'Art Participolis'[1]: Neoliberal Governance and Urban Art Policy in Delhi

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Abstract:

In the last decade, the metropolis of Delhi has witnessed a surge in urban aesthetic practice – ranging from murals to graffiti workshops and community art – that draws its intellectual value from being located in the public sphere, and in supposed critique of the elitist or commercialised art world. This paper uses analytical focus on the recent emergence of street art as a legitimate public art form, in order to understand the overall arts policy of the Indian state, locating it squarely within the 'cultural economy' (Pratt 2011) of Delhi. For this analysis, it places such art within the neoliberal 'revanchism' of cities today.

Keywords: Urban art, street art, participation governance, urban space, neoliberal urban, Delhi, urban policy, public art, cultural turn, creative city, creative class, citizenship, revanchism, cultural planning, Indian middle class, citizen artist, community art

The Neoliberal Urban India:

The 20th century has been witness to an urbanisation of the globe and a globalisation of the urban. After neoliberal reforms, an increased focus on individual cities as brands unto themselves is seen, as within the global the local is marketed, and at the 'invisible hand(s)' of the free market, places undergo reinvestment and regeneration in an almost cyclical pattern. Cities posit themselves in competition with other cities, where they are regarded as driving economic growth and development.

Doreen Massey ascribes the "changing forms of the spatial organisation of social relations" (Massey 1994:168) in cities the world over to globalisation. By the 1980s, America's industrial economy had been completely discredited and cities were fast emerging as centres of a service economy. Cities therefore became tools to generate cultural, rather than productive, work forms

for a new, emerging service class. This warranted generating an economy based on cultural potential such as creativity and knowledge, which further led to the "specific transformation of culture into resource" (Yudice 2003: 28). As cities acted as the crossroad for various kinds of exchange, it became important - in this 'cultural turn' - to produce an image of the new urban; setting off a global narrative about the 'creative city'.

By 2002, the construction of a 'creative economy'[1] had become an acknowledged and stated policy goal of governments across the globe. Ever since, cultural industries have attracted attention not just from capitalists, but also from urban policy makers for their significant role in the post-industrial economy. They are valued not only for their ability to provide employment to a vast section of the urban population, but also for their aesthetic and symbolic value. With reputed positive by-effects associated with urban cultural industries, it is not surprising that this sector is deemed worthy of public investment and intervention.

In India, the definitive break from a welfare regime can be said to have occurred in 1991 when the state undertook macro-economic reform that, over a decade, liberalised trade barriers, privatised public industries and deregulated markets. It was in the 90s that the neoliberalisation of Indian economy can be said to have begun. It makes sense, therefore, to posit this moment in history as a turning point for Indian urban governance, and to locate in it the emergence of the urban in Indian political economy.

Gautam Bhan (2009) notes that contemporary India has been shaped by the transformation to liberal market economies, a focus on developing world class cities and increasingly aspirational attitudes of the middle classes (see also Nigam and Menon 2007). A close study of the impact of the New Economic Policy on Indian urban schemes reveals the change in nature of planning that Indian cities have received since the 1990s. Swapna Banerjee-Guha (2016) writes in her essay *Contemporary Urban Policy in India: A Critique of Neoliberal Urbanism* that:

> *Contemporary cities need to be analysed in their contextualities in terms of the wider economic restructuration, weakening of the State at the national scale, and its response to the priorities of the market. The process is closely connected with the neoliberal doctrine sweeping across the*

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[1] UNCTAD defines the creative economy as "an emerging concept dealing with the interface between creativity, culture, economics and technology." Source: The British Council Creative Cities Project

world, characterised by an uneven and problematic inclusion of the urban process of the South in the global urban system and generalisation of gentrification as a universal global urban strategy.

(Banerjee-Guha 2016: 67)

In policy literature, the oft-referred to McKinsey Global Institute's (2010) report[2] on India's 'urban awakening' has been influential in both, highlighting the challenges facing Indian cities as well as restating a market-led approach to urban development. It charts the evolution of the Indian urban policy discourse, associating current policy approaches to India's overall political economy of urban development. Karen Coelho and Anant Maringanti also refer to how in Indian urban policy, "the language of inclusion has replaced earlier concerns with "distributive justice" and "equity", clearly signalling the shift from dirigiste to market-enabling modes of policy intervention" (Coelho and Mariganti 2012: 21).

Concomitant to the competitive growth of cultural industries in India, the Indian metropolis has undergone significant change in infrastructural and social set-up. No matter which city you pick – Mumbai, Bangalore or Chennai – the effect of neoliberal reform on urban structures and governance can be noticed. In this context, I quote Banerjee-Guha again, who believes that:

Cities of the (global) South have started showing signs of intense spatial crisis, reflecting contradictory processes of inclusion and exclusion, characterised by (…) heightening gentrification, conversion of a larger city space for elitist consumption and exposure to a global competitive framework leading to extensive place-marketing.

(Banerjee-Guha 2016: 67)

Dupont (2011) makes clear that the rise of urban entrepreneurialism in Delhi specifically, and its recent translation into a 'revanchist city'[3] seems to replicate familiar trends of neoliberal

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[2] http://www.mckinsey.com/global-themes/urbanization/urban-awakening-in-india

[3] Neil Smith in his seminal book *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City* analysed the conditions of New York City in the 1990s and termed the city's conditions as revanchist. He described 'neoliberal revanchism' as an urban condition characterised by a political shift— from distributive and social justice based urban discourse towards an attitude of vengeance against minorities, women, the poor, immigrants, etc. This resulted in an exclusionary view of 'civil society' and also consequently of (city) spaces. I have drawn my understanding from Smith's connection of gentrifying spaces to revanchism, keeping in mind that he suggested that this phenomenon is not something unique to New York City, but is a general condition of the late capitalist city, although every urban scholar would do well to examine the specific meanings of and preconditions for 'revanchism' in their particular context, especially in post-colonial cities.

urbanism widespread in Western cities. The ambition "to make Delhi a global metropolis and a world-class city" is very clearly expressed in the Master Plan for Delhi 2021 (DDA report 2007: 2). It is with the status of Delhi as India's most flourishing 'creative city'[4] in view, that one can study its aesthetic makeover since the 90s.

In the last decade or so, the metropolis has witnessed a surge in urban aesthetic practice – ranging from murals, graffiti workshops to collaborative public art – that draws its intellectual value from being located in the public sphere, and in supposed critique of the 'elitist' or commercialised art world. In examining the political economy of such urban art, one can understand the newly evolving street art scenario in Delhi as a potential creative industry that 'cultural economies' support and thrive on. Using Brenner and Theodore's (qtd. in Kamat 2011: 190) framework of "actually existing neoliberalism" to understand the specificity of neoliberal manifestation across contexts, I analyse (the contradictions in) urban art projects in Delhi as an example of place specific neoliberalisation.[5]

City Creative: Delhi

David Harvey (1989), in his analysis of the "condition of post-modernity," laid significant focus on the immaterial forms of the city, merging the urban political-economic perspective with the post-structural, linguistic one. The discourses around the creative city repeatedly suggest and enroll the arts as a driver of urban change and regeneration. It is in Harvey's unique methodology that I find theoretical grounds to examine these discourses and forge links between capitalist enterprise and urban projects in the creative city.

Malcolm Miles writes in his book *Cities and Cultures* about how "in culturally led redevelopment, the arts are used to rebrand the built environment of city after city in the affluent world, but with

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[4] The Creative Index Report 2013, launched by the Martin Prosperity Institute, Institute for Competitiveness and The Prosperity Institute of India, has ranked Delhi as the 'most creative city' in India, with the greatest potential for success in today's creative economy. (http://martinprosperity.org/2014/03/03/understanding-india-cities/)

[5] For familiarising me to this approach I give credit to Sangeeta Kamat, who has analysed Hyderabad as a 'global city' as very much part of the neoliberal urbanism that India is witnessing. Kamat writes: "'Actually existing neoliberalism' has proven to be a very productive framework to study the particular evolution of neoliberalism at the subnational and national level in India, and the contradictions generated therein for the postcolonial state. The analytical shift to neoliberalism as process helps to make sense of why and how certain neoliberal policies and programs are chosen over others, how these intersect with existing socio-political configurations at the provincial level, and the particular strategies that the postcolonial state deploys to mediate contradictions and conflicts" (Kamat 2011: 190).

mixed impacts on the broader cultures of dwellers" (Miles 2007: 1). Further, Tim Cresswell (1992) re-affirms that the latest obsession with the 'image making' of cities is vital in cultural economies, and the new kind of street art seems to play a role in contributing to this 'image', thereby supplying positive force to cultural industries and ultimately supporting national agendas in building creative cities.

It is not incidental, of course, that contemporary street art has proliferated at such speed in global 'world cities', where the flow of capital and information is abundant. It is now often even an integral part of creativity and innovation clusters that have been proven to work hand in glove with neoliberal agendas of gentrification and place branding.

Rosalyn Deutsche (1996), in her essay *Uneven Development: Public Art in New York City*, reveals how the rhetoric of urban beauty, on the one hand, and utility on the other, were harnessed in the process of redevelopment in Battery Park City in NYC. In support of this claim, Deutsche suggests that discussions of the "new public art" attempted to build a new and peculiar image of the city. However, the real function of this new public art, she believes, was "to reify as natural the conditions of the late-capitalist city". (Deutsche 1996: 19)

This kind of cultural planning triggers cities to re-develop, especially if they expect to be competitive in a global network of 'creative cities'. Such employment of art and culture to the benefit of urban spaces has been noticed in Indian cities too. Rajeev Sethi, famous designer and chairman of Asian Heritage Foundation, Delhi, backs this claim in asserting that:

> *Culture-based initiatives built into the master plans and goals for the cities of the future have devised universal indices that position their rank as creative cities. 'Culture' and 'the arts' are often mistaken as an expendable resource… They are far from expendable, initiatives using the two have often assumed key roles in boosting local economies, renewing urban areas in decay, and promoting the type of active citizen whose pride and self-esteem is an asset to any community. To commit to these activities as an economic and social strategy is a smart form of investment for a nation state.*

(Sethi 2014)

With globalising narratives of multiculturalism, street artists now are increasingly 'allowed' (encouraged and financed), by various cultural and diplomatic institutions to 'aestheticise' the city space. These initiatives, predominantly State-run, are augmented by cultural-planning processes at the local scale, giving way to proper public art policies. Within this de-territorialised

competition among global cities across the world, Delhi seems to have acquired a particular image that can be understood, deriving from Partha Chatterjee (2004), as a consequence of the increased access of urban middle classes to international travel and media representations of the post-industrial city.[6]

To better understand the politico-economic nature of this newly emerging image of an aesthetic Delhi, one can explore particular kinds of interests – political, diplomatic, careerist – that drive wall art projects in Delhi. Among many other murals, a case in point here are the murals in the revamped Lodhi Colony's Meherchand Market stretch, with focus on the Lodhi Art District, commissioned by the GoI's Swachch Bharat Mission.[7] Additionally, in the context of Delhi's urban villages and the preparation for Master Plan for Delhi 2001-21, the Urban Arts Commission had presented in the DUAC's exhibition in April 2006, an approach towards integrating urban villages into the planning process. Interestingly, the first street art project in Khirkee village, Extension Khirkee, that was carried out by artist Aastha Chauhan (of 'Aapki Sadak'[8] fame) in 2012 was largely supported and appreciated by the then chief minister of Delhi, Sheila Dikshit, and MLA Kiran Walia, for its function of fostering a sense of community and pride in times of disinvestment.

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[6] However, this de-contextualised drive for global competitiveness involving image-building has had negative consequences too, especially for the poor, through 'cleansing' the city of slums and other allegedly undesirable elements. It seems to have intensified socio-spatial polarisation (consider the image makeover of Delhi during the Commonwealth Games 2010 when hundreds of slums were demolished and barely any resettlement offered).

[7] One must consider here that Lodhi Colony is primarily a residential area for government officers and Lodhi Road is known to house important diplomatic and cultural institutions.

[8] https://aapkisadak.wordpress.com/

IMAGE 1: Buddha Mural by Yantr, Extension Khirkee, Delhi 2012 Source:
artasiapacific.com

It is quite interesting to analyse the various kinds of 'support' that goes into these projects, bringing to light the different methods by which totalitarian and democratic regimes enroll aesthetics as a means of generating opinion (Alexander 2005). In a neoliberal democracy, one could view such 'art statism' as an experiment in political economy and problematise the aesthetic content, spatial choices and economic authorship behind these projects, believing that this can provide some insights about the potential of art to be used as state propaganda, or whether commissioned art holds the possibility of criticality at all.

One would also do well to analyse the role that diplomatic institutions of various countries play in funding aesthetic projects in Delhi. Considering the urban focus of such institutions, I view some of these 'signature' projects as tools in 'soft diplomacy' between countries. An example of this can be found in the Street Art Project BRINDA- Brazil and India in Art. BRINDA (started in 2012), a collaboration between street artists Sergio Cordeiro (Brazil) and Harsh Raman Singh Paul (India), has been supported by the Brazilian embassy in India to spread intermingling of the two cultures through wall paintings and murals. Aesthetically pleasing and culturally beneficial,

this project then acts as soft power - an ameliorating resource for both socio-political and economic negotiation.[9]

IMAGE 2: BRINDA, Delhi 2013. Source: graffitiinindia.com

For those involved in the post-graffiti world of street art or more generally contemporary urban art, the 'creative city' has a lot to offer. Not only is such creativity in the urban space duly recognised but is almost hailed as bringing about social integration through engaging with the community. While providing the artists with some level of vocationalism, such projects also initiate a discourse about a new kind of 'cultural citizenship' (Rifkin 2000: 251) that the capitalist narrative of culture-as-resource (see Yudice 2003) basically revolves around. In what appears to be a circular process, this identification of the artist as a global creative citizen is developed as a local response to the global policies of neoliberalism, which in turn is further adapted openly by neoliberal cities, in forms such as street art, that can be turned into commercial entities without encroaching on the citizen's 'right to the city'.

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[9] The project webpage describes the initiative as one that "seeks to expand the possibilities of bilateral relations between India and Brazil in addition to the diplomatic and business cycle, with projects that involve the people of both countries and that promote mutual recognition of cultural and artistic similarities and differences."

But this cultural citizenship is also, as will be made clear, a sanitising and sanitised space made up of a particular social class. Leela Fernandes implicates the state in such civic programs of urban modification, saying that "state practices are engaged in political processes of spatial purification and the production of a new middle-class-based vision of the Indian nation" (Fernandes 2004: 2428). The central aspect of her argument is that the production of this new form of 'cultural citizenship' is linked to the changing relationship between the State and capital in the context of economic restructuring.

There is no doubt that the Indian State has been claiming public space for particular purposes that match and enhance the urban middle class lifestyle. Pushpa Arabindoo's (2011) discussion of municipal transformation drives, aimed especially at the appeasement of the middle classes in Chennai, gives a cue about trends in major Indian cities, and provides a framework for viewing spatial changes in these cities as encapsulating both—a utilisation of various urban tactics, as well as a justified belief in the exclusionary nature of these practices.

It is due to the nexus between global capital and neoliberal modes of expression that a new (largely middle-class) civic culture, whose basis is valuing 'creativity' and art, is thus seen developing. While enabling the role of art as state-backed gentrifier, new forms of governance and citizenship are also activated to employ the creative potential of the artist to the fullest. Kanngieser and Shukaitis write eloquently about this:

> *The question is not whether the creative class exists as such, but rather what effects are created through how it is described and called into being through forms of governance and social action based upon these claims. Planning and shaping the city around a certain conceptualisation of the creative potentiality of labour, or the potentiality of creativity put to work, is not an unprecedented or unique development, but rather is the latest example of capital's attempt to continually valourise itself through recuperating the energies of those organising against it.*

(Kanngieser and Shukaitis 2010: 67)

Such a mobilisation of creativity that accompanies and justifies a renewal of urban space blurs the distinctions regarding public life, what was once, for example, illegal in graffiti is now allowed, even desirable, in this kind of commissioned, urban art that invites the citizen to partake in it.

Participatory Politics: Citizens/Artists of Delhi

If one views urban space as not just infrastructural but also social, it can be said that neoliberalisation has led to major reforms in the way in which not just cities are governed, but also in the manner that citizens are dealt with. One is looking therefore not just at new polities but also newer ideas and models of citizenship. Under the neoliberal State, the citizen is provided with and developed into a new kind of participatory subjectivity, by being called upon to fulfil his duties, leading therefore to a transformation in the meanings of what it means to be a citizen. Citizenship must not just be possessed anymore, it must be enacted.

To better fit the description of such neoliberal creative cities that must allow local participation and creativity in the urban (re)development process, Indian cities have lately followed suit in what has been called 'tactical urbanism'. There is a felt presence of a certain kind of citizen intervention through artists, thinkers, urban practitioners in Delhi, coming together to form civic organisations (represented in project initiatives by/like KHOJ, Sarai, St+Art India, Unbox Labs etc.)[10] and engaging specifically with the urban space. International funding agencies have, of late, displayed a preference for such civil society groups, prompting various collaborations to conduct artistic-cum-social experiments in Delhi. These experiments aim to envision 'alternate' ways of being in the city, by indulging in what has been called planning from 'below'. Several artists/artist groups are seen engaging in community art that signifies what has been called the "social turn" (Bishop 2006) in the arts and finds conceptual solace in theories of social inclusion and participatory democracy.

Of such participation, Nancy Adajania (2008) speaks in her essay, *Public Art? Activating the Agoratic Condition*, in a rather utopian tone:

> *The monopolistic claim made on public space by the state – which marks it with legislations on usage, zoning regulations, and security measures – is increasingly contested by activists, architects, designers, and artists. In their approach to public space, the official fixation on objects is replaced by an exploratory, even a transgressive commitment in processes. The results of such a*

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[10] The rationale behind such a grouping is threefold: a) Many urban artists collaborate these days with the community at Khirkee, Shahpur Jat etc. running different kinds of wall painting/ street art projects that sometimes employ local themes and indigenous aesthetics; b) Organisations like KHOJ or Sarai are generally known to propagate and support interdisciplinary research around the urban and all of these create art in direct material, as well as discursive, engagement with the city, thereby using the city as canvas/studio; c) All of these receive funding from international private organisations that ultimately view cities as competitive tools for economic growth under neoliberalism. A full treatment of the paradox inherent in the political economy of urban art is outside the purview of this paper, but has been done by me elsewhere.

commitment are not monuments, but a range of effects: from documentation and status reports, to the re-wiring of the social, political and cultural circuitry of a neighbourhood.[11]

(Adajania 2008)

A shift in the definition and understanding of art from critique to amelioration, and from artist to artist citizen can be traced back, according to Adajania (2004), to the 1990s, when as a result of globalising forces, artists were forced to come to terms with an increasingly political Hindutva presence as well as neoliberal market reforms. It is in that decade that Indian contemporary art moved out from the gallery to the public sphere and from thence, there has been a significant artistic focus on urban space, participation and community. This has since given the middle class more political access and space in which to assert claims to the city (consider the Bhagidari Scheme initiated by the Delhi Government in 2000). Through increasing civic engagement, members of the middle class have often become agents of urban change and 'betterment', challenging issues such as illegality and urban aesthetics.

That explains why despite being 'illegal', wall murals in the urban villages are now evaluated as 'public art' and are not subject to removal. D. Asher Ghertner (2011) in his essay *Rule by Aesthetics: World Class City-Making in Delhi* provides an insight into this new aesthetic of legality:

> *In this new, more aesthetic framework, the law crafts fields of intelligibility by disseminating standardised aesthetic norms. Spaces are known to be illegal or legal, deficient or normal, based on their outer characteristics. A shopping mall, even if in violation of planning law, is legal because it looks legal. A slum, even if its residents have been formalised at their current location, is illegal because it looks like a nuisance. Here, the visuality of urban space itself is a way of knowing its essential features and natural standing within the "grid of norms" on which government can operate.*

(Ghertner 2011: 288)

The discourse of participation that public art often enlists, however, has been critiqued for its potential to exacerbate urban inequality (Cooke and Kothari 2001). To begin with, one could

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[11] The referenced essay was written as a reviewing glance at a now-famous public art project called '48 Degrees Celsius Public. Art. Ecology.' This public art project, bringing together artists from various countries, targeted various sites in Delhi in order to bring focus to its deteriorating ecology. Commissioned by the Goethe Institut (in collaboration with the Delhi Govt.), the project seemed to be one of the many 'artist-citizen' initiatives that lead to the betterment of cultural economies while strengthening the way the neoliberal State functions.

refer to Grant Kester's (1995) critique of the artist as service provider, always positioned from a higher to a lower cultural level, or to Hal Foster's (1995) critique of the artist as ethnographer (1995). Kester in a harsh critique of contemporary urban politics has called community based-art, wherein a lot of local participation involves unpaid work, a kind of 'aesthetic evangelism': according to him, the logic of community-based art reproduces a reformist ideology that views personal transformation and growth as a corollary to the amelioration of social problems.

In what seems like sounding an alarm in the Indian context, artist and multimedia practitioner Deepak Srinivasan (2011) says, "Any investment from the State calls for high state of security and 'gatedness', ensuring selective inclusion of urban communities in Indian contemporary urban centres." So while the 'citizen' gets to participate in the urban process by 'taking back' space from government planners, these artistic urban interventions seem to be largely tilted towards one side in the class divide. This is exactly what one witnesses in the urban villages of Delhi that are either already gentrified (Hauz Khas Village) or are well on the way to be (Khirkee Extension).

Even the residents that are propelled to support and/or participate in such urban art, ironically, are often from the landed middle class that owns space in the village and has increasingly come to have excluding attitudes towards those that 'do not belong'. Despite the inclusive rhetoric of community and citizenship, there may often be a gap between intention and execution. This gap may have to do with something as simple as the interests of the funding bodies, or as complex as a difference between the artists' and the community's perception of the role of aesthetics, owing to social differences. One must therefore ask questions around what art means in this context to the artist, the funding body and the (resident) communities involved, the nature of participation that these communities are engaged in, and whether the projects that claim to be inclusive are not actually strengthening conditions of neoliberal exclusion. More importantly, one must examine both the geographic as well as moral boundaries that are blurred and redrawn as part of these processes in the urban space.

Interestingly, most of the work done as part of the annual street art festivals held now in various Indian cities by street art organisation St+Art India seems to represent the above-mentioned combination of 'responsible citizenship' and 'government investment'. The focus here specifically is St+Art Delhi 2014, a brainchild of street artist/ designer Hanif Kureshi, and the first international street art festival in Delhi held in the winter months of 2014. The festival, spread over 50 days with various events including a graffiti jam, a Pecha Kucha talk night, workshops, curated walks and an exhibition, officially launched on January 18 with a

documentary screening/opening gala that took place at Max Mueller Bhavan in Delhi on January 24. Some of the artists who were part of the festival are: Anpu (Delhi), Tofu (Germany), Yantr (Delhi), Tona (Germany), Alias (Germany), Sergio Cordeiro (Brazil), Inkbrushnme (Pune), Harsh Raman (Delhi), PCO (Delhi), Alina Vergnano (Italy), Amitabh Kumar (Bangalore), DAKU (Delhi), Hendrik ECB (Germany), Mattia Lullini (Italy), Ranjit Dahiya (Mumbai), Bond (Germany), M-City (Poland), Ano (Taiwan) among others.

What turned out to be the most talked about and viewed murals of St+Art Delhi 2014, were the painted walls of two significant institutional buildings in the national capital, which now qualify as the longest and the tallest murals in the country. The first, the boundary wall of Tihar Jail, sported murals that dealt with themes of imprisonment, growth, reformation, transformation etc. -- inspirational messages relevant, of course, to the background of the wall. Some artists painted in Hindi, a poem written by a female Tihar inmate across a relatively large portion of the wall, strongly localising the art to suit its location. The artists here, thus, became the citizen-reformers and the artworks became their exemplary message, ironically, for those Indian citizens outside the Tihar Jail.

The second project was a 150 ft. tall mural of Gandhi covering the façade of the Delhi Police Headquarters at ITO. Painted by German street artist Hendrik ECB, who is known for his life sized portrait murals, and Anpu Varkey, a Delhi based artist who started street painting in 2012, the Gandhi mural now stands as a major landmark in the heart of the city. On the experience of negotiating with the Delhi Police, Hendrik said in an interview in 2014, "It's not only the head of police who had to decide, since it's their wall, he had to explain the decision to other people in the government. So they said, 'It's going to be something the majority of people can agree on'." Needless to say, it could only be the face of the 'Father of the Nation' that could stand as an undisputed image in Delhi, reaffirming a particular idea of India, reflected on one of the most important buildings representative of the Indian State.[12]

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[12] A contemporary art reference comes to mind here. The way Gandhi has been dealt with in the works of contemporary Indian artists, Atul Dodiya and Ashim Purkayastha, for instance, shows a direct subversion of the public attitudes attached to the 'Father of the Nation'. However, it must be remembered that these artists engage in a more private art practice, with no obligation to the State officials and their 'views'. In direct contrast are these street artists who engage in a 'non-commercial' public practice, which relies not only on the State's approval to be considered 'art' but also is subject to viewership at all times and by all kinds of members of the citizenry of Delhi, placing on itself the onus of sharing the public's conscience.

IMAGE 3: Tihar Boundary Wall, St+Art India, Delhi 2014. Source: St+Art India 2014 project team

IMAGE 4: Gandhi Mural, St+Art India, Delhi 2014. Source: St+Art India 2014 project team

What stood, however, was the role and attitude of the State towards these two murals. Apart from mere spatial concession to the art start-up, there seemed to be an entrepreneurial investment in the artistic venture. An alternative, friendly, even appreciative, approach to street

artists, was noticed, which, one may say, might be informed by newer ways of thinking about public art as capital resource, located within a broader change in the governance of urban spaces. The following lines by St+Art Delhi 2014 Project Co-ordinator, Mridula Garg, should be able to explicate this: "…and I think St+Art was able to bring about *social investment* (italics mine) by the locals, artists and art enthusiasts in an inspiring way. Not only were the wall owners helpful but also the city's government bodies gave a heart-warming welcome" (2014).

One is reminded here of what Slater and Iles (2009) explain, "…in Foucauldian terms, governmentality uses aesthetics to penetrate the subject more deeply, to tap into our capacity for self-government. If power has become life-like, it has also become art-like." Michel Foucault (1977) viewed the management of populations, or "the conduct of conduct", as the matrix for the shift of services under neoliberalism from state to cultural sectors. From a Foucauldian perspective, the rise of neoliberalism must be understood as the culmination of a historical development that redefined the ontological boundary between economy and politics. The production of a new economic subject is a consequence of neoliberalism's political ontology: economic rationality must be the rationality of the entire society. Commenting on the relevance of Foucault's work to what he calls 'neoliberal subjects', Nikolas Rose (1999) depicts in his work the kind of government that can exist through the mentalities of individuals and groups, suggesting that relations of empowerment (often claimed even about neoliberal urban policy) are always double-edged. As Foucault (1979) writes in 'On Governmentality':

> *An enabling state that will govern without governing 'society' – governing by acting on the choices and self-steering properties of individuals, families, communities, organisations. This entails a twin process of autonomisation plus responsibilisation – opening free space for the choices of individual actors whilst enwrapping these autonomised actors within new forms of control.*

> (Foucault 1979: 20)

Under such a regime, successful citizenship is also characterised by actively giving something back to society. In this respect, many legal public art projects such as the murals part of St+Art Delhi 2014, require street artists to paint 'socially responsible' messages. The logic behind the public artist bringing art to 'everyone', as opposed to the 'selfish' gallery artist, is also what seems to drive the state-aided street and community art events in Delhi. Considering all this, one can place such art within the neoliberal 'revanchism' of cities, with due differentiation between processes of gentrification and regeneration here. Slater and Iles (2009) clarify that "regeneration

does not boil down to gentrification. Gentrification is about real estate. Regeneration is also about getting people to behave differently."

This also prompts one to interrogate the idea of the 'citizen artist'. In common usage, the term 'citizen artist' now describes artists or artists-in-training who bring aesthetic offerings into economically stressed areas or to groups who do not attend 'art' (one may refer to the rhetoric of accessibility surrounding street art events in Delhi). The impulse behind this view of citizen-artistry proposes that experiences of art are good for people, and artists who provide such experiences are better citizens for doing so. Delhi Street Art, for instance, is an organisation that "promotes creative expression among citizens" and aims at "turning a trashy neighbourhood into an artsy alley."[13] Interestingly most of their art is located in industrial areas (like Udyog Vihar, Kapashera, Narela etc.) that need aestheticisation and, of course, reinvestment.[14]

Since it is well acknowledged now that in the creative city, public art tends to act like a globally recognisable marker of urban success, even the presence of graffiti and street art can be seen as "both a sign and a medium of a district's upwardly mobile reputation" (Zukin and Braslow 2011: 133), an image that is increasingly getting attached to certain areas in Delhi that are seen as hubs of alternative lifestyles and artistic movements. Such beautification and community projects, therefore, serve to entrench new urban aesthetics based on class purity, and upon examination, may reveal as their basis, narrowing and delimiting definitions of citizenship.

Conclusion

In describing the nexus between power and urban space, the focus here has been narrowed to the case of the capital of India, which has seen intense changes since LPG (Liberalisation, Privatisation, Globalisation) both in its infrastructural set-up as well as social relations, the two being, according to me, never independent of one another. However, there is almost a universal assumption of democratisation based on the rhetoric of 'accessibility' of whatever happens in or is done to 'public space' under neoliberal governance. But it has been proved time and again that the democracy associated with public space is one limited to activation of the rights of only those belonging to a particular class and gentry. To conclude, I find it necessary to adapt Nancy Adajania's (2008) take on responsible public art in India:

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[13] Source: Delhi Street Art Facebook webpage

[14] The metaphor of the citizen artist also manages to reveal an expansion of focus that artist training has undergone: consider the fact that most of these artists are institutionally trained to be urban artists.

Art that uses the public domain as site and resource does not automatically become radical because it is made outside the hallowed confines of a gallery or because it sidesteps the commodity nature of art. It requires constant negotiations with the authorities and diverse publics it come into contact with. To perform one's citizenship in reality rather than have nominal possession of it in a country like India, we would have to define the nature of our public sphere — where discussions between opposed interests can be held freely and fairly (Adajania 2008).

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