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“Samudayik Shakti”: Working-Class Feminism and Social Organisation in Subhash Camp, New Delhi

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ABSTRACT: This article illustrates the intersections between architecture and agency in Subhash Camp, a squatter settlement in New Delhi, by ‘situating activism in place’. It highlights the significance of place in social action by examining the architecture of everyday places- the house, the street and the square - as the sites of both individual transformations and collective consciousness. Through observations of the activities of and interviews with members of Samudayik Shakti, a women’s organisation and a men’s panchayat, this article highlights a number of related processes in Subhash Camp: how different women experienced different places through everyday spatial practices; how the spatial practices in these places were shaped by different social structures at different scales, from the family to the state; how the architecture of these places was significant both as sites of control and of emancipation of women’s bodies; and how this dynamic contributed to the making of social action in Subhash Camp.

Introduction

On the afternoon of 1st November 2002, vehicles from the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) came into Subhash Camp, a squatter working-class settlement in New Delhi and randomly demolished a few houses and shops along the main street. The same evening, Samudayik Shakti, the women’s organisation in Subhash Camp, called a public meeting with the members of the panchayat¹ in the market square. To those gathered there, they condemned the demolition as an act of cowardice. Finally, they reached a consensus to march in protest to their local MPs office. Such forms of resistance – what has been called ‘quiet

encroachment' (Bayat, 2000) often involving police complicity - were recurring incidents in Subhash Camp since the late 1970s. A complex set of issues were part of this resistance. For instance, while both the panchayat and Samudayik Shakti resisted demolition of their homes, Samudayik Shakti also resisted the patriarchal hegemony of the former. It is in this context that the 'informal' architecture of Subhash Camp becomes significant as the site of the production and consumption of working-class feminism. In this article, I am interested in examining the architecture of the everyday places of domesticity- the houses, the streets and the squares, from where Samudayik Shakti members contested the authority of the state and of the local patriarchy.

Thus, my analysis explores how the architecture of everyday places is implicated in the construction of intersectionality and the production of social action in Subhash Camp. I examine how material qualities of places are ascribed different meanings and how social agents strategically use places to create conditions for human agency. Feminist researchers (Fernandez, 1997; Hays-Mitchell, 1995, Martin 2002) have indicated that social actors define strategic identities to maximise the potential for action. I further suggest that such identities are inscribed onto the architecture through which women trace their daily routes. By this, I intend to not just 'spatialize women's socio-political action' as Nagar (2000a, p.344) suggests, but also to articulate the architectural quality of such places where social action is produced. Such an inquiry would contribute to a theoretical understanding of how everyday practices are intimately linked to the places where they occur and how such practices when used strategically by social agents can organise, operate and manipulate social action.

According to de Certeau (1984, p.xxii) 'everyday practice' refers to 'the ways of frequenting or dwelling in a place' through mundane acts of walking, cooking, talking and so on. Studies in feminist geography (Bassett, 2002; Fernandez, 1997; Fincher and Panelli, 2001; Hays-Mitchell, 1995; Legg, 2003; Martin, 2002; Nagar, 2000b; Silvey, 2003) have explored how the intersections between everyday practices and the places where they occur,

produce social action. They have illustrated how, in particular places, caste, class, religion, gender and ethnicity intersect with and constitute each other and how this ‘intersectionality’ constructs social action. They have also explored the ambiguity of the public/private divide, in terms of the way the public and private intersect in complex ways, constructing each other as hybrid spaces of agency (Fernandez, 1997; Nagar, 2000a; Legg, 2003; Secor, 2004; Staeheli, 1996). This is further problematised by an ‘interscalar’ (Bassett, 2002; Silvey, 2003) concept of place, where, in the creation of social action, the body is able to ‘jump’ scales between the spaces of the home and those of the State (Bassett, 2002), blurring the boundaries between public and private (Brown, 1997).

I build on this work by focusing upon the place-based strategies of social groups (Desai, 1995; Martin, 2003) linking the materiality of places with ‘visions of empowerment ... within those contexts’ (Nagar, 2000a, p.343). Such empowerment is often negotiated through the spaces of personal tragedies, collective subordination and state hegemony (Desai, 1995; Kapadia, 2002; Oza, 2001). Hence a ‘bunch of bodies’ that possess fragmentary identities can come together as ‘subaltern counterpublics’ (Fraser, 1992, p.123), simultaneously transforming or being transformed by the intersection between their bodies and different places. While grassroots counterpublics are often appropriated by middle-class values, (Aggarwal, 2002; Lazreg, 2002; Madon and Sahay, 2002), I suggest that working-class women can create new and valid empowerment models through a ‘resistant convergence’ (Keating, 2003, p.418) of economic, political, cultural and gender subordination of various groups that are particular to their spatial contexts (Saunders, 2002). This paper therefore brings together these threads of analysis to highlight the significance of architecture as a material site of both individual transformations and collective social action.

Method

An in-depth study of Subhash Camp, a squatter settlement in New Delhi, was conducted in Autumn 2002, when I explored the social action of Samudayik Shakti, the

women's organisation in Subhash Camp, with respect to the places where it originated and developed and which it has subsequently transformed. This involved attendance at their activities such as social work, education, meetings and public congregations. It also entailed a meticulous observation of the places in which it worked and the activities that took place there. This was supplemented by interviews with 12 participants. The interviews took the form of one- to two-hour long conversations with the author. They delved into the process of their arrival in Subhash Camp, their involvement in the organisation and their everyday experiences in the houses and neighbourhood. Most interviews took place in the office of Samudayik Shakti or on the streets, where the women spend a large part of their time. All interviews were conducted in Hindi and then transcribed and translated into English by the author.

Since this study concentrates on the work of Samudayik Shakti, most of the participants are women. They were chosen through the meetings of Samudayik Shakti where the attendees were informed of the project and their participation requested. Some men from the panchayat were regular collaborators with Samudayik Shakti and one of these, RamNarayan² became the only formal male participant. The men however would gather round when interviews took place in the streets. They provided valuable 'unrecorded' information about the work of the panchayat, which has made this study richer. But it was with the women that I was able to develop closer relationships. Although there was an obvious class difference between us, I often found that we shared similar ideologies. With Zahra I shared disappointments with our respective religious leaders. With Anita, I shared concerns about equality of labour within family structures. With Anita and Leela, I shared experiences of molestation in public places. With Zahira Bano, I shared concerns about the restrictions on attire and mobility that confront young Indian women. It was through conversations with them that I experienced not just the complex identities of different

participants, but also the intersections, overlaps and contestations between our identities, at different times and in different places.

While class differences were not apparent among the participants (or indeed among the attendees to the Samudayik Shakti meetings), the participants were from varying ethnicities, religions and castes. Meena was from the lowest Hindu caste of ‘Chamars’ while Jamila, Zahira Bano, Ameena and Zahra were Muslim. RamNarayan was an upper-caste Hindu and had arrived in the early 1970s from Rajasthan; Jamila and Zahra had both arrived in Subhash Camp in the 1970s from Uttar Pradesh, Jamila with her husband and Zahra to get away from her husband; Asha had arrived with her husband from Bihar in the late 1980s; Meena had come with her husband from Maharashtra in the mid 1980s; Premvati came to Subhash Camp after her marriage in the late 80s; Lata, whose house was demolished, also came to Subhash Camp after her marriage; Leela came with her husband from Uttar Pradesh in the early 1980s; Zahira Bano, Ameena and Anita were born in Subhash Camp; Anita was married in a village in Rajasthan but had returned with her children to her mother’s house in Subhash Camp.

RamNarayan had his own timber shop in Subhash Camp. All the other participants were economically active- as domestic help, as home-based workers, or as salaried members of Samudayik Shakti. While Jamila, Asha, Premvati and Zahira Bano were not salaried members, they regularly attended Samudayik Shakti meetings. Except for Jamila, all of them were literate. In interviewing participants affiliated to an organisation, this study is biased towards their perceptions. In terms of demography, however, the participants had arrived and assimilated into Subhash Camp through similar processes as other residents. What made them different from other residents, however, was their social awareness and activism within the Camp.

‘Building’ Subhash Camp

Subhash Camp was established in the 1970s when rapid urbanisation, rising land prices, lack of funding for affordable housing and corruption among law-enforcement officials allowed rural migrants to access the informal market for housing solutions (Bayat, 2000; Harrison and Reeve, 2002; Shivam and Karuppanan, 2002). In 1991, an estimated quarter (2.25 million) of Delhi's population (8.47 million) were squatters (NIUA, 2000) living on one-fiftieth of the city's land. Subhash Camp's location, like other squatter settlements in Delhi, was close to middle-class neighbourhoods where it was easy for women to find employment as domestic help and for men to commute to the nearby factories (Schenk, 2003). Current estimates (Jagori, personal communication, October 2002) put the figures at around 4,000 - 5,000 residents in Subhash Camp. There is also a 'floating' population of recent migrants who move between different squatter settlements. The 'permanent' population of squatters are those who have lived in Subhash Camp for longer and have invested their social, cultural and economic capital in this place. It is this population that is active in Samudayik Shakti and the panchayat.

As the numbers of squatters have increased, the spaces between their houses have decreased, leading to a tightly knit physical fabric. Over the years, the temporary structures have been upgraded by their owners into more permanent buildings, with the women providing the unskilled labour while the skilled labour was hired and paid for. Most houses now consist of plastered brick walls and timber doors. Yet, Subhash Camp is not a finished product. The house-building and improvements are an ongoing process and are renewed during festivals and weddings. In the absence of legal tenure, however, residents told me that they are constantly harassed by the police to pay them for their 'silence'.

The housing shortage that has led to the development of squatter settlements was addressed in 1998, by the National Housing Policy (Planning Commission, 1998). The report of the Planning Commission (1998, p.9) states that lack of legal and regulatory reforms to accelerate housing construction 'compels the needy to turn to unauthorised construction and

the growth of ugly slums which today totally disfigure the national landscape'. The Tenth Five-year Plan (Government of India, 2002, p.5) classified the poor into declining-, core- and improving-poor, using this classification to prioritise different levels of state assistance, asserting that this would help the slum-dwellers 'rise above the degrading conditions in which they live'. This moralistic discourse was legalised in 2002 by the Delhi High Court, which ruled that 'slum dwellers encroaching public lands are like pickpockets and because of this cannot have any right to alternative accommodation' (Upadhyay, 2003). Subhash Camp then, occupies an 'illegal' (Baviskar, 2003) geography, which is also a geography of 'ugliness' whose 'cure' can only be realised through its erasure; it also occupies a contested place, one that is constantly challenged for its existence. It is in this context that I examine women's social action in Subhash Camp.

Samudayik Shakti

The social action of Samudayik Shakti has its roots in the work of Jagori, a largely middle-class NGO working in Delhi 'to spread feminist consciousness for the creation of a just society' (Jagori, undated). Jagori was formed in 1984, a period when there was a resurgence of activism around issues related to violence against women. Jagori's model of empowerment uses participatory activism to bring about feminist awareness and its activities therefore concentrate on issues that are intimately associated with the emancipation of women's bodies (such as domestic violence, sex work, dowry, rape, female infanticide and sexual abuse). Since the early 1990s, Jagori worked with women in Subhash Camp through meetings, street theatres and marches to raise feminist awareness. The 'network links' (Cinalli, 2003) between Jagori and Samdayik Shakti members was significant in the social mobilisation in Subhash Camp. After ten years of involvement, when Jagori withdrew from Subhash Camp, they left behind a socially conscious and literate group of working-class women who formed Samudayik Shakti. Since the members of Samudayik Shakti had participated in Jagori's social work projects, it was to be expected that they were influenced

by Jagori's model of empowerment. While Jagori's remit had been broader, Samudayik Shakti, however, narrowed its focus to the socio-cultural and material transformation of Subhash Camp.

A panchayat had existed in Subhash Camp since the 1970s. Although this comprised upper-caste men, Samudayik Shakti members, were composed of a diverse group of lower caste, upper caste, Hindu and Muslim women of different ethnicities. What they had in common were working-class concerns for their marginal place in the legal geography of Delhi; feminist concerns for the deep injustices carved on women's bodies; and place-based concerns for the improvement of housing and basic amenities in Subhash Camp.

Studies in community organisation (Hays-Mitchell, 1995; Martin, 2002) suggest that women can manipulate differences in their identities to represent themselves through the category of 'women'. By referring to women as 'mothers and sisters', Samudayik Shakti members created a 'universal woman' who lived and worked in Subhash Camp. They highlighted the nature of all women's relationship with the physical layout of their domestic spaces. As Zahra said, 'The man leaves in the morning for work, he returns only at night. But women will go to work, return home, cook, go to fetch vegetables, fetch groceries, fetch water; she has to go through these lanes at least 50 times a day'. Samudayik Shakti therefore addressed the needs of women arising out of the structural differences in their normative gender roles from men and extended this discourse to challenge women's spatial boundaries. In this way they selectively presented their priorities 'in order to maximise the benefits to be achieved by political action' (Fincher and Panelli, 2001, p.129).

As Samudayik Shakti gained popularity among the women, the men labelled its members as 'home breakers' (Interview with RamNarayan, October 2002). Indeed, the women participants mentioned that they encountered initial resistance from their husbands and fathers who believed that they would 'revolt against all the men in the Camp' (Interview with Zahra, October 2002). In their activism, Samudayik Shakti therefore negotiated

‘sometimes diplomatically within existing gender paradigms and sometimes more fiercely against structures through varied and flexible modes of resistance’ (Raju, 1997, p.2197). The women who came to attend meetings were encouraged to go home and tell the men about Samudayik Shakti activities, in the hope that they would understand the nature of their work. By challenging police corruption and state apathy at the same time, the women also represented a collective voice against hegemonic power that did not necessarily define men as its sole perpetrators. As Zahra (Interview, October 2002) said, ‘Today, if I wear the police uniform, then I will also get power hungry the same way as men. If a woman is trained by men, she will also behave like them and use power like men. ... She will use the methods of men because men have trained her. She will not be feminist.’

With the increasing ‘successes’ of Samudayik Shakti in the 1990s in improving physical conditions (such as provision of water and electricity), resistance from the men declined. This was also influenced by the increasing power that Samudayik Shakti members were perceived to have through their connection with Jagori. Meena said, ‘I used to come home and tell him [husband] what we heard at the meeting. Then slowly he started thinking that if we don’t cooperate with them and if there is a fight or some violence, then who will come to our help?’ Meena (Interview, October 2002) said, ‘when our Muslim tenant was not vacating the house, Zahra (who was Muslim) went to mediate and he said, “Why are you not helping another Muslim but a chamar [lowest caste]?” Zahra said “Traitor, you think I will help you? Don’t think that Meena and her husband are alone. There are 300 people behind them.” Hence among Samudayik Shakti members, there was an implicit agreement that feminist activism had to fight religious and caste differences, along with ‘all the multifarious forms of androcentric domination’ (Kapadia, 2002, p.19). Through its work then, Samudayik Shakti members created personal loyalties, asserting their identities as working-class women. This provided strong bonds of mutual support, cohesion and collective organisation.

Samudayik Shakti's acceptance came not only through their work but also because of a perception that they were the caretakers of moral values. At times this role was housed in women's bodies. As Premvati (Interview, October 2002) said, 'I think it [respect] depends on oneself. If I am going out and I look at men and smile at them, or flirt with them, then men will obviously think that this woman is loose.' At other times, moral order was imposed by disciplining 'perverted' men (this will be further discussed under the section 'Streets'). However, a turning point in the residents' perception of Samudayik Shakti's 'respectability' came when they involved the police in closing an illegal bar in the Camp, which RamNarayan (Interview, October 2002) said 'had made it difficult for a respectable man to stay here.'

Samudayik Shakti's women therefore struggled at various scales from the home to the state, to become the collective voice of Subhash Camp. This was also possible because they were a process movement working since the 1990s to bring about a qualitative improvement in their physical and social environment, creating places that were intimately linked to their activism.

Places of Control and Resistance

The discussion of Samudayik Shakti members in place-making is not intended to trivialise the role of the panchayat. In Subhash Camp, men and women faced very different struggles and hence were differently motivated in their social action. As 'breadwinners', the men were visibly associated with income-generating activities. The main street and market square in Subhash Camp burgeoned with shops, weekly markets, small businesses and handcart sellers, run mostly by men. In these 'public' spaces, lower caste Hindu men and economically disadvantaged Muslim men were vulnerable to police threats. Hence, the panchayat was involved in the concerns related to the shops and businesses along the main street, as well as in local dispute arbitration. While men were more involved in these 'public' spaces, women were more visible in the internal streets of Subhash Camp. Although

Samudayik Shakti women were economically productive, their place-making sought to improve physical and socio-cultural conditions related to domestic concerns. Hence, they arranged water and electric connections, campaigned against domestic violence, initiated public meetings to discuss improvements to living conditions and also provided unskilled labour during the construction or improvement of their houses. While both panchayat and Samudayik Shakti members worked together in many instances (such as resisting demolition of their homes by the state), their work, however, was aligned along the particular gender roles in Subhash Camp.

The following section examines in detail four distinct places - the houses, the streets, the office and the meeting room - which were the prime sites of social action.

Houses

Most houses in Subhash Camp consist of single- or double-storey dwellings, with the upper floor usually rented out to generate income. Each family occupies a single multipurpose room on the ground floor which serves as a bedroom, wash room, shower room, kitchen and living room during different times of the day. The spatial confinement of living in one room particularly affected the women, who were involved in domestic activities³. As Leela (Interview, November 2002) said, ‘There is only one room and there are us and my kids, and cooking food in the same space, and washing dishes there, and if a relative comes, then there is our kids and us, and we can’t even ask the guest to stay over. Where do we stay or our children stay?’ Leela further highlighted how spatial constraints affected education, which led to a vicious circle of missed opportunities and unemployment. She said, ‘If there is only one room, then how can anyone study? The environment is such that they [children] can’t study.’

There were other spatial controls, which were more specific to ethnicity. As Anita (Interview, November 2002) mentioned, ‘If I have to wear the veil in front of my in-laws then how can I cook in the same room?’ As with Secor’s (2004) findings, veiling was a ‘spatial

discipline,' which, in different places was applied to and on women's bodies. This was also class-specific, since veiling is mostly found among the rural and working-class migrants from Rajasthan who conform to this practice. Married participants also highlighted the spatial control over their relationship with their husbands. Asha (Interview, November 2002) said, 'When we are sleeping together, sometimes our children wake up and see us and I don't feel good about that. That's why we abstain, it's days or months before we sleep together again.'

Significantly, these houses were built by the residents themselves through a process of negotiation between their individual needs, family power structures, economic capital, state negligence, police corruption and available land. Hence, while spatial restrictions reinforced ideological boundaries of culture and tradition and reminded the participants of their marginal status, it was also possible for those occupying these houses to negotiate and resist these restrictions. This was experienced differently from various positions of gender, caste, ethnicity and religion. For some Muslim women, the bodily act of crossing the boundary of the house to join in the activities of Jagori became symbolic of resistance. Ameena described how despite being told by her father that Muslim women do not act in street theatres, she 'kept thinking that if I stay at home, I will never be able to move on... If I go out then I can do anything'. She said 'My father was sitting outside with a stick saying that he will break my legs if I go out. But when he was not looking I managed to escape' (Interview with Ameena, October 2002). Participants mentioned that living in close proximity, they were able to hear the acts of domestic abuse in neighbours' houses and hence had learned to share and identify with each others experiences and bring such men to justice. Leela (Interview, November 2002) said that her husband could not beat her anymore because she would fight back saying, 'If you work outside then I work at home. I don't eat on you. I take care of the kids and I even work like you all day. And I put in that money in your house.'

Houses then were related to women's bodies and the discipline over those bodies by imposing physical and cultural boundaries that were mutually constructed through 'embodied

practices' (Legg, 2003, p.21). Houses in Subhash Camp were the physical nodes of intersection of cultural ideologies dictating traditional notions of behaviour, attire and conformity; gender ideologies sanctioning violence against women; and state ideologies challenging the very notion of 'home' through its acts of demolition. The architecture of domestic spaces was therefore significant as self-build (and primarily) one-room dwellings, because they were normalised as a woman's place, a place of nurturance, whose physical layout restricted the performance of their gender roles and where women's bodies were subject to violence, discipline and abuse. Houses then were the sites of bodily experiences of 'multi-scalar' (Bassett, 2002) control from the state and local patriarchy.

These narratives suggest how 'individual transformation occurs through collective participation' (Magar, 2003, p.518). Because both Jagori and Samudayik Shakti reinforced the idea that 'personal' issues of dowry and violence against women in the privacy of the house was a 'legitimate concern' (Martin, 2002) and its disciplining was essential to achieving women's emancipation, the house, as the place of control over women's bodies became the site of their resistance and emancipation.

Streets

The lack of space within the one-room house forced certain less 'private' activities such as cooking, washing, or socialising to be carried out in the streets if they were wide enough. These were also places where children played while women kept an eye on them. Streets then were places where the domestic labours of women were on display and should therefore be understood as extensions of domestic spaces in Subhash Camp.

Insert Figure 1 & Figure 2. Here

The internal streets of Subhash Camp derived their spatial character from the houses and the people who lived and worked in them. Due to the spontaneous nature of Subhash Camp's growth, they were not segregated along caste or religious lines. To many Hindu participants, this was emancipatory not only because of the obvious social integration, but

also in the protection of minorities that non-segregation confers. Leela (Interview, November 2002) said ‘my neighbour is a Sikh... That time⁴ we kept them locked inside our house. We gave them food, water, everything. People used to come from outside asking whether there were any Sikhs here and we used to say that there aren’t any Sikhs on our street.’ But, to Jamila, this lack of spatial segregation made her feel vulnerable. She said, ‘when Advani’s Rath⁵ happened, that day we felt a bit scared so we went to Nizamuddin (Muslim area) and stayed with my sisters. If someone comes from outside and attacks us, then what can the poor neighbours do?’ (Interview with Jamila, November 2002). For Jamila therefore, situations of violence broke down spatialised feminist solidarities and established new solidarities across religion (Secor, 2004). Despite these situations, Zahira Bano, a younger Muslim woman said, ‘I grew up here. I was even born in this house. It feels like this is my home. When my family members want to go somewhere else ... like close to Jamia College? [Muslim area] ...I didn’t like it. When I came home, I felt this is the best place.’ (Interview with Zahira Bano, October 2002).

The above narratives suggest how Hindu, Muslim and Sikh families were able to live in close spatial proximity by creating territorial solidarities and significant memories in places. Anita also reinforced Jamila’s suggestion that communal violence was perpetrated by ‘outsiders’, thus asserting their solidarity as citizens of Subhash Camp. When referring to recent communal violence between Hindus and Muslims in the state of Gujarat, Anita (Interview, November 2002) said ‘We are very happy together. We celebrate everything together, whether it is Rakhi or Eid, just like brothers and sisters. [It is] as if they were enemies in Gujarat. It’s the people who come from outside and set fire to houses... it was the outsiders.’

‘Spatialised strategies of differentiation’ (Secor, 2004, p.358) were also experienced in overt ways. Leela said, ‘the streets are too narrow... so narrow that it is difficult to get out. I can’t even place my charpoy⁶ out there. Can’t even place a bucket of water, can’t wash my

clothes outside'. This spatial restriction became significant in the way streets allowed the violation of women's bodies through molestations. However, as Leela (Interview, November 2002) said, 'Once someone molested my neighbour ... Then in front of the entire neighbourhood, in front of all the women there, the man ... had to ask for forgiveness in the same place where he had done the teasing.' Leela suggests how at the same time, these streets allowed the strategic disciplining of men. Streets as places then were important symbolic reminders of women's resistance to the 'undesirable elements' of patriarchy. By disciplining such elements in the same places where women's bodies were violated, streets became memorable places; they became representations of social resistance and of morality; and inseparable from the social action and work of Samudayik Shakti.

Social consciousness was not just realised in the spaces of domesticity, but also through the invisible economy of the streets. While most women were economically active, primarily as domestic help in middle-class areas, evidence of women's entrepreneurship could also be seen in small corner shops within the streets of Subhash Camp and in the involvement of entire families in home-based income generation in streets that were wide enough for people to gather in groups. Here, certain women experienced more control through assertions of religious ideologies. When she opened a vegetable shop, Zahra (Interview, November 2002) said 'my family started objecting. They said that Muslim women don't go out of homes, how can you sit in a shop? My brother said I will pay for your food'. It was only because she 'wanted to take her life in her own hands' that Zahra resisted such ideological constraints.

The house and the street therefore, cannot be discussed as separate places. As extensions of domestic activities, the streets incorporated values that were individually and collectively invested by the people living on it. They were imagined simultaneously as spaces of control, of nurturance, of domesticity and of economic independence. The power of the

social action that emanated from these places was communicated and circulated through their everyday practices, through casual encounters, through parenting and through socializing.

The Office/Meeting room

Insert Figure 3. Here

Since control occurred in domestic places, resistance often emerged from the realm of domesticity. In designing their activities, Samudayik Shakti members used their domestic spaces 'politically'. Because houses and streets were the sites of their daily labours, organising activism from their spaces was both strategic and efficient (Fincher and Panelli, 2001). It was on the first floor of Zahra's house that Samudayik Shakti's office/meeting room took place. Such a meeting room was also convenient and cost-free since it was donated by Zahra to the organisation, underscoring the personal friendships and social networks between the women active in the group.

The office was a domestic space, yet, on closer inspection, it was also a space of political activism. It was a small room incorporating multiple activities- meetings, record keeping, discussions, talks and children's education. The children referred to it as a school, the members referred to it as the office and the other residents referred to it as the women's panchayat. It was embedded deep within the narrow lanes and except for the board announcing their name there were no visual markers of its existence⁷. Inside the office, there was barely any furniture and everyone sat on the floor, representing the democratic nature of its organisation. The walls were covered with posters on domestic violence and adult literacy, letters of alphabets (for the children when it was used as a classroom) and photographs of the activities of Samudayik Shakti. While the meetings were held only among the members, the children's 'school' although small in capacity, was open to all the residents of Subhash Camp. The office then, was a place that held memories, stressed the continuity of the organisation, its welfare efforts and represented its setbacks and perseverance. It was a place where women politicised the home through discussions and dialogues on feminist issues. It

was here that decisions were taken regarding the actions against domestic violence, molestation and dowry. It was also here that the decision to resist the demolitions was agreed upon. The office was a space which lay at the roots of organising collective resistance to both state and patriarchal control.

Market Square

Figure 4. Here

The main square was the 'market' where the residents of Subhash Camp obtained their daily necessities. Most shops were built on the ground floor of the houses along the main street and around the market square. Hence, domestic spaces were also spaces of economic activity while economic spaces were also part of domestic households. Thus the 'private' and the 'public' were connected but did not necessarily translate into or directly correspond with specific spatial locations (Martin 2002; Staeheli, 1996). Architecturally, the market square was much wider than any other place in the Camp; it had a big tree, a religious building and was surrounded by various shops and businesses. It was also the only open space large enough to accommodate public gatherings.

Triggered off by the urgency of the demolitions, in the public meeting on the evening of 1st November 2002, I experienced for the first time, the audible nature of social action in Subhash Camp. It was the men who were most vocal, who made announcements over the microphone, who called the residents to attend the meeting and who spread the carpets under the tree for everyone to sit on. It was the men who suggested different options and then took hand-counts of residents to decide upon the next course of action. When the residents decided to march to the local MPs house in protest, it was the men who agreed to organise this resistance action and raise money to hire the van to take the activists there. When I asked why, the women participants said that they would prefer the men to take some responsibility because Samudayik Shakti members 'already had enough on their hands'.

Figure 5. Here

This act of invisibility was an attempt by the women of Samudayik Shakti to reduce their triple burden (of domestic duties, economic activities and community organisation). By strategically removing themselves from certain 'public' duties (such as the collection of money and organisation of transport) they also positioned themselves within the gendered division of labour. By leaving the men to address the practicalities of resistance action while they provided organisational support, the women also underlined their position as guardians of 'moral values' within the community. Thus, it was here in the main street and square that the politics of agency was negotiated through multiple layers of meaning. These multiple meanings were dependent upon how the square was 'constituted through the claims of agents in the community and the political, economic and social power relations that situated this community' (Martin, 2002, p.335). The square was a controlled place where the state had the most evident presence, expressed through repeated acts of demolition, corruption and threats to householders, shopkeepers and handcart owners alike. It was a place when men were visible in both economic and political activities not only because of their alignment with normative gender roles, but also through the active encouragement of the women to share their political responsibilities as 'equal' partners. It was a place where agency was performed through audible resistance, public gatherings and collective action. It was the place where the 'private' nature of a home was discoursed in the 'public' realm and where visible political action by men was produced through the act of invisibility by the women.

It was through these 'blurred boundaries' that the square became a hybrid place. Like the houses and the streets, the square was both the site of control and resistance; it was also both a public and private space. But most importantly, the square was the place that allowed the women to become political through collective participation and organise collective resistance against the 'injustices' of the state. This then was the site of production of a collective identity as citizens of Subhash Camp who asserted their 'right to exist' (Lefebvre, 1991) on urban land.

Conclusions

In Subhash Camp, different women experienced different forms of spatial control, constructed through gendered, religious, ethnic, class and caste-based ideologies. This control was also multi-scalar, experienced from intersecting and overlapping social structures such as the family, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), the police and the state. Participants used multiple modes of resistance to negotiate different spatial controls. To address issues such as domestic violence, they used the laws of the state against the hegemony of patriarchy. At other times, they used the class support of residents in Subhash Camp to resist state hegemony. Yet at other times, they challenged hegemonic religious and ethnic practices through Jagori's model of participatory activism. Thus everyday practices included in the act of 'dwelling' in Subhash Camp produced different acts of negotiation (such as talking to their men, using the streets as domestic extensions, bribing the police) or resistance (such as crossing the boundary of the house to join Jagori activities, public meetings). Sometimes places such as the home, the street and the main square were sites where daily activities were performed and sometimes these same places became the sites of working-class feminism, reflecting the multiple ways of experiencing and imagining place.

The different spatial strategies used by the participants also suggest the ambiguous nature of their agency that created hybrid spaces of public/private, home/state and personal/political. On the one hand, they used normative discourses of 'universal women' who were 'caretakers of social reproduction and morality' to endorse their organisation within the community and on the other hand they recognised the discriminatory spatial practices of ethnic-, religious-, class- and caste-based ideologies that created differences among the women of Samudayik Shakti. By articulating how hegemonic control was inscribed through the architecture of the house, streets and the square, participants were able to devise 'counterpublic' (Fraser, 1992) practices in these places to meaningfully resist both physical and ideological boundaries of such control. Differences in the architecture of places,

differences in the patterns of control exercised by this architecture, differences in the social networks that women were embedded in and differences in the meanings that they ascribed to places, were critical in the production and consumption of specific forms of agency in these places.. By locating their daily struggles within the house, the street, the office and the main square, the participants defined their activism through the specificity of place and its architecture. Hence, through both subtle and obvious acts of resistance, they performed an empowerment that operated simultaneously in these different places and along the dual axes of reinforcement and transgression of normative socio-cultural roles, blurring the material and symbolic boundaries between these places.

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¹ This literally means 'five members'. It is a form of rural local governance structure and is derived from the oldest judicial systems in India where collective decisions are taken by a group of five elderly members elected democratically.

² All names used in this study are pseudonyms.

³ This is unlike middle – or upper - class houses in Delhi which have 'standard' plans consisting of living/dining room, kitchen, toilet and one or more bedrooms in legalised colonies. Subhash Camp houses, as in other squatter settlements differed due to their lack of space and of legal tenure. The women in these camps were further marginalised in cases of dowry or domestic violence cases since the police in many instances would not lodge a complaint if the address was in an unauthorised area.

⁴ She is referring to the assassination of Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister of India, by her Sikh bodyguard in 1984. This led to communal violence when over 10,000 Sikhs were killed across the country.

⁵ This refers to the conflicts around the Babri Mosque near Ayodhya in North India which some radical Hindu groups claim as the birthplace of 'Rama' (a sacrosanct figure from Hindu religion) and where they want to construct a temple. In 1992, L K Advani, an Indian MP led a procession (called Rath Yatra) to rally support for this movement which resulted in damage to the Babri mosque by radical Hindu groups. This led to communal violence across the country.

⁶ A traditional bed made out of a wooden frame with a tightly strung hammock in between on which people sleep.

⁷ Yet, I was always given correct directions by residents when I lost my way.