

URBAN VILLAGES AND LAL DORA AREAS IN THE DELHI NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION, INDIA. A DILEMMA OF URBAN PLANNING

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Abstract: *In recent times, densely populated Asian countries such as China and India have nurtured the concept of urban villages, which present numerous constraints and limited opportunities. In China, urban villages are regarded as effective areas for redevelopment within the core urban zones of Beijing and Tianjin (Bertaud, 2012), aiming to preserve greenery and historical features. In India, certain pockets of old villages located within heritage sites have become sources of significant confusion for city planners. Ancient Delhi witnessed considerable evolution and expansion, stretching into the agricultural fields of surrounding villages. Lutyens' Delhi demarcated old Delhi's heritage rural sites with a red line, popularly known as Lal Dora, during 1908–1909. Since then, these regions have remained largely untouched, even as cafés and boutiques emerged, leaving long-time residents in uncomfortable living conditions. This paper explores an untold narrative of changes, alterations, and planning in the Lal Dora region, characterized by mixed commercial land use and limited employment opportunities. Haphazard layouts, narrow lanes, inadequate sewage systems, and insufficient water supply make the existing 135 urban villages within Lal Dora areas of Delhi a source of distress for residents. The paper highlights several planning measures adopted in these regions, aimed at improving living conditions and creating more satisfactory urban experiences.*

Key words: *Lal Dora, Urban Villages, Heritage Sites, Delhi Development Authority, Abadis, Phirni, Residential Colonies*

1. INTRODUCTION

The term *Lal Dora* - also referred to as the “red line” or “red string” - was first introduced during the colonial era in India in 1900, eight years after the region was consolidated by the Department of Revenue and Taxation. These areas comprised villages or rural settlements with heritage sites located within expanding urban settlements, later

designated as “urban villages” (GOI, 2017). Over time, rapid urbanization necessitated city planning, resulting in significant portions of land within the Lal Dora boundaries being absorbed into unregulated housing developments. Fortunately, the Delhi Master Plans and associated planning authorities advocated for the preservation and revitalization of these villages, allowing history to narrate its own story. Theoretically, urban villages represent a relatively recent concept that integrates sustainable development principles into urban planning, aiming to retain rural characteristics within the context of urban growth (Mare, 2005). A comparable phenomenon occurred in Romania, where until 1966, the number of small urban settlements grew marginally. Many villages were incorporated into urban areas, losing their identities; subsequently, these were reorganized under county jurisdictions to promote sustainability (Bendek, 2006).

Similarly, Whampoa Village - a historic harbor settlement with traditional architecture - once connected Whampoa Stream to the Pearl River. Today, it has been aesthetically preserved for tourism and leisure purposes (Xiao, 2015). As urbanization continues to transform global landscapes and cultural heritage, safeguarding sites of archaeological and historical significance becomes imperative, particularly in densely populated Asian countries. Governments play a critical role in conserving cultural heritage despite the challenges posed by development pressures (Zhang, 2023). It was observed in 2018 that homes in Delhi’s urban heritage villages embody more than physical structures; they represent communities, rituals, ceremonies, and monuments dating back to the 14th century. In China, urban villages typically exist on metropolitan peripheries, surrounded by dense urban infrastructure and services (Chauhan, 2018). These settlements are often inhabited by low-income populations and manual laborers, characterized by chaotic spatial arrangements, infrastructural deficiencies, social challenges, and extreme population density (Zhou, 2014). While economic growth tends to prioritize financial gains, development encompasses broader objectives, including social and demographic improvements. The purpose of development extends beyond accelerating the quality of life for populations; it encompasses creating and expanding diverse income opportunities while enhancing regional economies through conservation of existing land uses. However, this objective becomes challenging when planning processes encounter significant imbalances.

Historical evidence frequently illustrates the common pattern of cities expanding into adjacent villages, hamlets, gardens, and countryside - transformations that are often abrupt and aesthetically unappealing. Traces of these rural settlements, including heritage sites, persist within the continuous built-up fabric of urban regions, appearing as disruptions or irregularities - “disturbances,” “other areas,” or remnants that seem out of place. Whatever the terminology, urban villages often conflict with contemporary planning ideals (Meulder & Shannon, 2014). Urban villages should therefore receive substantial attention from policymakers, urban planners, architects, designers, and developers, alongside input from residents, to preserve them as repositories of sustainability and cultural heritage (Duany, 2003). In Western countries such as the USA and UK, urban villages are maintained as sustainable planning models - self-contained regional units characterized by mixed land uses, walkable neighborhoods, and strong community cooperation. Addressing the complexity of urban villages, however, requires multifaceted approaches that integrate cultural considerations (Wang, 2021). In contrast, developing countries in Asia experience rapid socio-economic transitions both at the peripheries and within cities. The unique, site-specific development trajectories of urban villages worldwide have generated diverse state responses and considerable dilemmas. In

the United States, such settlements have been envisioned as ideal formats for compact, mixed-use, walkable neighborhoods. Conversely, in densely populated Asian countries such as China and India, village units within cities - though historically resilient - face persistent threats of displacement under redevelopment pressures, encroachment, and overlapping urban expansion (Report, 2020). For instance, the condition of Nangal Thakran, an urban village in Delhi, deteriorated over decades as lush green fields were gradually replaced by cramped residential areas with inadequate drainage, loss of agricultural land, and poor basic amenities, as noted by Devinder Singh, a 65-year-old resident (Butani, 2021). Similarly, in the Czech Republic, following the World Wars and particularly after the Velvet Revolution in 1989, numerous châteaux, buildings, and monuments came under the supervision of the National Heritage Institute for improved management and conservation (Goryczková, 2024). The medieval urban fabric of Arabian cities exemplifies heritage tourism destinations where entire regions - not just monuments - merit preservation (Shehata, 2022). Historians and urban planners concur that Indian heritage sites have often been neglected, even within comprehensive urban development frameworks. Degenerated physical environments, poor economic conditions, and disputes over land ownership frequently hinder conservation efforts. A notable example is Nantou Ancient City in China, with a history spanning nearly 1,700 years. Today, it is predominantly inhabited by low-income migrant populations living in congested, poorly planned residential areas, leaving minimal scope for heritage protection. Conservation faces severe setbacks amid complex socio-economic matrices involving diverse income groups, inadequate infrastructure, and urgent spatial demands (Holmes, 2021). Heritage preservation in urban landscapes must therefore proceed cautiously, as issues of displacement and land encroachment can compromise both present development and historical continuity (Sharma & Tochwang, 2024).

Development in Lal Dora region as outlined by Gupta, 2014, had witnessed several types of intertwined problems of haphazard colonies, mixed and unfinished land use categories, ill-maintained relics and overall encroachment of the outsiders. Infact very recently, the government of Haryana has initiated registration of land within the Lal-Dora areas in the year 2024 (GOH, 2024). The Urban Villages of India more particularly in Delhi National Capital Region, had been characterised by unregular development, sprawling urban characteristics which have been yet not brought under suitable planning activities due to land disputes and illegal activities (Harekrishna, 2021). In the article, *when heritage is rural*, it has been aptly pointed out that China in recent times, is attending towards old villages which have built heritage and ancient territories altogether (Pola, 2019). As these discussion proceeds, this paper deals with few research questions that may be answered eventually. Firstly, the urban village concept has different meaning and approaches in different geographical locations and here the paper focusses on urban village of Delhi which have rich heritage importance. An urban village in the capital city of densely populated Asian country that too with archaeological assets have to be clearly studied in the context of planning. Secondly, the Lal Dora region of Delhi comes often in the headlines of urban encroachments, disputes of ownership and government policies. The region remains of great interest for the city planners and thus it was necessary to highlight the policies, the problems, the previous literatures, the global examples comprehensively for the ready reference.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The term *urban village* was first introduced in England in the late 1980s to describe the persistence of rural land uses and heritage sites within urbanized areas, where the pace of urbanization was either slow or deliberately restricted - posing significant challenges for city planners and designers. Previously, the concept was envisioned as a locality where the resident population could live peacefully, engage in their primary occupations, and enjoy a well-protected environment with minimal pollution and encroachment in the UK (Franklin & Tait, 2002). Such framework in urban development often 'viewed' these urban villages as examples of conservation amidst the city buzz, that are often targeted for rigorous abolishment and eradication policies (Kochan, 2015). Chng and Narayanan mentioned aptly that in certain conditions, the participation of the people who are directly and partially involved in these urban heritage sites should be useful for the sake of two reasons. Firstly, the protection and maintenance of these sites may be handled sympathetically by these local residents of the sites and secondly, these initiatives should be promoting sustainable economic growth not immediately but over the passage of time. The George Town, Penang, Malaysia is a rich heritage site where traditional and modern approaches are maintained for the conservation of the past as listed by UNESCO using traditional construction methods while introducing contemporary planning techniques of GIS mapping (Logan, 2012). Rapid urbanization in China since the middle of 1980s also gave birth to irregular development (or non-development?) of Urban Villages called Chengzhongcun. It has been narrated in the story of Parkdale, Toronto where early decades of 19th Century witnessed abrupt growth of politically independent suburbs and urban fringes, which also in the later periods of industrialization viewed haphazard sprawl and growing slums, heritage sites are neglected (Whitzman, 2009). Later, when urbanization took unprecedented pace, some places remained 'unchanged' either through governmental initiatives or planning indecisiveness or simply due to certain land disputes (Figure 1).

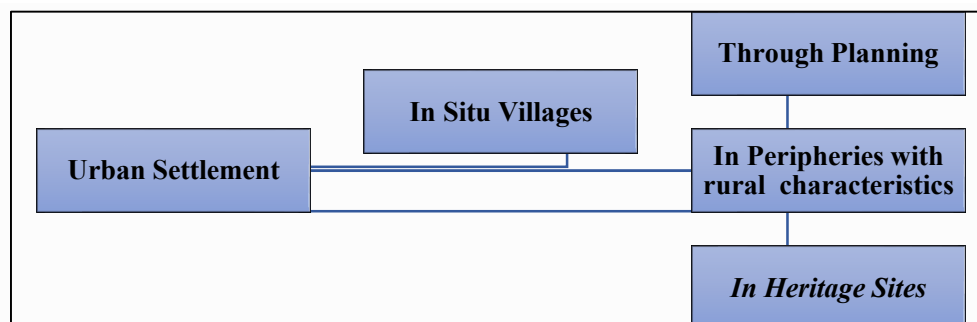


Figure 1. Urban Settlements: Growth in Various Directions

Source: As computed by the author

The British city planning board prioritised the urban villages in their nation-centric policies in the late 20th century. They also were part of the city-hinterland with strong identities of being rural. These villages within urban-scape are considered to be thing of the west and not so common in Asian cities. The cities which huge scarcity of space and land for expansion urban villages are surely a far cry. For India especially after the partition of Bangladesh and Pakistan, when the migration of people towards cities

where at its peak, maintaining villages within cities became quite challenging. Delhi being the capital of India could not afford to maintain the villages conceptually along with the heritage sites and encroachment were common. Additionally, as a reference the city of Zanzibar, popularly known as Stone Town, in Tanzania may be mentioned here where the newer buildings are encouraged to be built with coral stones and lime mortar (Myers, 2016). Many houses in these regions are so haphazardly built and that too without any building codes and regulations which had complicated the methods of new urban planning methods (Kumar & Singh, 2024). The residents have various types of occupations stationed in the Lal Dora region ranging from agriculture till retailing activities for which they are quite unwilling to relocate. It is conventional to believe that to preserve the villages within cities, planning should involve the government agencies and the end users which means the residents in one hand and the department of archeology and the veterans of historical studies in finding ways to conserve the 'heritage' and 'a piece of village' at the same time. However, change of 'land use' in the name of redevelopment and overlap of urban and rural components in the Urban Villages should be strictly condemned, believe the Urban Designers with great aesthetic inclinations. Schlager's used a method of land use planning that elaborated his ideas of urban geography for striking balance of rich urban past and the growing needs of the city dwellers. In urban theory, an urban village is a site which has mediumly dense housing and signs of good environment both in infrastructure and public utilities. These rural units within cities are indeed good examples of sustainable urban development efforts altogether. They are characterised by:

- Reducing the use of motor vehicles and promote cycle paths and walk-ways
- Offering an enjoyable neighbourhood in these villages where people work, enjoy and recreate together whole heartedly
- Enhancing a strong community feeling and interaction-based association for the villages to be continue

Bandung city which is situated in Indonesia is considered to be one of the densest cities in the country, especially in the region of Java islands that largely face the problem related to complex demography, space, land use and water supply. In fact, it is a city of clusters of urban villages originated out of the down-town locations. (Beta, 2010) The continuous inflow of migrants which gradually altered the social and economic backdrop of the city witnessed quite an interesting kaleidoscope of culture. In such situation, it is quite challenging to sustain the villages within the urban settlements. The villages which existed into the continuous built-up area of the urban settlements carried memories of the past and what remained disturbing was the gradual encroachment of urban components and haphazard land use into the regions. The decision should be very much based on the approach either to consider the regions within Lal-Dora as rich fabric of legacies or wipe away every such features of the erstwhile capital of Mughal dynasties and think afresh. Likewise, the village of Koliwada (a quiet fishing village of 20th Century) near Dharavi of Mumbai or Aldona in Goa are the examples of such old rural units within the urban settlements. It is also useful to distinguish between 'urbanized village' and an 'urban village'. An urbanized village is a socio-logical process where the 'designs' of urbanism is adopted that also witnesses a steady change of rural components to urban ones, based on population, its size, occupation, service activities and infrastructures (Mehra, 2005). On the contrary, an Urban Village is actually a rural settlement that has been caught in the process of growing of urbanization with hardly any way to return or move forward. The settlements which are now depicted Urban Villages existed very much before any

kind of planning interventions. Each time the planning proposals came in, Delhi NCR started implementing the same without the Urban Villages. They were termed protected habitation lands with little or no political and governance structures. In fact, in the year 1962 only 20 villages were declared Urban Villages but now the figure has increased to 135 and also while these villages were given the status of urban under the Section 507 of Delhi Municipal Corporation Act, the region within the red string or the Lal Dora ceased to exist. Indeed, the committee for urban planning strongly felt the need of resisting reckless waves of urbanization in Delhi but also couldn't oversee the primary advantages of such process of urbanization. However, the 'pockets of peculiar land use' like Urban Villages, Unauthorized Colonies, Slums and JJ Clusters and the Heritage Cities should be protected and redeveloped at the same time with wider street patterns, clean and decent spaces of living along with ample commercial spaces retaining their green characters for aesthetic purposes and conservation. The designated areas marked as Lal Dora that include heritage sites as well, in Delhi had been given separate status of land use which would be prevented from alterations of land use for the heritage conservation attempt (FF, 2019).

3. METHODOLOGY

The methodology part of the study paper included three phases. **First phase** was the most extensive phase which encompassed studying, examining and going through the reports, plans, drafts, different historical documents, gazetteers which mentioned Lal Dora areas of Delhi, vividly and even extensively or simply had the mention on the term. It was essentially a time-consuming phase which repetitively and quite often modified the terms like Lal Dora and urban village and that too in the Indian geographic situation. **The second phase** included analyzing the quantitative data which were mostly for the metropolitan planning purpose including the Census data. Such numerical data needed to be analysed for the sake of understanding few demographic parameters for the understanding of the study area. **The third phase** was a compilation of the first and second phase which encompassed the understanding of the areas under Lal Dora and the changing terminologies based on Delhi planning initiatives over the years. The study found that with the passage of the time, the city planners prioritize the very existence of the region marked under Lal Dora as marked since the British rule but also, calls for time to time management of the region to avoid displacement and silent encroachment. However, while working on the paper, few advantages were realised; one of these was, understanding that studying an area like a heritage site is interesting, multifaceted, and thrilling too. In fact, the historical significance, the region that tells stories and unveils many incidents that happened in the past in the present-day conjecture. Needless to say, the study enriched the knowledge of history, planning, space, administration in the common platform of Indian culture. This sometimes appear complex to bring into a single article with a fixed time frame, but such studies are always worth experiencing for the researcher.

4. STUDY AREA

The earliest settlement within the *Lal Dora* region of New Delhi was Siri, established as a military camp during the Alauddin Khalji dynasty in the early 14th century. This settlement included a water reservoir, Hauz-i-Khas, constructed to supply water to soldiers; today, these structures survive as relics that require urgent preservation (Dandona & Balani, 2019). As noted earlier, land for village *abadis* (settlements) in Delhi was demarcated during British rule and exempted from land revenue assessments, while areas outside *Lal Dora* were incorporated into the revenue system. This provision was later extended under the East Punjab Holdings (Consolidation and Prevention of Fragmentation) Act of 1948. In 1952, villages beyond the red boundary were consolidated as the extended *Lal Dora* area - previously known as *Phirni* - and assigned separate *khasra* numbers in revenue records. New Delhi, as India's political capital, spans 1,485 square kilometers within the National Capital Region. Its unprecedented growth has posed significant challenges for urban planners in accommodating population expansion and housing needs (Tables 1a and 1b). The evolution of urban villages is outlined below.

Table 1a. Evolution of Urban Villages, Delhi NCR

Year (As on)	Urban Villages	Rural Villages
1980	111	258* (156 of Delhi Tehsils and 102 of Mehrauli Tehsils)
2006	145	209
2019	214	-
2020	362	-

Table 1b. Village and Town Types in Delhi NCR (1981)

*The 258 Village settlements included (1981 Census):	Categories	Number	Population
	Census Towns	27	>5000
	Large villages	46	3000-5000
	Medium villages	40	2000-3000
	Small Villages	128	<2000
	Deserted villages	17	No Population
TOTAL		258	

The village settlements belonged to the Tehsils of Delhi and Mehrauli, of which 156 belonged to Delhi and the remaining were included in the tehsil of Mehrauli. Of such 258 Village Settlements, further changes were made by the Delhi Development Authority in the year 1985 (see Figure 2). Thus, the Delhi Metropolitan Region included, (as per DDA guidelines back in 1985):

- 15 Growth Centres
- 33 Other Growth Nodes
- 147 Villages of typical rural characteristics

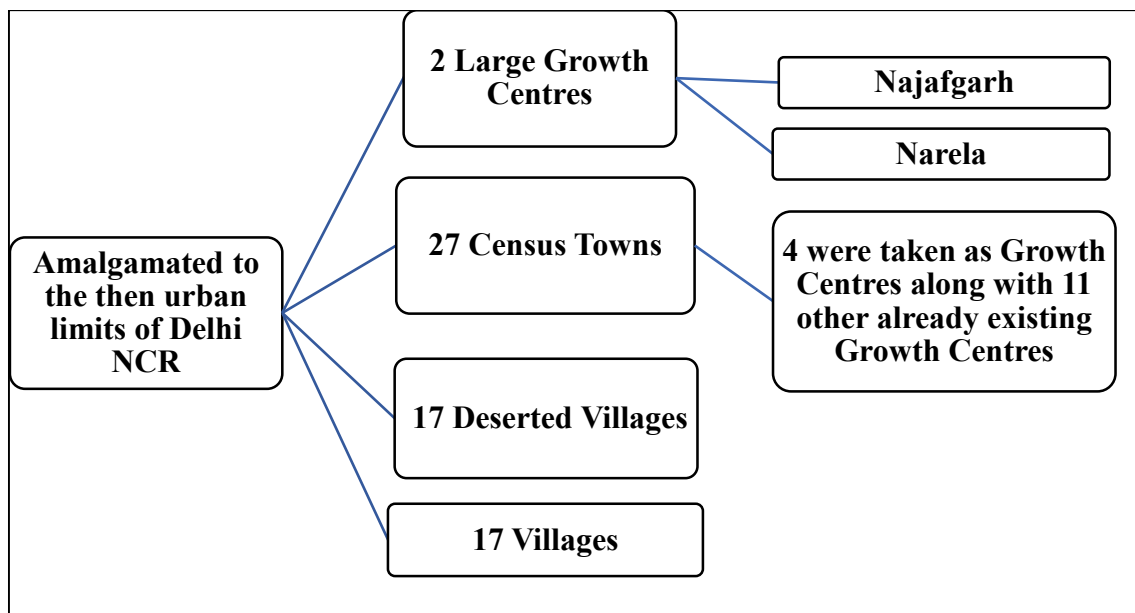


Figure 2. Delhi City and its Jurisdictions (1985)

5. DEMOGRAPHY

The city faces dilemma and confusions in this regard; as the Urban Villages are treasured by all but lack unfortunately, the basic necessities. The Urban Village named Mandoli is heavily populated as compared to the mean value, followed by Nithari. Most of the Urban Villages are categorized low as compared to mean (see Table 2 and Figure 3). This becomes contradictory as major his becomes contradictory as majority of Urban Villages record ‘low’ concentration of population deviated from mean and standard deviation, but very few are heavily populated for which separate planning is required.

Table 2. Z Score Analysis of Population Distribution in Urban Villages (152) in Delhi NCR-2011

Levels of Population Concentration	Ranges of Scores	Urban Villages	No.
Very Low	(-0.50- (-1.00)	Pur Delhi, Asalat Pur Khawad, Deorala, Badar Pur Khaddar, Badar Pur Majra Burari, Surakh Pur, Baqar Garh, Qullak Pur Delhi, Nanak Heri, Sarang Pur, Saoda, Shah Pur Garhi, Kharkhari Rond, Ghalib Pur, Hasan Pur, Kankar Khera, Kharkhari Jatmal, Kharkhari Nahar, Garhi Rindhala	19
Low	0.00- (-0.50)	Rasool Pur, Jhuljhuli, Qazi Pur, Sunger Pur Delhi, Garhi Khasra, Mohd. Pur Remzan Pur, Chand Pur, Pindwala Khurd, Zind Pur, Budhan Pur, Rewla Kham Pur, Badhosra, Darya Pur Khurd, Salem Pur Majra Burari, Daulat Pur, Shahpur	91

		Pur, Jhatikra, Sher Pur, Garhi Mendu, Singhola, Salah Pur Majra, Tigri Pur, Jat Khor, Salah Pur, Chatesar, Madan Pur Dabas, Khampur, Bihari Pur, Khera Dabar, Neel Wal, Punjab Khor, Sharmas Pur, Iradat Nagar alias Naya Bans, Samas Pur Khalsa, Kureni, Mundhela Kalan, Raota, Shikar Pur, Gadai Pur, Malik Pur zer-Najafgarh, Pansali, Taj Pur Khurd, Akbar Pur Majra, Holambi Kalan, Hamid Pur, Lampur, Hareoli, Singhu, Katwaria, Pindwala Kalan, Pindwala Kalan, Surera, Nangli Poona, Mungesh Pur, Jhangola, Hiranki, Palla, Satberi, Qutab Pur, Goela Khurud, Bodh Pur Bija Pur, Mamoor Pur, Taj Pur Khan, Nizam Pur Rashid Pur, Baqiabad, Kangan Heri, Bazidpur Thakran, Sultanpur Dabas, Holambi Kalan, Ochandi, Jaffarpur alias Hiran Kudna, Rani Khera, Goman Hera, Dera, Paprawat, Ujwa, bankauli, Jonti, Ladpur, Isa Pur, Mukhmel Pur, Saba Pur Delhi, Tukhmir Pur, Mitraon, Jaffar Pur Kalan, Bakkar Wala, Jagat Pur Ilaqa Delhi, Chandan Hala, Darya Pur Kalan, Bhor Garh and Dhansa	
Moderate	0.00-0.50	Raj Pur Khurd, Kotla Mahigiran, Qutab Garh, Barwala, Ibrahim Pur, Shakarpur Baramed, Mandi, Khera Kalan, Tilang Pur Kotla, Shafi Pur Ranhola, Maidan Garhi, Quadi Pur, Khan Pur Dhan, Tikri Khurd, Chilla Saroda Khaddar, Saidabad, Raja Pur Khurd, Bakhtawar Pur, Mohammed Pur Majri, Fateh Pur Beri	20
Slightly High	0.5-1.00	Mubarak Pur Dabas, Nab Sarai, Saba Pur Shahdara, Dindar Pur, Bapraula, Aya Nagar, Tikri Kalan, Jharoda Kalan, Dichaon Kalan, Kusum Pur	10
Moderately High	1.00-1.50	Kamal Pur Majra Burari, Karala, Malik Pur Kohli alias Rag Puri, Aali	4
High	1.50-2.00	Mukund Pur, Nangli Sakrawati, Moradabad Pahari, Nilothi, Jat Pur, Chhatarpur	6
Very High	2.00-3.00	Nithari	1
Extremely High	>3.00	Mandoli	1

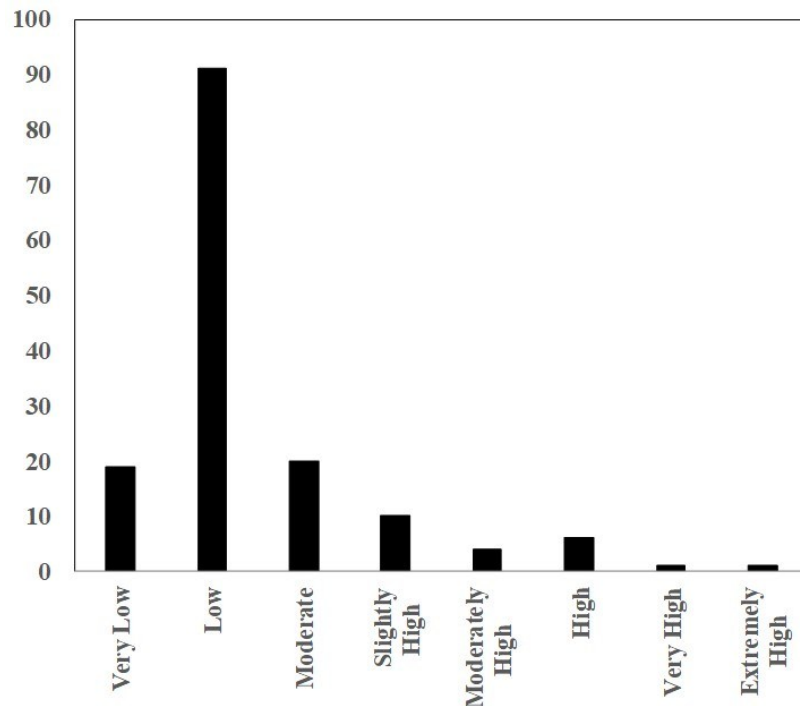


Figure 3. Distribution of Urban Villages in Delhi NCR based on Population by Z-Score-2011

Source: Demographic Profile, Census of India: Delhi NCR, 2011

6. PLANNING FOR LAL DORA

As discussed earlier the word red string or the red line (*Lal Dora*) was used in 1908, while planning for the land use categories in Delhi NCR. The region restricted from urbanization was meant to maintain its rural characteristics; settlement at its core, surrounded by Phirni or extended settlement areas surrounded by land under agriculture and livestock farming (Figure 4). Back then, such areas were demarcated literally by a red string to delineate the heritage sites with rural set up. Since then, the region has witnessed dilemma and indecisiveness as far as planning is concerned.

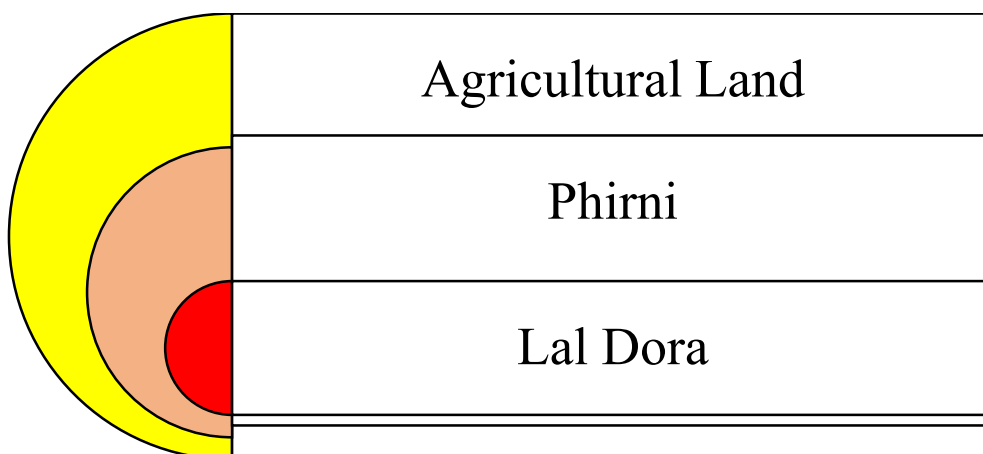


Figure 4. Laldora Area and its Neighbourhood-A Schematic Concept

What becomes distressing is the loss of agricultural lands and that to maintain the rearing of cattle for the dwellers of urban villages in Delhi NCR. The dwellers searched for alternative employment sources (opening shops, maintaining small industries, while renting out spaces for offices and go-downs). There has been quite a mushroom growth of below-standardised unauthorised colonies (1520) in these places which has further complicated the situation. The Planning Authority of Delhi National Capital Region attempts to address the long-standing chaos of the urban villages amidst the built-up area which may be somewhat successfully 'fit' themselves in the city. The Members of the planning committee who were to plan for the region within Lal Dora (ECLD) picked the challenging yet the noble task of associating and putting together the scattered 'stepping stones' of opportunities offered by the Urban Villages at the heritage sites. They admitted that all the rural villages (227) and urban villages (135) circumscribed by Lal Dora or Red line were nothing but unhealthy pockets of haphazard residences at present. Soetikno I, an urban designer and architect from the east suggested the concept of Hybrid Houses in Urban Villages of Shanghai while re-linking Suzhou Creek to the Huangpo river, which according to him may be divided into certain units;

- Spaces for Economic Activities (like shops, food courts, services)
- Work Stations or Spaces (Office, Workshops)
- Living Spaces (for family living and temporary residents)

In fact, he suggested for five major notions of making Urban Villages 'possible' amidst the dense city regions which are;

1. Breaking the dividing limit between the areas within the Lal Dora to the remaining part of the city
2. Increase the connectivity, mostly the road, to enhance the communication of the continuous urban settlement of Delhi to the region within Lal Dora
3. Re-building Activities with utmost foresight
4. Using Hybrid mode for mixed land use
5. Holistic Approach towards seamless existence of urban villages with the cities as a long-term vision

Delhi National Capital Region foresees its planning initiatives for the 2041 Master Plan through the regeneration and improvement methods upon the slums, unauthorized colonies and urban villages in particular. Delhi indeed has an advantage to 'make use' of its ever-growing economy, rich heritage while fostering its unique cultural public spaces through adaptive re-uses after great deals of adjustment. The urban villages of Delhi are filled with clothing boutiques, cafes, artist studios and other creative corners which also witness regular festivals, food and heritage walks. But such growths are haphazard, discrete and unplanned. Interestingly, these regions are quite a kaleidoscope of poor and ill-maintained houses, rich heritage sites with broken walls and shabby appearances, inadequate accessibilities due to narrow roads, mix-use hubs with potentialities of high-end retails and cultural economies with however zero safety standard maintenances (see Photo 1). In this regard Delhi Master Plan 2041, categorized the unplanned areas in the city region for the ease of planning, marked below.

1. The colonies, not yet authorised or brought under regulations
2. The regions that were initially marked within Lal Dora and those added later
3. Slums and JJ Clusters
4. Non-conforming industrial areas
5. Non-Conforming Go-down clusters

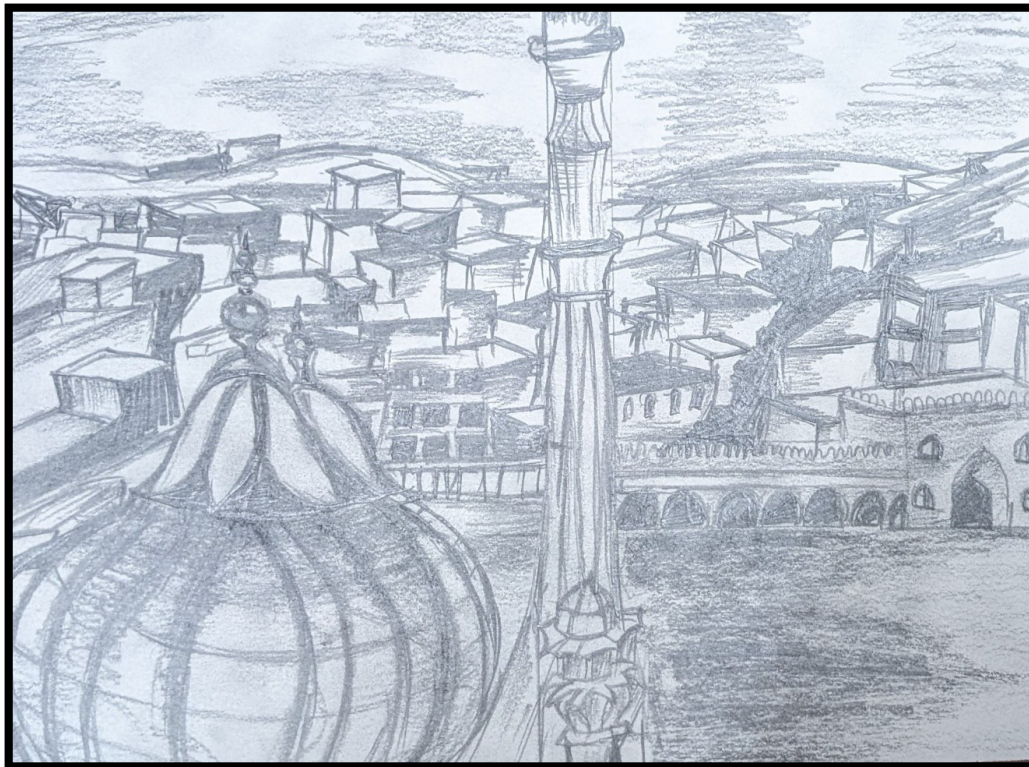


Photo 1. Urban Village in Delhi -A peculiar case of co-existence of Past and Present

The redevelopment efforts in the Lal Dora regions included the following strategies:

- Make effective and workable provisions for accommodating the present dwellers of the region and encourage its natural increase;
- Avoid segregation and only provide categorisation based on land use components;
- Renewal of decaying structures, rejuvenating the markets and its areas;
- Focus should be laid on the health and hygiene of the residents;
- Integrate nobly the decaying pockets of Urban Villages with the surrounding planned residential colonies and commercial spots;
- Usages of public unused land to proper utilization efforts;
- Promotion of trading and commercial activities to boost the market for employment opportunities;
- Conserving the traditional art and recognising its creators;
- Making the opportunities of development or redevelopment available to the end users or the residents of the Urban Villages;
- Keep the Urban Villages as they are, with upgraded infrastructures to cater to.

Such rehabilitation measures may definitely guarantee the villagers with alternative bread earning methods especially where the adjacent land to the villages would be undertaken for seamless city planning activities. Besides, the planning proposals for Delhi NCR for 2041 identified rather categorised some region for special attention mentioned below which would remain 'outside' to the land pooling processes:

- I. The area exclusively for 'green' category of land use;
- II. The land under un-authorised colonies, soon to be regularised;
- III. **The regions or pockets marked within Lal Dora;**
- IV. Lands marked for litigation or under acquisition proceeds;
- V. Land kept under 'approved status' previously by Delhi Development Authority or any other governmental activities;
- VI. Land notified as forested areas or for any such similar government-determined land uses;
- VII. Land under pre-existing occupancies or under consideration for regularization by the city planning authority;
- VIII. Areas marked for roads and natural drainage systems, wetlands, heritage sites, spaces under flood and irrigation monitoring departments, and railways or airport spaces.

In fact, in the Urban Villages, quite a few numbers of storage accommodations (or go-downs), products like food grains and marbles are often stalked. So, the plan was also to categorise these store-houses for better management with the target to be filled by the year 2023. The go-downs were categorised below;

1. Stand along go-downs: - Stand along go down plots which are not the part of the major clusters should be managed with few conditions;
2. Stand-alone go downs which would store non-hazardous materials may be allowed on minimum 30 metres Right of Ways;
3. In Urban Villages (within the boundary of Lal Dora), storage go-downs of majorly non-polluting or non-hazardous may be accommodated;
4. Facilities for proper loading and unloading things from the vehicles may be facilitated;
5. Shop owners' hazardous materials should be allowed on:
 - a) A plot measuring 300 square metres with a 9 metres Right of Way (or 7.5 metres with prior permission of the Department of Revenue).
 - b) A plot measuring 300 square metres with a 12 metres Right of Way.

The growth of cities come with the unprecedented socio-spatial dynamics reflecting the specific and unavoidable processes of peri-urbanization, rapid change of urbanization and mixed 'spaces' of urban and rural components and transitional phases of physical, morphological, demographical, political and socio-economic playing simultaneously (Dupont V., 2005). In 2014, Delhi municipal corporation marked few Urban Villages for restricted land use, especially the areas under Phirni. But within the year span of six years or so (200-2008/09) the land use characteristics were mostly altered towards urban components (see Table 3). In the city's upcoming Master Plan for 2041 the Urban Villages have well specified residential areas with adequate walkable pavements and restricted commercialization and overlaps. The areas demarcated as *Lal Dora* have been planned for group housing developments comprising multi-storey buildings equipped with basic amenities such as car parking, landscaped gardens, convenience shops, and public utilities, along with roads having a minimum right-of-way of 7.5 meters (see Table 4).

Table 3. Drastic Changes of Land Use in few Urban Villages of Delhi NCR

Areas	Urban Villages	Land Use	Built Up Area/Land Use % as in 2008-2009	Built Up Area/Land Use % as in 2002	Issues
Extended Lal Dora Abadi Area	Village Aya Nagar	Residential Built-Up Area	91	50	Forest Department
Lal Dora Area	Shahabad Daulat Pur	Commercial and Industrial	88	50	Objections raised by DDA
Extended Lal Dora Abadi Area	Nilothi Nangli	Residential Built-Up Area	51	Disputed	Absence of Lay Out Plans

Table 4. Distribution of Land Use Components-Delhi Master Plan-2041 (Proposed)

Sl. No.	Categories	Components	Codes
1	Residential*	Residential Areas*	RA
		The Areas where Foreign Embassies are located	RF
2	Commercial	Areas marked for retailing and general trading activities	C1
		Wholesaling and storage activities	C2
		Hotels and related accommodations	C3
3	Industrial	Manufacturing and Service Activities, Repairing etc.	M1
4	Recreational	Playgrounds and Park	P1
		Play-grounds and mutli-purpose play grounds	P2
		Historical sites and archaeological sites	P3
		Green Buffers	P4
		Sports Facilities/Complex	P5
5	Transportation	Airport Services	T1
		Terminals and bus stands and railways	T2
		Transport Circulation along with metro-corridors	T3
6	Utility Services	Water Supply and Treatment Plants	U1
		Sewerage Treatment facilities	U2
		Supply of Electricity (Power House, Sub-Station etc.)	U3
		Treatment of Solid Wastes	U4
		Overall Drainage System	U5
		Other Utility Services	U6
7	Under Government Uses	Presidential Estate and Parliament House	G1
		Government Offices and their Complex / Courts/ PSUs	G2
		Government Land (though uses are still not determined)	G3

8	Public and Semi-Public Usages	Sectors of Health, Education and Research activities and cremation grounds	PS1
		Sites of Transmission	PS2
9	Green area and Water Body	Green Belt: Zones of Conservation	A1
		River Zone (majorly the active floodplain), water bodies and natural drainage systems)	A2
*Land use of Village Abadi (Lal Dora) and Extended Lal Dora (notified by Department of Revenue) to be considered residential <i>Source: Delhi NCR: Master Plan (2041)</i>			

Urban villages in Delhi are particularly vibrant, featuring wall-painting initiatives near heritage monuments such as Khirki and Hauz Rani (Roy & Chatterjee, 2020). Figure 4 illustrates the location of 135 urban villages as recorded in 2001. With the implementation of land pooling policies in Delhi, many peripheral villages are now earmarked for development. However, urban villages within *Lal Dora* limits remain exempt from these initiatives. In contrast, adjacent rural lands have been pooled for urban development, resulting in the loss of agricultural and livestock farming areas - and consequently, traditional sources of livelihood. Figure 5 depicts the distribution of urban villages in Delhi as of 2011, showing a concentration primarily in the southern and central parts of the National Capital Region. At this stage, approximately 135 urban villages were scattered across the region, characterized by haphazard land use patterns and inadequate living conditions.

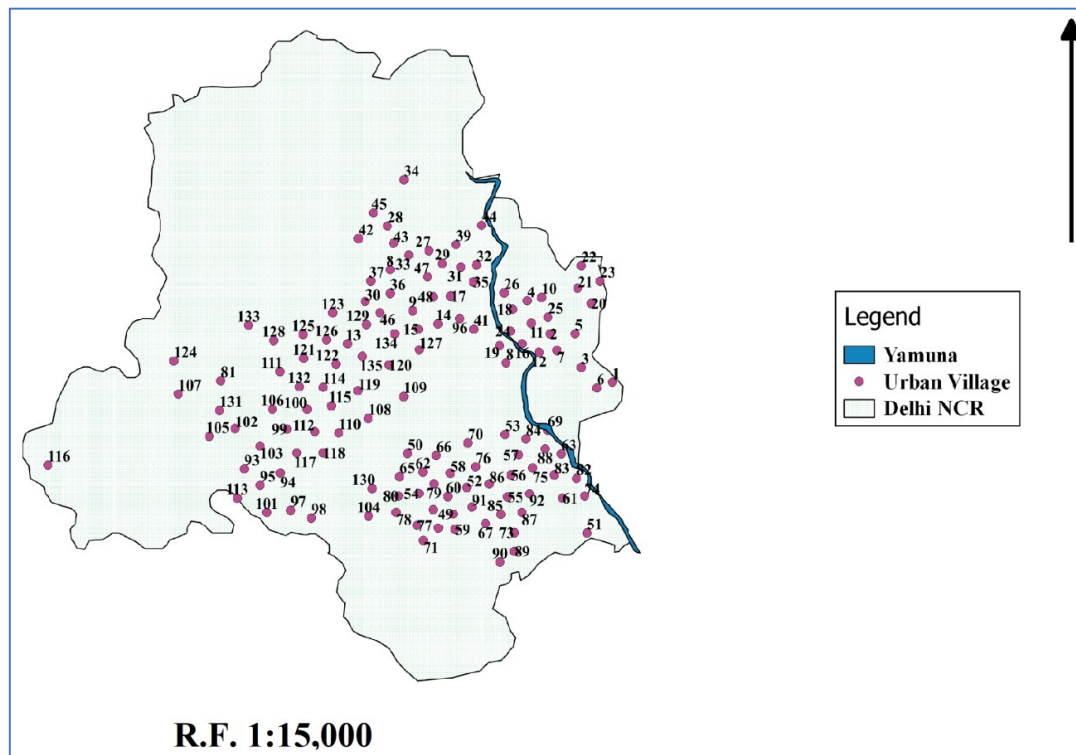


Figure 5. Delhi National Capital Region: Urban Villages (2011)

Table 5 lists the villages in the Delhi National Capital Region identified for land pooling, some of which include urban villages confined within *Lal Dora* boundaries. The initiative began with assurances that areas comprising urban villages within *Lal Dora* would remain untouched; however, adjacent rural lands have been earmarked for pooling, a move likely to impact traditional sources of livelihood such as crop cultivation and animal husbandry.

Table 5. Villages under Land Pooling Policies of DDA

Sl. No.	Planning Zones	Places where Urban Villages are located	Planning -2041
1	N	Barwala	Land Pooling
2		Mubarakpur	
3		Mundaka	
4	P-I	Alipur	Land Pooling
5		Khera Khurd	
6		Jindpur	
7		Budhpur Bijapur	
8		Nagli Puna	
9		Siraspur	
10		Mamoorpur	
11		Narela	
12		Banker	
13		Holambi Kalan	
14		Khera Kalan	
15		Kureni	
16		Bhorgarh	
17		Iradat Nagar	The old settlements as well as the entire Revenue Estate of the said village declared 'Urban'
18	J	Neb Sarai	Land Pooling
19	P-II	Akbarpur Majra	Land Pooling
20		Bhalswa Jahangirpur	
21		Burari	
22		Ibrahim Pur	
23		Jharoda Majra	
24		Jindpur	
25		Kadipur	
26		Kamalpur-Majra	
27		Khampur	
28		Mohammadpur Ramjanpur	
29		Mukundpur	

30		Mukhmalpur	
31		Nanglipuna	
32		Saleempur Majra	
33		Tigipur	
34		Fatehpur Jat	
35		Samaypur	
36		Libaspur	
37		Seerampur	
38		Bijapur	
39		Alipur	
40		TikriKhurd	
41		Gadi Khasro	
42	N	Bazidpur Thakran	Land Pooling
43		Nangal Thakran	
44		Bawana	
45		Puath Khurd	
46		Sultanpur Dabas	
47		Salahpur Majra	
48		Bhudhan Pur	
49		Katawada	
50		Jat Khor	
51		Chandpur	
52		Ladpur	
53		Kanjhawala	
54		Karala	
55		Madanpur Davas	
56		Mohd Pur Majri	
57		Rani Khera	
58		Rasulpur	
59		Ghewra	
60		Sawda	
61		Daryapur Kalan	
62		Khera Khurd	
63	L	Asalapur	Land Pooling
64		Chhawla	
65		Daryapur Khurd	
66		Daulat Pura	
67		Dichaon Kalan	
68		Dindarpur	
69		Hasanpur	
70		Haibatpur	
71		Jafarpur Kalan	

72		Jaffarpur Hiran Kudna	
73		Jhuljhuli	
74		Kharkhari Jatmal.	
75		Kharkhari Nahar	
76		Kharkhari Rond	
77		Khaira	
78		Khera Dabar	
79		Malikpur Zer	
80		Najafgarh	
81		Neelwal	
82		Pindwalan Kalan	
83		Paprawat	
84		Pindwalan Khurd	
85		Qazipur	
86		Rewla Khanpur	
87		Roshan Pura	
88		Sarangpur	
89		Samaspur Khalsa	
90		Surehera	
91		Sherpur Dairy	
92		Ujwa	
93	K-I	Ambrai Heri	Land Pooling
94		Bakkarwala	
95		Baprola	
96		Dhool Siras	
97		Goela Khurd	
98		Hastsal	
99		Kakrola	
100		Kamruddin Nagar	
101		Kirari Suleman Nagar	
102		Qutub Pur	
103		Masoodabad	
104		Mundka	
105		Nangloi Jat	
106		Nangli Sakrawat	
107		Nawada Mazara	
108		Nilothi	
109		Shafipur Ranhola	
110		Rajapur Khurd	
111		Tajpur Khurd	
112		Tilangapur Kotla	

Source: Delhi Gazette, 2021: Government of India

Notably, zoning efforts have recognized 112 urban village locations, of which one has been fully incorporated into urban jurisdiction (Table 6). Table 6 indicates that future planning zones will incorporate urban villages across the region, with Zone L containing the highest number, followed by Zones N and P-II. The Delhi Planning Authority has determined that, upon completion of land pooling procedures, a proportion of the pooled land will be returned to original owners according to a specified pattern (see Figure 7). The Delhi Development Authority has established detailed guidelines for land pooling and redistribution, as illustrated in Figure 6.

Table 6. Zones of Planning-Delhi NCR-2041

Planning Zones	Land Acquired (Area in Square Kilometres)	Number of Villages Undertaken except those Urban Villages within Lal Dora
J	0.02	01
K-I	0.07	20
P-II	62.70	23
N	90.63	24
L	228.40	30
P-I	73.65	14
Total		112

Source: Delhi Gazette, 2021: Government of India

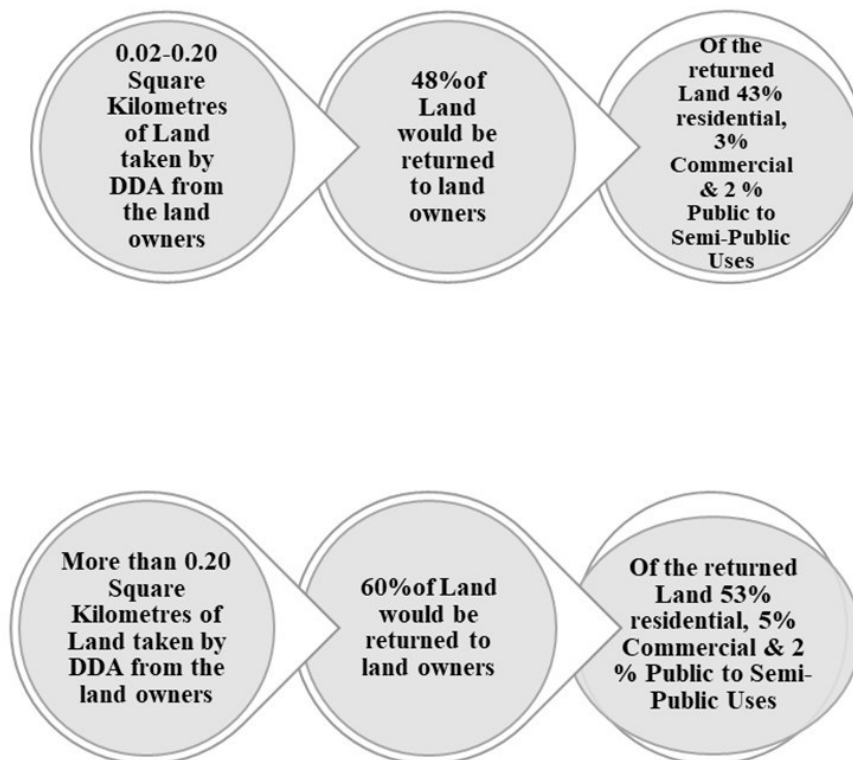


Figure 6. Land Redistribution Pattern: DDA-Mater Plan (2041)

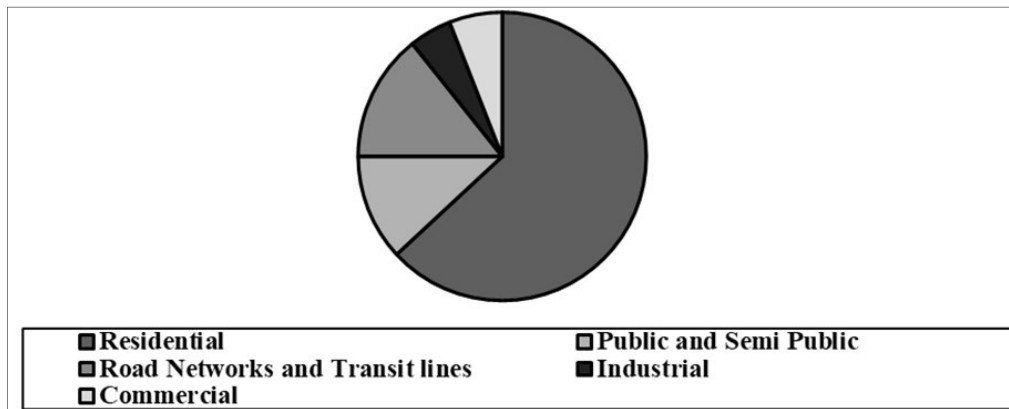


Figure 7. Distribution of Land Use Components after Land Pooling (2021)

The returned land will be mandatorily allocated for residential use, followed by areas designated for commercial activities, transportation infrastructure, industrial development, and public or semi-public facilities (Figure 7). The Figure 8 along with the Table 7, exhibits the future of Delhi National Capital Region encompassing the planning zones and zones under the Lal Dora, with reduced area as the agricultural areas are brought under Master Plan, especially in the Planning Zone L, P and J. The settlements within the Lal Dora are though exempted from the impact of land pooling, but their sources of income surely are included in the planning and re-organization attempts.

Table 7. Land Use in Delhi NCR showing the Lal Dora Area – Plan for 2041

Land Use	Area in km ²	% Share
Area under Lal Dora	101	6.76
Villages under Land Pooling	308	20.60
Urban Areas under Land Pooling	11	0.74
Greenbelt	230	15.38
Regional Park	68	4.55
Area under Wild Life	15	1.00
Planning Area	762	50.97
Total Areas	1495	100.00

Source: Delhi NCR: Master Plan (2041)

Since its inception in 1984, the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) has played a pivotal role in promoting heritage conservation within the context of urban villages. The organization emphasizes that monuments and regions constructed prior to 1803, particularly those from the late Mughal period such as Zafar Mahal, should be preserved for their archaeological significance. Structures built after 1803 but before 1947 are recommended for conservation due to their architectural value. Additionally, certain heritage sites are recognized for their cultural importance based on historical events, notable individuals, and traditional beliefs. In this regard, a grading system for heritage sites has been proposed to facilitate effective management and preservation of monuments and related structures (GOI, 2019).



Figure 8. Planning Zones of Delhi and Lal Dora Region

Source: Delhi NCR: Master Plan (2041)

7. CONCLUSIONS

Urban villages are relatively uncommon in Indian cities, yet they persist in Delhi, often clustered around heritage sites. As the national capital, Delhi already faces severe spatial constraints and struggles to maintain *Lal Dora* areas as heritage zones within an expanding urban fabric. Despite these challenges, *Lal Dora* regions remain popular destinations for cultural and heritage tourism. However, rising land demand exerts increasing pressure on urban infrastructure—such as roads, water supply, sewerage systems, and natural resources—highlighting the complexity of peri-urban interfaces in cities like Delhi. It is equally important to examine livelihood strategies and socio-spatial configurations to understand how governmental interventions influence development

patterns, urban growth trajectories, and governance challenges (Kanaujia, 2015). Preservation, erasure, and modification of land uses significantly shape city planning, particularly in overcrowded urban contexts. This complexity intensifies when heritage-rich areas require careful management to balance conservation with ongoing urbanization and renewal initiatives. Urban expansion typically radiates outward from the core—a process that accelerated in the early 21st century (Harris & Keil, 2015)—driven by rising incomes, technological innovation, and suburbanization. A five-pillar model for sustainable urban development emphasizes heritage conservation through five dimensions: **Space** (heritage city and its neighborhoods), **Economy** (employment generation), **Attractiveness** (tourism management), **Governance** (community participation in planning), and **Social Cohesion** (inclusive engagement across social strata) (Rivas, 2021). In many parts of India, heritage sites such as *Lal Dora* areas in Delhi remain relatively free from disputes, although rigorous planning efforts have been undertaken for better management (GOI, 2022). Comparable approaches exist globally—for instance, Hong Kong’s designation of Special Design Areas for comprehensive and sensitive planning (Chu & Uebegang, 2002). Similarly, strategies in Spain integrate environmental, cultural, architectural, and collaborative management principles (Palanca & Merino, 2019). Heritage conservation need not rely solely on government initiatives; public awareness campaigns, school competitions, artistic performances, and workshops can play an equally vital role (Alley, 1994). Ethiopia offers another example, where a cultural heritage spanning over 3,000 years is preserved through administrative, moral, religious, and community-driven efforts (Mekonnen & Bires, 2022). Chandan S. and Kumar A. (2019) rightly observed that historical centers, monuments, and buildings hold architectural, historical, and cultural significance, forming the core of a city’s identity and necessitating their preservation for future generations. Cities renowned for their historic architecture and cultural heritage often face challenges posed by rapid urban development, which tends to prioritize short-term economic gains over cultural preservation—a trend from which Delhi should not be an exception (Sato, 2024). Based on these discussions, several factors constitute the backbone of *in situ* heritage conservation (Oberg, 2021):

- Architectural and historical value
- Style and indigeneity
- Social and cultural significance
- Associations with historically relevant individuals or communities
- Function and activities
- Geographical context and land use
- Uniqueness and aesthetic appeal
- Originality and narrative value
- Streets, lanes, paths, and traditional *mohallas*.

Disputes and tensions pose significant threats to the survival of urban villages; while these issues demand global attention, they remain inherently local and deeply rooted in cultural contexts (Zhao & Li, 2023). Managing historically significant urban landscapes requires a holistic approach that integrates heritage conservation with the upgrading of essential urban infrastructure (NIUA, 2022). Government agencies play a critical role in city planning, yet balancing cultural preservation with development objectives remains a formidable challenge. Beyond governmental efforts, several welfare societies have undertaken commendable initiatives to maintain heritage sites and their

neighborhoods. One notable example is the Qudsia Bagh Welfare Committee, which oversees the upkeep of the Mughal-era park in Delhi (Report, 2021)

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