

**AN OORU AND A METRO: ETHNOGRAPHY OF A NEIGHBOURHOOD AND URBAN
INFRASTRUCTURE IN BANGALORE**

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**AN OORU AND A METRO: ETHNOGRAPHY OF A NEIGHBOURHOOD AND URBAN
INFRASTRUCTURE IN BANGALORE**

by

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Department of Humanities & Social Sciences

Submitted

In Fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis titled **An Ooru and a Metro: Ethnography of a Neighbourhood and Urban Infrastructure in Bangalore** submitted by **Ms. Usha Rao** to the Department of Humanities and Social Science, Indian Institute of Technology Delhi for the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy**, is a record of bonafide research done by her under my supervision. In my opinion, the thesis has reached the standards fulfilling the requirements for submission relating to the degree.

The matter contained in this thesis has not been submitted, in part or full, to any other university/institute for the award of any degree or diploma.

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The text holds the voices of all those in Ulsoor and in the Metro who unquestioningly let me in. They have spent hours discussing details, sometimes several times over and have filled these pages with the stuff of their lives.

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Usha Rao

ABSTRACT

Ulsoor (historically known as Halasuru) is a neighbourhood in the eastern part of Bangalore, with a history dating back to 10th century A.D and a mythical past that crosses time cycles. The Purple Line of the Bangalore Metro which was commissioned in 2011 flows over it. On Old Madras Road, that runs through Ulsoor, the presence of the heavy grey metro pillars and solid overhead rail dominates the view. The street is almost obscured by the concrete structure. For a rider on the Metro, Ulsoor appears as a blur passed on the way. On the day of Ulsoor's Car festival, an annual event celebrated on the onset of summer, its temple Car (*teru*) fills the street; its colourful canopy brushes past the grey rail as it trundles on its ceremonial path, pushed and pulled by residents. While neighbouring MG Road and the swathe of new developments being constructed along the Metro line echo the new spaces of a global city, Ulsoor's spatial design and sociality (as displayed in its three key festivals analysed in the thesis) evoke an older form of dwelling such as the *mohalla*.

The thesis takes a bifocal view of the street, which encompasses two seemingly disparate aspects of Bangalore: an old neighbourhood and the Metro, a symbol of the future city. In this thesis, they are not viewed as binaries i.e., 'archaic' vs hypermodern/global, but serve as loci to 'think with' so that a more nuanced understanding of the life of the city may be gleaned. A two-sided ethnography, enabled by a bi-focal view, offers a perspective to observe the parallels as well as the differences in the means and modes by which these two worlds are made: the meanings, practices, myths through which individuals construct belonging and inhabitation within these sites.

The focus on neighbourhood and the Metro attempts to shift the gaze from 'the city' as a 'singular' entity or a 'proper noun' and into its micro-spaces of dwelling where 'the city' is found and 'urban life' is lived and experienced. While gated communities, apartment blocks, and informal settlements or workplaces, places of leisure and worship could each be valid locations to explore urbanity and 'find the city', I focus on neighbourhoods as my interest is to understand dwelling and place-making as processes through which bodies are linked materially to landscape (the physicality of place) and community. The research is driven by the need to make sense of how belonging is produced and re-produced in specific places. I suggest that belonging is forged through inhabitation i.e., quotidian rhythms lived by bodies, grounded in the landscape, and mediated through practices and rituals – sacred, mundane, everyday, and of cyclical significance.

The Metro line that runs through Ulsoor is an alternative site for exploring the meaning of the ‘urban’ and city of the future, given its significance as a metaphor and a catalyst for ‘the worlding of Bangalore’ over the last decade. Attention to the production of Metro spaces and the subjectivities they engender, as well as techno-social relations that drive the Metro line provide insights into particular ways it produces the ‘urban’ and defines urban subjectivities.

Both the temple Car and Metro are viewed as assemblages of technology, humans and affective relations. In these stories about the Metro and the neighbourhood, the two assemblages come together in ways that link both sites to the city, hinterland and lives of people. For instance, we find the ‘industrial-worker’ and subjects produced through embodied regimes in the ‘hi-tech’ workplace of the Metro, while we see the centrality of Car technology as the engine that produces the neighbourhood and belonging in Ulsoor.

The thesis proposes that thinking about the city through the neighbourhood and the Metro may initiate a conversation between the two sites at the level of city planning and ‘development.’ In the wake of infrastructure development, neighbourhoods are glossed over and the impact of a passing metro is not considered relevant in the ‘larger interest of the city’. Foregrounding the story of neighbourhoods as sites of inhabitation, belonging and conviviality produced through shared rituals, in public spaces like the market, the playground or the street, may impact the terms in which city infrastructure is planned and viewed. It is hoped that attention to the material threads that constitute the urban will bring focus on imagining places for dwelling that are more ‘liveable’ in a world that is already approaching ecological or natural limits.

सार

उल्सूर, जिसे इतिहास में हालसूरु के नाम से भी जाना गया है, बेंगलोर (बेंगलुरु) के पूर्वीय हिस्से में पड़ता एक इलाका है। इस जगह के ऐतिहासिक प्रमाण १०वीं सदी ई तक से पाए जाते हैं, जबकि इसका अस्तित्व मिथकों में कई कालचक्रों के पार जाता है। बेंगलोर मेट्रो की बेंगनी रेखा २०११ के समय से स्थापित होने पर जमीन से उठी उल्सूर से होकर गुजरती है। उल्सूर से होकर गुजरता पुराना मद्रास पथ मेट्रो के भरी मटियाले स्तम्भों और उठी हुई रेल पटरियों से सजा है, जो आज इस जगह की पहचान बनाने में हावी हैं। यह सड़क इस सीमेंट के ढाँचे तले लुप्त सी हो गयी है। मेट्रो पर सवार किसी यात्री के लिए उल्सूर किसी छोटे बादल सा गुजर जाता है। उल्सूर के रथ पर्व के दिन, जो कि सालाना गर्मियों की शुरुवात में यहाँ मनाया जाता है, उल्सूर मंदिर का रथ (जिसे "तेरु" कहते हैं) यहाँ की सड़क पर फैल जाता है। उसकी रंग-बिरंगी छत मटियाली रेल को छूते हुए इस सालाना सवारी में सड़क पर से मटकती हुई, यहाँ के रहवासियों द्वारा धकेली जाती है। एक तरफ साथ चलते महात्मा गांधी मार्ग और मेट्रो के इर्द गिर्द बन रही नई इमारतों की भरमार वैश्विक शहर के नये स्थानों की गूँज देते हैं, दूसरी तरफ उल्सूर की स्थानीय बनावट और सामाजिकता एक *मोहल्ले* होने का, पुराने स्वरूप के रहवास का आभास देते हैं। इसी पुराने रहवास के स्वरूप को इस शोध में उल्सूर के तीन त्यौहारों के मायनों में समझा जा रहा है।

यह थीसिस 'सड़क' को दो नज़रियों से देखता है, जिसमें बेंगलोर शहर के दो भिन्न पहलू उजागर होते हैं – पुराने इलाके का स्वरूप, और मेट्रो, इस भावी नगर का प्रतीक। इस थीसिस में इन दो पहलुओं को बेजोड़ द्वंद्व की तरह नहीं देखा गया है, जैसे पुरातन बनाम अत्याधुनिक। इनकी भूमिका उन केंद्रों की होगी जिनके साथ 'सोचने' पर शहरी जीवन की एक जटिल समझ बन पाना मुमकिन हो सकता है। इस द्विदर्षीय समझ के सहारे खड़े इस दुतरफे नृवंशविज्ञान से जो नज़रिया बनता है, उससे इन दो जगहों की समानांतर और भिन्न प्रक्रियाओं के तौर-तरीकों – वे तमाम किस्म के मायने, क्रियाएँ, और मिथक जिससे व्यक्ति यहाँ आत्मीयता और रहवास का सृजन करते हैं – को समझने में निपुणता होगी।

रहवास और मेट्रो पर ध्यान केंद्रित करना हमारे लिए शहर बनाम अभिन्न 'इकाई' या एक 'विशेष संज्ञा' की समझ से पार देखने में सहायक साबित होता है। हम रहने के उन लघु-स्थानों तक पहुँच सकते हैं जहाँ 'शहर' पाया जाता है और 'शहरी जीवन' जिया और अनुभव किया जाता है। एक तरफ जहाँ तालाबंद समुदाय, कालोनियाँ, और अनौपचारिक रहवास या कार्यालय, आराम और आराधना के स्थल भी 'शहरी' [तत्व] और शहरीयता की खोज के जायज़ स्थान हो सकते हैं, मैं *मोहल्लों* पर ही इस थीसिस का ध्यान केंद्रित रखना चाहती हूँ। मैं इन्हें 'रहने' और 'स्थान बनाने' की प्रक्रियाओं के लिहाज़ से देखना चाहती हूँ जिनके द्वारा शरीर भौतिक रूप से परिसर और समुदाय से जुड़े होते हैं (स्थान या जगह की भौतिकता)। इस शोध का मुख्य उद्देश्य यह देखने की जरूरत है कि किस तरह विशेष स्थानों पर आत्मीयता उत्पादित और पुनरोत्पादित होती है। मेरा यह सुझाव है कि आत्मीयता रहने या रहवास से बनती है, यानि की शरीरों द्वारा

अनुभव किये हुए दैनिक तालमेल से, जो परिसर में गढ़े हुए रहते हैं, और ऐसी क्रियाओं और रिवाजों की मध्यस्तता द्वारा जो पवित्र, सामान्य, दिन-प्रतिदिन के और पुनः होते रहने की अहमियत लिए होते हैं।

उल्सूर से गुजरकर निकलती मेट्रो रेखा एक वैकल्पिक स्थान है इस बात को जानने का कि 'शहरीय' और भविष्य में उभरनेवाले शहर का अर्थ क्या होता है। यह साफ है कि मेट्रो पिछले दशक में बेंगलोर के 'वैश्विक होने' का मुहावरा और कारक बन चुकी है। मेट्रो के स्थानों के उत्पादन और इससे जुड़ी उभरती चेतनाओं पर ध्यान देना, और साथ ही साथ उन तकनीकी-सामाजिक रिश्तों पर नजर टिकाना - यह उन पहलुओं को देखना बनता है जो मेट्रो को चलाये रखते हैं, जो शहरीयता बनाते हैं और शहरी चेतनाओं को परिभाषित करते हैं।

मेट्रो रेल और मंदिर का रथ - दोनो को ही तकनीकी, मानवी, और भावात्मक तत्वों के परस्पर गठन [या असेंबली] के लिहाज से देखा जा रहा है। मेट्रो और मोहल्ले की इन कहानियों में यह दो किस्म के गठन कुछ इस तरह साथ आते हैं जिससे दोनों ही स्थान शहर, देहात, और मानवी जीविकाओं से जुड़ जाते हैं। उदाहरण के तौर पर, हमारी मुलाकात 'औद्योगिक मजदूरों' और ऐसी अन्य चेतनाओं से होती है जिनका ईजाद मेट्रो के 'हाई टेक' कार्यालयों की शरीर के अंतर्गत समाहित करनेवाली हुकूमतों में हुआ है। दूसरी तरफ, रथ-तकनीक में हम उल्सूर के भीतर ही मोहल्ले और आत्मीयता के उत्पादन के केंद्र देख सकते हैं।

इस थीसिस का सुझाव है कि शहर के बारे में मोहल्ला और मेट्रो के दृष्टिकोण से सोचने पर शहर की संयोजना और 'विकास' के स्तर पर इन दो स्थलों के बीच वार्तालाप की शुरुआत हो सकती है। सार्वजनिक साधनों में विकास के मद्देनजर, मोहल्लों पर सरसरी नजर फिरायी जा रही है, और 'नगर के मुख्य हितों' के आगे गुजरती मेट्रो रेल के प्रकोप को महत्वपूर्ण नहीं समझा जा रहा। मोहल्लों के रिहायशी, आत्मीयता भरे, और प्रफुल्ल स्थल होने की गाथा, जिसमें बाजार, खेल-मैदान, सड़क, इत्यादि शामिल हैं, साझे रिवाजों से लिखी जाती है। इन पर रौशनी डालना उन मापदंडों को प्रभावित कर सकता है जिनके जरिए शहरी साधनों को देखा और नापा जाता है। यह आशा है कि इक ऐसे दौर में जहाँ संसार निरंतर प्राकृतिक और पर्यावरण की सीमाओं की ओर बढ़ रहा है, शहरीयता के भौतिक रेशों पर ध्यान देना एक अधिक जीवन अनुकूल दुनिया को संभावित करेगा।

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¹ Source of maps (fig 1.1 and 1.2)

<https://www.google.com/search?q=namma+metro+map&sa=X&biw=727&bih=310&tbn=isch&source=>

**LIST OF PROTAGONISTS/PARTICIPANTS
IN ULSOOR AND METRO**

Ranjani	Great grand daughter of Subbiah Reddy, resident Ulsoor
Mrs. Balu	Co-owner Krishna Shetty Store, Ulsoor
Mrs Reddy	Ranjani's mother
Mala Bai	Metro worker also resident Gautampura near Ulsoor
Yamini	Old time resident of Ulsoor
Kishore	Architect who grew up in Ulsoor
Jayanna	Old time Jogupalya resident
Hari	Car expert and Jogupalya resident
Sumanagali Stores	Owners Sumangali Stores and old time residents
Brothers	
Kartik Shetty	Young son of Krishna Shetty Stores
Dr. Iqbal	Old time resident of Ulsoor, voluntary worker for harmony
Rangappa	Elderly gentleman, resident of Jogupalya
Aslamji	Fruit merchant in the market
Balaji	Farmer, Budigere
Other Residents	
Swamy	INTUC Union leader for Metro workers
Manju	Maintenance employee, Metro
Santosh	Maintenance employee, Metro
Ashok	Train Operator and Station Controller
Shiva	Station Controller and union activist

Sanjay	Railway Expert
Ex- Managing Director	Bangalore Metro (BMRCL)
Mr. Sharma	Sr. Project Manager (BMRCL)
Ramya	Metro commuter
Asha	Metro commuter, IT Professional
Suresh	Metro Commuter, IT Professional
Women Security guards	
Other commuters	