

# KHIRKEE VOICE



(<http://artdose.in/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/DSCF8464.jpg>)Undeniably, the Khirki village is a community of sorts: of class, caste, labor, culture, and nationality, an abrupt incorporation into the surrounding bustling city: parallels on the same plane. Lined with shops weighed down by residential floors, the rugged main lane and its dusty alleys reinstate the under-workings of a busy city with a conglomeration of Indian, Afghan and African market-places; an industrialized urban village, where the daily labourer is the micro citizen of his/her microcosm.

Within this extensive networking and overlapping of identities, Malini Kochupillai, primarily an urban researcher, navigates the neighborhood to gather the everyday stories of its diverse inhabitants. Capturing photographs to still the monotony and

gathering oral accounts of personal memories, *Khirkee Voice* becomes her medium to document the numerous instances of the ongoing struggles and victories as a regular pattern of events. These occurrences find solace in her twelve-page quarterly issues.

The initiative to carry out this project was conceived out of an interest in multicultural localities of urban spaces. Malini, a participant at the Khoj Residency, *Coriolis Effect: Migration and Memory* (2016), proposed to explore the commons and contradictions through the lives of the others, with the newspaper as a point of access to the organic aggregation. The effectual community engagement brings to fore global concerns reflecting at a local level and seen from a local perspective, where the personal becomes issues of public debate. The newspaper at this juncture becomes an important vehicle to perforate the consciousness of the many and create value to the living landscape. To have the members of the village see themselves getting featured in the newspaper gives value to their labor; co-existence and a sense of ownership is maintained to serve for the betterment of their neighborhood, explains Malini. The newspaper is

printed in English and translated to Hindi by Mahavir Singh Bisht, ensuring a larger readership. Copies are circulated to the locals, shopkeepers, rickshaw drivers, and passers-by, with the rest compiled for the Khoj Archives.

The residency and the public art interventions got her exploring more and more of the African community residing in the locality. With the ongoing political and social inconveniences encountered by the Africans on a regular basis adding to numerous accounts of racial discriminations, the community kitchen became an accessible channel to explore their responses to incidents of prejudice that have allied ramifications across the community. The first issue of *Khirkee Voice*, for instance, interweaves narrative strands of routine encounters recounted within the capacity of common kitchens frequented by its members, and so goes the story of Michelle's Kitchen (*Issue 1, page 6*).

The crucial role of each individual in the collective labor should be recognized for the contribution he/she makes for the sustenance of their immediate surroundings for a better society. Giving a simple example of rag-pickers, she wonders: how would the city function without their contribution in making it their responsibility to keep the city clean? Yet they are looked down upon with the utmost disregard for the work they do. Take the sellers working in the many small businesses in the neighborhood and the daily consumer of these essential commodities: how can a settlement sustain without these balances? Such instances throw light on the various start-ups that build these urbanscapes.

On wondering about the future of the endeavor once the neighborhood and its stories are well explored, Malini elucidates that she doesn't see herself as the editor of *Khirkee Voice* in the long run. Within the next three or four years, she plans on handing over the project to the community itself, so that they are self-sufficient to be able to regulate a sustainable economic development. In the process, the community should be able to include other projects to involve its members as participatory beneficiaries. This is a model project, an initiative for change and progress that should be implemented in every urban village because intercommunal awareness and communication through engagement and exchange is crucial, she concludes.

*Khirkee Voice* is a project initiated in 2016 by researcher Malini Kochupillai and supported by the Khoj International Artists' Association, located in Khirkee Extension.



(<http://artdose.in/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/DSCF8455.jpg>)

Malini Kochupillai

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