



A Morphology of the Chandrawal Landscape: From Mid-17th Century to Mid-20th Century

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Abstract

This research examines the historical evolution of Chandrawal village in Delhi, focusing on its origin, spatial transformation, social structure, and changing relationship with the city. The study traces the village from its early settlement and association with the Gujjar community to its transformation under Mughal and British rule. Special attention is given to the impact of the Revolt of 1857, British land confiscation, the establishment of Delhi Waterworks, and the shifting of the imperial capital to Delhi in 1911–12. These developments resulted in displacement, loss of pastoral and agricultural land, and the emergence of New Chandrawal near the present-day Kamla Nagar and Malka Ganj area. The study also examines the cultural significance of Pir Ghaib and the socio-economic conditions of the Gujjars. Using historical research methodology and archival, literary, and secondary sources, the study highlights how colonial policies, urban expansion, displacement, and resistance shaped the changing landscape and identity of Chandrawal. It argues that the history of Chandrawal reflects the broader processes of urbanization, land transformation, and community adaptation in Delhi.

Keywords: Chandrawal, Delhi, Gujjars, Village History, Urbanization, Land Confiscation, Revolt of 1857, British Rule, Displacement, Delhi Waterworks, Pir Ghaib, Social Transformation

Introduction

Chandrawal village is an important subject for studying how villages in North India were formed and how they developed over time. This research focuses on understanding the origin, growth, and social development of Chandrawal. It aims to find out how the village came into existence, who the first settlers were, and from where they came. The study will also examine in how many Chandrawals in this village situated and how the boundaries of the village have expanded or changed with time. An important part of this study is to see whether the professions of the villagers have changed through generations or if they have continued their traditional occupations. The research will also explore whether other communities joined the village later, and how this affected its social and cultural structure. By studying the morphology, community life, social order, and organization of Chandrawal, the research tries to understand how the identity of the village was formed and maintained. In short, this study aims to trace the complete historical journey of Chandrawal village from its early settlement to its present form and to understand the various factors that shaped its history and community life.

Chandrawal village, a *mauza* which was once spread over a large area, has been confined to a small area due to the land confiscation and acquisition policies of the British government. After the capturing of Delhi in 1803, British government needed land for administration and to control over the villages, or consolidation the British empire and to show their dominancy. In the context of Chandrawal, historians basically focus on two measure events in which their land was confiscated and acquired noted in revolt of 1857 and capital shifting in 1912. But in this research paper, I have studied how was the entire journey from the participation in the revolt to the independence. We will also see why the villagers of Chandrawal participated in the revolt, measures adopted by the British government after revolt, impact of their policies, what socio-economic changes came in the lifestyle & culture of villagers and changes in their ways of subsistence or show their resistance against the British rule. How they deeply connected with the Pir Ghaib just after the revolt, and how the waterwork program forced the villagers to move towards the north side. How the extension of Civil Lines and Kamla Nagar transformed this village and classification of Gujjars as a

criminal tribes led to their social and economic marginalization.

Chandrawal is one of the oldest historical villages of Delhi and it occupies a unique place in the city's past. This village reflects the layered transformations of the city across centuries. Today, Chandrawal stands as a site where past and present intersect & highlighting stories of resilience, confiscation, displacement, resettlement, acquisition, land rights, urbanization and adaptation, making it a key landscape in understanding the historical evolution of Delhi. And its historical roots go back to the reign of Shahjahan's period, when Emperor Shahjahan shifted his capital to Delhi in the 1648, the establishment of a reliable system for agricultural produce and dairy supply became indispensable to sustain the expanding urban population and the royal household.

To secure the essential supply, Shahjahan allotted land to agrarian and pastoral communities around the new capital. In this process, villages such as Chandrawal were settled, functioning as support centers that sustained the urban population and the royal household. The villagers of Chandrawal played a crucial role in the supply chain, because they supplied milk and agriculture products to the new city. As colonial records suggest Shah Jahan has given 2700 acres of land north side of the Red Fort near the Yamuna River. When we talk about the colonial period, Chandrawal was a huge village even in early 20th century when the British took over Delhi, it stretched from the Ridge to the Yamuna River. The village of Chandrawal was situated on the right bank of Yamuna River and in the foothills of the Northridge Delhi, also called as Kamla Nehru Ridge, a part of the Delhi Ridge which itself is an extension of Aravalli Hills. This village was inhabited by Gujjars community, they used to supply milk and other dairy and agriculture produce to the city and grazed their animals on their pastoral land. According to the oral tradition, the history of origin of Chandrawal village goes back even before the Shahjahan's period. This village existed before the reign of Shahjahan and stretched about 52,000 bighas & extended beyond the Yamuna towards the eastern side. The general traditional belief in village is that, the Chandrawal village was deserted twice, first by emperor Shah Jahan and later by British, it is called the *ujad ujad kar basne ki kahani*, means a story of being uprooted and resettled again and again. Historical records and oral traditions suggest that some villages, including Chandrawal came under the jagir of Jahan Ara Begum, she had revenue rights or administrative authority over this area. The people of Chandrawal believe that Shah Jahan ordered the destruction of this village because the villagers had killed the soldiers of Jahan Ara Begum when her convoy was passing through this village.

Old Chandrawal

Now the Old Chandrawal is situated near the Manju ka Tilla and right Bank of the Yamuna River. When the British captured Delhi in 1803, this village still extended from Kashmiri Gate to the end of the Northern Ridge along the banks of river Yamuna. When the British government needed land for the administrative purpose in Delhi, they allotted the land of the villages arbitrarily. Chandrawal village was one of those which became a victim of British

policies. This village was confiscated by the policies of Britishers over a period of time in a phased manner. And the process of confiscation was started in 1830s when around 187 acres land was allotted to the Thomas Metcalfe, who was the civil servant of British East Indian Company and agent of Governor General in the Mughal court. After the revolt of 1857, about 2/3 of village was confiscated by the British government and it was sold out as plots for the bungalows of Civil Lines (for the British officials), some portion was allotted as *maafi plots* to those who helped the Britishers and rest was kept possession by the government as *ghair mumkin* (prohibited), a technical term used for acquired land on which construction was not allowed.

The cause of confiscation of the village was that the Villagers took participate in the revolt of 1857, sacked the Metcalfe's House and occupied the arsenal of Wazirabad. The Gujjars helped the rebels to attack on the loyal elements to the British, onslaught the military cantonments and occupied the properties of the Church. The villagers of Chandrawal sacked the Metcalfe's house because it had been an eyesore for the villagers for long time and they were also looking for an opportunity to get their land back. But according to the Thomas Metcalfe's daughter, the British women and children were escorted safely to Karnal by Gujjars during the uprising. After re-confiscation of Delhi by the British in September 1857, the Gujjars were killed in large numbers and their villages were occupied by government.

There is a *Chaupal* (gathering place) in the Chandrawal village, its plaque mentions the martyrdom those who sacrificed their lives and property fighting against the Britishers to get freedom for India during the 1857 and wrote the name of their village in golden letter in the history of independence. The memory of this struggle is still preserved in oral traditions and local narratives. The retaliation was not limited to the walled city, as a punitive measure a large amount of agriculture land was confiscated from as many as 33 villages in Delhi district: Chandrawal, Alipur, Kotla Mubarakpur, Indraprastha, Palam, Wazirabad and Mehrauli are some of them. When the Bungalows were built no specific acquisition made, but the majority of them were existed in Chandrawal village. The Gujjars of Chandrawal claimed for post of chowkidars, if they were dismissed the Civil station houses would be looted. when they were dismissed from the post of chowkidars in 1908, they efficiently robbed every Bungalows of Civil Lines.

New Chandrawal

In 1911, when it was decided that the capital would be shifted to Delhi, the land was acquired for the temporary government buildings at Timarpur, Old Chandrawal and Wazirabad. This proved to be a huge disaster for the Chandrawal village and completely metamorphosed the village's physical structure and the original villagers were forced to leave the village and largely displaced and resettled near what is now modern day kamla Nagar, now it is known as New Chandrawal Village. And some of them opted for Karnal although they were offered by the king of Bharatpur on easy terms and also offered by the Sayed of Sonipat and the Nawab of Rampur. They were allotted land near Malka Ganj and villagers settled here peacefully in 1911-12. The site where the Delhi School of Economics

stands today was once the grazing ground for the cattle of Chandrawal's villagers. But over the period of time the situation was changed for the villagers, when their pastoral land came under the construction of DSE. They complained many times but no one listened to them. After Partition, due to the expansion of Kamla Nagar and campus of Delhi University the village got confined to a small area between the Kamla Nagar's market and Malka Ganj. This village has been also significantly impacted by the urbanization and as well as expansion of the Civil Lines. Civil Lines was established in the early 20th century, and Bungalows built on confiscated land from rebel villages after 1857 formed the basic of the Civil Lines. It extended on the cost of Chandrawal village, as the Civil Lines grew, the village shrank over time.

According to the report of Deputy Commissioner 1948, in the months following India's independence, several Delhi villages petitioned the government to reverse the punitive measures imposed upon them in the aftermath of the Revolt of 1857. These demands were voiced not only in local forums but also found expression in the debates of the Constituent Assembly of India. The descendants of families who had lost their lands under such retribution now sought their restoration. Prominent among the petitioning villages were Chandrawal, Chowkri Mubarakbad, Wazirpur and Khampur. There is little ambiguity that the post-1857 material milieu was deeply shaped by the punitive measures imposed on Delhi's rebels, who had been penalized by the British for their participation in the uprising. The desire to reverse these colonial impositions was clearly articulated in the decades following independence. An extract from a letter written by the General Secretary of the Congress Committee of Wazirpur to the Chief Commissioner of Delhi makes this connection explicit. The letter petitioned the Indian government to restore the lands confiscated by the British during the Jang-i-Azadi (War of Independence) of 1857, urging that they be returned 'as early as possible by the National Government.' It further emphasized that now, with the attainment of independence, the injustices and material losses suffered under the British Raj particularly the deprivation endured solely because of active participation in the revolt should be rectified, and the sacrifices of 1857 acknowledged through restitution.

Waterworks of Chandrawal

In the late 1860s villagers were forced to settle towards the north side from the village, now it is called the Old Chandrawal village, because it was decided that the Waterwork would be established here. The technology of attaching filters to wells started in late 1860s but this technique failed soon. After much discussion on financial matters and mobilize the necessary technique expertness, the huge program of Delhi Water project finally instituted in late 19th century. The wells were to dug in the populous area, the Lieutenant of Punjab gave consent to immediately vacate the village and relocate the village to the north side. Wells were dug at Chandrawal in two phases in 1892 and 1894, again the villagers were forced to settle north of the village which is now known as Old Chandrawal. The filtration techniques used initially were very simple and failed quickly within a year and the yield of water declined. An attempt was made to increase the percolation by

collecting water in trenches around the wells, but it was very slow process, due to the changes in river course and deposition of silt between the river & wells. And at last Delhi Municipal Committee was apparently happy to be persuaded in favor of artificial filtration, and in 1898 it was decided to establish filter beds, settlement tanks and other remedies at Chandrawal, where water could be taken directly from the Yamuna River. A powerful suction pump was installed on the river bank through the raw water was continuously pumped into the settlement tank and from where it was reached to the reservoir at Hindu Rao House. In 1936 the Waterwork plan further extended.

PIR Ghaib

An interesting story of the Pir Ghaib, is the remains of the 14th century hunting lodge of Firoz Shas Tughlaq that was the popular shrine for the Gujjars of Chandrawal, just like the Hardam Khayali's shrine was famous for the villagers of Begampur. Pir Ghaib was the spiritual saint for the people of villagers and they used to go here every Thursday. It is known as the Kushak-i- Jahan Numa, the world viewing palace, in the medieval Chronicles. There is a board in front of this monuments, on which its history is written, that Firoz Shah built this monument and a saint came to reside here and while praying he mysteriously disappeared, so this monument is known as Pir Ghaib. But the people of Chandrawal don't believe that it was built by Firoz, rather it was built by their Pir Baba, who often appears in the dreams of his followers which is called *Basharat*. The Pir is easily recognizable, he was older, silver hair and bearded his dressed was completely white and wore a white turban as well. Interestingly, the Urdu writer Rashid ul-Khairi mentioned account of weekly gathering held at the Pir Ghaib and its massive popularity only after 1857. During the Indian Rebellion of 1857, Pir Ghaib played a strategic role as a fortified battery station. Initially, the Indian sepoys controlled the Delhi Ridge, where Pir Ghaib is located. However, after the Battle of Badli ki Sarai in June 1857, the British forces gained control of the Ridge and used Pir Ghaib as an outpost and stationed their heavy artillery.

Villagers of Chandrawal

The villagers of Chandrawal are belong to Gujjars community and they were settled around Delhi before many centuries of arrival of Turks, there were many villages around Delhi. Chandrawal was also one such village and its origin dates back to the Mughal era. The Chandrawal village was inhabited by the Khari *gotra* of Gujjars. The Gujjars (also termed as Gujar or Gurjar) were the pastoralist and herders some of them were semi-nomadic tribes or roamed all over the northwest of Subcontinent and they kept cattle and horse. There is considerable debate among scholars on the origin of Gujjars, on the one hand British historians like A.M.T. Jackson, Vincent Arthur Smith, Colonel Todd and D.R. Bhandarkar believe that they are descendants of foreign tribes who came from Central Asia, such as *Khazars* who came with the White Huns. On the other hand, the Nationalist and Postcolonial Indian historians like B. N. Puri, K. M. Munshi, C. V. Vaidya & Dasharatha Sharma rejected the foreign origin theory and supported the indigenous origin theory. B. N. Puri denied the origin from *Khazars*, and says Gurjar are *jara* not the *Zars*. The Chinese

texts mentioned Gujars as Kshtriya, and Bana distinguished Huns and Gujars. Some claims that they were descendants of Nanda, the foster father of Lord Krishna, who was a cow herder, i.e. Go-Char.

In this study we need to focus on the socio-economic status of the Gujjars in Sultanate and Mughal period. When the Nizamuddin Aulia cursed to Tughlaqabad and said- '*ya base Gujar, ya rahe ujad*', it means either it will be taken over by the Gujars or it will become a barren land. This statement reflects the socio-economic status of Gujars. Babur in his biography mentioned about the Gujjars and says 'Whenever I have entered Hindustan the Gujjars & Jats have frequently came in enormous number from their forest and hills to steal buffaloes & oxen. Babar argues that they were most wicked who really caused the most suffering and were guilty of the most severe atrocities of country' this shows their social background. According to William Dalrymple, Gujjars were always viewed with great suspicion by their urban neighbour, who regarded them as thieves and criminals and many of the chowkidars in Mughal Delhi were from Gujar background. Afghan and Mughal military conquests led to the administratively subordination of Gujjars, Jats and Mewatis and they lost their autonomy. In the later Mughal period, the Indian peasantry was divided in two parts on the caste lines like ri'ayatis and rai'yatis. The former consisted Rajputs, Brahmans & Baniyas or they paid 1/5 to 1/4 as tax and later included the Gujars, jats & Ahir. The rai'yatis paid 50% as tax on the *batai* system, and depends on seth and mahajans for credit. Shail Mayaram exhibits that from the jowar-growing region comes a Gujar legend called Devnarayan or Bagrawat.

It is the story of a struggle between Devnarayan, the Gujar chieftain of 980,000 cows and buffaloes, and the Rajput Rana, ruler of 52 forts, to free captive cows, Pushkar is a sacred center of Gujars deity Devnarayan and his festival held at Sawai Bhuj (Ajmer) annual gathering of various clan & their livestock. Historian refers this story as a conflict between pastoralism and agrarian society. Gujjars were known for their plundering and raiding activities or were more active in night rather day, used *lathis* and plundered on straggler, refugees & travelers, sometime attacked on soldiers as well they looted treasures that being sent to Delhi. They divided Delhi for their plundering purposes after the confiscation of Delhi by the Britishers in 1803. They used to cut off the supply to the Delhi because they lived outside the city, for example during the revolt of 1857, they cut off the supply of ammunition & treasury. The great achievement of Britishers was the pacification and settlement of Gujjars and Mewatis.

Research Methodology

This research adopts historical research method to examine the morphology of Chandrawal landscape through a critical analysis of research papers, archival records, articles, journals and references books. This research explores the understanding of social development, growth and origin of Chandrawal village and the entire historical journey of Chandrawal village from its origin to its present formation and also explore the understanding of various factors those shaped its history and community life. This study focuses on the continuation of this village and what changes came over the period of time, how the villagers reacted all these

changes.

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