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Tales from the edges of the metropolis. Images from Savda Ghevra, Delhi

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1-2 | The margins of Savda Ghevra

These two pictures are describing the status of the Savda Ghevra Colony on 2010. On the left side: the part build from the new inhabitants, arrived in that area at the margins of the metropolis. The houses are all similar: made by bricks, with different high, but in any case not more then three plans. On the right side, the image is showing a pillar greed predisposed for the electricity, an infrastructural support provided from the government for the new inhabitants of this colony. In the field plenty of sun, young boys are playing cricket, the national Indian sport. Their voices are loosing in the hot colony's afternoon. In all the area, it is needed a correct distribution of water, but there is not the traffic of Delhi. The roads are calm: it is possible breathing an atmosphere more close to that of the peri-urban villages that a metropolitan one's. The resettlement colony of Savda Ghevra it is part of the actions proposed from the Indian Government exposed on the 74 Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992. This Act is containing many good proposals and between all this thematism it is listed also the necessity of a decentralisation of urban governance. On the reality, the achievement of this aim, it is not so easy, to testify this can be reported the text that is following. It was extracted from a study on the colony's life; finality of this study it was to understand the better system to welcome all the new persons addressed in Savda Ghevra, after the forced removals from slums or informal settlements in Delhi. The study was developed from two social housing venture based in Delhi and it was carried out for find the better measure to create a more integrated new peri-urban area.



“Despite the Constitutional Amendment 74 to ensure decentralization of urban governance, interagency coordination continues to be a major challenge, leading to a lack of strategic planning before that the slum resettlements takes place and to a period of daily struggle after the resettlement. (...) Savda Ghevra, the resettlement colony, was adopted as a case to understand which works and initiatives can shorten the community rehabilitation period for newly formed slum resettlement relocations. We hope this study and policy recommendations can facilitate measures to create a more integrated city fabric for low-income households”. (MHT & MHS, Collaborative Study on Savda Ghevra Resettlement Colony, 2011)



3-4 | The colony

Families living at the Savda Ghevra resettlement site are originally from various states of India. The Housing and Land Rights Network (HLRN) Study developed in 2014, reveals that most of the residents migrated to Delhi in search of work are coming from Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan, Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, and even as far as Tamil Nadu in South India. In fact: “*The persons evicted and resettled in Ghevra are living at their original sites of habitation, in Delhi, from ten to fifty years. Certain people in Savda Ghevra have been born in the settlement from where they were forcefully evicted.*” (Forced to the fringes: disasters of ‘Resettlement’ in India. Report One: Savda Ghevra, 2014)

The question of eviction and forced removals is a sensitive matter, from many years in Delhi, an important and sad issue that must be faced with intelligence and force. The matter it is directly related to Ghevra, as the colony was indicated as a new area to resettle people from eviction. There is an entire work of an Indian collective of activists devoted to document the forced displacement of Nangla Machi, an informal colony.

The government demolished houses and territorial relationship readdressing people to various locations.

Nangla Maanchi was one of the large informal settlements on the bank of the Yamuna river transformed from a fly ash deposit into a lively settlement by its inhabitants in the late seventies. Nangla was demolished in 2006 to make way for the new Riverfront, an action related to the new urban embellishment for the Commonwealth Games of 2009.

Some of the settlers have been relocated to Ghevra in the extreme Northwest of the city. After the displacement, the organization of a new colony is a very sensitive and difficult moment. The forced removal can comport separation of family, loss of a job and deep uncertainty relatively to the new geography of spaces and of relations, it requests a deep reactive attitude to build a new life.





5-6 | Rectangular Spaces

The urban path in Savda Ghevra is composed from a very regular grid: after each block of houses, there is a rectangular space, rounded and signed from little walls and gratings. Inside this enclosure there is a nude land. Relatively to the use that will be foreseen, each fence can contain: iron play for child, small football court or other urban furnishing of various type. In one of these areas it was built a structure for the prayers of different religion. Following an extract of a letter written in Savda Ghevra on 2007, from the director of a local association. It was addressed a Pratibha Patil, first woman to be head of the Indian State. The letter was asking the use of the land for religious matters and an economic and practical support for gardens and plants around the temple.

To Respected Madam President (...), Muslim fakir Rabb Baba, on 26th January 2007, the Republic Day of our nation, set up Lord Shiva's temple with the assistance of the residents of G block, Savda Ghevra, J.J. Colony.

A symbol of all faiths, the development of this temple is getting impeded because of interventions by the government, which remains unmindful that the faith and feelings of the local population are deeply attached to this place.

Thousands of Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians and followers of many other faiths pray in this temple everyday. When Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians gather in this temple complex and offer prayers to Lord Bholenath, the scene is worth seeing... Established without any government support, this temple, which promotes unity and communal harmony, begs you to protect it. The land on which this temple has been built has lain barren for years, and, moreover, no government scheme of any national value is applicable to it. Today, on 26.11.2007, local Hindus, Muslims and followers of many other faiths, in order to further construct this temple complex, pledged their custodianship of it and formed the "Shivalaya Communal Harmony Promotion Committee". (.....)

One acre (roughly 5000 sq. m) land be made available to the aforementioned committee at rates that are in accordance with those for religious establishments.



Alongside, you are also requested to ensure that the forest department grants us plants and the home ministry grants us monetary aid so that the temple committee may be able to develop the unused land around the temple, for public use. Sincerely, Chairwoman. (28 November 2007)



7 | Iron

In this image is depicted an iron typical of the Indian reality. On the streets of New Delhi, it is very common to see desk or table prepared to ironing cotton clothes or other garments of various typologies. Commonly the clients gave their clothes or fabrics clean to the person that is ironing along the road. The woman and the man who are ironing they are working sometime until very late in the night and they start very soon in the sunrise. The clients are back after few hours or the day after.



The iron utilized also today around Delhi it is a very particular object: because it is not alimented with electric energy but with incandescent carbon fossil. Like is possible to see in the imagine, the object it is totally in iron, and inside there are carbon that were immediately changed, before that they become too cold (condition that will make impossible a good ironing).



8-9 | Rubble of housing

These photographs are depicting a sad and problematic circumstance, connected directly with the resettlement colony of Sawda Ghevra: the destruction of finished houses because not conformed to the official dimensional standard fixed by the Government. The Government, in fact, is giving a lot of six meters for three meters, but it doesn't give any material to build the house or any addition support to the realization of the same.

For this motivation initially the new inhabitants, not having the immediate availability of money, they are realizing ephemeral houses with recycled material. The last form, and the more definitive one, it is a house made by bricks in two or three floors: habitation that must respected the norm of the building and the spatial standards prescribed from the Government. In the case of the picture the houses after being build from their inhabitants were judged not conformed to the governative standard and for this reason they were destroyed.

More in general relatively to the constitution of Savda Ghevra:

“When people first came here, this place was nothing but empty land rolling out till far. Tractors would be at work everywhere, trying to level the uneven land. As people came, they were directed to the plots assigned to them.

On these they made their first dwellings with bamboo mats. Then they got their plots measured by the registrar of land accounts and rebuilt their houses with brick and cement. Slowly, as pukka (permanent) houses began to come up amidst the bamboo mat houses, the place started taking a firmer form. The unbuilt stretches of land surrounding these emerging pockets of houses began to appear like “empty land”. To assure people about them, the Municipality planted signboards announcing what would eventually be made there. Here, a post office, a garden here, a hospital there, a dispensary there, a primary school here, a police station there.

Even today, these signboards continue to stand on their respective spots, unaccompanied by the structures they foretell. It is rumored that people from twenty neighborhoods in the city will be evicted and brought to Sawda Ghevra.



People from nine neighborhoods are already here. Now preparations for those who are about to come is on in full swing. Roads are being built, parks, toilets, schools are being constructed with haste. Before more people are brought here, the place that is going to be allotted to them is being prepared. Some of these new blocks lie in the space between two already settled blocks, and others in the empty space some distance away. Land is measured; electricity poles are planted in straight lines, along a rigid grid. People will make their houses after they come, but in the lanes that will lie between rows of houses, brick paths are being laid. Those already settled watch this transformation of land. Over and over again, the plan on the basis of which they have been resettled in Sarda Ghevra reveals and repeats itself. (J.Nagar, B. Rai, S. Ali and S.Rai, Cybermohalla practitioners, Delhi 2010)



10-11 | Roads, infrastructures and informal economy

One of the problem of the new colony, together with the distribution of the water it is the infrastructural isolation from the city and the relating distances that caused, to many persons, the loosing of a job caused from the difficulty of connections. Economically the colony was organized with small informal market, like depicted in the imagine 11, in the side of the street. Cart with wheels proposing goods of various typology.

Relatively to the distribution and water supplying:

It was the original intention of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) and Delhi Jal Board (DJB) to utilise the large canal directly north of the site to serve as a mains water supply for the entire settlement. As it stands the canal had not been redirected through Savda Ghevra and is primarily used by the village at the north for fishing. Further down stream signs of black water pollution can be seen as the main west drain runs directly from an MCD toilet into the canal due to an unfinished drainage channel. The settlement is not yet supplied with mains water, as it is the intention of the DJB to complete this installation only upon full occupation of the settlement. As part of the initial establishment water butts on platforms were planned, but only partly completed, and remain unusable. There are 8-9 tube wells on site, which are not yet operational, and their future use may well be questionable due to land contamination. Water for drinking and washing is supplied by tankers twice a week, which are met by frantic activity as people push and crowd for the limited supplies. Some of the wealthier inhabitants have private water tanks on the roofs of their properties. (Jeffries O., Lyons P., Tang B., Bodur B., Savda Ghevra Resettlement Colony. Landscape of Change. Physical and Cultural Survey, Summer 2008, Delhi, India, Architecture of Rapid Change and Scarce Resources, London Metropolitan University, in collaboration with CURE, 2008)



To read more about Savda Ghevra:

A) Appendix 1: About the demolition of Nangla Machi

About the demolition of Nangla Machi, Ravi Sundaram (2006):

Late last night I began reading the new posts on Nangla Machi, and I think I must have read them twenty times, again and again. I was completely disoriented. I sent them to many friends. I called people. Writing about loss is never easy, of a space, years of work, the destruction people homes and everyday encounters. All move now after the bulldozers into clouds of dust, memories and the cheerful march of the city in the media and the courts. And the blur of traffic. For all our comrades in the lab who have been working there, and all the practitioners in CyberMohalla who continue to write while the space is collapsing, so much of this is beyond representation. Perhaps memories. And so much comes through this – sounds, documents, fragments flying in the air, a kind of surreal violence and anger so far away from the melodrama of spectacular politics. “Documentation” is a cruel word to call these postings. They are rare fragments of a passing of a space, that is why they are powerful, moving – telling us that the coming myth-history of the New city on the river was also one of a terrible violence. That is why every time I go back to these texts in the coming years a chill will go through me. I know that. In solidarity with all the comrades in CyberMohalla. Ravi.

This written thought pass the true sense of loss that is accompanying the destruction of a place.

B) Appendix 2: The modality of build an house in the colony is well described in this contribution

Housing blocks A-S are made up of one of two plot sizes, either 18sqm (for those who can prove residence in their low income settlement in Delhi from or before the 1990's) or a 12.5sqm plot for those who cannot.

They are laid out in back to back rows. Prospective occupants are not given a choice of plot, but instead are allocated one by the government. The purpose of this is to promote integration of the different former settlements. Each plot costs 7000 Rupees irrespective of size. Occupants are legally allowed to build up to two stories giving a gross internal floor area of just under 37sqm and 25sqm respectively. Occasionally houses are built with additional storeys; roof level washrooms and or toilets in addition to the two storeys; or balconies projecting in front of the building line. This additional construction does not fall within permitted development and is therefore illegal, but the authorities do not appear to have a clear policy on enforcement. This ‘flexibility’ in typology adds a certain dynamic to what could be a very uniform development.

Within the minimal footprints layouts do vary but generally an arrangement of two rooms per floor is typical. The smaller room at the front forms an entrance area with a steep staircase to an upper floor space for cooking and washing. Rear rooms, which are slightly larger, are used for living and sleeping. Upper floors form further sleeping areas and when different generations of the same family live together often include additional cooking areas. Specific examples were surveyed and mapped. House

types are categorised into one of three constructional types: pukka (permanent), semi-pukka (semi-permanent) or kuccha (temporary). The majority of houses are self built with construction cost varying from simply the cost of building materials for kuccha housing to those built from materials otherwise acquired from around the settlement, to a two storey pukka house that may cost up to Rs 4500.

(Odel Jeffries, Philip Lyons, Bo Tang, Belgin Bodur, *Savda Ghevra Resettlement Colony. Landscape of Change. Physical and Cultural Survey, Summer 2008, Delhi, India, Architecture of Rapid Change and Scarce Resources, London Metropolitan University, in collaboration with CURE, 2008*)

C) Appendix 3:

The description of the colony's life made by the Cybermohalla practitioners

Cybermohalla is a collaboration between persons working belonging to Sarai-CSDS (Center for the Studies of Developing Societies) and Ankur: Society for Alternatives in Education, a NGO based in Delhi. They have settled laboratories in LNJP colony (lab since 2001-), Dakshinpuri Resettlement Colony (2002-), Nangla Maanchi (2004-2006) and Savda Ghevra Resettlement Colony (2009-). They develop a series of practices describing the city across different registers of sound, images, and texts within the context of these media labs located in this different neighborhoods.

Bus halted at the bus stop of Savda Ghevra. Its passengers emptied out and vanished into different blocks. The brick kiln right outside Kblock stood out sharply under the blazing sun. But, from time to time, it would suddenly disappear, engulfed by the thick haze of smoke that emerged from within it. Some children stood in the lane that leads into the block; intently looking into a house whose floor began at a height - as high as these children - from the level of the lane. Inside, a man, a knife in his hands, cut hens. The children edged closer to the door. A boy stood inside the school in Bblock. On the other side of the gate another boy, the same age as the first one, sat on a bamboo mat, with eatables things that he meant to sell set up around him. The two boys looked at each other for a long time, unblinking. Its weight heavily upon the walls that supported it, the gate slowly withered their cement. The room that will soon be open to the public as the Mother Dairy in Gblock is now complete. A few days ago, electricians had descended upon it with their tools and implements to install the fixtures: Where will the machine into which tokens will be inserted be? Where will the milk flow out from? Where will the machine that keeps the milk cold be located? Work continued for four to five days. Regarding how the Mother Dairy looks—it looks exactly the same as all others all over Delhi.

A Tata Sumo with “Government of India” written prominently on it drove into the colony. From the two loudspeakers that had been fitted on either side of the car, a voice emerged, informing the colony dwellers that a camp will be set up on the 27th, 28th and 30th that month, for installing electricity meters in the colony. Everyone is required to bring their parchees, which show they have been allotted the plot on which they are currently staying, and their election Icards with them to this camp. They will then be provided with forms, which they will have to fill so that electricity meters may be installed in their houses. The vehicle of the Government of India moved along the main roads of the colony, repeating this announcement. People followed it and asked the officials, “And what else should we bring with us?” An officer in the car replied, “Listen carefully to what we are announcing, remember the dates, and make sure you come to the camp which will be set up at the

bus stand near Bblock. Don't forget to bring your plot parchees. And now go, tell everyone in the inner lanes about this announcement."

In Mblock, most people have got their house numbers tattooed into the cement of the brick walls of their houses. These inscriptions state the block that each house belongs to, and the number of the plot in the block that it is on. These brief introductions of themselves, provided by each house, are so prominent that they as if jump out from the walls at passers-by. Naive about the purpose this serves, someone smiled and asked, "Why not get a nameplate made and hang it near the door instead?" A young woman, her skin dark like the evening, dressed from head to toe in pink, smiled back kindly at this naiveté and replied, "This way everyone ensures their plot number is marked out distinctly, as being separate from that of their neighbours. When ones identity remains tangibly before others, it stays firm."

Not far from her, in the park, a cyclist declared loudly that he would keep cycling in the same spot for the next 24 hours; that he will eat on the cycle, will sleep on the cycle, and even change his clothes on the cycle; and that by cycling in the same spot, he will dig a deep hole into the ground.

"The surveyors are here," a voice came from far. As soon as this voice reached them, people left whatever they were doing and headed for the place from which this voice came. When surveys had been conducted in Nangla, Lakshmi Nagar and all the places from where people have been relocated to this colony, signs had been left on different doors which had remained puzzles for long. P98, NDS, Lock, Comm. The residents whose houses had been marked with these signs didn't make it to Gheva. A place might be brand new, but when people begin to dwell in it, they bring with them the understanding they have formed over years. Isn't there a saying, "Once scalded by boiling milk, one blows even on buttermilk before taking a sip"?

A file in their hands, some officers are standing where two streets intersect. A heavy silence is slowly descending around them. People fear government departments. Here, they are gathering around government representatives, swelling into a crowd around them. "We will come again tomorrow," thundered the representatives. "Everyone must begin constructing their pukka -permanent- houses by then or their plot allotment will be cancelled." When they are addressed by a voice that speaks only to dismiss them, even the strongest personalities falter. And this, after all, is a crowd of people who are only beginning to live in a place which has just recently started to get made. Their announcement over, the officers turned, ready to leave.

Surveyors work under the constrain that their work has to be done during the day. Whenever a survey has to happen, it will happen during the day. If a survey will be conducted tomorrow, which it will be according to these government representatives, it will be during the day.

The crowd refused to budge. "Our work too is done during the day."

"We could take a day's leave from work, but what's the guarantee they too will not take the day off tomorrow?"

"Arre, who knows what will happen tomorrow?"

"What we have in hand is today."

People refused to let the surveyors leave.

"You can't leave till you finish our survey."

"We won't let you go till everyone's survey is done."

"Everyone will come back from work soon."

It was beginning to seem now that this was one survey that would have to be done by night.

(J.Nagar, B.Rai, S. Ali and S. Rai, from Cybermohalla, Delhi, 2010)

D) APPENDIX 4:

A fanny description of the shop signs, made by Cybermohalla Practitioners

It can be read like a list, but it is also a witness of the shop present on the colony:

Shiv building material and hardware supplier.

*Dust, gravel, sand, bricks, cement,
girders, Tironis,
angles, iron bars,
door frames, gates and grills
are available here at competitive rates.*

Here, far away from the city, many decided to re-enter in the world of work by setting up their own shops.

Truth Hardware.

*Pump, paint, materials for whitewash
pipe fittings,
PVC materials available here.*

As people kept coming, the number of shops kept increasing.

Get well medications.

*Joint pain, arthritis, allergies, haemorrhoids,
stones, respiratory problems etc
are treated here
with traditional herbs and medicines.
Cost of daily medicine Rs. 10 only.*

Kaleem Telecom.

*Photocopy, lamination
Make a call to anywhere in India for Re. 1.
All kinds of electrical material can be bought here.*

In every block, the ground floors are being moulded as shops, the first floors as residences.

Bhole Shankar Matka Kulfi.

*Available in cashew, pistachio, milk
and cardamom flavours.
Bookings are made for weddings.*

Mithila Hair Cutting Saloon.

Mobile recharge coupons available.

Walk through these lanes and you hear the entire colony hum the tune, "shop below, house above".

Narendra (Teelu halwai).

(SK Hussain)

*Buy milk sweets, condensed milk, chowmein, butter
at proper rates on placing orders.*

Note: Bookings are also made for weddings and parties.

Artisans for these occasions also available.

These shops now cater well to the daily needs of the residents of SamdaGhevra.

Sisodhia Chhole Bhature Corner.

Come, eat,

Keep eating.

But much still remains. One realises this each time a new shop is opened.

Tannu Jewellers.

All kinds of readymade silver jewellery

Available here.

22, 23 carat gold jewellery can be made on order.

Do give us an opportunity to serve you.

(J.Nagar, B.Rai, S. Ali and S. Rai, from Cybermohalla, Delhi, 2010)

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