

By Sidharth Mishra



Till about a week back, Jahangirpuri was hardly known to the city it exists in. The best introduction to Jahangirpuri beyond the subterranean cultural world of Delhi was that of a Metro station.

Not that Jahagirpuri itself has a great Metro traffic but is connecting station for those going to the new centres of higher education across the border at Sonipat in Haryana. The buses of these institutions frequent Jahagirpuri Metro station for the pick and drop of the students.

Coming back to Jahangirpuri and the other colonies of similar nomenclature, they have always made to headlines for the wrong reasons. Excepting for Janakpuri, which was the first planned sub-city by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA), most of the remaining residential colonies going by the name of 'Puri' are either resettlement colonies or unauthorized colonies.

While there might be differences in the property documents kept with the civic authorities between a Mongolpuri and a Jahagirpuri, they form part of the same social and cultural paradigm which can be safely called Delhi's underbelly.

Many of these Puris find origin in another bulldozer drive taken in another era. In 1975-76, with former Union Minister Jagmohan, then at the helm, DDA undertook the drive to clean the national Capital of its slums. Jagmohan had a mentor in Sanjay Gandhi, then all-powerful General Secretary of the Congress party and son of then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

The Puris of Delhi: Plagued by depravity

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While the media then painted a very 'anti-Congress' stories about the bulldozer drives undertaken by Jagmohan, several years later they would have realized that these resettlement colonies actually went on to become the strongholds of the Congress. Be it Jahagirpuri, Mongolpuri and Sultanpuri in Northwest Delhi, Seemapuri, Trilokpuri and Kalyanpuri in East Delhi, Govindpuri and Dakshinpuri in South East Delhi, Sitapuri in South-West Delhi and Pashchimpuri in West Delhi, they have remained pockets of influence of the Congress leaders and now the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). It goes without saying that most of these Puris mentioned above, and the list is no way exhaustive, rank low on the index of education, sanitation, health facilities and civic amenities and high on the crime graph.

Delhi since times medieval has enjoyed the status of being the main trade transit point of north India. In the second half of the last century it also became the main manufacturing centre of north India. With such spurt in economic activities, these colonies came to become homes of labour working in the factories, which worked in the authorized industrial estates, and those which functioned illegally in the unauthorized colonies.

Many of these colonies also became centres of illegal manufacturing and it goes without saying that it all happened under the patronage of political leadership and civic administration.

The policies of the present Aam Aadmi Party government of providing subsidized power and water supplies in addition to a very liberal liquor policy has only added to the depravities plaguing these colonies. These colonies need to be cleaned of its vices, and there could not be any doubt it.

However, what has raised the eye-brows is the suddenness of activity on the part of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-controlled civic body. Jagmohan as Minister in Atal Bihari Vajpayee government in 2003-04 had cleared the slums behind Raj Ghat. His political intent was very clear, to clean his constituency (New Delhi) of negative votes.

He, however, did it with some finesses, relocating the slums to way off Narela. The current BJP leadership could revisit Jagmohan's papers on how to create safe political constituencies by relocating people, whether it was for the Congress or later for the BJP.

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