Inquilab[1] at the Edge of the City: Encountering Capital and Citizenship in Seelampur

"What were you doing when the nation was being destroyed by a black law brought by two traitors, two despots? We are fighting, so that when our children question us in the future, we can tell them with pride that we were a part of the resistance, and we were so persistent that we did not leave till our demands were met, even if it meant that we would have to lose our lives."

- S, Seelampur

Abstract

This paper represents an advancement of literature on cities in the Global South by undertaking a case study of the locality of Seelampur in New Delhi, its historical context, and the geographic reconfigurations precipitated by the anti-CAA-NRC-NPR agitation. It attempts to build on the literature surrounding gender and production relations undergirding a city in the Global South, and focuses on the women of Seelampur for their defiance of the boundaries imposed by the logic of accumulation and the patriarchal purview of the state.

Throughout their life, the women of Seelampur have precariously inhabited the margins of the city. Just as they are deemed encroachers in the city, they are also cast as encroachers upon citizenship. Seelampur has been subject to underdevelopment to serve the needs of capital through the exploitation of its Muslim population and the confinement of their labour. The locality of

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1 The iconic Urdu word, 'Inquilab', means revolution and comes from the Arabic root word 'Iqlab' which means change, or transformation of one thing to another. It is used in the slogan 'Inquilab Zindabad' (Long Live Revolution), coined by Maulana Hasrat Mohani, a labour leader, a scholar, a well-known Urdu poet and also one of the founders of the Communist Party of India in 1925 (Habib, 2023).

Seelampur is compelled to converse with the disciplining face of the state, while the residents are deprived of welfare entitlements owed to them.

Seelampur as the site of protest constituted an instance of resistance to the continued privatisation of city space and represented a reclamation of the city-scape. The social production of space by the women protestors re-ordered the sense of time, place and gender within the locality - and hence reorganised priorities of the women towards kinship and family. The praxis of care feminised resistance and extended the socio-spatial boundaries such that the protest site became the home of homes. Challenging and subverting given notions of the public, Seelampur redefined Muslim women's political participation and public identity.

Keywords: city; citizenship; women; dissent

Introduction

The narrow lanes of Seelampur acquired a radical spirit. Every street echoed with slogans hailing resistance and every wall was painted in the colours of dissent. While the pillars of the metro-line snaking through the street were inscribed in big scrawls of "We the People of India," a large banner at the corner of a turning hung - with a painting of women gathered as an expression of sisterhood. The women had come together in solidarity to oppose the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA),[2]

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[2] The CAA is an amendment to the Citizenship Act, 1955 enacted by the Modi government in 2019. It enables individuals "belonging to Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians community from Afghanistan, Bangladesh or Pakistan," on meeting specific criteria, eligible for Indian citizenship. It thus defines citizenship in relation to religious identity alone and hence is discriminatory and contrary to secularism (Wasim, 2022).

National Register of Citizens (NRC)[3] and National Population Register (NPR)[4]. The CAA, passed in December 2019, systematically divides citizens based on their faith. When considered in conjunction with NRC and NPR, it forms a discriminatory instrument wielded against Muslims.

This paper focuses on the temporal and spatial specificity of Seelampur, a locality in a Global South city, examining it vis-a-vis placemaking, capital accumulation and feminist assertion, and centering the changes occasioned by the anti-CAA agitation. It relies on existing urban geographical frameworks, which argue that the impoverishment, ghettoisation and chaos of cities like Delhi are not the failure of planning, but in fact the outcome of a planning regime that ascribes citizenship and legitimacy to individuals based on their residence. Looking at the interconnectedness between informality, illegality, planning and private property in Global South cities, the protest site at Seelampur interacted with and contested the logics that prevailed upon it. The paper advances feminist scholarship on Muslim women in the Indian state to make sense of the experiences of the protestors at Seelampur and how they revised the existing dimensions of dissent and forged broader kinships of solidarity and struggle through the mechanisms of care-work.

In examining Seelampur in the aftermath of the anti-CAA agitation, this paper also seeks to distinguish itself from existing literature on the anti-CAA protests that conjure Seelampur and

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[3] The NRC is an exercise by the Indian government to recognise and expel "illegal immigrants" pursuant to Section 14A of the Citizenship Act, 1955 read with the Foreigners Act, 1946. It requires that people prove their presence in any part of India on or before 24th March, 1971. Being rooted in the insider-outsider binary, it has led to the institutionalisation of exclusion (Vatsal, 2020).

[4] The NPR is aimed at creating a database of residents of the country, both citizens and non-citizens, and provides the bedrock upon which the NRC will be operationalised. By giving unbridled authority to the executive to decide which residents it deems contentious, the Register is a tool through which the state seeks to legitimise the exclusion of Muslims from citizenship (Mander and Bhat, 2020).

other protest sites as satellites of Shaheen Bagh[5], and hence, characterise the former as replicating the politics of the latter (Mustafa, 2020) (Salam & Ausaf, 2020). The paper argues that the resistance displayed at Seelampur marked a radical claim upon the city-scape and a contestation to being relegated to the peripheries of development. The spatial strategies of the women - constructing a permanent protest[6] and being present all through the night, altered the character of the neighbourhood and the homes of the protestors. As the women came to don the role of everyday dissenters, gender relations within Seelampur came to be extricated from patriarchal conceptions of sensibility, safety and domesticity.

This paper begins by tracing the continuity of the violence and oppression meted out by the Indian state against the Muslim community. Following this, the locality of Seelampur, its exclusion from the narratives of the city, and particular exploitation by the powerful elite are discussed in an attempt to foreground the spatio-temporal peculiarities of the women's resistance. Further, the paper explores the distinct emerging political consciousness and placemaking practices of the Seelampur protest site, highlighting how citizenship hangs in the precarious balance between normative equality and the centralising tendencies of capital. Lastly, the paper delineates the themes of sisterhood, camaraderie, and resistance - thus unveiling how the feminisation of resistance through socio-physical proximity, practices of care and shared experiences also forms the basis of a wider solidarity network. Through these facets of the struggle, the unique character

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5 On the night of 15 December 2019, a handful of Muslim women came out of their homes in Shaheen Bagh, a little-known locality in South-East Delhi, to protest against the government's controversial Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), 2019 (Mustafa, 2020). As more and more women emerged to join the protests, it spurred action among Muslim women across the city – leading to the mushrooming of anti-CAA protest sites across India. The example of Shaheen Bagh came to stand as a national inspiration to anti-CAA struggles (Salam & Ausaf, 2020).
6 Permanent refers to a mode of protesting that warrants presence of protesting individuals in the site throughout the day and night, without any occasion for absences.

of dissent employed by the women of Seelampur is illuminated and differentiated from its counterparts in the rest of the country.

Methodology: Stories of Self and Site

This paper attempts to narrate the localised story of the Seelampur protest site against the CAA, situating it in a longer history. Examining how the locality negotiates the state and the market, it strives to attend to the local, while positing it in the structural. Our approach therefore, attempts a construction of Seelampur at its "intersections and interactions of concrete social relations and social processes" (Massey, 1994, 138). In doing so, this paper dives into important aspects of the local, found within social activities and relations, which are dynamic, changing and constantly becoming. Through this, we hope to glean how gender relations, households, economy, and state are impacted by the resistance of the women at the protest site.

As Sircar and Dutta emphasise, our engagement with the site was not to reduce the protesting women into categories of data or mere sources of retrieving information (2021). Rather, it was part of a need to be "ethical witnesses" to the processes which were unfolding at the site (Sircar and Dutta, 2021, 57). It was after the Delhi riots in February 2020, that the protesting women asked us to record their own voices in order to counter the onslaught of mis-information and police cases that were hounding members connected to the Seelampur protest. This consequently led to several interviews by the authors with many of the women leaders within the Protest Committee, in which they frankly and bravely shared their intimate dilemmas - between home and the site, their newly gained confidence regarding the futures of their struggle, and the hopes for their children to live in a society that was both materially and ideologically democratic. Through the process of gathering interviews on video, we recorded a vast breadth of the oral history capturing the site. This was

consequently compiled and edited into a full length documentary film. When we attempted to screen the film by way of small, informal screenings at our University campus – it was shut down swiftly, under the pretext that it would be far too political. Ultimately, we reached a dead-end and could not publicly showcase the documentary. However, we continued to feel that recording their stories publicly was an integral task. Foregrounding the "superiority of knowledge and being" of the protesting women (Sircar and Dutta, 2021, 93), we resolved to document our conversations – in part, through our writing.

In specific, the methods used in this paper include several on-site visits to the protest site and interviews with the protesting women. The protest site at Seelampur was extremely porous, with individuals leaving and joining throughout the day. Over the weeks, we interacted in the protest site as participants. The interviews were conducted only consequent to these interactions, as an after-thought to our more central participation at the site. We visited the site through a two month period from February to March 2020. Six weeks after our association with the site, we spoke to fifteen women involved in the protest and to five children present at the site. The interviews consisted of women participating in the protest at the site, representing a diverse spectrum of backgrounds, from young students to grandmothers. A majority of the women belonged to the Protest Committee - which undertakes organisational decisions - at Seelampur, or were selected to speak to us through democratic consensus by the Committee, and hence were able to provide a holistic account of the site.

All the interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, without the use of a predetermined, rigid questionnaire. Instead, a dialogic format was adopted, and the women had agency to engage with the things they deemed most relevant or wished to bring to the attention of the broader public. This approach was chosen to guarantee that the women's voices, words, and struggles were

communicated in a manner that resonated with their intentions. Through productive interactions and shared activity, both the women of Seelampur and the authors attempted to contribute to the co-creation of knowledge.

The shared act of walking alongside the interviewees offered a research device that allowed us to gain insight into the social space of Seelampur at different times within the day. Through engagement with the women while walking, we were able to experience the site through the tacit knowledge about the way it is organised and the decisions that influenced the choice of the protest location. Our reliance on this method and outlook is influenced by Jamil's understanding of the ethnographic walk as a feminist exploratory method that places questions of class, gender and mobility within the sociological imagination (2016).

We undertook participant study in the sense of "real participation" – with the focus to undertake activism within the movement – with explicit allegiance with its goals (Omvedt, 1979, 374). The use of participant observation as a distinct process of study enabled us to unearth the specific dynamics of organising within the movement, as it allowed us to be present in the day-to-day functioning of it. Omvedt suggests that practitioners of movements – through the mode of organisation, seek to produce knowledge by actively forwarding hypotheses about their political realities and putting them to the rest in real time (1979). Participant observation puts researchers "at the disposal of radical organisers" (1979, 392), making them partake in the political tasks of the movement as a means to study and understand it. In this way, our involvement in the protest site counteracted the dichotomy of insider-outsider, instead allowing us to undertake the work of the movement, allowing us to witness the process of movement building.

While literature has primarily seen the positionalities of the researcher and researchered as fixed, transcending such binaristic Western thought, it is critical to recognise how neither can remain outsider and insider consistently (Parikh, 2020). Instead, feminist geographers have highlighted the significance of positional spaces or spaces of betweeness which engender the complementary and productive interaction of both the researcher and the researchered by means of shared situated knowledge (Parikh, 2020). While we were outsiders as law students from a private University who were not from the locality of Seelampur, and in our specific caste class positionalities, through active participation in the site of resistance - in the form of joining the sloganeering and engaging with and extending solidarity to the protesters - we found ourselves in spaces of betweeness where both researcher and researched possessed shared knowledge and conviction. Being aware of our differing social backgrounds, the protestors encouraged the researchers to partake in the activities at the site by contextualising the slogans and songs and integrating us within the history and Urdu lessons. The absorption of the authors within the space of Seelampur brought alive the peculiarities of its material conditions and illuminated the social relations underlying the lives of its residents. Thus, rather than being construed as an external objective inquiry, the methods followed were borne from the immersion of the researchers in the site, engaging with its routine.

Feminist literature posits reflexivity as critical self-reflection on the role and position of the researcher. This is an essential project since one's postionality often gets encoded in the process of knowledge production. However, moving beyond the myopic disclaimer politics of positionality, the authors posit an "uncomfortable reflexivity" that recognises the complicated nature of identities and research in the context of social movements (Vlavonou, 2023).

The experience of protesting with the women of the Seelampur encouraged us to adopt an understanding of positionality that transcends the minimal confession of personal characteristics and instead develops alternative theorizations that speak to the necessities of political struggle. Critical discussions on reflexive practices within academic scholarship have highlighted the tendency of positionality statements to reify and reproduce the very hierarchical categories they problematize (Gani and Khan, 2024). Anticipating these dilemmas, Nagar had articulated a set of corrective approaches which involve treating reflexivity and positionality as processes that evolve over space and time and encourage crossing borders to build "situated solidarities" during feminist fieldwork (Nagar, 2014, 88). An investigation into the spatial conditions of the protest site and its location in the political economy of the city allowed us to centre the overarching processes of exploitation and oppression of Muslim residents that structured the fieldwork encounter. Our situatedness within the movement encouraged us to stretch the imagination of reflexivity to encompass political engagement and forge new solidarities. The combination of diverse voices kindled a process of collaborative knowledge directed at deepening the theoretical understanding of the concrete realities of women's struggle in Seelampur.

Locating Seelampur at the Intersections of History and Biography

The oppression the Indian state has subjected Muslims to is historic in character, with struggles against the communalising impulses of the state punctuating the history of the nation. However, the scale and nature of resistance displayed by the Muslim community against the CAA, NRC and NPR is unique and is the product of a novel and specific configuration of material and ideological conditions. Historically, a vast majority of the Muslim community in India have been relegated to the margins of the labour market. Further, demonetisation, introduced by the central government in 2016 severely impacted a large section of the Muslim community. Entrenched exclusion and

economic distress from the cascading impact of more recent events may be seen as a key factor in lighting the powder-keg of resistance in the community (Salam & Ausaf, 2020). In fact, data from the Labour Ministry disclosed that during 2017-18, unemployment in the country rose to a 45-year high, amounting to 6.1% of the total labour force (Press Trust of India, 2019). As per the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) data, unemployment among Muslims was over 50% (Roy, 2023). Additionally, in the aftermath of demonetisation, unemployment rose, the labour force participation rate plummeted, and young workers most acutely experienced the lack of jobs (Abraham & Shrivastava, 2021). Demonetisation, also paralysed the cash intensive informal sector, while the introduction of the GST regime significantly impacted small enterprises, all leading to immense job losses and a precipitous fall in revenue (Dharshini, Kajla & Bhattacharya, 2021). As Muslims predominantly participate in the informal economy, the economic policies of the Modi government gravely impacted the community, and proved to be the proverbial last straw for the unrest the anti-CAA movement gave expression to. The fundamental character of citizenship as a right to lay claim to the republic also distinguished the historical moment that produced the anti-CAA movement. Citizenship lies at the heart of democracy and must be realised by the state through recognition of inter-community differences. The state's effort to refract citizenship itself through religious identity reflects a departure from a Marshallian understanding of citizenship, which embodies the notion of equality (Chatterjee, 2017).

This differentiating tendency was contested by the protesting women of Seelampur, with one woman sharing in an interview that, "The CAA is applicable to Hindus, but not Muslims. Why not Muslims? This land is made of the blood of everyone. Our ancestors and community members have fought alongside. Today, we are the outsider. We cannot be othered in this manner. We are the same blood. We were born here and will die here. Is this not our country too?" By employing

metaphors that establish a nexus between blood and nation, the protesting women advanced a bridge between private imagery and collective object (Baruh and Popescu, 2008). The invocation of historical bloodshed foregrounded a popular conception of citizenship rooted in people's struggles; which displaced myopic legality, legitimised the women of Seelampur as equal subjects and emboldened them with the authority to inscribe the nation's future. It also alludes to Rahat Indori's poem, which became the clarion call of the anti-CAA agitation, which extols "Sabhi ka khoon shaamil yahan ki mitti mein. Kisi ke baap ka hindustan thodi hai".[7] These verses of the poem affirm the belongingness of those who lead a precarious existence, who live beneath the Damocles' sword of eviction. The poem effectively configures one's relationship to land and the idea of nation, as derived not by means of ownership but through labour. Eschewing any racial conception of nationality which conceives of the nation as an exclusionary community where citizens are tied to each other by "blood and soil", the poem views the nation as built through the sweat and labour of the dispossessed and as not the preserve of a single individual or community. Thus, the protesting women's employment of visceral metaphors and insertion within the body politic attested to how the anti-CAA agitation at Seelampur witnessed an imagination of citizenship that drew from working-class experiences rather than mere legality.

The police brutality unleashed on students at Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI)[8] on December 15, 2019, precipitated the struggle at Seelampur, as the women learnt of the CAA-NRC-NPR and the discriminatory agenda that the laws espouse, in its aftermath. In an interview, two women from Seelampur recounted how they had then begun canvassing in their neighbourhood along with

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7 These verses by Rahat Indori translate to "Everyone's blood forms a part of this earth. India is no single person's personal property."

8 A Central University situated in New Delhi. It was founded in 1920 by members of the Muslim intelligentsia in the context of wider anti-colonial agitation. It aims to bring about socio-economic transformation of common masses, in general, and Muslims, in particular through higher education opportunities.

students from JMI, explaining the nature of the laws and galvanising support amongst other Muslim women against the attacks perpetrated upon the students at JMI. The genesis of the anti-CAA protests reveals how the movement began in the university and then percolated outward (Chaudhuri, 2021). Thus, the history of the movement at Seelampur can be charted through the cross-pollination between study and struggle.

In an interview with the women from Seelampur, she delineated how when the number of women protesting the laws swelled to 300, they collectively decided to organise a sit-in. Initially they had contemplated sitting at the local *eidgah*,[9] but as a contingent of police officers had assembled there, they instead decided to gather at the side of the road. With each passing day, the strength of their voices and the peaceful nature of their protest encouraged more women to join the sit-in. Voice is a foundational element constituting the "metaphysics of protest", as it embodies the sociality of sound and possesses the ability to approach other individuals and embrace them within its fold (Sarukkai, 2021). As voice entails the process of being heard, it presupposes the presence of another and is instrumental in instilling collectiveness. (Sarukkai, 2021). The slogans and songs of the women of Seelampur then were intrinsically linked to the act of producing voice, of donning a political subjectivity that defied silence. Thus, the women's decisive occupation of space and the resolve of their voice were crucial in providing momentum to the struggle.

Once approximately two months had transpired from the commencement of the sit-in, the women of Seelampur decided to participate in the Bharat Bandh[10] called by Bhim Army chief, Chandrashekhar Azad,[11] to amplify their voices and lend solidarity to their Dalit brothers. Hence,

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9 Public space reserved for prayer for the Muslim community.
10 Refers to a nationwide shutdown, akin to a general strike.
11 The President of the Bhim Army, an organisation that strives towards Dalit emancipation. He had extended his solidarity to the Seelampur protest site, addressing the women and conducting a reading of the Preamble at the site.

on 23rd February, 2020, they blocked the roads at Jafrabad metro station. As evidenced in Jignesh Mevani's campaign in Gujarat, Dalit-Muslim unity has been a significant force in electoral politics (Khan, 2017), given how Dalits and Muslims are united in their performance of stigmatised labour and experience of class exploitation and social subjugation. Mevani, who won the elections from the Vadgam constituency, had based his 2017 campaign on the election symbol of a sewing machine, representing communal unity and against cow vigilantism,[12] which victimises Dalits and Muslims (Khan, 2017). At Seelampur, practices revolving around purity and pollution are eschewed, as Dalit-Muslim unity forms the bed-rock of the imagination of an equitable future. As one woman in an interview to us remarked, "I have this heartfelt wish that all communities - Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian, Dalit - sit together and eat from one Dastarkhwan (traditional table cloth), one plate. The joy of that would be unparalleled". Thus, as attested to by the anti-CAA struggle in Seelampur, Dalit-Muslim unity has been important not only in informing electoral victories, but also in its manifestation in movement politics, providing a potent base in the fight against the casteist and communalist tendencies of Hindutva.[13]

Following the Bharat Bandh, the women had initially planned to return to their protest site, when they heard Kapil Mishra's[14] inflammatory speech. Mishra had called on the police to evict the anti-CAA protestors, and menacingly declared that there would be violence if they refused to do so.

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12 The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party has used the symbol of the cow as a means to create communal fervent and to orchestrate a violent campaign against consumption of beef and against primarily Muslims and also Dalits, who are engaged in transacting cattle. Under the facade of cow protection, vigilantes empowered by the ruling administration have attacked minority communities, with 36 Muslims being murdered in such attacks, between May 2015 and December 2018 (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

13 A political ideology which seeks to establish Hindu supremacy and to undermine the secular status of India as enumerated in the Constitution, instead converting it into a nation of and for Hindus, or a Hindu Rashtra. The BJP and its allied organisation, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh subscribe to Hindutva ideology.

14 A politician from the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, who threatened violence if the anti-CAA protestors in Jafrabad were not removed in a span of three days. This speech instigated the violence that ensued in anti-CAA protest sites, where Muslim citizens were targeted and attacked.

The women spontaneously then resolved to remain at the metro station, to see if he would actually execute his threats. On the evening of the 23rd of February, a pre-planned riot was orchestrated in North-East Delhi, which subsisted till February 27th, where 53 individuals were killed and over 500 were injured, a majority being Muslim (Mustafa, 2020).

An hour after Mishra's speech, Ragini Tiwari,[15] a right-winger, allegedly helmed mobs and stirred them to attack Muslims. Subsequent to this, the anti-CAA protest site at Kardampuri[16] was set ablaze. In Chandbagh,[17] the police assaulted Muslim women present at the protest site (Anwar, 2021). Berenschot notes how implicit and explicit support from the police functions as a means to raise the morale of rioters (2011). The Delhi Minorities Commission Report provides damning evidence regarding the compromised character of the police force and how this emboldened rioters, pointing to how pro-CAA mobs often chanted "*Dilli Police Zindabad*" (Long Live Delhi Police!) (Anwar, 2020). The Report also provides numerous testimonies of police inaction, where despite emergency calls and being present at the site of violence, the police did not intervene, and did not disperse unlawful assemblies or detain individuals committing violent acts (Delhi Minorities Commission, 2020). The complicity of the ruling political class is also apparent as eye-witness accounts identify BJP councillor, Kanhaiya Lal, as part of the mob (Anwar, 2020). The fact that the riot was entirely planned and carried out as a means to silence the protesting women in Seelampur is evident from the fact that Muslim shops alone were torched, whereas shops owned by Hindus but leased out to Muslims were only ransacked. Investigation by the Delhi Police also

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15 A Hindutva leader who has campaigned for BJP leaders on numerous occasions. She played a significant role in inciting the riots that occurred in North-East Delhi.
16 A locality in the North-East of Delhi like Seelampur, where there was a coordinated and targeted attack of Muslims in the course of the riots orchestrated from February 24, 2020.
17 A locality in the North-East of Delhi like Seelampur, where there was a coordinated and targeted attack of Muslims in the course of the riots orchestrated from February 24, 2020.

attested to how the riots were premeditated, as messages in the *Kattar Hindu Ekta* WhatsApp Group[18] sought to mobilise rioters (Anwar, 2020).

As Brass argues, there are three stages to a communal riot; rehearsal, enactment and interpretation (2010). These stages were performed in the riots that occurred in North-East Delhi as well. In the rehearsal stage of a riot, Brass outlines how individuals, including politicians, visit the site of conflict and make speeches that are inflammatory, to generate discord. In the second stage, violence and destruction of property is performed with the systematic and direct intervention of the police force and political elite (Brass, 2010). In the third stage of a riot, the perpetrators are absolved, blame is affixed on other individuals and a tactic of intimidation is pursued (Brass, 2010).

In the aftermath of the riots, the media played a significant role in constructing the smokescreen of ideology. For instance, Times Now peddled lies that an individual was shooting at the police, when in reality, he was a pro-CAA rioter conniving with the police (Sinha et al, 2020). As noted in the Citizens Committee Report, where former Supreme Court justice, Madan B. Lokur, was the Chairperson, the media also consistently depicted the anti-CAA movement as a Hindu-Muslim controversy, elicited suspicion against the Muslim community, and maligned the protestors (2022). All this contributed to the construction of Muslims as criminals, and enabled state repression following the riot. The Group of Intellectuals and Academicians also released a report recommending that teachers, artists and students be investigated (Trivedi, 2020). The Group, helmed by Supreme Court Advocate, Monika Arora, and consisting of Professors from Delhi University, recommended the issuance of a direction to universities to ensure that their campuses

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18 *Kattar Hindu* refers to an individual who stringently abides by Hinduism and Ekta translates to unity. Individuals within the Kattar Hindu WhatsApp Group planned and participated in the riots that occurred in North-East Delhi.

are not utilised for political gatherings (2020). The Seelampur protest's mass character, which included anti-caste activists, intellectuals, and students, posed a threat to the Hindutva state, which, through the assistance of civil society and its grass-roots organisations, sought to dismantle the movement. It is essential to note that incarceration of protestors at Seelampur - through arrests and charges by the Delhi police - was more pronounced than that other sites such as Shaheen Bagh confronted.

Under the pretext of the pandemic, the state unleashed a brutal crackdown against student leaders and individuals spearheading the anti-CAA movement at Seelampur. The state charged Devangana Kalita, Natasha Narwal and Gulfisha Fatima under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), for allegedly being responsible for the Delhi riots (Sharma, 2020). Devangana Kalita and Natasha Narwal are activists from Pinjra Tod[19] and Gulfisha Fatima was a member of the Seelampur Protest Committee. All three played a critical role in organising the women at the protest site in Seelampur. Four FIRs[20] were registered against Devangana Kalita and three against Natasha Narwal, with the last one numbered 59/2020, invoking the UAPA (Lokur, 2021). On June 15, 2021, Natasha and Devangana secured bail for FIR numbered 59/2020, and were released from jail. Significantly, the Delhi HC judgement noted how the distinction between the right to protest and terrorism had grown liminal as the state was eager to quash dissent (Lakhani, 2021). However, the freedom Natasha and Devangana have been granted is partial, as Gulfisha Fatima remains in jail, and is yet to secure bail under the UAPA case. The utilisation of UAPA, which eradicates the possibility of securing bail, with Section 43D of the Act necessitating the court to determine bail

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19 A collective of women students that gained prominence for spearheading a struggle for accessible and gender-just university spaces, specifically to remove regulations restricting women's movement in hostels.
20 A report prepared by the police on receipt of information pertaining to the commission of a cognizable offence.

solely by examining the charge-sheet created by the National Investigative Agency (EPW Engage, 2022), epitomises how the state seeks to crush any whisper of dissent.

Thus, through slander, the ideological state apparatus has sought to invoke an 'inherent criminality' of Muslims and delegitimise protests that were peaceful. The state's repressive measures have conjured another Bhima Koregaon,[21] as the tentacles of criminalisation continue to sprout, to nip the alliances Seelampur has cradled. However, the resistance at Seelampur cannot be vanquished by the state, as the women's bold and uncompromised assertions over citizenship and towards collectivism have decisively shaped the character of the locality.

At the Margins of Citizenship, Capital and the City

<u>Courting Citizenship</u>

The unwanted intrusions of the state in the lives of the Muslim-dominated working class community of Seelampur in the years of 2019 and 2020 were not new. Neither was the unmaking of their citizenship. In the city of their dwelling, they have always lived as non-citizens.[22] The planned boulevards, lush gardens and shifting skyline of the new city were brazenly inattentive to the oppressed classes, pushing them to the edges. Excluded from its narratives and experiences, the protesting women of Seelampur were encroachers upon the city, just as they have been encroachers upon citizenship. In this milieu of marginalisation, their rise and resistance against a

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21 16 prominent activists, lawyers, scholars and artists were charged under the Indian Penal Code and the UAPA, and arrested without trial, in connection with violence that occurred in Bhima Koregaon, Pune in 2018. It is critical to note that reports point to how the evidence against the accused persons was planted (Poddar, 2022), and that there were significant legal violations of the rights of the accused (Goyal, 2021). The case hence represents an attempt by the state to quash dissent.

22 The segregated locality of Seelampur exacerbates the marginal status of its residents in Indian polity by subjecting them to social and material disadvantages in terms of welfare services as well as preventing collective participation. Consequently, they are represented as a community lacking civic virtue and the capability to be loyal, active citizens of the nation (Jamil, 2017).

regime where the ordinary safeguards of the law are fragmented, and its brutality expressed through discriminatory legislation, was remarkable. An admission of the segregationist motives of the state, the CAA, in conjunction with the NRC and NPR, represented an attempt to classify and award citizenship to the population along religious lines. This framework expressed the unmaking of Muslims as citizens, the erasure of their histories and the abortion of their futures by branding them as illicit encroachers. Beyond its legalistic definition concerning the unauthorised occupation of land, encroachment becomes an identity and the vehicle through which the state confronts its people. For Bhan, the encroacher is the antithesis of the citizen and personifies illegality, ridding her of claims to the same rights (2016). Unlike a citizen, the encroacher cannot rightfully access public space and her participation in it represents an unlawful intrusion. The spatial, political and economic interactions of the encroacher with the city comprise a complex network which is fraught with internal contradictions while simultaneously engaged in a conflict with the ruling order.

The establishment of Seelampur as a resettlement colony on the edges of the city occurred after the Emergency in India,[23] when the forceful eviction of low-income, minority communities was carried out through the destruction of their homes, forcing them to seek alternate dwelling (Jamil, 2017). The mushrooming of settlements in the areas that constitute Seelampur took place over the span of the next few decades, turning it into a densely-populated Muslim ghetto outside the urban

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[23] A state of internal emergency was declared in India from June 25, 1975 to March 21, 1977, by the then President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed on the advice of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. The period was marked by a spate of extremely restrictive measures and anti-democratic practices which were designed to curb dissent and specifically targeted working-class Muslim and Dalit communities. In Delhi, the State ordered extensive slum clearances and brutally crushed any acts of resistance, exemplified by the massacre of protestors at Turkman Gate.

planning realm of the state (Jaffrelot and Gayer, 2012)[24] (Shaban, 2016).[25] The anxieties of crime

and the impulse to create spaces of opulence and social prestige catering to the aspirations of

consumption contributes to ghettoization (Rao, 2016). The internal morphology of crime and class

appeal creates segregated enclaves characterised by heightened surveillance, eclipsing the right of

the ghettos to participate equally in urban life (Rao, 2016). Similarly, the urban authorities of the

city of Delhi ossified the production of ghettoised spaces in its North-Eastern region through

practices of illegalization of the space and the imposition of conditions on land ownership. In these

congested and vulnerable neighbourhoods, citizenship found no concentration of material

ownership to attach itself to. The declaration of Seelampur, a locality in North-East Delhi, as an

unauthorised colony meant that the transfers of residential and commercial properties in the region

through powers of attorney were rendered illegal until the area underwent the brutal process of

regularisation (Zaidi, 2020). In addition to the constraints imposed by capital and ground rent,

bureaucratic restrictions further distanced Seelampur residents from the enjoyment of ownership

rights and its associated political privileges. The dispossession of their land and the enforcement

of legal restrictions divested the ghettoised communities of the urban membership through which

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24 In their work on the marginalisation of Muslims in the various metropolitan cities of India, Jaffrelot and Gayer permit the deployment of the term 'ghettoisation' to describe the emergence of Muslim-dominated neighbourhoods in cities, only on the satisfaction of specific characteristics (2012). The five major characteristics of these spaces of relegation include an element of social or political constraint over residential options, the class or caste diversity of these localities which demonstrates their regrouping along religious lines, neglect of the locality by state authorities, the estrangement of the locality as well as the subjective sense of closure experienced by its residents as a result of their spatial marginality. The eighth chapter of the book, written by Laurent Gayer, documents the concentration of Muslims in the Seelampur locality based on their electoral percentage, which creates conditions for the estrangement, neglect and surveillance of the neighbourhood, qualifying it as a 'ghetto' within the city of New Delhi.

25 In 'Muslim Citizenship, Identity, and Violence in India', Shaban uncovers how heightened religious polarisation in Indian cities and the apprehension of communal riots, act as pivotal push factors resulting in the concentration of Muslim communities within marginalised enclaves on the periphery of large cities or in slums and dilapidated areas of established towns. Over the past century, Delhi has experienced a concentrated prevalence of communal violence, leading to its ascent from the seventh to the second rank among the most communally violent cities by 2009. Consequently, the emergence of Seelampur and other Muslim-dominated localities can be regarded as a direct response to the deeply ingrained communal tensions permeating Delhi. This socio-spatial phenomenon serves as a testament to the transformative effects of discrimination, communal politics, violence, and marginalisation within the urban fabric.

the claim-making powers of citizenship are realised. The movement of the women of Seelampur challenged the very foundation of their exclusion by rejecting notions of ownership and premising their claims to citizenship on a right to the city, not the right to property or the rights attained as property owners (Bhan, 2016).

The conflict between man and citizenship, reincarnated in the experiences of the women of Seelampur, was foregrounded by Marx within the division between the political state and civil society (1843). Attaining citizenship involved a dissolution of civil society and a transition to the political sphere by abstracting man from community to an egoistic, individual existence. The present authoritarian front of the neoliberal Indian state pushes toward the disenfranchisement of entire communities from their rightful position in the political sphere by reigniting the conflicts within civil society through religious ferment and communal instigation. In doing so, it safeguards the stronghold of the ruling classes over the political state and re-directs resistance and praxis. Evading challenges against itself for the protection and provision of welfare for its citizens, the state criminalises the protestors, burdening them with the onus of redeeming themselves. The strategies of organisation and dissent deployed by the women of Seelampur defied these manipulations by foregrounding their struggle in political emancipation and their claims to the city as Muslim citizens. Through territorial reclamation, they questioned their oppression and exploitation at the peripheries.

The symbolic organisation and classification of the residents of Seelampur as encroachers fractured their right to the city by attributing a caricature of criminality to their existence and casting doubt upon their legibility as citizens of the nation (Bhan, 2016). The accusations of bribery levied by state propaganda against the protestors contributed to the narratives of "improper citizenship" constructed around the Muslim community of Seelampur. The sequential order

through which the state perpetuated its anti-democratic ambition was resisted head-on by women of Seelampur through the capture of the city space itself in an effort to assert their claims to the nation. This dispossession from citizenship has been visibilized in the Supreme Court judgement[26] about the anti-CAA protest sites in Delhi, which held that utilising public land for protesting could not be deemed legal. The claims of the women of Seelampur to the spaces of the city objectified their claims to citizenship, as a resistance to the brutality of the state in its subservience to capital.

The Cruelties of Capital Accumulation

The locality of Seelampur has been subject to historical underdevelopment in order to propel the expanding motives of capital accumulation. As a social space, it must be conquered and integrated into the global circuit of capital in order to catalyse the reproduction of capital within the nation (Merrifield, 2013). The generation of a migration stream to the periphery and the suppression of wages and ground rent through community-based segregation has confined the productive forces of Seelampur to manufacturing and sorting industries and relegated a large portion of its labour to the sorting of electronic waste generated by the entire city of New Delhi. The presence of a Muslim population in the region has generated disinterest among potential investors who fear low-returns, owing to which housing options in the region remain unattractive and limited. Cheaper rent and lower wages provide fertile ground for the ossification of small-time manufacturing industries (Jamil, 2014). Post-liberalisation, the rapid introduction of electronic appliances and technologies catering to the growing middle-class market in a country without an adequate disposal infrastructure, as well as illicit dumping by first-world nations, influenced the process of spatialisation of the city and forced its margins to confront the electronic waste generated (Jamil,

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26 Amit Sahni v. Commissioner of Police (Civil Appeal 3282/2020).

2014). Reformulating Marx's conception of commodity fetishism, this distance between the market and the space where labour operates was weaponised by the state to enhance fetishisation (Herod, 2003). Through the physical isolation of Seelampur and the communal isolation of its workers from the market, the object of their labour, comprising the sorting of e-waste or manufacturing of small goods, was separated from its social character. The social relations crucial to the production of technological commodities are obscured beneath their flashy, material forms, and the cog of Seelampur in the machine of global capital is forgotten (Corwin, 2018). The specialised skills of its residents were invisibilised and exploited to meet the expanding needs of the market for manufactured technological goods.

The spatial division of labour based on different sectoral specialisations has been linked to the internal structure and organisation of capital and shapes the relations of production by reinforcing the supply and demand for specific types of skilled labour (Massey, 1995). The division of labour engages in dialectical interactions with the division of the city and engenders a labour 'ghettoisation', layered alongside the spatial ghettoisation experienced by the Muslim community (Corwin, 2018). Economic activity in a specific locality is imbricated in a relation of subordination or dominance vis-à-vis other regions (Massey, 1995), and spatialisation along these lines impacts the social relations that produce consent and resistance. The zeal with which manufacturing capital has dominated production in the locality stands in contrast to the hesitance displayed by financial institutions in expanding credit facilities in the area. While confining the labour of its residents to the hazardous conditions of waste recycling, the lack of access to credit, the inconsistencies in the supply of electrical power and the pervasive communal discrimination in Seelampur, also effectively stifled attempts to establish businesses in the region (Jamil, 2014), and served to eliminate competition from its Muslim-dominated community. Instead, informal work and self-

employment predominate in the locality, with families operating small businesses such as auto-repair shops, denim workshops and scrap-dealing where Muslims were confined to the lowest tiers due to spatial segregation and discriminatory business practices (Simone, 2018). Thus, the spatial locations and religious identities of the residents of Seelampur accentuated their economic precariousness and political marginality. In Marxian terms, then, Seelampur's history represents a reproduction of social relations of production that entails the maintenance and necessary perpetuation of a reserve army of workers to suppress wages, and equally, the possibility of resistance.

Delhi witnesses a marked residential distribution of workers on the basis of the function of capital, whether administrative, industrial or commercial; with a clear distinction between South and North Delhi leading to uneven development (Dupont, 2001). Through the externalisation and division of work across spatial structures in its global circuit, capital seeks to create new spaces for informal activity and social reproduction (Massey, 1994). The emergence of the e-waste sector in Seelampur, and its attendant non-market, unpaid and informal aspects too served as an important cog-in-the-wheel for the completion of the circuit of capital. The stocking, processing, trading, and auctioning of metal and electrical scrap material at Seelampur by Muslim traders and workers in a web of unremunerated and paid work, reveals how the socialisation and externalisation of particular forms of work to Seelampur created new sectors of informalised and social reproduction (Jain and Gidwani, 2023). Wire stripping, which is the work of female labourers paid the lowest wage, demonstrates how Seelampur remains an important illustration of how the metabolisation of capital is dependent on many informal, and neglected social processes.

The demand for a labour process derives not from the process itself but from broader social and ideological factors (Massey, 1995). The classification of labour as skilled or unskilled is not

contingent on the character of the occupation but on whether entry to that occupation is limited. Thus, while technology, the physical character of the production process and substance of the occupation condition labour demand, and consequently, the social status attributable to the occupation, the performance of a specific job by women or by marginalised ethnic groups in itself lowers the status of the job (Massey, 1995). Within the denim industry the Muslim residents of Seelampur primarily execute tasks entailing the performance of manual labour, such as stitching, washing and dyeing (Simone, 2018). In contrast, merchants who retain 60% of the profit from the industry are overwhelmingly either Hindu or Jain (Simone, 2018). Consequently, the relegation of Muslims within the locality to low-paying, low-status jobs and the dominance exercised by majority community individuals in appropriating profit despite not participating in the productive portion of the circuit of capital affirms the significance of social and ideological factors in contouring the labour market.

Criminalising Space, Shunning Welfare

State complicity in reproducing inequalities within the labour market operates in parallel with the perpetuation of the marginalisation of the locality itself. The state's withdrawal from welfare functions in Seelampur occured vis-à-vis an expansion of its disciplinary apparatus. The state's claim to legitimate rule in the city through developmental roles not only excluded the assent of the people of Seelampur, but hinged on their relegation to spheres of impoverishment and illegality. The walk from the nearest metro station to the site of the protest- with littered lanes, open sewers, dilapidated slums and garbage dumps – bore witness to its neglect. The privatisation of power supply, absence of health and educational infrastructure and dismal living conditions indicated a corrosion of their rights to the city through secluded underdevelopment. Through its absence in

welfarist governance, the state diminished the capacity of the residents to negotiate with capital, consigning them to increased exploitation and continued socio-spatial and economic segregation.

Yet, the residents of Seelampur were familiar with the contours of the disciplining face of the state. The criminalisation of their community based on class and religious status enabled the state to justify and legitimise its use of policing and intimidation techniques in the region. The historical vilification of Muslim localities based on perceptions of crime has always been a state-produced narrative. The residents of these neighbourhoods were stigmatised as "bums and bad characters" and were held responsible for the escalating crime rates in the city (Jagmohan, 1975, 71). In a curious marriage of identity and criminality, Muslim neighbourhoods are portrayed as a woman with "cowardly lovers" or as a city that has been "sinned against," since it houses the "breeding grounds for criminals and rioters, engendering the cult of the dagger and the spear" (Jagmohan, 1975, 36-39) (Pati, 2014). The accusations of sedition and terrorism against the protesting women (Sharma, 2020), and the violence unleashed against their resistance are reflective of the historical continuity in the imposition of illegality onto the Muslim locality. The practice of the segregation and exercise of state control over localities inhabited by oppressed communities generates a culture that criminalises ghettoised spaces (Hale, 1999), as evidenced by the experiences of Seelampur. In addition to quotidian forms of policing, selective curfews and state torture of Muslim men from the area of Seelampur were observed during the communal violence following the destruction of the Babri Masjid, while the struggle of denim workers and small traders against the closure of their factory units was met with open police-fire in 2006 (Sarkar, 2021).

Tainted with the memory of these terrors, the organised protest of the women of Seelampur represented acts of transcendence beyond the boundaries drawn for them by capital and the state. While the protestors consisted of several working class women engaged in both formal

employment in offices and informal employment in smaller industries, the majority performed unpaid domestic labour within their homes. In introducing the concept of labour geography, Herod argues that workers are not just historical, but geographical agents, and that their spatial embeddedness influences their social and political praxis (2003). The production of an emancipatory city space through the catalysis of spatial relationships by the working people demonstrated their active role in resisting the dominant geographies of capitalism (Herod, 1997). The historical experiences of the region have initiated expressions of praxis in the past, including through strikes by sanitation and *anganwadi*[27] workers (Lakhani, 2018). Through the struggle against the CAA-NRC, the protesting women in Seelampur altered the economic landscape of the locality by disorienting the process of social reproduction of labour within the region and breaking the shackles that have bound them to the silent drudgery of unpaid domestic labour. In an interview, a protestor expressed the primacy that the struggle had attained in their everyday lives, overshadowing the humdrum of the household.

The female leadership, heading the struggle, was a product of the spatial segregation experienced along class, religious and gender divides by the women of Seelampur. The layered experiences of marginalisation steered their resistance toward the assertion of their rights to public spaces such as pavement areas and the metro station, bringing about an internal reconfiguration of the landscape into a safer and more inclusive locality. Expressing this spatial shift and demanding the entitlements withheld by the neoliberal Indian state, a protestor asserted in an interview, "The fear within us has abated to the extent that eve-teasing in this neighbourhood has decreased…We are fighting for our children. For their jobs, education and schools." In their active attempts to diverge

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27 An *anganwadi* worker refers to a woman volunteer, employed by the Indian government as part of the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme, to provide supplementary healthcare and nutrition services to children and pregnant women at an honorarium below the minimum wage.

their immediate environments from the currents of patriarchal oppression and capital accumulation, the protestor envisioned a larger struggle for the rightful attainment of complete citizenship, expressed through state entitlements and opportunities. The struggle for access to public space stemmed from conscious acts of re-fashioning the space itself and transcended the territoriality of Seelampur in search of expansive social imaginaries.

Placemaking and Political Consciousness

With late night *naare bazi (sloganeering)* the participation of children in protest, collective readings of the Preamble and adult literacy classes, the anti-CAA-NRC demonstrations altered the character of the neighbourhood of Seelampur, filling it with a new political consciousness. This consciousness was displayed in the public struggles of the women against state incursions over their neighbourhood and rights as citizens, coupled with their feminist assertion over public space, resisting its patriarchal policing. The collective production of social space in Seelampur was one of resistance – to the state, and of reclamation – of city and citizenship. The Seelampur protest signified the importance of movements in re-imagining the city-scape into an accessible and democratic space. Through the occupation of the urban commons, the women asserted their sense of belonging to the city, and hence resisted the unequal ordering of rights and entitlements within it. By asserting themselves into the public gaze, the women at Seelampur foregrounded the importance of political participation, resisting hegemonic and exclusionary definitions of political beings, and lent a new and agentic subjectivity to their identities as Muslim women. It is therefore necessary to examine how the Seelampur protest site impacted the spatial politics of dissent in Delhi, and how it changed the temporalities of the neighbourhood.

Accumulation and Place-Making

The politicisation of urban space through the occupation of public land must be located within the questions of power disparities in space and mobility. Confronted with the centralising tendencies of capital, performance of dissent is also confined and centralised within the city space (Bhan, 2016). With the privatisation of the urban commons by the government, there is the simultaneous enclosure upon places of dissent within the city. Attending to the specific nature of Seelampur also reveals how the practices of the protest site have implications for the expression of dissent in the city, as well as for the freedoms that the women enjoy within their neighbourhood.

In Delhi, the dwindling spaces for dissent include Jantar Mantar[28] and Ram Lila Maidan[29], with the Delhi police not permitting marches and protests in other localities within the city. With fewer state-designated spaces for dissent, unfettered intrusion by traffic, and urban projects as a result of greater liberalisation, the protest at Seelampur illustrated an attempt to recover the city from the clutches of capital, providing new spaces for collective gathering and dissent. Harvey suggests that class struggle within territorially bounded social formations drives "impulses to seek a spatio-temporal fix elsewhere" (2004, 75). The tensions of urbanisation in Delhi, coupled with the fast-disappearing urban commons through the privatisation of public land therefore has implications to the life and imagination of struggle.

The dominant mode of production of space within neoliberal capitalism creates a tension between planning as a public apparatus, and people's struggles for space (Roy, 2011). Bhan has argued that the chaos of the Global South city is not the failure of planning, but rather the outcome of it, and

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28 The Jantar Mantar protest site is named based on the archeological monument which it neighbours. Lying on the road leading to the Parliament, a small section of which is assigned by the Delhi police for public calls for protests. It is heavily cordoned off and barricaded by the Delhi police, with fewer and fewer permits being given for protests (Baviskar, 2020).

29 Ram Lila Maidan is a large field in the centre of Delhi utilised for public protests and political rallies with larger attendance, permissions for which are granted by the Delhi police rarely.

therefore the city is determined not by planning – but by the slow and incremental process of auto-construction (2016). The mode of production of space within the Seelampur protest site was similarly governed by the logic of auto-construction; being built painstakingly, each bright blue tarpaulin sheet cover at a time, by the women's Protest Committee. The residents of the site have had to negotiate their right to protest peacefully from the very inception of the protest site which has been at odds with the masterplan of the city, and its conception of dissent - narrowly barricaded into Jantar Mantar. Similar to Bhan's characterisation of the *basti*[30] in which its "courage and resilience are real as are its vulnerability, marginalisation and structural exclusion" the protest site too, confronted its dual aspects – of fragility and insurgence (Bhan, 2016, 34). The Seelampur protest site too, came to be mapped within the constellation of illegalities which characterise planning in Delhi, and its placemaking practices must be placed in direct confrontation with the continued dispossession that its participants undergo.

Baviskar points to the death of dissent by way of the death of the commons, arguing that the construction of malls and luxury apartments in the Yamuna floodplain is part of this continued accumulation over once publicly owned land (2020). She points to how this process of commodification has directly thinned open urban spaces to voice dissent, instead resulting in a "side-street near Jantar Mantar designated as a ghetto for people with grouses" (2020, 14). The use of law to assist this privatisation of urban space is further witnessed by the Delhi Police's ready aide – the imposition of Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code to prohibit public gatherings

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30 A *basti*, as Bhan defines, is housing constructed by a city's working class of houses which are considered temporary. He explains, "Master plans as well as municipal and other laws variously consider *bastis* as 'informal' or 'illegal' because they are built in violation of planning norms and standards, and usually through the occupation and settlement of public or private land that *basti* residents do not own in title. In Delhi, in part due to a historic public land acquisition known as the 'Delhi Experiment,' most *bastis* are on public land" (Bhan, 2016, 9).

(Baviskar, 2020). While several pro-establishment TV media channels portrayed the *chakka-jam*[31] at Jafrabad metro station as a tactic of violent disruption to the commutes of hard-working car-owning citizens, the politicisation and occupation of the metro station and public road by the protesting women clearly illustrated the pressing necessity to resist the continued co-option of Delhi's commons by the city's elite.

As the twin logics of privatisation and planning have intensified, the available open space for public protests has dwindled. Hashmi writes that as the colonial state shifted the capital from Calcutta to Delhi, the city of Old Delhi – Shahjahanabad which was dotted with gardens and public markets became an important site for demonstrations (2019). He explains that the central arterial road connecting the Lahore Darwaza of Red Fort to the Fatehpuri Masjid, being the most open, enabled large meetings. In this very area, at a site known as Queen's Park, anti-colonial meetings were organised in support of Gandhi's Salt Satyagraha, and appeals to join the freedom movement had been made by Kasturba Gandhi when Gandhi had been arrested. Much later, in the 1970s, open parks and grounds like Ram Lila Maidan and at the Boat Club gained significance with the rallies held by Jayaprakash Narayan opposing Indira Gandhi, and the rally organised by the united front of trade unions in October 1978 against the Industrial Relations Bill (Hashmi, 2019). Following the late 1980s and the introduction of liberalisation and privatisation, democratic dissent was then sequestered to "the narrow strip of road opposite the 18th century astronomical instruments at Jantar Mantar, off Parliament Street" (Hashmi, 2019).

The larger class logics that contour the city can be witnessed through the manner in which protest is expressed. What contrasts the expression of dissent at Seelampur from the history of protests

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31 A *chakka-jam* refers to a roadblock or barricade that is erected by protestors on a public street.

and sit-ins is the moment at which it attempted to exercise collective claim over the city space. With over three decades of economic liberalisation policies, the extent of hunger and poverty, and unemployment has risen exponentially, with petty production being undermined and big capital protected (Patnaik, 2021). What made Seelampur distinct from the history of *dharnas* (protest demonstration) in Delhi is the manner in which it confronted the neoliberal state. While past protest in gardens and *maidans*[32] indicated a claim for urban commons and the consequent isolation of protests at Jantar Mantar a containment and privatisation of dissent, the staging of the protest in a public street at Seelampur exemplified a manner of collective ownership that opposed the tendencies of neoliberalism that are in their zenith. The relationship that Seelampur shares with the history of public demonstrations is the claim that it staked towards the urban commons. However, given that it had to face neoliberalism in its most intensified form, the protest site had to take-on a constellation of class-forces that prior protest demonstrations did not have to.

The history of the political economy of Delhi cannot be extricated from the aesthetic politics of the world-class city – a term which repeatedly comes to haunt the Global South. The privatisation of urban space comes to be synonymously tied with the aesthetics and visual registers of neoliberalism. Ghertner shows how the visual criteria of the world-class city necessarily entails slum demolitions. The symbol of the world-class city acts as a "diffuse signifier", which in turn constructs an "aesthetically grounded form of power/knowledge" rendering all potential actors to participate in its visual register (Ghertner, 2015, 9). This aesthetic has perpetually lingered in the castigation of the Seelampur protest site by the corporate media, and state, as a riotous, unsanitary site full of insurgent Muslims (The Wire, 2020). Moreover, the erasure of radical slogans on the walls – once inscribed with slogans such as "Say No to CAA-NRC-NPR" and the words of Faiz

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32 Large open ground, typically used for neighbourhood parades, markets and cricket matches

Ahmad Faiz's revolutionary poem "Hum Dekhenge"[33] indicates how the aesthetic logics of world-class urbanism pervaded state attitudes to the site, and sought to erase and suppress its existence. The erasure of the political graffiti at the protest site by the police force only provoked a fervour in the hearts of the dissenting women. The resistance of Seelampur embodied an assertion of the right of working Muslim women to the city and an attempt to wrest its fabric from the "spreading malaise of the neoliberal ethic" (Harvey, 2004). The appearance of protest and urban life is both re-ordered in Seelampur, as a consequence of the resistance.

By disputing the accumulation by state and capital over urban commons, the Seelampur movement pointed to a promise of protest that refused to be contained by the rapid privatisation of democracy and city space.

Emerging Political Consciousness

The emerging political consciousness at the protest site posed questions to the patriarchal state, while challenging local gender relations. By organising a permanent public protest, the women of Seelampur resisted the patriarchy of the Indian state. From prohibiting the practice of Triple Talaq to introducing the anti-conversion Love-Jihad Bills, the BJP government has portrayed itself to be the saviour of Muslim women, who are oppressed by an Islamic patriarchy (Mustafa, 2020). By constantly pigeon-holing them into such victimhood, the state's representations of Muslim women depict them devoid of agency, and personhood.

The oft repeated trope of "saving Muslim women" (Abu-Lughod, 203) is evoked in order to depict Muslim men as threats to the nation, and as aggressors (Guptal, Gökarıksel and Smith, 2020). The

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33 *Hum Dekhenge* is a revolutionary poem written by radical poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz, meaning "Certainly, We Too Shall See" in which the poet extolls that the contestation of authority is inevitable and irrepressible (Sethi, 2020).

Hindu Right – through the BJP ruling government -- attempts to continuously criminalise Muslims at the behest of protecting women (Guptal, Gökarıksel and Smith, 2020). Several aspects of the assertions of women at Seelampur were at loggerheads with this state discourse. In the instance of the recent Triple Talaq law, passed in 2019, it is essential to note that the ruling right-wing government has sought to criminalise instant Talaq in order to "protect" Muslim women from their abdicating husbands. By criminalising a Muslim practice such as Triple Talaq, the regime seeks to present women as lacking in independent thought and action, and their husbands as "premodern, lustful, polygamous, and barbaric." (Agnes, 2018). Presenting Muslim men as deviant, can then justify the continued mass violence the state inflicts on the Muslim minority, under a garb of social reform. Calling out Modi and Shah as "*tanashah*" (dictator) and "*gaddaar*" (traitor), the protest site entirely contradicted the messianic image of the ruling establishment. It instead centred the personhood of the women, which has been foreclosed from the eyes of the public. This contested the imagery of Muslim women as defenceless and silent subjects, instead presenting them as resisting citizens.

In conjunction with the Love-Jihad laws – which accuse Muslim men of conspiring to wed and consequently convert unsuspecting Hindu women into Islam, several BJP-led state governments passed legislations that have criminalised marriages between Muslim men and Hindu women (Rao, 2011). It is through these instances that the double standards of the BJP and its agenda to rescue Muslim women is revealed. Similarly, the High Court of the Indian state of Karnataka upheld a ban on Muslim women students wearing *hijabs* to classrooms in the interest of pursuing uniformity (Bania, 2022). Muslim women students who were wearing the *hijab* were even confronted by hundreds of men from Hindu Right-wing organisations, including the Bajrang Dal and RSS (directly linked to the ruling BJP), who were shouting slogans such as *Jai Sri Ram* (Hail Lord

Ram) at the campus gates and terrorising women from entering (Bania, 2022). It is in this regard one must locate the BJP's repeated attempts to evoke the defenceless Muslim woman – as a characterisation that consequently produces an aggressive Hindu masculinity. In sharp contrast, the manner in which the protesting women at Seelampur wore their faith – by allotting a space on the main stage area for prayer throughout the day, and by adorning diversely, *hijabs, niqabs* and *burqas* -- entailed taking on state discourses by putting up a fight. The women did not shun their religious identities, and instead incorporated them within the rhythms of everyday struggle.

The dehumanisation of the protesting women was legitimised and practised by the powerful. The Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh from the BJP, Yogi Adityanath alleged in a campaign speech that the opposition Congress and AAP[34] parties were feeding the protestors *Biryani*, and bribing them to participate in the protests. He menacingly threatened on national TV, "What are Congress and Kejriwal feeding these trouble-makers? *Biryani*. And what will we feed them? Bullets" (The Wire, 2020). The interlocking between *Biryani*, and Muslim identity is further apparent through the 'exposés' published by right-wing media houses who 'caught' protestors eating *Biryani* at protest sites including Shaheen Bagh. Popular urban rhetoric hence consistently seeks to fashion the locality as unfamiliar and hence undesirable due to its dietary practices (Chatterjee, 2017).

During an interview, a woman at the protest site responded categorically, "For what? Would we come to eat *Biryani* at the *dharna*? Allah has bestowed upon us many blessings. It is not true that we come here for charity. We come here to fight for our rights, not to eat *Biryani*." The women

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34 Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) is the ruling party in the Delhi state government. AAP did not speak about the CAA, and AAP leaders did not visit the sites that had been ravaged by riots, nor take part in any relief efforts. The ruling chief minister Arvind Kejriwal took to making patronising statements about maintaining the "peace" of protest sites. It remains a largely middle-class party, therefore pandering opportunistically to the generalised Hindutva sentiments (Penkar and Singh, 2020).

turned their focus to the matters of protest at the site, maintaining that they could eat *Biryani* to their heart's brim, instead of as corrupt pay-offs or as inducements to participate in protest. The practices of secularism in Seelampur, therefore, entailed a bold and unshrinking assertion of identity. *Biryani* - a dish that is particularly hated by the Brahmanical ruling class, is largely consumed by Muslims and oppressed castes in India (Gorringe and Karthikeyan, 2014). The women repudiated the suggestion that they eat *Biryani* at the protest site, emphasising their self-respect. They flipped the vilification of the protest site through the implication of their consumption of *Biryani*, instead refocusing the issue to their struggle for rights.

Following the violent and vile remarks of Yogi Adityanath, other leaders including Kapil Mishra and Anurag Thakur[35] from the ruling party openly called for violence at Seelampur and other protest sites. In response, the women of Seelampur further intensified their struggle, and did not end their protest despite the brutality of the riots that followed. When we returned to the site after the rampage, the permanent protest was going on in full force – with the women and children participating in sloganeering and music. Pointing to the holes in the blue tarpaulin sheltering the site, the women shared with us that the heavy rains and harsh cold had rendered conditions for protesting overnight worse. This had, however, not abated the enthusiasm of their protest. One woman insisted that we spend the night after the other women had joined, to witness the midnight *azadi* sloganeering in full force. The vigorous conviction of the women thus, took the hateful registers of state officials head on.

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35 A Union Minister of Finance from the ruling BJP party, Anurag Thakur publicly raised slogans provoking violence against anti-CAA protestors. In a public meeting in Delhi he had exclaimed "*Desh ke gaddaro ko, goli maaro saalon ko*" – "Shoot the bloody traitors" (Yamunan, 2020).

The unflinching decision-making by the Protest Committee, which is evidenced by the swift action of the protestors to move their protest site, is as per its most tactical requirement. Moving to the public street from the *eidgah*, and to the Metro Station for the Bharat Bandh, reveals this. It is in this regard that they are far from needing any paternalistic 'saving' (Abu-Lughod, 2013). The complexity of the lives, trials and tribulations that the protesting women at Seelampur face, means that the language of rights that their protest evokes seeks to capture the layered, incommensurate nature of their realities (Abu-Lughod, 2013, 186). This is evidenced by the fact that assurances as to the legality of their protest, and the rights guaranteeing freedom of expression were in fact communicated by lawyers, post-facto, once the decision to stage a permanent protest had already been made. Heeding only their tactics and hearts, the actions undertaken by the protest, was instead unique to their own conditions.

The temporal strategies of the permanent protest required women to be present at the protest site all through the night. The space available for the movement of women in the public eye was constricted, and beleaguered by masculine forces with respect to the mobility of working class, Muslim women (Phadke, Khan & Ranade, 2011). The reproduction of space at the Seelampur site therefore needed a constant negotiation with the protectionism of localised patriarchy (Zaidi and Pani, 2020). By occupying public spaces well into the night, the women of Seelampur demonstrated a radical political consciousness of freedom and mobility within the city. They often conducted several important programs at night. For instance, Chandrashekhar Azad arrived at the site late into the night, and conducted collective readings of the Preamble of the Indian Constitution in the bitter cold of the Delhi winter. Film screenings, and the singing of revolutionary songs also took place late into the night. At a late evening interview in the Seelampur protest site, a protesting woman proudly told us, "Earlier, we would not leave the house at night. After becoming part of

the protests, it doesn't matter what time of the night it is. Whether it is 2am or 3am, we return to our homes, or even leave our homes, to be part of the protest." The temporal politics of the protest thus reorganised priorities of the women and reordered their affiliations towards kinship and family. The protests shifted domestic obligations, with the gendered rhythms of household work superseded by the demands of politics. By prioritising their protest over husbands and children, women brought a sense of urgency to the collective struggle, taking on the state unequivocally. A protestor shared, "We have put our struggle ahead of our children's education. If we ourselves are not safe today, what would be the fate of our future generations?" The gendered rhythms of household work is superseded by the demands of politics. By prioritising protest over their husbands and children, women take on the state unequivocally.

The patterns of duty also witnessed a change in the wake of the protest at Seelampur, as usual routines of household labour and time were revised. The women considered the protest as their inalienable duty, a democratic obligation towards their fellow protestors, children and to the secular fabric of their nation at large. One of the protesting women told us that, "The only concern is about the imperative to be here", illuminating how all the protesting women responded to the urgency of justice through their presence at the site. At one point, the father of a woman participating in the protest urged her to head home as night had fallen. However, she refused, emphasising a shift in the understanding of fulfilling duties. This perspective suggests that duties were no longer discharged by adhering to the state-imposed curfew or by returning home on time. Instead, they were fulfilled by standing together throughout the night in unity and resilience. Thus, duty became a register to record dissent, and to call for change.

The subversion by the women at Seelampur needs to be contextualised in relation to the patriarchal character of public spaces that limits the political articulations of women by constantly surveilling

their bodies (Ali, 2020). At the Seelampur site, patriarchal surveillance was further strengthened by the apparatus of the state. The women at the protest site related an incident, when they had to take down a CCTV camera that the Delhi police had covertly attempted to install. This illustrated that the women have a close experience of state surveillance. This intimate experience of surveillance in Seelampur may be seen not only as a manifestation of the patriarchal policing of women's bodies, but also as a testimony to the overarching presence of the state. The historical confrontations of the neighbourhood with the Delhi police, (following the demolition of Babri Masjid,[36] for instance) indicates how the Muslim ghetto has evolved a nuanced understanding of the operations of state power. The regular policing of Muslim women in city spaces also corresponds to the suspicious attitude of the state toward Muslim communities in the city.

Despite such stifling suppression, the women stood collectively to show their resistance, taking decisions democratically through a Protest Committee that is composed of the local women. For instance, a woman at the protest site shared with us in an interview, "decisions regarding our protest are taken by us, women. Even our husbands did not know when we had taken the call to protest at the Jafrabad metro station!" This clarity about the "us" despite different class locations allowed the women sovereignty over their resistance, and the ability to organise effectively. The conception of "us" challenged state narratives about 'outsiders' instigating violence in the *chakka jam*, and during the riots. It serves a purpose of security in the protest site as well. In one of our visits to the site, a leader from the Protest Committee took to the stage to announce that there were few 'outsiders' who had been lurking suspiciously outside the protest, and asked the women to be

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36 The demolition of the Babri Masjid, "a 16th-century mosque in Ayodhya, on December 1992 took place in the context of the *Ram Janmabhoomi* movement, which claimed that the mosque was built on the (mythical) birthplace of Lord Rama, the Hindu god, and hence stood on land that rightfully belonged to the Hindus. The complete destruction of the mosque by a group of Hindu kar sevaks triggered one of the biggest communal upheavals in post-independent India, one that was followed by several months of rioting across the country" (Chatterjee, 2017, 32).

alert. In light of the open brandishing of guns, and public shootings at anti-CAA protests that were carried out with full impunity from the police (Scroll Staff, 2020), the firm construction of 'us' afforded the women sovereignty over their actions. The protesting women contributed to the emergence of a life-giving *'Hum'* from Faiz Ahmad Faiz's *Hum Dekhenge* in the nooks and corners of Seelampur. The clarion call to reject the repressive state forces echoed far and wide in a musical fashion through the words of Faiz Ahmad. Thus, political consciousness at Seelampur was a challenge to state policing and surveillance conducted in the name of safety and security.

The spatial surveillance of the Seelampur is entwined with the calculative rationalities of the state. The ambition of the selective enumeration and documentation of citizens through the CAA and NRC reflects the coalescing of a modern, liberal mode of governance with the febrile anxieties of the Hindu-nationalist project; which perpetuates the unequal distribution of resources and creates the conditions for the material subjugation of entire communities. Taking cognizance of the fears voiced by struggles that resist these algorithms of power, Routray posits an argument that includes the idea of numerical citizenship within the theory of substantive citizenship, which extends beyond its formal connotations (Routray, 2022). The right to be counted encapsulates a struggle for legibility, visibility, and enlisting. In the neighbourhood of Seelampur, the women's demand for this right strategically exposed the contradiction between the heightened surveillance of the space and its flagrant abandonment vis-a-vis the material entitlements of citizenship. Their claims to space and infrastructure in the city were operationalised through their demands for crucial facilities such as water, electricity, hospitals, sanitation and educational facilities in the locality.

Furthermore, the women used the protest site as a space for learning. Regular Urdu, Hindi and History lessons were conducted by student activists. Through these classes the Seelampur protest site offered possibilities for the women and their politics, with resistance further supplemented

with political education. These classes opened up a lexicon of protest. Through the lessons about historical figures, including discussions about the struggles of Fatima Sheikh[37] and Savitribai Phule[38], the classes at Seelampur wrested the writing of history from nationalist and Brahminical forces. These classes further foregrounded rising Muslim-Dalit solidarity that emerged in the anti-CAA moment, and re-emphasised the intertwining between Muslim and Dalit struggles. Another historical instance evoked at the protest site was the revolutionary camaraderie shared between the Muslim and Hindu freedom fighters, Ram Prasad Bismil and Ashfaqullah Khan in the anti-colonial struggle. These classes thereby empowered the protestors to contest the representation of Muslims as foreign and alien. By highlighting the contributions of Muslims in the freedom struggle, the protesting women pushed against the manner in which the Hindu right seeks to represent Muslims in Indian history. Against the homogenising impulses of the market and regulating tendencies of the conservative state, Muslim women had expressed imaginations of a democratic citizenship and carved spaces for themselves within the anti-colonial independence movement by declaring their demands for emancipation and autonomy (Yuval-Davis, 2005). In occupying the streets to reclaim their rights to be active citizens, the struggle of the women of Seelampur established a continuity with the women who combated colonialism, and reignited the demand for a democratic citizenship that permits the right to be different. Hence, the radical vocabulary employed by the women at the site relied greatly on the histories of people's movements. By studying marginalised and militant figures in Indian history, the Seelampur protest captured the composite character of the Indian

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37 Fatima Sheikh was a pioneering teacher, anti-caste activist, proponent of girls' education, and social reformer in 19th century Maharashtra. Along with Savitribai and Jotirao Phule, she started the first girls' school in the country, in spite of loud, threatening opposition.

38 Savitribai Phule was a trailblazer in providing education for girls and for individuals from marginalised castes. She became the first female teacher in India (1848) and opened a school for girls with her husband, Jotirao Phule. She went on to establish a shelter (1864) for destitute women and fought for equality of all classes. Her life is heralded as a beacon of women's rights in India.

polity. These classes, conducted by local student activists, pointed to how the women sought to overcome stigmatisation of Muslim labour, and the confinement of Muslim workers to form the reserve army of labourers, or serve as underpaid manual workers in Indian cities.

Additionally, the slogans and modes of struggle employed by the women of Seelampur relied on a range of political symbols and metaphors, thereby reclaiming the ethic of secularism espoused within the Indian constitution. The BJP and RSS have consistently attacked secularism, criticising it for as constituting nothing more than pro-minority measures used by political parties to cater to their vote banks (Ashraf, 2021). Individual BJP Members of Parliament have even asserted that the Constitution should be amended to remove secularism (Outlook Web Bureau, 2017). On the other hand, the Indian Constitution eschewing any strict separation between the state and religion instead seeks to facilitate the free exercise of religion, with Articles 25 and 26, for instance, granting religious minorities the right to establish and maintain educational institutions (Bhargava, 2022). Thus, the act of conducting prayers at the protest site, along with the *naare bazi,* contested the undermining of secularism, instead embodying its constitutional essence. In contrast to the vision contained in the Constitution, the Indian state has constantly othered Muslims, prohibiting the consumption of meat, restraining mosques from using loudspeakers, and practising a deeply majoritarian form of secularism (Jaffrelot, 2010). By centering worship along with their protest, the Seelampur protest enabled an assertive performance of religious identity, which has been repeatedly ghettoised. By constantly emphasising their community affiliations along with their citizenship, the secular consciousness that emerged at the site was an open defiance of the dehumanisation Muslims must face in India (Bhatia and Gajjala, 2020). While prior literature on Muslim localities affirms how demands for civic amenities precedes those of religious recognition for lower class residents (Chatterjee, 2017), in Seelampur, the protesting women asserted their

right to liveable urban spaces in conjunction with their right to their religious identity. Thus, through the merging of religious and political participation, the women of Seelampur attempted to retrieve the constitutional notion of secularism and contest the majoritarian tendencies that are encoded within citizenship.

While the constitutional project envisions equal citizenship and participatory democracy, the marginalisation of Muslims reveals how the state and its institutions constantly undermine the law. There is therefore, an apparent contradiction between citizenship as sanctioned by the Constitution, and citizenship experienced by the women at Seelampur. The presence of such contradictions within citizenship implies that political engagement in Indian democracy is a constant negotiation between the ruling class, and the normative equality granted by law (Chatterjee, 2011). Shaban shows how the complex interplay among four distinct notions of citizenship: the liberal, republican, ethno-nationalist, and non-statist coexist and often generate tensions. This quadruple framework of citizenship has facilitated the recent resurgence of ethno-nationalist assertions, resulting in an alarming escalation of violence against religious minorities, with Muslims in India being particularly targeted. Consequently, Seelampur emerged as a site of contestation, embodying a critical locus where the ethno-nationalist discourse of citizenship was challenged and a resolute demand for the realisation of equal citizenship under the constitutional framework was articulated. Throughout the protest site, a profound symbolism resonated in through the pervasive presence of Constitution-related imageries and evocations of the Preamble, serving to fortify their legitimate claim as citizens (Shaban, 2016).

The CAA-NRC-NPR is an ultimate culmination of the long history of the dispossession of Indian Muslims and displays how the attacks on Indian citizenship emerge from a long lineage of communal practices by the Indian state. The CAA-NRC-NPR is also a form of misrepresentation

constituting what Fraser would term a meta-injustice (2013), as it reveals the Indian state's departure from ensuring political representation to all and instead attests to its effort to dispossess Muslims from the right to participate in decision-making. However, the struggles of the Muslim women at Seelampur reflected a transformative approach to determining the boundaries of the nation's body politic, as the women asserted their right to justice within the nation through slogans such as "*Hum desh bachane nikle hain, aao humare saath chalo*" (we have set out to save the nation, join us). They were able to transcend their immediate territoriality and embrace alternative imaginaries of the city and citizenship outside the location of permanent marginality that the state assigns to their community. Their impulse to transform public space extended to the spatial and temporal region of the entire nation and was voiced through their cries of assertion to usher in a *naya zamaana* (a new era) (Cowan, 2018) Their resistance indicates the important role that people's movements play in expanding the conception of citizenship in democracy. Thus, the practices of place-making in Seelampur were responsible for giving body to the understanding of secularism, rights, and resistance.

Sisterhood, Solidarity and Feminist Resistance

<u>The Practice and Ethics of Care</u>

When women become the movement makers, it becomes pivotal to examine the diverse means through which they employ and perform care. The act of care-giving provides sustenance to permanent protests, as it possesses the capacity to nourish life, nurture the vulnerable, and conscientiously address the multifarious needs of its participants (Abel and Nelson, 1990). A feminist conception of care gives precedence to socio-spatial contexts whether it is the household, the protest site, or the marketplace. (Abel and Nelson, 1990). The women of Seelampur defied

power relations at home, and epitomised their vision of a feminist future through the praxis of care. The women embraced collective agency and assumed the responsibility of redistribution of care labour, which was pivotal for the protest site. This process, imbued with the spirit of care, feminised resistance, propelling the intimate spaces nurtured within their households to expand and encompass the very fabric of the protest itself. Thus, care work extended the socio-spatial boundaries, making the protest site a 'home of homes'. Aslam suggests how the sustenance of the protest site is ensured by individuals acting together (2017). Similarly, Seelampur was a consequence of material collaborative action and collective duties undertaken by women. The duties usually included organising protest sites, resourcing food, keeping the area clean, providing technical expertise and medical help, disseminating information and organising lectures and classes. Such collaborative efforts encouraged the assertion and articulation of agentic power. It also provided the women with the vocabulary and knowledge needed to get things done, an undertaking previously dominated by men. Their leadership was instrumental rather than tokenistic whereas intervention by men was participatory. The protesting women claimed to be the faces and initiators of dissent. This enriched and transformed the female temporality that they inhabited by inserting a self-sufficient dimension to its character.

The strategies of care employed at the site included songs, *naare bazi*, poetry, looking after the children, lessons and stories in history and Urdu. These expressions served as a conduit for women to engage in secular discourses, engendering a collective consciousness that transcends temporal boundaries, attuning them to societal conditions and the political upheaval of contemporary times (Contractor, 2021). The protesters' transfigured Seelampur into a crucible of political transformation: a space teeming with spirited political discourse, a fertile ground for unfettered artistic expression, nurturing a communal crèche, and fostering public reading and learning. This

metamorphosis pierced through the localised context of a Muslim neighbourhood, resonating across numerous communities throughout the nation, who lent their support to the protesters. Thus, the protest radiated into a national space, subverting the power dynamics deeply entrenched within the home and outside (Abu-Lughod, 2012).

The visibilisation of care could be witnessed through frequent distribution of food packages, blankets and mats on the floors, banners, posters and so on. Defiance against the violent Hindutva forces was formed by processes of collaboration, mindfulness of the needs of protestors, and collation and circulation of inclusive and oft-marginalised narratives about India and its Constitution. The protests at Seelampur relied on the laboriously built networks of care, advanced through both online and offline correspondence between women of multiple backgrounds and caste-class-religious identities. The enduring character of their resistance, fostered through care, changed the way women at Seelampur experienced time. Their perennial presence at the protest site regardless of the hour inserted an unwavering permanence in their struggles. It became a historical moment, marking a significant rupture from the prevailing social order and catalysing a collective memory that permeated through generations. The presence of youngsters, teenagers, mothers, and grandmothers at the site captured a moment in which several generations converged in resilience and their struggle. The temporal dimensions of the protest transcended the immediate, extending far into the future, inspiring continued activism and shaping the aspirations of the community (Koopmans, 2004).

Protestors employed care as a fundamentally moral and emotive framework; yet, upon critical enquiry it was apparent that its practice and embodiment at the protest site was strategic (Bhatia and Gajjala, 2020). Personification of care metamorphosed into the practice of non-violence, which radically challenged the legitimacy of the brutality executed by the police, the state and the

advocates of CAA and NRC. The fact that peaceful sit-ins disrupted and threatened oppressive Hindutva structures lays bare their fragile and suspect composition. Thus, performance of care became a strategic backdrop against which the cruelty of the state appeared clear and striking. Rather than denouncing care as a notion of traditional femininity, the women at Seelampur weaponised it to further contrast the atrocities of the state. Moreover, here care was employed not to serve individualistic interests at their own expense; rather, it was used to strengthen and sustain the movement wherein each effort further nourished their collective cause. Thus by exercising autonomy, the women of Seelampur experienced the ethics of care from a place beyond its archetypal understanding.

A Unique Vocabulary of Dissent

As has been extensively reported, most of the women who were a part of the sit-ins were protesting for the first time in their lives (Bhowmick, 2020). Earlier, this facet of the movement was exploited to illuminate concerns around protestors not being aware of what they are protesting about. This narrative was constantly pedalled by right-wing media houses as captured by a woman from Seelampur, in the course of an interview:

> "The media should listen to us. We are standing in the rain, our women are standing in the rain, our children are standing in the rain. But no media house captures this. They do not show the truth. Instead, they repeatedly peddle lies. Why can't they tell the truth? They should listen to our voice as well. They hold back the truth, instead, regurgitating lies. If anyone from our community- our elders, men, children - utter anything wrong, they repeatedly screen it. Why does the media come here (the protest site) only at the request of our men? The media

persons such as those from Zee TV[39] do not acknowledge us. They merely take

a video from outside, and leave."

An understanding emerged about the extraordinary ways in which the first-timers invoked meanings of resistance (Farooqi, 2020). The fact that these women in open defiance against discriminatory laws carved their own identity and publicly claimed their land and citizenship further foregrounds their significance as first-time protestors. They transformed the ethics of dissent and enriched it by materialising novel interpretations and claiming the cultural and political landscape through imaginative ways. Women's participation was tied directly to the spatiality and accessibility of the protest site. They easily joined the sit-ins whenever required due to their proximity to the protest site and therefore avoided the weight of travel expenses. The loudspeakers and sirens remodeled the entire locality into a communal space of dissent; therefore emergencies were quickly communicated and appropriate mechanisms were put in place. They could also access their homes whenever needed. Many young mothers who were accompanied by their infants and children were labelled and discredited as political tools by right-wing propaganda. As most of these women were from disenfranchised sections and resided in nuclear families, they could not afford to leave their children alone. Consequently, the routinary of their lives was woven into the fabric of protests, eventuating a distinct vocabulary of dissent, that is, a feminisation of resistance. Therefore, the essence and character of Seelampur's protest site became an extension of the homes of the protesting women.

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39 Zee News, an Indian Hindi-language news channel known for its highly polarised and partisan news broadcast, which actively promotes the viewpoints of the BJP, the current ruling party (Ninan, 2019). As a mouthpiece of the state, it frequently engages in peddling anti-Muslim rhetoric to malign and demonise the CAA protestors.

The sloganeering by the women at the site adopted radical tones, and the women raised slogans for *azadi* (freedom), and *inquilab* (revolution). An often-repeated rallying cry at the protest site included "*Auraton ke naaron se inquilab ayega*" (through the slogans of women, the revolution will arrive). Revolutionary music was often sung at the site, including Habib Jalib's Dastoor[40], and the feminist anthem *Tod Tod Ke Bandhano Ko Dekho Behana Aati Hai* (breaking the shackles, see our sisters are coming). In the lyrics for Dastoor, the women replaced the male subject with the female, converting it into "*Main nahi maanti, main nahi jaanti*" (I refuse to accept, I refuse to acknowledge), hence constituting women as the normative political actor.

Women's increased participation and political organising in nexus with sustenance strategies gives rise to a feminisation of resistance wherein they challenge long-held gender norms and are deeply transformed by their own political participation. As Medha Patkar[41] aptly points out "When the fight is long and hard, you need women. That's the beauty of women-led movements. They never die" (Matta, 2020). Women exhibited an unconventional articulation of belonging through their resistance (Farooqi, 2020). Seelampur's protest goes beyond the immediate visible site of reference, alluding towards deep interconnections that subsist between resistance and belonging. Since the body-politic of India inheres a Hindu-patriarchal ideology, the existence of Muslim women, demanding their political rights on the streets, disrupted its hypermasculine composition and created immense discomfort (Banaji, 2018). In identifying the protest site and occupying it

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40 Jalib's song *Dastoor* has remained a clarion call for democracy in several movements in India and Pakistan. The first lines of the song, poetically read *Aise dastoor ko, Subhe-be-noor ko/ Main nahin maanta, Main nahin jaanta* (This system, this morning bereft of light/ I refuse to accept, I refuse to acknowledge) (Rahman, 2020).

41 Medha Patkar is a social activist and social reformer. She is the founder member of *Narmada Bachao Andolan*, mobilising massive marches and peaceful protests against the construction of huge dam projects since the late 1980s, which displaced thousands of tribal peoples and submerged vast stretches of forests and farmland. She also started the National Alliance of People's Movements, an alliance of progressive people's organisations, with the aim of working on issues related to socio-economic justice, equity, political justice among others.

without external advice and entirely autonomously, the women of Seelampur also realized the principle of parity. Participatory parity, as Fraser advises, is crucial in constructing democratic procedures for disputing androcentric hierarchies and determining the 'who' and 'how' of justice (2013). In fact, one of the women from the protest site satirically pointed out to us in an interview, "I would like to specially thank the Prime Minister and Home Minister for suffusing so much energy and enthusiasm in the hearts of us weak women that we are fighting with such strength and courage today. I can stand alone and face ten men. We were not even able to cross the path of a single man or speak up. Today, in thousands we can stand up on the stage and talk. We owe it to our Prime Minister, Modi, who enabled us women to stand up, gain courage and confidence. I am very grateful to him for this." Hence, the feminisation of resistance in public spaces posed a risk to the archaic notions of pride and honour peddled by patriarchal structures. It also created ways of imagining, enacting, and experiencing political participation.

Seelampur feminised resistance in unique ways- in its inception, the women came together in their capacity as mother and sisters to voice concerns over the violent reprisal against Muslim students who protested the CAA at Jamia Milia Islamia. This showcases how social concerns raised by women grounded in their familial roles, by extending their domestic spaces, can engage in broader discourses surrounding citizenship and belonging (Contractor, 2021). The spirit of community, essential to a protest also emanated from this feminisation since women shared similar routines of work and nurturance within their homes and neighbourhood. Their shared experiences along with physical proximity mediated the way they think - fostering relationships and propelling collective action. Thus, feminisation of resistance formed the basis of a wider solidarity, reverberating the struggles of the protesting women into the public space. This particular brand of resistance embraced a profound sense of belonging, forged through an ethos of relationality and dialogue that

centered care, compassion, and responsibility (Werbner, 1999). The women of Seelampur embodied the feminisation of resistance, exercising a unique vocabulary of dissent as the protest site became an extension of their homes.

<u>Intersectional Politics Enabling Material Solidarities of Comradeship</u>

It is the living experiences and apprehensions of discrimination that brought women from different ages and communities together (Mustafa, 2020). Through democratic dissent, the women of Seelampur forged material solidarities of aid, intimacy and comradeship within and across their community which enabled the emergence of feminist political subjectivities and strengthened their resistance. The same was echoed by a woman from Seelampur who stated in an interview that, "Now, these women are my mothers, sisters, daughters. We have become one. Earlier, we would not recognise each other. Now, if we are not together, we feel sorrowful. We would rather come here to the protest site, than stay at home." By articulating their oneness, they divorced themselves from individualistic interests and called attention to their collaborative endeavour. Moreover, while describing their union, they used the intimate relations of "mothers, sisters, daughters", employing the lens of familiarity towards each other. While the state appeals to the communal sentiment of the nation and gauges their identity through the clothes they wear and the food they consume, the women of Seelampur invoked affection and humanity to refer to one another.

In a reality characterised by repression and chaos, Seelampur gained more significance as it exhibited a facet of support that women availed for material and moral sustenance and to discover a sense of solidarity in hardship. As such, women's gatherings transformed into arenas for feminist contemplation and resistance, where women challenged their deprivation of autonomy, rights and dignity (Biagini, 2019). Analogously, this was evident from the women's potential to "stand alone

and face ten men" or by occupying the stage in thousands to voice their demands. Therefore, their politics demonstrated precise feminist overtones that became explicit when they undertook to challenge the position of privilege usually held by men in private and public spaces. While women's bodies are disciplined and regulated through discourses of masculinity, they were also sites of dissent and revolution as they reconstitute personal ways of expressing counter-discursive means of resistance (Hafez, 2016).

The Seelampur struggle inspired women to form connections and relationships founded on solidarity and construct a unified front against oppressive powers. Their sisterhood, founded in political solidarity transcended their variances and confered vigour to their rebellion. The clarity of thought could be seen through S's statement, a protestor at Seelampur who bravely expressed in an interview, "We are fighting for the entirety of India. We are fighting for all Indians. Whether they are Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian or Dalit." At the Jafrabad metro station, members of the Kinnar[42] community, in solidarity with the Seelampur women at the roadblock informed the protesting women, "We will even face bullets if we have to, but we will not allow this nation to be enslaved." The modern state's pathological obsession with order and governable subjects enables a form of intersectional politics with diverse and radical alliances between Muslim housewives, students and members of the transgender community. Thus, Seelampur became, what Ghosh would call, an organic, living site for political dissent where people sang of revolution, taught, and created art as a reminder of India's democratic and secular character (2020).

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[42] The term "Kinnar" is employed to describe individuals who encompass a broad spectrum of anatomical forms and engage in various gender and sexual practices and orientations. Within the Indian subcontinent, intersex individuals and transgender communities often choose to identify as Kinnar or Kinner, drawing from the depiction of mythological beings known for their prowess in song and dance (Ung Loh, 2014).

The women of Seelampur fostered alliances that are deeply rooted in the values of equality, dignity and freedom. In their struggle, they strengthened local leadership. They have highlighted the way a marginalised identity experiences its location and, consequently, association with its allies (Farooqi, 2020). This sensibility is expressed by the women of Seelampur, one of whom stated in an interview, "We are being subjected to practices of untouchability. We want freedom from these practices. We want freedom from the injustice that is being done to us. We want the freedom that was fought for women long ago, that which was won by Fatima, Savitri and Jotirao Phule[43]."

The network of such diverse alliances is collectively against the state and its governing ideology, that interprets marginalised identities merely from the vantage point of lawlessness, violence and ignorance. However, women's mode of peaceful sit-ins stands in contrast against such typecasting. The same sentiment is reiterated by S, who remarked in an interview, "We have been sitting here too. Do you see us carrying *lathis*[44], guns or stones? All we are doing is raising our voices. Our hands are empty. You could take our lives, but you will find nothing with us. We will continue to raise our voice no matter what." Therefore, rather than being defined as members of a community allegedly inclined towards lawlessness, the women of Seelampur rightfully became the epitome of the lawful, the bearers of the constitutional.

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[43] Jotirao Govindrao Phule was a prominent social reformer and thinker of nineteenth-century India. He led the movement against the caste system in India. He revolted against the domination of the Brahmins and struggled for the rights of peasants and lower-caste people. Phule was also a pioneer for women's education in India and fought for the education of girls throughout his life.

[44] A lathi, a long, heavy stick, is often used as a weapon by police officers, designed to inflict more pain than traditional batons. It is frequently employed against social activists, highlighting its specific role in suppressing dissent and exerting force in such contexts.

Conclusion

"*Yeh hum gunahgar aurtain hain;*

jo ahl-e-jubba ki tamkanat se na roab khaen;

na jaan bechen;

na sar jhukaen;

na haath joden;

yeh hum gunahgar aurtain hai"

(It is we sinful women; who are not awed by the grandeur of those who wear gowns; who don't sell our lives; who don't bow our heads; who don't fold our hands together.)

(Naheed, *Yeh Hum Gunahgar Aurtain Hain*, 2001)

A study of Seelampur in the context of the anti-CAA agitation is hence vital in understanding how history and geography, and local phenomenon and global forces, have shaped the politics of the locality, and in unpacking how the relationship between the city, state, and its citizens is constantly made and unmade through collective assertion. An attunement to the historical relations, material contradictions and spatial configurations of Seelampur reveals how the anti-CAA struggle has produced a paradigmatic change in the character of the locality and in modalities of dissent, that cannot merely be explained as a replication of the the politics of Shaheen Bagh.

In the locality of Seelampur, the logic of capital finds its starkest expression in the experiences of the social phenomena of ghettoization, criminalisation and immiseration. A cartography of the city

and its dwellers is incomplete without a political-economic investigation into its peripheries and the construction of the boundaries that exclude its makers. Transcending these margins, the women of Seelampur laid claim to citizenship in defiance of the algorithms of capital accumulation and the authoritarian governmentalities of the state. A study of the protest is critical in enhancing clarity on the circuit of capital within the city, navigating the convolutions of citizenship and generating a framework for feminist resistance.

Through the occupation of the urban commons, the women asserted their sense of belonging to the city, and hence resisted the unequal ordering of rights and entitlements within it. The residents of the site have had to negotiate their right to protest from the very creation of the protest site which has been contradictory to the masterplan of the city, and its conception of dissent - narrowly barricaded into private enclaves. The relationship that Seelampur shared with the expression of dissent – is the claim that it staked towards urban commons.

Through its daily practices, the emerging political consciousness at the protest site posed questions to the patriarchal state, while challenging local gender relations. Opposing the protectionist logics of state and household, the involvement of women at the protest site refocused democratic agitation at the centre of women's priorities, thereby building an atmosphere of political participation. Narrating the resistance of the Seelampur site can reveal how placemaking practices deployed by women through their dissent can build political consciousness, actually transforming the material and cultural space of their neighbourhoods.

Seelampur marked the inaugural instance in which care networks have enveloped and sustained the protest, rendering it an exceptionally crucial lens through which women-led movements can be studied. The protest marked a pivotal moment in the lives of women in ghettoised locales as

they have forged an ecosystem by extending the boundaries beyond their homes to the protest site, effectively merging the two. This should be studied as a significant point of rupture, that merits further attention in future protests.

The spirit and resolve embodied by the women of Seelampur stands tall, even in the face of a vicious onslaught by Hindutva forces. Their organisational capabilities, adoption of local leadership, transcendent forging of alliances, immediacy in mobilising and educating themselves, establishes a guiding framework for future peoples' movements. The wreckage and debris dispersed around Seelampur are symbols of oppression, of erasure and of resistance. In their collective struggle, the women of Seelampur offer hope to reclaim the city and its commons.

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