Time Out Delhi

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Badi Assad

DJ three-way
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World famous in Punjabi Bagh

Band Baaja

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Happy

TJ's Crunch

Fresh from Tihar Jail

West Side Stories

west delhi special

Rajinder Nagar
ਰਾਜਿੰਦਰ ਨਗਰ

जादूगर गायन!

Kriti

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SANJEEV SAITH

Memory lane

Photographer **Sanjeev Saith**, whose family was one of the first to settle in New Rajendra Nagar, recalls growing up in the 1960s and '70s.

We all presume that the area was named after Dr Rajendra Prasad, but different people and institutions still spell it differently. When we got our post office (and the pin code 110060 to ourselves – before this, we had had to share Karol Bagh's 5), a large board spelled it as Rajinder, and that has stuck. It is a small example of the Punjabification of the area that started when Partition families were settled here.

The first wave of refugees settled in single-storey barracks in Reading Road (now Mandir Marg) and the peripheries of Connaught Place. My family moved to New Rajendra Nagar in May 1951: the original houses were in blocks of eight, and had a common roof. This was when the Alstonia outside our house was planted. We still live in the original house, but sadly it is the only one left on the street. The rest have been pulled down and converted into multistoried residential blocks.

Rajendra Nagar is like a mini-valley, because it is surrounded by the Ridge forest on two sides. It is flanked on one side by institutions such as the Ganga Ram Hospital (always, "Sir Ganga Ram Hospital" to my parents), and by the "school mile" (named for Bal Bharati, Ramjas and Springdales schools) on the other, that stretches until Pusa Road. Up until a few years ago, the area was also called Deemak Nagar, because of a persistent termite problem. These pests apart, there were jackals and peacocks in the neighbourhood. Even ten years ago, I'd spot the occasional Indian fox, and once, a Neelgai.


ANUPAM SHARMA

Ridge recorder Sanjeev Saith's family home is the only one of its kind left standing; (left) Saith's photo of Shankar Road around 1977

I studied at St Columba's School. In the mornings, one of those green, snout buses would come to pick me. After school, I'd head down to old Mr Nangia (I think that was his name)'s cycles-for-hire shop and go around the colony – all for 25 paise. Then, one birthday, my father gifted me a cycle, which I was supposed to ride down to the school, which is at a distance of about five kilometres. Schools close down on the merest of excuses these days, but I remember I had to cycle to school even in the winter. All my friends would wait for me at the gate because my clothes would have a slender layer of ice (the result of a combination of the Ridge's mist and the wind chill) that they wanted to poke and break into shards.

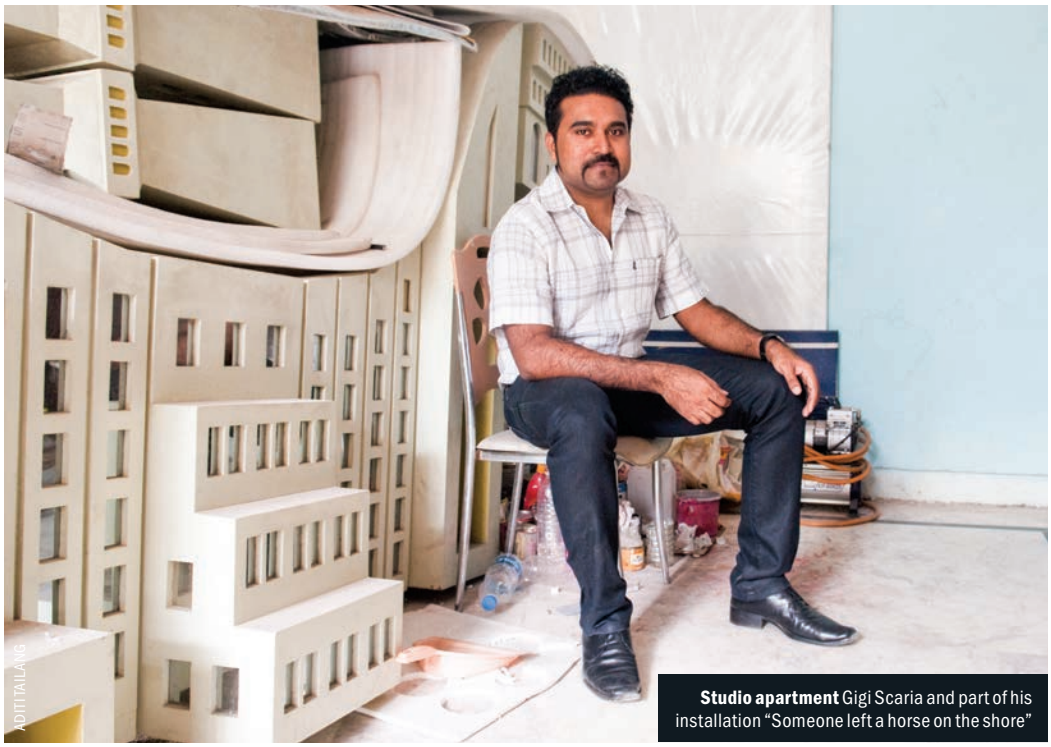
In the early 1960s, when people still had time to spare and everyone knew everyone else, the neighbours would meet over a long, leisurely Sunday brunch: I christened it the Eating Club. The men did what is called behas karna – debating about politics, inflation and government policies – while the women turned to singing. All of this happened in the street (my mother would take 45 minutes to reach my aunt's place, barely 20 houses away, meeting and greeting everyone on the way) and the congregation entered the house only when they wanted to eat. In the early days, the members put together elaborate spreads, but later it was decided that every household would limit themselves to only four dishes. Slowly the meetings started to peter out; people aged, began to fall ill, or became immobile.

Some other preoccupations have also fallen off the radar. My cousin Suman Saith used to rear and fly homing pigeons. He had close to 400 birds at one time, and he knew them all by their markings. Endurance flying contests were frequent (and held at the national level), where neutral referees would be invited to judge. The pigeons were sent off and at the end of the day, when they'd grow tired, they'd come back to rest. The number of hours they'd spent in the air was logged, and the cumulative time recorded.

Other entertainment options were limited. My friends and I would visit the Rabindra Rangshala, a large amphitheatre in the neighbourhood, for film screenings; I watched *It's a Mad Mad Mad World* the first time here. The other two cinema halls, Naaz and Sheila, were in Jhandewalan (Naaz used to be where PhotoInk Gallery now stands). The other hall we frequented was Filmistan, which I passed on my way to St Stephen's College everyday in the bus. The actress Neena Gupta travelled in the same bus, and would leave her long hair untied. That memory is inextricably linked with another one from that time. The hall was close to a few butcher shops and every morning a row of bakra heads stared back at me – but Neena Gupta never did.

Several of New Rajendra Nagar's landmarks have disappeared over the years. We used to get milk from the gaushala down the road, then later DMS booths, and now Mother Dairy outlets. Every evening, a mithaiwala came to your doorstep to sell sweets, but along with the ganderi and phalsa sellers, he seems to have also slipped through the cracks.

As told to Karanjeet Kaur.



ADITI TAILANG

Studio apartment Gigi Scaria and part of his installation "Someone left a horse on the shore"

Life on a Metro

Gigi Scaria tells **Sonam Joshi** how living in Rohini shapes his art.

Rohini has no pretensions of being a cultural hub. Originally conceived by the DDA in the 1980s as a sub-city to house the capital's teeming millions, the roughly 40sq km neighbourhood today consists of endless rows of residences: some built by the DDA, with its patent drab architecture; and other slightly more imaginative structures built by the cooperative group housing societies that were allotted land here.

Yet Rohini is also an unlikely muse for multimedia artist Gigi Scaria, 38, who has lived here for the last 13 years. Scaria, who is originally from Kerala, calls his work "local" in its content and context. "You may construct a completely different reality and make up your own world, but it basically comes from the prototype which you actually experience," he told us. Initially, it was the practical question of employment that brought him and his wife Prerna here, soon after earning a MFA in painting from Jamia Millia Islamia University in 1998. The couple taught art in local schools, with Scaria taking classes 1 to 10 in neighbouring Harsh Vihar's Deepayan Vidya Niketan. After four years of teaching, he was awarded with the Inlaks scholarship in 2002. A bigger break came in 2007, with a solo exhibition titled *Absence of an Architect* at The Palette Art Gallery. He's since gained some prominence in the art world; last year, some of his works were exhibited at India's first national pavilion at the Venice Biennale.

Even though Scaria's work has taken him far and wide, he choses to continue residing in Rohini, appreciating its "planned development and green cover" over "congested and polluted" South Delhi. In a quiet locality in Sector 14, his house is within walking distance of the "Japanese Park", though, as Scaria jokes, there is nothing aesthetically Japanese about it, it's just that some aid from Tokyo contributed to its development. His nearby studio, the next sector over, is in a light green building, conspicuously marked by billboards of the neighbourhood health club just behind it. At the entrance is his disassembled sculptural installation of a wooden horse, titled "Someone left a horse on the shore" (2007), which turns out to be a metaphor for his artistic engagement with urban expansion.

Scaria's art often hints at his physical location on the north-western periphery of the city, adjacent to the agricultural lands of Haryana. For "Someone left a horse on the shore", he drew upon the myth of the Trojan horse to create a wooden animal whose body resembles the exteriors of local apartments. Scaria subsequently placed and photographed the installation in four locations around Rohini and Rithala. In this context, the installation alluded to urbanites conquering the hinterlands on the periphery of the city.

The identical architecture of Rohini's apartment blocks has also been a motif of development in Scaria's work. Vast stretches filled with newly constructed, uninhabited apartment complexes in Sector 27 – an "ocean of apartments" Scaria calls it – provide the backdrop for photographs of his "Wheel", a Ferris wheel with seats shaped like apartment blocks. "There are similar scenes in other parts of Delhi," Scaria said, "but here the view of the apartment blocks is clearer and the visual impact is very strong." Together, the horse and the wheel are grim chroniclers of the city's continuous expansion, and the dislocation this growth entails.

Living in the north-western corner of the city has inevitably meant a lot of travel within it, especially to the galleries and museums of central and south Delhi. While travelling on a motorbike to Vasant Kunj for a teaching job in 2005, Scaria would look at and observe the changing cityscape around him. "This daily commuting created a lot of thinking space for me," he said.

But it was the introduction of the Delhi Metro line to Rithala in 2004 that changed everything. Today, Rohini is one of the Delhi Metro's major hubs. The residential complex is interspersed with shopping malls, parks, institutional areas and a court complex, and has grown to more than 50 sectors. Scaria finds it difficult to imagine the past before the Metro, and says it provided him with a new artistic perspective. "On a Metro ride, you could see another layer of the city from a completely different perspective," he explained. "That came because of the elevated Metro track here."

From the Rohini West Metro Station, Scaria began photographing the construction of malls and the coexistent workers' shelters – a project that became his series "Site Under Construction". He also drew inspiration from the view overlooking the Netaji Subhash Place Metro station for his animated video "Amusement Park", in which brightly lit, revolving buildings evoke a carnival atmosphere. In 2011, Scaria's association with the Metro and experiments with placing art in public spaces received a further fillip when three of his sculptural installations were placed at two stations along the Metro's Airport Express Line. While most people might notice the major landmarks – the Metro Walk Mall, with its water park, the PVR multiplexes – in Scaria's works, the coming of commercial spaces is often represented by images of the labourers who have built them.

Even as his adopted home inspires his work, Scaria describes Rohini's cultural life with a pinch of salt, calling it "the property dealer's city", whose residents enjoy eating out, and visiting malls and multiplexes. "I would tell friends that everyone has books in their homes in Rohini – and they are the Yellow Pages," he quipped. His neighbourhood might not be the city's cultural centre, but Scaria has ensured that it's far from being on the margins of the art world.

ADITI TAILANG (2)

Going places Sly R gets around

In the hood

Simran Bhalla gets the down-low on a growing hip hop scene from Sly R, a Vikaspuri rapper.

Pacific Mall in Subhash Nagar is an upscale, sprawling shopping centre, gleaming brightly amidst the dusty old roads and buildings that surround it. It's an unlikely breeding ground for a new guard of desi rappers, who throw around phrases like "he's a G" as if they're on the streets of Atlanta. Yet this is where we met rapper and singer Sly R (aka Roopansh Sharma) and beat boxer Kashish Dagar – at the Cinnabon of their choosing. That's not to belittle their street cred: the two were born and brought up in Vikaspuri, attended school together at Kendriya Vidayala, and are two players in a burgeoning hip hop community in West Delhi.

It was during their school days that Sharma and Dagar became interested in rap. "I was watching a video in 2002, of 50 Cents 'In Da Club'," Shara said. "I was so influenced by it. I also wanted to do the same thing." Last year, the 21-year-olds formed a crew called Project Hustle with two other members. Many of their former classmates have rap crews with names such as D Souljaz; most of them have ordinary day jobs. Sharma is a graphic designer, while Dagar reluctantly divulged to us that he is an engineer.

According to these two, the West Delhi hip hop scene has as many divisions – or "beefs" – as any street culture. Sharma and Dagar are derisive of "wannabe" rappers. "Most of the rappers think that 'we can get chicks', you know – they just put 'rapper' before their name," Sharma told us. "Rapper Brijesh, rapper Ramesh," Dagar laughed. He added, "They record stuff, but it's childish. They're not into social things. They just rap about money, girls, that shit." Sharma agreed, and stressed the realness factor: "The main thing is that we're not fake. They're like wannabe Lil Wayne. They also rap about guns. I'm like, if you don't have a gun, why are you rapping about it?"

Not that Sly doesn't touch on the usual subjects. Take "Yeh Narazgi Kyoon": "Chal, mere saath/ naache saari raat/jabtak bachte nahi subah ke chaar in the clock./ Main hoon raja/ tu banegi rani of my block." But he'll also talk about broader themes, like in "Dar", a song he says is about fear-driven politics. There's also a fair amount of swaggering and self-reflection. In "The Message", fellow rapper KeepSake busts out in Punjabi: "Jad mic mere hathan vich tan kadi sharam/ dhamake kardi haigi meri ey kalam/ beete ik saal ch maine kamayi inni izzat/ ni gavana kissi keemat ch main rakhda inni himmat" (When I grab the mic and forget my inhibitions/ I'll drop such bombs with my pen./ Just in the last year I've gained such a reputation, I'm going to hold onto it at any cost.)

Though Sharma occasionally performs at clubs such as Purple Lounge and Delhi University colleges, he also likes to take his art to the streets for impromptu rap sessions with Dagar. They've rapped at the PVR in Subhash Nagar, in parking lots, and, once, at India Gate at midnight. "We were supposed to perform at Kink [in Noida]," he recounted, "but we had a dispute with management. We came back to India Gate – I was pretty much drunk that time – and parked our car and started rapping like crazy. Most people didn't know what we were doing, but they enjoyed it." They say they feel free to rap spontaneously around their home turf. "People are friendly here. They interact more on the streets," Sharma said.

And while West Delhi may play host to as more glinting malls than the rest of the city, there are still plenty of places to glean inspiration. Sharma and Dagar's favourite spot to ruminate and write is the Jumbo Point near Bagdola Villagein Dwarka. "It's so quiet there. It's just a railway track. We park our car there, and planes fly over," Sharma said. "We get a feeling of peace there."

Nightingale of the west

Dr KC Chaudhry

Doctor, astrologer, YouTube sensation – Dr KC Chaudhry is known to millions of bored surfers around the world for his karaoke videos, in which he's covered everyone from Kishore Kumar to Mariah Carey. Within his own locale, he keeps a low profile, and is better known for his medical textbooks and practice.

Chaudhry moved to Delhi from Haryana in 1978, living above a nursing home he ran. In 2002, he shifted to Paschim Vihar's B Block, where we caught up with him. Now 67, Chaudhry told us he's famed for his obstetric expertise. "People from Maharashtra come to me for deliveries," he said. Chaudhry is also a matchmaker and astrologer; "People treat me like a spiritual man," he said. But his biggest claim to fame is karaoke.

Chaudhry was a singer of his own meandering tunes when, in 2007, he got some life-changing feedback. "I used to listen to my songs in the car," he said. "My daughter's father-in-law heard and said: 'Kya bakwas hai, yeh koi gana hota hai? Koi break nahi, koi music nahi, isko aap gana bolte ho? [What is this crap? Is this what you call singing?]'" Chaudhry laughed. "I searched the Internet for a couple of hours and on the first of Jan, at midnight, put my first karaoke on YouTube."

Chaudhry started spending up to 17 hours a day online, recording songs. His first channel had 1,400 videos, 1,700 subscribers, and 2.4 million views in 18 months. His new channel has over 1,000 subscribers and 2,800 videos. But does he have local following? Chaudhry said "I am not popular in Paschim Vihar. People still don't know I sing." He added that India isn't his main fan base. "I'm most popular in Canada, then Pakistan," he said, "Very few people in Delhi know me as a singer. I would like them to, but that doesn't happen." Still, Chaudhry often informally sings his favourite, "Maine Pi Sharab, Tumne Kya Piya?" at local weddings. **Nirvana Sawhney**

The doll house The daughter of one of Kathputli Colony's oldest puppeteers, Babulal Bhatt

JOSHUA COGAN

Disappearing act

Kathputli Colony, near Shadipur Depot, is an improbable mixture of slum and creative hotspot. It's crowded lanes have been home to some of India's finest puppeteers, magicians and acrobats. New York filmmakers **Jim Goldblum** and **Adam Weber**, who spent five months shooting their documentary *Tomorrow We Disappear* there, talk about the colony that will soon cease to exist.

Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* is a favourite with both of us. There's this part in which Salim passes through a colony of magicians. We became really obsessed with the idea of a magicians' ghetto. Then we read a *Times of India* article about how they were going to relocate the colony. A year later, we were there.

There has been a proliferation of articles since we started working on this project, but when we were looking it up, we were limited to a couple of clippings and old, weird video reports. We wanted to go and see if it really existed and if any of these traditions still persist. To work in Kathputli over a long period of time is difficult. We talked to a BBC director who went there in the '70s. We also read *Net of Magic* by Lee Siegel, an American professor. He had a long relationship with some people in the colony in the '90s. He said it just takes coming back, because so many people come there and they never see them again. We came back day after day, month after month with no other agenda but to sit and listen.

What's interesting is that we live in a digital age, where people can be found on the Internet. We were talking to the magician Ishamuddin, who'd done the famous Indian rope trick, on Gmail before we went, and Kailash, a puppeteer in the colony, on Facebook. So once we arrived, they kind of introduced us.

The first couple of days we were sort of expecting to walk in to wonderland. It definitely did not work that way. It looks, ostensibly, like any other slum. But there are 2,800 artists there, many more have come around the periphery. That they're doing performing arts that have travelled to England and Japan and America isn't obvious. Then people started pulling puppets out of the closet and the magicians took their bags off the shelves and the art started to unveil itself. There was this one moment at a wedding , when we literally got swept up and ended up at this tent with a DJ. There was point when we put down our cameras and started dancing like idiots. That was a moment where we didn't feel the intimacy, but knew it was possible.

We're basically setting up Kathputli in the context of Delhi at large – the fact that, within this sprawling metropolis, there exists a colony of musicians, acrobats and puppeteers. It's a little bit out of sight, out of mind. It's pretty easy to drive by it. And then we're following an ensemble cast – Rahman the magician, Puran Bhatt the puppeteer, Maya the acrobat – and dealing with the triumphs and travails of their lives in a year when they're going to be relocated.

For 30 years, there have always been rumours of a relocation, or that they were going to be kicked out. But in terms of the plans for

the skyscraper, it all unfolded in the months after we started shooting. We were there when Raheja [the developer] brought the Katputhli people to the relocation spot. That was the first time they saw where they were going to be relocated. They had to sign a paper of consent. We actually have the moment of the signature , when they realise this is an inevitability.

Katputli Colony has every representation of a slum. Yet these artists have been able to build spaces that accommodate their art form. People have to have a place to store their acrobat poles, and when you start to deal with more utilitarian spaces, you push away the ability to accommodate your art. It's going be hard to carve a storey-high puppet in a house that's eight feet by 12 feet.

When it comes to space in Delhi, all you see is that there's no place to build and that these poeple are squatting on government land. Can we put them in nicer houses somewhere else? Yeah, of course. It's easy to ignore a culture when you're dealing with certain numbers. *Midnight's Children* addresses how magicians believe in the possibility of magic, which makes them very skeptical of government promises. We liked the connection between the kind of illusion of the way our systems run and also the illusion of performance.

What's interesting is how, in the face of immediate destruction, someone will spend money to fix their roof. In many ways, the place is very much a slum, but when you dig deeper, you realise there's this palace that exists. It's not real, it's an idea, but I think they all share it. It kind of started with a cooperative. All these people came together and put in 60-80 rupees of their money back in the '70s. That was a big deal. They believed they were stronger together than individually.

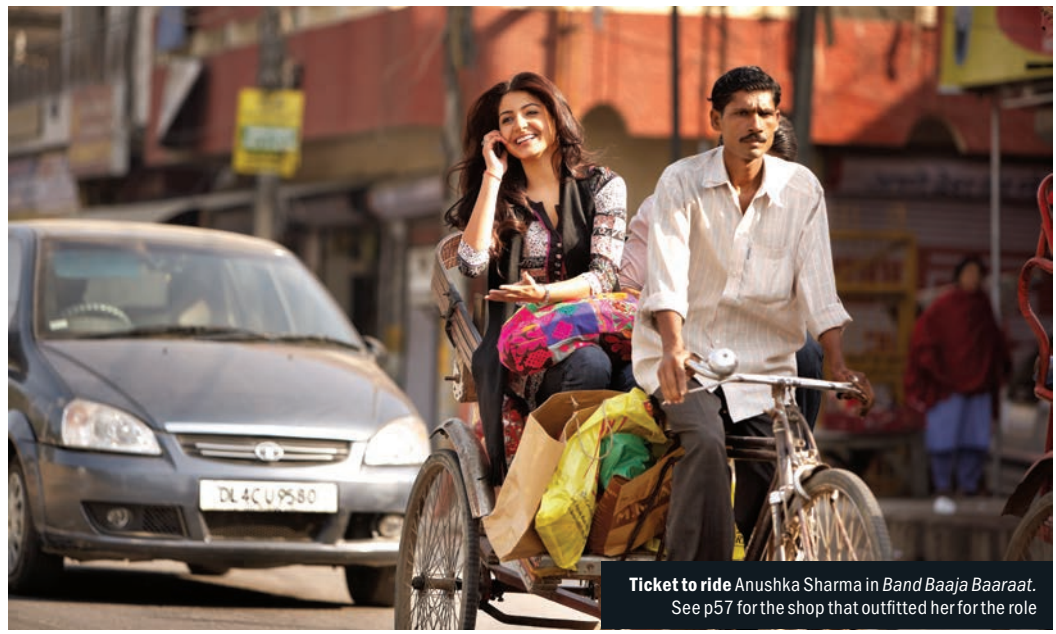
The relocation means more than moving. The magician will keep performing, and the puppeteer will keep making puppets, but the important question is, are they going to teach their children these things? It's about being part of an artistic community and what happens when that community dissolves.

As told to Uday Bhatia.

The film is slated to release later this year. Check for updates on www.facebook.com/tomorrowwedisappear.

Band baaja Bollywood

Uday Bhatia on the Delhi filmmakers who decided to go west.



Ticket to ride Anushka Sharma in *Band Baaja Baaraat*. See p57 for the shop that outfitted her for the role

Khosla Ka Ghosla is usually regarded as the first big screen representation of West Delhi. Yet, according to its director, the setting wasn't really West Delhi per se. "*Khosla Ka Ghosla* could have been set in any of the core inner city areas," Dibakar Banerjee said of his 2006 debut. "In my mind, it wasn't necessarily West Delhi. It could have been anywhere from Model Town to Karol Bagh to East Patel Nagar. I just wanted an area where DDA flat culture hadn't come in."

At any rate, *Khosla* was a landmark as far as cinematic representations of Delhi were concerned (*Chashme Buddoor,* 1981, and *New Delhi Times*, 1986, notwithstanding). Over the next decade, Bollywood wandered into Paharganj and Palika Bazaar, Lodhi Colony and North Campus. It also kept returning to West Delhi. Sarai Rohilla, minutes from where Banerjee used to stay as a kid, may not have been name-checked in *Khosla Ka Ghosla*, but a significant portion of the film was shot there. The neighbourhood also provided a crucial setting for the director's next venture, 2008's *Oye Lucky Lucky Oye*, a film imbued with the spirit of Maya Enclave, Karol Bagh and Paschim Vihar; places Dilliwalas were familiar with but the rest of the country knew little about.

Oye Lucky Lucky Oye was a razor-sharp satire about Delhi's visible and invisible class divisions. Lucky, played by Abhay Deol, is a master thief (the character is based on real-life "super-chor" Bunty, originally from Vikaspuri). He eventually discovers that his skills, though formidable, aren't quite enough to get him what he really wants, which is social standing. Like *Khosla Ka Ghosla*, the film is full of characters trying to escape their surroundings. Lucky can't shake his lower middle-class origins any more than Khosla Jr can ditch his embarrassing first name, Chiraunji Lal. Banerjee said that this desire to rise above – and move out of – West Delhi was something he'd noticed around him for years. "People would grow up, get a job in South Delhi and move there," he said. "Sometimes you'd hear of an illustrious son who'd bought his parents a flat in Chirag Dilli. It was an overall movement."

Banerjee's characters saw nothing to boast about in their West Delhi origins. Audiences would have to wait until 2008 for *Band Baaja Baaraat* to introduce the novel idea of West Delhi cool. Far from covering up their origins, wedding planners Shruti and Bittoo infuse formulaic South Delhi do's with their "Janakpuri style". Production designer TP Abid told us that director's Maneesh Sharma's familiarity with the milieu (he grew up in Pitampura) helped the crew find and transform locations into authentic slices of West Delhi. "One time, we came upon this particular house, and we just knew it belonged to Shruti," Abid said. "There was a feel to it, a kind of design to the furniture, the way the bedroom was set up. So we used props from the house and shot there." *Do Dooni Chaar*, shot in colonies across Delhi but employing a similar middle-class aesthetic, also released in 2008 (it's no coincidence the director was Habib Faisal, *Band Baaja Baaraat*'s screenwriter).

More than filming in the same neighbourhoods, it's the visual and aural palette of these films ("immigrant style", as Banerjee puts it) that binds them together. Despite their differences, all of them have sets that look lived-in, feature actual Delhi Punjabis, and evoke something resembling life in a city we're familiar with. They've also been instrumental in shifting the industry's focus away from touristy locations like India Gate and Chandni Chowk to neighbourhoods that look like "the real Delhi". The West Delhi film might just be a small, specific subgenre in itself, easily differentiated from the surface nostalgia of *Delhi-6* or the surface gloss of *Aisha*. They may eventually be subsumed within the rapidly evolving superset of the Delhi film. But it's nice to know you can always call upon them to add a dash of Janakpuri style to proceedings.

MANITBALMIKI

The long wait Well-wishers outside Tihar Jail

Life sentence

Tihar offers a new lease of life to some of its inmates, but those living outside its walls have a wary relationship with the big house on the block, finds **Gayathri Sreedharan**.

A few months ago, we wrote about an incident in 1979, when *Indian Express* journalist Ashwin Sarin infiltrated Tihar. Well before Kiran Bedi's time, the two days Sarin spent in the "hellhole" were traumatising, and the impressionistic "Getting into Tihar" series of articles that followed further confirmed the general public's suspicions: Tihar was a hub of bad energy. Violent criminals lived like animals, and jail officials didn't really care.

For the residents of Vidya Marg in Maya Enclave, as well as those of Janakpuri's blocks B and C, who live closest to Tihar's exit gates, those impressions still persist – Bedi's reforms notwithstanding. At the very least, the residents we spoke to admit to a general sense of discomfort at the idea of the world's biggest jail existing in their midst. Speaking to us on the phone, PL Devgan, a former president of the Maya Enclave Resident Welfare Association, sounded cagey when he explained, "We've complained to the Tihar jail officials in the past, yes. Their arrangements for the prisoners aren't always conducive to our well being."

In his yawning office in the Tihar complex, Law Officer Sunil Gupta told *Time Out*, "We've had complaints from the RWAs of these areas because they are all close to Gate Number 4, where we release prisoners every Thursday. They even filed complaints with us through their former MLA, Jagdish Mukhi." Mukhi, member of the BJP and formerly the Delhi Cabinet, confirmed that he did raise the issue with Tihar officials. "After all," said Mukhi, "it's a matter of their sense of security. It's not just the violent criminals; petty thieves come out that way too. The residents are also wary of prison breaks." So much so that even the occasional alarm or fire drill can set them on edge.

Mukhi and his constituents didn't have much luck with their petition; Gate 4 continues to release prisoners. The continued requests for change seem to baffle Gupta, who is eager to boast of the jail's security. "We've got armed guards, high walls, electrical fencing, and there's a few hundred metres between the jail cells and the boundary walls. So far, there's been no untoward incident, even after we released prisoners."

What confuses, and slightly amuses Gupta, is the simultaneous demand, from across Delhi, for the "Tihar roti". "We've had requests from lawyers, politicians, middle-class men and women from West Delhi and beyond, for just a single roti made by a prisoner," he told us. Reviled though they may be to most, Tihar's inmates are held in special regard by extra-religious Hindus, who believe that a roti made by a criminal will ward off bad luck for generations to come. The belief comes from the Lal Kitab (Red Book), a Vedic astrology book that offers remedies to the penitent, for everything from physical illness to bad fortune.

"Of course, we've turned down these requests," Gupta laughed, "aren't TJ's brand [of snacks made by prisoners] good enough?"

But for most residents like Devgan, the Lal Kitab is of no significance personally. "We are here on a daily basis," Devgan said. "The requests must come from those who live far away, in their plush, untarnished surroundings." True, most high security jails aren't located in the middle of residential colonies. And no doubt if land in Delhi weren't at such a premium, the likes of Devgan and Mukhi might have settled in more comfortably elsewhere. But life does go on; no one's banging down the doors at Gate 4 in protest.

COURTESY OJAS ART

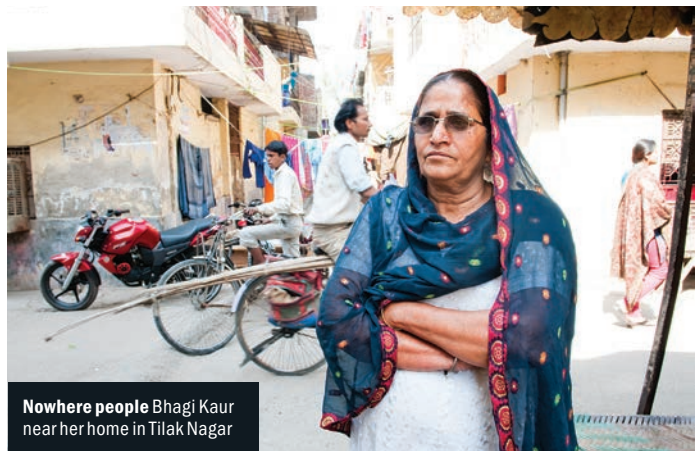
Jail house roti Rameshwar Broota photographed "Roti" in 2009 at the Tihar Jail community kitchen, as part of a two-year- long project organised by Ojas Art. The resulting exhibition, *Expressions at Tihar*, included artworks by Broota and other artists based on their experiences of visiting the jail, and by inmates who attended art classes during this time. "The show ended up being the largest fundraiser for the Tihar Jail Welfare Fund, ever," said Anubhav Nath, the curator.

In living memory

Forgotten Tilak Vihar still remembers the violence of 1984, says **Sonam Joshi**.

Located behind Tilak Nagar's busy Metro station and market, with its large, glass-walled showrooms, restaurants and English coaching institutes, Tilak Vihar presents a striking contrast. Small, ground-floor shops are tucked between faded yellow-gray apartments. The crowded houses are in a state of disrepair, their plaster peeling and cement breaking, and the dusty parks are littered with garbage and rubble.

Neglected though it may be, Tilak Vihar – or Widows' Colony, as it's locally known – is full of old memories. Every family here has a story about the tumultuous events that followed the assassination of Indira Gandhi in October 1984. These residents have suffered dislocation twice: they were the urban poor who were relocated to resettlement colonies such as Trilokpuri in East Delhi. In 1985, they were shifted to Tilak Vihar, when these flats were allotted to the widows and family members of Sikhs killed during the riots. Twenty-seven years later, people have settled in, but certain wounds never had a chance to heal. Resident Bhagi Kaur, 56, told **Sonam Joshi** about life in the neighbourhood.



Nowhere people Bhagi Kaur near her home in Tilak Nagar

How did you end up in Tilak Vihar?
I used to live in block number 32 in Trilokpuri in East Delhi, and in Shahdara before that. When we were resettled from Shahdara to Trilokpuri, we were allotted plots of 25 yards and given loans of ₹2,000 each. I lost several relatives in 1984 – my husband, my nephew, my brother, my brother-in-law and others. After [the riots], we lived in a camp in Farsh Bazar Khana for four to five months and came here in early 1985.

What was the area like?
When we came, there were not as many shops here. The area behind Tilak Vihar was an empty expanse. There was no electricity for the first few months, and a common tap for 16 houses in the block. We got these services in a few months. Initially, we were quite lost and distraught. My children were very young. We didn't know what to do. It was only after I got a job that we got our bearings back.

How did your life change after moving here?
I didn't work when I was in Trilokpuri. My husband used to work as a coolie in the New Delhi Railway Station. In 1986, I got a Class IV government job in a school at a starting salary of ₹900. It was very difficult to make ends meet. We had to work throughout the day. There was no one at home to take care of the children when they were young. Now, I work in Sarvodaya Bal Vidyalaya in Janakpuri between noon and 6 pm. My sons only studied until primary school, but my daughters reached middle school. My elder son works in a gurudwara but spends all his earnings on his addictions. It's a problem common to many youngsters here. My grandsons study in Guru Harkrishan Public School… maybe they will get a better life.

How did you cope with the loss of your husband?
Many of the people in this block are my neighbours from Trilokpuri. Because everybody is together, there is a support system. If another widow is making a living here, so can I.

What are the problems you face living here?
Our houses are about to collapse. We were given exemption from paying electricity and water bills, but lately lady police officials have been coming to our houses and asking us to pay our bills. The government should think about how we will get by. How can we pay the bills when it is so difficult for us to make both ends meet? We used to get a small monthly pension from the Sisganj Gurudwara but that has also stopped. We also demanded compensation from the government and they had agreed to give us a sum of ₹10 lakh, but we have only received ₹7 lakh.

Do you keep track of the 1984 riot court cases?
I used to attend court hearings regularly, even taking leave from school. But even though we have gone to court regularly, there are others who have benefited. I haven't gone for the last eight months. Now, there is also a new principal at my school, so I have to be careful.

Do you still hope to get justice?
What justice will we get? It's been 28 years. If the government hasn't given us justice so far, what can we expect now? The government only looks after the rich; it doesn't care about the poor. If the guilty are punished, we will feel that all our demands have been fulfilled.

Electric ride

Dwarka City Wheels

"You know Shatrughan Sinha?" Mahesh, a 30-year-old rickshaw puller, asked me. "These cycles belong to his nephew." Indeed, the sign at the back of Mahesh's new battery-operated two-seater proclaims that it belongs to one Mukesh Sinha and is part of the Dwarka City Wheels' fleet, which is slowly making its presence felt in the sub-city.

Sinha and wife Sudha, who run the Dwarka Self-Employment Trust for labourers, came across a design for a battery-operated rickshaw two years ago, at a fair in Pragati Maidan. "We knew this design could be used here in Dwarka," Sinha told us.

Due to the suburb's sprawling nature, "rickshaw pullers are in more demand here, but they are often easily tired out, and therefore don't make enough money to cover costs," Sinha explained. "In addition, we had reports that many of them drink in the evening, mostly to deal with the physical stress."

With an auto manufacturer, the Sinhas redesigned the rickshaw (it was a three-seater, but the battery drained too fast). After producing 25 rickshaws that go up to 80 kilometres on a full battery, the Sinhas approached pullers last November to discuss the advantages of switching. Mahesh, who has pulled rickshaws in Dwarka for three years, got his City Wheels two months ago. "It requires much less effort," Mahesh said, "and I can run it for much longer". Sinha said many of the battery-rickshaw pullers have given up drinking on weekdays.

The electric rick has boosted incomes too. Mahesh said he makes at least ₹100 extra daily. Sinha credits the rickshaw with doubling daily incomes from an average of ₹250 to ₹500. "Because it looks new, and is more stable than the ordinary cycle, [it] has more takers," he said. By June, DSET will introduce 150 more electric rickshaws to Dwarka. Riders, be warned – the added efficiency comes at a price. For a distance of 200 metres, Mahesh charged us ₹30.

Gayathri Sreedharan

MANIT BAJMIKI (2)

Jolly good fellow

Humour thrives in the unlikeliest places, as **Sonam Joshi** discovers in Naraina.

MANIT BALI

All smiles Jatender Pal Singh Jolly in his office

The way to the office of Naraina's local funny man is through a narrow, dark alley and a dank staircase. But then, above a sign printed with the words Jolly Uncle, is the reassuring logo of two smiley faces welcoming you in. The name is an apt nom de plume for Jatinder Pal Singh Jolly – and one that is easily recognisable to readers of *Punjab Kesari*, which has featured Jolly's jokes and stories for the 11 years.

Jolly, 59, told us that his name was a fortuitous mistake, which came about when an employee of a local newspaper accidentally printed his jokes under this pen-name. As fate would have it, the moniker stuck. "Now, nobody recognises me as Jitender Jolly, everybody knows me only as Jolly Uncle," he said. Besides authoring five Hindi joke books, this funny uncle's writing has appeared in over 100 local and national newspapers.

Jolly runs a cargo cleaning agency in Naraina and has been a resident of Tilak Nagar since 1986. His father migrated from Pakistan during Partition, and settled down in Rajouri Garden in 1955. It was here that Singh spent his formative years. But he discovered his funny bone relatively late in life, when he was diagnosed with deep vein thrombosis in 1994. "The doctors told me that there was no cure, that I should go home and rest. As my social circle reduced, I began writing jokes and stories and sending them to various newspapers," he recalled.

It took a couple of years for Jolly to find success. His earliest jokes were printed in local newspapers, many of them published from West Delhi. These included *Uday Prakash* and *Triveni Bhasha* from Tilak Nagar, *Meri Dilli* from Punjabi Bagh, and *Rashtriya Samachar* from Paschim Vihar. "These made me realise that I could write," he said. His health problem still restricts his movement, but Jolly remains undaunted. He published his first joke book, *Hansi Ka Khazana*, in 2004, and has put out four more since then.

Jolly finds inspiration for his humour in everyday life. "You look here, there is a vendor on the street calling out. You look there, you see children up to naughty antics. There is humour all around us – it only needs to be recognised," he said. One of Jolly's oft-repeated stories is centered on a misunderstanding with his dhobi. Jolly asks his dhobi to reverse (ulti karo) his shirt before ironing it. He returns some time later to find the shirt is still unironed because, as per instructions, the dhobi was waiting to do ulti (vomit) first. "It's nothing but a little bit of wordplay," explained Jolly, who frequently draws on double meanings and puns in Hindi to elicit laughs.

But jokes are no laughing matter for this gent. "I realised that humour can change people's lifestyle for the better," he said, explaining how he began writing motivational stories, which were compiled in his latest book *Anmol Khushiyan*. He has also tackled subjects like drunk driving for Delhi Police's *Navchetna* magazine, and violence in Kashmir for the Indian army's magazine *My Views*. A typical Jolly Uncle story begins on a humourous note, goes on to discuss the issue and concludes with "a strong message that touches the heart".

Jolly's most popular characters are Veeru and Basanti, from the Bollywood blockbuster *Sholay*, which he introduced a decade ago. His own characters are set to make the leap to the big screen too, with a script that's been made into a movie starring veteran TV comedy couple Jaspal and Savita Bhatti. Titled *Chadha Chadhi Te Nikke*, the film, scheduled to release in October, is a slapstick take on the state of medical care. Its protagonists are two government hospital doctors who misuse the facilities of the hospital they work in.

Jolly ensures that his fans get their supply of humour in the form of a daily joke on his Facebook page. He's also become something of a community figure in Tilak Nagar, as his pictures with various eminences attest. "I am lucky I get love and respect from everyone. I am invited to every function whether BJP or Congress, Delhi Police, a temple or a gurudwara," he said, "because whatever I write is for the betterment of society."

Visit www. jollyuncle.com

Matrimonial alliance

Rishte Hi Rishte

An entire generation of Indians who grew up in Delhi in the '80s and '90s could be forgiven for forgetting their own addresses. But only serious amnesia could justify blanking out on 28 Regarpura. The address, inscribed on every wall back in the day, was ubiquitous – inveigling its way into our memories, powered by the breathless message that accompanied it. "Rishte Hi Rishte [Matches and more matches]," screamed the walls, followed by a wheedling "Ek Baar Milein To Sahi [Meet us at least once]".

Rishte Hi Rishte was a marriage bureau, the brainchild of late English literature professor Dharam Chand Arora, who started it in the early 1970s. Professor Arora's title, also scrawled across the walls, presumably added a veneer of legitimacy and propriety to the business that shared the august company of "Khandani dawakhanas" and "Gupt rog visheshagyas". During the early '80s, Rishte Hi Rishte and the marriage bureau business grew exponentially, attracting johnny-come-latelys like Pathak Ji Ke Rishte. They were undoubtedly aided by their 360-degree approach to advertising, which eclipsed Arora's crucial contribution to the business of fixing weddings. Before the marriage bureau came along, weddings were fixed through family or immediate friends – Arora managed to tap into the zeitgeist of the Indian arranged marriage, and discovered a lacuna, where people were done contemplating their navels.

Then, inevitably, things changed. From a snoozing, semi-provincial town, Delhi became a city. Defacing walls became a punishable offence. And the Internet brought with it the matrimonial website, an admission-free playground for stressed and time-strapped parents. Rishte Hi Rishte also attenuated its business: it now exists as Connexon H, rebranded with incorrect spellings to answer the demands of the day, and is run by Arora's niece, Poonam Sachdev. It still stands at the same address, albeit in a new, but curiously weathered-looking building.

In a way, Rishte Hi Rishte was a symbol of the burgeoning presence of West Delhi on the wedding map, with specific markets for each aspect of the celebration. Rishte Hi Rishte may live on only in our collective memory, incubated by the warmth of a shared joke, but these establishments – shaadi bands, kundan set lenders, thali decorators – continue to thrive. See p58 for the wedding businesses *Time Out*'s intrepid shopping team dug up.

Karanjeet Kaur

Connexon H, Aroras KDC, 28 Padam Singh Road, Regarpura (99119-37641). ⊖ Karol Bagh.