

Accumulation at the margins: A case of Khora colony, National Capital Region

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Cities have played a crucial role in economy of post-colonial India due to being centers of industrialization causing migration from rural areas in search of employment. Whereas in the pre-liberalization era the Indian planning regime maintained an intention to establish industries in the backward regions of the country in order to ensure balanced growth, the post liberalization development is starkly geared towards big metropolitan cities that remain as the privileged sites of investment by global finance capital. In fact the entry of global capital has led to rescaling within national political economy whereby a number of powerful sub-national actors have emerged that are directly engaging with global capital without the mediation of the national government. This accumulation based on large scale infrastructural projects via Public-Private Partnerships is mostly happening in the peri-urban areas of large metropolises or new towns in their vicinity where large scale acquisition of land has been feasible. The critics of this form of capital accumulation and the spatial restructuring done by them have argued that it has led to 'uneven development' and 'splintered urbanism' producing fragmented cities. This causes increasing investment in infrastructure in some parts of the city inhabited by middle and upper classes via gentrification and further deterioration of the areas inhabited by the poor in slums and unauthorized colonies.

In this paper we intend to discuss the transformation of a village called Khora at the border of Delhi, Noida and Ghaziabad (both satellite towns of Delhi) to throw light on the peculiar form of capital accumulation happening over there. The village, with its extended abadi in the form of Khora colony, is situated between the south eastern periphery of Delhi, the south western periphery of Ghaziabad and north western periphery of Noida. Khora has rapidly changed from being a sparsely populated village in 1971, spread over an area of 426.55 hectares in the Ghaziabad Tehsil of Meerut District¹ with 96 households and a total population of 656, (Census 1971, p. 55) to a population of 189,410 in 2011. Officially, Khora has been declared a census town in the 2011 census. While these are official census figures, the actual numbers living in Khora seem to be much more with newspaper and other media sources reporting around 1 million in 2013 calling it 'Asia's biggest labor colony'. Since the high density development of Khora is essentially linked to the development of Noida, we would try to understand how the accumulation in Khora is tied to the new town of NOIDA. Khora presents an interesting case study because of two reasons. Firstly, because of its

¹ Ghaziabad used to come in Meerut District till 14.11.1976 when it was carved out as a separate district.

location at the border of three cities: the national capital, and two industrial cities. The location at the border is one of the crucial reasons why it became favorable for migrant population that gave access to job opportunities and markets of all the three cities. Secondly, it does not exhibit the features of primitive accumulation or accumulation by dispossession which constitutes the usual theoretical frameworks for understanding transformations that include acquisition of land of farmers by the state for urban development.

This is because Noida authority was not able to take possession of the land that it had officially acquired in 1978 and paid compensation for. The land owners in Khora with the mediation of property dealers and colonizers sold not just their own land but also that belonging to Gram Sabha to the incoming migrants at a nominal rate. The location of Khora at the border of the capital city and the notification by Noida for development gave rise to enormous speculation with a number of land dealers buying huge swathes of land from the farmers of the Yadav community in Khora and started subdividing them into plots². The population density of Khora started increasing specifically after 1984, when the pace of industrialization started picking up in Noida. The Noida authority went to demolish the houses once in 1987 but could not do that due to a violent incidence leading to a casualty. In the words of an official of Noida the land of Khora was consequently “left free for all”. As the population rose in Noida with growing industries, the migrant workers, not being able to afford the already scarce number of housing constructed by Noida, bought land being sold at extremely cheap prices at Khora and built their own houses or took up on rent over there.

The erstwhile owners of farmland belonging to Yadav community presently own a number of buildings that have single room tenements for workers and bigger accommodations for lower middle class families. They also own tractors pulling water tankers and RO plants for supplying potable water in the absence of municipal water supply. The earlier migrants also own houses of various sizes in which they rent out room or open a shop to supplement family income. Khora is an intensely dense colony that is home to laboring population ranging from factory workers, guards, domestic help, auto-rickshaw drivers, rickshaw pullers, rag pickers, scrap dealers and collectors. The sheer number of people is a reason that it serves a thriving market for all kinds of goods from bigger shops of building materials, furniture, electric, submersibles to street vendors selling fruits and vegetables.

One way to look at Noida, with the foreign investments and EPZs on one hand and places like Khora on the other, is as a classic case of uneven development. But this overlooks the way in which spaces such as Khora themselves become nodes of accumulation for various classes ranging from the erstwhile owners of farm land to migrant workers and the ways in

²Ibid.

which the two modes of accumulation interact. That is the question that we are interested in probing in this paper.

