

Subjective Place-Making in the City: Role of Neighbourhoods and Gatekeepers in Place-Making of Northeast and Muslim Women Migrants.

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of neighborhoods and gatekeepers in the place-making practices of Northeast and Muslim women migrants in the urban landscape. This paper primarily employs secondary literature to shed light on the everyday negotiations these migrants go through to make place for them in the hostile city. Place-making is a conceptual category that is examined and contextually explored through understanding the role of neighborhoods and gatekeepers. The role of the neighborhoods is discussed as a transactional site and in providing familiar environments. The gatekeepers, on the other hand, are resourceful individuals who facilitate the transaction of migrants to the city. Through the case of Northeast and Muslim women migrants, this paper examines how the experiences in the city are tied to the identity of the migrant groups. In this way, this paper looks at how the practice of place-making is driven by experiences based on identities in the city. This study is significant as it focuses on the contextual and subjective experiences of different groups in the city and moves beyond the homogeneous understanding of urban experience. The case study of Northeast and Muslim women migrants gives us an opportunity for a comparative assessment, which emphasizes the role of subjectivity to understand the experiences tied to identity in the city.

Keywords: PLACE-MAKING, NEIGHBOURHOOD, GATE-KEEPERS, NORTHEAST MIGRANTS, MUSLIM WOMEN MIGRANTS

The relation between migrants and the city is dynamic. Migrants come to metropolises with their innate subjectivities and interact with space. The process of adoption in the metropolitan space has various effects on the metropolis and migrants. However, the experiences of adaptation to the city have various layers and cannot be generalised based on the migrant's identity. The identity is consequential and determines the adaptation strategies employed by the migrants on their arrival in the city. (Jorgensen et.al, 2001)

The process of adaptation is closely related to the subjectivities of the migrants. To understand the dynamics of

adaptation, one needs to look at how migrants get by in the city on their arrival with their inherent subjectivities.

At the same time, the adaptation mechanisms adopted by the migrants are mostly invisible to the others.

Place-making practices provides a comprehensive framework to empirically understand the mechanisms of adoption. Henry Lefebvre's concept of Place-Making, taken from his dialectical approach to everyday life and the social production of space, provides a free framework for analysing how migrants accommodate in urban space. According to him, people forge a relationship with the spaces. The process of forging the relationship is called place-making. Place-making, according to Lefebvre, is the everyday practice by actors that shape the space. (Lefebvre, 1991)

Whereas, according to Friedemann, migrant's adoption depends on the development of the rhythm of life in the places. According to him, Place-making occurs when migrants create routines and interactional places within the city. (Freidmann, 2007) Gustafson, in a similar way, relate places with the personalisation that migrants perform overtime to forge a link with the city. (Gustafson, 2001)

Furthermore, the theories of Place-making make a distinction between Space and Place. Here space is understood as bleak and meaningless materiality and only becomes place by gaining subjective meanings ascribed to it by the inhabitant. (Susen, 2013) Although the process of creating a place out of space is counter-hegemonic, such activities do not happen in a vacuum and have bigger processes affecting them. This is precisely appropriate in the context of the reorganisation of urban space in India in a neoliberal era (Baviskar, 2003; Bhan, 2009). Furthermore, the clear distinction between space and place cannot be made, and it can empirically non-existent. (Merrifield, 1993)

Moreover, Place-making, as a practice, needs empirical accounts and designation of activities that come under the preview of the same. Different tactics, practices, politics, and objects fit into place-making, and which fit into expressions of identity, as most actions and objects fit into both. The difficulty is presented in form of taking migrant experiences of Delhi and fitting them into a fixed conceptual framework.

Although, the attempt to conceptualise adaptation of migrants in context to only Place-making seems to fall short of empirical. If identity is cursory to the experience and adaption, then the generality the concept presents is again problematic to the understanding. In other words, there is a possibility to deduce too much into some actions, just as it is possible to deduce too little into others.

Although the theoretical significance of the concept of place-making cannot be discounted in any way possible, to account for the empirical, there is a need for a material manifestation that connects the migrant's

life with the city, eventually leading to Place-making. The aim is to present an overview for place-making, which accounts for the subjectivities of the migrants, their struggles and early exposure to the metropolis. In this account, the place-making takes on a context-specific shape, which is initially absent in the grand account. In order to empirically account for the practices of Place-making in context to the migrants, this paper seeks to narrow down its focus. Firstly, the role of neighbourhoods and gatekeepers is examined in the Place-making of migrants. Secondly, the inquiry to account for the subjectivities of the migrants seeks to examine the role of Neighbourhoods and Gatekeepers in context to Northeast and Muslim Women migrants.

Both Neighbourhoods and Gatekeepers are influential in the early exposure of the migrants to the metropolis, eventually initiating place-making activities of the migrants. In a way, they determine the exposure to the city. The aim of this paper is to understand their role in migrant's life.

Another task this inquiry adopts is to understand the interplay of identity in relation to the urban space. In this way, the enquiry seeks to present an overview of the Northeast and Muslim women migrants in the city, their experiences and place-making in the city. The role of Neighbourhoods and Gatekeepers takes on a context-oriented and subjective role when discussed in connection to the identity of a few marginalised groups.

Although this enquiry emphasises the role of Neighbourhoods and Gatekeepers, it also tries to present a nuanced understanding of the interplay of identity and moves away from the 'Victim of the city narrative' and looks at how migrants experience and express their presence in a multi-layered: Marginalised; Ethnic; Cosmopolitan way through their Place-making practices. Due to the worldwide lockdown in the wake of CoVID-19, by the time I started writing this paper, this inquiry to understand the role of Neighbourhood and Gatekeepers uses secondary sources only to map out the narratives of the migrants from these two sections and treat their narratives as an entry point to understand Place-making. Although the inquiry mainly focuses on the narratives of the city of Delhi, it also uses some of the narratives from the city of Mumbai to further the analysis plane.

Violence and marginality as a binder

To further understand the role of Neighbourhoods and Gatekeepers in the Place-making of Northeast and Muslim women migrants, first, it is essential to understand the peculiar choice of both the groups in context to this enquiry at hand. Moreover, it is essential to understand the peculiarities of both the groups and their

experiences in the urban landscape. This section points out the essential markers of identity, which in turn shed light on the subjectivity of the groups and how they construct themselves in the urban space.

Violence and Marginalisation are two treads that connect these two migrants and their conceptualisations in the Urban scenario. Northeast migrants, for the longest time possible, are only conceptualised in the urban scenario as victims, whereas northeast migrants experience Racism in urban cities. All the ethnic groups are lumped into a singular frame based on racial characteristics. This Singular category is again differentiated from the Indian Mainstream. (Mcduie-Ra, 2013)

Racism in Delhi is reflected in the epithet 'chinky'. Tribals are constantly subject to this epithet as they move around the city. They hear the term in their workplace from colleagues, from other students in their university classes and even from non-tribal friends. Epithets matter because they reflect deeply embedded stereotypes about tribes and have an impact on social exclusion, whereas Racism is manifested in various layers of discrimination and Violence. This discrimination is felt especially in the housing market, where people from the northeast find it difficult to find adequate housing at fair prices in the city. (McDuie-Ra, 2012c)

In Delhi, repeated harassment at continuous intervals consists of name-calling, denied admission into establishments (especially upscale bars and clubs), dual pricing and sexual provocation (kissing noises or propositions). Whereas grave Violence against women from the northeast is even more widely observed. In Delhi, cases of the gang rape of a Mizo Women and the Beating of two siblings by their landlords is a testimonial to that. In the first case, the perpetrators waited for the woman to be dropped back to her home in a tribal enclave in the early hours of the morning after shift work at a call centre, suggesting that she was carefully targeted (Chandra, 2010). In the second case, the siblings from Manipur had confronted their landlord, who had installed a camera in the female sibling's bedroom and frequently made obscene gestures to her (Northeast Support Centre and Helpline, 2011). According to McDuie-Ra (2012c), one of the biggest reasons the urban ethnic enclaves flourished in the city is due to the notion of safety that these sites represent. Where Violence and Marginalisation of northeast migrants are based on Racial lines, the Violence and Marginalisation faced by Muslim women migrants are as nuanced, where community perception and religion-based incidences of Violence define their daily lives in the metropolises. Muslims in India, despite their diversity, are categorised in a single grouping that shares certain attributes in common, a religion with minority status and a collective experience of Marginalization. In India, the impact of the, 1992-1993 communal riots, Babri-Majid demolition and Gujrat Riots of 2002 had a serious impact on the community, which came

together despite their differences and became more closely knit. (Menon and Hasan, 2004) As Ravinder Kaur (2005) points out, communal Violence produces effects that alter an urban space. According to Kaur, Violence on the minority often result in pushing traditional community boundaries afar.

The Violence, apart from hitting the community to reconfigure itself in tight knits, work as a trigger for the community to impose grave restrictions on the mobility and expression of identity in the urban space (Khan, 2010). Muslim women hence become victims on two different levels and experience the city through layers of violent past and community impositions. The role of community imposition is essential to understanding the place-making of Muslim women in the urban context. At the same time, their lives are heavily understood through the permissibility allowed by the community in general.

This inquiry, to account for the subjectivities of Place-making activities of migrants and emphasises the role of Neighbourhoods and Gatekeepers, take this marginality and Violence as a marker of identity. Violence and marginality become a significant aspect through which these groups experience the urban space. But in no way, this inquiry limits the experience of these groups based on their identity markers but through identification of these two markers bring two communities together in the analysis.

Furthermore, Violence and Discrimination push people together into their own ethnic groups, consequently leading to the formation of ethnic neighbourhoods and strong kin and ethnic ties in the urban context (Kipgen et al. 2019; Angelova, 2015; Mcduie-Ra, 2013).

Subjective neighbourhoods

Neighbourhoods as a category of analysis to understand urban India is majorly neglected while examining the influence of identity. In the Urban context, caste, class, ethnicity, and religion are hard to understand without the influence of neighbourhoods, which provide a plane for the social formation of identities and an arena of social and cultural influence. (Abraham, 2018) Arjun Appadurai (1995) give importance to the neighbourhoods in the process of place-making and conceptualise them as localities that are relational, contextual and also fragile. According to him, neighbourhoods require 'the continuous construction, both practical and discursive, of an ethnoscape against which local practice are imagined to take place' (1995:184) place-making in neighbourhoods require the construction of locality in a certain space and the recognition of a nonlocal space outside the locality inhabited by the others. The importance of the interplay of identity and their discursive formation of practices are essentially expressed by neighbourhoods

in the urban scenario. Accordingly, this section treats neighbourhoods as an essential entity through which the expression of subjectivities of migrants can be essentially captured in the urban space. Whereas the section emphasizes the role of the same in the place-making of migrants.

Snyder (1976), in his work, give emphasis to the presence of neighbourhoods that are geographically identifiable groupings based on kinship, friendship and tribal or ethnic identification. Migrants on their arrival essentially prefer to move into one. In the context of migration, neighbourhoods are conceptualised in two important ways:

1. Urban neighbourhoods as a small recreation of ethnic or religious social order. (Hellman 1956; Hunter, 1934; Banton, 1956; Bruner 1961; Turner 1962)
2. Urban neighbourhoods as a milieu in which the individual makes a transaction to urban life. (Abu-Lughod, 1961; Bruner; 1961; Mar 1961)

Consequently, this section locates neighbourhoods in these two diverse frames to understand their roles in migrant's place-making.

Urban neighbourhoods as a recreation of the familiar

In context to Delhi, two localities represent ethnic and religious neighbourhoods featured heavily in the secondary sources; Humayupur and Jamia Nagar. Both localities have a strong presence of migrants from a particular ethnicity and religion. In the literature, the theme of chain migration was prevalent, which led to the formation of whole localities based on kinship and ethnic or religious ties. (Colombijn et al. 2003; Pratsinakis et al. 2017)

The localities rise tied to the fact that migrants from both groups find it difficult to find residential space elsewhere in the city because of their respective identities. (Tapan, 2014; Angelova, 2015) Landlords either exploit them with high rents or refuse altogether to keep them as tenants in different localities of Delhi. (Kipgen et al. 2019)

Due to the high density of people from similar ethnicity or religion, the practices of migrants are easily revived in these neighbourhoods. Duncan McDuie-Ra (2013), in his study of the Humayupur locality of Delhi, which

is predominantly occupied by the migrants from the northeast, describe how a different world exists within the narrow lanes of Humayapur, which is concealed from the city as a whole. Most people who own businesses in these localities are from the same community. Shops sell products that essentially feature in the lives of migrants back home. The locality of Humayapur features shops selling specialities like Nagri (Fermented fish), Sagop (Dry Pork), Bamboo shoots, Baal (Yam), which are essential for Kuki Migrants back home. (Kipgen et al., 2019) Similarly, stores feature clothes and other amenities which are part of their regional cultures and cosmopolitan identity. (McDuié-Ra, 2012b) Similarly, Jamia Nagar, with a major population of Muslims, provides an open space to express religious affiliations in the form of easy access to masjids for namaz. Local eateries also provide delicacies preferred by the community, like Halal meat. (Mehta, 2010) Apart from serving the needs of the migrants in a metropolis, these neighbourhoods present a peculiar avenue for movement and access. In Delhi, most Northeast migrants are young and unmarried and lead different lives than those of their counterparts and families back home. (Angelova, 2015) Although they reside with people of similar ethnicity, they access spaces in the city and mingle more freely. Young men and women share residential spaces together, with no obligation of marriage.

Muslim women also experience life more freely, even with the familiar. Urban spaces are always accessed with an intention, like studying and small work. The permissibility of such avenues is available to Muslim women only due to the assurance these familiar neighbourhoods provide to the families of Muslim women migrants back home. (Tapan et al. 2014)

Liberty to express is even enhanced in these neighbourhoods, wherein Humayapur men and women walk freely in market squares, in attires of their choices, mingling freely on streets with friends at any hour of the day, where such a possibility is not present back in their hometowns or even outside the neighbourhood due to safety issues of both men and women. (McDuié-Ra, 2012c) Muslim women also relatively feel free to make such choices which they are not back home and mingle and engage freely due to the permissibility of family members offered only within the neighbourhoods. (Khan, 2010)

Urban neighbourhoods as transactional site

Although the experience of Northeast and Muslim women migrants are majorly framed under the garb of Violence and Marginalisation, migration is a promising prospect for both types of migrants. Whereas, there are various promising reasons for migration, escaping the conflicts back home (Tapan et al. 2014), the

opportunities provided by the neoliberal transaction of the city (Dupont, 2011), to escape toxic households (Hasan et al. 2004) and the prospect of social mobility. As Thapan et al. (2014) describe, Muslim women insist upon marrying grooms who work in metropolises like Delhi to better their own chances for employment and studies.

These neighbourhoods, while providing homely refuge, also serve the function of safe access to the city for various migrants. Violence is a major issue that paints the life of Northeast and Muslim women migrants in the city. These neighbourhoods provide a safe venue through which migrants access opportunities available in the metropolis.

The majority of Northeasters work in hospitality, retail and call centres in Delhi, which require late hours by men and women. The neighbourhoods like Humayupur provide safe passages to access entry and amenities to these migrants at convenient hours. (Ramesh, 2016) In the case of Muslim women, accessing opportunities like university education and work is more permissible by their families as their concern for safety is eased by neighbourhoods. (Khan, 2010)

Apart from safety, these neighbourhoods are associated with the function of forging a strong identity by the migrants living in such places. The migrants residing in these neighbourhoods are able to forge an identity apart from just as a victim of the city as these neighbourhoods provide a space that is free yet familiar. Community formation and action due to the proximity of migrants become easier. (Psatsinakis et al. 2017)

In recent times, both groups have emerged stronger and asserted their identities symbolically. Muslim Women assert their identity through veiling. Hijab, rather than being a symbol of religiosity, has become a marker of political identity that these women assert. Hijab has become a way to contradict Islamophobia in the public spaces of the city. (McGinty, 2014)

Northeast migrants also assert their identity in contradiction to North Indian Mainstream. Duncan McDuie-Ra, writes, 'tribal migrants themselves embody the dramatic discord between the ways tribals see themselves and the ways they are perceived in Urban Spaces.' (McDuie-Ra, 2012c p. 3) Northeast migrants use fashion, consumption of Korean popular culture, different food culture to express themselves as Cosmopolitan in ways different from others around them.

The neighbourhood for these migrants become a doorway and a bubble through the safety and refuge of which migrants benefit from neoliberal opportunities, feel safe and assert their identities politically against the

mainstream.

Accessing the city through Gatekeepers

Though neighbourhoods influence migrants experience and interaction in urban space, they are still marked by people who inhabit them. The neighbourhood represents a plane of everyday activities of migrants. Only through the inhabitation do neighbourhoods become a category in themselves. Accordingly, to understand the process of place-making, neighbourhoods are still a macro category, whereas the interaction needs human actors to facilitate the same.

This section attempts to move beyond the category of neighbourhoods to understand the role of Gatekeepers in the place-making activities of Northeast and Muslim women migrants in the urban space. Gatekeepers are individuals who, because of their experience, knowledge or socioeconomic position, provide linkages between the dominant urban society and the neighbourhoods. The gatekeepers serve to facilitate adaptation and problem-solving. Personal relationships back in urban society facilitate gate keepership. (Snyder, 1976) Furthermore, gatekeepers are primarily associated with chain migration into the cities. Kipgen and Panda (2019) divide the chain migration into three stages:

1. Innovator Stage- are the ones who first discovered the opportunities in the city and migrated with no support.
2. Early adopters- First ones to migrate to city space with the help of Innovators. Responsible for creating communities in urban space.
3. Late adopters- are the ones who migrated with the support of kin and kith into the cities and reaped the benefit of chain migration.

The ethnic community, kin, kith and friends who migrated before the current stream of the migrants, predominantly assumes the role of gatekeepers. Gatekeepers are the initiators of new inhabitants into the urban space. They introduce the newly arrived migrants to ways of urban living and facilitates their transition to the urban space. Narratives of both Muslim women and Northeast migrants feature the roles of gatekeepers in the adoption of the city.

Muslim women migrants and gatekeepers

The literature on Muslim women migrants in urban space looks only at the role of kin and kith network in the

act of migration itself and does not touch upon nuances of the same process, where there is a need for more articulate research in the same area. The gatekeepers play essential role in migration of Muslim women to the city. According to Hasan and Menon (2004), Muslim women migration is completely dependent on kin and kith network, whereas ninety-seven per cent of women surveyed confirmed the linkage. Accordingly, most women migrated to urban centres after their marriage to grooms, working in the cities. Another set of migrants who migrated for education and jobs lived with their kins of some kind or at least lived within their own communities. The networks are the biggest facilitator of Muslim women migrants where access to the city on their own is almost absent in this case.

Here, the facilitators are also the one who limits the interactions of the migrants in urban space. As Mehta (2010) noted, about eighty-six per cent of these women need permission from their husbands or closest male relative to engage in most of the activities that require them to venture out of the neighbourhood. Khan (2007) understands the restriction imposed on the Muslim women living in metropolitan centres with the incidences of Violence and threat faced by the Muslim community.

Northeast migrants and gatekeepers

Compared to Muslim women migrants, the literature available on the gatekeepers for northeast migrants is plenty and go beyond the role of gatekeeper just as a pull factor for migration. Going through each aspect will require a separate paper of its own. However, this section highlights a few important roles played by gatekeepers in the context of northeast migrants.

The following points summarise broadly the roles played by gatekeepers in this context.

1. Providing Accommodation on arrival. (Kipgen et.al, 2019; McDuie-Ra, 2012a)
2. Providing jobs and opportunities through referrals and bringing your buddy schemes. (Ramesh, 2016)
3. Introducing and helping the newly arrived migrants in admissions to educational institutes. (McDuie-Ra, 2012b; Angelova, 2016)

Although the broader roles summarise the basic requirements, the role of gatekeepers is even more nuanced than it seems. Gatekeepers, introduce the recently arrived migrants to their version of the cities, which eventually shape their association and practices in the urban landscape themselves. (Kipgen, 2019) Again at this point, touching each aspect is not possible, though, here summarisation will be of much importance.

As most northeast migrants are young and unmarried, urban space provide a free plane to create bonds beyond blood and marriage. Gatekeepers play a fundamental role in the process as they introduce newly arrived migrants in neighbourhoods, places of work and educational institutes to their already available networks of friends and kins. The role of gatekeepers is even more important in context to northeast migrants as they rarely interact outside their own pan-ethnic northeast networks. (McDuie-Ra, 2012b)

Secondly, Gatekeepers introduce newly arrived migrants to a cosmopolitan way of living, specific to the identity only in the urban landscape. In turn, through the embracing of cosmopolitan identity, newly arrived migrants enter new modes of interactions, routines and rituals. These comprise of visiting places, like churches, parties, and meetings; consuming media; shopping and food habits. (McDuie-Ra, 2012a; 2013; Angelova, 2015)

Finally, the gatekeepers, through the introduction to networks and rituals of urban living, help in building a sense of community and belonging in urban space. Where communities help in voicing concerns of new migrants, providing safety against Violence and organising protests and rallies portraying concerns.

Conclusion

over the course of three sections, this inquiry touched upon the role of neighbourhoods and gatekeepers in place-making practices of Northeast and Muslim women migrants. Place-making as a theoretical construct is empirically understood through micro categories of neighbourhoods and gatekeepers, where Violence and marginality bonded the two district groups in an urban context. Neighbourhoods played the role of providing familiarity and transition in the metropolis, whereas gatekeepers on various levels supported the place-making of the groups in the city. However, micro in their own rite, neighbourhoods and gatekeepers provide a comprehensive way to capture place-making in urban India in context to particular identities. Although there is a need for further research on the roles of food practices, community centres, fashion etc. in the place-making of Northeast and Muslim women migrants in the city, which in turn help in understanding the subjectivity brought in by different migrants and their practices and move away from homogenised narratives of city spaces in turn of larger phenomena like globalisation. The research in microscale can also eliminate generalisations based on pan-identities emphasising homogeneity in groups like Muslim women and Northeast migrants and look at more specific narratives which different sections bring to the table.

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