

## Project Report I

### CITY [IN]VISIBLE

The focus of my six-week residency at KHOJ is to develop an art project through generating dialogues and narratives with local communities in the neighbourhood of Khirki Village. This neighbourhood, along with nearby Hauz Rani, are part of the unauthorised colony of Khirki Extension in South Delhi.

The local communities here subsist on daily-wage earnings in small workshops and factories, as construction labourers, as artisans. Though barely seen, they remain a crucial demographic variable within the rapidly expanding and impersonal cosmopolitan ethos of high-end shopping complexes, business centres and corporate habitats. These hyper-visible yet invisible migrant communities are undergoing displacement from their places of origin often without social or legal protections and entitlements.

As a local presence, KHOJ enabled me to intervene in these localities, and interact not only with my target group but also people connected with these groups, and inhabiting the same area.

#### Week 1

I conducted introductory sessions with the artisans and their employers at two design workshops in Hauz Rani. I later had a session with a few shopkeepers in Khirki Extension.

As part of these introductory sessions I visited the small factories and interviewed workers at their workstations.

The world of labour practices here is essentially very private, operating within its own norms, and quite sequestered. Drawing upon my previous fieldwork with working-class communities in England, I did not use a microphone – the presence of this technology can be alienating and intimidating, and force people into artificial postures and self-conscious expression. Instead, I followed the methodology of casual conversation with my subjects, documenting this in my notebook. I was relieved that I was allowed to use a camera on the premises.

From 22 April 2008, I began visiting the embroidery factories in Hauz Rani.

I first visited the workshop run by the person who is originally from Howrah, Bengal. He is friendly and hospitable. He runs a small unit of hand-stitched embroidery: ten workers, each working 12-14 hours each day. Prior to migrating to Delhi, he had worked in the field himself for several years. He trained mainly in his own village, Panchara. After much struggle he managed to open his own unit in Hauz Rani in 2003. He lives with his family in on the first floor of the rented two-storied building, with the workshop on the ground floor. The workers are mostly from Bengal and Bihar. They have either already been trained in their villages, or are being trained in this unit.

My second visit was to a small unit of machine-made embroidery. Four to five workers each work 10-12 hours each day. When the demand is high, they may work for up to 20 hours. The owner of this workshop also sells life insurance, as an LIC agent.

## Week 2

I initiated my plan to visit each unit twice, to document the work processes. I also arranged for personal interviews with the workers, at their convenience, on the KHOJ premises.

During our dialogue, I noticed the workers repeatedly using certain words and terms that are commonly uttered, and are strongly associated or bound up with their lives. I made a list of these words/terms, and tried to push the conversations through those words. I then asked each person to select one of these word and to talk on it, how it is connected with his work experience as well as his personal life.

I arranged sessions of conversations with workers from machine stitch unit on the KHOJ premises when their shift ends. Two workers from this unit came for the session; and interestingly, a worker from another unit, joined us. I followed the same protocol that I had used for my interviews with the workers of the other unit.

## Project Report II

### **City [In] Visible**

While in a dialogue with the artisans and other local people from various other professions, I learnt that this locality is gradually taking shape of a new residential place. The people who have recently shifted in this area work in the new Select City Walk Mall and Max and other hospitals across the road and also those who work in BPO.

I became quite keen to talk to these new residents as well. It adds more dimension to my project to show the both experiences in terms of residing in a locality which is seeing rapid changes in recent times.

## Week 3

I was fortunate to get a contact of few nurses who works at Max through one of close friends. These nurses are working at Max Hospital and living at Hauz Rani. I fixed an appointment with one of them on Monday after her evening shift. She works in ICU.

She stays with three another friends of her working in the same hospital. We had a initial introduction.

That week I also had lined up a face to face session with the people of from machine made unit on 6th May, Tuesday.

As a part of the project I printed some postcards and posters and distributed them to the people from two unit, shopkeepers in the Hauz Rani area, people working in the Mall and the nurses working in Max hospital but staying at Hauz Rani.

Unfortunately, the face to face session with the people at machine made unit had to be postponed for next day, i.e. on 7th May as none of them were able to work the whole day as there was no power in their unit for the whole day and they had work load at their end.

On 7th May, I went to machine made unit for second round face to face session around in the evening and gave them the postcards I got printed for them.

We had a detailed discussion on various work and livelihood related topics for couple of hours. I and Anuradha both took notes although the discussions. Joy was busy taking photographs which he worked on and are available to see in the gallery.

On 8th May, 08, as planned before, I went to meet nurses from Max hospital in their house at Hauz Rani. After a brief introduction and discussion they they agreed to write about their experience, anguish and aspiration relation to their workplace and experience of living at Hauz Rani. On that day evening, I ventured out to Select City Mall, which is opposite to Khirki Village to find if any person working at the shops were staying at Hauz Rani or not. I was fortunate enough to find 3-4 people, who were working there as well as staying at Hauz Rani/Khirki Village. I am developing a series of interaction with them within the constrains of their hectic and busy work schedules.

### Project Report III

Initially it was difficult for me to figure out the people in the massive place like City Walk Mall who are working there and living in places like Khirki Village. But gradually in couple of days time I managed to find few people. However I was unable to contact all of them due to less time scheduled for my project.

I changed the plan of interaction as I started meeting new people from Mall and Max hospital. I had an introductory session and explained my project to each of them separately. I bought few copies and distributed those among the persons I met.

First I met a young man who works in a coffee shop named 'Barista' inside the Mall. This person works in the night shift as a kitchen porter. So on an evening, we fixed up a time for meeting in the coffee shop where he works. We had an introductory session.

Then I met a lady who works in a designer's shop in the City Walk Mall. This woman works as a full time sales person. I spoke to her after her evening shift was over. She agreed to write about her experiences on Hauz Rani and the changes brought about by the Mall.

I tried to meet other two young ladies working as sales persons in two different places like boutiques/ accessories shops. But I failed to meet them due to their constant change of shift.

Another young man whom I met in a Herbal product shop refused to give me time even after the shift as he was scared of his employer.

I distributed posters and postcards to the people with whom we interacted in past few weeks to understand, learn and expand the knowledge about these people, who are settled at Hauz Rani. These posters and postcards were produced from the bits and pieces of information gathered through interactions with these people and also documenting their works through photographs. I had been to handmade Unit as well and found that one of the persons working in the unit was suffering from yellow fever, and was not able to work as a result he was not able to get his daily wages. I thought of giving them a gift as part of the project a water filter, which might prevent the other labours from falling sick from the water borne diseases.

Finally, I went to handmade unit again for the last session with the people in their workshop. This way I was able to talk to all the people working in the unit as well as they were able to talk while working. This time we found a new person who joined the unit. He learnt this job while studying in school in his home town at Bairelly, and when he left school till studying at class 7, he went to Rajasthan to work. He left that job as the demand of work was decreasing. From there he came to Delhi and was at Jamrutpur working in a unit. Later he joined a factory. He didn't like the atmosphere at the factory and joined this present unit. This time I decided to ask them to speak on 3 words and associated to their each day them with their own individual life. The words were Samay (time), Awaz (sound) and Mohalla (community).

Again I met the young man from Barista, as he looked busy and was getting prepared for his night shift job at Barista, I was able to talk to him only for few minutes. He agreed to write his narration about his staying in Hauz Rani, working at the Mall, even after doing an MBA from Faridabad.

Again I met the nurses who work in Max and collected their narratives including the one who was away on her holiday. I collected the texts that they wrote about their experiences at work place and personal aspirations.

Later in that evening I met young lady, sales person from the designer' shop again at the Citywalk mall. She confessed and was apologetic that due to heavy work load in the shop and her house, she was unable to log her daily dairy. I had a talk with her after the shop, she works, closed at 9 pm. She talked about her regular routine at the shop, where she has to check the stocks everyday, coming of new acquisitions, discard of old stock, starting of sales. While I was in a dialogue with her Anuradha was documenting the conversation.