

What's in a Name? Environmental and Historical Archive of Civil Lines, Delhi

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Abstract: Archives are an important source of historical information for any place or institution. They also help increase the sense of a place, identity and sociocultural understanding. The dictionary definition of an archive is a collection of historical documents or records providing information about a place, institution or group of people. Creating and maintaining archives thus plays an important role in preserving heritage and sometimes also serves as a useful tool in historical studies. The present research contribution attempts to extend the concept of an archive by exploring the relevance of names of places, parks and buildings in the Civil Lines part of Delhi. The research work analyses and deduces the historical relevance of names of parks, places and buildings located in the Civil Lines area and attempts to use them to create a virtual archive of the Civil Lines area.

Civil Lines is a noted residential area and sub-division of North Delhi District in the National Capital Territory (NCT), India. It is one of the 12 Zones under the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD). The name Civil Lines itself is a relic of British times. After the Uprising of 1857 the city of Delhi was organised into separate areas where the British military and civilian buildings were located. While the European community moved out of the old city of Delhi, the British army moved into the Red Fort and Daryaganj. Areas where the British personnel lived were henceforth demarcated as Civil Lines. Similarly, several other parks, places and buildings have names which reveal significantly about their past, which this research work has tried to compile. The focus is also to understand the past in Delhi's present and highlight the natural and built heritage of Delhi, a significant part of which is rapidly being lost, both in the physical sense as well as in the memory of the people of Delhi.

Keywords: environmental history, built heritage, historical studies, archives.