus stop, by short cut is 2 kms away. There is only one bus which comes once in the morning and evening. The parents have hired a private van to transport their children to and from school which charges around Rs 450 per month. Many children pay on a daily basis which comes to Rs. 30. When they don't have money, they do not go to school. As far as women are concerned, they have been rendered completely out of work. Earlier, they worked mostly as domestic help in the middle class homes of South Delhi residents. Now they do not have any work. Some of them sold small products or vegetables in the local markets. They do not have any skill and cannot work in the industry either.

There is no adequate access to health facilities either. The nearest hospital is called Balmiki Hospital and is approximately 4-5 kms away. The residents reported that it becomes very difficult for the sick, especially children and old people to go to the hospital. There are no shops, markets or any other institutions in the entire area albeit such institutions are part of the plan. There is no metro or railway, nor are there any private sources of transport. People have to walk bare foot to reach the nearest bus stop.

With respect to electricity, the residents report that it is supplied by a private company, NDPL and it is very expensive. They reported that their monthly bill comes to about Rs 1500- 2000, which they can't afford. The sanitation and sewage is no better. The drains are open and choked. During rainy season, they overflow with garbage and are an invitation to disease and epidemic. The MCD has not provided any solid waste disposal service till now though these flats were allotted in September 2010. I always observed heaps of garbage lying all around the complex, emanating a very foul smell.

Thankfully a little water is supplied by Jal Board, which is actually ground water, leading to severe ecological degradation. There is no supply of ration to these residents although they belong to BPL category and have ration cards. Rations have not been issued to them even once since their arrival here. There is no gas supply by any agency. No agency is giving them gas connections. They have to get their gas in black market at a cost of Rs. 1200- Rs. 1500 per cylinder from far off places.

For all practical purposes, these poor people have been forcefully evicted from their habitats against their wishes. Most of them reported that they were extremely unhappy in this new "jail or hell" as they termed it. They were far happier at their earlier locations as they had livelihoods, access to all basic services and amenities that a city has to offer. They could access public spaces, civic infrastructure; they were mobile and connected. Now they are totally cut off from civilisation and forced to live at the periphery of the city, with no employment.

The beneficiaries in the category I, as mentioned before, are completely missing. Only one family which is the actual allottee is residing in the entire complex. Most of the flats are unoccupied. A very few are occupied by families who have rented these accommodations for residential purposes at Rs. 1500 – 2000 per month. Some of the residents have also hired these flats for commercial purposes, such as running an ayurvedic clinic. The person concerned is no professional but dispenses medicines. The rent of commercial establishments is higher at Rs. 3500 per month as the risk is far higher to the allottee.

The real estate agents, who are active in the market, and come from the neighbouring village, reported that the flats for industrial workers actually have been bought by the industrialists in the name of their workers. The workers themselves are not in a position to pay the required Rs. 60000/-. There is also speculation in



real estate prices of these flats with the market price around 6 to 7 lakhs in 2014. The security of tenure, in this instance has completely failed to provide any real sense of security to the poor worker.

### **The myth of rehabilitation**

These field insights reveal the neo-liberal agenda of the JNNURM to cater to the aspirations of the growing new middle class to turn Delhi into a world class city. RAY was a gross violation of the Delhi High Court's judgement of 2009 that viewed urban poor as equal citizens having equal right to the city. In my case study, the site of slum relocation was 30 to 40 kms. away from the city centre, and surrounded by agricultural fields. The implicit purpose was not rehabilitation but to make poor out of sight by evicting them to the periphery. More than one lakh families have been evicted to facilitate the implementation of private capital's projects since the late 1990s.

The globally funded large infrastructure projects that are replacing the evicted slums benefit only a small section of population at the huge cost of displacing large number of poor from their work and homes. My study reveals that far from rehabilitating the slum dwellers, the newly built houses are harbouring slum like conditions and housing the influx of fresh migrants into the city. It is clear that beneficiaries of resettlement policy are made to surrender their rights to the city in abetting the logic of the market ( Harvey, 1982). The political economy of this entire process of urban redevelopment is mired in corruption. The land mafia, the local politicians, the builders, and the bureaucracy, acted out of self-interest while the DDA failed miserably to plan and provide adequate housing to the poor.

Can the provision of this kind of shelter on the outskirts of the city without any facilities or livelihoods be called the dissemination of social justice or the fulfilment of the right to the city? Here in lies the paradox of this sort of housing policy. The planners designed these places as industrial towns without providing all the amenities and facilities for which a city attracts migrants. There is no greenery, adequate public transport, places for commerce and trade, street lighting, schools, hospitals or any safe open public parks or places of entertainment. The endless rows of unoccupied EWS category housing in the vicinity, too, are waiting for the inhabitants to come for more than a decade. On paper, these houses are allotted to those who fulfil the eligibility criteria for rehabilitation under this scheme. The criteria cover the duration and proof of stay in Delhi. However, as I mentioned earlier, there are very few owners who are occupying the houses themselves. There is no security of tenure or ownership as the houses are given on lease till the time loan amount is repaid. Significantly, those who were in need of rehabilitation are living somewhere else within the very city from which they were evacuated, may be, in the process of rebuilding another JJ cluster.

### *Notes*

1. Delhi's population grew from 6,95,686 inhabitants in 1941 to 14,37,134 in 1951. This was the decade of highest urban growth rate in Delhi. *Source* : Census of India, 1941, 1951.
2. About 4% of Delhi's urban population in 1951, lived in slums. Incidentally, it went up to 27% in 1998 to come down again after demolitions and evictions.
3. See: Chakrabarti, P G Dhar ( 2001). *Delhi's Ongoing Debates on Informal Settlements and Work Places- Some issues of Environmental Jurisprudence*. [https://www.ucl.ac.uk/dpu-projects/drivers\\_urb\\_change/urb\\_infrastructure/pdf\\_land%20tenure/NAERUS\\_ESF\\_chakrabarti\\_Delhi\\_Informal\\_Settlements.pdf](https://www.ucl.ac.uk/dpu-projects/drivers_urb_change/urb_infrastructure/pdf_land%20tenure/NAERUS_ESF_chakrabarti_Delhi_Informal_Settlements.pdf).
4. The Master Plan of Delhi- 2021 projected a construction of 24 lakh new dwelling units in Delhi by 2021 taking into account the housing shortage of 4 lakh units in 2001 and requirement of 20 lakh new dwelling units for additional population based on projected population of 230 lakh by 2021. It also recommended that 54% of the total new dwelling units to be added upto 2021 shall be for EWS and LIG category and 40% i.e. 9.6 lakh dwelling units out of proposed additional housing stock of 24 lakh to be constructed through re-development/up gradation of the existing areas and 60% i.e. 14.4 lakh new dwelling units to be constructed in new urban extension areas.
5. JNNURM was under implementation for seven years before it was formally put to a close in 2014 when the new NDA government took over in 2014. See details at : <http://mhupa.gov.in>

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