Ghevra Diaries

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SLUM & JJ DEPARTMENT INVITES TENDERS

For developing plots in Squatter Re-settlement Scheme at Ghevra Sawda Village Ph-II, towards:

1: Supply and Lowering of 3H.P single phase sub.p/set in JSC Block 'P', Block 'R', Block 'M', Block 'N', Block 'O', Block 'R', Block Q.

2: Providing Internal Electrification and Supply and Fixing of electrical accessories in JSC Block 'M', Block P, Block 'N', Block Q.


4: Providing Internal Loop Connection in 6 nos. JSC in Ph-II.


6: S/F of Metal clad board i/c safety measures accessories and wiring at pump house.


[B] (1) Near Police Chowki (2) Next to Police Chowki (3) Near Kali Mandir (4) Near Barat Ghar (5) Near JSC No.-3 Ph-II

7: Repairing and Rewinding of 3 Phase Sub.P/set 6H.P. stage and supply and fixing of allied accessories in JSC at Bapu Camp, Mandi Pahari.

8: Providing temporary street lighting in Ghevra Sawda Block 'G H' Phase-I.

Last date of receipt of application for purchase of tender papers: 4.00 P.M. on 12.09.07

Last date and time for issue of tender papers: 4.00 P.M. on 13.09.07

Last date and time for receipt of tender papers: 3.00 P.M. on 14.09.07

Date and time for opening of tender papers: 3.30 P.M. on 14.09.07

**Closer to the Destination**  
Rakesh Khairalia

I felt uneasy, like an outsider to that which I was witnessing.

Before my eyes, the foundation of a new neighbourhood was being laid alongside the erasure of one that was 30 years old. Today the demolition of Nangla leapt closer to its destined conclusion.

The state was issuing receipts for land in exchange for the life in Nangla. Today's date will jar in the timeline of the school, which became a site for this historical moment. Hands clutched the gates of the only school in the locality. People stood in lines with their ration cards, tokens of identity they have received from the state. Identities they have been frozen in, identities that they don't desire, identities that they tussle with, and yet struggle for. Everyone carried these identities in the form of documents today, pressed against their bodies. Men and women sat, heads covered for protection from the sun, restless eyes shifting, faces contorting with an insatiable hunger. Shadows flickered in the intense heat that surrounded them. Voices, sounds, ricocheted; they had no destination. After living in their past for so many days, a route out had opened itself for hundreds in Nangla. Getting a house. Getting an opportunity to be able to build again a neighbourhood, a web of social relations to reside in. Wasn't it to reach this destination that so much had been put at stake these last few days?

Sawda-Ghevra was but a faint, distant shadow here. What could be seen was only a desire to emerge from time that had passed.

**The Corners of a City**  
Shamsher Ali

In the thousands of corners in the city, there will surely be one that holds space that is destined for me. “City”: the word holds this meaning that everyone shares an understanding about. People come to the city with this stubborn thought in their hearts, searching for their corner. Unstable routines become their identities, with which they enter the city, beginning once again to plant their feet.

There is a reason to reach the city, but there is no destination to reach in the city.

The thought that the world is very big and that everyone will surely find a place in it becomes a force with which the search for a location begins. The wheels of time keep moving, and the person who came to the city recently soon becomes a city-dweller who has been here for 10 years. He participates in and becomes tied to the time and the crests and troughs of the space he is in.

An invalidated licence. Everyone finds one so as to stay in one of the infinite informal spaces in the city. Desires find shade to rest in. That is why, when a young child runs away from
home, the hope of his return remains. This hope stays tied to spaces even when a long time has elapsed. It is these spaces that evictions and demolitions are threatening today.

People whose houses were marked ‘Post-98’ in Nangla, and who have not been allotted a plot in Ghevra, have also reached Ghevra. Their certainty that there is a corner in the city for everyone is intact. They are sure there is that wall in Ghevra for them, where they and their families can rest their backs. And why not! This is a city, after all.

**Entering Ghevra**

Lakhmi Chand Kohli

Long, broad, levelled land. There is no settlement in sight till far. No sound can be heard. There are footprints and marks of bicycles and tractors that have passed on the unpaved, turning lanes. This land, in the shape of fields, has soaked up all water.

Standing here, amidst land that stretches for miles, eyes search the city, search for distant mounds that would indicate houses. Ears strain to hear a fragment of a sound interlaced with the sounds of the city. But there is nothing here.

Just a huge power plant, and the government office of the JJ resettlement colony.

The city is far away from here, at the fringes.

Even the black line of a road that joins this place to the city seems to be breaking away from this space, moving away from it. To reach here, one has to leave this road and turn in. This road is not a route for any bus yet. The roughly three-kilometre stretch that brings you here has to be covered on foot. By the time you reach here, the mind forgets it is still in the city of Delhi. This is Ghevra, the new corner of Delhi.

**Ghevra through the Eyes of My Father**

Suraj Rai

When someone abides by a place, he earns the regard of others. This regard brings a value to the space. It is in exchange for the 30 years that people have given to Nangla that they are being given plots of 12 and 18 square metres in Ghevra.

In LNJP, where I live, different decisions – from the structures of the houses, to how the lanes turn, to which houses can lie together – have been ours. Where will we make our home? In which direction will doors open? Who do we want to include in our neighbourhood, and who do we keep out? We have decided these things ourselves, here in this place in which we live. We are the ones who thought of making the temple underneath the peepal tree. Maybe our contributions to this place developing the way it has been within our limited means; but the decisions about how the space evolves have been ours; the place has been shaped by our will. In Ghevra, this gets immediately subtracted from our lives. And it pinches. There are
no words for this, and so everyone is losing themselves in talk about loss of comfort and lack of amenities. But the unhappiness is really that of having lost power.

Is it possible that everyone is happy with his neighbourhood? It’s not possible. There are days when one feels like escaping from here. Relations can be forged in two minutes; bread may be offered by anyone who happens to be sitting next to you. But still, we are all lamenting the loss of relations and neighbourhood. There is something that we are hiding.

**Forming Maps**
Lakhmi Chand Kohli

Many five-foot pillars of cement stand in a row. Some have numbers inscribed on them – 36A, 36AF. Many are blank. The pillars are dividing up the place into portions, making frames in which the paintings of new lives will be hung. The colours of the paintings are not yet certain.

Around the pillars, in a radius of about four feet, small pieces of wood, painted red, have been hammered into the ground. Along these, lines have been drawn by sprinkling white DDT powder. Each frame is divided into many parts. Was this place inhabited by people before this?

At the edges, wire nets have been hung with the pillars as pegs; the expanse of the space has been contained. A hot wind is blowing; the borders have come alive, they are shivering.

This is the border between Delhi and Haryana.

A faint map of the lane is emerging from the red pieces of wood and the DDT powder.

Measured plots peer out from behind them.

Some distance away, a lake has dried up and is fixed, unstimulating, into the ground.

**On Returning from Ghevra**
Neelofar

On returning from Ghevra, when I enter my home, I can’t see anything. I sit on one side and slowly wait for things to make themselves visible, for them to reacquaint themselves with me. Sometimes Ma keeps to herself, lost in her work; at other times she asks me, “You’re back very early today?”

I go to the toilet, then come back and drink water, and lie down. My mind revisits the morning I spent in Ghevra. Today Ghevra’s journey to becoming a colony doesn’t seem immeasurable, but I don’t seem to be able to cover it. I feel my mother’s past time is in that place somewhere. When I ask her, she says, “How can I recount my days in Mustafabad? Neither water not electricity; houses far away from each other, ground of sand and dust...”
To reach Ghevra you travel beyond Shakarpur and the big shopping malls and clubs, beyond the stretch of road where huge construction work continues. The journey challenges and asks us, “Where are you in all this?”

**Token**

Suraj Rai

Last night, as I looked inside the trunk, I saw a square piece of metal, layered with chalk dust. I had no memory to associate with it. I picked it up and removed the dust from it. It was an aluminium plate. It bore a number: 4-1-5. I recognised the number. Our ration card bears the same number. The metal plate was embossed with a sign. The issuing authority’s, I thought to myself. Within this sign, or logo, was a stamp of time: 1987. On seeing the year, an image flashed in my mind. A day from my childhood when I saw two men standing on the other side of the threshold of my house, one of them painting this number with a brush onto the wall. The number stayed on the wall through my childhood.

I asked my mother what the square piece of aluminium was. She said it was a token. It bore the token number of our house. Our ration card and election I-card have both been issued on the basis of this token. VP Singh [a politician] had got it made. All the poor people who lived here got one. The purpose was to assist us in getting kerosene for stoves and sugar at lower costs. Our colony got its name when these tokens were issued. Today it is called LNJP colony, but then it was named T-Wood Market. My mother told me to put it back in the trunk, to return it to where I had pulled it out from. She said it would help us later in life.

As I put it back in its place I thought to myself: that which has no relation to my memories of my family is a strong token of my family’s identity in the city.

**Ghevra Is at a Distance of 75 Kilometres from Dakshinpuri**

Lakhmi Chand Kohli

The kilometres don’t feel as if they have been traversed, on reaching Ghevra. Instead, they seemed to keep rolling on in the spread of Ghevra.

Ghevra is discussed often in Dakshinpuri. How can it be otherwise? When a settlement in the city is faced with demolition and there is talk of its relocation to another place, a resettlement colony like Dakshinpuri begins to reminisce. Images and memories from its own past emerge and begin to be narrated. The tension unfolding elsewhere in the city becomes proximal.

The difference between Dakshinpuri and Ghevra seems to be that with the passage of time Dakshinpuri has reclaimed its place in the city, whereas Ghevra has just begun this journey. “Where have they brought and left us, so far!” When I hear someone in Ghevra saying this,
I feel the distance between Dakshinpuri and Ghevra has amplified and become infinite. It seems then that Ghevra is not only distant from the present moment of Dakshinpuri, but also from the imagination of the emerging city.

**Construction Has Begun**
Rakesh Khairalia

Countless people are being cast onto the land of Sawda-Ghevra.
Those lives, which had once before transformed barren terrain by infusing it with life-force and embellishing it, have now begun to descend on the land of Ghevra, to once again take on the challenge. Another struggle to give direction to the wayward lines of time has begun. The process of rehabilitation of settlements from Lakshmi Nagar and Shahdara has begun.

One man has driven four to six bamboo sticks into the ground to create a frame; tied ropes around the frame and created a canopy by draping blankets and sheets over them.

The afternoon sun shoots rays like arrows to the ground. In the fields, each grain of sand seethes like lava.
Construction has begun in Ghevra.

**The Form of a House**
Azra Tabassum

A gap, where a small wooden bench can fit, had been left before the entrance to the house. The *kuccha* (unpaved) floor had been freshly plastered with a paste of mud. Opposite the entrance, on the wall of matted bamboo, hung a calendar from the year 2006.

The entrance was to the left. The door and the wall were made with the same material. Yellow, rolled-up bamboo mats had been straightened out, framed with narrow poles of bamboo, tied together at the edges with ropes to make a room. The door was a mat framed with thicker bamboo poles.

Sunlight took new shapes in the small portion of space on the other side of the door. It filtered in through the wall across the room and fell on the wall with the door, making it shine. Then scattered itself like many diamonds on the floor. Moonlight will also enter in streams and fragments and spread itself here this way.

There was something behind the wall at the far end of the house. Light didn't find a path in from there. On these freshly made walls, even a mild light seemed acute. The house is empty at the moment. When people begin to live in the house, what kind of relations will the light be bound into?

There was a section in the house where someone could sit and read without needing a bulb.
Four steps ahead, another space, which seemed as if it was created as an afterthought. No light entered here. It was right in the middle of the house. It was smaller than the space that lay ahead of it.

Further inside, a space that was in complete darkness. As if it was night.

There had been an attempt to tie the 12.5 square metres of space together in different ways. The shape and form of the house will surely change with time. But I feel people who will live in it will maintain the openness it contains at the moment.

**Everyone Is an Artisan**
Tripan Kumar

Two men sat on the dusty ground, making a thatched roof. There was a big needle in their hands. They tightened bamboo poles to a bamboo mat with twine they had strung through the needle. When after standing near them for a while I sat down beside them, they glanced towards me. I asked, “Are you making your own home, or are you artisans?” They replied enthusiastically, “In today’s world, who isn’t an artisan! Everyone is an artisan, some less, some more than others”.

Anand Halder is 60 years old. His son Ashish is 35 and grandson Raju is 22; they hail from Murshidabad district in Bengal. In Ghevra, they are working on making houses using woven mats of bamboo.

Anand Halder said, halting his work as he spoke, “We take Rs 1000 to make one house, and it takes two days to make one”.

Each bamboo mat costs Rs 15, and bamboo poles are priced at Rs 60, 65, 80, according to their strength. All the material to make a house is purchased by the person whose house is to be made. The mats are made in Nainital and can be bought from the market in Shahdara.

“How long have you been doing this work?”

“This is not the only thing we can do. We know all kinds of work…”

“… Yes, we can do anything. We started this work recently, since this place began to take shape”.

Ashish’s voice emerged from inside, “Incidentally, we are fishermen. That’s our familial occupation. We supply markets with fish from the Jamuna, from Garhganga, Ghaziabad and other places. But this is not the season for that work, so we have had to seek other jobs”.

The three of them continued talking among themselves. Alongside, work continued. Now they cut a bamboo pole with a knife, now they tied the mats to the poles. I sat near them, watching them as they worked.
The Shop Is Ready
Lakhmi Chand Kohli

A narrow opening – the slight wall of woven material has been cut open, the flap raised and kept in place with the support of a bamboo stick. This marks the house as being different from others. One can tell no one will stay here after 11 at night.

The floor is cool with the fresh smear of mud and cowdung.

Just as one can sense there is an urgency in everyone to get their own land, a haste to make a home on it, one can also tell that making a shop on the plot assigned to one’s name is very important here.

What kind of a life will a shop in the middle of the lane have? Will it be able to become a hub for different kinds of transactions, in the manner of a market?

But these questions are untimely right now. It seems what is important to the owner is that some kind of a start be made, that the shop become a presence in people’s lives from the beginning...

In the lane a few plots still lie vacant, without anything built on them. Other than on these, work is being carried out with a kind of immedicacy.

The Making of the First Concrete House
Shamsher Ali

The afternoon glare reached the low wall of bricks; the wall hastily soaked up water being sprinkled on it. The sum total of the first two days’ work had been a foundation with an elevation of two feet. It takes one week and one day to make an entire house.

But how will this calculation account for the day preceding this one week and a day?

Both individuals had their own understanding about the small piece of land. The man in the cap was marking a map; the woman was conjuring an image of her home.

Those hands held nothing very special – just a thin, long thread and a big inch-tape. They were formulating a shape for the tall grass and unlevelled land – a shape before the land is settled on.

A small group of people noisily followed the man, their eyes fixed on the inch-tape. But the woman’s voice carried a force; it drew the entire scene to her. “O bhaiyya (brother), measure our plot. My sons are old enough, they will start building from tomorrow”.

It had been heard that plots were being measured against receipt of Rs 100 and a box of sweets. Maybe the government servant in the cap had already received his sweets. He measured the plot and compared the plot number with his map, then made some marks with his pen.

The woman’s voice and the work of the man with the cap stretch the 12.5 square metre
plot along two different axes. With measuring it, the man in the cap had finished his job. But the woman’s hands will keep working her entire life, decorating and building her home.

The Making of a Home
Yashoda Singh

Our home remains the same today as it was at the time when the foundations of houses were beginning to be laid in LNJP. Today the lane is two feet above our floor. The paving of the lanes has slowly raised the lanes, causing several houses to become lakes each time it rains. Our house is one such. The frame of the door is so low that it greets those who enter our home by saluting them on their foreheads. Sometimes Mother gets frustrated by this and in her anger says, “I will break this threshold! I am the one who cemented it to the wall…”

Whenever someone bumps into the doorframe, the time when it was made mutters its way onto Mother’s tongue. She still remembers the moment when the foundations of the first houses were being laid in the settlement. Objects were being collected from different places to make a home.

The broad wooden plank in our doorframe has receded from view because of layers of whitewash over the years. But Mother had brought it with a lot of affection, choosing it from among the piles of wooden things that had been discarded by the residents of the yellow quarters where she worked, cleaning it and, drenched in sweat, carrying it home. At that time rickshawalas didn’t charge too much, but still, Mother had not hired a ricksha. Today when she says in frustration that she will break it, the entire house seems to dissolve into its layers, and the cementing of bygone dreams begins again.

Papa often says in response to Mother’s frustration, “If the doorframe were to break, how will we scrape up the money for a new one?” Then Mother says, “You be quiet! What has your contribution to this been, anyway! You had just picked up your silver box and started out. But I am the one who has made this home liveable”. When Mother says this, my eyes become sensitive to time seeping from the mud-plastered walls.

Each year, the repair of these walls begins a week before Diwali. The crevices in the walls and the burrows of rats are filled in with slaked lime. The crust of the unpaved floor cracks each time someone’s heavy boots graze it. This may embarrass those who do not make things with their own hands, but for those who make things, such crusts are repositories of pride, which only gets stronger each year.
Eight Days
Rakesh Khairalia

“It takes eight days to make a house”.

“Can’t you do it in less time? The sooner it gets done, the better. There will be a roof over
our heads and a place to rest. Then one will not feel reluctant to return home everyday…”

“It’s a 12-square-metre plot; I am a mason. My hands and feet are not machines. It would
be good for me too if the job could get completed less time – I could then move on to my
next job”.

Eyes are trying to calibrate the measured plot of land from behind a veil. “Mistry-ji, how
many bricks should I order?”

The mason paused, looked upwards, turned his head from left to right, studied the four
corners of the plot. His lips moved slowly.

“It will take 4000 bricks. If more are needed, then we will see”.

“And what about the roof?”

“You tell me how you want the roof”.

“We have cement sheets from earlier; let’s make do with them”.

“Then consider your house made”.

Turning her head towards her husband Rajkumar, who was standing quietly on one side, she
said, “Arre, what about red sand and cement which will be needed?!”

The mason detailed the expenses and left.

“What do we care if someone gets theirs made or not, or if they take an entire year to make
theirs. You get ours made quickly”, she said definitively to her husband.

It was morning. A truck advanced through the dusty, unpaved road; it was laden with bricks.
It stopped at one side of the mouth of the lane. Rajkumar gestured to the truck driver to
drive in. The truck moved through the lane. The husband and wife smiled as they watched
the approaching truck. They supervised the unloading of the bricks.

Then a tempo brought bags of cement. They were unloaded quickly.

Now they are waiting for the mason.

“You are late by half an hour, mistry-ji…” The mason had brought a bricklayer with him. He
carried a bag with a trowel, an iron vessel for mixing, a gouge, a hammer. There was an
inch-tape in his shirt pocket. A hoe rested on the bricklayer’s shoulder, and he held a spade
in his hand.

Rajkumar gave each a glass of water to drink. Then they both stepped into the mat house
and began to work out how deep they must dig to lay the foundation.

The first strike of the hoe was near the door.

From behind the veil, held in place between her teeth, those eyes began to visualise the
completion of the construction of the walls, the windows, the roof. It was almost as if the house had already been made.

Where Do We Go Tonight?
Jaanu Nagar

Now his eyes were going to ask me where we would spend this night. It was not difficult for me to make out the unsaid in his lowered eyelids. Such were the times...

The route we were taking was familiar to me; but my father was a stranger to it. With a parched throat and pursed lips he said, “Let’s go, son”. Today I was not returning to my own room but was going to sleep in someone else’s house, a little distance away. We had been given shelter there. Leaving behind our now broken corner in the city, the two of us set out, to make and decorate a new place. Cutting through the breaking Nangla, we reached the main road. Police had set up a checkpoint here. Even buses had changed their routes. I was perplexed with the effort of trying to make sense of these by-ways that had become strangers to me.

Papa asked, “Where are we going?”
Halting, I replied, “Shashi Garden”.

“Then let’s walk till Khatta Mod”.

While walking, I tried to recollect the numbers of the buses that would go to Shashi Garden, but I couldn’t remember the routes that would take us to our destination today. Just then a three-wheeler stopped next to us. “Will you go to Shashi Garden?” I asked him.

“Yes”.

“Will you go by the meter?”

“No, it’s not working”.

“Then how much will you charge?”

“Rs 40”.

Hearing this, I thought our destination was far. Papa said, “All right”. We got in.

The three-wheeler took us past the Yamuna, crossed one turn, and stopped on the second one. The driver said, “Get off”. Recognising the place, I got off and moved towards a lane that looked familiar. My eyes scanned the forms of the houses, to locate what I wanted. When would I reach the house which had stones on its exterior and which would have a white car bearing a Haryana number plate?

When I saw the car, I moved towards the house, trailing my hand over the vehicle. A woman appeared; I didn’t know her. She gestured to us to stop. I immediately smiled and introduced myself, “My name is Jaanu. We are the tenants from yesterday”. Papa remained quiet.

The woman said, “Son, we have filled water for you”. She climbed the stairs ahead of us.
Opening the door, she said, “Spend one more night here; in the morning you will get your room”. Then she started down the stairs, saying, “You must have brought your food with you”. We lied and said we had.

I pulled down the cot and asked Papa to sit. I gave him water in a small pot and took off his shoes. This house wasn’t ours; nothing had a designated place. I kept the shoes beneath the cot. Papa took off his shirt and put it on the cot.

The light outside was dwindling; the milky radiance of the tubelight filled the room. Papa said, “Leave behind what has happened in Nangla. Now let’s look towards a new life. Let’s see what turn it leaves us at next”. Then, thinking about our hunger, he said, “What shall we do for dinner tonight?” I said, “Let’s find an eatery for today”.

Switching off the tubelight, closing the door behind me, I followed Papa. As soon as we stepped out of the house, he asked, “What will you eat today?” I was a few steps behind and couldn’t hear him. He became annoyed. “Are you deaf?” Then he pulled me close, put his arm around my shoulder and started to tell me about this place as if he had known it for years. He said, “Listen, this place was a jungle for me. I used to live in Khichripur with my sister. These DDA flats that you see: there were acacia trees here earlier. Just beyond them was ITI. I am talking of roughly 1991-92”. We spotted a place where four or five cooking vessels were set out. Papa said, “Oh look, we’ve reached a hotel”.

We ordered food, but we couldn’t eat properly. Papa paid with a 20-rupee note and then we left. As soon as we reached the room I switched on the tubelight. Papa lay down on the cot. I spread a carpet on the floor and lay down on it. I don’t remember when I fell asleep. I didn’t even ask Papa if he would be able to sleep.

Mister Halder Sahib
Shamsher Ali

His laughter softened the blazing sunlight and the harsh air. Clad in a vest and a waistcloth, with a saw, a hammer and a gouge in his hands to frame his skills, with dishevelled hair and an immaculate smile on his face, standing before me was Halder sahib. His hands were locked behind him, in the posture of a babu (clerk). We just stood there for a while, in front of each other, looking at each other. Not with surprise or perplexity, but with that small rag from an encounter called a smile. He would look down for a moment, then raise his eyes again. For a few minutes, laughter was all that passed between us.

Halder sahib’s home was in Lakshmi Nagar. After being moved from there, he was given a place in Ghevra. The place was brand new then. Lakshmi Nagar was the first settlement that came to Ghevra.

His family had difficulty digesting the ‘puresness’ of this place, so Halder sahib sent his wife and children to the old soil of his village.
According to his tools, his trade is that of a carpenter and he makes beds, cupboards, chairs, etc. But work is slow in the factory that employs him. The factory remains open, but there is no work to be done. Halder sahib can’t afford to fritter away his money on travelling there every day. As a result, going to the factory has come to a halt. His monthly salary was Rs 7,000, which he didn’t get last month because there was no work.

“People around me have taken the advance and bonus for Diwali and gone to their villages”, he laughed.

Well, for the time being, he will get a lot of work in Ghevra. “There is much furniture to be made in Ghevra”. Saying this, he went his way, as if he had some plans for the time to come in this place.

**Bus No. 949**

Jaanu Nagar

Drops of dew had not left yet the blades of grass. Rays of the sun danced upon them. Bus No. 949 started out from Sarai Kale Khan bus depot. It wasn’t 7:50 am yet. Familiar faces from Nangla were in the bus; they were setting out to Ghevra. The driver of the bus must have been about 50 years old; he was wearing Rajasthani *jootis* on his feet and he smoked *bidis* frequently. The conductor was about 45 years old; he wore glasses. It was a regular DTC bus, the kind found on any route.

The bus halted briefly in front of Nangla Maanchi. Some people who live in Nangla village climbed into the bus from the rear door. Manus-ji also stepped into the bus. Returning from his village last night, he had got off at the Nizamuddin railway station. But there was no means of reaching Ghevra, and so he stayed the night at Nangla village. The bus started again. Crossing Delhi Sachivalaya, Rajghat, Delhi Gate, Zakir Husain College, Ajmeri Gate, Anand Parvat, Karol Bagh, Khalsa College, Punjabi Bagh, Peera Garhi Chowk, it travelled past Nangloi; and in an hour-and-a-half it turned towards Sawda-Ghevra.

**Beauty Parlour**

Yashoda Singh

Passing by a lane, I saw, under a black tarpaulin sheet, a dark girl shaping someone’s eyebrows. There is nothing unusual in this sight. But here, where on all sides into the distance there are nothing but the remains of fields, and where houses have not yet been set up, it is surprising. Brings a smile to your lips, makes you confront the will to live.

She stopped when she saw me. Smiled a little, and who knows what hesitation she wiped away when she passed three fingers over her forehead. I smiled and asked, “You have skills to work in a parlour?”
With a thread pressed between her lips she said, “Yes”.
“So do you plan to open a parlour here?”
“Yes, but not right now. There is no surety even about daily meals here yet! Why don’t you come inside?”

The thatched dwelling was open from three sides. There was no door. So, there was nothing to stop one from entering. The formality of taking off one’s shoes before entering was futile here, so I entered just as I was. There was no bulb, nor fan. But the Lord above was being generous today; wind entered from any direction it chose and the thatched roof fluttered, as if the wind were teasing it. For some time, I stood where I was. I think the girl was confused about how to play host to me, wondering where she could offer me a seat. I removed a dupatta (long scarf) and a feeding bottle from a cot that was lying on its side and sat down.

“What is your name?”
“My name is Maqsuda, but they used to call me Neha or Nisha in the parlour in which I worked”.

“Where was the parlour?”
“Same place we have come from. Lakshmi Nagar, Area No. 8. They said something was going to be constructed there. And now look, where they have left us, in this jungle.”

An elderly lady sitting to one side and fanning herself with a handheld fan said, “What jungle? This will become a garden, watch closely. All this place needs is four to five years. When we settled in Lakshmi Nagar, what do you think it consisted of? Acacia trees, grass, mud! We cleaned it all with our own hands. And it turned into gold, over time”.

Her words had a weight. The weight of people who, no matter where they go, manage to build a habitation. The passage of time strengthens them.

**Strength**
Tripan Kumar

Right where Ghevra begins is a corner where, under the shade of a huge tree, some hawkers gather. Vegetable sellers, vendors of summer drinks, spice sellers, people who manage STD-PCO booths – they have all created a feeling of a small market here. This place, and the way in which people here talk to each other, and work, gives a glimpse of their capacity to create their new space and inhabit it. I spoke with one person here, whose name is Sunil. He must be about 25 years old. He is well built and he has a thick moustache. By profession, he is a truck driver.

For the time being, Sunil-ji has left his driving work. He says, “Now I have come to Ghevra village and I clean the makeshift public toilets. I am in search of a government job here. As this place gets made, as more people settle here, as Ghevra develops, the toilets will
become bigger and also concrete. My boss was saying to me that I should continue working here. When this place becomes concrete, so will my job. So, it’s just a matter of two to three years now. By then, this place will be ready and, God willing, I will get a permanent post”. Sunil-ji has a vision of himself in this place in the time to come.

I asked, “What do you do when you have free time?”

Sunil-ji smiled. “What else, I walk around in this new place. Chat and joke around with my friends and other people who live here. When it’s time to work, I work”.

Sunil-ji has lived for a while in J-Block in Dakshinpuri. I live in Dakshinpuri, near J-Block. I shook his hand and then walked on. I was thinking to myself, people have started making their plans about this place. There is a spark in people about settling in their own place. There is drinking water, there are toilets, mobile dispensaries. There is electricity in the evenings. Work remains as a question, since places in the city are now very far.

All that is needed is for things to get constructed quickly, people to settle down well. As people begin to settle, the place will gather strength.

That Face Has Not Been Made Here Yet
Shamsher Ali

Many words weave a space together. If a string is removed from a woven mat, the mat does not weaken. But the missing string is immediately visible. This is exactly how it is when there is an absence of certain words.

Usually, when one sees four people having gathered, and chatting, one knows they are doing ‘time-pass’. But words such as ‘time-pass’, ‘getting bored’, have not taken seed in Ghevra yet. Here, seeing four people together indicates something serious is being discussed. Seeing a group like this, people passing by unhesitantly try to join in the conversations by standing close or far from the group.

If society creates a context for us to meet, it is society that also asks us questions. “What were you doing out of the home late into the night?” “Why are you keeping company with those boys?” Questions like these wander around us from time to time; they instruct us and our behaviour. Whose face is it that asks us such questions? The face never makes a clear appearance before us. We come to accept within us that, yes, it is not good to be outside the house after midnight. Instructions seep inside us and dwell there. They begin to flower within us; we begin to create contours of that instructing face, once hazy. The argument with oneself continues.

In its process, Ghevra today has expelled the word ‘vagrant’. No one seems to be just wandering about; neither does an older person call a young man vagrant.

The echo of time can be heard even in someone’s rebuke or scolding. To include the word ‘vagrant’ in its vocabulary, this place will have to access its passed time, and to recreate it.
Many things will have to be forgotten, and many recollected.
After all, words are tied to the time of a place, and not a place and its time to words...

Proud Days
Azra Tabassum

“It doesn’t seem to me you have come from somewhere else. You seem to me to be from here itself!”

When she said this, it broke through the hesitation Yashoda and I felt about it being our first day here. Smiling, we sat down on the cot fitted beside the cot on which she was sitting.

Noorjahan baaji lived in a house of 40 yards in Lakshmi Nagar’s Area No. 8 for 15 years. Now she has been given a plot of 18 square metres. As of now, the plot has not been transformed into a casing supported by beams of concrete.

There are only a few people around, and so Noorjahan baaji’s heart is not in this place yet. “But so what! I have somehow made my place amidst others who live here, and I live among them”.

The narrow spaces between houses that have been constructed do not shy away from inviting others. They are prepared to soak different kinds of presences into themselves.

“Do you know, a sardar (Sikh) came here today; and he parked his bike behind my cot”. Baaji lowered her voice and brought her lips close to my ears to continue. “He had come to buy plots. He was staring at me. I turned my back to him. Then he said, ‘O bibi, O bibi, can I get a glass of water, please?’ I turned around and looked at him in surprise and said, ‘Bhaiyya, I am Muslim’. He replied immediately, ‘So what? What is Hindu and Muslim when it comes to drinking water?’ I liked it when I heard this. Where I used to live, that is exactly what people used to say. I gave him water in a plastic utensil. There, see, it’s kept there”.

Next to the stove lay a turquoise-blue plastic container. She uses utensils that are separate from her daily utensils when she gives us water to drink too.

When we meet Noorjahan aapa, we always feel she creates a distance from people in her mannerisms, but not in her conversations.

Looking at a shadow that stirred on our right, she said, “I never eat anything someone else has taken a bit of, or from another’s plate. I always remain pure and perform my ablutions. I used to wake up at 4:00 am where lived earlier, and after saying my prayers, I would clean the entire house. The floor of my house used to shine; one would not hesitate to lick curd off the floor... I would get a new suit made for myself every month, and that too of a kind others would not be able to take their eyes off! People from the neighbourhood would come to my house to ask my advice on all kinds of matters. And now...! Now can anyone tell I have lived those days? Why, I myself wonder if it was someone else, not me, when I recall those days”.

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As she said this, she brought an unknown kind of laughter to her lips, and tried to hide the moistness in her eyes. Maybe this moistness wanted an answer to “When?” It was very difficult to say anything at that moment.

**The Cot**
Yashoda Singh

There are three cots in her house. Sitting on one, dark-skinned Noorjahan apaa, with half the hair on her head having turned white, gold earrings colliding with the string attached to her spectacles, was intently undoing the chain on a bag she was holding. Another bag emerged from this bag, shinier and more beautiful than its container. She unzipped this second bag, and it revealed a third bag, more beautiful than the previous two, and with fresher colours. Seeing this, a smile spread across my lips. I said excitedly, “Wow! Bag inside bag! It’s looking so beautiful!”

Sweeping her hand over a bag, she said, “My daughter gave this to me; she made it from the scraps of cloth left over each time she got a new suit stitched. She said to me, ‘Ammi, use them to keep your special things’”. Saying this, she began looking at the bags lovingly.

This is our third meeting with her. Whenever we come we find her fanning herself with a handheld fan, and she begins to talk to us with a lot of affection about different people in her family. The house, open from all sides, gets filled with so many presences that I lose track of time amidst them. I sense a big, happy family which will return home in the evening; the three cots will fill with stories from the day that has passed. Anecdotes from different days appear on her lips each time we meet her.

While chatting I asked her, “How many children do you have?” I think she didn’t expect this question. She just sat there looking at me for some time. Then she said, “No, child, I have no children. I have been married 30 years”.

She said this, and then picked up a plastic bag lying next to her and started to transfer the ghee from it into a container. She said, “The house is open from all sides right now, and can only take shape slowly. Right now, dogs come in from any side and drag away the packets of ghee...”

**Ramlila**
Jaanu Nagar

This year Ravana will be brought from Nangla and will be slain in JJ Colony Sawda-Ghevra’s B-Block. The tent has been set up. Those who set it up said, “This is where we are going to live now. There we used to set up the stage for Ramlila on government land; but this space is our own. Then why should we not perform our old Ramlila here!”
As of now, all the artists are separated from each other. But whatever the case may be, a beginning has been made.

Sajjan Thakur spoke with a lot of joy, “This mic, this machine, these speakers – we bought them with money we put together in a committee in Nangla”.

Caught in his excitement, the small joker said, “Take my photo or I will bury myself alive!”

“Don’t do that, little joker. Why a photograph; come, I will make a small film of you”.

This made him happy, and in gusto he picked up his mic and stepped forward. The mic was not connected to the speakers yet. They were only rehearsing at the moment.

He called out loudly, “Long live Ram Chandra! Long live Sita maiyya! Long live the dwellers of Nangla Maanch! Repeat after me with love: long live the dwellers of Sawda-Ghevra!”

All this happened when there was no audience, just members of the committee. The sunlight was harsh, the wind blew with force. The tent swayed. The things that would be played with at night were being set up.

**About Myself**

Love Anand

From a distance it looked like nothing more than an empty field. As we neared it, small houses made of bamboo mats and poles could be seen. Some houses were adjacent to each other, while others stood alone. I walked on and soon I found myself standing in the middle of a process of making a new part of the city.

Two rickshawalas stood on either side of the lane. There were carts, one after the other; people were selling things. There were five to six shops. This area has taken the form of the first market in Ghevra.

To my far left, underneath a tree, a stall had been set up like a shop selling general provisions. Next to it was a bench for sitting. I immediately headed towards it. On reaching, I saw tea was being made next to the bench. I ordered tea.

“Have you come in search of your house?” the young man managing the teashop asked me. His name was Deepak.

I replied, “I know some people here. I’ve come to meet them and also to see this place”.

“Now the space has become capable of being seen. People have made it so. We were given an open, empty field. People have made their own spaces on it. The earth had to be dug for hours, levelled. Only then has it been possible to make something on it”.

Near me, some kids were at work with their parents. The father was digging up the uneven earth with a hoe; he threw the loosened mud to one side. The mother and the kids gathered the mud and loaded it onto a cart. Once loaded, the kids pulled the cart, chanting loudly, “Zor laga ke, haiyya; hut ja, ghar banaane de jaldi, mere bhaiyya! (We’re pulling with all our
strength; let us make the house quickly, don’t become an obstacle, my brother!”

Hard work and effort was visible all around. There were busy khatar-patar sounds, and sounds of digging. Everyone seemed busy doing something or the other. Looking around, you saw all the houses were being made of the same material – mat and bamboo poles. When I asked the tea-maker about this, he handed me my cup of tea and said, “Bhaiyya, there is an instruction from the government that no one is to make houses of concrete for three months. The slips we have got against the allotment of our plots will be verified after three months. Plots, lanes, roads will be measured properly in the meanwhile. No one will be exempt. If someone makes a pucca house, and on measuring it is found the built space is more than the allotted space, the house will be pulled down. That’s why people are living in kuccha houses. That’s why you see doors opening in all kinds of directions”.

I took a sip of tea and said, “The tea is really good”.

He smiled. “I have had the magic of tea-making in my hands since my childhood. Whoever has a cup of tea made by me doesn’t tire of praising me”.

He continued, “These days, whatever anyone was selling in the place they were living in before, they are selling the same things here. After all, everyone knows a new place is being settled; everyone is used to some things and will need them here. People may buy less, but buy they will. Haven’t you heard, ‘No one can pray on an empty stomach’?

There were bamboo poles in every direction. Where there weren’t any, there was preparation on to erect them. I asked, “When you run out of supplies, where do you get more from?” He said, “I take off to Shahdara. That’s where I bring things from, usually. But there is a salesman here as well, who comes on a bicycle with all kinds of things to eat. I get fresh milk from the village nearby. I sit there and make sure the buffalo is milked in front of me, even though this makes it a little more expensive than otherwise. I can do anything to make good tea”.

I said, “Okay, bhaiyya, I will never forget the taste of the tea you make”. And I started to walk away from there.

A woman was busy plastering, with a paste of mud, the floor of what was shaped like a house to make the ground amenable to sitting. There was a table, a bench and two chairs in the middle. Some medicines were kept on the table. Near it, a man was splitting bamboo poles and peeling them one by one with a sickle to remove splinters.

There were mobile toilets everywhere, which probably help shade one from shame in the daytime and from poisonous insects at night.

When I reached the tea stall again, I saw someone sitting there. The goods loaded on his bicycle told me he was the salesman. Deepak and he were in deep conversation about the goods. The salesman was insisting Deepak take some things that, it seemed, Deepak didn’t want. The salesman said, “Deepak bhai, make me a cup of tea and keep these. Pay me if these sell, otherwise I will take them back”. Saying this, he put them down in the shop.
No one hesitates in forming a relationship here. Everyone is asking after each other and talking about someone else. Everyone introduces themselves through what they do, so that they may be known by their name or their skill or potential work in the colony.

Wearing a loincloth and vest, a man came to the teashop, ordered four cups, and sat down very close to me. He was lathered with mud, and splinters from the bamboo mats were stuck to his clothes. Looking at him I could tell he had been working. When I asked him if he had come from the same place as Deepak bhai, he laughed, raised his eyebrows, rubbed his hands and said in a loud and crisp voice, “What special thing should I say about myself?”

I became quiet. I thought I might have asked a wrong question. I said, “You are right. What difference does it make, knowing anything about anyone else?”

He slapped me on my shoulder and said, “What should I say about myself which is special? There is nothing special to be told. I had a house of my own in Nangloi. Because of fights with my brother’s wife, I left it and made myself a small hut in another settlement”.

“Left it? Arre, you should have stayed on in some room there”.

He said, “I can’t stand bickering. What special thing about myself should I tell you…? When there would be any fight in the neighbourhood, I would reach there and people would calm down with one gesture from me. I couldn’t live like a coward in my own house. Bhai, I used to cook on my own and eat on my own. I made a hut and lived in it alone. Fate has been such that, see, I have a plot to live on here once again. Now I am happy with what I have got. I will make it, decorate it, and live in peace in it”.

I asked, “What do you do?”

He said, “What should I tell you about myself which is special…! I do whitewash. Anything that needs labour to be done, I just have to see it done once, and then I can do it”.

Deepak bhai brought tea and said to the man, “Here, your four teas”. I stood up and said, “It was nice talking to you”.

He immediately placed the kettle on the ground, came near me and said, “What should I tell you about myself that is special, I have not told you anything special till now. I am making houses of mats and bamboo poles for people right now. I will tell you something special once things get made here”.

I said, “Of course”, and set out from there.

One question kept working in my heart – is the place being settled, or is the place being made to get settled? Is the place making itself, or is it being made?

Coming here, it seems to me that no place gets made or settled on its own. Those people, they just measured out and allotted plots of land according to some map. But to decorate a place, take care of it, to carve out spaces of belonging in it, to create an environment in the place, to make new relationships in it, to seek out something special in it – all this emerges with a beauty when you go and stand close to someone.

I looked up and saw a tempo approaching, loaded with things and with people hanging out
from it. People were still in the process of reaching Ghevra. On the tempo’s rear slat were painted these lines: “Buri nazar waale tera munh kaala (May bad things befall you if your gaze be evil)”.

Editors’ Note

These texts are excerpted from Bahurupiya Shehr (The Dissembler City, Rajkamal Prakashan, 2007, New Delhi), a compilation of locality logs/writings on the city by practitioners in Sarai’s Cybermohalla project. Translated from the Hindi by Shveta Sarda.

For a detailed narrative of the Nangla Maanchi demolition compiled from Cybermohalla practitioner blog entries, see Sarai Reader 06: Turbulence (CSDS, 2006, Delhi), pp. 525-69.

Reader 06 online text: http://www.sarai.net/journal/reader_06.html

Nangla blog (Hindi): http://www.nangla-maachi.freeflux.net

Nangla blog (English): http://nangla.freeflux.net

Hindi blog translations by Shveta Sarda