

Are urban villages contested territories of the city?

MAKING OF CHANDIGARH

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THE CREATION of cities is a phenomenon associated with the creation of boundaries and edges. It has emerged from several edges, the first being the partition of undivided Punjab, whereby a political-geographic edge was created following the recommendations made by Radcliffe, an English lawyer, and politician. With Lahore acceded to Pakistan, the search for the new capital of east Punjab began as 'an expression of the nation's faith in the future' and Chandigarh was chosen after rejecting eight existing sites. Thereafter, the reorganisation of the state of Punjab in 1966 witnessed the second edge – and the periphery of the state of Punjab was trifurcated between Punjab, Haryana, and UT Chandigarh.

With other developments on the city periphery controlled by different building bylaws of the states of Haryana and Punjab, the existing villages in the periphery have suffered. Many lost the *abadi deh* (commonly understood as the area of the village habitation) to high-rise developments and their rural character was deeply compromised creat-

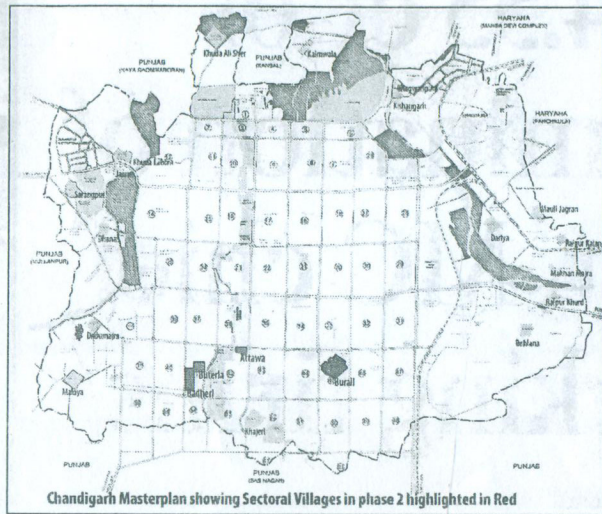
ing the contested edge between the village and the city.

Chandigarh, comprising neighbourhood sectors and urban villages chose to wipe out the existing villages in Phase 1 completely. Realising the imprudence of wiping out existing villages, such as Nagla, Kelar, Teli, Shahzadpur, Rurki Padaav, among others, four villages which lay in the Sectoral grid in Phase 2, two sectoral villages in Phase 3 and 16 non-sectoral villages were retained.

THE 23 VILLAGES

At present, there are 23 villages in the city. The agricultural land of the four sectoral villages was acquired, but the *abadi deh* was integrated into the sector planning. In order to check haphazard development, these villages were brought under the purview of the 'Site of the Capital' – a subsection of the Panjab Development and Regulation Act, 1952.

As a general rule, these four sectoral villages were to share the health and education infrastructural facilities of the urban sectors and certain activities were to be curtailed. Deprived of their agricultural land, residents have adopted occupations based on demands of the sectoral grid. Due to their lower rentals, the villages serve as a landing

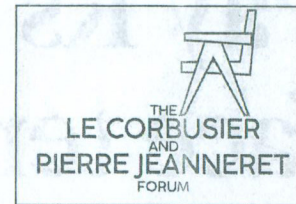


ground for migrants. Activities contributing to the service sector of the city, such as construction material in Attawa village that is abuzz with migrant masons, carpenters, electricians, and plumbers, supports a market of electrical goods on its periphery. Badheri, Buraal, and Buterla villages also thrive on similar markets, providing services such as tailoring, tyre re-treading, welding, electronics repair. The shops along the narrow internal village streets also serve as godowns for city shops. Guesthouses, lodges, and hotel accommodations are transformations to the village fabric as

residents prefer tourists to tenants offering better profits and less headache. The villages optimise their proximity to rural areas of Panjab for daily wage workforce also. Pre-cooked snacks, bakeries, and low investment and quick return businesses have begun to thrive in these urban villages and have emerged as contested territories to the sectoral grid. These urban villages provide opportunities for the have-nots and also service the city.

INTEGRATING THE VILLAGES

With the creation of Chandigarh MC in 1994, the sta-



tus of these villages and their services and infrastructure were upgraded. This has resulted in urbanisation of the village boundary with the city. How do we integrate these much-needed service sector habitations into the mainstream of city design? The administration and the civic body must address the issues of fire and structural safety of tenements as well as ownership besides providing access to open spaces, light, and clean air, drinking water, and sanitation. The symbiotic relationship between the city and its urban villages is well understood. Efficient village development plans backed by sound development controls keeping in view the reality of urban villages are the need of the hour.

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