

Dynamics of social change in South Delhi's Hauz Khas Village

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Abstract

This paper looks into South Delhi's Hauz Khas Village exploring the relation between identity constructions of young urbanites, their practices and imaginaries and the socio-spatial changes erupting within the Village's multi-layered and increasingly gentrifying spaces. Cosmopolitan inner city life reveals the distinctions emerging between the young urban middle and upper middle classes and the familiar images of Indian middle-class urbanity and Global City living. These differences are increasingly implicated in gentrification processes and the rearrangement of the city, according to the aesthetics of the neighbourhood. South Delhi's urban villages emerge as appropriate sites of tension in which the drastic changes after Delhi's economic liberalisation have become starkly visible. The paper presents a differentiated picture of middle class and elite identities and illustrates the way symbolic claims to urban space are expressed in cosmopolitan urbanity.

Keywords

Delhi, gentrification, urban village, urbanisation, creative industries, consumption

Introduction

I had finally set foot in South Delhi's hippest neighbourhood of Hauz Khas Village, after scrambling past its barrier. Among its high facades, I can spot bamboo linings, a bicycle sloping high above the ground, street art peeking out at odd angles and an array of signboards plastered on streetlamps advertising for its countless bars and restaurants packed into the bafflingly tight arrangement of houses. The sensation is instant; this space offers a markedly different experience than anywhere else in Delhi's urban landscape. A group of girls slip passed the same barrier in short dresses and high heels, waving off flyers for couples' spa treatments and meal deals. They mull over the plethora of food options and finally settle on one of its most popular new restaurants -- 'The Social'. Boasting of the meticulously designed interiors, and combining the aesthetics of a fashionable New York coffee shop's industrial chic, it fits the urban elite's expectations of global metropolitan modernity. Groups of youngsters enjoy drinks and meals, mingle and chat the afternoon away. The scene is different upstairs, where freelancers either sit alone with their laptops and cappuccinos or network with other young professionals who have rented a workspace in the establishment. Here, I get a glimpse into a world enjoyed by a young crowd of urbanites who write their tastes as producers and consumers into the urban architecture of the South Delhi villages. This paper concerns their imaginaries and practices which feed into the rebranding of the locality as a cultural and entertainment hub. From late 2000 onwards, Hauz Khas Village drew a significant number of educated upper-middle-class newcomers to its increasingly busy lanes. In addition to freelancers, musicians, writers and artists moving into long-term accommodation, cultural and creative businesses in advertising, architecture, visual arts, design, film, music and digital media set up their offices in the centrally located neighbourhood. The newcomers' practices and imaginaries have substantially contributed to the rapid social and physical changes leading to the village's current incarnation. This evidence adds to studies on spatial and social change in Indian cities. The newcomers' vision of inner city life distinguish them from the familiar narratives of Indian middle-class urbanity and Global City living and are increasingly implicated in gentrification processes and the dictum of neighbourhood branding contributing to 'themed' rearrangements of the city. South Delhi's urban villages are therefore pertinent sites of cosmopolitan urbanity displaying the tensions of drastic change after Delhi's economic liberalization. This paper looks at the urban village of Hauz Khas Village in the affluent South Delhi area, to examine the relation between identity constructions of young urbanites and the socio-spatial changes within the gentrified village's multi-layered spaces. The paper explores young urbanites as producers and consumers of a modern global urbanity and draws a differentiated picture of middle

class and elite identities -- one that demonstrates the ambiguities in the way symbolic claims to urban space are expressed.

Methods and Informants

In her studies on gentrification processes in New York, Zukin concluded that “sociability, urban lifestyles, and social identities are not only the result, but also the raw materials of the growth of the symbolic economy” (1998: 830). The practices of newcomers moving in to Hauz Khas Village similarly gain a particular significance in the changing symbolic landscape of the city. The urban lifestyles and identities of the young intricately link with neighbourhood transformation. An ethnographic approach is best suited to grasp the way youth identities are embedded in this locality and simultaneously engage with global media scapes and imaginaries of cosmopolitan urbanity.

Following this approach, primary data was collected in a first fieldwork period between October 2014 and March 2015 through qualitative interviews and walk-alongs (a method adopted in human geography and anthropology which combines the interview with mobility studies as the interviewer accompanies informants on their explorations or daily travels in their neighbourhood while they talk about aspects of their environment that have a certain significance to them). This data was further complemented by documentary research, census data and media reports. During fieldwork, I participated in a range of neighbourhood activities, visited art galleries, co-working spaces and restaurants in the area and observed the daily life in media and design enterprises. Interviews conducted include a variety of agents ranging from local artists, designers, entrepreneurs, musicians, students, café owners, filmmakers and freelancers working and/or residing in the village, as well as landlords and low-income groups such as embroiderers and maids living in the village. This paper will, however, primarily focus on the young entrepreneurs and residents moving into Hauz Khas Village. These agents were mostly in their mid-twenties and early thirties, had a high level of education and came from middle and upper middle-class backgrounds. Many but by far not all received financial support from their families, while others supported themselves through freelance work or were employed in creative businesses. A minority also counted themselves as their families’ first generation to graduate from university. Young residents of the village, artists, freelancers and musicians had in many cases moved to Delhi for their studies or work from their family homes in other cities in India, whereas young start-up entrepreneurs had mostly grown up in Delhi.

Urban Restructuring in India

Even though they play an increasingly salient role in the cultural and symbolic landscape of the city, urban villages have garnered limited attention in studies on Delhi's urban make-up. Scholars working on Delhi's neo-liberal reorganisation of space mostly focus on large-scale capital intensive urban development projects often accompanied by the removal of slum dwellers and squatter settlements (see for example Mehra, 2008; Dupont, 2011). Others discuss constructs of new middle-class identities, changing consumer cultures and the concomitant rise of a broader landscape of commercial, residential and leisure sites such as gated communities, theme parks and malls (Brosius, 2010; Srivastava, 2012). Delhi is at this moment identified as a contested terrain, moulded by world class city aesthetics (Ghertner, 2011), ongoing privatisation of space and the state's close ties with a middle class constituency (Fernandes, 2006). Akin to studies on American urbanism high rises, business clusters, mega-malls and elite enclaves have come to form the exemplary sites of its postmodern urbanism (Sorkin, 1992).

Signifying progress and global modernity in the postcolonial city such spaces have been primarily discussed regarding transnational homogenisation as well as about the roles of elites and developers in the production of the new 'spectacular' urban landscape. The spectacle of place, however, also extends to the themes of select quarters within the city which manifest as carnivalesque spaces dominated by "consumption, urban lifestyles and cultural events" (Bell and Jayne, 2004: 4). In the European context, such quarters can be found in gay villages, ethnic quarters, red-light zones, creative and cultural quarters variously produced through neighbourhood branding, development projects or reinvestment in previously ambiguous areas (Bell and Jayne, 2004). Such practices have received less attention in studies of South Asian cities, even though Delhi's urban villages exemplify its own version of ambiguous economic and spatial areas. In the course of urban expansion, these former rural settlements incorporated into Delhi's city limits resulted in new socio-spatial configurations. The urban villages add to the mosaic of the postcolonial and neo-liberal city and warrant scholarly engagement.

To meet the needs of rapid population growth, the acquisition of villages' agricultural land in the south of Delhi commenced in the years post-independence. From 1957 onwards more and more expansive swathes of such agricultural land was demarcated for urban development, most of which was subsequently sold by the Delhi Development Agency to

private agencies on freehold basis and eventually saw the construction of regulated residential colonies (Gupta, 2000). The inhabited *abadi*¹ areas of the villages were meanwhile left largely untouched and in 1963 officially given a special status by the Delhi Municipal Corporation exempting them from building by-laws, construction norms and regulations such as the need for sanction plans. Since then, this status has been gradually modified, but nevertheless acquiesces intense construction work and accommodates a mixture of commercial and residential use -- a licence which is taken due advantage of in a city otherwise dominated by strict zoning policies. Urban villages thus historically supplied the labour and trade needs of the surrounding colonies akin to Doreen Massey's description of London's South Bank as "a metropolitan underside" (Massey, 2000: 26) indispensable for the operations of the colonial capital.

The stringent zoning laws of the planned city impede commercial businesses from setting up offices in residential areas, making it easier for small-scale companies and big studios to work out of urban villages. Hauz Khas Village therefore not only holds significant appeal to Delhi's nouveau riche but functions or used to operate as a site of experimentation for the city's young populace: a place where alternative lifestyles, entrepreneurial subjectivities and creative pursuits could be tried and tested. The spread of cultural and entertainment amenities and consumption spaces significantly shaped the development of the Village, as the young were drawn to this neighbourhood thanks to a favourable rent environment and the less rigid separation between residential and commercial spaces that allow engaging forms of street life to take hold.

Hauz Khas Village – an alternative vision of urbanity?

When I conducted my fieldwork starting in 2014 many of my informants derided Hauz Khas Village as long passed its "golden age" having devolved into a veritable "monster" of mass consumerism. The village, however, still received significant attention in national media and blogs, identifying it as the "the most happening spot in the city, be it day or night".² Indeed it still attracted many visitors and tourists on any night of the week, with the occasional film crew also taking advantage of the Village itself as well as its adjacent fourteenth-century monument. Known well beyond Delhi borders, parallels were drawn to New York's East Village, further affirming its centrality to a young generation not wanting to miss out on

¹ This area is also often referred to *lal dora* (red thread) area originating in the practice of the land revenue department of using a red thread to demarcate villages' habited from their agricultural land.

² <http://littleblackbookdelhi.com/things-to-do-see-hauz-khas-village-delhi/#>

Delhi's cool scene. The village's more unobtrusive days of alternative entertainment, arts and music were, however, proclaimed to be irreversibly gone.

Hauz Khas Village had undergone other waves of popularity: first as a fashion designer hub in the late eighties and early nineties, brought to an abrupt end when authorities and the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) stepped in to seal establishments. The Village was then 'rediscovered' twenty years later, when low-cost housing attracted a population of artists, musicians and writers looking to participate in a burgeoning sub-cultural scene. The fast-paced growth of the food and beverage industry started in 2012 and eventually catapulted the number of restaurants to 48 at the time of writing. My informants fondly remembered the short period before this boom as a haven of alternative entertainment marked by underground music genres, a small number of cafés, restaurants, and design studios relying on social conviviality among a group of like-minded individuals and word-of-mouth popularity. Although centrally located, it felt removed from the city, with its adjoining park and water reservoir completing the picture of an oasis -- largely unnoticed and unbothered by the regulations ruling the surrounding colonies.

One former resident tells me: "the thing that I liked most about Hauz Khas Village was that it felt like you were not in Delhi any more, and you could actually pretend you were in some far away hill station". In the resident's imaginary the Village was not merely geographically distant from its surroundings, but also symbolically remote in terms of a particular understanding of urban life differentiating it from other neighbourhoods of Delhi. The area had a relaxed and non-commercial atmosphere and reputed to offer small-scale cultural offerings. Most crucial, cheap rents, provided experimental space in which young people could explore creatively and professionally, providing newcomers with the opportunity to create and consume a space of their making. Allowing for mixed land use and exhibiting a distinctive layout Hauz Khas Village offered a form of street level vibrancy that came to be central to this desired urban experience, as it created a sense of metropolitan excitement missing from more regulated colonies. Low rental rates and the presence of different social groups helped to further consolidate the kind of diversity young urban residents identified as prerequisite of the modern city. The spaces of the urban village have a characteristic vibrant street life, due to the concession of commercial and residential mix and the presence of different social groups drawn by cheap central accommodation. These features not only became central to their urban imaginaries but were persistent signifiers of a resisting lifestyle, one that contested established notions of good modern middle-class living in purely

residential colonies. As Appadurai has argued, neighbourhoods “require the continuous construction, both practical and discursive, of an ethnoscape (necessarily non-local) against which local practices are imagined to take place” (1996: 184).

The village was similarly constructed as the other of the middle-class neighbourhood where a strict segregation between market and residential area prevailed and lifeless streets seemingly felt the pulse of middle class moralities. One artist for instance argued that in Delhi’s middle class colonies, city dwellers would be categorically “shut out from the wholeness of the street”. My informants distanced themselves also from the lifestyle of the regular office goer and consumer citizen. They rejected the sanitised, spaces of malls and gated high-rise developments in the urban outskirts. As one young resident described their reluctance as “a matter of principle to choose not to segregate and sanitise their urban experience”. Studies on youth cultures have long acknowledged the importance of styles such as music and fashion to demarcate collective and individual identity. The discursive construction of the village life, meanwhile, indicates the strong links between youth identity and the organisation of spaces, as Doreen Massey writes “control of spatiality is part of the process of defining the social category of ‘youth’ itself” (1998: 127). Crafting an emancipated young upper middle class identity in a rapidly transforming city, thus, took on a distinctly spatial form, as they imprinted their tastes and aspirations onto the urban landscape.

Cosmopolitan Urbanity

The way the village is nostalgically conjured up with references to its “quality” people and cultural offerings, plays out what Sanjay Srivastava has described as middle-class “dramas of distinction” (2014: 68), in which cultural competence is evaluated through behavioural codes. It further exemplifies the discussions around elite cosmopolitan competencies through which a young crowd seeks to distinguish itself. The concept of cosmopolitanism as a set of performances, practices and imaginaries (Jeffrey and McFarlane, 2008) highlights the way a sense of cultural versatility was deployed to demonstrate difference and exclusivity. Young residents and entrepreneurs at this moment could use their familiarity with music styles and other transnational trends as a cultural and economic resource. This cosmopolitan identity was constructed upon notions of good taste, authenticity and a valorisation of difference that derided the perceived pretence and lack of sophistication of mass consumerism. The agents living and working in Hauz Khas Village frequently argued that India opening up to global consumer goods had heralded in a class that would blindly emulate all Western mainstream influences without reflection or finesse. They themselves

could meanwhile display a more nuanced knowledge of Western forms of urban consumerism such as international underground music and art scene, while still remaining in touch with their own cultural heritage, locally grown talents and artistry. A considerable presence of European and American foreigners as well as re-migrating Non Residential Indians (NRIs), supported this claim to transnational cultural competence, and helped create a collective sense of belonging to those with the cultural capital to join in.

The Village's topography was thereby idealised as a cosmopolitan project that would refine the landscape of the modern capital. Its surge in popularity around 2010 was furthermore underwritten by a groundswell mood circulating in the city, evident from the remark of a filmmaker and a long-term resident: "There was a big feeling of change, a lot of people moved to the city and moved away from their traditional family spaces. A lot of things came together in 2010, the metro came to the South, it was pushed like a time of opportunity around the Commonwealth Games."

The young urban newcomers push for a new and different kind of urban experience was not, in particular, opposition to the project of beautification of the city, which dominated popular discourses at the time of the Commonwealth Games, but was ultimately informed by similar popular discourses and demands of a growing middle class. Hence, they supported Delhi's ambitions to become a world-class city and felt entitled to a modern urban experience, in a city enriched with the global capitals and inhabited by cosmopolitan subjects. The refashioning of the city thus influenced young city dwellers' desire to participate in what they perceived as a localised, yet global metropolitan modernity.

Theatres of Consumer Spectacle

Hauz Khas Village soon drew bigger crowds looking to bask in the cosmopolitan aura of its high end retail shops, nightlife and restaurants. Very few small-scale restaurants and bars currently remain to compete with big players in the food and beverage industry with coffee chain Starbucks being the latest to open its gates in November 2015. This transformation is reminiscent of the artist-led gentrification cycle in which the creative youth attracts a larger market of consumers famously described by Zukin in relation to New York City (1982). The reputation created by the presence of young people living, working or frequenting the Village elevated the neighbourhood's profile and intensified capital investment. Most property owning villagers have now rented out their spaces for commercial purposes with some landlords' families still residing; few interspersed among the busy front lanes and more in the

back lanes of the Village. While some artists and musicians still live in its back lanes, many young residents have left, as residential rents were also raised with the growth of the Village's popularity. Tarlo related the Village's earlier incarnation as a fashion design hub in the early nineties to the changing conditions of a restructured urban economy (1996). Similarly, embedded in the wider scale of the city's economic landscape, its more recent transformation can be linked to a boom in Delhi's leisure economy, changing consumer habits of a growing petite bourgeoisie, and South Delhi's surplus capital flow. Moreover, consumer trends inspired by global imaginaries stimulate consumption practices and boost the demand for a nightlife hub in the capital.

The concentration of artistic subcultures in Hauz Khas Village marked a fashionable presence in Delhi's urban landscape with its existing population of freelancers, artists, musicians and entrepreneurs seen as representatives of good taste. The village's 'artsy' atmosphere and ambience of cosmopolitan urbanity developed into a marketable feature in the practice of neighbourhood branding, with media lauding how in "Hauz Khas Village the creative coexists peaceably with the commercial, and mainstream taste mixes with alternative inclination".³ Co-opted into a model of high-end consumption the area's bohemian moment may have been over, but its traces came to be valorised in a new urban leisure economy. In de Koning's discussion on cosmopolitan Cairo she establishes how "[c]offee shops offer visceral experiences of a re-territorialised First World in Egypt" (2009: 127) and "allow for the imagination of certain modes of belonging that are inflected by First World fashions and experiences and suggest membership in a cosmopolitan space that is local, Cairene, and Egyptian, yet part of wider First World circuits and publics" (2009: 126). Hauz Khas Village's bars and restaurants now fulfil a similar function for Delhi's young and outgoing population offering accessible cultural capital and presenting the alluring opportunity to take part in the city's most 'modern' urban lifestyle. The village has thus come to symbolise the ease with which young Indian upper middle class navigates the cacophony of cosmopolitan imaginings, international trends and consumption goods available in the city. At the same time the 'Indian village identity' – occasionally resurfacing in symbolic references to its quaint lanes and historicity – appears to localise its cosmopolitan status offering a sense of being in touch with ones' cultural identity and heritage. One restaurant owner with a long history in the Village for instance described the experience as a "natural kind of a habitat, it's not like entering a shopping mall or a straight-lined architecture, it goes back to your roots, it goes back to your DNA."

³ <http://travel.cnn.com/mumbai/play/hauz-khas-village-create-cool-urban-community-322804>

This image of Indian village nostalgia contains an element of orientalist branding. Tarlo described a similar romanticising narrative of Hauz Khas Village at the height of 'ethnic chic' when a largely fabricated and romanticised rural village setting had been utilised as a backdrop for a new shopping experience (Tarlo, 1996). The Village's history as a newly urbanised space still exhibiting some remnants of its old architectural features allowed it to be reconfigured into an explicitly 'Indian' yet simultaneously 'global' consumer spectacle. Hauz Khas thereby turned into both "village and a super-village with evolving, dissolving and invented traditions competing for space" (Tarlo, 1996: 315).

Nonetheless, many interpreted new chain outlets as signs of standardisation likening the Village's current state to an outdoor mall. This development also opened up some opportunities that are otherwise difficult to find in Delhi's urban landscape: first, it created a space for mixed gender sociality, with public displays of affection as a common sight. Second it provided a degree of easy access for young women to move freely. Female visitors and residents often told me they had no qualms about walking around the village even late at night. Restaurant owners made clear that groups of men were not welcome within the village, and 'single stag entry' usually prohibited, as establishments were eager to reach a balanced gender ratio so as to retain the flow of female customers. Akin to Srivastava's discussions on the figure of the female shopping mall consumer that produces some - if conditional - access to public space for women, Hauz Khas Village may then also "provide an alternative logic of loitering" (Srivastava 2013: 58). The Village offers women the opportunity to experience a relaxed form of sociality usually reserved for men, although this access remains contingent on the imperative of conspicuous consumption. Although female residents regard the village's older population as a strong patriarchal setting, on-going commercialisation maintains a steady flow of visitors and impacts on women's ability to move through the village freely. As landlords obtain their main source of income from rents, this interdependence further mediates lifestyle clashes and conflicting moralities. In the new narrative of urban modernity, the 'urban woman' in public space (Srivastava 2015, Phadke 2005) comes to take centre stage, representing aspirational images of the globalising city. Female customers accordingly, constitute a desired category, legitimising the Village's claim to modern cosmopolitan urbanity.

Unregulated Development

Relatively small in size Hauz Khas Village has a distinctive geographical layout. With only one lane effectively reserved for the food and beverage industry, the most sought after commercial properties are concentrated in very limited space. Acute problems the Village faces today include an unfettered construction boom leading to unsound building structures and fire hazards, outside capital outpricing small scale businesses, and increased pressures on weaker sections of its population. These issues can be linked to the distinctive process of urbanization Delhi's urban villages have undergone.

In the Delhi Masterplan, urban villages were designated as primarily residential areas to protect villagers' rights to remain in their villages. While license for some commercial activities was reserved for convenience shops and offices to cover local needs, this provision was not intended to extend to outside investment. However, since these spaces received little attention from authorities and villagers were forced to turn to rental income after the loss of their farming land, large numbers of external commercial and manufacturing activities entered into urban village localities. Supplying affordable housing in central locations they thereby came to play a substantial role in the urban landscape. As Ananya Roy (2009) point out such informality, manifested in unregulated urban developments, fulfils vital functions in Indian urbanism meeting pressing needs of the city's economic system. The lack of regulation in urban villages can come with severe drawbacks as has become glaringly apparent in Hauz Khas Village. Looking to maximise rental income, land-owning villagers have increasingly exhausted the limits of construction. Despite misgivings about the quality of new structures, more floors and extensions are fitted into already overstrained spaces. Neglected by development authorities urbanized villages have a history of lacking behind in the supply of infrastructure services. Unregulated growth of villages such as Hauz Khas Village has acerbated these problems, particularly regarding water, parking, waste and sanitation facilities. While its infrastructure struggles to keep up with the growing number of visitors, the single road leading to the village entrance is mainly pushed beyond its limits.

Residential areas of villages were not surveyed at the time of incorporation into urban boundaries. Houses within village areas, therefore, usually lack clear property ownership records (Kumar 2015). This condition has led to ongoing quarrels and power struggles among villagers over land ownership, especially in the light of Hauz Khas Village rising popularity and real estate values. Attempts by authorities at regulating urban villages' construction development have remained largely unsuccessful. Active intervention would

necessitate the preparation of local area plans because villages require attention to particular areas. Such local area plans have as of yet failed to materialise due to an urban planning culture that prefers blanket policy over area-wise solutions, a lack of resources within the municipal corporation, and resistance from local landowners. The accumulation of wealth by individual villagers and outsiders who have acquired the biggest or most desired plots has led to the rise of influential local players, many of whom have entered local politics. Clearly defined land use and development controls would potentially cut into the influence wielded by such local stakeholders. For this reason, a circular issued by the Municipal Commissioner to tighten building by-laws and enforce a 2005 High Court ruling on the requirement of building sanction plans met with widespread resistance and political pressure to retract it. As A.K Jain, former architect and town planner at the Delhi Development Authority explained to me: "That circular was withdrawn very quietly and the status quo of 1963 circular was continued without issue because, if they would put it in writing that this circular is withdrawn, this will be in contempt of the High Court and the Supreme Court".

While some continue to reap the benefits of Hauz Khas Village's integration into the commerce and service sector of the city, tense power struggles dominate the internal networks of the Village. Lower-caste residents living in permanent homes (*pakka*) or temporary huts (*kachcha*) at the back of the village find new employment as doormen or service staff in the villages' businesses. Rising rents, even in the less desirable locations, however, hamper benefits for low-income groups, as they increasingly face the pressure of rent hikes and overstrained infrastructure. Living conditions for migrant labourers are not improving, in part becoming more precarious, as commercialisation characterises the public life of Hauz Khas Village. Congestion and haphazard construction work have furthermore damaged its built environment, contributing to what many see as serious safety hazards.

Ownership and Village Aesthetics

Transformed into a theatre of conspicuous consumption Hauz Khas Village has undergone a stark physical transformation. As mentioned above, the scarcity of space has led to inflated rental rates for commercial space, with landlord wealth growing substantially through incoming upper-middle-class residents and businesses. Nevertheless, an uneasy relationship between villagers and young newcomers characterises the Village's social fabrics. Landlords have recognised the young newcomers' 'cultural capital' in the shape of high education levels and well-versed knowledge of new consumer goods, and consumption practices, interpreting it as potential opportunity to modernise the Village's profile and

eradicating its image of ‘backwardness’. Many young artists and musicians were somewhat reflective of their role in the drastic changes within the village, but most argued that they had not profited in the longer term. A select few landlords owning most of the land and controlling the village spaces at times demonstrated their power by evicting establishments in the hope of getting more rent from new people looking to set up businesses. This struggle became emblematic in the unsuccessful protests against the eviction of an alternative bookshop and publisher Yodakin. Landlords at this moment saw their chance to gain more out of their village’s growing popularity and frequently favoured drastic transformations and increased commercialisation of land use. Young people, on the other hand, felt the villagers lacked an essential understanding of the space and aesthetic they had created, which was dependent on small-scale cultural venues and shops. A fantasy of village life relying on quaint sleepy lanes untouched by the relentless rhythms of traffic and commerce found in the rest of the city had after all provided the raw material to sculpt into their creative quarter. The young residents and small business owners thus felt increasingly disenchanted with the development of the village. A local musician and promoter, for instance, tells me “the other places that have opened since, they did not bear any allegiance to the local community, they just do whatever it takes to please the general Indian mass customer”.

Different concepts of ownership and modern urbanity pitched against each other have since reconstituted the village arena. Neighbourhood marketing in the postcolonial city can include complex contestations around imaginaries of cosmopolitanism, modernity and heritage. Writing on Cairo’s coffee shops, De Koning describes them as “prism through which one can view the way local and global come together to create specific configurations of hierarchy and distinction, closeness and distance” (2008: 66). Hauz Khas Village may function as a similar prism, establishing contesting spatial claims through newer elite production and consumption practices. Such a contest for urban space exemplifies the way urban modernity and class identity are forged. The Village at the moment emerges as a space in which multiple and parallel temporalities are juxtaposed, and the modern urban subject finds several conflicting expressions.

Conclusion

This paper has laid out some of the ways in which particular spatialised identities, imaginaries and behaviours, distinctively construct the urban village of Hauz Khas Village. The spatial configuration of the urban village presents a fitting site for personal and professional experiments of a young urban middle and upper middle-class disillusioned with

the city's more regulated neighbourhoods. The dispositions, practices and tastes of local artists and other creative enterprises contribute to neighbourhood ambience, eventually leading to accelerated urban development and intensified capital investment. The presence and participation of artists, musicians and creative enterprises in urban areas as well as in the urban workforce have significantly transformed the Village. The current transformation of Delhi's urban spaces furthermore intersects with intensified middle-class consumption practices, with entertainment, nightlife, food culture and other lifestyle pressures impacting on the complex internal ecologies of urban villages.

South Delhi's Hauz Khas Village thus manifests the strenuous relationship between the arts, cultural production and new strategies of accumulation in the neo-liberal economic landscape of urban India. It demonstrates the social impact of new lifestyle and consumption habits of the middle-classes in an increasingly socially and spatially polarised city. Similar processes of gentrification have led to market-driven displacement and class succession in other parts of the world. The shapes such global developments take, however, depend largely on local specificities and economic environment. The specific status of the urban village within Delhi's development, along with its relations to broader economic and cultural flows operating in and between cities at the moment significantly affects its trajectory. As other spaces representing Delhi's neo-liberal restructuring receive more attention in urban literature, one needs to focus on urban villages as they contain "projects of transformations that seek to conjure both the ideal urban body and idealised topographies" (Srivastava, 2015: xxii). Drawing on global imaginaries, Hauz Khas Village has become a site in which young urbanites assert and localise their modernity drawing on current narratives of cosmopolitan urbanity, appropriate consumption, professional and creative innovation. Particular notions of inner city-life interwoven with transnational trends, chart a new urban geography, ambiguously positioned within discourses of a modernising 'world-class' capital.

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