

Moving Frontiers: Delhi's Hinterland in 1870's-1910's

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Abstract: Focussing on the hinterland of Delhi in the period between 1870 and 1910, this essay explores the ways in which Shahjahanbad/Old Delhi and its rural periphery approached each other.

In particular, the period saw a tighter integration of the economies of city and rural periphery with crucial repercussions on the 'constitution' of the rural itself.

Keywords: Delhi, City, Delhi's Suburbs, Rural Lands, suburbanization

The term rural connotes a number of meanings: agrarian production, village life, and the countryside, or in some cases, a tabula rasa. While the first two terms are better defined, in the last category, the rural is seen as a blank canvass to be etched with planner's urban imaginaries. Against the characteristic landscape of the city, defined through repeated metaphors of opacity, labyrinthine texture and decrepitude, the defining feature of the rural is its unstudied simplicity. While these distinctions are fundamental to many understandings of city and village, the spatial boundaries of the two are not so neatly segregated. In particular, there are ways in which the histories of the city are embedded in their rural periphery; and therefore the urban landscape is, both a creation and constitutive of it.

The intervention of colonial authorities in the rural lands beyond the wall of Delhi city with an eye on urbanising them, was another moment of the reconstitution of the rural. Incorporation of rural lands in the ambit of the city is neither exclusive to nineteenth century Delhi nor a modern phenomenon. At all time in history cities have enveloped the neighbouring rural in some ways. However, at this particular juncture the colonial intervention in the rural areas failed to generate its intended effect; instead the rural lands presented a formidable obstacle to the colonial urban vision, because the suburbanisation of the agrarian tract of Delhi appeared to follow a trajectory of its own. In contrast to its 'imagined' blankness, the physical space of rural Delhi was rooted in a particular past, was made up of complex and 'ancient' land tenures, often surviving various changes of political rule. The essay attempts to show that they persisted until later and in turn, the emerging suburban landscape of Delhi city was very much constituted within a matrix created by these relations of land and produced by them.

Controlling Lands, 1870-1890

In the aftermath of the 1857 revolt Delhi was forced to wear a desolate look, yet time was a great healer. Within a decade following the revolt, the city began to show the signs of recovery. In overcoming the devastation of revolt, according to Gupta, the railways indubitably played a crucial and important role.¹ Though the railways came to Delhi only in the late 1860's, it provided the city a much boost for its commerce. From 1872, Delhi has the largest share in the volume of Indian trade compared to any other towns of Punjab. As railways connected Delhi with all the provinces of north India, United Province, N.W.F.P. and Punjab itself, the city was an enterpot for food grains and other items, importing and exporting them further.² 'The great expansion of Delhi as a commercial city', the author of District Gazetteer in 1883 wrote, was 'stimulated by the extension of the Railways.'³ Alongside promoting the commercial expansion of the city, the railways also contributed immensely in the physical expansion of the city itself.

The first clutch of Railway construction in early 1870s Delhi and the influx of people, attracted to its commercial prosperity, thrust the city's expansion into the rural. Delhi expanded, according to Narayani Gupta, not through the usual

¹ Narayani Gupta, *Delhi Between Two Empires 1803-1931: Society, Government and Urban Growth*, (OUP) New Delhi, 1981. p.41. Hereafter Gupta *Delhi between Two Empires*

² Delhi station was the largest junction in North India that time and Delhi district itself was served by no less than five Railways. See *A Gazetteer of Delhi*, (1912), Vintage Books, 1992, p.163-4. Hereafter *Gazetteer (1912)*

³ *Gazetteer of the Delhi District, 1883-84*, (Originally Published In 1912), Reprint (1988), Vintage Books, p.36. Hereafter *Gazetteer (1883-84)*

process of 'suburbanization' but rather through 'the steady acquisition of the tracts of agrarian villages.'⁴ In fact, the railways in this period swept past the first barrier in the expansion of city by touching the city wall on the western side. The railway, gave a much needed opening to the walled city and as a result, the city was constantly pushed outwards into the agricultural belt surrounding it.⁵ As the population of the city grew, the suburbs outside the walls also began to be crowded.

In effect, along with the older suburbs like Sabzi Mandi, Sadar Bazaar, and Paharganj near to the city, a large number of villages also came into the ambit of city in the 1870's. The villages of Chandrawal and Sadhaura Kalan in north-west, Khandrat Kalan, and Jahanuma in west and Banskoli in south-west of the city were among those that increasingly began to be taken up by people for residence. The northern suburb of Civil Lines was a European Enclave carved out of the grazing grounds of Chandrawal village after 1857. The idea of an exclusive European enclave was mooted in response to the rebellion.⁶ As the city experienced an outbreak of cholera in 1874, the leather workers and dyers in city were shifted and resettled in the new settlement of Qarol Bagh and Fauladnagar in village Banskoli, as a 'sanitary' measure.⁷ Thus the immigrant population was largely moving in to these suburbs is indicated from the fact that between 1864 and 1881, the population of the suburbs had increased by more than 40 percent. In the same period, the population of the city increased by just 20 percent.⁸

Apart from the small, isolated pocket of lands occupied by dwellers for habitation, the suburbs were largely heterogeneous. There were *abadi* areas (settlement), gardens, agricultural lands, and *bungalows*. For instance, market gardens

⁴ Narayani Gupta, 'Delhi and Its Hinterland: The Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries', in Robert Frykenberg, (ed.) *Delhi Through the Ages: Selected Essays in Urban History, Culture and Society*. (OUP) 1986. p .148. Hereafter, Gupta '*Hinterland*'

⁵ Shankar gives an excellent account of the actual process through which the lands beyond the city were acquired by British authorities in late 19th century. Devika Shankar, *Tracks of Change: Railway Construction and The Reorganization of Colonial Delhi (1864-1926)*, CHS, JNU(2011), Unpublished MPhil Thesis

⁶ Gupta '*Hinterland*', p 148. Shahid Amin, 'Past Remains', *India International Quarterly Journal*, 2001

⁷ *Report on the Administration of Crown Lands in Delhi* (Lahore 1913) Hereafter *Crown Lands* (1913)

⁸ *Gazetteer* (1883-84), p 207. After 1901 census separate figures of population are not given for suburbs.

of Khandrat Kalan and Sadhaura Kalan supplied the vegetable demands of the city. Much of the land in Jaisinghpura resembled an archaeological excavation spot, dug up for the thirteen brick kilns supplying the unceasing demand of the city for building material.⁹ The built environment in the suburbs was just taking shape through these constant alterations in the land-use pattern.

Huge chunks of land in these suburbs were 'government property' placed under the charge of the Deputy Commissioner. Since 1803 the British authorities in the city were administering these lands as they formed the personal property of Mughal crown and royal family i.e. *Taiul*. Similarly, the state also controlled crown lands classified as Nazul lands. After 1857, these lands came under the direct control of the British authorities by confiscation and escheat. In fact, the bulk of the land in the suburbs of Delhi owned by the state was contained within one of these categories. In the two decades following the revolt, authorities' intervened very little in these lands, they more or less sold some of these lands and some large plots were granted for 'loyal service' during mutiny.¹⁰ As a result, a large portion of land in southern and western extension was in the hands of city merchants and rich middle class. However, in the mid-1870's, the officials increasingly started taking interest in these government lands.

In 1873-74, two successive surveys of *Taiul* and Nazul property in and around Delhi were conducted by authorities. While it is difficult to suggest what prompted the state to undertake such a survey, it is likely it aimed to define the right of the state over these lands in clearer terms. In fact, the scrupulous and elaborate fashion in which the survey was conducted, and the way in which questions like encroachments and rights over property were pursued in both surveys suggest that officials were trying to bring a certain kind of uniformity to the property market through recording of rights.¹¹

The first enquiry, conducted by Assistant Commissioner Leslie Smith, was largely focused on land in Jehannuma and Khandrat region - the new suburbs - in the vicinity of city, since it was presumed that *Taiul* lands which had belonged to the last Mughal emperor had now become the

⁹ W.M Hailey, Commissioner, Delhi to Deputy Secretary, Foreign Department, 5th November 1912, F No 13, 1913, Commissioner, DDA

¹⁰ Settlement Report (1882), Appendix No XIV - Showing rewards granted in the Delhi District for Good Service in the Mutiny. Also see, Nayanjot Lahiri, 'Commemorating and Remembering 1857: The revolt in Delhi and its Afterlife', *World Archaeology*, 35:1, 35 - 60, (2003)

¹¹ In years 1870-1890's, similar surveys of suburbs were conducted in Lahore, Calcutta, Lucknow and Bombay.

property of the colonial government.¹² In case of Jehanuma, Smith in the course of his survey found that many occupants held good legal titles to the land. However, he connected these titles to the post-Mutiny sale of Taiul land by authorities in 1860's.¹³ An assertion of such reasoning, possibly, meant two things; first, non-recognition of all pre-1857 titles to land and second, labelling all pre-1857 holdings as 'squatter occupations', 'encroached' subsequent to mutiny; as he did in case of both Jehanuma and Khandrat. And in an expected move, Smith proposed the assertion of the right of government to these lands and the resumption of *maufis*. Basing his reasoning on the "statute of limitation" on prosecution for illegal possession, which allowed a time frame of 60 years for an adverse possession, he argued that right of the colonial state could be established as the state was in possession of these lands from 1857.¹⁴ Even the Finance Commissioner concurred with his recommendation and pressed for the assertion of the right of government to such lands.

T W Smyth, Deputy Commissioner, however was hesitant to reach such a conclusion. He conducted another survey in 1874 to ascertain the facts. In contrast to Smith's conclusion, the survey found that the Mughal Emperor, at no point in time had held ownership of these lands; he thereby faulted the initial 'presumption'. In fact, the survey firmly established that the tenure of properties in these suburbs was much more complex in range and more ancient than presumed by colonial authorities. Most of ownership rights in these lands sprang from customary usage, grants from kings or from some relatives, *makbauza khatas* (religious establishment), religious *maufi*, or government land sold by Mr Treveylan illegally.¹⁵ In the end, Smyth, concluded that, 'these estates did not form the part of the territories and land assigned by the British Government to king of Delhi in 1803-05.'¹⁶

In the light of such evidence, Smyth was also not quite sanguine about the legal tenability of position of the government in asserting its right. He reprimanded Smith for a lackadaisical nature of inquiry, as he failed to consult the English register in the revenue office. Smyth, then pointed, that the

'burden of proving the adverse occupation falls on the government since the statute of limitation would run from the date of the occupation of the land, not from 1857.'¹⁷ This point was reiterated many years later by Robert Clarke, Deputy Commissioner, as explanation for government's failure in getting any success in 'Delhi Taiul case'. Finally, on the commissioner's recommendation the right of government on most of Taiul land was abandoned. As a result of this policy decision, the Taiul land under the possession of the state shrank drastically.

However, the story of these two surveys is not quite complete. In the course of his inquiry, he found that many lands in Jahannuma and Khandrat were not used for the purposes they were originally held and recorded as such. For instance, take the case of charitable/religious *maufis*. These *maufis* were originally the land grants given in pre-colonial times to religious families or for other purposes. As they were 'ancient' religious grants, Smith noted, 'he (grantee) pays neither rent, revenue nor cesses.'¹⁸ As the lands under these grants were held by person and families, subsequently these lands were partitioned within the families as the number of claimants' to property increased. As the pressure began to build upon land in the city and people moved to the areas of Khanadrat, subsequently many of these land grants had been absorbed into the main settlement.

In the meantime, the lands under these tenures began to be sold in the land market. Thus in one case, a similar land grant was sold to another party and was being used for purpose of lime burning. By the condition of tenures, all shareholders in land were to enjoy the exemption from any kind of cess. Even the official documents which referred to it did not dwell on how new shareholders were to be treated. In the case of land grant and *maufi*'s not used for the same purpose, Leslie Smith held the view that they should be ended and government right should be resumed.¹⁹ However, Smyth objected to any such action, on the ground that 'an indiscriminate and rigid assertion of Government rights would cause widespread discontent.'²⁰ Even after it was established that some of possessor in case of tenure

¹² Report from L Smith, Assistant commissioner to Deputy commissioner dated 19 May 1876, F No 29-A, 1878, Commissioner, DDA

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ In 1828, Mr Treveylan was granted 200 bigha of land in order to set up a suburb. However, later it was found, in Whitehead report, that he sold 326 bigha of extra land illegally. T W Smyth, DC Delhi to W G Waterfield, Officiating Commissioner, dated 13th August, 1878, F No 29-A, 1878, Commissioner, DDA

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ See the list of grantees attached to the Smith report, dated 1878, F No 29-A, 1878, Commissioner, DDA

¹⁹ He said, 'On the whole it cannot be considered that the income of this *maafi* is devoted to charitable purposes, it should therefore be resumed.' Report from L Smith to Deputy commissioner dated 19 May 1876, F No 29-A, 1878, Commissioner, DDA

²⁰ T W Smyth, DC Delhi to W G Waterfield, Officiating Commissioner, dated 13th August, 1878, F No 29-A, 1878, Commissioner, DDA

were not entitled to exemption from rent, Smith dwelling on the issue said,

it would be hard to impose a rent upon ground which had been held rent free for so long a time period, and built upon on the belief that possession was not likely to be disturbed.²¹

In the end like other category of disputed lands in Jehanuma and Khandrat area, the authorities did not press the issue further. A similar action was taken in case of other *maufis*.

In case of religious *maufi* tenures, making a decision for abandonment was quite easy for Smith given the peculiar nature of such properties as compared to other disputed lands. However, this seemingly minor affair reveals the presence of complex tenures on the ground and the limits they set on an official intervention in suburbs. In making a suggestion for assertion of the government right, Smith's survey, perhaps was trying to bring a certain kind clarity with respect to these complexities. His position was consistent with the fact that ill-defined rights in land and ever proliferating complex land tenures were at the root of property disputes. The clarity and uniformity of rights would eventually enable a land market to function efficiently in the growing new suburbs. As far as the concern of state with recording rights considered, however, it would be misleading to see these two surveys as failures. Despite the disagreement of Smith and Smyth over the question of rights, they both pressed for drawing new registers of property to simplify and record complex structures of property.²² Though it was impossible for the administration to completely set the property on a new basis, in making a decision to relinquish the government right a purely legalistic perspective of 'adverse possession for sixty years' was taken. In this sense, these surveys marked a crucial stage in changing the character of land rights in this landscape.

The outcome of these surveys, however, also illustrates the ways in which the suburban landscape was incorporated and constituted within the matrix of political economies of rural lands-from the pre-colonial regime through to the events of 1857 and various stages in revenue offices down to the final transfer to Delhi Municipality in 1872. More importantly, it elucidates the ways in which the transformation of land-use pattern was occurring beyond the walls of city. The outcome of

²¹ Ibid This view was expressed by Smith for all the land that had been under adverse possession for more than 60 years.

²² Out of these surveys, two new register of *nazul* property were drawn for the lands in the area of Jehanuma and Khandrat. However, the later survey of Whitehead reveals that after these survey no new register were made of *Nazul* properties.

Delhi Taiul Case hints at the difficulties that authorities faced in imposing a modern regime of property on these lands.

Given the fact that the lands beyond the wall of Delhi was sprinkled with land tenures of these kind- 'ancient' and pre-colonial, religious *maufi* and service grants, and various jagirs -, as the Smith report show, they would limn the contours of future built environment in a significant way. What is significant, by the last decade of nineteenth century the lands in Jehanuma and Khandrat and adjoining villages began to be knit more intricately in the urban fabric of the city, these different revenue histories and land-tenures were carried along in the new urban milieu.

Producing the Suburb, 1890-1910

Describing the city of Delhi in the first decade of the 20th century, the author of the District Gazetteer remarked, 'half a century of peace has left its mark, especially on the city in the shape of Municipal buildings, factories, railways, and other developments of Civilisation.'²³ This comment underlines the phenomenal growth that city of Delhi experienced in the three decades between 1880 and 1910. Since the last decade of 19th century, the commercial status of Delhi was reinforced by setting up of a number of new industries. The city also acquired, in the same period, a more extensive railway network. From the mid-1880s, as a consequence of its commercial standing and opportunities of work available, a large number of people flocked to city. Since 1910, half lakh people were migrating into city every year, mostly as labour for railways, factories and industrial work.²⁴ This was, however, also a period of massive change in the landscape of Delhi. More particularly, the outskirts of Delhi had been transformed beyond recognition.

Most of the migrants who arrived in the city during this time largely occupied the older suburbs of Delhi, Subzi Mandi, Sadr Bazaar and Paharganj. As a result, by 1910 these suburbs had grown into settlements that housed almost as much population as the intra-mural city. Few of these migrants also occupied areas which were slightly far from the city. We hear, for instance, of labourers' from Mewat Rajputana settling down in the locality of Jaisinghpura and Madhoganj.²⁵ In the areas of

²³ Gazetteer (1912) p 39

²⁴ Ibid Part B, Table 6, 7 and 8, shows figures for population, Caste-wise distribution of population and Migration respectively. For the number of people employed in factories and newer trade that opened in late 19th century. *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Volume 11, (Clarendon Press) 1908, p 271

²⁵ Petition from Residents of Jaisinghpura against acquisition of their land, dated 12th May, 1912, F No 4, Home Department (Delhi Branch), August 1912, NAI

Jehanuma alone in 1870's, according to a report, there were no less than 5000 dwellings.²⁶ More and more agricultural lands of Firozabad and Khandrat Kalan began to be incorporated in the extra-mural part of city. The smoke emitted from tall chimneys of factories and workers walking back to their suburban neighbourhood in Delhi reminded an official of Manchester or Lancashire.

By the last decade of the nineteenth century, however, this new physical milieu, coupled with a huge mass of an emigrant poor population, brought its own kind of anxiety. The civil authorities in the city frequently complained of 'increasing rent', 'housing problems', 'congestion in the streets' and of 'poor vagrants'.²⁷ The increase of population and crowding in suburbs made certain kind of extensions or restructuring an imperative. In Delhi, as a result, considerations were doing rounds from quite some time, suggestions for which were eagerly forwarded, to regulate this urban growth. The official concern with the urban environment and growth in Delhi, however, must not be seen as an isolated phenomenon; similar concerns were also articulated in case of other cities in India. For instance, in late nineteenth century the Bombay Improvement Trust (BIT) was instituted with a concern to procure sanitary housing schemes and building of new broad streets in congested parts of Bombay city. In fact, the late 19th century was a key moment when we see the emergence of an urban discourse in colonial India.²⁸

In 1881, Robert Clarke, Commissioner of Delhi, proposed a suburban improvement scheme linking the main market of city with the suburban market of Sadr Bazar. The scheme would have

²⁶ *Crown lands* (1913) p 17

²⁷ One officer saw Delhi as city of 'innumerable dingy torturous back streets'. *Gazetteer* (1912) p219

²⁸ Most scholars on Indian cities see the late 19th century as the critical juncture when the British authorities first attempted to directly intervene in the built environment of the city. The immediate reason and occasion was different for different cities, like in Bombay the BIT came as in response to the Plague of 1898, in Calcutta the proposal to realigned the major roads came in around 1900, however restructuring of space of city was followed with a logic to create more flexible spaces for business use and circulation of capital. On the institution of BIT see Prashant Kidambi, *The Making of an Indian Metropolis: Colonial Governance and Public Culture in Bombay, 1890-1920*. (Ashgate) 2008, Nikhil Rao, *House, But No Garden: Apartment Living in Bombay's Suburbs, 1898-1964*, University of Minnesota Press, (2013) on Calcutta Partho Datta, *Planning the City: Urbanization and Reform in Calcutta, 1800-1940*, (Tulika), 2012

provided an outlet to the city; however in the wake of the military authority's objection to the demolition of Lahore gate and the nearby city wall for security imperatives, the project was abandoned. It was only after a decade, in 1892 that the scheme was finally realized in the form of Clarkeganj, without any protest either from the military or the municipality. The project was lauded as a model for suburban development.²⁹

In Jyoti Hosagrahar's view, the silence with which the military authority gave assent to the Clarkeganj scheme is a clear reflection of the business concern and property value taking lead, even though limited, over the military imperatives.³⁰ From its origins, Clarkeganj was envisaged in plans as a scheme for connecting the main commercial market of the city through a street and most of the land around it was converted to shops to be leased. Thus it was a plan for creating fungible space for the circulation of capital, par excellence. With a similar 'view' on urban improvement, in 1904 Major Parson put forward a scheme on to restructure areas around Kabul and Ajmeri gate.³¹

Apart from being a successful urban improvement scheme, the setting up of Clarkeganj also represent a crucial moment when colonial authorities began to intervene more earnestly in the suburban landscape beyond the city wall. In contrast to earlier attitudes of authorities on suburban lands, which were more directed at bringing certain kind of clarity in property or recording them, as mentioned in the previous section, more serious efforts were made. Hosagrahar sees the late 1890s and the laying of Clarkeganj in particular, as a key moment when the colonial authority's failure to restructure the urban landscape of the old city allows it to shift its attention to the suburban land as the 'blank canvass' for an 'idealized urban vision'.³² Colonial authorities saw the rural suburb as a panacea for 'the paradoxical demand of simultaneously promoting commercial and controlling urban development', a problem with which the state was struggling in late 19th century.³³ Another factor that possibly influenced the official decision to concentrate on suburbs was the rising value of

²⁹ Gupta, *Delhi Between Two Empires* (1981), p.171. For a discussion on effects on military imperative on the city of Delhi Narayani Gupta, 'Military security and Urban Development: A case study of Delhi, 1857-1912', *Modern Asian Studies*, 5 (1971)

³⁰ Jyoti Hosagrahar, *Indigenous Modernities: Negotiating architecture and urbanism*, 2005 (London and New York: Routledge), p.117 Hereafter Hosagrahar *Modernities* (2005)

³¹ *Crown lands* (1913) p 42

³² Hosagrahar *Modernities* p. 117

³³ *Ibid* p.117

suburban and rural lands. In fact, in Delhi Banger, Delhi Khaddar and Khandrat land was fetching prices 69, 30 and 160 times respectively the land revenue of it in 1908.³⁴ The last two areas are those which roughly fall in the immediate vicinity of the city. In the coming years, a number of plans were taken up with respect to these suburban areas.

In the first decade of the 20th century two major schemes were proposed to improve the suburbs. In the first scheme, forwarded by Major Parson in 1904, the proposal was to restructure the area between Kabul gate and Ajmere gate. In 1906 R Humphreys, Deputy Commissioner, proposed a much more extensive city extension scheme in the west of the city, the anticipated area of development.³⁵ Though Commissioner proposed an extension in the south of the city, R Humphreys, cautioned against any such "order" bringing any fruit and rejected it as "wholly improbable." The alternative plan sought to restructure the area of Jehnumma and Khandrat, including the suburb of Pahar Ganj, Sabzi mandi and Sadar Bazar.³⁶ Unexpectedly, however, none of the two grand schemes materialised. What could have thwarted the effort of colonial officials? Let's pause for a moment on this for an adequate answer to this question.

In 1908, the Financial Commissioner of Punjab, asked the Commissioner of Delhi to conduct a survey that would allow accurate map and records of rights of state-owned Nazul land in Delhi to be prepared. The moment was thought particularly opportune given that a settlement was in progress at around the same time. This was not the first time that a map had been requested, but the urgency of tone was markedly different. It was possibly prompted by an official sense that land around Delhi, much of which belonged to state, was about to rise in value. In fact, in 1902-1910, the value of landed property registered an increase of 700% in Sadr Bazar, 400% in Paharganj and 300% in Sabzimandi.³⁷ It sent tremors of apprehension through officials, who thought that the state was not getting its due and had been kept out of the real estate market. To a certain extent, the reasoning was correct, as it was Delhi Municipality which was entrusted with the Nazul land, which cornered much of the benefit from state property. Hence the object of the Whitehead survey (corresponding with the name of the officer

³⁴ *Settlement Report* (1906-1908), p 3

³⁵ R. Humphreys, Deputy Commissioner to A Meredith, Commissioner, dated 14 August 1908. F. no. 13, Vol. no. 1, 1908, Commissioner, DDA. Humphreys said 'The directions in which extension must take place are well known and is essential that it should be foreseen as far as possible and guided and regulated.'

³⁶ *ibid*

³⁷ *Crown lands* (1913) p. 4

in charge of it) as the previous two surveys were to gain an 'accurate picture of the landed property of "such special value" in the suburbs and environs of Delhi city.'³⁸

However, unlike the earlier two surveys, *Report on the Administration of the Delhi Crown Lands* (1910), was quite different. The report was one the most comprehensive documents on the property and land tenures in the suburbs and villages recently bought under Municipal limits. Interestingly, a major part of this voluminous report was devoted to rural nazul lands than the nazul land in the city. It tried to cover all possible avenues to define the property rights; looked at urban and rural Nazul; inquired about the role of municipality and its administrative practices; suggested terms for lease of property; looked into question of suburban and rural villages to be incorporated in city in the near future; and finally a plan for 'future expansion of the city of Delhi on an orderly and pre-conceived plan.'³⁹ The diligence with which the various issues were brought together in this report makes it quite clear that question was not just property. In fact, the insistence of authorities on such a comprehensive report in 1908 was indicative of something more. The report, I would argue, was a direct response to authorities' frustration with its suburban project and a cure to that problem.

The Whitehead survey points out that the reason colonial authorities had to abandon its two suburban projects was the high value of land which would lead to a costly acquisition and resistance from people. Yet the major problem was the fact that authorities had little control of any sort over these lands; the root cause of which was a false premise on the part of authorities. From Major Parson to Humphreys, like Smith four decades earlier, there was a mistaken idea that Nazul land in Jehanuma and Khandrat suburb was 'state property' since 1857. However, the survey revealed that this very premise of administration was inaccurate, and occupants in 'Government' village of Kaithwara, Andholi, Jehannuma and Khandrat possessed 'ownership rights'.⁴⁰ In fact, as the report showed, from the very first moment of intervention in these areas (1890s), the state's efforts to establish control over nazul lands and generate certain kinds of revenue were constantly frustrated. The case of Lala Baseshar Nath Goela illustrates this well.

In 1891, along with the older suburbs some nearby villages in the vicinity of city were also

³⁸ Interestingly, a major part of this voluminous report was devoted to rural nazul lands than the nazul land in the city. *Ibid*

³⁹ *Ibid* p.3

⁴⁰ *ibid*

brought under the Municipal limits.⁴¹ The timing of this decision suggest that it was a part of an administrative effort to bring a certain kind of uniformity of control over the nazul lands in areas of Jehanumma, Khandrat, and Sadhuara Kalan where most of these lands were situated. The Municipality was in the charge of Nazul land since 1872, however, by bringing them under the Municipal limits meant that it would also now possess the power to collect different cesses on the properties which were built on these lands as they fell in the municipal limits. In fact, immediately after assuming the control of lands, the Municipality sent few such notices to individuals.

In one case such case, a notice was sent to owner Lala Baseshar Nath Goela, a lawyer and Municipal commissioner, for payment of *Chaukidari* tax on his land in 1904. In response to the notice, Goela filed a case in the court questioning the right of Municipality to charge the *chaukidari* tax. He contested the Municipality's assertion that the property was nazul land and argued that his holding was a pre-Mutiny free grant (*maufi*) to one Mr Kirk which he bought in 1867. Neither Municipality nor authorities could produce any document the support of their claim as they were working with the premises that it was nazul land which had become 'government property' after 1857. Finally, the judge taking cognizance of the fact that proprietary rights in lands were prior to 1857, decided in favour of Goela.⁴²

The fact that Goela was a municipal commissioner himself between 1903 and 1912, must had an important bearing on the final decision of the question. However, the presence of a property like this or *maufi* grant not only points to the difficulties the government had in establishing control over it, but implied that Municipality could take little action on these properties. One of the implications was evident in the restricted power of Municipality in collecting tax. The others could be the power of Municipality to control the built structure on this land or restrict the customary uses of the property. What is more striking is that, courts at different points of time recognized these land rights as they did in the case of *malik nisf-ret* land tenure of Lacchmi Narain of Jehannuma.

Though it is difficult to define the *malik nisf-ret*, according to Whitehead, it was a kind of land tenure in which the holder paid certain dues to state in form of *Malikana*, along with revenue and cess. In this particular case, the original holding was a perpetual *maufi* assigned prior to 1803. In 1843, it was converted to *malik nisf-ret* (paying the revenue at half rate) and in 1878 a portion of this property was bought by Lacchmi Narain. In 1902,

this property was acquired by Delhi-Umballa-Kalka Railways, however, the collector decided to pay Lacchmi Narain only half the compensation. The collector claimed that status of Narain was a tenant as he paid *Malikana*, and the land belonged to the government. The Collector tried to present the holder's status in these words: 'His position as regards the lands is that of an *ex-maufidar* by purchase, or something between that of *tenant-at-will* and an *occupancy tenant* (sic) he is entitled at the very most to half the value of the land.'⁴³

Against this order, Lacchmi Narain filed a case in the court of Divisional Judge and contended that he had never paid any *Malikana* as all his dues (*Malikana*, revenue, and cess) were less than the actual revenue for land. In other words, if nothing was paid over and above the revenue, an owner's obligation to the state for the enjoyment of property, then the question of state being the owner did not arise. In the end, the court finally gave the decision in favour of Narain. Interestingly, as Whitehead discovered later, the land actually belonged to the state but in the above case the judge's decision was based on the 'local interpretation of *malik nisf-ret* as an owner.'⁴⁴

In fact, one of the most striking things in Whitehead's report is a marginal entry with the title: '*Local Interpretation of Government rights in the disputed class of Lands*.'⁴⁵ This section, particularly, includes the commentary on local interpretations of land-tenures employed by the administration and the court while deciding the question of disputed nazul lands which had their origin in the pre-colonial period in previous judicial cases. Analysing the previous judicial decision on the disputed class of lands, much like Smith four decades earlier, he was not quite sure about the legal tenability of government asserting its right on lands in Jehanuma and Khandrat in 1910. Accordingly, he suggested 'it would be neither politics nor equitable for government now to assert its rights of ownership as against perpetual *maufidars*, *maqbazadars*, and *nisf-ret* owners.'⁴⁶ This suggests that these tenures were held valid by courts and had local significance when it came to a question of property.

Apart from the difficulties of control over lands, Whitehead also specifically highlighted the slackness with which the Municipal committee and the administration handled earlier suburban improvement plans. Referring to the leases issued by the municipality in the past years for areas which were needed for Humphrey's extension scheme, Whitehead sardonically remarked, that '(leases) contain no provision by which the land can be recovered, for instance, if required for a

⁴¹ Gupta, *Delhi Between Two Empires*. see the map of Delhi Municipality with different Municipal wards p 161

⁴² *Crown lands (1913)*, Ibid Para 41-42 p. 11-12

⁴³ Ibid, Para 61, p.23-24

⁴⁴ Ibid, Para 61 P.23-24

⁴⁵ Ibid, Para 60 p.22

⁴⁶ *Crown land (1913)* p32

public purpose.⁴⁷ In other words, the only possible way by which these lands could be acquired in 1906 was to purchase them through the market at high cost, a major reason for the failure of the scheme to materialize. Four decades after Smith's survey, in 1908, Whitehead was making same complaints: 'No list of Nazul land is in existence.'⁴⁸

Thus, in several ways the report describes the specific problem that the colonial authorities encountered in the case of suburban improvement plans; not only was the built environment heterogeneous but a highly differentiated, perplexing form of land tenures also existed. The heterogeneous landscape of suburbs threw up challenges of its own kind to this vision of 'producing ideal suburbs'; the fate of two suburban projects illustrates this. After 1870, though the largely non-urban and heterogeneous landscape in the west of Shahjahanabad transformed into a peri-urban space, it still largely remained heterogeneous and interspersed with gardens, and working class neighbourhoods, and the railways. Because the colonial state had followed laissez-faire with regard to tenures in these suburbs even prior to 1857, it was unable, in the 20th century to alter the relations on land that had been enjoyed over a long time. As Whitehead said, 'if profitable action was impossible in the year 1889, it cannot be held that the situation from the government point of view has improved after the lapse of another score of years.'⁴⁹ Thus, rather than presenting a blank canvass for the unfolding of the colonial planner's vision, these tenures served to resist and transform the authorities and their wish to produce ideal suburb.

In many ways, thus, the suburban development of Delhi reveals a trajectory through which the rural was reconstituted; it also points to how almost surreptitiously the complex ancient land tenures which was carried into the urban landscape, became a part of the built environment of the city and shaped it.

While the limitations of sources prevent any further speculation on how these complex structures of landed property contributed to the emerging suburban landscape, the work of William

⁴⁷ Ibid p. 21. Interestingly, here, Whitehead was referring to the leases that were issued for the Clarkeganj scheme.

⁴⁸ Whitehead was very critical of the way lands records were drawn up in 1870s even in the Smith and Smyth survey.

⁴⁹ Ibid p 24. After the previous two survey conducted in 1870s, the government went to court in some cases. But miserably failed to prove its right to the disputed lands, and finally it had to abandon all the land in 1889. see the Robert Clark's commentary on Taiul case in the previous section.

Glover on colonial Lahore provides some important parallels. Glover argues that the production of physical form more or less is directly tied to the legal tradition governing ownership and in turn, contributed to the space of city. He sees the continuity of certain formal urban patterns throughout the history of Lahore city, first during Mughal times, then Sikh and finally British rule, largely as result of the survival of certain legal traditions of ownership in this period.⁵⁰

To an extent, Whitehead's report is a comment on the appalling conditions of government lands, inefficient management and calls for an efficient administration of land through classification and introduction of new lease forms. It advocates stricter control of the state over property, a point made by Jyoti Hosagrahar in regards to whitehead report. She argues, the report marked a 'clear departure from earlier official perception of land, property, and Delhi society.'⁵¹ Hosagrahar construes it as an immensely important event when authorities tried to bring much more clarity to property relations. She ignores the fact that two earlier two surveys, from more than four decades ago, were also originated from with the same concern and intention. The whitehead report, however, was important in other ways as I shall demonstrate.

Whitehead's report was crucial for it timing and the concern it addressed. In fact, the authorities' insistence on a survey like Whitehead's in 1908 was a direct result of the state failure to restructure suburban lands and was an attempt to bring more control over them. The report is also indicative of an important policy departure in colonial state's thinking with regard to suburban lands and its suburban discourse. Indeed, Whitehead's terse comment, 'expansion is not an end by any means' was the pithiest expression of a radical new vision for suburbs.⁵²

In the course of his inquiry, Whitehead, had came to a conclusion that there would be little success in establishing government rights over land and even if could, it won't be of any help in suburban planning itself. In his opinion, the existence of these *maufis* and complex land tenures was the single most important problem for any future planning of suburbs: 'the present Nazul trouble is only the premonitory warning of future

⁵⁰ William, Glover, *Making Lahore Modern: Constructing and Imagining a Colonial City*, (2008) University of Minnesota Press. p 16 Also see Vanessa Harding, 'Space, Property, and Propriety in Urban England', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, xxxii:4 (Spring, 2002), 549-569

⁵¹ Hosagrahar *Modernities*, p. 137

⁵² Crown lands (1913) p. 34, section on Future Expansion

difficulty.⁵³ He advocated and bargained tenaciously for a more comprehensive planning for suburb: the expansion is not an end by any means. Even the co-surveyor, Major Beadon, the settlement officer, remarked

there is a distinct need of prescient scheme sufficing for continuous expansion.....I cannot help feeling that scheme for the improvement of scattered plots will not suffice, and that a really comprehensive scheme for a new suburb altogether should be drawn.(sic)⁵⁴

The plan they had in mind was a more aggressive intervention in the rural suburb. The area they surveyed was primarily the rural suburb, despite these villages being part of the Municipality which, for the most part had significant agrarian features. Whitehead tried to impress upon the authorities and Municipal committee to acquire or purchase huge chunks of land in these regions and vicinities of the city in suburbs. Arguably, the first measure taken in this direction was to change the nature of land through technique of classification.

In 1910, at the same time when the Whitehead survey was in operation, the settlement officer sought to reassess the garden land in Khandrat and institute a new circle mauza Delhi consisting of all 14 villages in the limits of Delhi Municipality. Since the moment he was first entrusted with the task of settlement of Delhi region, he sent constant missives to the Punjab government, for garden villages of Khandrat to be paired off with the suburban area of Delhi city for assessment. 'A procedure which was', he fervently argued, 'necessitated by the exceptional value of the land in the proximity of the city' and hence these lands had a 'no rural significance.'⁵⁵ Though revenue assessment of market garden varied from year to year, the rate of assessment was fixed, depending on the market price of crops. In 1910 assessment was fixed, without any links to the market.⁵⁶

The delinking of assessment from the market price marked an important shift, a very important point in the passage of the lands from agricultural to urban land. On a different level the classification

⁵³ibid p. 38

⁵⁴ Interestingly, the settlement officer of Delhi district was also assisting Whitehead in conducting this survey. The settlement officer as official of revenue department concerned himself more with village but associating him in the survey points to the increasing interest of the authorities in the rural lands. Impressions of Whitehead survey can be also seen in the way, the settlement officer classify the lands in settlement.

⁵⁵ Note by Financial Commissioner, Punjab in *Settlement Report* (1910)

⁵⁶ *Settlement Report* (1910), p 8

of these lands into 'land with no rural significance' would have exempted them from the Punjab Land Alienation Act, which prohibited sale of agrarian land to non-agriculturists. Thus, this marked an important step towards bringing uniformity in land tenures and enabling an efficient market in land. Nikhil Rao, in discussing the Bombay suburb, calls this particular classification intervention or exercise on behalf of the authorities, an "epistemological transformation" which entailed recasting of villages into urban property. Rao see this transformation as central to the emergence of Bombay suburb, in a sense that it transformed the nature of land and 'accelerated the commodification of land.'⁵⁷

In shaping this new urban milieu, an entirely new role was envisioned for the Municipal Committee. The report is a blunt and most vehement critique of municipality; it clearly put the onus of difficulty faced by authorities on the Municipal committee. In very categorical terms, Whitehead listed the offenses of the Municipal Committee: the lackadaisical nature of management of lands, no scheme for improvement of lands, profit as the sole objective, committee members' personal interest in Nazul land and the drawing of perpetual leases in land without the government's approval. However, he was equally critical of the role of the Deputy Commissioner, who managed the Nazul land on behalf of the government: 'The Government management of the district Crown land cannot be said to have been in any way more successful than the Municipal administration of the Delhi Nazul state.'⁵⁸

In his view the real problem lay in giving a free hand in the management of Nazul land to the Municipal committee without any proportional delegation of power to control such land. The bureaucratic formalities of securing a sanction from higher authorities for grant of leases, short-time period of lease, and even to institute a suit against the encroacher, according to him was much to blame.⁵⁹ Along with setting the Nazul land administration on the 'business line', he advocated that Municipality should be left with nazul land administration but shall be given more autonomy and power to lease land 'for any duration'. Indeed, his proposal arguably can be seen as an attempt to raise the status of a semi-private body to a semi-public institution, on the lines of Bombay Improvement Trust.⁶⁰ The survey preceded the transfer of capital to Delhi; hence there was no link

⁵⁷ Nikhil Rao., *House, But No Garden: Apartment Living in Bombay's Suburbs, 1898-1964*, University of Minnesota Press, (2013) p. 29

⁵⁸ Ibid p 35

⁵⁹ *Crown lands* (1913) p 38 See section Management of Nazul Land

⁶⁰ In Punjab, neither Lahore nor Amritsar, two large cities as compared to Delhi, had an improvement trust till 1920's. However, Whitehead was treating Delhi as a special case.

with the political status. But it was an important moment in the urban history of Delhi and its suburban lands.

Thus Whitehead survey in all possibility was a direct response to the particular situation in the suburb. In the impasses reached between the property market and the unruly land tenurialship, the survey aimed to reverse the situation by setting land on a new basis, through classification and leases. The report attests, quite simply, to the entanglements of colonial visions in the complex land tenures; stiffer resistance from the pre-existing political economies of rural land; and an urban landscape produced and created out of these. In the end, the suburban landscape of Delhi was fashioned through tension between a regime trying to create a modern form of property and local 'interpretation' of property; its imagined restructuring of the space of Delhi and resistance.

Conclusion

In many sense, in the 1870s the city of Delhi, the old splendorous capital of Mughal Empire, was resuming its life again after the destruction of revolt. The revolt of 1857 and violence that was unleashed by British in retribution left the city completely devastated; railway brought the city on the track of prosperity. While the population of the city grown rapidly in these years, the landscape of

the city also began to attain new shape under the pressure of growing population. It also increasingly began to incorporate the rural into it.

The spurt off urban expansion, however, also brought colonial authorities face to face to with the question of suburban and rural lands. The earliest intervention in the suburbs concentrated more on bringing a certain kind of clarity and uniformity in terms of land rights and tenure. The administration wanted to bring lands in the west of city under its control. However, the intended project of state failed to have an effect, they found it difficult to rationalise the complex land tenure from pre-colonial times and set them on entirely new basis. In the first decade of 20th century, the official made more concentrated efforts to mould the rural spaces and urbanise them with an official vision. It was the failure of authorities to restructure the built environment of city that compelled them to move westwards, yet they also saw the rural as a blank canvass for the suburban vision. Like its earlier attempt, to a large extent these attempts were frustrated by the complex and ancient land tenures and costly acquisition of lands. Rather than to be moulded, the lands in periphery resisted and subverted the official improvement scheme. In effect, the suburbanisation of Delhi followed a different trajectory from the city. It was more and more constituted and produced by the rural itself.