

Neoliberal Settler City: Socio-Spatial Segregation, Livelihood of Artists/Craftsmen in Delhi

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Abstract : The study uses the concept of 'Settler city' to understand the nature of peripheralization that a neoliberal city initiates. The settler city designs powerless communities without inherent rights, title and sovereignty. Kathputli Colony, home to generations of artists/craftsmen, who have kept heritage of arts/crafts alive, has undergone eviction of its population from urban space. The proposed study, 'Neoliberal Settler City: Socio-spatial segregation and livelihood of artists/craftsmen in Delhi' would problematize the settler city as a colonial technology. The colonial regime has 'erased' the 'unwanted' as primitive and swept them to peripheries in the city. This study would also highlight how structural change in political economy has undermined their crafts/arts by depriving them from practicing/performing it with dignity in urban space. The interconnections between citizenship and In-Situ Private Public Partnership in Kathputli rehabilitation has become part of academic exercise. However, a comprehensive study connecting inherent characteristics of neoliberal settler city, trajectory of political economy of unorganized workers - artists/craftsmen and legal containment and exclusion leading to dispossession and marginalization of communities from the city site, is relevant to contextualize the trauma of spatial segregation. This study would deal with political, cultural, social and economic dominant behavior of the structure in the state formation, accumulation of property and design of urban space, fueled by segregation of marginalized/unorganized communities and disowning the 'footloose proletariat', the migrant workforce. The methodology of study involves qualitative research amongst communities and the field work-oral testimonies and personal accounts- becomes the primary material to theorize the realities. The secondary materials in the forms of archival materials about historical evolution of Delhi as a planned city from various archives, would be used. As the study also adopt 'narrative approach' in qualitative study, the life experiences of craftsmen/artists as performers and emotional trauma of losing their livelihood and space forms an important record to understand the instability and insecurity that marginalization and development attributes on urban poor. The study attempts to prove that though there was a change in political tradition from colonialism to constitutional democracy, new state still follows the policy of segregation and dispossession of the communities. It is this dispossession from the space, deprivation of livelihood and non-consultative process in rehabilitation that reflects the neoliberal approach of the state and also critical findings in the study. This study would entail critical spatial lens analyzing ethnographic and sociological data, representational practices and development debates to understand 'urban otherization' against craftsmen/artists. This seeks to develop a conceptual framework for understanding the resistance of communities against primitivity attached with them and to decolonize the city. This would help to contextualize the demand for declaring Kathputli Colony as 'heritage artists village'. The conceptualization and contextualization would help to argue for right to city of the communities, collective rights to property, services and self-determination. The aspirations of the communities also help to draw normative orientation towards decolonization. It is important to study this site as part of the framework, 'inclusive cities' because cities are rarely noted as important sites of 'community struggles'.

Keywords : neoliberal settler city, socio-spatial segregation, the livelihood of artists/craftsmen, dispossession of indigenous communities, urban planning and cultural uprooting

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