CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

MUNIRKA - A HISTORY OF THE URBAN VILLAGE

The image of primitive man becomes merged with that of 'man in general' who, in the end, looks suspiciously similar to the goal oriented pragmatist of capitalist society. Leach E.R. 1957. The epistemological background to Malinowski's empiricism in Raymond Firth edited, Man and Culture, London: Routledge & Kegal Paul.

Munirka is a fast changing urban village. No longer is Munirka today what it was even a few decades ago. There are principally two related factors that are responsible for this dynamism in Munirka. One is the overpowering nature of capitalism, and the other, the interactions with the urban metropolis of Delhi, within which it is now situated. Equally important are the interventionist policies of the state, namely those of planning and development. Caught in a dilemma, much as the juxtaposed order reveals, Munirka
demonstrates a continuing struggle to maintain its past in the face of the changes that are a result of its interaction at various levels with the metropolis. Today the village exhibits both the bold new entrants, especially at the economic and political levels, and at the same time one can discern different social and cultural features of its past that are undergoing vast changes. The changing nature of primordial ties in the village, such as those of caste, kinship marriage and religion or the very nature in which rituals are observed on a massive scale leave reflections of several kinds. One is immediately struck by the fact that the 'transitions' of the kind that this urban village is undergoing is not smooth. There are a multiplex of relationships (e.g. market, new political order, rituals, etc.) that are implicated, and any close scrutiny of such a social field must take them into account. The country town nexus, as the theme suggests, is built on linkages on a variety of axes between the urban village and the metropolis. These
Linkages do not presume a one way movement, but must also examine the dynamics of reciprocal flows and spirals of involuted developments, which is why terms like modernization, urbanization or development seem inadequate.

Munirka is situated in South Delhi adjacent to the Jawaharlal Nehru University. The Jats are the dominant caste in this village, though there are other castes too such as Jatavas, Potters, Weavers and Brahmins. The residential pattern of the village is by and large on caste lines. The fact that it is located in the midst of urban Delhi has raised the rental value of houses and rooms in Munirka. A large number of people rent places in this urban village. In addition this village has also attracted investments from outside, primarily of the small scale variety. Such investments, more than anything else, have given a fillip to the village economy. They have generated jobs, encouraged local enterprise, and also, quite significantly,
enhanced rental values. The population of the village has been growing rapidly. Though the village has undergone changes at almost every level, yet it remains, in terms of its appearance and morphology a village. Culturally too it is quite distinct from the urban areas surrounding it. In other words, though Munirka has changed it has not become the same as the urban world outside it, nor has it been able to fully retain its past traditions and culture in their pristine forms.

The village is thus gripped by diverse pressures. There is growing prosperity on the one hand and a certain grimness on the other, reminiscent of a typical description of an early industrial city: "The industrial cities, especially in the early part of the 19th century, contained miserable residences for the workers and their families. Housing was poorly constructed and crowded closely together - typically as tall tenements or row housing, often with little or no provision for water and sanitation. In one
part of Manchester in 1843-44 for example, surveys reported only one toilet per 212 persons. Cellars - dark, dank and unsanitary - often served as dwelling places. Provision for garbage and rubbish removal was inadequate. Windows were small and narrow and lighting inadequate. Limited space was available for gardens or children's play and so forth so on...."\(^1\)

The village today is rife with contradictions and disorderliness. Whereas the elements of Jat culture which could be best categorized as *bhaichara* (brotherhood), *bira-dari*, *man maryada*, *ijjat*, *bhai bandhu* still continue, caste wars are not unheard of or unknown. The market has an established and sprawling presence in Munirka converting it into a site of commodity production and collective consumption. This co-exists with traces of their past practices. No less is the prevalence of old methods. If the market has been helping the residents of Munirka through derivation of
rent, which is their major basis of income, buffaloes continue to remain tethered in their homes, for purposes of milk production and for providing cowdung cakes for fuel. These products are both for domestic use as well as for sale. The cultural valorization of a 'khat' or of a 'hookah' continues. The art of wrestling where one is able to prove one's physical prowess is still a game that is much admired. The women for their part are often seen carrying sickle and cutting grass as fodder for their cattle. The practice of ancestor worship continues, even as the Arya Samaj provides the Munirka residents with many resounding ideals. The modern mass media have had a profound role to play as well in the village. Faced with instances of a world divided immensely by different value orientations the people of Munirka show diverse patterns of behaviour. On the one hand, gossiping at the 'chodor' smoking hookah, playing cards, or drinking are fairly common sights in the village but so are the effects of the modern world. A house
with a T.V. showing the latest cable movie release becomes a tiny picture hall with crowds watching the screen from outside. All kinds of shops proliferate, from those that sell products to service and repair workshops. They often encroach upon religious institutions like temples and other places of worship. The whole village with serpentine routes almost makes one feel as if one is standing amidst a market place. As far as residents are concerned, the village today has more migrants than autochthonous inhabitants.

In a place so heavily set with 'extremes' of heterogeneity one can easily feel intimidated if set upon the task of finding a leading factor to explain the dialectic between the previous order which still exists and the fast occurring changes of contemporary times. Bewildered as one might feel, there are several meanings and explanations which could be offered to come to terms with the unfolding of the country-town nexus with Munirka as a focus.
Munirka is an old village. Its historical growth seems to have begun around the beginning of nineteenth century. The place remained more or less like a grazing field. The land was rocky and inhospitable to the possibility of growing crops, and not much water was available anyway, except for a pond which remains till this day. One part of the village gradually separated itself from Munirka and is known by name of Mohammadpur. Till 1951, however, it was treated as together with Munirka by the Census Handbook (1952). Today they are formally separate entities.

The Jats of the Tokas clan are the original inhabitants of the village. They originally migrated from Behraur (Bhagi Behraur), in Rajasthan. In due course of time these Jats were joined by other groups of people who were also Jats but of the Rathi clan. Their numbers were augmented by the potters from Jhajhar in Haryana, the Jatavas, weavers, as well as by Brahmins. There is also a thin population of Muslim Jats in the village.
The name Munirka can be etymologically traced to one Afghan Munir Khan to whom the village once belonged. Originally according to folk tradition, two Jat brothers of the Tokas clan travelled on bullock carts and took shelter at Babar Ka Takiya, mosque near the present Income Tax Office. From there they moved on to the monument or gomut that stands in Munirka. In popular lore often cited by the Jats, that the land was of munis meaning Sadhus and thus the name Murnirka. This is a weaker version. Other papers which I received from Tis Hazari Court, Delhi, suggest it must have come into being during the reign of Razia Sultan or Iltutmish.³

The 'gomut' or the monument was bought by the two brothers with kuriya or precious stones. Another legend says that the village belonging to Munir Khan was pawned property in the hands of Sri Chunnilal and was finally won by Sri Rudh Singh, one of the Jat brothers, at Lahore Court.
The system of 'purdah', where women are required to veil their faces is widely practiced. The accusation of eyeing the brother's wife on the pretext of tying the bullock cart became the cause of jealousy and suspicion between the families of the brothers which eventually led to separation. Consequently the younger brother stayed behind, and the elder settled at Pilibhit Gaon, in Pilibhit, Uttar Pradesh.

The village landscape is unevenly divided. The front of the village, the one facing Rama Krishna Puram, is on level ground and its posterior end which faces Jawaharlal Nehru University, projects like a ridge or a cliff. The land was not very productive and it remained a grazing field for cattle. It managed to produce a meagre growth of crops, like jowar and bajra. The best lands and the core dwelling area belonged mostly to the Jats. The other caste groups which came later were allowed to settle but mostly on
the exterior boundaries. The Jatavas and the potters for instance live at the back on the cliff side. The Jats reside mainly in the heart of the village. The Rathis, also Jats, who joined later, live in the front facing Rama Krishna Puram. They were supposed to act as chowkidars, or guards, and protect the village from extreme invasion, particularly by the Muslims.4

The population of the village has undergone tremendous change because of migration and because of growing urbanization in the city surrounding it. The construction and repair of new and old houses is a part of everyday routine. Due to the increase in population, there is no specific Laldora5 which one can clearly delineate. Village record surveys were carried out on four occasions. The first was in 1842, then in 1864 and 1880. The last to be carried was in 1908-9. No other records exist after this. These records make some interesting revelation.
First let us examine the population changes which the village witnessed in due course of its development. The census records between 1961 and 1981 are very revelatory. The present figure is unknown but the trend is easily discernible.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Population (in thousands)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>6056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>7,4337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>15,6678</td>
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</tbody>
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The urban population has thus been ever increasing very rapidly. The figures show the ascending nature of growth in population of metropolis Delhi. As far as Delhi's population is concerned Gupta writes, "the urban population, 2,14,115 in 1901 doubled after partition and in 1981 stood at 5,713,581." Having seen the growth in population figures it is equally essential to show how the village lands today do not respect ten old Laldora apportioning of land between
agricultural and residential area. Encroachment remains a normal practice of the day. What we have are village records showing an increase in the previous boundaries contained within Laldora. The records are of 1842, 1864, 1880 and 1908-09 showing an increase in Laldora for respective years as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Bighe</th>
<th>Biswe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1864</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908-9</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1 Bighe = 20 Biswe)\textsuperscript{10}

Much of the increase has been due to increased population strength and also because of the proliferation of markets. Today to the best of our knowledge the village has as many as 11 markets all engaged in sale of consumer products. Added to it is the rent seeking nature of the village. With the intrusion of those new elements, viz. market forces, and democratic polity, the village has undergone tremendous changes even at the cultural or primordial
level. The subsequent chapters will try to delve into these aspects to the extent our competence allows. To accomplish this we must first begin by refining our conceptual understanding by reviewing village studies of the past with our problem in mind. This will assist in the shifting of material from the field so that the nature of the country town nexus receives a comprehensive elaboration.
Notes and References


2. Behraur falls in Alwar district of Rajasthan State. It is midway between New Delhi and Jaipur.

3. The monument has an interesting history. The Department of Archaeology, Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi, which has a list of Muhammadan and Hindu monuments, published in 1919 by the Superintendent, Government of Printing, Vol.2, Sl.No.314, p.220, placed it as follows:
   
a) Mosque called Malik Munirka

b) In the middle of the village


d) II.
e) Afghan

f) None

g) Ruined

h) Should be protected

i) The mosque is built of rubble and coated with plaster. It consists of a central compartment flanked by three others on either side. The Central Chamber measures 24 square E.M. and is covered with a dome. The wings on either side measure 37' by 15' E.M. In the Central compartment is a grave of rubble in middle, probably a later addition. The building is now occupied by villagers. To the south of the mosque is an apartment 33' by 14'6" E.M. probably intended for the Mulla or priest. In front of this apartment and facing south there are traces of an entrance to the mosque.

4. It is said that the Rathis came from Mehrauli after having fought with the Muslims. The Rathis suffered a loss and thus were invited by the Tokas brothers to
stay with them and also act as village guards or
defenders. The Muslims were considered to be their
main enemy. The settlement of the village goes back to
the period of Razia Sultan and Iltutmish around the
early 13th century the period of the Sultanate or the
Slave Dynasty.

5. Laldora literally means red-thread. Since the days of
the British the village area was mainly into two parts,
viz., an area meant for residential complex, schools,
hospitals, parks, civic amenities and the other, the
open land. The demarcation between the two was signi-
fied by the Laldora. The area thus bounded by the
Laldora excludes the fields. (A demarcation, drawn on
the basis of residential and open area, the Laldora is
an indicator on the map of the village showing the
separation of the two.) The Laldora keeps shifting
because of growing population pressure, or due to the
number of shops and garages which keep rising in the
village. Most importantly within this "laldora", construction activity does not require the sanction of Municipal Corporation of Delhi, Delhi Development Authority or the Delhi Urban Development Act. This is what has led to the spate of economic enterprises of various kinds in these urban villages.


10. Compiled from records available at Tis Hazari Court, 25th August 1993 with help of Kanungo Shri Maichand. Munirka contains within it the urban village Munirka. Its other areas are Rama Krishna Puram, Vasant Vihar, Jawaharlal Nehru University, etc.