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**Wealth Inequality and Elites in the global South**

SCIS Working Paper | Number 50

# WEALTH ELITES IN DELHI-NCR

*Anjana Thampi and*

*Ishan Anand* | March 2023

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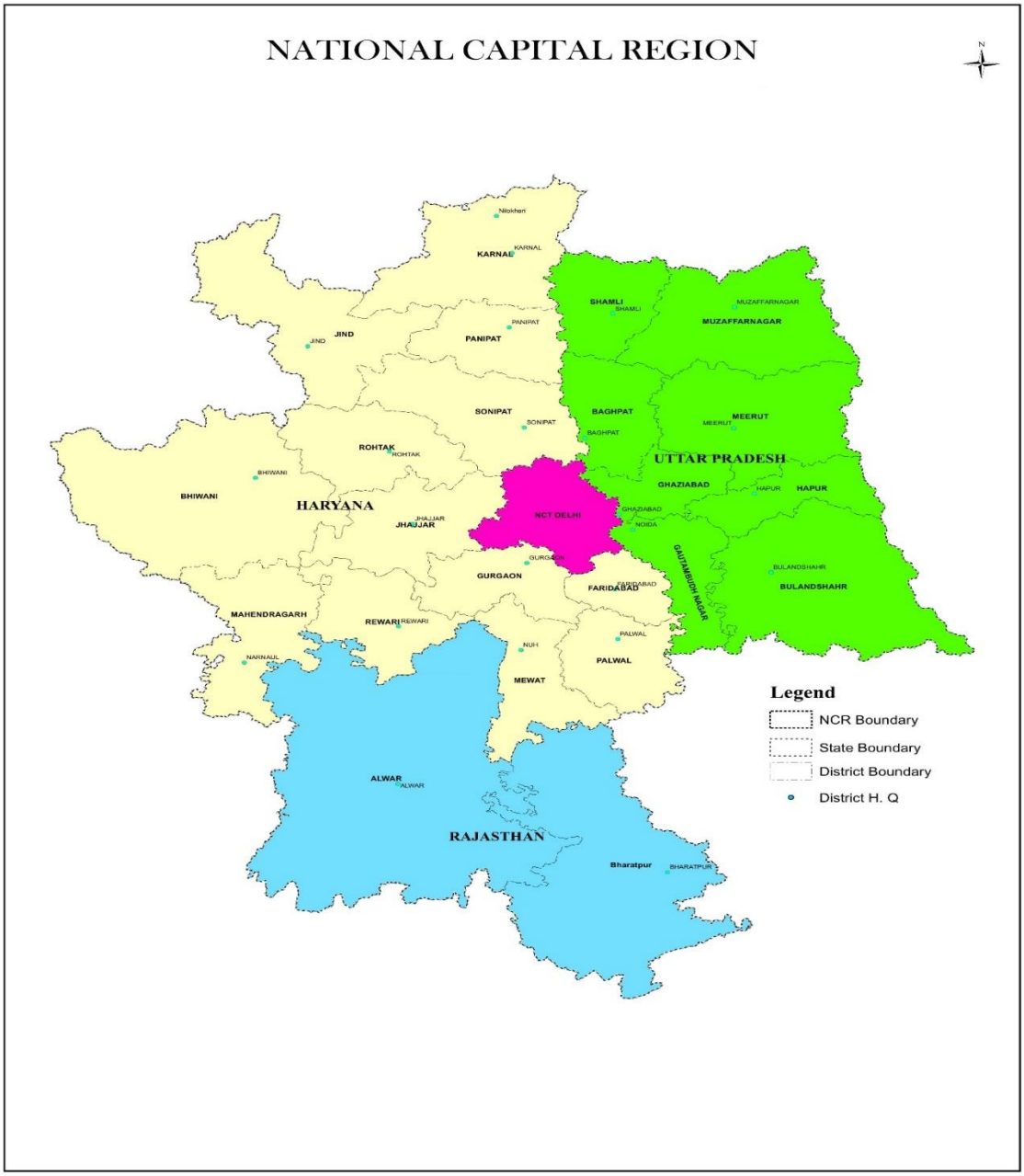
*"Delhi can point to a history as chequered and more ancient than the 'eternal' city of Rome; it was a famous capital before the days of Alexander, and has survived all the vicissitudes of time and fortune to become one of the youngest and certainly the most magnificent of recent imperial cities." (Spear, 1937)*

*"Who's the most powerful person in Delhi?" "It all depends on politics. You can have a billion but if you have no connections, it doesn't mean anything."* (Dasgupta, 2014).

# Introduction

The National Capital Region (NCR), sometimes referred to as Delhi-NCR, has an important place in the history of the South Asian subcontinent and continues to play an essential role as the home for the capital city of India. Delhi-NCR is an ever-expanding interstate planning region with the National Capital Territory (NCT) at its heart (Figure 1). The NCT of Delhi is a union territory of India with an estimated population of about 22.5 million in 2021. The region has seen a phenomenal population boom in the last few decades and its population has grown by around 50% in each decade in the post-independence period. The planning board of Delhi-NCR was constituted in 1985. The NCR currently consists of 14 districts of Haryana; eight districts of Uttar Pradesh; two districts of Rajasthan, and the entire NCT of Delhi. The current population of Delhi-NCR is estimated to be around 64 million.

**Figure 1: National Capital Region**




Source: https://ncrpb.nic.in/image/map_constituent%20areas.jpg

The NCT of Delhi, or Delhi as it is popularly known, is "an agglomeration of a vast variety of identities and physical spaces" (Chakravorty and Sircar, 2021). It is home to several remarkable historical monuments; the offices of the highest judicial, executive, and legislative bodies are located here; it can boast of several leading higher education and research institutions; it houses migrants from different parts of the country and its population is quite diverse in terms of social, religious, and lingual identities. Delhi is also expanding rapidly – the neighbouring cities of Gurugram and New Okhla Industrial Development Authority (Noida), described as satellite cities, are now home to some prominent corporate offices.

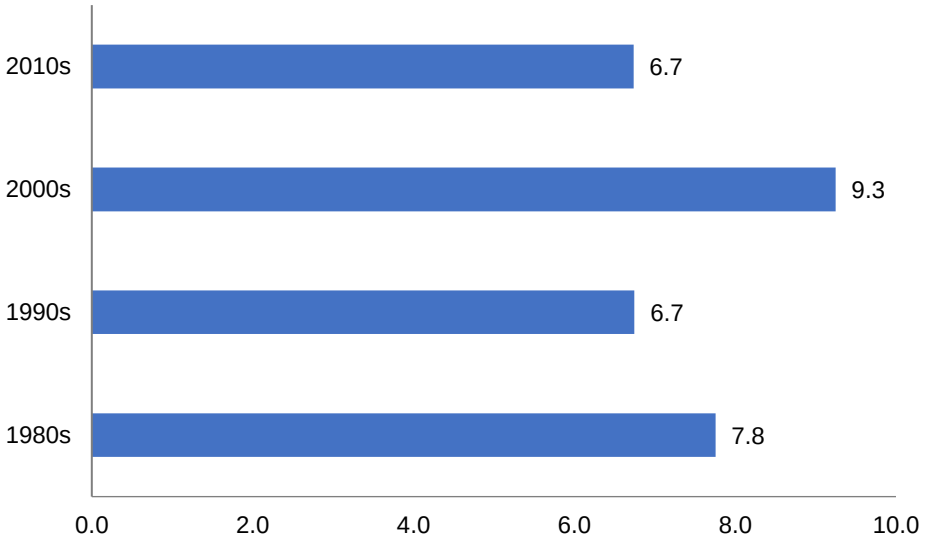
While Delhi's historical, spatial, and demographic aspects have been studied extensively, the evolution of wealth and wealth elites in Delhi has received relatively less attention. Around 190 people of diverse backgrounds from the

region feature in the Hurun rich list with a net worth of over INR 1000 crores. Delhi's elites can be categorised into political elites, civil servants and bureaucrats, professionals, rentiers and new-age entrepreneurs – and sometimes these categories overlap. At the same time, Delhi has a sizeable population in slums and several regions face acute deprivation of assets and basic amenities. In this study, we aim to provide a detailed account of wealth elites in the region, different phases of wealth accumulation, and the processes driving wealth disparities.

## Economic growth and employment structure

Delhi NCT is among the richest regions in the country in terms of per capita state domestic product. The region has registered impressive rates of economic growth since the 1980s (Figure 2). It has an unusual employment structure, with 60% of the workforce being regular or salaried workers, as compared to only 24% across the country (Table 1). Delhi is largely urban, and comparing its employment structure with the national average of urban areas shows that the proportion of salaried workers in Delhi is higher than the national urban average by 10 percentage points. Casual labourers only constitute around 4% of the workforce of Delhi NCT, as against almost a quarter at the all-India level and 14% for all urban regions. Around 37% are self-employed compared to more than half of the workforce in the country. Delhi also has the highest share of interstate migrants in its population at 40% as of 2011 (Kawoosa, 2019). Migrants who moved for work accounted for 20% and another 24% moved with their families (Kawoosa, 2019).

**Figure 2: Growth rate of gross state domestic product of Delhi NCT (%)**




Source: Authors' calculations using data in EPWRF

**Note:** Compound annual growth rates have been computed using the gross state domestic product at constant (2011-12) prices.

**Table 1: Employment structure in Delhi and India, 2018–19**

| | Self-employed | Salaried | Casual labour |
|---|---|---|---|
| Delhi | 36.6 | 59.6 | 3.8 |
| India | 52.0 | 24.0 | 24.0 |
| India (Urban) | 37.8 | 48.7 | 13.5 |

Source: Authors' calculations using PLFS 2018–19

## Delhi-NCR: Wealth disparity

We assess the extent of wealth inequality in Delhi-NCR using the All-India Debt and Investment Survey (AIDIS) and the rich lists compiled by *Forbes India* and *Hurun India*. AIDIS is a large-scale nationally representative sample-survey of household assets and liabilities. By AIDIS estimates, Delhi NCT is the most unequal state with a Gini coefficient of net worth of 0.79 in 2018, as compared to the all-India Gini of 0.68 (Table 2). The share of the top 1% of the urban population in the country in net worth was 20% in 2018, whereas the top 1% in Delhi owned 27%. The wealth-share of the top 10% in Delhi was around 70%, compared to 56% at the all-India level. Concentration of wealth is clearly very high in Delhi (Table 3).

To understand wealth inequality by caste and religious groups, we decompose the Gini coefficient into 'between' and 'within' group components (Table 4). Between-caste inequality accounts for 10% of total inequality in Delhi. This proportion is only 7% at the all-India urban level. Between-group inequality for religious groups contributes around 10% to Delhi's inequality, compared to only about 3% for all urban regions. Delhi clearly has higher levels of 'vertical' or inter-personal inequality, but the wealth gaps between caste and religious groups are also much higher than the all-India figures

**Table 2: Gini coefficient of per capita net worth, 2018**

| | Rural | Urban | Overall |
|---|---|---|---|
| Delhi | 0.854 | 0.787 | 0.795 |
| India | 0.639 | 0.707 | 0.682 |

Source: Authors' calculations using AIDIS 2019

**Table 3: Wealth shares (%), 2018**

| | Top 10 percent | Top 5 percent | Top 1 percent |
|---|---|---|---|
| Delhi | 69 | 57 | 27.4 |
| India | 55 | 41 | 19.7 |
| India (Urban) | 56 | 42 | 20.3 |

Source: Authors' calculations using AIDIS 2019

**Table 4: Relative contribution of between-group inequality (%), 2018**

| | Social group | Religion |
|---|---|---|
| Delhi | 10.0 | 9.8 |
| India | 9.1 | 1.6 |
| India (Urban) | 7.4 | 2.8 |

Source: Authors' calculations using AIDIS 2019

The ratio of wealth-share to population-share is an indication of the relative positions of caste and religious groups in the wealth distribution. Scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and the other backward classes (OBC) communities are worse off than forward-caste groups in Delhi and more so than at the all-India level (Table 5). Among religious groups, Muslims in Delhi fare far worse than across the country (Table 6). The Sikh community in Delhi, however, fares much better than all other religious groups and are also better off in Delhi than at the all-India level.

**Table 5: Population and wealth shares by social group (%), 2018**

| | India (Urban) | | | Delhi | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Population share | Wealth Share | Ratio (W/P) | Population share | Wealth Share | Ratio (W/P) |
| ST | 3.8 | 2.9 | 0.8 | 2.3 | 0.5 | 0.2 |
| SC | 16.1 | 7.5 | 0.5 | 25.2 | 7.9 | 0.3 |
| OBC | 43.4 | 33.3 | 0.8 | 27.6 | 17.9 | 0.7 |
| Others | 36.7 | 56.4 | 1.5 | 44.8 | 73.6 | 1.6 |

Source: Authors' calculations using AIDIS 2019

**Table 6: Population and wealth shares by religion (%), 2018**

| | India (Urban) | | | Delhi | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Population share | Wealth Share | Ratio (W/P) | Population share | Wealth Share | Ratio (W/P) |
| Hinduism | 76.9 | 81.6 | 1.1 | 83.1 | 88.3 | 1.1 |
| Islam | 17.1 | 9.9 | 0.6 | 13.5 | 2.4 | 0.2 |
| Christianity | 2.9 | 3.7 | 1.3 | 0.2 | 0.2 | 0.9 |
| Sikhism | 1.6 | 2.8 | 1.7 | 2.7 | 8.8 | 3.2 |

Source: Authors' calculations using AIDIS 2019

## Mapping the wealthy in Delhi-NCR

As AIDIS surveys do not sample the super-wealthy, the estimates of wealth concentration from these surveys are underestimates. We therefore use the rich lists compiled by *Forbes India* and *Hurun India* to get a better idea of the top end of the distribution. Even these lists only include the reported wealth of corporate billionaires. As identified by *Forbes India*, there was one US dollar billionaire in India in the early 1990s. By 2018, this number increased to 118. In 2021, 18 of the top 100 billionaires listed by *Forbes India* were from Delhi-NCR. The Hurun rich lists give us a larger list of the super-wealthy by listing all those who have a reported wealth of or above INR 1000 crores (roughly equivalent to USD 135.2 million, as per the average exchange rate of INR 73.93 per USD in 2021). By this list, 189 people based in Delhi-NCR were super-wealthy in 2021.

For the initial compilation of wealth elites in Delhi-NCR, we used multiple sources. This included the *Hurun India* rich list 2021 (individuals with a wealth of INR 1000 crores or more); *Forbes India* rich lists between 1998 and 2022; Fundoodata.com (a website that provides information on companies); Trendlyne (a website that provides information on shareholders); the Panama Papers; Myneta.info (a data repository on electoral candidates run by the Association for Democratic Reforms); books on wealth elites; and Wikipedia pages on powerful individuals and businesspeople in Delhi. This yielded a total list of 302 wealth elites, of which 189 were on the Hurun list and 98 are estimated to have a net worth ranging from INR 100 to 1000 crores (Table 7). We have also included 15 people in the 'fuzzy category', that is, those who may not cross the threshold of INR 100 crores but may be of interest in the study.

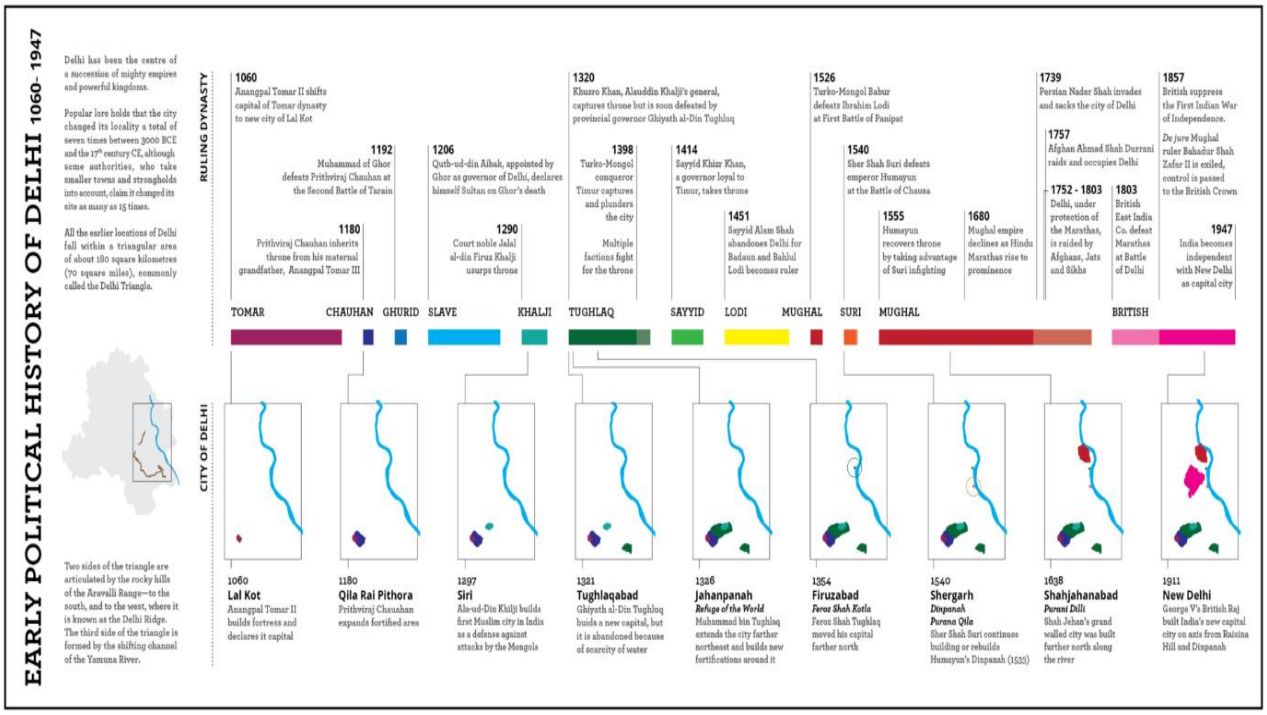
**Table 7: Mapping the wealthy in Delhi-NCR**

| Category | Number | Source |
|---|---|---|
| More than INR 1000 crores | 189 | IIFL Wealth Hurun India Rich List 2021 |
| INR 100 crores – 1000 crores | 98 | Other sources |
| Fuzzy category | 15 | Other sources |
| **Total** | **302** | |

## Brief history: Pre–colonial and colonial Delhi

Ibn Battuta, the famous scholar and explorer, reportedly said in the 1300s that Delhi is "the metropolis of India, a vast and magnificent city, uniting beauty with strength" (Frykenberg, 1993). Since then, Delhi (or its surrounding regions) has been the capital for the Tughlaq, Lodi, Suri, Mughal, and the British empires (Figure 3). While the Mughal provinces of Bengal and Gujarat developed as trade centres, Delhi thrived as a political capital during the pre-British period. Historians have noted high levels of inequality in Delhi in the pre-colonial period: "Bernier, who lived in the city soon after it had been built in 1638, … commented on the absence of men of 'the middle state'. He saw great opulence and an abundance of provisions, but also great squalor" (Gupta, 1981).

**Figure 3: Political history of Delhi 1060–1947**




Source: [History of Delhi - Wikiwand]

With frequent changes in regime, often after bloody wars, Delhi was destroyed and rebuilt many times. After the establishment of British rule, certain suburbs of Delhi gained importance. Among them was Civil Lines in the north of the city, and Sabzimandi, Sadar Bazar, and Paharganj to the west (Vanaik, 2020). After the 1857 Revolt, these suburbs were home to Punjabi Muslim traders, Dalit landless labourers, and the construction workers who built New Delhi (ibid.).

Historical records show a brutal destruction and restructuring of Delhi after the British empire defeated rebels in 1857 (Gupta, 1981). The revolt of 1857 against the colonial rulers changed the spatial character of the city, and officials moved out. Bayly (1998) describes the shift away from divided sovereignties in the city to clearly demarcate the jurisdiction of spaces. Intersecting railway lines, intended as one of the punitive measures in response to the 1857 revolt, made Delhi a commercial centre for neighbouring regions (Vanaik, 2020). The British established municipalities in Delhi in 1863, and the locals who were loyal to the British were given municipal offices. Gupta (1981) argues that such people were already rich landowners, bankers and traders, and their wealth helped their children gain English education and make professional careers. Hindu bankers and traders and Punjabi Muslims benefitted the most from trade after the 1857 revolt (Vanaik, 2020). Much of Delhi, however, remained a "poorer cousin as compared to the colonial cities of Bombay and Calcutta" (Sundaram, 2011, p. 15), and amenities and infrastructure, such as railways, electricity, and piped water, were available much later in Delhi than in some other cities. In 1911, the British regime moved its capital from Calcutta to Delhi.

Between 1920 and the 1940s, Delhi went through an economic recession and became a site of mass politics, transforming urban administration and the property market (Vanaik, 2020). Delhi Improvement Trust (now, Delhi Development Authority or DDA) was set up in 1937, later than other colonial cities that established their trusts in the first two decades of the twentieth century, such as Bombay and Calcutta (Vanaik, 2020). However, Indian big business, including those based in Delhi, did gain significantly from the Second World War. The war "gave an impetus to economic activity in India, with several opportunities opening up for import substitution" (Malik, 2018). As production declined in war-ravaged Europe, the demand for Indian products surged. Leading Indian industrialists drew up the famous Bombay Plan in 1944, which called for state intervention to prepare conditions for private enterprises to realise their full potential. One of the signatories of the Bombay Plan was Lala Shri Ram, the then owner of Delhi Cotton Mills (DCM), and the subject of Case Study 1. Incidentally, the Plan noted the existence of high and undesirable levels of income and wealth inequality and suggested ways to reduce the disparities, although it added that it was undesirable to completely eliminate inequalities (Baru and Desai, 2018).

# Temporal and spatial mapping

## The Nehruvian period (1947–1980s)

In the aftermath of independence and partition, Delhi witnessed brutal communal violence in 1947. Communal riots left thousands of people dead, and the population of Delhi underwent a massive transformation. The Muslim population in Delhi reduced from 33% in 1941 to about 6% in 1951 (Kudaisya and Yong, 2002). At the same time, Delhi witnessed an influx of refugee Punjabi population, and the physical boundaries of the region also expanded. Muslims who returned to the city in the aftermath of the communal riots were rehabilitated in predominantly Muslim localities, creating residential segregation of religious communities. Violence during the partition was hardly a conducive period for business and wealth creation. Other important setbacks following the partition were the contraction of the domestic market, the loss of important cotton and jute growing regions to Pakistan, and the loss of some manufacturing units that were operational in Lahore (Tripathi, 2004).

Independent India moved towards a planned economy after independence, with several government controls and regulations on investment, production, distribution, and trade, but with ample scope for the private sector. The Industrial Policy Statement of 1948 assured private entrepreneurs an important position in the Indian economy. The government under Nehru set up the Industrial Finance Corporation of India in 1948 to meet the credit requirements of the private sector and strengthen the banking system. Other such bodies were also set up. The Nehruvian period of protectionist industrialisation saw a diversification of Indian capital into sectors such as banking, construction, and real estate. DCM, for instance, diversified into chemicals. It is argued that the post-Nehru regime "tightened the noose around the private enterprise" (Tripathi, 2004: 285) through institutions such as the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Commission, nationalisation of major banks, and new licencing policies announced in 1970 and 1973.

In 1959, the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) acquired close to 39500 acres of land. Agricultural land was acquired in villages largely in the southern parts of the city. This was separated by a red line from homestead land or *lal dora*, giving rise to 135 urban villages or *lal dora* villages (Pati, 2022). "The Delhi experiment" is considered to have failed in its goals to prevent speculation and inequality in land and housing markets (Bhan, 2013). To villagers protesting land acquisition in Shahpur Jat, Delhi, in 1958, the former Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, reportedly responded, "*Badhte hue bachhe aur badhte hue shahar ko main nahi rok sakta*"[1] (Pati, 2022).

Following land acquisition in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the villagers within the *lal dora* became resentful about being left without access to modern amenities while posh colonies developed nearby (ibid.). The low compensation amounts and the poor regard for improving village amenities have also been officially acknowledged:

"The grievance is that village lands were acquired at the official acquisition rates, which are admittedly far lower than what the market is prepared to offer. (It is an open secret that a substantial proportion of payment in land deals remains unaccounted.) These lands fetched very high sale prices in auctions conducted by DDA. Despite the huge profits made, not enough was invested in providing basic civic amenities in the village abadi areas. By and large, villages lack even the most basic civic amenities…" (Delhi Development Authority, 2007: 21)

In another development, the Nehruvian era also witnessed the establishment of commercial and technical institutions of higher education such as IIMs and IITs. These institutions created a pool of professionals who, through well-paying salaried jobs, had a chance to accumulate assets and differentiate themselves from the larger mass of the working population. Public sector educational institutions that had to abide by constitutionally mandated reservations also led to opportunities for students belonging to historically deprived communities (scheduled castes and tribes). While the implementation of reservations in education was far from perfect, it did help in creating a group of professionals from marginalised communities. During the neoliberal period, these institutions became the breeding ground for new-age entrepreneurs, two of whom are covered in Case Study 7.

### Post-1980s: Neoliberal capitalism

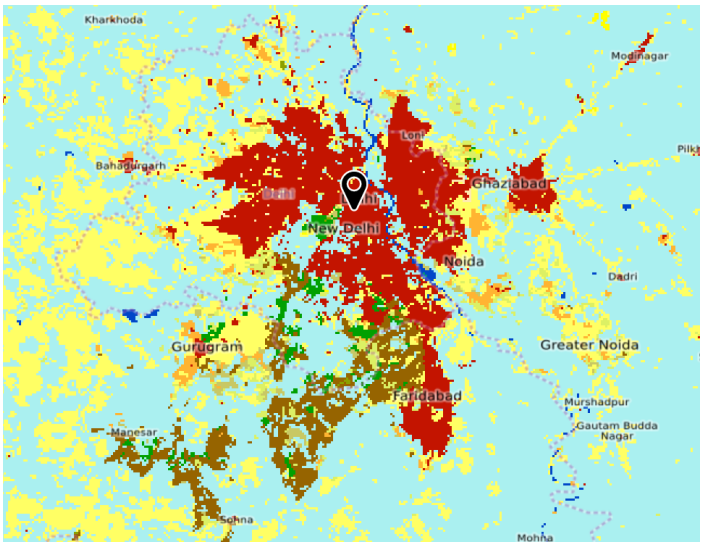
The decade of the 1980s was crucial in the history and economy of Delhi-NCR. Following the assassination of the then prime minister, Indira Gandhi, by her bodyguards of the Sikh religion, there were violent riots against this community in 1984. This decade also saw a transition of India to a regime of neoliberal capitalism. After economic liberalisation in 1991, the role of the government changed drastically, and policy took an explicit pro-big business turn. Along with the macroeconomic restructuring of the economy, the doors opened for private players to invest in several strategic areas and regulatory structures weakened significantly. The gains of big business are reflected in the rise in the number of US dollar billionaires in India and Delhi. The neoliberal period also oversaw massive changes in the spatial configuration of Delhi-NCR (Figures 4–7). By 1980, Delhi had run out of space, and the only route for expansion seemed in the direction of Gurgaon (now, Gurugram) in the neighbouring state

[1] 'I cannot stop a growing child and a growing city' (Pati, 2022).

of Haryana. Families that collectively purchased rural land in Gurgaon, Najafgarh, and Rohini saw steep rises in the value of their land with the rise of commercial property (Pati, 2022). Such payoffs on land speculation were strongly related to social and political networks and the related access to information (ibid.).

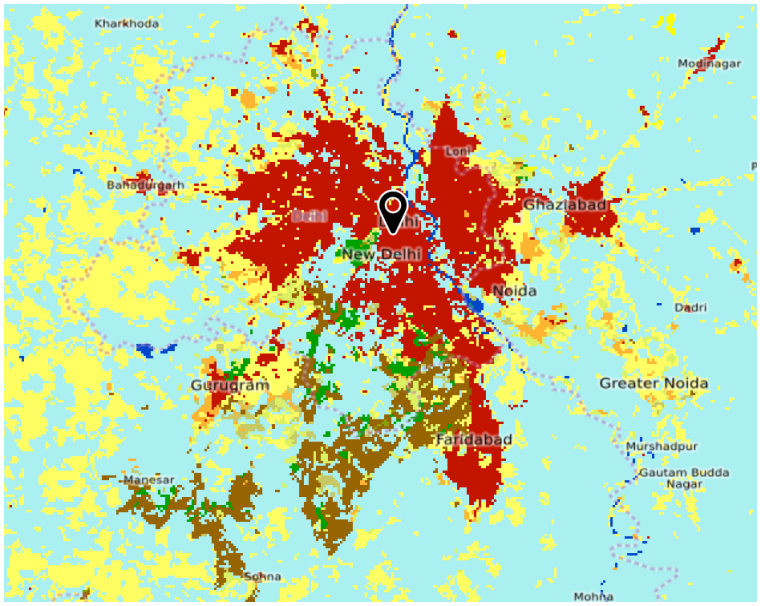
Lands in Shahpur Jat, Delhi, that used to be village commons and designated as 'wasteland' in colonial land records were acquired without payment by the government after the 1980s (Pati, 2022). DDA offices were built on the property and the land is now worth crores of rupees (ibid.). This is perceived as a deep loss among the villagers and the anger has seeped to the youth as well (ibid.). The earliest 'farmhouses' were in fact owned by bureaucrats and politicians (Dasgupta, 2014). The term 'farmhouse' itself reflected lands reserved for agriculture and seized by the elite to build their private estates from the 1970s (ibid.). These farmhouses have come to reflect the lives and excesses of the elites, becoming the sites of their parties and private collections of expensive possessions.

**Figure 4: Delhi in 1992**



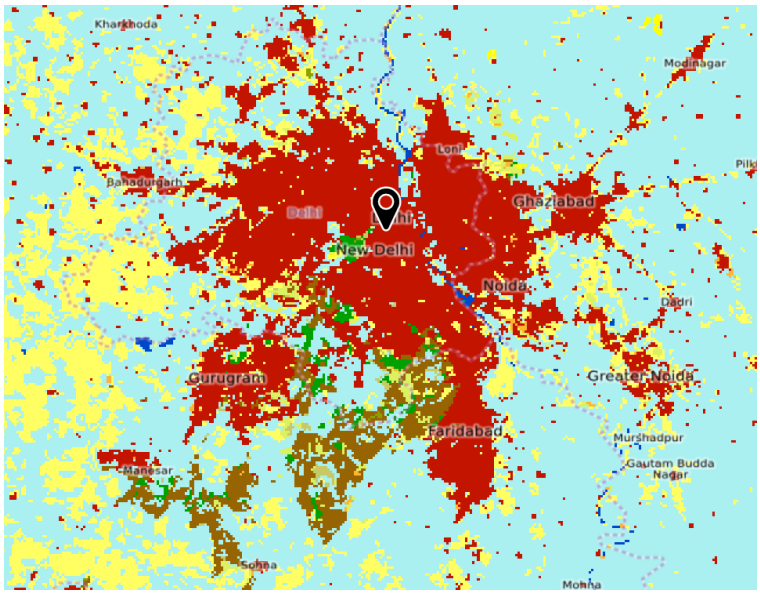

**Note:** The red colour on the map denotes urban areas. Source: ESA/CCI viewer (ucl.ac.be)

## Figure 5: Delhi in 2000



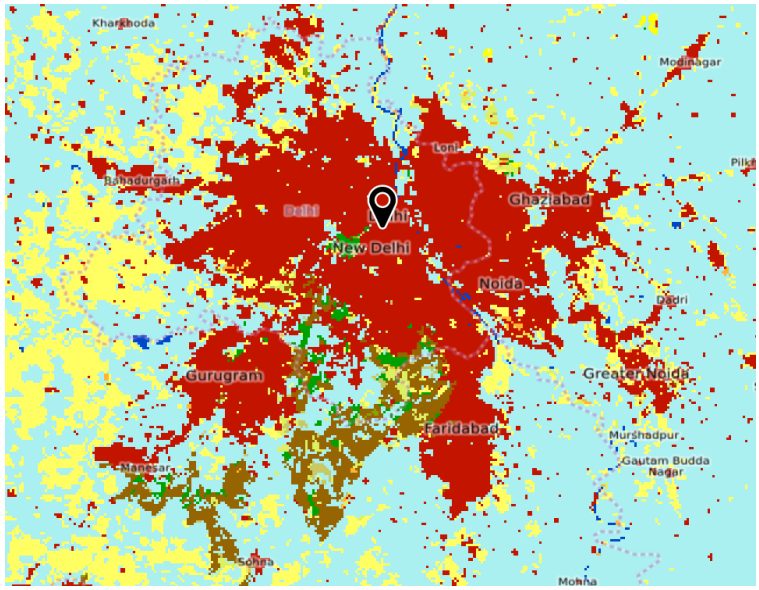

**Note:** The red colour on the map denotes urban areas. Source: ESA/CCI viewer (ucl.ac.be)

## Figure 6: Delhi in 2010




**Note:** The red colour on the map denotes urban areas. Source: ESA/CCI viewer (ucl.ac.be)

**Figure 7: Delhi in 2020**




**Note:** The red colour on the map denotes urban areas. Source: ESA/CCI viewer (ucl.ac.be)

## Analysis of sample

We analysed the available data on elites and linked it to the 'voices from the ground'. Our sample included 302 individuals in Delhi-NCR. For the individuals in the sample whose *jati* (ethnicity) could be identified, around 44% were of the Marwari community and another 26% were of the Khatri community. The dominance of Marwaris, Khatris and Aroras on the rich list of Delhi-NCR reflects the continuing dominance of the business and mercantilist communities of north India. Brahmins accounted for around 8% and Jats for around 5% of the sample. There are a small number of individuals of other *jatis* – Gujjar, Sindhi, Yadav, Nadar, Rajput – on the rich list. While there are some individuals of the Jat and Gujjar communities on our rich list, their limited presence in the sample does not reflect their population or political strength in the region. Damodaran (2008) discusses the lack of involvement of these communities in industrial activities. During our fieldwork, we also understood that much of the wealth in these agrarian communities is in the form of land (both legal and 'benami') and are often not visible in the construction of the rich lists that mainly focus on big business.

In the composition of the sample, Hindus dominate the religious group, accounting for 91% of the total. Sikhs accounted for around 4% of the sample and Muslims and Jains for around 2% each. The gender compostion of the sample suggests a disproportionate dominance of men (around 90%). However, several individuals on the rich lists are listed along with their families.

One of our interviewees, journalist Murthy*[2], identified different phases in the main sectors of wealth accumulation over recent decades in Delhi-NCR. In the first phase, between the 1960s and the 1980s, the core of wealth generation was in the manufacturing sector, and not in services. This included business families – such as the Shrirams, the Singhanias, the Thapars and the Modis – whose ancestors were traders. Some of this 'old wealth' still thrives in Delhi. Shriram's grandson, Arun Bharat Ram, featured in the Hurun rich list 2021 with a net worth of INR 5900 crores. Raghupati Singhania, heir of the Singhania family, also features in our list of wealth elites in the region, with a net worth of INR 470 crores.

From the 1990s, with the adoption of market-oriented reforms, the services sector became dominant. The traditional business families were now in a battle for survival, and "the capital was increasingly being taken over by outsiders" (Raj, 2020: 34). In fact, the first US dollar billionaire in Delhi-NCR to enter the *Forbes India* rich list was Shiv Nadar, originally from Tamil Nadu. This was after his information technology services company, HCL Technologies, was listed on the stock market in 1999 (Table 8 and Case Study 2). Shiv Nadar was joined by Sunil Bharti Mittal in 2004. Mittal, originally from Ludhiana (Punjab), was earlier a distributor of Beetel telephones and went on to accumulate wealth from the telecom services sector with his company Bharti Airtel.

Former non-resident Indians also started ventures in the services sector at this time such as the business process outsourcing-firm EXL Service. Shiv Nadar continues to lead the Delhi-NCR rich list with a net worth of USD 21.4 billion as of 2022. Certain 'outsider' business families were also able to find success in manufacturing sectors. Ranbaxy Laboratories of the Singh family became India's top research-led pharmaceutical firm at the time. The enterprise later crashed with allegations of fraud, and the founding brothers, Malvinder and Shivinder Singh, are currently jailed on charges of money laundering and illegal diversion of funds. There are also reports of the two brothers setting up offshore firms in the British Virgin Islands in 2009 (Singh, 2021). Other outsider business families tied up with Japanese auto companies in the 1980s and 1990s, resulting in fruitful collaborations through Hero Honda, TVS Suzuki, and Escorts-Yamaha (Raj, 2020).

Murthy* identified a real estate boom in the 2000s during which Delhi Land and Finance (DLF) made its fortune, and KP Singh (Case Study 3) entered the list of US dollar billionaires in 2006. Om Prakash Jindal, originally from Hisar (Haryana) and founder of Jindal Steel and Power, was among the dollar billionaires on the rich list in 2005, the same year of his death. His spouse, Savitri Jindal, continues to be among the few women from Delhi-NCR on the list of the super-wealthy. Since 2007, the list of Indian dollar billionaires in Delhi-NCR has continued to increase, and, after 2018, *Forbes India* only noted the top 100 wealthiest individuals in the country. This can explain the drop in the number of US dollar billionaires in the region in 2019 (Figure 8).

However, the rate of growth of the housing price index in Delhi seems to have fallen since the 2010s, as per RBI data (Figure 9). Murthy* identified the period after the 2010s as the phase of start-ups in Delhi-NCR. From Table

[2] Names of most interviewees have been changed to preserve anonymity; this has been highlighted with asterisks against each name.

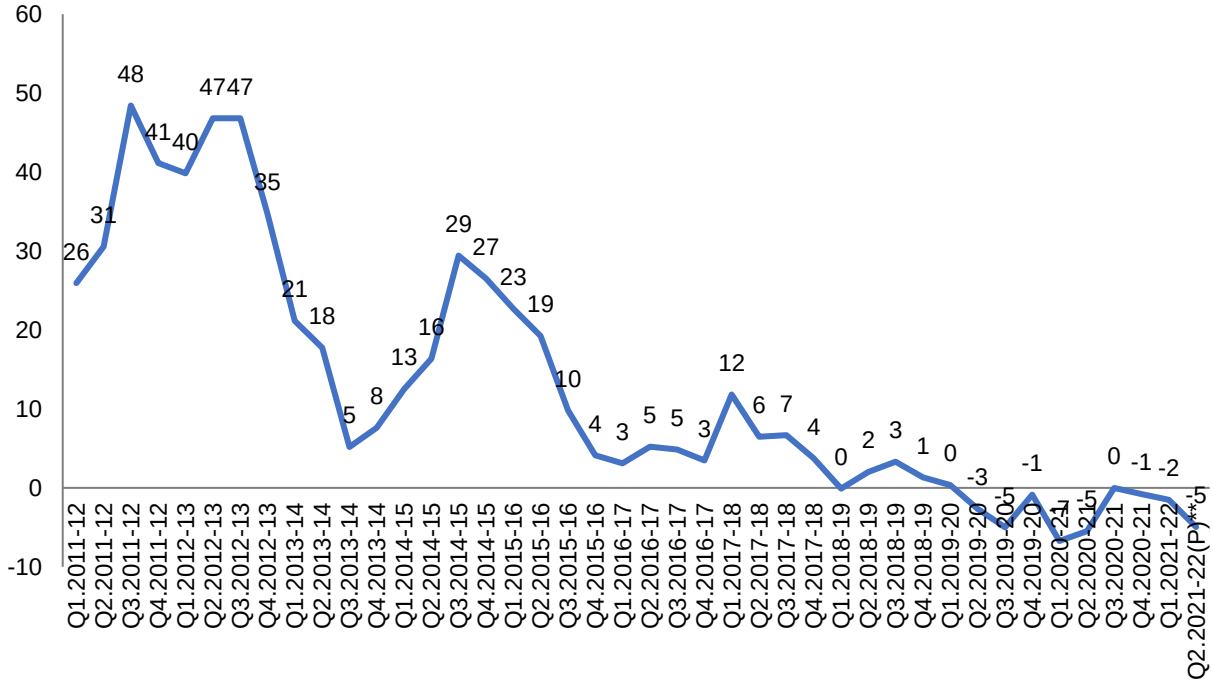
8, we notice that more recent sources of wealth accumulation are services sectors such as financial services and financial technology, security services, and online services. An example is Vijay Shekhar Sharma, the founder of the mobile e-commerce services company, Paytm, and the subject of Case Study 8. Soon after the disastrous demonetisation experiment in November 2016 that rendered notes of certain rupee values invalid, Sharma entered the *Forbes India* rich list in 2017 and remained there in subsequent years.

**Figure 8: Dollar billionaires in Delhi-NCR, 1999–2021**




Source: Forbes lists

**Figure 9: Rate of growth of housing price index, Delhi**




Source: Authors' calculations using city-level House Price Index, Reserve Bank of India

**Table 8: Source of wealth of dollar billionaires in Delhi-NCR, 1999–2021**

| Diversified | Other services | Other manufacturing | Consumer goods | Automobiles/ motorcycles/ auto parts/ airlines | Finance/ financial technology | Infrastructure | Healthcare/ pharmaceuticals/medical diagnostics | Steel | Telecom | Information technology | Real estate | Year |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
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| | | | | | | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | | 2005 |
| | | | | | | | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2006 |
| 1 | | | | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 2007 |
| 1 | | | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2008 |
| | | | | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2009 |
| 1 | | | | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2010 |
| | | | | 1 | | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2011 |
| | | | | 1 | | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2012 |
| | | | 1 | 1 | | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2013 |
| | | | 1 | 2 | | | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2014 |
| | | 1 | 5 | 2 | 1 | | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2015 |
| | | 1 | 3 | 2 | 1 | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2016 |
| | | | 3 | 3 | 2 | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2017 |
| 1 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 4 | 2 | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2018 |
| 1 | | 2 | 2 | 4 | 1 | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2019 |
| 1 | 1 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 1 | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2020 |
| 1 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 1 | | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2021 |

Another more recent source of wealth is the fast-moving consumer goods sector. Case Study 4 also studies a billionaire in the sector of manufacturing automobiles and motorcycles and their parts. Together, these point to the increasing importance of the financial sector, changing patterns of consumption, and how these benefit entrepreneurs and wealth accumulation in these sectors.

Certain sectors have been classified as "rent-thick", indicating that they are potentially thick with economic rents due to market power and preferential access to licensing with close relations to the state (Gandhi and Walton, 2012). According to their classification, sectors such as real estate, construction, infrastructure, telecom, cement, mining, and media can be termed rent-thick, due to the role of the state and licenses, reputations of illegal activities, or monopolistic tendencies. By this classification, some of the early sectors of wealth accumulation of listed billionaires in Delhi-NCR were rent-thick, such as real estate, telecom, steel, and infrastructure. But most of the sectors of wealth accumulation in the region, such as healthcare and pharmaceuticals, information technology, financial services, and consumer goods, would not be considered rent-thick by this classification. However, it is not clear that these latter sectors do not seek or benefit less from state patronage.

A stark example after the Covid-19 pandemic are the healthcare and pharmaceuticals sectors. Governments across the world have provided large subsidies to develop vaccines, without requiring the benefitting companies to share the knowledge and technology that they acquired (Ghosh, 2021). Since 2020, certain pharmaceuticals and medical diagnostic services companies have witnessed substantial gains in the Indian stock market. This could be why corporate empires also seem to be considering expanding their presence in the healthcare sector, such as Roshni Nadar (HCL Technologies), as reported in an interview in May 2022 (Majumdar and Ishwarbharath, 2022).

## Fieldwork and analysis of primary data

From the initial listing of wealth elites in Delhi-NCR, we purposively selected 80 individuals, for whom we filled the short schedule of the project. Seventeen of these people are reported to own wealth of more than INR 1000 crores; 58 own between INR 100 crores and INR 1000 crores; and 5 own less than INR 100 crores. Information was collected for this sample on the basis of the short schedule, that included information on gender, social and religious composition, and educational attainment. The caste category of the individual was identified mainly by considering the surname of the individual and consulting with those who were from the same hometown.

For the long schedule, we reached out to multiple founders and heads of companies, academics, and journalists for their personal interviews. Even those who agreed to the interview were often hesitant to speak of their own story of wealth accumulation.

Our interviewees include the following:

- one of the members in a leadership position in the Dalit Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DICCI);
- three journalists (referred to here as Murthy*, Arjun* and Vasu*);
- an academic and former journalist who works at a private university in Delhi-NCR (Ravi*);

- an academic affiliated with a management school;
- an academic with a published book on Delhi (Shreya*);
- a researcher of the Gujjar community who also belongs to the community (Vinod*);
- two real estate agents (Ram* and Shyam*);
- a serving bureaucrat (Ranjit*); and
- a farm leader (Ravinder*).

We also used secondary source material such as autobiographies, biographies, and interviews that narrate the accounts of the heads of business empires. This includes the autobiography of Kushal Pal Singh; interviews of Shiv Nadar and Roshni Nadar; the story of Royal Enfield written by Amrit Raj; and the stories of Sanjiv Dangi and Manju Rani as narrated by Kapur, Babu and Prasad (2014). These are featured as case studies and referenced in the main text. We categorised our main findings from the fieldwork into five key themes in the following subsections.

## Real estate, land and farmhouses

Nine people on the rich list of Delhi-NCR have generated a large part of their wealth from real estate. A major player is DLF (Case Study 3), whose owners, Rajiv Singh and family, have a reported net worth of over INR 50,000 crores. Real estate is crucial for wealth accumulation in Delhi-NCR for the super-wealthy, but also for the relatively smaller players.

Murthy* categorised the elites who derived their wealth from land in Delhi-NCR into three categories: land with traditional families, 'babu-brigade', and traditional agricultural communities. The DCM Shriram Group is an example of the first category. Murthy* pointed out that when business was floundering for this Group, their ancestral land came to the rescue. The DCM Shriram Group sold around 38 acres of land to DLF in 2007 for around INR 1675 crore.[3] The second category, the 'babu brigade', includes the bureaucrats and professionals who bought government land for a pittance between the 1960s and the 1980s. Journalists were allotted land in Gulmohar Park, and bureaucrats were allotted land in Vasant Vihar, Anand Niketan, and Shanti Niketan. The value of land in these areas increased exponentially as Delhi expanded towards the south. While these property holders were already well-off in terms of income, a rise in the value of the land and any associated apartment enabled them to accumulate wealth to an extent that their previous generations could not. This enabled children of the 'babu-brigade' to study in elite institutions across the world and join the ranks of top earners.[4] The third group of landed elites are the former agrarian communities, mainly Jats and Gujjars, who made their fortune by selling land to groups such as DLF. By the 2000s, it was clear to these communities that agriculture was not a lucrative means of livelihood, and

[3] DLF, DCM Shriram in largest pvt land deal, *The Indian Express*, 17 August 2007

[4] During the interview, Murthy* shared that he was sitting in a rented apartment that was owned by a former bureaucrat, and its current value would be around INR 50-60 crore. The bureaucrat had passed away, and the apartment was owned by his son who was settled in the United States.

they took advantage of the real estate boom in Gurgaon and other regions surrounding Delhi-NCR. To understand Delhi's real estate sector, we interviewed two real estate brokers, Ram* and Shyam*. Ram* described the process by which large farmhouses were developed in the heart of south Delhi. The elite locality of Sainik Farm was developed as a co-operative society in the 1960s, along the Mehrauli-Badarpur Road and Sri Aurobindo Marg. Ram* and Shyam* narrated how agricultural land was illegally acquired and accumulated in and around Sainik Farm and later sold to the likes of DLF and the Ansals. While claiming that their business is 'clean', Ram* and Shyam* suggested that only the powerful and politically connected buy these farmhouses now, some of which are sold for INR 100 crores. Shyam* also claimed that a few NRIs buy and sell them in response to fluctuations in the stock market – we could not verify this claim. We also interviewed a landed elite farm leader Ravinder*, who spoke more about the farmers' movement and less about his personal wealth. Ravinder* is a former MLA who declared his net worth as INR 632 crores in the 2009 Lok Sabha elections. As per a media report, his grandfather, Sir Datar Singh, swapped land with Pakistan's first prime minister and acquired land worth hundreds of crores in Muzaffarnagar (western Uttar Pradesh) and in Punjab Khor in southwest Delhi. Ranjit*, a serving bureaucrat, also narrated in general terms how several 'aggregators' became wealthy with the establishment of the Maruti factory in Manesar.

### Caste and community networks

In a critical study of north Indian agricultural communities, Damodaran discusses the lacklustre participation of these communities in industry and describes a few major players who did emerge as major capitalists (Damodaran, 2008). A prominent example of caste and community networks are the businesses of the Marwari community. Historically merchant communities – Aroras, Baniyas and Khatris – do dominate our rich list. To better understand the role of caste and community networks in wealth-generating processes, we interviewed two academics – one working on and belonging to the Gujjar community (Vinod*), and another who has mainly studied the Jat community in South Delhi (Shreya*).

As discussed, these agricultural communities in the Delhi-NCR region made their fortune by selling their plots of land. Our interviews reveal that much of the land was bought and sold within the community. Much of the land in this region is *bhaichara land* – that is, land collectively owned by several family members. The names of the owners are registered in *thok* (bulk). For instance, a plot of land could be a property of 'Haathi waali thok' – that is, registered in the name of the Haathi family. Such land is typically sold to 'aggregators' within the community or the village as it is very difficult for outsiders to manage properties that are registered in the name of 35–40 people. Vinod* gave us examples of how such 'aggregators' make wealth. While making land deals, the aggregator – who often also has political influence or connections – buys the individual plots of the members of the community at a cheaper price. The aggregator then negotiates a land deal with big players such as the DLF at much higher prices and makes a fortune in the process. Through our interviews, we were able to identify some individuals who have amassed wealth through this process. One such individual is Chaudhary Daya Ram. Further online searches led us to the Facebook

page "Gujjar Community"[5]. A post on this page dated 18 November 2002 reads "The undivided property of this family (Ch Daya Ram known as CDR) is judged well over 50,000 Crores. Now his son Ch Ved Prakash (who owns the chain of Five stars in Australia and a few other countries owns 30,000 crores, making him the richest individual Gujjar in India." We could not verify these numbers independently.

### Start-ups

A third interesting route of wealth generation since the late 2000s has been through start-ups. Unlike the previous examples where wealth was primarily made through land and with the help of community networks, several start-ups in the region have made a fortune despite not inheriting a family business. Several such entrepreneurs are alumni of prominent educational institutions. Some examples in our list are those who established Zomato, Chaayos, Paytm, and DeHaat. We attempted to reach out to the owners of several start-ups. All but one of our interview requests was denied or ignored. The individual who did initially agree to the interview later withdrew, citing their busy schedule. Nonetheless, we have conducted interviews of external analysts and online sources and included three case studies of individuals who initiated start-ups.

We interviewed a finance journalist, Vasu*, to understand the processes driving these start-ups. Many start-ups established their offices and operations in newly emerging areas such as Gurgaon, Noida, and Okhla. With the boom in the Indian economy in the late 2000s, and as India emerged relatively unscathed from the Great Recession of 2008, large amounts of venture capital money began to chase far fewer new companies. Vasu* noted that even in the early phases of several of these start-ups, the promoters dilute, that is, they bring their stake down and become angel investors in other companies, and they also spend on assets such as housing and luxury cars.

The bureaucrat Ranjit* narrated the story of a start-up of his bureaucrat colleague who used to work with the Indian Railway Traffic Service. The colleague gained information of the business opportunities in the sector and resigned from his post in 2006 to start his own business. The new business is now worth INR 1500 crores and is expected to go public shortly.

### Politics and wealth creation

Our fieldwork and analysis highlight the importance of political networks in wealth creation. An example is a politician named Dheeraj Tokas. As per the electoral affidavit, Dheeraj Tokas declared his net worth as INR 89 crores in 2013. Of this wealth, he and his spouse owned agricultural land worth INR 61 crores, none of which was inherited. Key informants in our fieldwork remembered that Dheeraj started off relatively poor and made his fortune through deals with a real estate company. Another name that emerged in our interviews was that of Ram Singh Netaji. While our informants were reluctant to go on record about specific instances of corruption, they did point out certain generic processes. Several wealthy politicians in Delhi-NCR have made their wealth through shady land deals, having often acted as 'aggregators', by accumulating several plots of land from members of their caste and

[5] Facebook post

community and then selling it to real estate giants. Other routes of amassing wealth were through businesses established with government contracts in areas such as construction, managing parking lots, and so on.

## Investment in educational institutions

Several members on the Delhi-NCR rich list own their own educational institutions. Among the most prominent examples are Shiv Nadar University and OP Jindal Global University. For most individuals in our list, educational institutions are not the main source of income generation. While there are no available estimates on the earnings from these institutions, several of their websites suggest that the tuition and residential fees are very high. With the mushrooming of private universities and schools in the outskirts of Delhi, investing in educational institutions seems to be a profitable and reputable business opportunity. More research is required to estimate the extent to which educational institutions add to the wealth of the existing elites. Table 9 shows a detailed list of educational institutions owned or supported by wealth elites in Delhi-NCR.

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**Table 9: Elites and ownership of educational institutions**

| Name | Link of the institution |
|---|---|
| Shiv Nadar & family | https://shivnadarschool.edu.in/shiv-nadar-foundationn |
| Vikram Lal & family | https://www.eicher.in/eicher-schools |
| Ravi Jaipuria & family | http://pravahrjcorp.org/about-us/about-rj-corp/index.htmll |
| Anil Rai Gupta & family | https://www.havells.com/en/discover-havells/csr/education.html#greff |
| Sunil Mittal & family | https://bhartifoundation.org/our-story/ |
| Rahul Bhatia & family | https://www.interglobe.com/SAME |
| Salil Singhal & family | https://www.piindustries.com/Media/Documents/CSR-OCTOBER%20Edition%202022_Linked.pdf |
| Rajan Bharti Mittal & family | https://www.businesstoday.in/latest/corporate/story/bharti-family-rs-7000-crore-charity-advanced-science-university-89216-2017-11-24 |
| Rakesh Bharti Mittal & family | https://www.businesstoday.in/latest/corporate/story/bharti-family-rs-7000-crore-charity-advanced-science-university-89216-2017-11-24 |
| Surjit Kumar Gupta & family | https://www.havells.com/en/discover-havells/csr/education.html#greff |
| Mahendra Prasad | https://www.mpmschools.com/m_mgt.aspx |

| | |
|---|---|
| Gautam Dalmia & family | https://nldalmia.co.in/about-our-school/#:~:text=With%20a%20vision%20to%20provide,important%20to%20educate%20its%20citizens. |
| Naveen Jindal & family | https://jgu.edu.in/founding-chancellor/ |
| Manohar Lal Agarwal | https://www.gyanshree.in/site/chairman_desk.aspx |
| Sara George & family | https://pggs.edu.in/muthoot-group/ |
| Pradip Burman | https://wescoorg.org/welcome-from-the-founder/ |
| Yadu Hari Dalmia & family | https://www.dalmiavidyamandir.education/visionaries |
| Chaudhary Daya Ram | CDR Public School |

# Case studies of wealthy elites

## Case Study 1: Lala Shri Ram (1984–1963)

Lala Shri Ram, a Punjabi of the Agarwal Bania caste who was named "the merchant of Delhi" (Dubashi, 1984), was among those who established the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI). He joined as a private secretary in Delhi Cloth and General Mills (DCM) which was owned by his uncle, Lala Gopal Ray. Lala Shri Ram later ran DCM with his father for a decade and then took lead of the firm. Shri Ram and his company made a fortune by supplying tents to the army during World War I. His company also expanded during World War II. He was appointed the president of FICCI in 1930. Lala Shri Ram was one of the signatories of the Bombay Plan, along with others such as GD Birla and JN Tata. Lala Shri Ram was instrumental in establishing certain leading educational institutions in Delhi and India, including the Delhi University colleges, Shri Ram College of Commerce and Lady Shri Ram College. Arun Bharat Ram, Shri Ram's grandchild, is the chairman of SRF Limited and was ranked number 55 on the Forbes list of Indian US dollar billionaires in 2020.

## Case Study 2: Shiv Nadar[6]

It is noteworthy that the wealthiest listed person in the Delhi-NCR region – and the first to enter the rich list – is of the OBC community and originally from Tamil Nadu. Shiv Nadar had previously worked at DCM. In 1976, Shiv founded MicroComp Limited, a calculator sales company, with former colleagues from DCM. With the revenues generated, they were able to launch Hindustan Computers Limited (HCL). HCL enjoyed state support and patronage, with the state government of Uttar Pradesh providing land and one-fourth of the initial start-up capital in exchange for a stake in the company. As Shiv narrated in an interview in 2006:

[6] The material for this case study is drawn from our interview with Ravi*, Knowledge at Wharton Staff (2006) and Majumdar and Ishwarbharath (2022).

"We were unlikely to get permission ourselves, so we had to find someone, such as a state government, that had been given permission and get into a joint venture. The government of U.P. [the state of Uttar Pradesh in northern India] joined the venture, and that's how we got the approvals." (Knowledge at Wharton Staff, 2006)

In 1977, due to government regulations that required the source code to be within India, multinational companies such as IBM decided to exit the country, and this opened a wider market space for HCL. In 1991, HCL partnered with Hewlett Packard in a successful attempt to get environmental clearances and enter the market in the United States. In 1999, HCL was listed on the stock market after the exit of one of the partners, following which Shiv Nadar was listed as the wealthiest dollar billionaire in the Delhi-NCR region. In 2020, his daughter, Roshni Nadar Malhotra, took over as chairperson of HCL Technologies after being CEO of HCL Corporation since 2009. Interestingly, in an interview in 2022, she commented: "I don't think Shiv had a choice … There was no son, so we grew into the role together." (Majumdar & Ishwarbharath, 2022).

Our key informant Ravi* spoke of the journey of HCL Technologies during the early years when bids were raised to supply computers in government offices and banks in attempts to modernise the country. HCL Technologies aggressively bid for these projects but could not fully deliver. Even after making only part-deliveries, HCL received full payment for these projects. Ravi* identified this as having been a key factor in raising Shiv Nadar's fortunes.

### Case Study 3: Kushal Pal Singh[7]

The suburb of Gurgaon was developed into "the cyber city of Haryana" by the real estate giant, Delhi Land and Finance or DLF. In 1946, Chaudhary Raghvendra Singh, a civil servant under the colonial government, set up DLF, anticipating the need for housing with the waves of refugees after the partition of the country into India and Pakistan. Singh was a highly ranked army officer from a politically connected Jat family from Rohtak, Haryana. The company developed elite colonies in various parts of Delhi. In 1957, DLF was decimated with the Delhi Development Act (1957) that formally established the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) for land development.

Raghavendra Singh and his son-in-law, KP Singh, attempted to diversify by entering into the manufacturing of car batteries and electrical motors, but did not succeed in their venture and returned to real estate. In 1966, the state of Haryana was formed from parts of Punjab, and the government of the new state aggressively pushed for urbanisation and opened itself to private development in 1975. From the late 1970s, KP Singh put into motion a plan to acquire rural land in Haryana to revive DLF. Singh identifies a chance meeting with Rajiv Gandhi as a turning point in the trajectory of DLF.

At the time, Singh had to contend with the laws of Haryana that did not allow private companies to develop land. Singh was able to get an audience with Gandhi on multiple occasions, and Gandhi influenced changes in these laws. DLF received its first license in 1981 and sold its first plot in Gurgaon in 1985–86. Singh's autobiography also

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[7] The material for this case study is drawn from our interviews with Murthy* and Ravi*, and from Radhakrishnan-Swami (2013), Donthi (2014), and K. P. Singh (2015).

includes an account of how, in 1991, he was asked by Gandhi to approve the passages on urban development in the Congress Party election manifesto, an example of the clear nexus between the state and corporate players (Singh, 2015). DLF was also able to lobby for and secure a change in the route of National Highway 8. However, this flashy suburb continues to have poor drainage systems, frequent power cuts, and excessive extraction of groundwater. The flashiness of the suburb hides the informal settlements of the working class.

KP Singh refers to his strategy of acquiring land in extensive self-congratulatory accounts:

"… the hundreds of hours I spent under the burning sun, trying to persuade villagers that giving up their relatively small piece of land would guarantee their children and grandchildren a better life." (Singh, 2015: 9-10)

He identifies part of his success to his profile: "… it was my rural and army background that allowed me to be accepted by the farmers whose land I was trying to buy" (Singh, 2015: 10). DLF also worked to establish itself as a creditor at a time when bank finance was exorbitant.

Singh's accounts are also useful in understanding the gendered dimensions of land ownership as well as the patriarchal constraints on the interactions of women:

"The average plot size in Gurgaon was 4 to 5 acres, mostly held by Hindu undivided families. Legally, to get clear titles, I needed the consent of every adult member of these families, that could be up to 30 people for one sale deed. Getting the married daughters to sign was tricky. Often, the karta would refuse to share the proceeds of the sale with them. So, I would travel to their homes and pay the daughters in secret" (Radhakrishnan-Swami, 2013)

### Case Study 4: Vikram Lal[8]

Man Mohan founded a tractor shop, Goodearth Co., in 1948 and later partnered with the German firm Eicher. Eicher Group manufactured tractors used in India before Independence and later diversified into trucks and automotive components. Eicher purchased the Royal Enfield (RE) brand from Madras Motors Limited in 1990. Man Mohan's son, Vikram Lal, was of the view that RE was about 'selling a way of life'. During the period of protectionism between the 1950s and 1970s, there were routine orders from the Indian Army for import of RE motorcycles. But these orders waned during the 1980s and in the early 1990s, and RE was in financial trouble.

Later, Vikram's son, Siddhartha, overhauled the company. Post-liberalisation, people were willing to pay for personal mobility, and automobiles became status symbols. Siddhartha was aided in this process by two strategists, V Sunil and Mohit Jayal. Sunil and Mohit proceeded to unleash a strategy that linked RE to the 'spirituality of

[8] The material for this case study is drawn from our interview with Murthy*, Dubey (1998) and Raj (2020).

motorcycling' and its Anglo-Indian roots.[9] Even when the automobile industry was affected by the global financial crisis in mid-2008, RE continued to see an expansion in sales.

The notable difference in Vikram's business strategy was that he handed over the management of the Eicher Group to a group of professionals. Vikram is thought to have been inspired by the model of German companies that separated management from ownership and where children had to prove their ability to hold a senior position in the company. Raj (2020: 84-85) notes the decision as being, at the time, "unheard of in Indian business families … [that] were run like dynasties, where regardless of worth and ability, sons and nephews would succeed their fathers and uncles at the head of their companies, and it was all only a matter of time." Nevertheless, Eicher Group also did not stray too far from the norm, with Siddhartha Lal later taking over the reins. Meanwhile, Siddhartha's sister, Simran Lal, was assigned the management of the lifestyle brands of the family, Good Earth and Nicobar.

### Case Study 5: Sanjiv Dangi[10]

Sanjiv Dangi (current vice president of the Dalit Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry or DICCI, and one of our interviewees) is considered "a rare breed among Dalit entrepreneurs" (Kapur et al., 2014: 41): a second-generation businessman, educated at the premier IIT Bombay, and one who does not recall any experience of overt caste discrimination.

Sanjiv's great-grandfather Narsingh and grandfather Buddha Ram fought in World War I and World War II, respectively, on the side of Great Britain. In 1971, even while being a state government employee, Navin, Sanjiv's father, set up a private company in secret, through which he would buy plots of land and develop and sell them after an interval. When forced to transfer from Jaipur, Navin decided to quit his job. Given his later success as an entrepreneur, it has now been referred to as "a heroic decision" as "a Dalit quitting a government job in those days was unheard of" (Kapur et al.,, 2014: 45).[11]

Navin gained social and economic mobility and was able to send Sanjiv to one of the best residential schools in North India in the late 1980s, where his identity as a Dalit student remained unknown. Sanjiv later acquired admission in IIT Bombay to study electrical engineering through reservation. After graduating, he set up Chandram Solar Power Private Ltd. with non-Dalit colleagues. He later decided to help in expanding the core family business in real estate, Dangi Associates Private Ltd., run at the time by his elder brother Rajiv. Sanjiv decided to transform the company into a registered company for construction, viewed with more 'respect' than real estate, and was successful in the project. In 2012, the government held an auction for the flats constructed for participants of the

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[9] Sunil and Mohit also succeeded in using a similar 'feel-good travel experience' with Indigo Airlines, propelling its founders, Kapil and Rahul Bhatia, to the list of dollar billionaires.

[10] This case study is based on Kapur, Babu and Prasad (2014) and a personal interview with the entrepreneur himself.

[11] Quote by a writer of issues related to Dalits.

2010 Commonwealth Games held in Delhi. Newspapers named Sanjiv Dangi as one of the few private bidders who won with a bid of around INR 4 crores for a three-bedroom flat. We interviewed Sanjiv in the DICCI office in South Delhi. Sanjiv was warm, cordial and receptive. He preferred to talk less about his personal life and more about DICCI and their work. In his view, economic liberalisation and unleashing the market forces are the only way forward for the Dalit community. Given the small and shrinking pool of reserved government jobs, entrepreneurship is the only way forward, says Sanjiv. Sanjiv and his associates pointed out that DICCI today has a membership of over ten thousand people and that their voice is taken seriously in policy circles.

We pointed out that, despite the rise in Dalit entrepreneurship, the community is far behind historically privileged groups in terms of wealth. Sanjiv responded with *"lambi ladai hai"*.[12] Sanjiv referred to the black capitalist movement in the US and remains optimistic that deepening market relations will weaken oppressive caste relations. According to him, even though the Covid-19 pandemic has hit the deprived community businesses the hardest, they can "challenge caste with capital".

### Case Study 6: Manju Rani[13]

Manju Rani was the only woman to feature in the stories of Dalit entrepreneurs in Kapur, Babu and Prasad (2014), and her wealth at the time was much less than most others that we discuss in the report. Manju owns an assembly-line production unit for shirts in an apparel manufacturing hub in Karol Bagh, Delhi. Her wealth at the time of publication of the book is unclear but certainly less than INR 5 crores, which was her stated future goal.

In 1962, Manju's father, Chhote Lal, who was uneducated and landless, migrated from Uttar Pradesh to Delhi. After an initial fruitless search for employment, he worked as a street hawker, and the family lived a hand-to-mouth existence in a slum in Bapanagar, Delhi. In 1994, after joining her husband at his rented home in Mangolpuri, Manju sold cooked lunches in the afternoon to workers at an embroidery hub nearby and made sizeable profits. After having her first child and returning to Bapanagar, Manju wished to have own earnings again and began to work at a shirt packaging unit. However, she could not gain the profits she had made in her self-employed food business, and she could not restart it as street food hawking would be 'looked down upon' in the locality where everyone knew her and her family. Even with her sisters providing childcare, she had to devote part of her time to rearing her children, and this is thought to have restricted her rise. In 2009, Manju quit her job and began to sew and supply jeans to a company. At the time, many clothing brands had begun to outsource manufacturing of their products so as to be able to increase supply without being restricted by labour regulations and associated costs. However, a relative who came to Delhi from her village in search of work informed other villagers that Manju produced leather products. With the stigma and caste associations with such activities, she was hurt by the claim: "as if we ran a tannery" (Kapur et al., 2014: 256). With her background in shirt production units, she decided to switch to

[12] "We still have a long way to go."

[13] This case study is based on Kapur, Babu and Prasad (2014).

manufacturing shirts in 2010. She was able to meet with the manager and impress him with the tale of their hard work. Even then, however, she did not reveal her caste.

### Case Study 7: Sachin Bansal and Binny Bansal

Sachin Bansal and Binny Bansal, alums of IIT Delhi and former Amazon workers, established Flipkart in 2007 with initial capital of USD 6000 (Chakraborty, 2017). In 2021, Sachin and Binny had net worths of INR 7800 crores and INR 8000 crores, respectively, as per the Hurun list. The business initially focused on offering nationwide shipping for online book sales. The first institutional funds were provided by Accel India (USD 1 million) in 2009, after which Flipkart continued to raise funds from hedge funds and mutual fund companies.

In 2018, Walmart took a stake of 77% in Flipkart. Despite objections from traders who feared that the Flipkart-Walmart agreement will force several small retailers out of business, the Competition Commission of India approved the merger. Sachin left Flipkart in 2018 after the Walmart acquisition after selling his stake in the company. Following accusations of sexual harassment, Binny Bansal resigned in 2018.

### Case Study 8: Vijay Shekhar Sharma

Paytm started as a straightforward mobile wallet but has since developed into a financial service and digital payments platform. Vijay Shekhar Sharma, who received his engineering degree from Delhi College of Engineering, launched the business in 2010. Vijay founded One97, the parent entity of Paytm, in 2001, with a loan of INR 8 lakhs. In 2014, the Reserve Bank of India published proposed regulations for payment banks, and permits were granted to Paytm and 10 other companies. Paytm benefited greatly from the demonetisation of banknotes of INR 500 and INR 1000 in 2016, and Vijay managed to acquire great wealth at a time when most businesses were in distress. In May 2018, an investigative news outlet released a sting video that purportedly showed a senior Paytm official claiming that the Prime Minister's Office requested the business to disclose customer data following the previous year's intense stone-pelting incident in Kashmir.[14]

### Case Study 9: Ritesh Agarwal

Ritesh Agarwal, the founder of OYO, received the Thiel Fellowship in 2013 and then dropped out of college in Delhi to move to California.[15] He returned with a starting grant of USD 100,000 for his project. Several rounds of fundraising allowed OYO to rise rapidly in its valuation. By 2015, OYO had a presence in several Indian cities and

[14] The video shows the senior vice president of the company, Ajay Shekhar Sharma, allegedly informing the Cobrapost reporter that the PMO requested the personal information of some Paytm users to determine which of them threw stones in the incident.

[15] The Thiel Fellowship was initiated by Peter Thiel, early investor in Facebook and co-founder of PayPal.

also expanded internationally later and entered the unicorn club in 2019. However, concerns have been raised about OYO's hire and fire policies[16] and predatory pricing practices.[17]

## Discussion and Conclusion

*Khosla ka Ghosla*, a 2006 Hindi film, depicted the situation of a household in Delhi whose plot of land was encroached upon by a land grab nexus using forged documents. News accounts of very similar crimes startlingly show that such incidents are not fictional (Sunny, 2020). Our analysis of the trajectory of wealth accumulation of elites over time reveals certain crucial elements that have enabled the reproduction, expansion, or shrinking of wealth.

Wealth inequality is the highest in Delhi NCT, as per large-scale household sample surveys. Such surveys identify land and buildings as the critical assets that contribute substantially to differences in asset ownership. In Delhi-NCR, both of these asset types have been acquired legally and illegally, with rampant land grab and illegal construction. For instance, following complaints filed by owners of flats in a DLF apartment complex in Gurgaon, the Competition Commission of India found serious irregularities and unfair practices in the construction of the complex and imposed a fine of INR 630 crores on DLF in 2011. The "steroidal" rise of Gurgaon is not a new phenomenon that occurred after economic liberalisation, but rather "… the product of a longer history of negotiations between governments, businesses, builders, landholders, labourers and middle-class settlers" (Donthi, 2014). As the story of DLF reveals, some of the key factors that contributed to the rise of the city can be traced to the partition of the country. Our fieldwork and primary data analysis also reveal five key themes that have contributed to the processes of wealth accumulation in Delhi-NCR: real estate, land and farmhouses; caste and community networks; start-ups; politics and wealth creation; accompanied by investment in educational institutions. These processes help us understand the trajectory of 'elites' as occupying a social position in a relational structure (Jodhka and Naudet, 2019).

In 2021, 189 super-wealthy elites were listed as having a reported wealth of or above INR 1000 crores in Delhi-NCR. Our interviews with key informants reveal different phases in the trajectory of wealth accumulation in the region. Between the 1960s and the 1980s, the core of wealth generation was in the manufacturing sector, mainly by traditional merchant castes communities. After the 1980s and economic reforms, the services sector also became a prominent source of wealth generation. In more recent years, the sources of wealth have become more diversified, and sectors such as financial services and financial technology have become lucrative. An example is the rise of the founder of the e-commerce platform Paytm, Vijay Shekhar Sharma, soon after the disastrous demonetisation experiment. Other relevant sectors of wealth accumulation are the fast-moving consumer goods sector and automobiles manufacturing.

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[16] OYO to downsize 3,700-employee base, cut 600 jobs, The Hindu, 3 December 2022

[17] OYO refutes allegations of predatory pricing, deep discounts, The Hindu, 26 December 2018

Together, these point to the increasing importance of the financial sector, changing patterns of consumption, and how entrepreneurs in these sectors have benefitted. Our analysis also concluded that the distinction between sectors on the basis of being rent-thick is not very clear. For instance, the healthcare and pharmaceuticals sector has earlier been classified as not rent-thick but recent experiences after the Covid-19 pandemic indicate that these sectors also rely on state patronage and government subsidies. The activities of business empires are closely linked with state patronage, and particularly so after the 1980s. The fortunes of DLF and other real estate companies have been enabled by a government that aids builders in acquiring land and by real estate brokers who bring in buyers, one of whom seems to consider it a "nashaa [high]" (Donthi, 2014). The promoted success story of DLF and Kushal Pal Singh (Case Study 3) identifies a meeting with Rajiv Gandhi as a turning point that effectively eased the way to establishing DLF through legal changes, access to information, and even access to comment on party manifestos.

As one of our key informants identified, these interactions were not incidental – KP Singh had influential networks and connections that he was able to use to promote DLF. That DLF was able to successfully lobby for a change in the route of a national highway can be seen as an instance of how elites can "… influence, and often shape, power politics, economic processes, and the normative and aesthetic frames of everyday social lives" (Jodhka and Naudet, 2019: 1).

Similar insights can also be drawn from the story of Shiv Nadar (Case Study 2). Nadar was able to set up HCL Group on land and with capital provided by the government of Uttar Pradesh. Our informant also identified that HCL received full payment for supply of systems in the early years of computerisation of government offices and banks, even though only part-deliveries were made. Our informant identifies this to be a key driver of Nadar's fortunes, and this also reflects state patronage and the power of political networks.

We also map the social profile of the wealthy in the region as per household sample surveys as well as the entrepreneurs in our short schedule sample and case studies. Historically, the Jat community has established dominance in the ownership of land and associate a sense of pride and belongingness with this asset. Communities with generational wealth have access to social and political networks that would be difficult to access for Dalit entrepreneurs. Nevertheless, we can identify cases of successful Dalit entrepreneurs who represent the formation of a new elite within marginalised communities (Jodhka and Naudet, 2019). Dalit entrepreneurs who have been successful often associate social mobility with village-to-city mobility, where they can enjoy relative anonymity.

Our case studies of two Dalit entrepreneurs reveal very different trajectories. However, we notice that both of these entrepreneurs chose not to reveal their caste at times when they anticipated that it may work against them. One of the entrepreneurs is considered "a rare breed" (Case Study 5) and experienced the benefits of being a second-generation businessman and one who was able to attend an elite school with others who did not realise his caste. The other (Case Study 6) is a female Dalit entrepreneur who grew up in Delhi in abject poverty and later acquired wealth through her business acumen. In spite of her successful enterprise, the extent of her wealth (as of 2014) was much less than others in our sample. In spite of progressive legislation, a very small proportion of women own land in India and may not have control over it even when they do (Agarwal, 1994). This is reflected in the account of land acquisition for DLF, where KP Singh (Case Study 3) narrates negotiating with adult daughters in secret.

However, certain women in business families contribute actively to the accumulation of wealth, as reflected in Case Study 4. Contrary to the view that women in elite business households are outside the sphere of production of wealth, such women often make use of money to create networks outside of their family (Bhandari, 2019). Elite women in Delhi secretly make financial investments through middlemen, who then supply these funds to businesses that use them for their production activities (ibid.). Women in elite business households of the dominant caste Agarwal community play an active role in the reproduction of wealth by forging kinship and network ties within and outside the household (Ponniah, 2019). Nevertheless, the extent to which women are credited for their contribution to the growth of the business empire or assigned leadership positions is not always clear (Case Study 2).

In an interview in the early 2000s, NR Narayana Murthy, then chairman of Infosys – a digital services and consultancy firm in the city of Bengaluru, Karnataka – reportedly said that it was important that the Infosys staff from the nearby low-income neighbourhoods needed to believe that they were sharing in the gains from the company's growth (Sukumar, 2016). This is contrasted with the discontent among the people of Karnataka who did not, in fact, seem to believe that they were beneficiaries of the gains from the software boom in the city. In a similar way, even after the rise of Gurgaon into a 'cyber capital', there continue to be several infrastructural problems, for which the wealthy who have made the city their home or office space have expensive solutions, but from which the poor are unprotected. As with the fictional *Khosla* household, the stories of wealth accumulation and preservation are ripe with illegal activity and acquisition of assets and particularly land, often disregarded, or perhaps abetted, by the state.

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