Dr B.R. Ambedkar University Delhi

CENTRE FOR COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE

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A Note from the Director

'CCK' is one of countless acronyms used at Ambedkar University Delhi. Most members of AUD and plenty of sympathetic outsiders know that CCK stands for Centre for Community Knowledge. Some even know that CCK formally began as a university centre of study and research in 2012, and they might be aware of CCK's part in such activities as the Delhi 'neighborhood museums' initiative (since 2013), the Dara Shikoh Festivals (April, 2015 and September, 2016), the Delhi Citizen Memory project, several conferences and workshops, and nearly a dozen curated exhibitions of art, photography and material culture. Everyone in AUD 'knows' to contact CCK if they want to have an important event of their School, programme or club recorded for posterity. CCK caught the attention of a wider public in August of last year, when major Delhi media reported on the signing of an agreement between CCK and the Delhi Department of Archives for a two-year Delhi Oral History project. The Deputy Chief Minister of Delhi, Sri Manish Sisodia, communicated his support for the partnership at the agreement signing on 5 August 2019 at the India International Centre and he spoke enthusiastically about the importance of maintaining a public and accessible repository of Delhi citizens' recorded recollections of the past. The Delhi Oral History project (2019-2021) is the initial phase of what should be a continuing CCK effort and it will build upon the growing expertise of the Centre in oral history.

While CCK has produced several publications, this is its first newsletter. One of this newsletter's purposes is to introduce the AUD community, not impressionistically but in detail, to some work of Centre project staff, employees and associates. Over the years, CCK has benefited from the involvement of many dozen AUD students, former students and friends of students as volunteers and project assistants. Some of them have helped conduct singular CCK events on or off the university's campuses. Some have been engaged in continuing projects, conducting interviews of Delhi residents or preparing transcriptions of interviews. Others have 'graduated' to positions of project assistants and associates who do Centre research and supervise AUD student volunteers. Several articles in this newsletter recount the experiences of Centre workers as they have learned to negotiate the terrain of oral history and memory studies while working on one or more CCK projects. Other pieces here focus on experiences of teaching oral history in AUD programmes and they tell us about the discoveries of AUD students who learned techniques of oral history and recording community memory.

While it might be unusual for a newsletter to have a dedication, I'd like to take the opportunity to dedicate this inaugural issue of the CCK newsletter to the memory of Ronald Vivian ('R. V.') Smith, who passed away on 30 April 2020, aged 83. R. V. Smith was a newspaper man, associated primarily with *The Statesman*, for which he was sub-editor and news editor in the Delhi bureau for thirty years, and a captivating story-teller of Delhi life over the centuries. I had read a few of R. V. Smith's books as well as his semi-regular column in *The Hindu* for more than a decade before first meeting him last August at the aforementioned inauguration of the Delhi Oral History Project. There was no question but that R. V. Smith, a tireless collector of Delhi lore for more than sixty years, should sit at the dais for such an event. There could be no better representative of the spirit of inquiry into Delhi's past through the exhaustive collection of tales about the city. Smith apprehended this rich heritage in the form of documents, inherited lore and anecdotes (including ghost stories) passed across generations, and he was always receptive to personal recollections by Delhi residents. With R.V.'s passing, a living archive is no more. Fortunately, CCK 'captured' some of R.V.'s own observations and memories in its expanding audio-visual archive of oral history and will make them a part of public record.

To learn more about the AUD Centre for Community Knowledge, visit www.cckonline.in

Denys P Leighton

Changing Wedding Practices in Delhi over the Years

Vinitha Jayaprakasan

Photographs of the Delhi Visual Archive (DVA) and oral narratives of residents collected by Centre for Community Knowledge (CCK) reveal the social and cultural transformations of Delhi over the past several decades. Many items in the DVA illustrate changes in wedding practices of Delhi residents. The DVA assembles about 3,800 photographs from the 1880s to the 2000s clicked by commercial and amateur photographers, travelers, foreign students and journalists. Many of the items came to light as Delhi residents donated family photo collections during CCK's oral history projects in Nizamuddin, Shadi-Khampur and Mehrauli. It is no surprise that these collections feature so many images of marital couples, their families and wedding practices. For many years before our era of inexpensive digital cameras and 'selfies', marital festivities and weddings were the occasions that families and individuals were most concerned to document in photographs. We can see the changes that people witnessed on how marriages used to conduct through their photo collection and memory.

The testimony of Jagbir Singh, born in the 1940s and who spent his childhood in Ghazipur village, reveals how families communicated about upcoming marriages. He recalled the following:

> We are Gujjars, we don't marry into the same gotra. We have 100-200 gotra spread across different villages. In order to pass a marriage announcement in distant villages, *nais* [barbers] were sent to give out the invitations. We didn't have wedding cards back then. Either a handwritten note was given or they were asked to orally pass on the information. We gave them clothes in return.[1]

From the above narrative we can see how nais played an essential role in passing messages and information between Delhi and faraway villages, and we get a glimpse of how caste operated in cities and villages fifty or more years ago.

The following photograph [**Figure 1**] depicts a wedding reception of 1931 from the Narain Prasad Collection. Lala Narain Prasad was a resident of Haveli Haider Quli, Chandni Chowk, Delhi. He got his first camera in 1938 at the age of 14 and went on to photograph the changing face of Delhi and its residents until the 1980s. In addition to being a photographer, he was also a meticulous collector and record keeper of his family's photographs, leaving us an collection which has allowed us to see the city from the 1880s-1930s through studio and family portraits.

[The 1931 wedding reception photograph [**Figure 1**] is from that collection. It shows men and women sitting on chairs. Men can be seen wearing pants and shoes instead of dhotis and jootis.[2] Wearing Indian clothes was a national duty, as it was a sign of pride to show independence even in a state of dependency. And women were the main exemplifiers of this (Guru 1927: 45,139). The above photograph is also the earliest wedding documentation that Delhi Visual Archive has and suggests the social change Delhi was witnessing in those years.

Figure 1. Wedding reception, 1931. Photo by Narain Prasad, Delhi Visual Archive, CCK.

Wedding photographs from family albums have not just helped us visualise these transformations, but they have acted as 'memory triggers' to stimulate memories from other residents as well. The photograph **[Figure 2]** below depicts the ceremony of Sirguthi in weddings. The ceremony had women adorning plaits of hair with small white flowers like chameli, motia and mogra. This practice was common till the middle years of the twentieth century. The flowers were woven to make necklaces, matha patti, jhoomar and choti. According to the contributor of this photograph, the ceremony allowed female relatives and friends to see the new bride of the house who would otherwise be veiled in the presence of elders. When this photograph was shown to Susheela, a long time resident of Civil Lines, she responded as follows:

> We have seen this in one or two weddings. But then people decided to not wear white clothes anymore. And [they] chose red and pink… more colourful clothes instead, and started wearing jewelries over the floral ornaments. But this photograph must be of a Mathur family.

Because their culture was close to Muslims'… educated, literate, inclined to music and dance… even today people do wear flowers, but it is nothing like this. This was predominantly in the Muslim culture, not in our Marwari culture.[3]

Figure 2. Woman and children adorned in Sirguthi floral ornaments for a wedding. Photo by Narain Prasad, 1964, Delhi Visual Archive, CCK

The post partition years witnessed a cultural shift in Delhi that also transformed how weddings were conducted.[4] Practices such as groom coming atop a white mare, women doing bhangras, and brass bands in processions of the celebrants started emerging. Women started wearing coloured clothes that they used to wear in Lahore. Men started wearing suits and pants with latest fashion cuts, in place of plain white clothes with safas and turbans. Custom tailors sprang up in the neighbourhood. Refugees started recreating enclosed spaces for weddings that they had in their native places. S. K. Gandhi (born in the 1940s) recalled, "We had set up tents in our colony park for our sister's wedding. This was back in the 1970's."[5] Community centers and Baraat Ghars were set-up to meet these needs over the years.

The 'destination wedding', extravagant marriage halls, professional wedding shoots, designer lehengas and kurtas are practices of the last two decades illustrating rise of conspicuous consumption. **Figure 3** shows us people's booming aspirations. While families in earlier times had photos taken of 'pre-wedding' events and of gatherings of family and guests, there has been a recent turn to elaborate shoots of marital couples before and after marriage ceremonies or large celebrations.

Figure 3. Pre-wedding shoot at Metcalfe House, Mehrauli. 2016. Photo from CCK Archives.

The photographs in **Figures 1 and 3** show how over three of four generations, personal desires to break free of social norms increasingly play out in weddings. More frequent depictions of the marital couples, in addition to formal wedding portraits, particularly in "solitary" settings free of family members, seem to attest to rising individual and conjugal aspirations. Clothing choices in recent wedding photographs and settings or actions symbolizing individuality reveal something about individual and collective aspirations to climb social ladders. Similarly, we can see how virtual spaces have also changed traditional marital norms and practices. For example, posting e-invites and marriage announcements videos on social media, along with subscribing to dating and matchmaking websites, signal changing social "statements' by individual men and women, marital couples and their families.

Personal wedding photographs and oral testimonies help us visualise transformations Delhi has undergone as a colonial city, as a post-partition capital state and as an urban megacity over the past eighty or more years. For example, Susheela's reflections give us insight into how different communities transform and modify a tradition according to their culture, and they reveal people being aware of wedding practices of social groups and categories other than their own. Migration, modernisation and urbanisation have brought cultural shifts that are revealed in how weddings are conducted, celebrated and communicated to the wider society. Wedding photographs and narratives about marriage as a

life event are documentation of social transformations. The photographs of Delhi Visual Archive and oral narratives collected by CCK help us uncover these transformations and therefore makes it a valuable documentation of people of Delhi and their everyday life in the city. The collection helps us visualise Delhi in its continuities and transformations by depicting multiple life-worlds.

The digitised photographs of the Delhi Visual Archive can be seen on the website www.delhimemories.in.

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[1] Interview of Jagbir Singh Nagar and Satbir Singh Nagar, residents of Hasanpura, conducted by Farah Yameen. Delhi Oralities Project (2014-16)

[2] Guru, Kamtaprasad (1927): Hindusthani Shishtachar, Allahabad

[3] Interview of Susheela Jhalani, resident of Civil Lines, conducted by Mesha Murali and Surajit Sarkar in 2018. Susheela was born in the 1930s.

[4] A. Kumari, "Delhi as refuge: Resettlement and Assimilation of Partition Refugee," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.48 (2013), 60-67.

[5] Interview of S. K. Gandhi, resident of Nizamuddin, conducted by Vani Subramaniam. Nizamuddin Neighbourhood Museum (2015)

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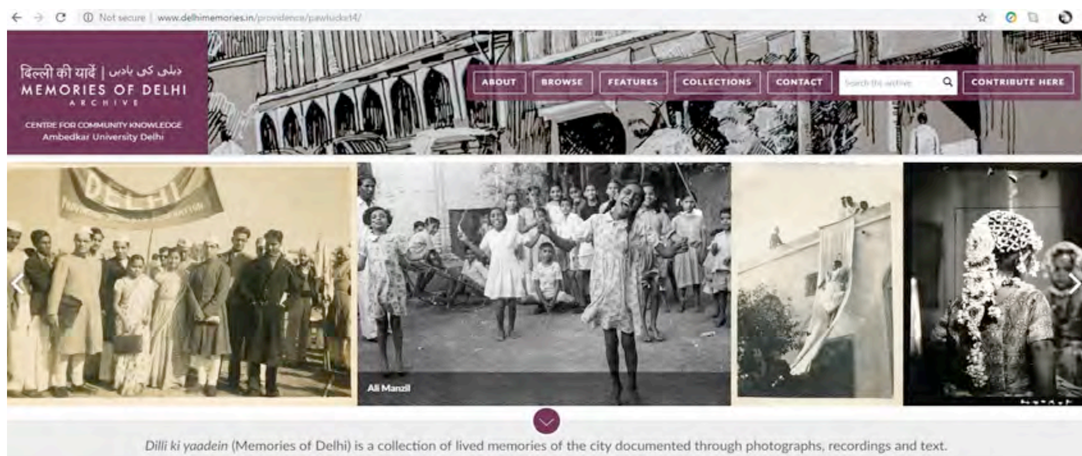
Our Websites

www.aud.ac.in/centres/centre-for-community-knowledge

www.cckonline.in

www.maritimearchives-cck.org

www.delhimemories.in



From Playgrounds to Parking Lots: The Changing Face of Delhi's Urban Spaces

Mesha Murali

We often hear our parents and grandparents talk about the past, what it was to live in a time of no mobile phones, internet or telephone. In passively hearing stories and in actively collecting them, the kinds of narratives that occur with highest frequency reveal how neighbours used know each other by name and spend their evenings sitting outside their houses gossiping and playing. These recollections often come with a tinge of nostalgia for a relatively slow-paced everyday life and the lost neighborliness in a fast urbanizing city. The interviews of Delhi residents collected by CCK feature the subjects' memories and experiences of transformation of space and everyday life. This article gives a glimpse of urban transformation in Delhi, over the past five decades, through the narratives collected from the (middle/ upper-middle class) neighbourhoods of Jangpura and Nizamuddin.

When asked to describe their childhood memories of Delhi, specifically their immediate neighbourhood, most long term residents like Jogender Singh from Jangpura recall a sparsely populated city with pockets of tight-knit residential areas, an image starkly different from the concrete jungle of today.[1] This process of urbanization has brought with it changes in the way neighborhood residents interacted with each other and the spaces around them. For instance, Premlata Chadha, a resident of Jangpura, remembers that in the 1980s, "… *there was a tradition of sitting outside the house*." [2] People used to sit outside their houses and talk in the morning and evening depending on the weather and sometimes sleep there during the summers. (**Figure 1**) However, today such scenes are beyond our imaginations. Shared or common spaces around the house and even 'private' spaces that faced neighbors and facilitated communication between families are increasingly turning into individual private spaces. One main reason for this is the increasing need for a space to park private vehicles. A Jangpura resident observes:[3]

> You are now required to build a parking space in your building. A part of your ground floor will be used for the parking space. You can no longer park your car on the street. The house on the corner of the street has its own parking space, but the owners still park their cars on the street. But they had to incorporate parking as part of their building since no house/building plan will be passed if you don't.

Most of these shared spaces came about as a consequence of people looking for sources of shared entertainment, like listening to the radio or gossiping. Rajbir Ghangutia, a resident of Nizamuddin East market, fondly narrates how he along with other residents of the neighbourhood used to "gather at Aneja restaurant to listen to the news on radio at 8 pm."[4] However, increasing population and emergence of alternate sources of entertainment, such as the television and mobile smartphones, have increasingly pushed people indoors and resulted in privatization of these shared spaces.

This transformation, nevertheless, did not happen overnight. It was a gradual process. There was a time, as many residents recollect, when not everyone in the locality could afford to buy a television or radio. They were rare luxury items owned by a hand full of people. Rajbir Ghangutia recalled,

> "… the most fun was when Mr. Chadha got a black and white TV. He could fit 20-25 people in his home, so he would issue us passes – (as a child) I have gone to see several 26 January parades, Chitrahaar's..."

It is only post liberalization and opening up of the consumer goods markets in the 1990s that the middle class household could afford individual TV sets along with other 'modern' technology. The evolution of technology - transport, entertainment, etc – and the increased spending capacity to purchase the same has resulted in the altering of the individual life and the built structure of the house as well. While access to modern technology has made the middle and upper middle class individual more detached from their immediate neighbourhood, it has also brought with it a new sensibility of "how families should properly inhabit the physical space of the (urban) house."[5] Until the late 80s and early 90s, most middle class houses were built and utilized keeping in mind the harsh Delhi weather. For instance, most houses had an open courtyard in the middle to allow for better ventilation and evening breeze during the summer months. Premlata Chadha in Jangpura reminisced,

> "We never liked using the fans, and our house was well ventilated. If we opened the doors and windows nice cool breeze used to flow in."[6]

However, as S. K. Gupta, a builder, points out, "people today prefer covered houses to prevent dust from coming inside so we have to work less and also have more facilities."[7] With access to technology such as the air conditioner and room heater, the architectural construction of the house today has become more technology centered than people centered, changing the way spaces are imagined and used. (**Figure 2**)

While these narratives describe the changes in urban living in the neighbourhoods of Jangpura and Nizamuddin, other interviews, part of the Delhi Memory Archive at CCK, from across Delhi illustrate a similar trajectory of change in the city. Along with being a great source of information about the Delhi and the life of its residents, the interviews conducted under the Delhi Memory Archive have helped initiate dialogue between Delhi neighbourhoods, encouraging residents to engage with each other and their shared pasts.

Figure 1 .Charpoys on the street outside homes, Nizamuddin East, 1980. Source: Delhi Visual Archive, CCK

Figure 2 - Quadrangle outside SK Gupta's house. Model Town. 2019. Source: CCK archives

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[1] Interview conducted by Aadya Sinha, Mesha Murali and Surajit Sarkar (June 2019).

[2] Premlata Chadha, Interview by Farah Yameen (? 2014-2015)

[3] Satnam Kaur (46). Interview in Jangpura conducted by Aadya Sinha, Mesha Murali and Surajit Sarkar (June 2019).

[4] Interview by Vani Subramanian (December 2015).

[5] W J Glover, Making Lahore Modern: Constructing and Imagining a Colonial City (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), p 99.

[6] Premlata Chadha (mid 50s). Interview by Farah Yameen (? 2014-15).

[7] S K Gupta (mid 50s). Interview conducted by Avarna Ojha and Mesha Murali (June 2019).

Inside-Out: Notes from the Field

Kumar Unnayan

On a full moon night in August 2018, I was packed in the rear seat of a car with three other passengers. All of them belonged to Pipariya, a municipality town in district Hoshangabad, Madhya Pradesh where CCK had initiated an oral narratives research project in the autumn of 2016. We were on our way from the town to a neighboring village to talk to a shikari. Once a commissioned hunter of the British, he was widely reputed for his exhaustive knowledge of the local forest tracts. Upon arrival, we were informed that he no longer wanted to be interviewed. The locals on the team had known him for long and tried to negotiate. The interview had been scheduled in advance and might have given the impression of an official report. His grandson expressed the old man's apprehension: "You know what the maahaul is like these days. He doesn't wish to talk about anything that could land us in trouble. Let it be." By maahaul, he was alluding to the nation-wide increase in public attacks on religious minorities. One of our most anticipated conversations had turned into a timely reminder that any field-work comes with its pitfalls and uncertainties. For a researcher who was the only non-local, it also brought forth the questions of positionality in the field. Could an outsider's presence have been one of the factors behind the person's withdrawal? Or were there too many insiders that made it difficult for him to talk at ease? In either case, what could have been an alternate path to build the trust that the field demands of you but is often denied by practical constraints as time and mobility? The cancelled interview wasn't the first or the only time I had to consider such issues as an interviewer.

The project had begun with the objective of collecting oral narratives on evolving technologies and techniques of farming in Pipariya and the changing relations between the town and its hinterlands. The town's history dates back to the last quarter of the nineteenth century when a new railhead was laid out for the British cantonment of Pachmarhi in the Satpura hills. A team of two researchers was assembled to coordinate the field exercise. I joined Narendra Maurya (61), a local man who grew up in the town before moving out in the early 1990's. But the work couldn't have started without the involvement of local residents of the town. A small, informal group of people had agreed to lend us their assistance. We would discuss the prospective interviewee, interview framework, predetermined questions and also the unspoken, informal cues that often arise during a conversation. In becoming fellow researchers, they played active roles in putting together pieces of different memories of the various aspects of a town they had inhabited. At the same time, having two people from the same neighbourhood talk to each other carried the possibility of tacit or open collusion; for instance, they could agree to omit certain facts or narratives.

Figure 1: Kailash Maurya (middle) describes a photograph to interviewers Narendra Maurya (left) and Sri Gopal Ganguda (right), Pipariya, 2017.

Social hierarchies of caste, community and gender are among a few factors that regulate the local dynamics in a field research exercise. For instance, on an evening in May 2017, Narendra and I were in Gondipura, one of the oldest basti in the town and home to a number of Gond, Keer, Goojar and a few Korku families. We were slated to talk to an elderly woman from the Gond community. The lead had come from Narendra's younger brother, a worker in the local municipal corporation. The conversation began but was soon cut short abruptly. The interviewee wished to speak but her family expressed discomfort. We could only guess as to the reasons for our informants' hesitation, but we eventually concluded that they suspected we would report on them to local authorities about bootlegging of alcohol, which was common in the locality. Narendra was especially suspected due to his conspicuous links with the place and familial relations with a government employee. In another instance, a conversation was scheduled in the Irani basti and the interviewee had agreed to be interviewed by her son in our company. Though fluent in Hindi, she chose to speak in her mother tongue, Persian, through the one hour long conversation. In fact she barely spoke and I feared that

she was not comfortable with the all-male group of interviewers. However, her son had a different story to tell. Between the bouts of laughter, he translated what she had said during the interview as we sat there: "Now you will ask questions to your mother? And the tall one (Narendra) is a local, isn't he? I don't wish to tell anything to anyone that will make us subjects of gossip in the town! When are they going to leave?" In both the cases, the insider-led ethnographic approach had worked contrary to some of our expectations. The incidents reveal that the 'outside' researcher's positionality can sometimes combine with the local dynamics (e.g. personal relationships) to shape the form and content of interviews.

Figure 2: A group interview in Mehtar Mohalla, Pipariya, 2018.

During the course of the two year long field work, a strong element of local participation in collecting the narratives also brought a shift in the nature of research objectives. Local involvement exposed the shortcomings of a top-to-bottom approach of understanding a place by highlighting the ability of local stakeholders to control the dialogue. The conversations became more lively and confusing (for us as interviewers) due to the local references and anecdotes. From narratives of farming, we veered towards the memories of transformation of a small village of few Gond and Korku families into a bustling agro-commercial town. Lived experiences of this transformation continued to be remembered and retold in a variety of ways by the recent arrivals as well as long-time residents. It was not possible to separate the private/personal memories from the public memories and collective consciousness of the place. In Pipariya, the myriad retellings of railways, early occupations, agriculture, local festivals, transportation, bazaars, grain-trade, political milieus and community relations layered the conversations on the local histories of the town.

The methods we adopted to collect and assemble such local narratives can only be described as inclusive rather than absolute. It is not as if the insider-outsider tandem always works smoothly with the former providing local sub-contexts and the latter chipping in with reflexivity and observations. A regular dialogue between the two is essential to steer the research in the pre and post interview stages. As field researchers, it is crucial to re-imagine the narrator-listener axis, change techniques of conducting conversations/interviews in the field and constantly re-examine our methods in order to meet the ever-shifting challenges of fieldwork.

CCK AT WORK

Transcribing the Oral Interview: Part Art, Part Science.

Mishika Chauhan and Saransh Srivastav

Right from conducting an interview to the representation of the findings, we have often found ourselves meeting various challenges at multiple levels while working with data. However, out of all these challenges, we would specifically be focusing on the process of transcription- the process through which the oral interview interaction is converted into written text. And to do so, we intend to discuss the necessity, the challenges and the limitations of it.

While the nature of projects at the Center for Community Knowledge varies, in particular one thing that remains similar is the indispensable role that transcripts play across projects. Since the center tends to work with intangible oral narratives collected across time, transcripts play a reasonable role in giving them a tangible form of text so that further on they can be used to serve numerous purposes as and when required. Such as;

1. They are often used to disseminate information/knowledge to partner organizations during collaborations, thus making it equally important to see the act of archiving these transcripts as a political act, which places our oral histories on equal footing with government generated documents in state-run archives.
2. They also assist in providing reflection and hindsight to the reader. For instance; in case a certain section is needed to be looked at, they have proven to be a more viable option than listening to the whole audio/video. Although it may not always be impossible to go through the audio/visual format of interviews (averaging 10 mins-2 hours), it surely becomes more convenient to look for the information we may need during the analysis with the help of 'Keywords', as seen in **Figure 1**. Keywords help in identification and categorization of metadata. One can just type in the "migration" or "partition" and shall be directed to the related narrative mentioned in the adjacent column(s).
3. They can be used and referred to by the researchers while working on their individual projects across time, etc.

Now, it may seem that having a transcript at your disposal suffices. However, while working on the process of making it, we found that it is more important to have a 'good' transcript. Keeping the challenge of creating a good transcript in mind, at CCK we have tried to identify a uniform transcription practice- verbatim- which has been born out of many divergent, and inadequately done transcripts over the years. And we have found that there are certain factors that collectively produce a good transcript. They are as follows;

1. The issue of language: not all interview interactions happen in English. In such cases, even the transcriber may not always be well versed with typing out the script of the language/dialect in which the interview was conducted. In such a scenario, transliteration becomes the key in keeping the transcription viable for further use. Keeping such practical limitations in mind, Roman script can be used to transcribe the vernacular, as shown in **Figure 1**.
2. The grammar of the transcript: this grammar is built with not only the words spoken, but also identifying the effect of gestures or changes in pitch and tone. In order to do that, it is thus deemed important to capture the non-verbal cues as well. Consider, for instance, the following:
   - Regions of disfluent speech are difficult to transcribe. Speakers often repeat themselves - "matlab samaan le liya, saara samaan le liya" (**Figure 1**), talk partial words, restart phrases or sentences, and use numerous hesitant sounds. Transcribers should take particular care in sections of disfluent speech to transcribe/mark exactly what is spoken, including all the partial words, repetitions and filled pauses used by the speaker. For example;

     [I wanted to (er)..I wanted to..I wanted to revisit that place (long pause) and make it (uh) happen…]

   - It's important that the punctuations and spellings are uniform throughout the transcripts. For example; the spelling of "peeche" and "samaan" (Fig 1) has been the same

everywhere they appear.

- Interjections made during someone's speech should be enclosed within a single parenthesis (), italicized and highlighted. Look at, for instance, the interjection made by the UN (Unidentified Narrator) in **Figure 1.**

- We also keep in mind that the transcribers must not try to correct the non-standard grammatical errors in someone's speech, e.g. "I see him" for "I saw him". Such examples should be transcribed as spoken. The same goes for words that are used in a non-standard way. Transcribers should transcribe what is spoken, not what they expect to hear, and more.

Sound clip: fy_pdhingra_raw_230615_1

Duration: 01:02:06

Centre for Community Knowledge, Ambedkar University Delhi

Time Duration	Transcript	Keywords
00:02:58 - 00:03:03	**Toh Daadi jab aap aaye the waha Amritsar toh apke saath Pakistan se or kon kon se log the?... Aur jab aap waha se yaha safar kar rahe the uss time mein beech mein aapko kissi ne roka ya kuch hua aapke saath?**	
00:03:04-00:03:55	PD: No bech mein ladaai-jhade hue the. *(Nahi aisa kuch bhi nhi hua tha)* Bade Bhai-Saheb peeche reh gaye si... *(Woh aisa hua naa jab hum Train se bhi aaye na kuch time Train pe chade toh mere jo Chote Brother the na unke pass kaafi samaan bhi tha woh neeche reh gaye or train chal padhi, woh peche reh gaye... ab (uh) ab Amritsar jab hum Flat mein aa ke thare toh humko yeh chinta the ki woh peeche reh gaye hain kya hoga? Te 10 15 din baad wapas aa gae the).* matlab samaan le liya saara samaan le liya Kapde utar wa liye saare	
00:03:04-00:03:55	PD: No, beech mein ladaai- jhagde hue the. ***(UN: Nahi aisa kuch bhi nahi hua tha)*** bade bhai sahib peeche reh gaye si... ***(UN: Woh aisa hua na jab hum train se bhi aae na... kuch time train pe chade toh mere jo chote brother the na unke paas kaafi samaan bhi tha. Woh neeche reh gaye or train chal padi. Woh peeche reh gaye.*** *(long pause)* ***Ab,*** *(uh)* ***ab Amritsar jab hum flat mein aa ke thehere toh humko yeh chinta thi ki woh peeche reh gaye hain, kya hoga? Te 10 – 15 din baad wapas aa gae the.)*** Matlab samaan le liya, saara samaan le liya. Kapde utarwa liye saare.	Migration (partition)

Figure 1. Example of transcription sheet Source: CCK archives

Furthermore, it's been found that keeping in practice the factors mentioned above in creating a verbatim (good) transcript can help overcoming the challenges faced at various levels while working with the data. Yet there were certain limitations that we became aware of only later. One of these was the loss of the tonality within the transcription process. Transcribers have to be continuously aware of the internal flow of a narrative and to keep that flow alive in the transcript.

While faced with the limitations mentioned above, another thing that has been beneficial is when the transcription has been done by the interviewer herself or himself rather than by a third person. It is completely possible that an interviewer who is not a transcriber may take more time than usual, but it's more important that the speech patterns and body language of the interviewee is not completely lost in the process of the transcription. A third person having only the audio/visual recording of the interaction might well miss (or ignore) the subtleties of an interviewee's body language, her changing pitch or tone of speaking, and so forth. The interviewer's memory of the dynamics of the space, the set up, the body language of the interviewee, the context of the anecdotes and other circumstances plays a crucial role in making a an effective transcript.

While working with oral interview (**Figure 2**) - a multilayered communication full of gestures, pitch and tone, silences, pauses, words, interjections- one thing that has been stark throughout the process of capturing these layers in transcription is that a transcript only partly reflects all that happens in an interview. Moreover, if the silences/pauses are recorded in writing, no two people will mark a length of silence and restart it in the same way. So, in transcribing we are representing a living dynamic event that was the interview interaction. This is precisely why the readers may think they received all the information of the interview, whereas in reality, they are only as close as the television viewer who watches a rain forest on the screen and assumes he possesses the experience. From such a perspective, all transcriptions may be inaccurate. Veteran oral historian David King Dunaway uses the parable of Plato's cave in comparing an oral interview transcript to the interview itself: a transcript is a shadow of a three-dimensional experience ('Transcription: Shadow or Reality?,' Oral History Review, 12 (1984): 113 – 117).

Figure 2. Recording oral narrative using photographs on location. Source: CCK archives

Reading a City Through its Neighbourhoods

Komita Dhanda

Cities are multi-layered, complex and diverse. The processes through which the residents build cities have become a focus of studies across disciplines like sociology, urban history, economics, political science and cultural studies. The present day city is often defined as an outcome of historical processes interwoven with micro and macro-level interactions between socio-cultural, political, economic and technological developments. It can also be read as a relatively large aggregation of heterogeneous communities residing in smaller units in what we call as neighbourhoods. Thus, studying a neighbourhood as a microcosm can provide insights into socio-economic and cultural life of the city. Using this approach, 'Reading Cities Through Neighbourhoods' (RCN) converts the neighbourhood into a pedagogic site where students learn observation, mapping and orality as methods to understand everyday experiences of city dwellers and the processes that contribute to the creation of a city.

A Neighbourhood As a Site

''Reading Cities Through Neighbourhoods' (RCN) is an elective course designed by the Centre for Community Knowledge for undergraduate students in which they explore neighbourhood as a micro unit for grasping complex social interactions and transformations within the city. During a lecture at the University of Twente, Prof. Karin Pfeffer (2018), explained that tacit knowledge about the city is something that we gain through everyday practices and personal experiences. However, life in a cityscape exists beyond one's own personal experience. To understand diverse and relational experience of the residents in the city, visiting neighbourhoods become an interesting teaching-learning method.

For example in the initial classes we ask students to describe their neighbourhoods – buildings, people and their activities etc. Interestingly, in the descriptions carry some noteworthy characteristics, commonalities and dissimilarities that exist in neighbourhoods.

> "In my area, you can find many coaching institutes, especially for CA classes. It is because of that you can see a large population of students coming from across the country residing in this area…and the coming up of Delhi metro led to too much crowd now because of which we have to suffer." [A student writing about her neighborhood in East Delhi]

Another student living in an urban village of South Delhi shares,

> "Opening up of *Made Easy* coaching centre for GATE, IES, IAS preparations in my locality has led to over crowdedness. But because of the student population new PG/rent accommodations, home food and domestic help services are much [more] easily available."

This sort of sharing conveys that the neighbourhood can be studied as a source of history of transformation. Observation at the neighborhood scale provides insight into the macro processes of city making. Students' descriptions of neighborhoods include their perceptions of change over time, even if only over periods of five, ten or fifteen years.

As the first two modules in the course progress, students learn to describe in detail parks, open spaces, roads, lanes, metro stations, bus stops, food places, shops, parking zones, and so forth. They become more attentive to changing or enduring uses of space. The deep and repeated observations over a period of time help in developing a nuanced perspective of how we view our neighbourhood and why it is organised in certain ways. By beginning with observation of spaces in their own homes and neighbourhoods—by articulating the obvious—the students become more aware of the urban area as an assemblage and an organic whole.

Subsequently, the guided walks in the areas surrounding Karampura campus help to sensitize students, and make them more observant; students begin to notice the implicit and the invisible. After one such walk to the former Swatantra Bharat Mill (SBM) area a student wrote,

> "Our professor took us for a walk around our campus, our destination was the SBM. We had a look around the mill or whatever is now left of it. Later I gathered some information

from my father who was born and brought up in Moti Nagar. He gave me some basic information about the mill, rest I found out through my online research."

Figure 4: A neighbourhood walk near Swatantra Bharat Mill in Karampur with RCN students (batch 2020) [photo by author]

Here, we can see three ways in which the story of SBM was assembled — neighbourhood walk, oral narrative and further research. This by and large underlines the purpose of the course. By walking inside and around campus students learn how to observe, collect information, translate it into knowledge maps of various kinds.

Figure 2: The facade of main gate into Swatantra Bharat Mill (estd. 1948) in Karampura Industrial Area [photo by a student]

The Fourth Dimension of a Map

Mapping, being a two-dimensional method of organising information through a set of symbols and rules, enables us to communicate a sense of place. By understanding the fundamentals of reading and of making various types of maps — noting livelihood, food, smell — students learn to locate themselves in their neighbourhood.

Placing fixed (a built or open space) and relational spaces (how, when and by whom it is used) together in dialogue with each other adds temporality as the third dimension in a map. This third dimension highlights changes occurred, disparity and issues of accessibility in a neighbourhood as a site.

Figure 3: Map of present day Karampura drawn by a student showing AUD campus and major landmarks, lanes, housing in the locality.

While identifying places in a map gives an idea of the physical landscape, in order to understand transformational processes, students learn how to annotate the map through oral narratives. It is a method through which the spatial is comprehended while looking at the temporal and the social within a neighbourhood. Thus, adds the fourth dimension to the map. The people's narratives combined with online archival research about the neighbourhood help students comprehend how the city of Delhi is constructed over a period of time.

> "In 1970 Karampura looked like a village of working class people. Thousands of workers worked in SBM and Sylvania and Laxman and other factories. The workers earning below than Rs 20,000 were entitled to use this ESI dispensary."

Shakeel Ahmed, a security guard at the dispensary, told a student during an interview.

By doing regular field visits, students not only understand what exists but also become aware of absences in the neighbourhood. For example for Wahid, a garage owner and Phulo Ram, a cobbler near Milan cinema, complain about lack of public toilets in the area and the inconvenience it causes to them as locals. These are the sorts of stories students collect after repeated visits and conversations with the locals.

> “Before this I never paid any attention to whether there is lack of civic amenities in the area or not…but it seems to be a big problem for Wahid because the lane in front of his shop always stinks due to public urination.”

shared a student in the class. Simple comprehensions like these is what the course tries to nurture, gradually enabling students to make the connection between civic policy, planning and the actual everyday practices of people living in the city. Such oral history narratives, on one hand bring out the peculiarity of the neighbourhood and on the other hand highlight what ties the everyday life of various communities living in the city.

In 2019, the interwoven stories of local residents came together in a form of a small display — Voices from Karampura -- that gave a glimpse of socio-economic and cultural life of neighbourhood around AUD Karampura campus.

A walk in the neighbourhood allows us to observe, analyse and re-imagine the city that exists beyond or behind the conceptual frameworks of land-use plans, zoning, urban designing, architecture and infrastructure. Using multidisciplinary approaches, the course ‘Reading Cities through Neighbourhoods’ teaches how to read the city as an outcome of historical processes, as the continuing result of micro and macro-level interactions taking place among people in the neighbourhoods.

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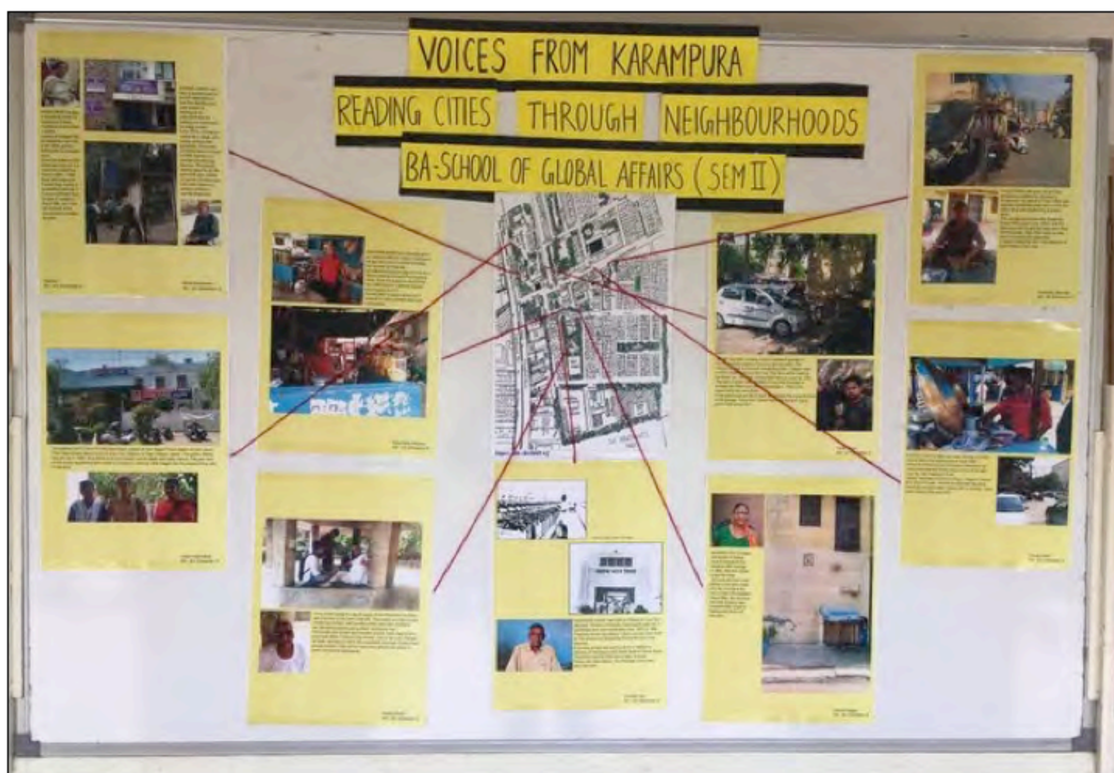

Figure 4: Voices from Karampura - A selection of narratives were displayed through nine A-3 panels consisting of photographs and text collected from people in the neighbourhood

Oral Stories as Pedagogical Method

Surajit Sarkar

Extract #1 *"My father took a cycle around 2am early in the morning which was kept outside the hospital and went home. When he went home he immediately fainted. His head, hands and back was swollen very badly. It was the worst experience for him and he doesn't want to remember that day (31st October 1984)."*

Extract #2 *"My father said his first night here he slept on a charpai in a room which was meant for anyone from his village if they came to Delhi."*

Extracts from assignments by students of 'Delhi in History' (AUD School of Undergraduate Studies, 5th Semester course)

Extract #1 is from an assignment presentation by a student on the 1984 anti-Sikh riots in Delhi and their effect on the city. The sentence reading 'It was the worst experience for him. . .' led to a class discussion that revealed how the student first heard his father's thoughts about the 1984 riots when interviewing him for the assignment.

In the same way, Extract #2 emerged from an assignment and discussion on migration and the making of Delhi. Trying to individualise the migration experience, students whose parents were first generation migrants (Dilliwalas) were asked to find out about their families' early days in Delhi. Asking questions like 'Where did you sleep? (Bathe? Eat?)' reveals how migrants used pre-existing social networks to make the move to the city possible. These social networks created a space where one recognises people as 'one's own' and are recognised by them as such.

The use of oral sources and testimony requires students to engage with the idea of subjectivity, to learn not only what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, what they now think they did. Whether a narrative practice embraces and describes the story of a person's life or is a collection of individual stories told together, its power resides in the meaning made of the storytelling and what we learn from the stories. Embedded within the practice of language in its everyday use are many hierarchies arising out of histories of domination based on gender, class, race, class, caste and race. In effect, language is never correct or incorrect, it is always positional. And since all discourse must take place in this medium that is full of creative as well as coercive potential, there is no discussion that is not rife with possibilities of both.

Learning from oral narratives begins as we recognize that we continually participate in processes of social transformation – as individuals, family members, or members of a shared community defined by ethnicity, age, gender or even a taste in music or food. Knowledge and discourse come out of experience, and reflecting upon and talking about our own experiences are means through which we come to understand our own participation in the social. Validating individual experiences in classroom activities or assignments encourages students to process their experience by giving an account of it as it comes into being. Student's develop a storyline as a way of dealing with the flow of experience, and they see that individual stories are entangled with social processes. From the students I hear their realisation that researchers are in fact creative individuals and that what they do is a creative process.

Highlighting the importance of imagination in learning, Paul Willis in 'The Ethnographic Imagination' emphasises "the ethnographic as conditioning, grounding and setting the range of imaginative meanings within social thought ... imagination is thereby forced to see the world in a grain of sand." Approaching the teaching process from what some call the auto-ethnographic perspective requires, besides listening and observing, attention to the practice of understanding the surroundings (space, place and people). Bringing in multiple layers of experience and knowledge, helps develop experiential understandings that are useful across many disciplines. It is what allows students to stand at a historical site (**Fig 1**) many centuries old and combine their preparatory readings and lectures with multiple first hand views of the place – from the guides and visitor, to workers, local shopkeepers and others – to come up with an

imaginative view of history that is marked by 'colour',' dress' and 'food', among other things.

Figure 1: The Asokan rock edict in Kailash Hills (East of Kailash) that looks down at the river two kilometres away.

Extract #3 *"I have written the assignment about the day I want to forget. But it's only meant for you, not anyone else."*

Extract from assignment by a student of 'Digital Storytelling' (AUD SUS, 6th Semester course)

One important aspect in storytelling is to recognise the difference between stories as they emerge from our own life as compared to someone else's. Developing an understanding of self, other, and culture, students engage with memory through narrative, negotiating ambivalences and uncertainties, and represent experiences. In the Digital Storytelling course, students have to work with concerns and considerations that lead to the methods, purposes and ethics of narrative practice, seen here between the biographical life histories of **Extracts #1** and **#2** . These can be seen as distinct from the autobiographical **Extract #3 or Figure 2**.

Students in the Digital Storytelling course were motivated to share their individual stories, and many have been generous storytellers, comfortable with sharing life stories. The assignment to create a storyboard of 'A Day that you want to Forget' led students to share narratives of disappointment, loss and despair. One condition of the 'sharing' was my assurance that their stories stayed with me, unless they wanted to communicate it to others.

Figure 2: My Fat – a Visual Storytelling exercise by a student of 'Digital Storytelling' (AUD SUS, 6th Semester course)

Figure 2 above, and **Extract #3** before this, describe variations in such intimate telling. Reading (and watching) the students while teaching these courses, I am struck by the rawness of their verbalisation, a reflection of the moment where young adults are motivated to want to share personal experiences and understandings.

These exercises teach students to stretch analysis and to encompass an understanding that includes generally hidden spheres of experience (for example, family life) and see previously hidden connections (between, say, social relationships and economic decisions, past experience and future priorities). As a pedagogical tool, digital storytelling can draw on and generate new forms of literacy – information, visual, digital, experiential – and expand our understanding of what literacy means in the 21st century. Along the way students acquire content knowledge in a topic area, research skills and technical expertise needed to put it all together.

दिलवालों की दिल्ली

Stories of Mutual Aid from the city of Delhi

As the COVID-19 pandemic sweeps around the world, the stress is on individual responses - care for yourself. For example, the lockdown in India did not include any logistical, or economic preparation for assisting human beings, or even recognising their emotional distress. Besides receiving advice from government or experts, like wearing a mask, washing hands regularly, downloading an app or isolating yourself from the outside world, apparently full of the terrifying virus floating around, what other options did the average person have while confronting this grave situation?

Rescuing a truck trapped in Floods, Okhla 1978

While “social” aka “physical” distancing is a necessary tool to help stop the spread of this virus, it is effective only if grounded in an ethics and practice of social solidarity and collective care. Even in these times, we come across many every day actions by people to keep each other safe, through a framework of solidarity and autonomy, not charity and dependence. This appears through ensuring access to everyday necessities - food, shelter and money, making people not feel alone or abandoned, receive health and other care, the list goes on.

At the Centre for Community Knowledge, reviewing our collection of life histories, we have found examples from the past that give an insight into how residents of Delhi have encountered, and resolved these challenges. These have involved the provision of services in times of adversity, providing support and mutual assistance that contributes to maintaining cultural norms of reciprocity, and which in turn have wider implications for social integration and solidarity.

The legacy of such mutual aid can remain for years even after conditions have changed. For example, some of us may know how the ‘tandoor’ made its appearance in post partition Delhi in neighbourhood kitchens. Here, new arrivals from Punjab, without access to cooking fuel, brought their ‘atta’ kneaded into dough to be made into tandoori rotis. As Seema Bhatt, sometime resident of Nizamuddin ,says in her interview, “We’re from Gujarat. So I was fascinated to see Punjabi families carry their atta to Ramchander to get tandoori rotis ands parathas made by him.” And then of course, the tandoor also introduced Dilliwalas to the tandoori chicken. “It was totally exotic — meat cooked to order for just a few minutes,” food writer Madhur Jaffrey recalls, “We were so used to cooking meat to death.”

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About the Centre for Community Knowledge

The Centre for Community Knowledge (CCK) is an interdisciplinary research centre, housed in the Kashmere Gate campus of Ambedkar University Delhi. Academically, the centre collaborates in implementing a variety of field programs ranging from oral history to aspects of traditional knowledge.

Located in Delhi, the centre has as a major theme, the collection of memories and life histories from residents of the city as part of the Memories of Delhi programme.

The Centre's local knowledge documentation programme involves study of different living communities in India, their cultural knowledge heritage and their interrelations. Currently, the Centre also undertakes field research in the North East region of India and neighbouring regions of mainland SouthEast Asia, in partnership with the North East Forum (NEF) at the university.

The Centre is also engaged in documenting and building digital collections to create offline digital repositories and online archives of community knowledge.

The Centre's activities aim to create access to cultural and intellectual resources that enlarge the vision of historicity, entangle power relations between information sources of lived cultures, offer local wisdom and insight into elements of histories that remain overshadowed by established meta-narratives. By bringing together community knowledge holders with scholars and cultural administrators, CCK is working towards developing an interdisciplinary reassessment of our cultural past. The Centre's work aims to build a dialogue between knowledge from the margins and the mainstream, in the absence of which knowledge and cultural identity unique to local communities will continue to be ignored.

Partnerships

CCK has been a co-partner of a major research grant from the A W Mellon Foundation, New York / International Institute of Asian Studies, Leiden, called 'Humanities across Borders' (HaB) for the period 2017-2020. A follow up grant has been announced for the period (2021-25).

On 05 August 2019, an MoU was signed with the Department of Archives, Government of Delhi to create the Oral History Archive of the City of Delhi. Using anecdotes, stories and experiences of Delhi residents, this programme will also make these archives available online in the form of recordings and transcripts.

INTACH, New Delhi through its Intangible Heritage Division has supported a number of CCK's oral knowledge projects since 2015.

The Centre works with cultural and scientific research institutions like the Anthropological Survey of India, Indian Museum, National Museum, Indian National Trust for art and Cultural Heritage, Indian National Science Academy, Indian Council of Social Science Research, Indian Council for Historical Research, India Foundation for Arts, Lalit Kala Akademi, Kerala Tourism, National Innovation Foundation, Roja Muthaiah Research Library, Vasant J Sheth Memorial Foundation, International Institute of Asian Studies (Leiden), University of Chicago, University of Texas (Austin), International Association of Agricultural Museums and others.

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