

Raghav Kishore, *The (ungovernable city) Productive Failure in the Making of Colonial Delhi, 1858-1911*, Orient Black Swan, New Delhi, 2020, pp. 259, Price ₹ 895/- only.

This book has been brought out under the series of New Perspectives in South Asian History. It is a study of the urban history of Delhi. It begins with the regret of Ghalib regarding the change in the city after the mutiny. Its restructuring has been discussed in detail. There was a change in the ownership of property. The loyalists were rewarded and refractory elements taken to task. Their properties were confiscated and sold. To resolve the shortage of house properties, the compensation plan relied on giving credit to the owners of demolished houses to procure the confiscated houses. The overall result was the creation of a market in urban property. Both demolition and erection of property took place. It was measured, valued and sold for the highest price.

Kishore then passes on to Delhi Municipality and the challenges of urban governance. With colonial attitude hardening, the need for policing the city became necessary. Agencies like the municipality were created. It took upon itself to keep a record of births and deaths, clear drains and sewers, ensure that streets were lit at night, and that octroi duties were collected to fund works of public utility. As the city was perceived as inherently dirty and disease-ridden, native habits came under its surveillance. One of the first objects of attention was the Sabzi Mandi which was a picture of chaos and confusion. In the name of public nuisance, the municipality sought to refashion urban spaces. The chabutras were ubiquitous and projected on to the streets. At times the doors of the shops were portable and could be folded to double the chabutras. They were demolished in

public thoroughfares as they blocked public spaces. Piped water and drainage also received attention and cost-effective plans were made for them. Sanitary works trapped the municipality between huge borrowing costs and paying compensation for confiscated buildings. In all this, there was an element of coercion. Hence, the municipality was subjected to criticism. Moreover, with limited funds, it considered the repair and cleaning of drains in certain privileged areas to the neglect of others. Obviously then, the native quarters of the city would have suffered which the author has failed to take note of. Its incomplete and unfinished projects, the seemingly arbitrary methods of its operations, and heavy fines resulted in lawsuits.

Attempts were made to improve the natural landscapes. Trees were planted in the open spaces. At the same time decaying vegetation like wild cactus were removed. In the gardens fruit and other trees were planted. Kishore writes, "In Delhi, the municipality was lavished with praise for its tree-planting drives along the roadsides of the city. Colonial visitors admired the special attention given to trees, and also the fact that they were enclosed within brick-worked walls to prevent cattle from trespassing them" (p. 111). But outside the city, conditions were bad. As he writes, "... unruly and waterlogged 'jungles' were not only reminders of diseases lurking at the city's doorsteps, but also an affront to the 'civilising mission' of colonial authorities and their plans for 'improvement'" (p. 114). There is also a discussion of the riverine tracts. Sanitary conditions were bad and there was an infestation of rats which killed the plants. They were finally cleared for the Royal Durbar as the king and queen addressed their audience from the Fort. Usage of streets was also changed. Instead of their use selectively, arterial streets were thrown open for all. In this context Kishore makes a special reference to the processions of Saraogi Jains who invoked the Queen's proclamation promising equality. But it also evoked opposition. The unclad deity evoked resentment in some quarters. He writes, "At one level, streets were accessible to all those who wished to with 'religious' activities.... On the other hand, the rebellion also left a deep-seated fear of 'public disturbances' and colonial paranoia of 'disorder' on the streets" (p. 175). Thus, access to the streets was a source of bitter competition and rivalry among social groups during times of ritual processions and displays.

Lastly, there is a discussion of the railways and commercial growth. Over-bridges were planned as an effective means of creating unrestricted connections between burgeoning trade centres and passing the grid of railway sidings and level crossings. After 1880s there was a growing preference for the use of railways which slowly began to dominate but not replace other forms of transport. The Royal Durbar of 1902 was important in this regard as it became a platform through which the supposed benefits of colonial rule in terms of newer technologies like motorcars and electric tramways were launched. The Town Hall was one of the few spaces which were soon illuminated by electric lighting.

In conclusion Kishore points out, inter alia, that in 1911 it was announced by the government that New Delhi would be built. Attention was shifted to it to the systematic neglect of 'Old Delhi.'

This is a well-documented book. Kishore has used varied sources to collect information. In the field of urban history he has covered a new ground. The glossary adds to its usefulness. It is interspersed with rare pictures and figures which add to the enlightenment of the readers. Overall, all those wishing to know about Delhi in historical perspective will find this book useful.

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