**BACKGROUND**

With 12.8 million people living over 1483 square kilometers, Delhi is the capital of India and one of the largest cities in the world. A tour of the area would reveal its rich heritage and long history of urbanization. Its abandoned cities, various tombs, exquisite gardens, and iconic monuments each have a story to tell. As the city grows, it incorporates the many villages that come in its way. These newly subsumed areas are known as ‘urban villages’, and the processes of appropriation are not always smooth. Urban villages are small clusters of unregulated areas that have emerged as a result of planning decisions made in the 1960s. Many of these urban villages have come up around significant historical monuments scattered throughout the city. Delhi has over 300 urban villages that are situated in densely populated areas. One of the most well known villages is at Hauz Khas. Hauz Khas is unique because of its heritage value, long historical presence, its position as a green lung of the city, and the processes by which it has gentrified since the 1980s into an exclusive market for antiques, rare textiles, designer jewelry, and expensive art. The village simultaneously serves residential, retail, commercial, tourist, and recreational purposes, and this is reflected in the architectural character of the area. However, there remains a clear and visible hierarchy of space and function. Hauz Khas and its village have changed significantly since the turn of the 20th century.

**RESEARCH PROJECT**

My project examines Hauz Khas, an important archaeological site and the most popular urban village in New Delhi. By focusing on historical transformations in boundary and land use along with the contemporary politics of urban planning at this heritage site, I seek to understand how seemingly discrepant alternatives and interests converge in remaking a place. How do everyday negotiations both within and without the legal framework translate into urban forms? How have cultural tastes for the ‘ethnic chic’ and ‘village old’ pushed economic investment into this historically significant agrarian site? My work highlights how India’s urban villages can help us think about the complex and contradictory nature of historic preservation, the political and economic nature of neighborhood change, and the gaps that exist between land acquisitions, ideologies of official planning, and the local realities that shape small pockets within big cities.

**METHOD**

Drawing on literature from history, geography, and city planning, I use the concept of ‘landscape’ to understand changes at Hauz Khas. I see landscape as a constructive political process. There are particular relationships between material practices and cultural production, between the physical environment and what it comes to symbolize. By examining in historical detail the political ecology of this unique site in Delhi, I am trying to understand how the built environment, ongoing social processes, and complex struggles over identity, resources, and space are located as a politics of difference. In presenting a detailed case study of Hauz Khas and its village, I hope to illuminate larger questions on how decisions about the use of city space are made, from what viewpoint they are articulated, and how they actually play out in creating multiply constituted yet highly recognizable landscapes. One of the research areas that I seek to make larger contributions to is how cities with illustrious pre-modern urban pasts comes to terms with modern practices of city planning, historical preservation, and the use of space. My research is based primarily on four methods – archival, textual, ethnographic, and visual.