



# The Village in the City: Field Notes from Shahpur Jat

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**Abstract:** This article offers an ethnographic exploration of the lived experiences of people in Shahpur Jat—original residents, migrant workers, shopkeepers, designers, domestic workers, and families—based on fieldwork conducted in 2017–18 and again in 2024–25. Rather than viewing the urban village through planning categories or land-use maps, the study foregrounds the everyday practices, encounters, and negotiations through which residents and migrants make sense of life in a rapidly changing settlement.

Across both fieldwork periods, the village emerges as a dense social world where Jat landowning families, long-settled non-Jat households, and migrant labourers from Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Jharkhand live in proximity yet inhabit unequal positions. Their stories reveal how economic pressures, caste hierarchies, gender norms, and informal labour arrangements shape daily routines—whether in tailoring workshops, dye units, boutiques, rented rooms, courtyards, or narrow lanes.

COVID-19 marks a distinct rupture in these experiences: boutique closures, disrupted incomes, rising rents, and shifting migration patterns altered how workers lived and worked, while local families navigated new uncertainties alongside older forms of authority and belonging. Yet despite these disruptions, Shahpur Jat remains a place sustained by relationships—between employers and karigars, landlords and tenants, neighbours and co-workers—relationships that are fragile, uneven, and constantly renegotiated.

By centring voices and experiences across social groups, this article argues that Shahpur Jat exemplifies the everyday

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urbanism of Delhi: a place where village memory, migrant precarity, aspiration, and informal economies intersect and shape the rhythms of ordinary life.

**Keywords:** Urban villages; Everyday urbanism; Informal economy; Socio-spatial change; Ethnography; Shahpur Jat; Delhi; Lived experience; Urban transformation

## Introduction

Urban villages in Delhi occupy a complex and evolving position within the city's socio-spatial landscape. They function simultaneously as residual rural enclaves and dynamic urban spaces embedded within global and regional circuits of capital, labour, and consumption. Scholars have long described such settlements as paradoxical formations—spaces where rural social structures coexist with metropolitan economic functions and informal urbanism (Mehra, 2005; Shah, 2012). More recent research, however, has extended this insight, showing that urban villages are neither transitional nor peripheral, but enduring components of contemporary urban development that reveal the uneven and incremental nature of urban transformation (Kasula et al., 2025; Rawat & Singh, 2025).

Within this broader landscape, Shahpur Jat stands out as a critical site for understanding the lived experience of urban change in Delhi. The village's transformation—marked by the proliferation of boutiques, cafés, rental housing, and workshops—reflects patterns identified in recent urban studies that position Delhi's urban villages as “hybrid socio-spatial configurations” shaped by informal governance, mixed land use, and complex property regimes (Pati, 2023; Singh et al., 2024). As scholars note, such settlements challenge formal planning logics, often developing through incremental construction, informal regularisation, and the intensification of rental markets (Harikrishnan, 2021).

This paper explores Shahpur Jat ethnographically through two periods of fieldwork: an initial phase conducted in 2017–18 during a period of commercial expansion and optimism, and a later phase in 2024–25, shaped profoundly by the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Ethnographic observations across these years illustrate how residents and migrants negotiate shifting economic pressures, changing labour conditions, and

evolving social relations within the village (Yadav, 2024–2025). This longitudinal approach aligns with calls in recent urban anthropology to foreground everyday practices and lived experiences as key sites for understanding how cities are made and remade (Ranganathan, 2022).

The 2017–18 fieldwork captured Shahpur Jat’s growing integration into Delhi’s creative economy. Migrant workers from Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Jharkhand formed the backbone of its labour-intensive boutique and garment ecosystem, echoing wider studies on informal labour, migration networks, and precarious urban work in Indian cities. Jat landowning families—benefiting from caste-based property control—continued to reconstruct ancestral plots into multi-storeyed rental buildings, reinforcing patterns of “urban rentierism” documented in recent scholarship (Ranganathan, 2022).

By contrast, the 2024–25 period revealed a landscape marked by fragility and recalibration. COVID-19 disrupted livelihoods, sent many migrants back to their home villages, and forced boutiques, workshops, and small businesses to renegotiate contracts, payments, and labour arrangements. These shifts mirror broader post-pandemic trajectories observed in other Indian urban villages and informal settlements, where economic uncertainty has deepened precarity while accelerating uneven forms of urban development (Singh et al., 2024). At the same time, gender norms, caste hierarchies, and localised forms of authority continue to shape the experience of everyday life—patterns consistent with research on urban villages’ gendered transformations (Govinda, 2013).

Rather than treating Shahpur Jat primarily as a planning anomaly or transitional settlement, this paper approaches it through the conceptual lens of *everyday urbanism* and *urban anthropology*. Everyday urbanism directs attention to mundane practices—renting rooms, negotiating workspace, sharing courtyards, or walking through lanes—through which residents and migrants actively produce urban space in ways that exceed formal plans. At the same time, an anthropological perspective emphasises relationality: the ways caste hierarchies, kinship, migration networks, and informal labour arrangements shape everyday negotiations of belonging, value, and authority. Bringing these approaches together allows the paper to move beyond description and argue that Shahpur Jat is not simply “urbanising,”

but constitutes a dynamic socio-spatial formation where power, visibility, and livelihood are constantly renegotiated through ordinary practices.

### Shahpur Jat

Shahpur Jat is one of South Delhi's most prominent urban villages, situated along the historical remains of the 14th-century Siri fort. Like many villages incorporated into Delhi's expanding urban fabric, its origins lie in agrarian Jat households who cultivated mainly tobacco and seasonal crops like wheat, mustard, etc., until the late twentieth century. The broader pattern of village transformation mirrors what Mehra (2005) and Shah (2012) identify as the dual process of urban absorption: agricultural land is acquired for planned development, while the *lal dora* residential core remains under customary control. In Shahpur Jat, large portions of farmland were acquired by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) between the 1950s and 1980s, leaving the village's interior morphology unchanged but situating it within an increasingly urbanised landscape.

These historical dynamics produced the spatial distinction still visible today: planned neighbourhoods and institutional complexes on formerly agricultural land, and a dense, labyrinthine residential core shaped by kinship and inheritance. Dupont (2007) describes this pattern across Delhi as a form of "selective urbanisation," where state planning coexists with informal, lineage-based spatial organisation. As compensation and rising land values encouraged reconstruction, older havelis were gradually replaced by multi-storeyed rental buildings—an evolution consistent with the shift from agrarian to rent-based urban economies noted by Srivastava (2015) and Kumar (2015).

By the early 2000s, Shahpur Jat emerged as a hub for Delhi's independent fashion and creative sector, as designers and small entrepreneurs repurposed village homes into boutiques, workshops, cafés, and studios. This transformation reflects wider trends in Delhi's urban villages, where informal property markets and flexible land-use practices enable new commercial uses to flourish despite regulatory ambiguity (Chattopadhyay, 2020). At the same time, the social fabric of the village continues to express its rural origins: Jat families retain authority over land and local decision-making; Dalit households occupy long-established residential clusters;

and migrant workers from eastern and northern India inhabit dense rental pockets embedded within commercial and workshop spaces.

Anthropologically, Shahpur Jat exemplifies the coexistence of rural memory and urban aspiration, caste hierarchy and entrepreneurial opportunity, informality and creativity—creating a socio-spatial formation that is emblematic of Delhi’s urban villages. Its layered history makes it a productive site for understanding how lived experiences shape the everyday realities of urban transformation.

### **Aims and Objectives**

The aim of this paper is to understand urbanism in Shahpur Jat through the everyday workings of its emerging village economy. Rather than approaching the urban village primarily through planning frameworks or built-form analysis, the paper examines how new economic activities—such as boutique production, small workshops, services, and rental housing—reshape social relations and ways of living in the village.

Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in 2017–18 and 2024–25, the paper has two closely connected objectives. First, it explores how different groups—residents, migrant workers, and small entrepreneurs—experience and negotiate everyday life within this changing economic landscape. Second, it analyses how routine practices around work, housing, mobility, and social interaction produce the social and spatial character of Shahpur Jat, particularly across pre- and post-pandemic moments. By focusing on lived engagements with the village economy, the paper seeks to contribute to a broader understanding of urbanism as a process shaped through everyday economic practices and social relations.

### **Methodology**

This paper is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Shahpur Jat during two distinct periods: an initial phase in 2017–18 as part of my MPhil research, and a subsequent phase in 2024–25 undertaken for my doctoral work. The use of two temporal moments allowed for a longitudinal understanding of how everyday life in the village has shifted across a period marked by significant economic and social change, including the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Ethnography was selected as the

central methodological approach because it enables the close observation of lived experiences, everyday practices, and social interactions that constitute urban change—dimensions that cannot be fully captured through planning documents, surveys, or spatial analysis.

Fieldwork consisted of participant observation, informal conversations, and semi-structured interviews with a diverse set of actors: Jat landowning families, long-settled non-Jat households, migrant workers employed in tailoring, dyeing, and garment finishing, domestic workers, boutique owners, small vendors, and young people navigating the village's changing economic landscape. Observations were carried out across different parts of the village—commercial lanes, inner residential alleys, workshops, rental rooms, boutiques, and open courtyards—to trace how spaces are inhabited and transformed by different groups. This multi-sited ethnographic approach allowed for the documentation of coexisting and often unequal social worlds within the village.

Across both phases of fieldwork, I interacted with approximately 55–60 interlocutors in varying degrees of depth. These included around 12 Jat landowning households, 8–10 long-settled non-Jat families, and nearly 30 migrant workers employed in tailoring, dyeing, embroidery, finishing, ironing, domestic work, and delivery. In addition, conversations were held with boutique owners, small workshop operators, local vendors, and a few young people navigating changing educational and work trajectories. While not statistically representative, this range of interlocutors enabled an ethnographic understanding of how different social positions shaped everyday engagements with the village economy.

Comparisons between the 2017–18 and 2024–25 fieldwork periods were not based on identical samples, but on thematic continuities. Fieldnotes were analysed along recurring axes—work and livelihood, housing and space, visibility and hierarchy, and gendered mobility. These themes provided a comparative frame through which to trace how pandemic disruptions, commercial expansion, and shifts in rental markets altered everyday negotiations over time.

Conversations were conducted in Hindi, occasionally mixed with regional languages spoken by migrant workers, and were recorded through fieldnotes rather than audio recordings to maintain comfort and anonymity.

Ethical considerations were central: participants were informed about the research purpose, identifying details were removed, and sensitive narratives were recorded with care. Reflexivity remained integral throughout, particularly as my familiarity with the field site deepened over time. Rather than approaching the village as a static object of study, I engaged with it as a dynamic social world in which relationships, rhythms, and meanings continuously evolve.

### **Socio-Spatial Transformations in Shahpur Jat**

Shahpur Jat's physical and social landscape reflects the layered processes that urban village scholars have long described—spaces where older rural forms persist even as new urban uses proliferate (Mehra, 2005; Shah, 2012; Dupont, 2007). Walking through the village today reveals these layers vividly. The wide *phirni*<sup>1</sup> road and the remnants of *khasra*<sup>2</sup> divisions coexist with narrow interior lanes where old havelis and courtyard houses stand beside boutique clusters, cafés, and co-working studios. Ethnographic encounters from both 2017–18 and 2024–25 show how residents narrate these changes with ambivalence: pride in the village's commercial visibility is tempered by memories of a quieter agrarian past.

Land fragmentation has intensified over generations, producing a patchwork of small plots on which rental rooms, tailoring workshops, design studios, storage units, and small factories are densely stacked. This mixed land-use pattern, also observed in studies of Delhi's other urban villages such as Hauz Khas and Khirki (Dupont, 2007; Srivastava, 2015), is not the result of formal zoning but of everyday adaptations through which families and entrepreneurs convert available space into livelihood opportunities. In Shahpur Jat, a single building often contains a workshop on the ground floor, migrant workers living on the mezzanine, and a boutique on the upper level—arrangements consistent with ethnographies of informal urbanism across Indian cities (Bhowmik, 2010; Webster et al., 2017).

These spatial arrangements also produce everyday inequalities. Jat landowning families occupy rebuilt multi-storeyed homes along broader lanes, while long-settled Dalit households inhabit smaller, subdivided plots in more congested areas. Migrant workers—mostly from Bengal, Bihar,

and Uttar Pradesh—live in the tight interiors of workshops or shared rental rooms, quietly moving between home and workplace. Tailors often sleep beside sewing machines; dyers cook on small electric stoves beside dye vats; and delivery helpers share cramped mezzanine spaces above shops. These ethnographic details echo broader observations that caste, class, and migration status continue to structure access to space within urban villages (Kumar, 2015; Ranganathan, 2022).

Encroachment and informal construction practices further shape the built environment: staircases extending into lanes, extra floors added without sanction, shops spilling onto walkways, and temporary sheds used for storage or work. Similar practices described in studies of Delhi’s urban villages (Chattopadhyay, 2020; Gokhale Institute Report, 2023) highlight how informality is not an exception but a mode of spatial production. In Shahpur Jat, these practices arise from necessity—families expanding rental units, boutique owners needing display space, or workshop owners accommodating additional workers.

As one elderly resident remarked:

*“Pehle sab khula tha — ab har jagah deewar ugg aayi hai. Ghar bhi, dukaan bhi, aur upar kiraye wale kamre bhi.” (“Earlier everything felt open — now walls have grown everywhere: houses, shops, and rental rooms stacked above.”)*

Yet, despite congestion and unevenness, the village remains socially and economically vibrant. Its spatial flexibility allows new forms of work, habitation, and enterprise to coexist in proximity. These socio-spatial transformations demonstrate how Shahpur Jat continues to navigate the tension between rural memory and urban aspiration, shaping a hybrid and lived form of urbanism.

### **Cultural Life, Identity, and Community**

Cultural life in Shahpur Jat continues to be shaped by the enduring presence of Jat identity, kinship networks, and caste-based authority structures that long predate the village’s urban absorption. Studies of erstwhile rural settlements incorporated into expanding cities note that lineage, caste affiliation, and community institutions often persist long after agrarian life has receded (Shah, 2012; Mehra, 2005). Ethnographic scholarship reminds

us that such continuities are not simply residues of the past, but active resources through which people make sense of urban change. They operate as what anthropologists describe as “moral” and “affective” orders — forms of belonging, obligation, and authority that shape everyday behaviour even as material conditions shift (Das, 2007).

Encounters from both fieldwork periods reflect this dynamic. Older Jat men speak of the gaon with a sense of custodianship, recalling agricultural routines, cattle sheds, and community gatherings that once anchored everyday life. These narratives do not just evoke nostalgia; they help reproduce claims to authority and legitimacy in the present, allowing elders to position themselves as guardians of local order in a village that is now deeply urban. In this way, memory, kinship, and caste continue to organise social life, even as boutiques, rental housing, and new forms of livelihood transform the built environment.

Despite the village’s transformation into a commercial hub, Jat cultural identity is performed and reinforced through festivals, gatherings, and the continued authority of the *panchayat*<sup>4</sup>, which, though informal, influences decisions about disputes, rental matters, and acceptable behaviour — patterns similarly documented in research on other Delhi urban villages (Dupont, 2007; Srivastava, 2015). Temples and local shrines function as cultural anchors, and community halls become spaces where kinship-based solidarities are enacted. Even mundane practices — seating arrangements in front of homes, men occupying specific street corners, or women maintaining *ghunghat*<sup>5</sup> in front of elders — reflect the persistence of a moral and spatial order.

At the same time, caste continues to structure belonging and hierarchy. Jatav and Valmiki households, though long-settled, occupy peripheral spaces both socially and spatially, echoing patterns observed in other Delhi urban villages where caste-based spatial segregation endures despite urbanisation (Kumar, 2015). Their narratives highlight limited access to property control and fewer opportunities to participate in the rental economy that underpins Jat prosperity. Yet, these families also articulate forms of community belonging tied to generational presence, local histories, and shared festivals.

Generational change further complicates the cultural landscape. Younger Jat men express aspirations aligned with urban mobility —

education, business ventures, private-sector work—while younger women navigate a tension between expanding possibilities and the constraints of family reputation, mobility norms, and expectations around propriety. Meanwhile, migrant workers participate in cultural life differently: often absent from local festivals due to long working hours or unfamiliarity, but forming their own networks of camaraderie in workshops, rented rooms, and local markets. Their cultural practices—shared meals, evening gatherings, regional songs—create micro-communities within the village’s larger social fabric.

Thus, cultural life in Shahpur Jat is neither homogeneous nor static. It is shaped by layered identities: Jat cultural authority, long-settled non-Jat presence, and migrant social worlds. Together, these groups contribute to a dynamic and evolving community life that blends rural memory, caste hierarchies, and urban aspirations—producing a lived cultural landscape that is emblematic of Delhi’s urban villages.

### **Labour, Livelihoods, and Everyday Economies**

The economic life of Shahpur Jat is sustained not only by its visible boutique spaces but by a set of everyday economies organised through informal labour and small-scale production. Studies of urban informality in India show that cities often depend on flexible, decentralised arrangements and networks of small enterprises rather than formal industrial systems (Bhowmik, 2010; Webster et al., 2017). In Shahpur Jat, this is visible in the dense clustering of tailoring units, embroidery rooms, dyeing spaces, packing centres, and services operating from residential lanes and converted village houses.

Drawing on Simone’s work on urban life in the Global South, these arrangements can be understood as forms of “infrastructure” created through people themselves. Rather than relying on formal institutions, everyday relationships, obligations, and negotiations hold the system together (Simone, 2004). In Shahpur Jat, workshop owners mobilise workers through kin and regional networks; boutique owners coordinate dispersed production through trust and reputation; and migrant workers share accommodation, information, and support. These interlinked relations function as the underlying circuitry through which work circulates, orders move, and livelihoods are sustained. Fieldwork conducted in 2017–18 and

2024–25 shows that these economic activities depend heavily on migrant labour, primarily from Bengal, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh. Many workers live close to or within their workplaces, sharing small rental rooms or sleeping inside workshops. Such patterns reflect broader characteristics of precarious urban employment, particularly in garment and craft-based economies (Kumar, 2015).

A tailor from Bengal described this uncertainty clearly:

*“Kaam hai to paisa hai. Boutique band ho jaye, to hum wapas gaon. Shahpur rehne ke liye mehenga hai, par kaam bhi yahin milta hai.”* (“When there is work, there is money. If the boutique closes, we return home. Shahpur is expensive to live in, but this is also where work exists.”)

Alongside migrant labourers, long-settled service groups and small local entrepreneurs participate in sustaining the village’s everyday economies. Landowners provide rental spaces for workshops and housing, boutique owners coordinate production across multiple small units, and workers contribute skill and labour under informal arrangements. These relationships form an interdependent economic system in which trust, familiarity, and negotiation are central, compensating for the absence of formal contracts or regulatory oversight.

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted these fragile arrangements. Workshop closures, return migration, and loss of income exposed the vulnerabilities embedded in informal employment. In the post-pandemic period, many workers returned under altered conditions, marked by lower wages and reduced security. Yet, Shahpur Jat’s economic life gradually resumed through the same informal networks and adaptive practices that had sustained it earlier. This continuity highlights how everyday economies in the village are relational, flexible, and shaped by lived experience, offering insight into urbanism as it is produced through work, livelihood strategies, and social interaction.

### **Power, Conflict, and Governance**

Power in Shahpur Jat is closely tied to control over land, visibility, and economic activity, and is most visibly concentrated around Dada Jungi Lane, which has emerged as the village’s primary commercial and symbolic centre. Unlike internal residential lanes where workshops, rental rooms, and

service activities are tucked away, Dada Jungi Lane functions as a curated frontage of the village—lined with boutiques, cafés, and designer studios that attract middle-class consumers from across the city. Ethnographic observations suggest that this spatial concentration is not accidental but reflects the historical dominance of certain Jat families, particularly those associated with Dada Jungi, who have been able to convert land ownership into economic and cultural capital in the era of the village’s creative economy.

Rather than acting as dispute mediators, dominant families associated with this lane exercise power through economic positioning and spatial control. Boutique owners consistently describe Dada Jungi Lane as the most “visible” and “desirable” location within Shahpur Jat—one that commands higher rents, greater footfall, and symbolic prestige. Access to this space is uneven: land ownership enables certain families to selectively lease properties to designers and premium brands, reinforcing the lane’s status as a commercial hub while marginalising other forms of economic activity to inner alleys. This process mirrors patterns noted in studies of urban villages where elite enclaves emerge within informally governed settlements, producing internal hierarchies of space and value (Dupont, 2007; Srivastava, 2015).

A boutique owner put it bluntly:

*“Yahin dikhai deta hai. Jo dukaan Dada Jungi par hai, uski pehchan hai. Andar wali lane mein rehkar brand nahi banti.”* (“This is where you are seen. A shop on Dada Jungi has recognition. You cannot build a brand from inside lanes.”)

Caste hierarchies intersect sharply with this spatial economy. Jat households dominate property ownership along Dada Jungi Lane and continue to shape decisions about who can rent, what kinds of activities are acceptable, and how the lane is visually presented. In contrast, long-settled Jatav and Valmiki households remain largely excluded from these high-value commercial spaces and are concentrated in less visible parts of the village. Their economic participation tends to be limited to service work, back-end labour, or rental arrangements with less bargaining power. These caste-based exclusions rarely take the form of direct conflict; instead, they operate through everyday practices of selection, pricing, and spatial allocation that normalise inequality while maintaining surface-level coexistence.

Power within Shahpur Jat's economy is also exercised through control over specific occupational niches, often organised along regional and migrant lines. Certain kinds of work are widely associated with particular groups—for instance, dyeing units run largely by migrants from Bihar, tailoring dominated by networks from Bengal and eastern Uttar Pradesh, and ironing and finishing managed through long-standing migrant chains. While these groups may not control land, they exercise authority within their economic domains: workshop owners regulate recruitment, wages, and access to work, often independent of village-level elites. This creates a layered economy in which dominance is not singular but distributed—Jat families control space and rent, while migrant entrepreneurs and skilled workers control labour processes and technical knowledge.

Gender further shapes the ways in which power and economic visibility are organised. Dada Jungi Lane is largely a masculine commercial space—designed, managed, and monitored by men, even as it markets a feminised consumption aesthetic. Jat women's limited presence in these spaces reflects enduring norms around respectability and mobility, while migrant women working in boutiques or salons navigate visibility differently, often under heightened scrutiny. Gendered regulation thus reinforces existing caste and class hierarchies embedded in the village economy.

Governance in this context functions less as conflict resolution and more as economic ordering. Decisions about shopfronts, renovations, signage, and customer flow are negotiated informally but are shaped by unequal access to property and influence. The municipal state appears selectively—during inspections or disputes—but outcomes are often mediated through existing power structures. Those associated with dominant locations like Dada Jungi Lane are better positioned to absorb regulatory pressure, while workshop owners and migrants in interior lanes remain more vulnerable.

Taken together, the dominance of Dada Jungi Lane illustrates how urban power in Shahpur Jat is exercised through economy and aesthetics rather than overt authority. It demonstrates how urbanism in the village is produced through selective visibility, commercial concentration, and the uneven conversion of land into value. Rather than a unified village governance system, Shahpur Jat reveals a fragmented urban order in which

caste, class, and migration shape who occupies the front stage of the city and who remains embedded in its back-end economies.

## **Conclusion**

Shahpur Jat illustrates how urban transformation is not simply a matter of changing land uses, new construction, or commercial expansion, but a lived process negotiated through the everyday practices, relationships, and tensions that shape social life. Across two periods of fieldwork—spanning the pre- and post-pandemic years—the village emerges as a dynamic urban formation where older social structures, particularly those grounded in caste, kinship, and lineage, coexist uneasily with new forms of labour, mobility, and aspiration. The built environment has densified and diversified, yet the rhythms of daily life continue to be organised through long-standing hierarchies and informal governance systems.

For original residents, especially Jat landowning families, the transformation of the village brings both opportunity and unease: rental incomes and commercial visibility sit alongside concerns about congestion, shifting demographics, and the erosion of familiar cultural practices. For long-settled non-Jat communities, the expansion of the rental economy has not erased older marginalities; rather, it has intensified spatial and social inequalities within the village. For migrant workers—who sustain the boutique and workshop economy—the village is simultaneously a place of livelihood and vulnerability, offering opportunities for skill development and income while demanding endurance of precarious housing, fluctuating wages, and limited social protection.

Ethnographic attention to gendered experience further reveals how women navigate these changes differently. Their movements, aspirations, and work choices are shaped by moral norms and surveillance practices that persist despite the village's growing urban character. Women's stories, whether of restricted mobility or emerging forms of agency, underscore the gendered dimensions of everyday urbanism in Delhi's urban villages.

What emerges from these layered ethnographic observations is an understanding of Shahpur Jat as an entangled urbanism—a place where rural memory, informal economic structures, caste-based authority, and urban aspirations intersect in complex ways. Rather than viewing urban

villages as transitional or anomalous spaces within the city, this study demonstrates that they are active sites of urban production, shaped by the people who inhabit them and the relationships they forge. The everyday negotiations of residents, workers, and entrepreneurs reveal how cities are made not only through planning decisions or infrastructural investments but through lived practices, informal arrangements, and localised forms of governance.

Shahpur Jat thus offers a critical vantage point for rethinking contemporary urbanism in Delhi. Its transformations remind us that the city is not a uniform or linear space but a constellation of differentiated social worlds, where continuity and change coexist, and where the urban is experienced, adapted, and contested through everyday life. By foregrounding these lived experiences, this article underscores the value of ethnography in illuminating the complexities of urban change—showing how the “village inside the city” is not simply a spatial condition, but a lived and ongoing urban reality.

### Notes

1. **Phirni:** *Phirni* denotes the traditional peripheral pathway encircling a village settlement, historically used for circulation and access, and still visible in the spatial layout of many urban villages in Delhi (Delhi Development Authority, Master Plan documents).
2. **Khasra:** *Khasra* refers to a revenue land parcel identified in village land records (*khasra-khatauni*), maintained under the land revenue system. These plot divisions continue to structure ownership and land use in Delhi’s urban villages even after urbanisation (Government of India, Department of Land Resources).
3. **Gaon:** Village
4. **Panchayat:** In this paper, *panchayat* refers to the informal village council or assembly of elders that continues to exercise social authority in Delhi’s urban villages. Although not a formally recognised institution within municipal governance structures, such *panchayats* play a significant role in mediating disputes, regulating everyday behaviour, and influencing decisions related to land use, tenancy, and community norms in erstwhile rural settlements absorbed into the city (Shah, 2012; Mehra, 2005; Government of India, Ministry of Panchayati Raj).
5. **Ghunghat:** *Ghunghat* refers to the practice of veiling the face or covering the head, observed primarily among married women in north India.

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