

CONSEQUENCES OF METRO-RAIL INDUCED POPULATION DISPLACEMENT IN NEW DELHI

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ABSTRACT

Anthropological and ethnographic perspectives to study the consequences faced by displaced peoples due to urban infrastructural development have increased in the last decade, with the rapid progress of ghettoization and urbanization, the lives, cultures, and traditions that are lost with often sudden displacement of entire communities has come to light. This paper will look into the specific case of populations displaced during the construction and development of the Metro-Rail in New Delhi, analyzing various account of cultural losses, complications during re-settlement, and the traditions both lost and gained in the process of internal displacement. The paper will study three stages of this displacement, before, during and after, where relevant subaltern narratives will be illuminated with theoretical sociological foundations on the importance of tradition, culture, and a community's attachment to the geographical space we call "home".

Keywords: urban displacement, ethnography, New Delhi, Metro Rail, cultural losses

INTRODUCTION

Since the inception of metro rail conception in Delhi-NCR in 1998, lives, cultures, heritages, and homes have been lost in the pursuit of development, modernization, globalization, and progress. The myth of urban development requiring collateral damage of this kind is yet to be dispelled by policymakers and governments. Infrastructure and other "development" projects of various kinds -- canal widening, highway expansion, flyover beautification, and finally metro rail projects -- have displaced over 77,000 people in 2017 (Citizen Matter, 2018). This is almost definitely an underestimated number. Further, the livelihoods and histories lost are seldom recorded in socioeconomic analyses of the consequences of metro-rail construction, geographic analyses of displacement, and sociological analyses of the struggle faced while moving. For an effective understanding of the multivariate harm caused to these communities, one needs to specifically understand the sociological and geographic notion of "home" and home-making as a concept,

and a close study is required of three stages of displaced lives -- prior to displacement, during displacement, and after resettlement.

This paper seeks to follow anthropological and ethnographic perspectives to study the consequences faced by displaced peoples due to urban infrastructural development in the last decade, with the rapid progress of ghettoization and urbanization, to understand the lives, cultures, and traditions that are lost with often sudden displacement of entire communities has come to light. This paper will look into the specific case of populations displaced during the construction and development of the Metro-Rail in New Delhi, analyzing various account of cultural losses, complications during re-settlement, and the traditions both lost and gained in the process of internal displacement. The paper will study three stages of this displacement, before, during and after, where relevant subaltern narratives will be illuminated with theoretical sociological foundations on the importance of tradition, culture, and a community's attachment to the geographical space we call "home". The paper begins with an introduction to the Metro-Rail in Delhi, followed with a theoretical review of the concepts of home, heritage and tradition. The paper is then followed by a secondary review of accounts of displacement peoples and neighborhoods in Delhi due to the Metro-Rail construction. Finally, this study provides a framework for policy changes in the future that take into account participatory models of consensus raising that can prevent the sheer magnitude of cultural loss faced by citizens, as collateral damage on the path to growth.

BACKGROUND

The Delhi metro-rail began construction in 2008 -- a transit system that expanded across India's capital city as well as nearby cities of Ghaziabad, Gurugram, Noida, Faridabad, Bahadurgarh, and Ballabhgarh, all in the National Capital Region (NCR) (Roy, 2017). It's sheer size and extensiveness warrants it being the eighth longest metro system in the world and the sixteenth largest metro in terms of the number of people who use it. Further, it is the busiest metro-rail in India, and the largest. The system's first section was opened in 2002, from Shahdara to Tiz Hazari (the Red Line), and the first underground section was opened between Vishwavidyalaya and Kashmere Gate (the Yellow Line) in 2004 (Roy, 2017). This was a significant development, allowing a crucial city such as Delhi access to its large geography at relatively low prices, encouraging accessibility and mobility. The system is large and complex, with 8 color coded lines, 343 kilometres of metro-rail tracks and 250 stations-- including above ground, underground, and elevated stations, both standard- and broad-gauge (Roy, 2017). Since the opening of the first segment, the network has in the years since been developed extensively, in 4 phases. Phase I was completed in 2006, including 3 lines; Phase II in 2011; and Phase 3 is in

progress, scheduled to be completed this year in 2019. There is a fourth Phase that has been approved and scheduled to begin in 2019, to proceed for a large part of the next half-decade.

The metro-rail is run, built, and operated by the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation Limited (DMRC), with equal equity ownership by the Government of India and the Government of Delhi.

Delhi Metro Rail Corporation Limited (DMRC), a company with equal equity participation from the Government of India and the Government of Delhi (Roy, 2017). However, the size and breadth of the metro system's operations are not without consequence to the lives of people around. In the strictest sense, the consequences include population displacement due to direct construction related scenarios. However, subtler consequences exist -- settlements and housing complexes located in close proximity to metro-rail tracks and stations must suffer from a constant and large amount of noise, in some cases causing long-term health issues as well as reduction of the quality of life while living there (Millennium Post, 2018). In 2017, a 5-year old from the Rohini sector of Delhi-NCR sought shifting two metro-stations in Sector 18 and 19, to alternate sites due to high noise levels, above 85 decibels. She filed a plea to the National Green Tribunal, further seeking compensation for the trauma caused to her due to noise pollution. The NGT responded by directing the DMRS to comply with the appropriate noise pollution limits, and directed the Delhi Pollution Control Committee to drive a stop to the noise pollution caused by the operation and construction of the metro-rail (Makaaniq, 2017). Speed barriers were installed at various locations to account for this, as well. High blood pressure, anxiety, and sleeplessness are some of the consequences of loud noise levels from the metro-rail (Makaaniq, 2017).

Yet, if merely the subtler consequences are this dire, there is a need for both the privileged unaffected populace of Delhi as well as policymakers and key authorities to reflect upon the incredible damages caused by forced displacement of communities. When home is lost, there is significant cultural, physical, and emotional loss. To comprehend this, there is a need to critically understand the concept of 'neighborhood', 'home' and place attachment from sociological, anthropological, and geographical standpoints.

There has been an increased interest in these concepts from environmental psychologists, to analyze the emotional and cultural bonds that people establish with the place where they live (Gieryn, 2000; Cresswell, 2004; Beatley, 2004). This movement in academic study arose as a result of development, stress on economic progress, urban infrastructure development, and migration that results in homes, unique places, and neighborhoods being threatened (Beatley, 2004; Gieryn, 2000). A neighborhood is understood to be an area limited by space, where the size can vary according to cultural dimensions, yet directly tied to a sense of community. While a

group of house occupies a distinct geographic space, a neighborhood implies an interpersonal connection, with traditions and culture attached to it -- from common acts of acquiring crucial resource (water, electricity, food, etc.) to interacting and viewing the other occupants of the area regularly (coincidentally meeting a neighbor while on a walk). There is hence a “degree of presence of neighborhood” to a particular dimension (Galster, 2001).

DISCUSSION

What were the homes lost, and what were their lived experiences? As previously mentioned, the study looks at Delhi-NCR urban displacement caused by the metro-rail in three stages -- pre, during, and post displacement.

Before Displacement:

As mandated by government regulations the DMRC conducted audits and assessments of communities that would be displaced and neighborhoods at every phase. However, the results of those assessments were seldom effectively considered with the implement of the metro-rail’s construction and development. One particular report clearly shows that several jhuggies -- temporary homes in unauthorized regions -- were demolished when Phase I of the Metro was in progress (Government of India, 1995). However, the EIA (Environment Impact Assessment) report, while mentioned 2502 jhuggies that required resettlement, does not mention these particular displacements or demolitions (Government of India, 1995).

Further, these reports to be properly conducted, require a full listing of all affected families including data about their socio-economic conditions. The report mentioned 2502 jhuggies in unauthorized areas, 195 permanent (pucca) houses, 292 permanent shops, and 371 temporary shops houses with a total population of 10,788 people who were to be displaced from the land that the DMRC acquired for the metro rail project (Government of India, 1995). Yet, this report only sampled a meagre 8% of the affected families in the area (Government of India, 1995). Further, while the DMRC has set aside a sum of Rs. 45,000 per displaced family, there was little to no assessment of the living conditions after resettlement or the loss of livelihoods and economies (Government of India, 1995).

Further, while DMRC documents have stated and mandated adequate engineering design to minimize displacement and resettlement, and mention under their Rehabilitation Action Plan (RAP) that where displacement is unavoidable, for the “people losing assets, livelihood or other resources, assistance is proposed for improving their former living standards RAP is to improve quality of life of the affected persons, it is important to assess the changes brought about by the project. National Policy for Rehabilitation and Resettlement -2007 will be followed for the

resettlement action plan. Since Japan International for International Cooperation Agency (JICA) will finance the project, the JICA guidelines on Environmental and Social Consideration have been followed.” (“Social Impact Assessment For Janakpuri - Dashrathpuri Corridor Of Delhi Metro”, 2013)

Yet, even these optimistic guidelines come with a caveat that temporary huts and jhuggies do not come under the rules of the Land Acquisition Act or the Rehabilitation Action Plan. These reports themselves mention the opposition and struggles of communities, including the Dashrathpuri neighborhood that, while not opposing the metro-rail itself, they expressed the severe problems faced by not only the loss of shops and livelihoods, but also the felling of trees and sacred spots in the area (“Social Impact Assessment For Janakpuri - Dashrathpuri Corridor Of Delhi Metro”, 2013).

During Displacement:

During displacement, there is significant struggle to the lives of individuals in communities being displaced. Displacement requires an entire upheaval of lived experiences -- new schools for the children, new jobs in many cases for the parents, the identification of new temples and sites of worship, new traditions, and new methods of maintaining pre-existent culture and traditions. Moreover, it is also a matter of economy -- many neighborhoods are built around markets and the economies that support them. One significant example was the struggles faced by many in Delhi's Panchkuian Road, a famous furniture market. While assured by authorities that there would not be a disruption to their lives during the construction of the metro-rail till they were entirely resettled, there was faulty implementation with traffic being allowed only on one side of the main road, with metal blockades and partitions blocking access to the market and the furniture shops, hence disrupting their businesses entirely (The Hindu, 2003).

After Displacement:

Following displacement, as previously mentioned, it is imperative that the DMRC and relevant authorities follow up regarding living conditions, livelihood improvement, and analyze socio-economic community variables for sustainable system creation, community-building and institution-building. Reports show that following displacement and resettlement, there were little to no checks by the DMRC or other bodies to ensure that the resettled communities have appropriately found new livelihoods, resources, and rebuilt their cultural and economic foundations effectively (Dupont, 2013).

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Considering the previous discussion on the lives of communities and economies affected due to displacement from the metro-rail project in New Delhi, one clearly sees the need for participatory and democratic approaches to Displacement Rehabilitation and Resettlement (DRR) plans and procedures in India and its capital city. There is a need to consider these ethnographic accounts of their economies affected by various conditions from noise, to road access inhibition, blockages, and so on. Community-centric approaches, when integrated into the policy and plan for further urban infrastructure development including metro-rail development will truly do justice to the word “development” only when it considers its very human and very real consequences, on the ground.

Policymakers can no longer exist and analyze situations from their air-conditioned rooms and academics can no longer survey data from their ivory towers: there is a need for action on the ground, to collate lived experiences, and ensure that all largescale metropolitan planning is cognizant of the needs of people of all classes and creed, living in such localities, who are displaced.

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