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STUDIES

Cities in South Asia

Edited by
Crispin Bates and Minoru Mio



Cities in South Asia

Globalisation has long historical roots in South Asia, but economic liberalisation has led to uniquely rapid urban growth in the region during the past decade. This book brings together a multidisciplinary collection of chapters on contemporary and historical themes explaining this recent explosive growth and the transformations ongoing in the cities of this region.

The chapters in this volume attempt to shed light on the historical roots of these cities and the traditions that are increasingly placed under strain by modernity, as well as exploring the lived experience of a new generation of city dwellers and their indelible impact on those who live at the city's margins. The book discusses how, previously, cities such as Mumbai grew by accumulating a vast hinterland of slum dwellers who depressed wages and supplied cheap labour to the city's industrial economy. However, it goes on to show that the new growth of cities such as Bangalore, Hyderabad and Madras in south India, or Delhi and Calcutta in the north of India, is more capital-intensive, export-driven and oriented towards the information technology and service sectors. The book explains that these cities have attracted a new elite of young, educated workers with money to spend and an outlook on life that is often a complex mix of modern ideas and conservative tradition. It goes on to cover topics such as the politics of town planning, consumer culture and the struggles among multiple identities in the city. By tracing the genealogies of cities, it gives a useful insight into the historical conditioning that determines how cities negotiate new changes and influences.

There will soon be more megacities in South Asia than anywhere else in the world, and this book provides an in-depth analysis of this growth. It will be of interest to students and scholars of South Asian History, Politics and Anthropology, as well as those working in the fields of urbanisation and globalisation.

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Century', *The Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko* 66 (2008), pp. 103–129; and 'A Reappraisal of Studies on *Nāyakas*', *Journal of Karnataka Studies* (2008), Vol. 5, No. 2.

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1 Introduction

The city in South Asia

Crispin Bates

Globalisation has deep historical roots in South Asia, but economic liberalisation has led to uniquely rapid urban growth during the past decade, and this urgently requires scholarly attention. Previously, cities such as Mumbai (Bombay) grew by accumulating a vast hinterland of slum dwellers who depressed wages and supplied cheap labour to the city's industrial economy. However, the new growth of cities such as Bengaluru (Bangalore), Hyderabad and Chennai (Madras) in the south of India, or Delhi and Kolkata (Calcutta) in the north is more capital-intensive, export-driven and oriented towards the information technology and service sectors (Ahmed 1991, Heitzman 2004). These cities have attracted a new elite of young, educated workers with money to spend and an outlook on life that is often a complex conflation of vibrantly modern ideas and conservative tradition (Baviskar & Ray 2011, Brosius 2010). They have also attracted a large inward migration of less skilled workers from outlying districts in order to service the needs of the new urban middle classes.

To understand the drastic changes currently taking place in cities in South Asia, it is necessary to look at the historical development of social, cultural and political lives within cities. Over centuries South Asian cities have experienced various and sometimes contradicting forms of urban transformation, from Islamic urbanism to colonial and modernist urban planning (see Cheema 2007, Kalia 1999, Patel 2005, Sengupta 2007, Nair 2005, to mention a few). Migration from villages to cities and overseas has also characterised the lives of South Asians for generations (Bates 2001, Verkaaik 2004). Tracing the genealogies of cities will give a useful insight into the historical conditioning that determines how cities negotiate new changes and influences.

The importance of the new style of urban growth to government finances means that the middle classes associated with it now dominate political and economic decision-making across the subcontinent to an extent that is vastly disproportionate to their numbers. The physical geography of South Asian cities is also being transformed (Ashraf 1989, Hosagrahar 2005). Problems of congestion, combined with the improvement of mobile telecommunications, have led to a reverse process of decentralisation in many cities, with businesses and offices relocating to suburbs and satellite towns. Such towns have thus been transformed from dormitories into centres of employment. The new class of single, mobile IT

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workers who have re-located to growth centres across India bring with them new ideas about how to live, and this sometimes creates conflict with the ideals of local communities (Upadhyā & Vasavi 2008). These tensions have led working-class communities to organise themselves into conservative and patriotic associations to resist the tide of social change, and have sometimes even resulted in violence, as in the city of Ahmedabad in 2002 (Shani 2007, Breman 2004, Hussein 1990, Roy 2003, Tarlo 2003).

Cities have always simultaneously been a source of cultural and social aspiration and invoked a sense of fear (Hansen and Verkaaik 2009, Nandy 2007, Srivastava 2007), and the growing influx of capital into cities has further magnified this complex imaginative repertoire. A proliferation of programmes on multiple TV channels has enabled the creation of new religious sects with massive followings almost overnight; once-forgotten religious festivals have been revived, and undemanding 'lifestyle' gurus and new forms of yoga are increasingly in vogue. These developments are challenging and changing traditional conceptions of religion and of the relationship between religious authority and society as a whole. Above all, a new ideal of 'subaltern citizenship' (Pandey 2010, Chatterjee 2004) has emerged within cities, through which the middle and working classes have sought to empower themselves with the aid of legal NGOs and charitable organisations. Battles are being fought over planning, the environment and the utilisation of urban space (Kaviraj 1997, Neve & Donner 2006, Verkaaik 2009, Ruet & Tawa Lama-Rewal 2009, Anjaria & Macfarlane 2011). Collectively, these developments have profound economic and political implications for the management of the modern city in South Asia, which are of crucial concern to national and international development agencies, as well as business enterprises seeking to invest in the burgeoning South Asian urban environment.

The chapters in this volume attempt to shed light on the cities of South Asia in the present day from differing disciplinary perspectives. They also present, uniquely and for the first time, the work of East Asian (Japanese) scholars within this field and the products of some of the very latest scholarship within western academia. They are the result of multiple workshops held in Japan from 2006 to 2010 under the Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research programme of JSPS ('A cultural anthropological study of the commercialisation and transformation of urban space in South Asia') which culminated in an international conference held at the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka in July 2010. By bringing these original perspectives on the city in South Asia within the same frame, the conference organisers and editors of this volume hope to achieve an alignment that may help to establish the city in South Asia as an empirical field of study in its own right, rather than merely the object of competing disciplinary perspectives.

Part I: ideologies of city making – the formation of the Indian city

In [Chapter 2](#), Junichi Fukao considers the cities of South Asia from an archaeological perspective. He claims that the main focus should be on the material

aspects of cities. Based on the criteria set out by Gordon Childe and other archaeologists, he has formulated benchmarks by which to distinguish a city from a village from the viewpoint of material evidence: settlement size, isolation from the surrounding area, monumental public architecture, town planning, extensive use of goods not in daily use and site hierarchy. There is a hiatus of more than 1,000 years between the ‘first urbanisation’ in the Indus civilisation and the ‘second urbanisation’ of early historic cities in north India, and there is little archaeological data available in the case of the early historic cities in south India. However, Fukao argues that a close examination of related pottery can show possible links and continuities between cities in these three categories.

In the following chapter, Nobuhiro Ota discusses legendary accounts of the foundation of Vijayanagara city, the capital of the Vijayanagara state, from the middle of the fourteenth century to the middle of the sixteenth century, and the role within such histories of a Hindu saint named Vidyāranya. An analysis of the available accounts demonstrates that Vijayanagara city was unique among south Indian ‘Hindu’ capitals not only in its spatial expanse and form, as already noted by existing studies, but also because it played a significant role in the creation of dynastic power in symbolic and representational terms. The last section of the chapter deals with the historical context in which these legends were created and received. Ota concludes that the story of the founding of Vijayanagara city under the auspices of a ‘Hindu’ saint seems to have been conceived within the framework of south Indian cultural traditions, but that it is possible to detect within it an echo of the political norms of the ‘Islamicate’ world that engulfed south India during the Vijayanagara period.

The contemporary relevance of these chapters lies in the collective memory of South Asians and the archaeological legacies that surround them. Even today, the echoes of these ancient city structures are still visible in the layout and imagining of many cities, and they provide a mythology and practice of city culture from the remote past that helps to normalise urban living for South Asians in the present day.

Part II: politics of town planning – colonial and postcolonial

In this section, Partho Datta considers the Scottish town planner Patrick Geddes, who came to India in 1914 and for the subsequent decade was engaged principally in writing town-planning reports for local municipalities and princely patrons. His report on Barrabazar, Calcutta’s indigenous business district, written in 1919, was exceptional for its attempts to grapple with one of India’s largest colonial cities. Geddes had to enter into a ‘dialogue’ with official planners, not only because the scale of the problem in Calcutta called for a more innovative approach, but because opposition to his ideas was more entrenched there.

Datta contextualises Geddes within currents of thought concerning town planning in early twentieth-century India. The worldwide plague epidemic (1896) resulted in urban policies that set stringent rules for the relationship between bodies and urban spaces. Implementing these were autonomous ‘Improvement’

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Trusts, which followed the precedent of demolition and rebuilding set by Haussmann in Paris (c. 1850–70). Geddes adopted a more cautious approach that would help preserve the historic core of Calcutta. His survey revealed that this traditional district had a functional and economic *raison d'être* and could indeed be modernised. Geddes's plan and survey challenged orientalist notions about the moribund nature of Indian towns that seemed beyond the pale of urban reform.

Moving from the colonial period to 1950s Pakistan, Markus Daechsel's contribution addresses the question of how a new national identity could be represented in urban space. Just like the makers of Vijayanagara several centuries before, policy makers were faced with the task of creating new urban centres that reflected a programmatic religious vision. This problem was particularly acute in Karachi, a city structurally and symbolically ill-equipped to serve as the new capital of a Muslim nation. Early attempts to create an ambitious new cityscape that was simultaneously Muslim, modern and democratic failed, and soon the debate shifted away from city planning to the more restrictive field of monumental architecture. Several modernist architects from Europe and Japan were invited to propose designs for important buildings of state, but their proposals were without exception rejected by senior bureaucrats who could not agree what a proper Islamic style for Pakistan should look like. After General Ayub Khan's coup d'état of 1958, the problem of religious representation in the city was approached from a bolder and more 'developmentalist' perspective. The Greek planner Constantinos Doxiadis was tasked to solve the Karachi problem with two geographically separate projects: the Korangi satellite town close to Karachi itself, and more spectacularly, the newly created capital city of Islamabad in the north of West Pakistan. For Doxiadis, both urban sites could be made distinctively Islamic by taking care to provide for all the perceivable needs of a Muslim population. But this 'developmentalist' Islamic urbanism, too, was quickly rejected by both the state and the ordinary residents of these new cities, leaving the original question of how to represent Islam in urban space not only unresolved, but in fact unresolvable.

Moving from the heavy-handed planning of new cities in Pakistan to the reconstruction of already well established communities in India, in [Chapter 6](#) Roma Chatterji discusses the changing representations of slum dwellers in slums such as Dharavi in Mumbai through the lens of slum redevelopment projects. From an initial perception as illegal encroachers on public land, they are increasingly being viewed as local-level entrepreneurs. The role of the state has also been re-fashioned in the process. However, these changes cannot be thought of in terms of a linear trajectory. Instead, legality is a process with its own dynamic, and attempts to redraw the line between legal and illegal residents of a territory are constantly shifting.

Issues of territoriality are also addressed in the research of Solomon Benjamin, who examines in [Chapter 7](#) how globalisation shapes the spaces of city contestations over territory and infrastructure in complex ways. He argues that a critical understanding of such contestations comes from looking at cities beyond the plan and seeing them as spaces constituted by everyday practices shaped

around multiple logics by the complexity of ‘on the ground’ politics. Such an analytical frame is very different from the assumption of the inevitability of a homogenised terrain that is commonly held across ideological perspectives on globalised cities. Bangalore, having been famed for IT since the late 1990s, and with the social and political tensions that resulted from this, forms a useful example with which to illustrate the shift in conceptual approach.

Like other Indian and ‘southern’ cities, Bangalore has its fair share of globalised infrastructure: ‘gated’ housing, office complexes clad in glass and granite, and large infrastructure projects such as expressways, metro rails and an international airport. Since 1998, an IT-dominated ‘civil society’ has been particularly vocal in envisioning the corporate-led future of the city along this path. Such visibility provides an example for others in India to look to as an illustration of corporate-led urban governance. But this narrative of ‘good governance’-oriented urban reforms also homogenises the rest of the city into a non-planned ‘slum’ and results in select parts of the central market areas being sanitised into a heritage precinct. In such a narrative, those who are not part of the IT industry, especially the poorer groups, remain marginalised, unruly, illiterate victims of a corrupt politics.

At first glance, Partha Chatterjee’s ‘Civil and Political Society’ seems an attractive resource for understanding such tensions in Bangalore and elsewhere in urban India (Chatterjee 2004, 2008). Such a categorisation, however, overlooks how the city actually works on the ground, where elite groups mobilize court cases, surveys and categories of Master Planning to homogenise diverse logics in constructing new ‘public space management’ to create ‘occupancies’ in their favour. A reverse of this situation is witnessed in resettlement housing, where poorer groups claim anthills as sacred territory. This is, of course, part of their belief, but also helps build up occupancy claims that counter governmentalities mobilising the ‘grid’ and ‘survey’. Benjamin calls for careful ethnography to enable more subtle understandings of the production of contested political space. These spaces are necessarily fluid and shaped by complicated relationships, and operate beyond notions of ‘resistance’ or in oppositional frame to ‘the plan’. Thus, city politics can be understood as ‘stealth like’ and points to a vast city that is undisciplined by ‘the plan and policy’ to contest the rules imposed by centralised political party politics. This approach contrasts several recent studies of cities in the postcolonial south that adopt the frame of ‘The Plan’ to then view its outgrowth as a contamination – either as a ‘victor’ against or ‘victim’ of harsh modernism. Benjamin suggests that we look to the construction of space from Massey (2005), and draw from Singerman’s (1995) work on Cairo to highlight the notion of quiet politics. Rather than considering institutional realms through the lens of the nation state, he instead locates them within Santos’s (2004) conception of legal and institutional pluralism. The city in these conceptions operates as a series of heterogeneous and contested spaces constructed around complex land claims.

Benjamin’s argument, along with the other chapters in this section, points towards a research agenda that attempts to conceptualise the South Asian city

from beyond ‘the plan’ within the narrow confines of western theory. Instead we are encouraged to look at the possibilities opened up via everyday practices across place and time, within which there are constantly changing interactions among different elements within urban society and between the local populace, local state and global trading networks.

Part III: the city as an arena for struggles among multiple identities

In this section, Sandeep Banerjee and Subho Basu discuss the establishment of British crown rule in India in the late nineteenth century, when Delhi gained a new symbolic status. At this time Delhi was seen as the capital of precolonial India by Indian elites, as well as the colonial ruling class. Although Calcutta remained the centre of British power and flourished as a hub for the men, materials and resources of empire both within India and outside, it lacked the historic authenticity of Delhi among the colonial elite and Indian literati. This sensitivity to the past and present of the two cities betrayed a deep sense of alienation. To many Hindu neo-nationalist Bengali elites, Delhi symbolised ‘Muslim tyranny’ and lost Hindu glory. In the middle of the nineteenth century, Bengali writers celebrated Calcutta for its modernity. Yet as the long nineteenth century reached its closing decades, such celebrations seemed to be increasingly undermined by a sense of diminishing agency within the city. This chapter argues that during the late nineteenth century, as the tendency to imagine and visualise the colonial state space as the future nation space of India grew, this sense of alienation gave rise to an implicit yearning to restore Delhi to its position of glory within the putative Indian nation. The ruins of Delhi thus became a symbol for the nation among the bourgeois elite of Calcutta, the capital of British India, who aspired to restore the lost glory of India. By excavating the narratives of Bengali travellers, this chapter establishes how the city of Delhi became a metaphor for a ruined nation and charts the emergent geopolitical awareness of the imperial space of India as a site for the production of an imagined nation.

Moving from nation to region, the chapter contributed by Riho Isaka examines the way in which Bombay State was reorganised on a linguistic basis following Indian independence, and the influence of this process on the social and political situation in the city of Bombay. Although the Indian government conducted a large-scale reorganisation of states based on linguistic differences in 1956, it was not until 1960 that Bombay State was divided into two linguistic states, Maharashtra and Gujarat. This delay was mainly a result of conflicting opinions concerning the position of Bombay city, namely whether it should be included in Maharashtra, if the state were to be created. While there had been a demand among the Marathi elite for the creation of Maharashtra with Bombay as its capital, there was strong opposition to this idea, mainly from the Gujarati elite. They argued that Bombay was a multilingual city and was connected historically, economically and socially with both Marathi-speaking and Gujarati-speaking regions. While repeatedly rejecting the idea of including Bombay

within Maharashtra, the Indian government suggested alternative solutions, which caused serious political tensions. Riho Isaka's chapter examines in detail various ideas of the city presented in this process and shows how the notion of Bombay as a place primarily for Marathi speakers gained significant influence in the late 1950s. This development not only resulted in the birth of Maharashtra in its present form, but also had an important effect on politics in Bombay after 1960, encouraging the rise of the politics of regional chauvinism (and of the Shiv Sena in particular). The chapter thus considers the implications of the creation of linguistic states for the development of contemporary cities in India.

In [Chapter 10](#), Tetsuya Nakatani discusses how in the urban environment of Delhi the neighbourhood has been formed and influenced by the urbanisation and redevelopment of urban spaces, using the case study of Chittaranjan Park, formerly known as the 'East Pakistan Displaced Persons' Colony', in New Delhi. New Delhi has many displaced persons' colonies for migrants from West Pakistan, and since independence these have expanded the urban areas of Delhi and helped to form the modern conurbation. The [first part](#) of this chapter deals with the annual Hindu festival of Durga Puja in Chittaranjan Park. Durga Puja was first organised in 1970, when the development work of the colony was still ongoing and the number of residential plots was small. Since then, while the number of Durga Pujas in the colony has increased and the festival has become largely commercialised, some residents have begun to separately perform new neighbourhood pujas which have a more homely and personal touch. The various organisational changes within the Durga Puja festival demonstrate that once the expansion of an urban neighbourhood exceeds a certain size, it tends to dissolve and re-shape itself into an appropriate scale for social living. The [second part](#) of the chapter deals with urbanisation and its influence on the ethnic composition of Chittaranjan Park. Rapid urbanisation in Delhi and the redevelopment of two squatters markets in the colony during the past decade have changed the ethnic composition of Chittaranjan Park, once again challenging the identity of the local community.

Finally in this section, Parvis Ghassem-Fachandi explores a strange contradiction that haunts the urban experience of Ahmedabad, a city strongly divided along class and communal lines. The city's Sabarmati river is traversed by seven modern bridges, which, instead of being a solution to the problem of separation, have assumed its very form. In ordinary life, as well as during extraordinary events, residents of the city use these bridges not only to span space and gain access to the other half of the city, but also to escape and confine, project and expiate, and even to remain hidden in plain sight. This chapter describes experiences of separation in Ahmedabad and how these experiences are expressed in reference to its bridges. In other words, urban structures intended to overcome physical space and represent the modern promise of connectivity have instead become embodiments of division.

Collectively these chapters demonstrate how the spatial reconfiguration of urban spaces affects understandings of community and identity. However, they further suggest that the location of that community within wider political and

social communities, whether that be of the city as a whole, the region or the state, can profoundly alter the way in which urban identities are lived and conceived.

Part IV: lived cities – views of cities from the ground

In the [first chapter](#) of [Part IV](#), Yoko Taguchi discusses how 1990s economic liberalisation gave rise to a new type of civil society movement led by the urban middle class. By invoking citizens' 'civic sense', middle-class activists strive to eliminate 'filth' from public space and to create a 'world-class' city. However, these movements have been criticised for aspiring to progress at the expense of poor and marginal groups. The chapter offers a new perspective on these controversial movements by focusing not on the politics of middle-class activism, but the forms and aesthetics of one particular 'clean-up' campaign: 'Fight the Filth', which was organised by the *Mumbai Mirror*. By investigating the forms and aesthetics of civic activism, Taguchi considers what it means to be a responsible citizen in the context of the competing demands placed upon the urban middle class within the public culture of contemporary Mumbai.

In [Chapter 13](#), Minoru Mio writes about spirit cults in Udaipur, Rajasthan. In the old town of Udaipur, an ancient capital city of a Rajput kingdom in south-eastern Rajasthan, spirit possession cults, centred on the recently revived spirits of Rajput warriors and/or lords who fought on the battlefield hundreds of years ago, have rapidly become popular. These cults function as new communities for their followers, and for the citizens of Udaipur have become a basis for the reconstruction of the locality. At the same time, they show features that deviate significantly from the typical characteristics of such cults seen elsewhere. After describing the recent social changes in Udaipur and the features of these cults, this chapter aims to consider how such apparently old-fashioned cults can be the basis for locality reconstruction in a contemporary Indian city. The cults have developed in a place where local cities, loaded with the unique memories and traditional meanings of an old capital city, have been incorporated into the space of the modern nation state. The followers of these cults both resist and negotiate with the forces of nation building and globalisation by participating in the religious practice of cults that recollect the memory of past Rajput warriors and lords.

In the following chapter, Mizuho Matsuo discusses the role of religious practices among the urban middle classes in contemporary India by focusing on *Narayan Nagbali*, a funeral and ancestor rite performed at Trimbakeshwar in Maharashtra, western India. Narayan Nagbali is believed to solve family issues such as childlessness, the lack of a male child and domestic conflicts caused by the curse of restless ancestors or the sin of killing a cobra (*nāg*). Although it takes three days to complete the entire ritual, and various procedures are required, it is becoming popular with the urban middle classes, who visit Trimbakeshwar to perform Narayan Nagbali.

Economic liberalisation in India in the 1990s brought rapid economic progress and the expansion of the Indian middle classes. Arising from this are two

different phenomena concerning the religious practices of the middle classes that have attracted the attention of scholars. One is the growing Hindu nationalism among the lower and middle classes and their involvement in the movement to construct 'India' as a nation consisting solely of Hindus. The other is the increasing popularity of charismatic modern gurus with spiritual healing powers. By attaching themselves to a certain guru, middle-class devotees can construct an identity as a modern Indian. By contrast, however, Narayan Nagbali seems to involve rather traditional and orthodox religious practices which have been performed since Vedic times. Why is the performance of such ancestral rites necessary for the middle classes, and what kind of social role do they play? Through a detailed examination of the Narayan Nagbali ritual and the people who gather at Trimbakeshwar, this chapter reveals that the performance of this ritual helps to make the category of family visible. It also assists in the reconstruction of the locality and, as with the spirit cults of Udaipur, reflects the social transformations and uncertainties surrounding the lives of the urban middle classes in India.

Part V: subaltern practices and discourses in urban situations

In the [first chapter](#) of this section, Anindita Ghosh considers Calcutta in the late nineteenth century and its relationship with singing and street songs at a time when the material infrastructure of the city was changing beyond recognition, with tramways and gaslights, parks and avenues and unprecedented levels of commercialisation within daily life. Interestingly, the city in contemporary imagination was also seen increasingly as a site of moral corruption, sin and ruin. Yet rather little is known of the responses of the city's more humble inhabitants – migrant workers, boatmen, songsters and an army of clerks – to these tumultuous developments. What was the reaction of these people to the changing world around them? Contemporary songs, some of which were later captured in print, provide entry-points into the psyche of Calcutta's lower social orders. They show how these groups reflected upon and engaged with these changes through participation in and the patronage of street songs, which became an immensely popular part of contemporary urban culture. This chapter thus explores the interstices between largely pre-modern, pastoral and deeply indigenous sensibilities on the one hand, and the onset of a rushed modernity and urbanity in nineteenth-century Calcutta on the other, as well as their wider significance for the newly emergent public sphere within the city.

In [Chapter 16](#), Ajay Gandhi focuses on Indian migrant labourers who work in the wholesale markets and construction *mandis* of Delhi's old city. These Hindu and Muslim labourers work intermittently as jobs arrive and are mostly away from their families and kinship networks in India's northern states. This chapter provides an examination of the Indian street as a constitutive space for the urban underclass. Gandhi addresses the plasticity of street activities, the ways in which the street opens up into different sensory possibilities and threats, and finally the ways in which the street is a conduit to elsewhere – a broader public culture that

is vernacular and fragmentary. The chapter discusses issues such as ‘time-pass’, intoxication and gratification, and the ways in which the everyday eating, watching and waiting of workers hovers over notions of habit, addiction and indulgence, and their myriad moral and social consequences.

What is the lived experience of people dwelling in the city? How do the city’s inhabitants experience the city, and how do they regard their everyday lives? How do they view human relationships in the city, particularly in comparison with those in the village? Mineo Takada answers these questions with regard to Muslims belonging to the lower strata of society in Chittagong, Bangladesh in [Chapter 17](#). Employing the methodology of oral history, the chapter attempts to give voice to the residents of Chittagong through a presentation of their personal narratives. These stories reveal unexpected experiences, such as the harsh realities of everyday life in rural areas, children running away from home, and teenagers existing on the street, along with other aspects, both positive and negative, of city life. A hidden connection between street children who have run away from home and city residents in the lower strata also becomes apparent. With the facts of their lives as a background, their impressions of human relationships, ambivalent views on city life and on the city itself are explored in the conclusion of this chapter.

These insights into street life in Chittagong, the Old City in Delhi, and historical examples of popular culture in Kolkata, reveal a thriving counter-culture within urban life, according to which ordinary people imagine their lives in the city in ways that contrast markedly with those of the middle classes, the town planners and the city’s economic and social elite. The city from this perspective is a space of contestation: poor residents, labourers and migrant workers are seen not as mere passive victims but as groups and individuals actively competing for opportunities on the margins of thriving urban centres, negotiating their hopes and despair, and securing a sense of freedom through the tactics of cultural creativity.

Part VI: consumer culture in contemporary South Asian cities

In this chapter Izumi Morimoto discusses Nepali tourism, which has been developing since the middle of the twentieth century. Tourist industries such as hotels and restaurants have accumulated in Kathmandu, which has also been changing rapidly in the context of modernisation and globalisation. In Kathmandu, the greatest change is in the touristic space of Thamel. This space has come to represent the image of Shangri-La imagined in the west. When the number of tourists decreased at the end of the twentieth century as a result of the volatile political situation, the new Nepali middle class began to visit Thamel in order to explore and enjoy the exotic side of Nepalese culture as seen by westerners. At the same time, local Nepali people re-created their own culture as a consumer product. For example, foreign tourists enjoy ethnic Nepali food cooked with ketchup and with very little chilli, while the demand from Nepali people has created many

local Nepali food restaurants where local foods are prepared with plenty of chilli. Initially, the tourist space of Thamel was created by demand from foreign tourists, but recent changes have transformed this space into a centre of consumption for the enjoyment of the Nepali middle classes as well.

Consumption in the form of dining out thus helps to define the middle classes in urban Nepal; it is a phenomenon that has arisen in other major cities in South Asia in recent years, notably in Kolkata, where ‘dining out’ has become an entirely novel part of middle-class culture. However, consumption can be equally important as a site for the regulation of urban society and spaces of social interaction. In the final chapter of *The City in South Asia*, Aya Ikegame and Crispin Bates explore the drinking culture of Bangalore and the way this has become a focus for novel forms of social control in reaction to the burgeoning sociality of middle- and working-class drinkers.

Over the last decade, Bangalore has enjoyed such names as the IT City, Techno-Hub and Pub City, leaving its old names, the Garden City and ‘the Haven of Pensioners’, far behind. Bangalore is unusual in that it is one of the few cities in India where a woman can openly drink in public and still feel safe. In Church Street, immediately behind the city’s landmark M.G. Road, many young female office workers thus enjoy a lunchtime beer with their colleagues. At the same time, Bangalore and Karnataka’s second city, Mangalore, has witnessed several violent incidents carried out in the name of moral policing in recent years. Women going to pubs wearing jeans and sleeveless shirts have been targeted and assaulted in public by gangs of Hindu nationalists.

Drinking in India has always been a very contentious issue. Christian missionaries encouraged a policy of temperance, while the army in cantonment cities such as Bangalore fortified its troops with copious quantities of spirits. Giving up drinking was considered to be one of the ways in which the lower castes could claim higher status in the *varna* hierarchy. Gandhi added to this ‘Sanskritising’ behaviour a sense of patriotism, as alcohol was a major source of income for the colonial state. Unfortunately, the excise duty on alcohol remained an extremely important source of income for post-independence state governments (accounting for more than 20 per cent of tax revenues in most states). Inheriting as it did both the nationalist (or Gandhian) moral agenda and the financial structures of the colonial era, the postcolonial state had to play a seemingly contradictory role.

Some states tried to introduce a total prohibition on alcohol sales, but most of them failed to continue this, with the exception of Gujarat. However, it need not be contradictory to both adopt a moral stance and ensure that financial demands are met. It all hinges on controlling people’s moral and bodily practices. Southern states have now banned the sale of arrack, a typical working-class drink, on the grounds of health and family welfare, while encouraging the sale of Indian Made Foreign Liquor (IMFL), a more middle-class drink, which happens to be centrally distributed. This is a clear example of how the state has endeavoured to exercise moral authority over predominantly urban populations while controlling and collecting excise revenues more efficiently. Earlier, toddy liquor

was banned for similar reasons. This chapter demonstrates the changing and diversifying nature of drinking cultures in Bangalore and explores the ways in which the postcolonial state has endeavoured to control the way people drink, and the spatial and social re-orientations of the city that have resulted.

The post-orientalist South Asian urban space

According to Max Weber, the city in South Asia was never properly developed as an institution. It lacked a central economic, symbolic and political role. It never developed a mature middle class nor the concomitant civil society customs and practices. However, the chapters in this volume prove this to be an overtly orientalist point of view that is far removed from reality. Even in ancient times, the city played a powerful symbolic, political role within segmented Hindu state systems. In the colonial era, the paradigms of urban development were generally quite different from those found in Europe. Nevertheless, urban centres grew in response to the demands of administration and international trade. Lively debates ensued about the development and organisation of cities, and the fundamentals of civil society were established through a series of collaborations between indigenous and colonial elites. Small towns and cities grew, while some, such as Kolkata (the largest city in the world at the end of the nineteenth century), became major conurbations. Yet despite the rapidity of economic and social change, the old ties of language, ethnicity and belief persisted. Within the urban environment, new communities asserted themselves and reconfigured urban spaces to suit their interests. A subaltern public culture was articulated to match that of the colonial and civic elites, and old and familiar spiritual practices were revived and reinvented.

In more recent times, in cities such as Chandigarh and Islamabad, governments have sought to replan and redesign the city in sovereign exercises of state power in order to fulfil the expectations of an imagined modernity. In cities such as Bangalore, the government has even attempted to interfere with and control the drinking and social habits of the populace. Yet, to a greater or lesser extent, these attempts at direction and control have failed. They have been overwhelmed by the complexity of social arrangements and assertions of popular agency. Contrary to the arguments of Weber, this does not represent an absence of civil society, but a conflicted public culture in which powerful and organised communities and interests pull against each other. The city in South Asia is not disordered, but highly competitive, and in being so reveals a dynamism and creativity that is startlingly different from European examples, but which cannot be overlooked. It is this creative, burgeoning and contested urban space that this volume attempts to explore, arguing for the validity of the South Asian city as an empirical field of study, and the importance of interdisciplinary perspectives in approaching it.

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Part I

Ideologies of city making

The formation of the Indian city

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2 Cities in India

An archaeological perspective

Junichi Fukao

This chapter looks at cities in India from an archaeological perspective, taking their material aspects as a focal point. Drawing on the work of Gordon Childe and other archaeologists, in the first section a set of criteria is outlined by which a settlement may be defined as a city; these include the extensiveness of the site, its clear physical demarcation from the surrounding area, the existence of monumental architecture for a public purpose and evidence of the existence of specialised craft industries, etc. The chapter goes on to discuss several sites in light of these criteria, beginning with cities in proto-historic India in the first period of urbanisation and moving on to examine settlements in the second period of urbanisation – over 1,000 years later – in early historic north India and in southern India, where the second period of urbanisation occurred later still. The closing section of this chapter comments briefly on the possibility of a connected cultural development process in India using the evidence provided by black and red ware, a type of pottery.

What in archaeological terms constitutes a city? Archaeology is the study of human cultures based on material evidence, and thus when cities are viewed from an archaeological perspective their material aspects form the main focal point. Gordon Childe, one of the world's most influential archaeologists, listed ten criteria for a settlement to qualify as a city, and these are still referred to today as a classic example of the 'definition' of a city (Childe 1950). As a result of the stress he placed on the ideological aspects of urbanisation, Childe's criteria are somewhat complex and may appear to be a mixed bag of multifaceted features. Childe coined the term 'Urban Revolution' and claimed that it was the second critical and revolutionary turning point in the history of mankind, after the 'Neolithic Revolution'. He remains highly influential, and many other archaeologists, including Shaffer (1993) and Allchin (1995), have formulated their idea of the city based on Childe's criteria. In this chapter the criteria put forward by Childe and other archaeologists are elaborated upon and summarised into several materially discernible elements to be used as benchmarks in distinguishing between a city and a village in the examination of archaeological sites.

Before beginning the main body of this chapter, an important point must be made regarding the significance of focusing on material evidence alone. With

the rise of religious fundamentalism, studies of Indian history have often been exploited in order to justify particular political or religious ideologies, such as the idea of indigenous Aryans, alleged medieval Islamic vandalism, claims of a possible link between Dravidian people and Indus valley civilisation and many others. In this context, in order to circumvent this kind of controversy, it is strategically important to confine the analysis of Indian cities that will occur here to material culture. The following are the proposed observable elements for the identification of a settlement as a city from the viewpoint of material culture:

- 1 The extensiveness of the site and/or estimated high population density, which reflects the overwhelming size of the settlement compared with other sites.
- 2 Clear demarcation of the site from the surrounding area with a wall and/or a moat, from which the existence of an isolated centre of power may be inferred.
- 3 Monumental architecture for some public purpose, the construction of which would have required the collective labour of non-food producing groups.
- 4 Well-arranged town planning from which, again, the existence of a controlling power supervising the overall city could be inferred.
- 5 An abundance of excavated artefacts not in daily use, or luxury goods which would be the result of the development of craft specialisation, or which would have been obtained from extensive trade activity from distant places.
- 6 A hierarchical relationship of archaeological sites, from which the relationship between cities and their hinterland could be inferred.

It is important to note that the above-mentioned six elements need not be considered as rigid indices for a city; some cities may fulfil all the criteria, and others may meet only some of them. In the following section cities in proto-historic and early historic India will be examined in the light of the above benchmarks.

The first urbanisation in proto-historic India

It is a well-known fact that cities appeared for the first time in Indian history in the Indus civilisation, which flourished in the Indus River plain and the surrounding area from about 2600 BCE to 1900 BCE. Two outstanding urban settlements in the Indus civilisation are Harappa (Meadow 1991, Kenoyer & Meadow 2001, Kenoyer 2008) and Mohenjo-daro (Kenoyer 2008, 2009). Both of these settlements lie in present-day Pakistan: Harappa is situated in the present Sahiwal Division, Punjab; and Mohenjo-daro is in the present Larkana Division, Sindh.

Regarding the size of the settlements, the structural remains from the Indus period in Mohenjo-daro cover more than 83 ha, and it is estimated that the total habitation area would have extended to around 250 ha. Harappa is reported to have covered an area of 76 ha; however, it is possible that it extended to almost 150 ha when the discovery of habitational deposits outside the major mounds is

taken into account. Although there are some other sites with a total area exceeding 100 ha – including Lakhmirwala, in the present-day Jind district of Haryana, India, which is an unexcavated site estimated to cover nearly 225 ha (Chakrabarti 1997) – it is certain that relative to other archaeological sites in that area, Harappa and Mohenjo-daro are of outstanding size.

Most of the major Indus cities have a fortification wall to demarcate the urban settlement, separating it from the surrounding area. At Harappa, the western mound of the site, which is named Mound AB and comprises one of the major parts of the settlement, is demarcated by a massive fortification wall, made mainly of mud and mud bricks with a revetment of burnt bricks. It is roughly a parallelogram in shape, and measures nearly 400 m north–south and 200 m east–west. Judging from the available data, the average height of the fortification would have been around 5 m. Recently, part of a mud-brick wall has been found along the southern edge of two other adjoining mounds, called Mound E and Mound ET. Although it is not so clearly discernible as the one at Harappa, a mud-brick wall has also been found at Mohenjo-daro. Many of the smaller Indus sites have a similar fortification wall that encloses an urban settlement. Kalibangan (Thapar 1975), situated in Hanumangarh district, Rajasthan, India, consists of two habitation mounds, both of which have a separate mud-brick wall forming an approximate parallelogram. The wall running along the smaller western mound measures about 130 m east–west and 260 m north–south. On the other hand, the east–west width of the wall of the other, bigger mound is about 239 m, although its north–south length is unclear. With an area of approximately 7 ha, the Indus port town of Lothal (Rao 1979), Ahmedabad district, Gujarat, India, is also a small site, but it too has a mud-brick enclosure, measuring 280 m by 225 m. A middle-scale Indus site, Dholavira, the area of which is 52 ha (Kondo & Koiso 2000) and which lies in Kachchh district, Gujarat, India, also has a perimeter wall of almost rectangular shape, which encloses an area that measures roughly 755 m long and 685 m wide. The enclosing wall of Dholavira is peculiar in the sense that it is constructed from stones.

Inside the fortification of a settlement, large-scale structures can be found that were probably used for some public purpose. The so-called ‘Great Bath’ – a huge watertank made of burnt bricks – at Mohenjo-daro is certainly one of the most impressive structures in the Indus period. The tank itself measures approximately 12 m north–south and 7 m east–west, and has a maximum depth of 2.4 m. Just to the west of the ‘Great Bath’, a series of mud-brick platforms have been revealed which extend to an area of about 46 m east–west and 27 m north–south. It is popularly known as the ‘granary’, but its real function is as yet unknown. A similar type of ‘granary’ made of mud bricks has also been found at Harappa and measures 45 m north–south and 45 m east–west. A further warehouse has been found at Lothal, a settlement that is also famous for a burnt brick structure that is considered to be the ‘dockyard’. Other notable structures include a mud-brick structure at Kalibangan, which was assumed by the excavators to be a ‘fire-altar’, and the multiple masonry water tanks that surround the settlement at Dholavira.

The layout of many of the Indus sites is somewhat similar in that the settlements consist of a so-called 'citadel' mound and a 'lower town'. The 'citadel' area usually contains some public structures, and the 'lower town' tends to be more of a private residential nature. Harappa and Mohenjo-daro are typical examples of this town planning. At Harappa, Mound AB is designated as the 'citadel', and Mound E and Mound ET, just south-east of Mound AB, are designated as the 'lower town'. At Mohenjo-daro, the western mound containing the 'Great Bath' and 'granary' is taken to be the 'citadel', and the eastern mound is the 'lower town'. Among the smaller sites, Kalibangan closely follows the double-mound layout of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa. The western smaller mound of Kalibangan is the 'citadel', and the bigger eastern mound is called the 'lower town'.

Not all Indus sites are laid out in this way, with a 'citadel' and 'lower town'; some Indus sites in the Gujarat region show a different layout. For example, Lothal has a single enclosure wall, and inside the enclosure there is a clear distinction between the 'acropolis', which is stood on a mud platform, and the 'lower town', which is situated at a lower elevation. In Dholavira, also in Gujarat, the site is surrounded by nested rectangular masonry walls, and the innermost wall serves to demarcate the 'bailey' from the 'middle town' and 'lower town'. In the interior of the city long, straight streets are visible, intersecting one another. In the 'lower town' of Mohenjo-daro, Street 1 probably runs along the western part of the mound for more than 700 m. The 'lower town' of Kalibangan shows grid-like road planning, and the well-laid drainage systems found in Mohenjo-daro, Harappa and other sites would also seem to attest to a public centre of power in the city. It should be noted that the standardisation of town planning is not seen only in the town layout, but also in the standard size and weight of bricks.

In the Indus civilisation, the development of craft industries can be seen in many respects; for example, evidence can be found of copper metallurgy and a pottery industry, among others. This can be taken to signify the growth of non-food-producing social groups in the Indus period that were able to support the city. In particular, ornamental beads made of faience and semi-precious stones such as carnelian and agate were actively manufactured. At Lothal and Mohenjo-daro, a bead-making workshop was found in a habitation mound. Famous Indus seals made of steatite or terracotta, with various designs and Indus scripts, have been found and are also examples of advanced craft technology.

As has been shown earlier in this chapter, Mohenjo-daro and Harappa are surely outstanding sites in the Indus civilisation from the viewpoints of both size and the quality and abundance of excavated architecture and artefacts. After them come the middle-scale sites, such as Kalibangan and Dholavira, which are around 20–50 ha in size. There are also many smaller sites, such as Lothal. This kind of site hierarchy demonstrates the existence of a stratified relationship among Indus settlements, which is to say the distinction between city, town and village (Koiso 1998). On the whole, Indus cities were equipped with several of the features that characterise urban settlement.

The second urbanisation in early historic north India

As a result of such presumed causes as extraordinary environmental changes in climate and/or river routes and the stagnation of trade activity, the Indus civilisation declined around 1900 BCE, and thus the cities that were dependent on the Indus civilisation also went into decline. There was an interval of more than 1,000 years before cities appeared in the Indian subcontinent again, in the Gangetic Valley in about 600 BCE.

One of the oldest urban sites to have been excavated in the Ganga Valley is Kausambi (Sharma 1969) in the district of the same name, in Uttar Pradesh (hereafter UP). At Kausambi, the area enclosed by the massive rampart probably covers around 160 ha. Another site, Maheth (Sinha 1967, Aboshi *et al.* 1999), situated in Sravasti district, UP, is believed to be Sravasti, the ancient capital of *manajanapada* Kosala, and covers an area of about 160 ha. The settlement at Rajgir (Ghosh 1951), in Nalanda district, Bihar, was referred to as Rajagrha, the old capital of Magadha. The old fort of Rajgir extends to about 200 ha in area. Most of the cities in early historic north India extend around 200 ha or so, with the exception of Pataliputra, which is estimated to have an area of around 1200 ha (Erdosy 1988).

One of the remarkable features of early historic cities in north India is a rampart wall encircling the entire urban space. The shape of the rampart varies from site to site; unlike the Indus cities, it is mostly irregular in design, and principally depends upon the geographical conditions of the location of the city. Kausambi has a rampart wall made of mud, with a revetment of burnt bricks, along with a moat. Its average height is about 10.7 m, with watchtowers reaching 21–23 m high; this structure is noteworthy, as burnt brick revetments are not widely seen in the early historic period. At Maheth, there is a mud fortification which is about 5 km long and 18 m high; its shape is similar to a crescent form in design. The old fort of Rajgir is made of stones, and has inner and outer walls.

As for the monumental public architecture, at Kausambi a massive stone structure – measuring 320 m by 180 m – inside the fortification is believed to have been a ‘palace complex’. Just south-west of Maheth is situated the site of Saheth, which has been identified as the famous Buddhist monument of Jetavana Vihara, referenced in Buddhist literature.

As regards the other criteria for categorising a settlement as a city, since there are very few sites that have been extensively excavated, the internal structure of the city in early historic north India is not fully known. At Bhitia (Mashall 1912), in Allahabad district, UP, two streets and house planning were revealed by excavations, and this basic town layout seems to have been retained until the later period. With regards to craft industries in early historic north India, Northern Black Polished Ware (hereafter NBP) was a characteristic form of pottery (Roy 1986). Finely manufactured pottery of NBP was widely distributed as a luxury good as far as south India. Iron implements were also extensively used in this period, and technology was remarkably developed. Studying the settlement patterns of early historic north Indian cities, Erdosy pointed out the

stratified relationship of archaeological sites according to their size, which could reflect the difference in the function of those sites (Erdosy 1988).

Urbanisation in early historic south India

From the available archaeological data, it is assumed that urbanisation in the southern part of India began in around the third century BCE. However, the details of this change have not yet been studied in depth, since most of the excavations have so far not been carried out to a satisfactory extent. At present, inferences about south Indian cities have to be drawn from the meagre data obtained from casual excavation work. As for the area of the settlement of south Indian cities, again only limited information is available, since no extensive excavations have yet been carried out. In some cases it is possible to estimate the extension of the settlement from the fortified area. Dharanikota ('Excavation at Dharanikota, District Guntur', 1965, 1967, 1969), just 1 km from the famous Buddhist stupa site Amaravati, in Guntur district, Andhra Pradesh (hereafter AP), has a square rampart wall which covers an area of about 35 ha. In Sannati (Sundara 1988), Gulbarga district, Karnataka, the area of the settlement encompasses about 200 ha. From the available evidence, it appears that the areas of south Indian urban settlements were generally not as large as those in north India.

Not many early south Indian sites have been found to be within a fortification wall, and for those that have, the shape of the wall seems to vary from site to site. To name a few, at Dharanikota the settlement is visibly enclosed by a square rampart wall; Sannati has a brick wall of 4 m width and 2–3 m height; and at Satanikota (Ghosh 1986), Kurnool district, AP, a fortification wall made of mud with a partial burnt brick revetment surrounds the settlement, along with a moat. Further south, in the present-day Tamilnadu, no early historic sites have been found to have such a fortification. At Arikamedu (Wheeler *et al.* 1946, Begley *et al.* 1996), a famous port site near Pondicherry, some sections of a brick wall have been found in the northern part of the site.

Some of the most striking architectural remains in urban sites in the coastal region of south India are wharves. At Kaverippunpattinam (Soundara Rajan 1994), Nagapattinam district, Tamilnadu, a brick platform measuring nearly 18 m by 7.6 m was found and is believed to be a wharf. Also, in Dharanikota it is possible to see the renovation process of the structure from a wooden wharf to a brick structure. Other impressive remains include Buddhist monuments, the construction of which was very prevalent in the Andhra region during the early historical period. The Amaravati Maha Stupa is very well known, and the remains of a stupa have also been found in Sannati. A brick-built Buddhist monastery has also been discovered at Kaverippunpattinam.

Concerning the other criteria for cities, the available archaeological data generally reveals very little about the town planning of early south Indian cities. However, at Arikamedu, structural remains seem to show alignment in cardinal directions, and at Nagarjunakonda (Subrahmanyam 1975), Nalgonda district,

AP, part of the layout of the streets and houses is visible, although it belongs to a slightly later date.

Finely manufactured deluxe pottery, NBP – demonstrating the existence of non-food-producing industries – was found from the early phase of south Indian urban sites like Dharanikota, and as far south as Korkai ('Excavation at Korkai, district Tirunelveli', 1971) and Alagankulam (Kasinathan *et al.* 1992), both in Tamilnadu. Besides NBP, there were a variety of finely made pottery items brought to this area as a result of extensive trade activities. Roman pottery such as Arretine ware and Mediterranean amphorae have been found profusely at Arikamedu and other eastern coastal sites. Further, rouletted ware, a type of pottery made for export purposes, is widely available in eastern coastal sites such as Arikamedu, showing that such trades did indeed serve to support the settlement. Also, the semi-precious stone and glass-bead industries continued to flourish in this period, and Arikamedu was one of the active production centres for those beads. Last, with regards to inter-site relationships, it is important to mention that large- and small-scale sites were found that were intended as trade ports, strategically located in the eastern coastal area in south India. These included the likes of Arikamedu, Kaverippunpattinam, Dharanikota and Alagankulam (Fukao 2004).

Urbanisation and proto- and early historic India

So far this chapter has examined cities in the Indus period and in early historic north and south India. There is a considerable time gap between the first urbanisation of the Indus civilisation and the second urbanisation of early historic north India. Further, there is both a geographical and a chronological gap between early historic south Indian cities and north Indian ones. However, if a close study of archaeological finds from those three periods is conducted, it might be possible to say that there is a possibility that the cities in those three periods would have had connections to each other (Figures 2.1–2.4).

It is possible to gather some evidence of a connected cultural development process in India through the presence of a certain kind of pottery throughout India. Black and red ware (hereafter BRW) is a characteristic pottery in which the inner wall and the upper portion of the outer wall of the piece are black, and the remaining portion of the outer wall is red. It is finely made ware with a

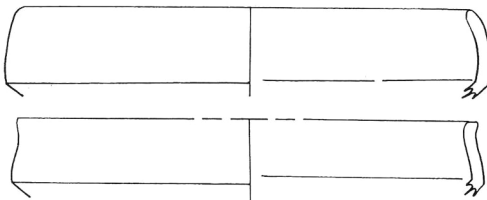


Figure 2.1 Pre-urban, megalithic period BRW from Kodumanal, Tamilnadu (source: Fukao 2001).

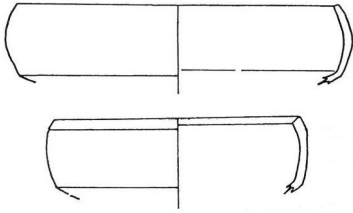


Figure 2.2 Pre-urban, megalithic period BRW from Vallam, Tamilnadu (source: Subbarayalu 1984).

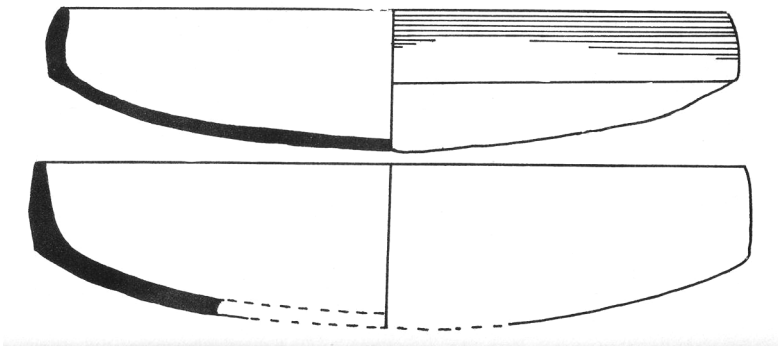


Figure 2.3 Pre-urban BRW from Sonpur, Bihar (source: Sinha & Verma 1977).

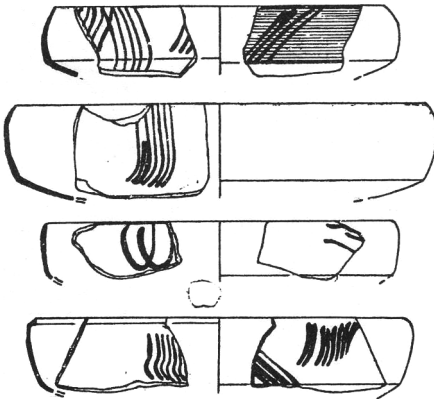


Figure 2.4 Painted grey ware from Hastinapura (source: Roy 1986).

special polish treatment on its surface. BRW first appeared in India in the Indus civilisation in Gujarat regions such as Lothal. After the decline of the Indus civilisation, BRW developed in south-eastern Rajasthan, with white painted designs. It is noteworthy that BRW is a characteristic pottery in the pre-iron, pre-urban Ganga region in north India. On the other hand, BRW became the most profusely used pottery in south Indian pre-urban, megalithic culture (Fukao 2001). Moreover, some close similarities in pottery types can be discerned between pre-urban north and south India. For example, the pottery type of a shallow bowl/dish with sharp carination is a typical BRW shape found in megalithic south India (Figures 2.1 and 2.2), and the same kind of pottery in BRW or other varieties of pottery can be seen in pre-urban north Indian sites (Figure 2.3) (Fukao 2005). In north India, this kind of pottery seems to have been handed down to the urban period with some evolutions (Figure 2.4). From the facts mentioned above, it could be inferred that the urbanisation process in India would not have been a separate process in proto-historic and early historic north and south India, but rather that there would have been a dynamic cultural development process involving the whole of India.

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3 Who built ‘the city of victory’?

Representation of a ‘Hindu’ capital in an ‘Islamicate’ world

Nobuhiro Ota

This chapter discusses legendary accounts of the foundation of Vijayanagara – the capital of the Vijayanagara state from the middle of the fourteenth century to the middle of the sixteenth century – and the role played by a Hindu saint named Vidyāranya. Analysis of these accounts will show that Vijayanagara was unique among south Indian ‘Hindu’ capitals not only in its spatial expanse and form, as shown in past studies, but also in that it played a significant part in the build-up of dynastic power in symbolic and representational terms. The last section deals with the historical context in which those legends were created and received. The story of the founding of Vijayanagara under the auspices of a ‘Hindu’ saint seems to have been conceived within the framework of the cultural tradition of south India, but in it can be detected an echo of the political norms of the ‘Islamicate’ world that engulfed south India during the Vijayanagara period.

Capital cities in south Indian history

It has often been noted in south Indian historiography that the Vijayanagara state, which was founded in the fourteenth century (c. CE 1336), took on unique characteristics which had not been present in any antecedent south Indian dynasties. For example, Nilakanta Sastri wrote that ‘Vijayanagara was perhaps the nearest approach to a war-state ever made by a Hindu kingdom; and its political organization was dominated by its military needs’ (Sastri 1975: 307). Although the validity of such characterisation still requires verification, as far as capital cities are concerned a huge difference between the Vijayanagara state and other south Indian dynasties is apparent.

In scale, Vijayanagara (present-day Hampi in the Ballari district of Karnataka State) surpassed any preceding south Indian capital city; its area, surrounded by several rows of walls, was unprecedentedly extensive. Palaces, administrative offices, military facilities and temples enshrining the tutelary gods of the royal family were tightly packed in the central part of the city, surrounded by inner rows of city walls.¹ This concentration of government facilities is another unique characteristic of Vijayanagara. Traditional capitals in south India, such as Palaiyarai in the Chola State, are composed of several settlements and characterised

by the loosely structured organisation of space, which can be properly called a 'city complex' (Champakalakshmi 1996: 331–371).

Another important point regarding the history of capital cities in south India is that capitals in the pre-Vijayanagara states were not necessarily the absolute centres of their respective states; it was not unusual to transfer a capital during the pre-Vijayanagara period. It is sometimes difficult to locate former capital cities because of the lack or insufficiency of available information in contemporary records, which mostly consist of inscriptions. This could be interpreted as an indication that the political and cultural significance attached to capitals of the pre-Vijayanagara states, at least by those who left behind contemporary documents about them, was not as great as is often imagined. For example, the Rashtrakutas, who ruled the vast area around the north of Karnataka for about two centuries from the middle of the eighth century, fixed their capital in Manyaketa in the middle of the ninth century, but it is not possible to say with certainty where their capital(s) was before that (cf. Ishikawa 2002). In the case of the Cholas, reigning over the vast area around the Tamil region from the late ninth century to the late thirteenth century, there was more than one city that functioned as a centre of dynastic power. It is usual to couple the city of Tanjavur with the Cholas, but throughout their existence their capital, in the sense of an administrative centre or seat of the royal family, was actually in Palaiyarai. Chidambaram, a major religious city built around a temple of the god Nataraja, the tutelary of the Chola royal family, functioned as a religious and ceremonial centre which the kings visited relatively often. In the early eleventh century Tanjavur emerged as a new ceremonial city, with the construction of the gigantic Rājarājēśvara (Bṛhadīśvara) temple by King Rājarāja I, but the palace in which the Chola kings resided during their visits to the temple was constructed at Vallam, seven miles from Tanjavur (Champakalakshmi 1996: 331–371, 424–441). Thus, in a way, the Cholas did not have a capital in the sense of a supreme and absolute centre of the state.

Taking account of the above-mentioned features of capital cities in early medieval or medieval south India, it appears that there was a stage of historical development in south India in which moving kings or courts often functioned as the centre of states. In other words, capital cities were frequently shifted or kings travelled, as occasion required, to visit various centres scattered around the states, and it was during the Vijayanagara period that this stage actually ended. Vijayanagara continued to be the absolute, literally immovable capital of the state from its foundation to its plunder and destruction following the military defeat at Rakkasagi Taṃgaḍagi in CE 1565. Without the fixing or stabilisation of the capital, it would have been impossible for Vijayanagara to grow to such an unprecedentedly enormous size.

The foundation legend of Vijayanagara

The first capital of the Vijayanagara state, Vijayanagara (literally meaning 'the city of victory'), is sometimes called Vidyānagara (literally meaning 'the city of

wisdom') in inscriptions and other texts. Why and how this alternative name or notation came into existence is generally explained through legendary accounts of the state's foundation. Many versions and redactions of the accounts have come down through various media, and rather wide differences in their content can be observed. However, most accounts agree that when Harihara I, the first Vijayanagara king, and his brother, Bukka, founded the state, a Hindu saint named Vidyāraṇya (literally meaning 'the forest of wisdom') played a significant role. As will be shown, what he actually does varies from one version to another, but in most he is supposed to have been deeply involved in the construction of a city which would become the centre of the newly established state. This city has come to be known as Vijayanagara, and its alternative name, Vidyānagara, is derived from the name of the saint whose involvement was crucial to its construction.

Since modern historical studies on the Vijayanagara state began at the start of the last century, there has been a lot of argument about the reliability of legendary accounts of Vidyāraṇya's involvement in its foundation. In the 1920s and 1930s, some founding fathers of the Vijayanagara historiography expressed their respective views. Heras, in his *Beginnings of Vijayanagara History* (1929), asserted the fictitiousness of the Vidyāraṇya legends (Kulke 1985: 122–123); this negative view of the historical authenticity of the legends was shared by Saletore (1934: 1: 83–112). On the other hand, both Venkataramanayya and Sri-kantaya argued in their books, published in 1933 and 1938, respectively, that even though the whole content of the accounts could not be said to be authentic, Vidyāraṇya did indeed make a definite contribution to the foundation of the Vijayanagara state (Venkata Ramanayya 1933, Srikanthaya 1938).

Vidyāraṇya served as the pontiff of the famous Śṛṅgēri monastery (*maṭha*), which was supposedly established by Śaṅkara, the champion of the Advaita philosophy. He has been widely acknowledged for his voluminous writings on philosophy and related sciences, and there is abundant literature focusing on his life, works and contributions to the development of the Advaita philosophy.² However, in spite of a continuing interest in his work, scholars have not yet reached a consensus on the important question of which works should be attributed to him.

In 1985 Kulke advanced a balanced argument, based mainly on the secondary literature, concerning the controversial points of Vidyāraṇya's life and works. According to him, Vidyāraṇya did not appear as the highest-level religious authority until Harihara II, of the second generation of the first (Sangama) dynasty, ascended the throne of Vijayanagara in CE 1377, and so far no valid contemporary documents have been able to corroborate the claim that he played a major political role during the founding period of the Vijayanagara state (Kulke 1985). Furthermore, Kulke examined the history of the Śṛṅgēri maṭha, which Vidyāraṇya served as the pontiff, and arrived at the conclusion that the origin of the maṭha could not date further back than the time of Vidyāraṇya himself or his preceptor, Vidyātirtha, who was almost contemporary with Harihara I (Kulke 1985: 134–136). Kulke's argument is generally well balanced, and his conclusions are convincing. It seems

clear that legendary accounts of Vidyāraṇya are indeed full of fictions that blatantly oppose the historical facts.³ However, Kulke and other scholars stressing the fictitiousness of the legends have failed to ask an important question: what significance the legendary accounts had for those who wrote them down and transmitted them to later generations, or why the fictitious story of Vidyāraṇya building a city was fabricated and incorporated into the collective memory of the Vijayanagara state.

Connected to this question is Wagoner's analysis of a legendary account of Vidyāraṇya and his role in constructing the city of Vijayanagara given in the *Rāyavācakamu*, a Telugu work from the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century, which Wagoner himself translated into English. Wagoner points out that, compared with the 'standard version' of the legend in the so-called *Vidyāraṇya Kārajñāna* manuscripts, the redaction of the *Rāyavācakamu* is characterised by its 'emphasis on the "magical" nature of the city and on Vidyāraṇya's pivotal role in its founding'. The city of Vijayanagara is 'a talisman that bestows protection on its "bearer" [i.e. a Vijayanagara king]', and such a magical talisman, granted to a dynasty by its tutelary divinity, is a sort of cliché in the literary genre of 'dynastic chronicle' in south India, which concerns stories of a dynasty's rise to power (Wagoner 1993: 41). For example, in the *Pratāparudracaritramu*, a Telugu work from the early sixteenth century which chronicles the dynastic history of the Kakatiya state, the sword and shield are said to have been gifted to the dynasty's founder, Madhava Varman, by a goddess and to have made him and his descendants unassailable and able to rule for a long time. Vijayanagara is, according to Wagoner's interpretation, a 'perfect counterpart' to Madhava Varman's divine sword and shield (Wagoner 1993: 43–44).

Wagoner's reading of the legend is clear-eyed and penetrating, but it raises a few questions. First, the sword and shield, talismans of the Kakatiya dynasty, were given to its founder by a goddess, while Vijayanagara was built by Vidyāraṇya for the sake of the first Vijayanagara king, with the blessings of gods and sages. Given this difference in the character of the talisman-givers, it appears one-sided to emphasise the similarities between the two talismans. What does it mean that a talisman is not given directly from a divine source to the dynasty's founder, but through the mediation of a saint? Second, in the case of the Vijayanagara kingship, why did the talisman take the form of a city and not something else? Was the talisman a city for any particular reason? These questions are explored in the final section of this chapter. This section ends with an outline of Harihara's personal history before his enthronement, which is sketched in some versions of the legendary account of the founding of the Vijayanagara state. The exact content differs between the versions, but the following outline is common to most (Wagoner 2000: 305–307).

Harihara and his brothers once served the ruler of Warangal. They were arrested by an invading army of the Delhi Sultanate, but on one occasion the Sultan came to know their honesty and released them. Shortly afterwards they were dispatched with the army of the Sultan to sweep away the anti-Sultanate forces in south India. They lost in the first encounter with King

Baḷḷāla, but recovered to defeat him after meeting Vidyāraṇya and finally established their own dynasty.

Warangal, located in the middle of present-day Andhra Pradesh, was the capital city of the Kakatiya state until the Tughluq army destroyed it in CE 1323. King 'Baḷḷāla', who allegedly was eventually defeated by Harihara, is reminiscent of the Hoysalas who ruled the southern part of present-day Karnataka before the Vijayanagara state. Many of the Hoysala kings named themselves Baḷḷāla, including the last king, Baḷḷāla IV (c.1342–1346).

In twentieth-century Vijayanagara historiography, a common story is that the brothers once apostatised to Islam but later reconverted to 'Hinduism' at the hand of Vidyāraṇya. This story is thought to be an amalgamation of the traditional account mentioned above and fragmental and obscure accounts of certain apostates in fourteenth-century south India seen in several books belonging to the Islamic tradition of historiography (Wagoner 2000: 301–304). Drawing attention to the significance of something 'Islamicate' in the construction of the authority of the Vijayanagara kingship, Wagoner insists that the traditional narrative of the brothers and the Sultan 'must be understood as a political foundation myth, an ideological attempt to represent the authority of the Vijayanagara state as deriving directly from that of the Sultanate [emphasis in the original]' (Wagoner 2000: 304).

The story of the brothers' arrest by the Sultan is told in several versions of the foundation myth.⁴ However, there are also many versions and redactions that do not carry it. For example, the redaction of the *Rāyavācakamu* carries a detailed story of how Vijayanagara city was constructed but describes neither what the brothers did before establishing the dynasty nor the relation between them and Vidyāraṇya. The theme of the brothers' arrest is absent from the versions of Kannada texts examined in the next section. If the lives of the brothers prior to the founding of the state are referred to in these texts, it is their politically and economically powerless condition that is emphasised. Thus, the general body of 'empowerment narratives' (Wagoner 1993: 41) of the Vijayanagara kingship is composed of rather different versions and redactions. How and why such diversification has occurred may be an important topic for future research.⁵

Vidyāraṇya as the founder of the kingdom and the city

In this section a few redactions of the foundation myth of the Vijayanagara state in Kannada texts are explored and compared with similar foundation myths of other south Indian dynasties. First, the *Kamalāpurada Kaiḷiyattu* (Kaifiyat of Kamalāpura), one of the so-called 'Mackenzie Manuscripts', will be examined to see how the life of Vidyāraṇya and the foundation of the Vijayanagara state are narrated. The Kannada word *kaiphīyattu* – meaning a statement or report – borrowed from the Persian and transliterated as *kaifiyat* in English is used especially in the context of historical research as a general term for manuscripts and documents of indigenous languages collected by the British during the colonising period of south India. Most, though not all, *kaifiyats* are written by hereditary

officials of villages or administrative units just above villages, and their main contents are local history. The *Kamalāpurada Kaiphiyattu* is one such *kaifiyat* and was written in the early nineteenth century by Dēsāyi, a hereditary official of a supra-village administrative unit. Kamalāpura is a village near present-day Hampi and located in the erstwhile metropolitan area of Vijayanagara. The latter life of Vidyāraṇya is narrated in the text as follows (Kalaburgi 1994: 430–432).

In Honnāvara, at the foot of the Western Ghats, a Brahmin named Mādhava Bhaṭṭa lived in extreme hardship because of poverty. One day, he acquiesced to the wish of his wife and went to Śrīsaila [in the present-day Kurnool District of Andhra Pradesh State] to perform penance in a temple enshrining a goddess named Brahmāmbike in order to alleviate their poverty. However, the goddess told him that he could not escape from poverty in the present life. Mādhava Bhaṭṭa proceeded to the temple of the goddess Kamalā, located near the sanctuary (*kṣētra*) of Pampā [a place remembered in connection with the namesake goddess, supposed to be in present-day Hampi] and performed penance there. But again he was told by the goddess that poverty would never leave him. Despairing of having his wish fulfilled, he got initiated to become an ascetic named Vidyāraṇya. After some time, in the Śaka year 1188 of *Parābhava* [corresponding to CE 1266–67], the goddess revealed herself in front of him, and by her grace he got great treasure. He then visited the sanctuary of Pampā and wrote *Vidyāraṇya Bhāṣya* [a commentary]. After visiting Kāśi in order to ask the sage Vyāsa a few questions that had arisen in his mind during his writing, he used the treasure given by the goddess to establish a village, Kamalāpura, and build a city named Vidyānagara. He ruled the city for 26 years, but in the Śaka year 1258 of *Dhātu*, at the seventh day of the bright half of the month *Vaiśākha* [corresponding to 18 April in CE 1336] he came to realise that a man's body would not exist for ever. He recalled a cowherd named Bukka who used to bring him milk when he performed penance in the temple of the goddess and solemnly invested him with the lordship of Vijayanagara city and the title of 'Bukka Mahārāya'. After completing the appropriate procedures, Vidyāraṇya departed for the other world.

Because of the obscurity of the text and defects in it, it is not clear which goddess eventually gave Vidyāraṇya the treasures, but from the context it is presumed that Kamalā did.⁶

Another version of the foundation myth can be found in the *Keladi Nṛpa Vijaya* (*The Victory of Keladi Kings*). The work was written probably in the late eighteenth century by Liṅgaṇṇa, an ex-official of the erstwhile Keladi Nayakas. The Nayakas ruled the vast area of the Western Ghats and the Arabic coast for about two centuries up to CE 1763. Their history is narrated chronologically in the work and the following foundation myth of the Vijayanagara state appears episodically in its opening part, as the Vijayanagara kings were overlords of the ancestors of the Nayakas (Śāma Śāstri 1973: 15–17).

At the side of the Kṛṣṇādēvī river [possibly meaning the Kṛṣṇā river], Mādhava Bhaṭṭa was leading the life of a householder. One day he visited the sanctuary of Pampā in the Kuntala region [one of the traditional regions mentioned in Puranic literature, vaguely designating the middle part of present-day Karnataka State] and recited a spell to get wealth. Then the goddess revealed herself to tell him that he could enjoy prosperity only in the next life, not in the present one. Hearing that, he decided to renounce the world. He was initiated into the life of an ascetic by the hand of Vidyāśaṃkara, a disciple of Śaṃkarācārya, and named himself Vidyāraṇya. After some time, a goddess appeared to him in a dream and said: 'This country is filled with Jains and Kirātas [savage hunters] and people have no control over their own desire and are doing whatever they want. You must build a city in this country and establish a kingdom to promote virtue and punish vice'. Shortly after that, poor Kṣatriya brothers named Harihara and Bukka, led by a voice in a dream, came to the home of Vidyāraṇya. He gave them the order (*kaṭṭaleyaṃ*) to rule a kingdom 'as devotees (*bhaktarāgi*)' of the 'lord (*kartaṃ*) Virūpākṣa' [one of the forms of Śiva; a temple enshrining him stands in the sanctuary of Pampā and the goddess Pampā is supposed to be his spouse]. Furthermore, he gave Harihara the name Harihara Rāya and had him build a city named Vijayanagara. The auspicious time for the ceremony to celebrate its completion was fixed by Vidyāraṇya; however, it did not start exactly at the fixed time because of the sound of a conch blown by a Dāsa [literally meaning a slave, but in this context it probably designates a non-Brahmin mendicant devoted to Viṣṇu]. Seeing that, Vidyāraṇya predicted: 'This city will come under the rule of Muslims (*turuṣka*) after some years.' In the Śaka 1258 [corresponding to CE 1336–37], he enthroned (*paṭṭamaṃ kaṭṭi*) Harihara Rāya on the jewelled lion throne in Vidyānagarī [a variant of Vidyānagara].

Another, much more condensed, version of the foundation myth is seen in a copy of a copperplate record originally issued in CE 1652. It had been preserved in the family of a Brahmin resident of Vidyāraṇyapura, located near the Śṛṅgēri maṭha that Vidyāraṇya once served as a pontiff. In the vicinity of Śṛṅgēri there were many villages (*agrahāras*) donated to Brahmins affiliated with the maṭha, and one of them was Vidyāraṇyapura, named after Vidyāraṇya. The copperplate record concerned was written in both Sanskrit and Kannada and recorded that Saccidānanda Bhāratī Svāmi, the then pontiff of the maṭha, distributed among Brahmins shares in the property of Vidyāraṇyapura, which was re-established as an *agrahāra* by one of the Keladi Nayakas. The following account is based on the Kannada part, but almost the same content is repeated in the Sanskrit part (*Epigraphia Carnataica* 1886–1965: 6: 196 (Sg11)).

Formerly, Vidyāraṇya Śrīpāda, who was the teacher (*gurugaḷu*) of our line [i.e. the Śṛṅgēri maṭha] and the author of the *Vēda Bhāṣya*, had, out of

mercy to the world (*lōkānugrahārthavāgi*), founded Vidyānagara using the power obtained from the god Virūpākṣa by virtue of his penance (*tapōbaladimda*). Then he, for the protection of cows, gods and Brahmins, put Harihara Mahārāya on the lion throne (*siṃhāsanaadalli*) and performed the anointing ceremony (*paṭṭābhiṣēka*) at his coronation.

So far three versions of the legendary account describing the role played by Vidyāraṇya in the foundation of the Vijayanagara state have been examined. The details vary, but they all concur on two points. First, the first Vijayanagara king was given the kingship and enthroned by Vidyāraṇya. Second, the capital of the state was built by, or at the direction of, Vidyāraṇya.⁷ In an account of his travels, Buchanan, who conducted an extensive research tour in south India in 1800–1 immediately after the British defeated Tippoo Sultan of Mysore and established their colonial hegemony there, gave a detailed account of the content of a book titled *Rāya Paditti* ('traditions of kings'), written by one 'Ramuppa Varmica', a resident of Kundapura in the present-day Dakshina Kannada district of Karnakata. According to Buchanan, '*Srī Vidyāraṇya Mahā Swāmi*' is noted here too as both 'the founder of *Vijaya-nagara* city' and 'the crowner of *Harihara Rāya*' (Buchanan 1807: 3: 118).

Many south Indian states had narratives of dynastic empowerment that tried to account for and establish the legitimacy of the foundation of the dynasties principally through invoking the divine protection and blessing supposedly given to the dynastic founders. Arguably one characteristic of the Vijayanagara foundation myth as a narrative of dynastic empowerment is the significance given to the role of the saint who acted as an intermediary between divinity and the dynasty founders. Wagoner, analysing the *Rāyavācakanu* version, stressed that Vidyāraṇya was represented merely as 'a passive instrument of fate' in the text. However, the versions and redactions in the Kannada texts treated so far have given another representation of Vidyāraṇya: he played a crucial role as an intermediary agent who passed the divine supra-natural power on to the newly founded dynasty. The term 'a passive instrument' can be more appropriately applied to the roles of Harihara and Bukka. They are represented as common cowherds or poor *Kṣatriyas* before, by the grace of Vidyāraṇya, suddenly emerging from such unenviable circumstances to be enthroned.

In the tradition of narratives of dynastic empowerment in south India, Vidyāraṇya is not an exceptional, unparalleled character. We sometimes come across saints acting, as he did, as crucial intermediaries for dynasties other than Vijayanagara. When the foundation myth of Vijayanagara is compared with these other empowerment narratives featuring intermediary saints, another of its characteristics becomes clear, namely the important position occupied by the theme of the city and its building. Let us explore a foundation myth of the Gangas, who ruled the southern part of karnataka for a few centuries until the end of the tenth century. The empowerment of the Ganga dynasty and the role of a Jain saint named Siṃhanandi are recounted as follows in an inscription from CE 1222 (*Epigraphia Carnatica* 1972–: 13: 14 (Sh 14)).

Mādhava and his brother Daḍiga escaped their father's kingdom when it was besieged by the enemy. On their way to the south, they happened to meet Siṃhanandi, a Jain ascetic, at Ganga-Hērūru. Siṃhanandi, knowing the circumstances of the brothers, caused the goddess Padmāvati to appear, obtained a boon, and gave them a sword (*khaḷgamuṃ*) and the whole kingdom (*samastarājyaman*). When Mādhava broke a stone pillar with a stroke of the sword, Siṃhanandi realised his power, put on his head a crown (*paṭṭaman*) of the petals of *karnnikāra* (probably designating a drumstick tree in this context) which he had made himself, and endowed him with numerous attendants, elephants and horses, along with a peacock fan (*kuṃcaman*) as the signal flag (*kētanam*).

The story of Mādhava being endowed with the kingship by Siṃhanandi cannot be found in inscriptions of the original Gangas, who were overthrown by the Cholas at the end of the tenth century (Saletore 1938: 9). The story appeared only in literary works after the twelfth century and from about CE 1100 in the inscriptions of a subordinate chiefly family who claimed to be descended from the original Gangas and ruled the Shimoga region under the Western Chalukyas (Nagarajaiah 1999: 4). The above-mentioned inscription was issued by these later Gangas. When the legend of Mādhava and Siṃhanandi started to circulate in the twelfth century, most of southern Karnataka was ruled by the Hoysalas. Their empowerment narrative also has a Jain ascetic playing an important role. The story goes as follows, in an inscription of CE 1173 (*Epigraphia Carnatica* 1972–: 10: 26 (Ak 23)).

One day, Saḷa of the Yadu clan met a great ascetic. The ascetic, seeing Saḷa bow deferentially to him, thought of giving him the whole kingdom (*sāṃmrājyamaṃ māḷpen*) and started to perform suitable worship to bring into subjection the goddess Vāsantikā of Śāśakapura [also known as Soseyūru, tentatively identified with present-day Aṃgaḍi in the Cikkamagaḷūru District of Karnataka State]. When the goddess sprang forth in the form of a tiger in order to break the worship, the ascetic exclaimed, 'You hit, Saḷa (*nīm poy Saḷa*).' Accordingly, Saḷa struck it with a cane (*betta*). Hence the name Poysaḷa was acquired by the Yadu kings and the tiger and cane (*seḷe*) became their crest (*cihnam*).

Here, the dynastic name 'Hoysaḷa' is explained through the episode in which the dynastic founder Saḷa was told to hit (*poy*) the tiger by the ascetic. The earliest record containing this explanatory episode is said to be a copperplate record from CE 1117. There are other versions of the legend of the founder Saḷa in inscriptions in which the details are different from the above account. The name of the ascetic is not specified in many variants of the legend, but in some his name is given as Sudatta (Coelho 1950: 12–17).

The empowerment narratives of the Gangas and Hoysalas share with the foundation myth of the Vijayanagara state the basic storyline that a dynastic

founder becomes empowered by the favour of a saint.⁸ Some further common elements are discernable between them, such as wandering brothers and the grace of goddesses. However, a difference should also be noted, that is, the object that is made a symbol of dynastic power, in other words, what is given to the founder by the saint as a marker of power. Mādhava of the Gangas is described as receiving a sword, a crown of petals, a peacock fan, attendants, elephants and horses from the saint Siṃhanandi. In the case of the Hoysalas, a cane and the dynastic name ‘Hoysala’ itself function as symbols of power handed over by the saint. A city is not included among the symbols of power in the instances of these two dynasties, but the city of Vijayanagara, along with the title of Rāya, function as emblems of the power given to the first Vijayanagara king by Vidyāraṇya. What sets the Vijayanagara story apart from similar legends of dynastic empowerment through the favour of saints is the theme of a city as a symbol of power.

Saints, kingship and capitals in the ‘Islamicate’ world

Among the general body of the foundation myth of the Vijayanagara state that has been handed down through various media, differences in details can be seen from one version to another, some of which are significant. In one group of versions, the relationship of the dynastic founder with the Sultan of Delhi is highlighted and occupies a crucial position in the empowerment process (Wagoner 2000). However, in another group of versions, including those of the Kannada texts dealt with earlier, the story centres almost totally on Vidyāraṇya, who, using the wealth he was favoured with or following the direction of the divinity, caused Vijayanagara to be built, and enthroned the person of his choice there. In these versions, the dynastic founder’s relationship with the Sultan is completely omitted, and he appears to be nothing more than a ‘passive instrument’ who is just a cowherd (in the *Kamalāpurada Kaiphiyattu*) or a poor Kṣatriya (in the *Keḷadi Nṛpa Vijaya*) before being selected by Vidyāraṇya for coronation. It seems that this group of versions centring on a ‘Hindu’ saint being favoured by the ‘Hindu’ divinity seeks to construct the talismanic and sacred power of Vijayanagara exclusively within the framework of Hinduism.

It should be noted here that in the historiography of south India the rise of the Vijayanagara state has sometimes been represented as an expression of Hindu resistance to the advancement of Muslim powers.⁹ It is indeed true that contemporary inscriptions contain phrases and representations that project the Vijayanagara kings as champions of ‘Hindu’ culture or as restorers of the social order disturbed by Muslim advancement. Among the titles used by members of the royal family, there are some which allude to their attempt to promote Vedic practice, such as ‘Vedamārgasthāpanatparaḥ’, that is, ‘a person devoted to establishing Veda tradition’ (*Epigraphia Indica* 1892–: 8: 301) and ‘Vaidikamārgasthāpanācāryaḥ’, or ‘a savant establishing Vedic tradition’ (*Epigraphia Indica* 1892–: 3: 122).¹⁰ A copperplate record from CE 1391 reads that, having killed the Turks (*turuṣka*) and reinstated the gods who had

been removed, Mādhava Mamtri, a servant of Harihara II, restored the 'Dharma', which had been 'destroyed by fierce flames of the wicked [*asajjana śikhijvālohagadhān*]' (*Epigraphia Indica* 1892–: 21: 20 (No. 4)).

Recent studies shed light on another aspect of the Vijayanagara kingship. According to them, the Vijayanagara kings developed close contacts with the surrounding Muslim regimes in the subcontinent and beyond, and actively assimilated their culture. For example, the title of *Hindūrāyasuratāṇa*, literally meaning 'the Sultan among the Hindu or Indian kings', was used by the Vijayanagara kings. This indicates their attempt to articulate their own political status through the Islamic idiom of *suratāṇa*, a corrupt notation of *sultān*. Also, in the Vijayanagara court sharpened caps and loose gowns, respectively called *kulāyis* and *kabāyis*, were adopted from West Asia (Wagoner 1996). The palace buildings in Vijayanagara city clearly showed the influence of the contemporary Deccan Sultanates (Michell 1992). Furthermore, the administrative and military systems of the Vijayanagara state bore characteristics and elements that were common in the contemporary Muslim regimes in South and West Asia, but had not been found in prior south Indian states. For instance, a fair-sized cavalry was thrown into a battle by the Vijayanagara kings, with war horses imported from Arabian countries for that purpose, and a substantial number of Muslims were mobilised as soldiers. Some of them came to occupy high positions in the politico-military structure of the state, and mosques were constructed not far from the centre of the capital city (Stein 1989: 29). As already noted, certain versions of the foundation myth of the Vijayanagara state claim that Harihara I was dispatched by the Sultan of Delhi to pacify South India, and Wagoner interpreted this myth as 'an ideological attempt to represent the authority of the Vijayanagara state as deriving directly from that of the Sultanate [original emphasis]'.

These recent studies show that there were close exchanges between the Vijayanagara state and its Islamic neighbours and that the Vijayanagara kings endeavoured to cultivate self-images of rulers that would be judged as respectable or decent by the standards of the surrounding Islamic world. If the legends of Vidyāranya and Vijayanagara are to be fully understood, they should be placed in the historical context of the Islamic world standard penetrating through the Vijayanagara state. Indeed, saints conferring kingship are familiar figures in the indigenous tradition of 'empowerment narratives' in south India, but such figures also appear in the Islamic world engulfing south India during the Vijayanagara period.

According to studies by Digby on the Indo-Muslim regimes contemporary to the Vijayanagara state, Muslim saints of Sufism (*ṣūfī shaykhs*) were believed to possess spiritual jurisdiction (*wilāyat*) over a specific territory and were thus able to not only influence political events and material destiny there but also bestow kingship upon individuals they encountered (Digby 1986, 1990). Eaton (1992: 14), elaborating the relationships between Sufi saints and rulers in Indo-Muslim history, wrote:¹¹

It was widely believed that ... temporal rulers had only been entrusted with a sort of temporary lease of power through the grace of Muslim saints who

were considered to be especially well-endowed with *baraka*, or the grace of God. Since such saints possessed a special nearness to God, it was they who wielded legitimate authority on earth, even if sultans possessed effective power. Therefore in Indo-Muslim history we often come across Ṣūfīs predicting who would attain political office, and for how long they would hold it. Indeed, given the feeling that such holy men possessed a greater legitimacy as God's representatives on earth than princes or kings, such predictions were often understood as appointments.

It is obvious that the function of Sufi saints delineated by Digby and Eaton has similar or common features to that of Vidyāraṇya in the Vijayanagara foundational legend. Both Sufi saints and Vidyāraṇya are endowed with transcendent power by favour of the divinity and able to appoint secular rulers as a result of that power. It should be remembered here that in some versions of the legend – including that of the *Keḷadi Nrpa Vijaya* – Vidyāraṇya predicts the future destruction of the city and the kingdom. This is reminiscent of the prophecies of Sufi saints about the duration of the regimes they themselves empowered.

A saint who was first favoured by the divinity and then favoured secular power himself was not an exceptional figure in the Islamic world around the Vijayanagara state. Such blessed and blessing saints are present, standing behind many Muslim regimes in the form of *shaykhs*. Secular rulers sought empowering saintly figures in order to authenticate their own power and consolidate their own positions in this world. As the Vijayanagara state emerged at the fringe of this expanding Islamic world and grew into one of the major powers, the real or historical Vidyāraṇya was transformed into a legendary figure who carried out a function similar to that of Sufi saints in Muslim regimes. The birth and spread of the Vidyāraṇya legend may have involved, besides the obvious self-assertion of his successors at Śrīṅgēri, two intertwined practices of imagination and representation. One is representational manoeuvres on the part of the Vijayanagara kings, conscious of the Islamic world standard, to erect a figure of religious authority who could be relied on as a source of their own power. The other is the political thinking or imagination among the general public, presuming that a tutelary saint stands behind every major political power like the Vijayanagara state.

For the purpose of finding the similarities and parallels between Sufi saints and Vidyāraṇya in terms of representation, there is another feature of the relation of Sufi saints with secular powers in the political culture of Indo-Muslim regimes that cannot be overlooked. This is the importance of cities as channels through which the supra-natural or spiritual sovereignty of Sufi saints is transformed into or linked to secular sovereignty. For example, Firuzabad was built by Firuz Shah (r.1397–1422) of the Bahmanis on the spot where a saint named Khalifatu'r Rahman was supposed to have resided. Firuz Shah was eager to make a spiritual supporter of this saint, whose shrine (*dargāh*) complex was constructed contemporaneously with the city of Firuzabad (Michell 1993: 186). Delhi can be cited as another, more famous example. Through Delhi, which was both the capital of the Sultanates and the residence of the Sufi saint whose *dargāh* was built there

after his demise, the wellbeing and fortunes of the Delhi Sultanates were identified with the great Shaikh Nizam al-Din, a Chishti Sufi (Digby 1986). Fatahpur Sikri, the well-known capital of Akbar, the third Mughal emperor, is another good example, albeit one belonging to a later period than that of the Vijayanagara state. Akbar selected a site for his new imperial capital at Sikri, a village that was the residence of Sheikh Selim, a Chishti Sufi, whom Akbar frequently visited (Streusand 1989: 89–94, Richards 1978: 290–291). In Indo-Muslim politics, the city was 'a firm political statement and symbol of the new order' (Richards 1978: 290).

This chapter has shown that what sets the Vidyāraṇya legend apart from similar narratives explaining the foundation of south Indian dynasties is the representation of the capital city as a symbol of power gifted by saintly figures. Only when this representation is posited against the background of the contemporary Indo-Muslim political culture does it become possible to understand its significance. The Vidyāraṇya legend seems to have been conceived within the framework of the 'Hindu' or indigenous tradition of south India, its leader, Vidyāraṇya, as a pontiff of a monastery, representing the orthodoxy of Hinduism. Yet, an echo of Islamic political norms is discernable in its representation of the capital city as a symbol of power gifted by Vidyāraṇya; according to these norms, capital cities are statements of political power and function as connecting links between the temporal and supra-natural powers.

An echo of Islamic political culture can also be detected in the account by Nuniz of 'a very grand temple' in Vijayanagara city. Nuniz, a Portuguese visitor to the city in the early sixteenth century, wrote down the following story of its construction. When the first Vijayanagara king ('Dehoráo') went on a hunt, he happened to see the strange incident of a hare rushing at a hound. Following the advice of 'a hermit', he built a city on the spot of that incident and gave it the name 'Vydiajuna' after the hermit (Sewell 1900: 299–300). This hermit can be safely identified with Vidyāraṇya, and 'Vydiajuna' may be a corrupt notation of Vidyāraṇya or Vidyānagara. Up to this point, the story is very similar to other versions such as one in the *Vidyāraṇya Kārajñāna* manuscript (Wagoner 1993: 168), but Nuniz's account continues further. After the hermit died, the king built 'a very grand temple in honour of him', and ever since, when the successive kings ascended the throne, '[they] have, in honour of the hermit, to enter this house [the temple] before they enter their own; and they offer many prayers in it' (Sewell 1900: 300). Here, the authority of the kings is explicitly identified with that of the saintly figure. Parallels can easily be found between *dargāhs* of Sufi saints in and around Islamic capital cities and the 'temple' that is said to have been built in honour of Vidyāraṇya and visited by the Vijayanagara kings before their coronation. No definite answer can be found with regards to what this 'temple' was, or whether it was really built. However, what is important as regards the purpose of this chapter is the fact that such a narrative of a city and a saint was told, communicated and recorded. It is a product of the encounter between south Indian indigenous tradition and the political culture of the expanding Islamic world.

Eaton noted that the Vijayanagara state was, in terms of political norms, cultural values and aesthetic tastes, integrated into a world system that can be properly called ‘Islamicate’ as opposed to ‘Islamic’, in the sense that the cultural standards, not the religion, of the Muslim community had the predominating influence on non-Muslims. Then again, he insisted that the Vijayanagara state claimed its own legitimacy by drawing on ‘the sacred power of a fixed religious site’ embodied by the goddess, and this contrasted strongly with its Islamic neighbour, the Bahmani kingdom, which recruited and patronised Sufi saints, who were ‘highly mobile’ (Eaton 2000). The foregoing discussion in this chapter indicates that such a contrast between ‘fixed’ Hindu and ‘mobile’ Islam should not be overestimated. One of the religious or spiritual powers behind the Vijayanagara kingship was the saint Vidyāraṇya, who was also mobile.¹²

As already stated, the Vijayanagara state has been sometimes represented as a bulwark of the ‘Hindus’ against the advance of Muslim powers. The emphasis of its foundation myth on the role of a Hindu saint may have nurtured and maintained that representation, but the other side must also be taken into account. The myth itself is a remarkable testimony that the Vijayanagara state was a component of the ‘Islamicate’ political world extending around the Indian Ocean where, although the Muslim regimes enjoyed dominance over non-Muslim ones, religious identities such as ‘Hindu’ and ‘Muslim’ in their strict senses had little significance. In that world, whether Islamic or not, the capital cities of states played a culturally and symbolically significant role as institutional links connecting political powers to saintly representatives of the divinity.¹³

Notes

- 1 Great progress has been made in research on Vijayanagara in the last quarter of a century. Three large-scale archaeological projects have been conducted in and around Hampi, the former Vijayanagara, by the Directorate for Archaeology and Museums of the Karnataka State Government and an international team of scholars since the 1980s. For a general outline of these projects and the bibliography of their publications, see Fritz *et al.* (2006). On the spatial organisation of the central part of the city especially, see Fritz (1986).
- 2 For instance, see Rama Rao (1930, 1931, 1934), Sarma (1932), Krishnamoorthy (1971), Ramakrishna Rao (1973); Mallappa (1974); Kripacharyulu (1986); Ranganath (1996); Slaje (1998); Fort (1999, 2000).
- 3 Desai and his co-authors maintained in their general history of Karnataka, published in 1970, that narratives of Vidyāraṇya’s involvement in the foundation of the Vijayanagara state were later fictions (Desai 1970: 326–328). Hanumantha Rao also emphasised the fictitious and ideological character of the Vidyāraṇya legends (Hanumantha 1986: 161). The negative view about the factuality of Vidyāraṇya’s direct involvement in the foundation was also expressed in a voluminous history of Karnataka in Kannada published at the end of the last century (Şek Ali 1997: 3:16–18, 20).
- 4 In some versions, including those with the motif of the arrest by the Sultan, the brothers were described as having once served the rulers of Warangal as generals or guards. Some scholars, especially those of Telugu origin, getting a clue from such descriptions, asserted that they came from Andhra and had a heated argument with those who claimed that the brothers were natives of Karnataka, in the heady atmosphere of regionalism before and after independence (cf. Stein 1989: 5–7).

- 5 According to the study by Aparna, the earliest inscription referring to Vidyānagara that can be safely judged 'authentic' in the sense of not being a forgery or a fake is dated CE 1392 (Aparna 2010: 394). Vidyāraṇya appeared in contemporary inscriptions only after almost 20 years had passed since the foundation of the city and the state, which was presumed in the legendary accounts to have occurred in CE 1336. One factor in the rise and spread of the legends anachronistically making Vidyāraṇya the city founder may be the rivalry between the Śṛṅṅeri maṭha and the Kāṃcī maṭha, both of which claimed to inherit the tradition of Śaṃkara in South India, and especially the attempt of the former to assert its own superiority in relation to the latter. This issue is beyond the scope of this chapter.
- 6 The *Śrīśaila Dēvālaya Kaiṃṃiyattu* (Srisailam Temple Kaiṃṃiyat) reads that 'Vidyāraṇya Śaṃkara Bhārati Svāmi' built a city using wealth obtained by the grace of the goddess Brahmāmbikā of Srisailam and gave the kingship to Harihara Rāya after he himself ruled the city for some years (Sitapahi 1981: 8, Sitāpati 1982: 12). It is interesting that the goddess Brahmāmbikā, who declined to carry out Vidyāraṇya's wish in the *Kamalāpurada Kaiṃṃiyattu*, bestowed her favour on him here.
- 7 I have been able to confirm that among the published Kannada *kaiṃṃiyattus* edited by Kalaburgi, besides the *Kamalāpurada Kaiṃṃiyattu*, six *kaiṃṃiyattus* mention or allude to Vidyāraṇya's involvement in the foundation of the Vijayanagara state. Two out of the six *kaiṃṃiyattus* (the *Mallūru Sāsivehaḷḷi Śīme Kaiṃṃiyattu* and the *Vasudhāre Grāmada Kaiṃṃiyattu*) talk only about his grace bestowed on the state or the kings and do not refer to his constructing a city (Kalaburgi 1994: 100, 118). The remaining four (the *Haḷebīḍa Kaiṃṃiyattu*, the *Hoḷehonnūru Kaiṃṃiyattu*, the *Kaiṃṃiyattu Kurugōdu*, *Tālūke Baḷḷāri* and the *Tālūku Kaṃṃali Kaiṃṃiyattu*) refer to the construction (Kalaburgi 1994: 184, 217, 449, 493–494).
- 8 Another example from outside south India can be cited. In thirteenth-century Mewar, the story of the empowerment of the Guhilas was passed around, according to which Bappā, the dynastic founder, obtained lordship over Mewar thanks to the grace of Hārītarāśī, an ascetic of the Pāśupata sect of Śaivism (Sinha Kapur 2002: 207, 215).
- 9 For example, see Krishnaswami Aiyangar (1921: xii, 184). cf. Stein (1989: 4–6).
- 10 An inscription of CE 1410 reads: 'Brave Harihara [the second] having a body of unparalleled beauty rescued the Vedas and the earth without turning into a fish or a boar' (*Kannada University Epigraphical Series* 1998: 3: 58 (Haṃṃi 69)). Needless to say, this passage is based on the episodes of the *avatāras* of Viṣṇu, who in *avatāra* of a fish (*matya*) saved the Vedas immersed underwater and in *avatāra* of a boar (*varāha*) rescued the earth.
- 11 For a more recent discussion on the topic of the relationship between Sufi saints and Muslim rulers, see Green (2004).
- 12 In the versions of the legend mentioned in this chapter, Vidyāraṇya is depicted as having been often on the move, visiting Srisailam, Kasi and Kashmir.
- 13 The Vidyāraṇya legends, along with other legendary accounts of dynastic progenitors being blessed by ascetics or saints, will certainly provide valuable materials for the old debate about the nature of relations between the 'political' and the 'religious' domains in traditional India. The legends may be interpreted as indicating the significance of religious authorities (of world-renouncing ascetics, not of Brahmans on the top of the caste hierarchy) to political legitimacy, which has tended to be played down in recent studies. But an easy generalisation must not be deduced from the case of Vijayanagara kingship discussed here. It should also be noted that the way in which those two domains were linked was informed by several competing principles, even within one particular polity (cf. Peabody 2003). See, for historical studies touching on the relations between ruling powers and Hindu ascetics or sects led by them, Appadurai (1977), Burghart (1978), Wolters (1979), Bouillier (1991), Sinha (1993).

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Part II

Politics of town planning

Colonial and postcolonial

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4 Patrick Geddes and the metropolis

Partho Datta

The beginnings of modern planning and Patrick Geddes

With the decision to shift the capital of colonial India from Calcutta to Delhi in 1911, urban planning became a prominent area of debate and discussion in planning societies and journals throughout the western world. Because of this project, other urban centres in colonial India – willingly or not – came under the radar of urban planners, and the discourse of modern planning expanded to accommodate many Indian towns and cities.

The colonies had always attracted and provided opportunities for all kinds of technical experts from Britain. Consequently a whole band of architects, engineers and town planners (their work usually overlapped) were to make a name for themselves throughout the British empire by laying down a common thread of concerns and attitudes towards urban problems in the colonies. In the words of historian R.K. Home, town planning became part of the ‘currency of progressive paternalistic ideas circulating in the British Empire in the 20th century’ (Home 1990: 27). Examples include E.P. Richards, who worked in Calcutta and Singapore, A.E. Mirams in Bombay and Uganda, Herbert Baker in Delhi and Johannesburg, and Patrick Geddes all over India and in Colombo and Palestine. Western planning models, indeed the western experience of urbanisation, was seen by some of these planners as the only available model for modernisation. It was because of these itinerant individuals that western urbanism was extended to the colonies and in some cases gained a new lease of life. The work of Geddes is particularly important because he represented a considered and very articulate dissent from this conventional planning wisdom.

By the early twentieth century colonial metropolises presented a picture of great urban squalor which needed urgent attention. The rapid growth of factory-based industry (particularly in Bombay and Calcutta) had given a fillip to migration into the cities, and the concomitant problems of overcrowding and lack of sanitation became particularly acute during epidemics such as the plague (1896). The colonial governments were particularly concerned with shielding cantonments and towns with significant European populations from disease, and responded by intervening decisively in built-up areas, demolishing old buildings and slums, quarantining the sick and setting up vigilance operations to discipline

and regulate the population. Thus modern planning in India had its roots in nineteenth-century pandemics.¹ One outcome of this was that the relationship between bodies and spaces came to be intensely investigated and the management of spaces in the city became an important part of urban policy.

In the first few decades of the twentieth century, the town planning movement gathered momentum with the emergence of the professional town planner, the publication of journals and the proliferation of professional associations, pressure groups and lobbyists for town planning. In India the marriage of extant urban policy to town planning ideas soon took concrete form with the setting up of Improvement Trusts after the plague, most prominently in Bombay (1898) and Calcutta (1911), as well as in numerous other cities in later decades. The importance of these Trusts lay in the normative standards for 'improvement' that they developed. Planning, as Christian Topalov has perceptively pointed out, had a larger reformist agenda: changing cities meant changing people, and this in turn meant changing society itself (Topalov 1990).

By and large, in the hands of bureaucratic practitioners 'improvement' was often procrustean in nature. One objective was sanitising public places in the city, but with epidemics showing no signs of abatement, the colonial state forcibly entered the Indian home, making a bid to set sanitary standards for private and domestic spaces too. Not surprisingly, the sanitary reach and goals of the state often clashed with communitarian norms: sanitation and hygiene did not dovetail easily with traditional Indian notions of purity and pollution. Regulation of domestic practices thus remained a contentious issue, and the populace refused to follow modern sanitary standards in daily life or practise them in public spaces. In colonial India, the initiatives of the state in this sphere were complicated by its alien status, its inherent racism and class inhibitions. Even Indian nationalists who supported planning as a progressive move were quick to point out that the colonial state openly favoured European neighbourhoods at the cost of Indian localities. With the people reluctant to assent, spatial planning and restructuring in the city took on the character of violent coercion. Commercial and business imperatives often justified these measures as inevitable, which in effect meant unleashing class violence on the poor living in slums. The slum populace was easy to attack since they were squatters with no legal title to land and at the mercy of unscrupulous landlords. Colonial town planners, irrespective of needs, mechanically implemented the Haussmannian model of restructuring, which meant cutting broad swathes of roads, usually rectilinears and diagonals, on the face of the city for efficient traffic circulation. The influence of nineteenth-century English sanitary and bye-law regulations also played a decisive part.

Not all practitioners of town planning were mechanical and unthinking in their approach. Haussmann's model of city improvement provoked contrary views. His work was criticised by contemporaries such as Camillo Sitte (1889), whose championing of non-geometric forms challenged mechanical conceptions of design and the tyranny of the straight line (Goodfriend 1982; Schroske 1981), and by Ebenezer Howard (1898), whose garden cities brought into question the

very usefulness of sustaining expanding conglomerations with improved utilities. Similarly, the influential architect Raymond Unwin (early 1900s; he had previously designed Hampstead Garden Suburb in London) campaigned against the mechanical implementation of bye-law streets (Evenson 1979: 22–23, 265, 1989: 124). These thinkers were responsible for pointing out the perils of unabashed industrialism. In India, too, there were rumblings of discontent with official policy. J.M. Linton Bogle, who wrote a pioneering book on town planning, made an implicit criticism of colonialism and how political power determined space when he wrote the following, about Allahabad: ‘is there any good reason why the occupants of Civil Lines should have enormous compounds of six to eight bighas – far more than they want – while the houses in the city are packed together like sheep in a pen?’ (Linton Bogle 1929: 8).

Similarly, another contemporary planner, H.V. Lanchester, wrote retrospectively on the problems of ‘cutting straight roads through the more congested areas, regardless of the groupings of those displaced’ (Lanchester 1942: 119).²

Geddes’s method: some details

Patrick Geddes’s work threw some of these dilemmas of modern planning into sharp relief in a more sustained manner. Invited to work first in India by the Governor of Madras, Lord Pentland, Geddes stayed on as a freelance advisor and planner for princely states and other municipal authorities. His work was backed by numerous town planning reports, almost 40 according to one estimate, which he wrote and published between 1918 and 1924 (Meller 1990). Geddes was appalled at the indifferent and unthinking drives to demolish large parts of the historic core of Indian cities and was quick to appreciate the varied urban and civic traditions of pre-modern India. He had long been convinced that capitalist modernisation had brought sea-changes, but had been unable to efface vital cultural symbols.³ Geddes’s only major book, *Cities in Evolution* (1915) – a theoretical statement on cities, published before he came to India – argued that the post-railway age had obscured and hidden the ‘grand design’ of cities in the past (Geddes 1915: 16).

Geddes’s approach is generally seen as ‘culturally informed’ (Goodfriend 1979). This meant that he was sensitive and empathetic to extant civic culture. He was impressed with the functional character of Indian building traditions, the adaptation to weather, the use of local materials, the multiple uses of public spaces and the small-grain character of street life. He argued that these practices were sensitive to the ecology of the regions and therefore needed to be recovered and reinstated (Guha 2001).⁴ However, unlike in the west, none of these practices had been theorised in the academy, nor were they sanctified by modern movements for conservation. Geddes was sympathetic to Indian nationalism and hoped that Indian leaders and thinkers, with their rejection of mechanical western ideas, would play a vital role in encouraging his efforts. In an early, celebrated essay, which he published in *The Modern Review* hoping to catch the attention of Indian nationalists, he advised:

For present purposes, our problem, as students of cities and their planning, is to get beyond architectural studies, as commonly understood. What we need are interpretations, sociological and civic, i.e. on the one hand in terms of the social life and psychology from which buildings of each type arise, and of the movements these express; and on the other of the main types of City Development which are their fullest concrete expression, and which react in their turn, on the mental world of their inhabitants.

(Geddes 1919b: 213)

Like many people of his generation, Geddes was a practising evolutionist. He was appalled that the Industrial Revolution had unleashed economic forces without taking cognisance of the biological circumstances of human beings, and in this he was truly prophetic, anticipating modern environmentalism by many decades. He wanted to apply evolutionary theory to society but realised that since evolution was not always progressive, the vast potential created by the evolutionary pattern had to be consciously seized (Meller 1980).⁵ Modern town planning with its grand schemes and industrial technology exuded a utopian flavour and was unusually dismissive of the past. Only upon painstaking unravelling of the social pattern of the community, Geddes argued, could the plans for a future be drawn. He was willing to be a utopian if the future was also premised on an understanding of the past; Geddes wrote that the quest for utopian endeavours should begin right in the city itself and the way to connect the past and the present was through the observation and recording of local heritage which had persisted, with local advantages, through generations. Only then would 'historic appreciation and utopian anticipation ... be increasingly united to bring forth fruit in civic aspiration and endeavour' (Hollins 1908: 6). This approach was markedly different from that of his contemporary, Ebenezer Howard, who envisaged 'Garden Cities' on an empty plain where no contingencies existed (Fishman 1977: 6). In contrast, Geddes's utopia was no escape from the harsh realities of urban squalor.

Geddes invented what he called the 'the diagnostic or civic survey' to aid the process of recovery. This survey method, which Geddes patented, gave him an enviable 'feel' for the organic form of the city. However, this was not an intuitive response but based on an idiosyncratic reading of the history, morphology, economy and cultural traditions of the city, which he put forward in his book, in his town planning reports and in his famous travelling exhibitions which showcased this approach graphically. In one of his Indian reports, Geddes warned that the enthusiastic designer who put pen to paper without survey:

exceeds too readily the scale of his surroundings and over-reaches also the requirements of the town. The result has been that, in too many cities, imposing new streets have been laid out without survey of their surrounding quarter and constructed without reference to local needs or potentialities.

(Tyrwhitt 1947: 24)⁶

To tackle the dross and decay of urban settlements, Geddes added the complimentary 'conservative surgery' to his civic survey. This was a way in which maximum improvement could be achieved with minimum demolition and disruption. He explained:

the method of Conservative Surgery ... first it shows that the new streets prove not to be really required since, by simply enlarging the existing lanes, ample communications already exist; secondly that, with the addition of some vacant lots and the removal of a few of the most dilapidated and insanitary houses, these lanes can be greatly improved and every house brought within reach of fresh air as well as of material sanitation – a point on which the more pretentious method constantly fails, as is evident on every plan.

(Tyrwhitt 1947: 41)

Geddes wanted to preserve and extend traditional spaces that were integral to the community, neighbourhood and family. Courtyards, rooftops, thresholds, pavements, small shrines, and parks were well integrated in his plans. He knew that these places were vital to the privacy and sociability of women who otherwise faced many customary restrictions, and for this reason he was a champion of 'purdah gardens'.⁷ Similarly, if the tulsi plant symbolised the nurturing power of women then it had to become the symbol of the thriving Hindu home. The *chabutra* (platforms outside houses) also had to be saved since they were vital to neighbourliness and a sense of community. For ideas such as these Geddes was dismissed as a conservative, and he in his turn was contemptuous of radicals who wanted to have no truck with tradition. Geddes was in fact far from being a traditionalist, as his championing of working-class housing and sensitivity to the exclusion of lower castes in his many reports demonstrate.⁸ Geddes's belief in communitarian civic norms was firmly rooted in modernist ideas of health, beauty and sanitation.⁹

For planning historians of colonial India, Geddes is important because his work throws up larger questions. Douglas Goodfriend, in his re-evaluation, has written that Geddes critiqued the 'unconsidered importation of any Western planning practices into (the) different cultural milieu' (Goodfriend 1979: 344) of India. On this theme the planning historian Anthony King has written a perceptive and pioneering essay (King 1980). For one, importing planning models from the west meant measuring indigenous society by standards set elsewhere, for example with regards to overcrowding and sanitation. Such plans also ran the risk of being imposed on a people with totally different needs. Also looming large was the question of social and financial costs, since large planning projects called for huge investments and displacement hit citizens very hard. Even more tellingly, these imposed plans never questioned power relations in the colonial city. Racist distinctions like black/white were taken for granted and maintained (King 1980: 210). Geddes's critique of colonial planning anticipated many of these concerns. His work also demonstrated that the norms of Euclidean geometry (the rectilinears, the diagonals, etc.) used by planners in the plans were

dubious since they represented all space uniformly. The biggest casualty in this method was the labouring poor: being low down in the social hierarchy meant that they were unlikely to find representation in the plans and would therefore become victims of cartographic silence.

Barrabazar: fantasies of demolition

Barrabazar (literally ‘Big Bazaar’) was central Calcutta’s most congested and most important business district. It had developed into East India’s centre for wholesale and retail trade in the hands of Marwaris, who had settled in this area in significant numbers by the end of the nineteenth century. Barrabazar was an important indication that Calcutta’s economy, despite appearances, was dependent on trade rather than manufacturing (Beverly 1881: 22, 46). One early account from the 1840s gives an orientalist hue to this bustling mart:

Few Europeans, I believe, have ever taken the trouble of exploring the inmost recesses of the Babel-like regions of the Burra Bazar. . . . Here above and below, may be seen the jewels of Golconda and Bundelkhand, the shawls of Cashmere, the broad cloths of England, silks of Moorshedabad and Benares, muslins of Dacca, calicoes, ginghams, chintzes, brocade of Persia, spicery and myrrh and frankincense from Ceylon, the Spice Islands and Arabia, shells from the eastern coast and straits, iron ware and cutlery in abundance, as well from Europe as Monghyr, coffee, drugs, dried fruits, and sweetmeats from Arabia and Turkey, cows tails from Thibet, and ivory from Ceylon. A great portion of these and other such articles, are either sold or brought by natives of the countries from whence they are obtained, who together with visitors, travellers and beggars, form a diversified group of Persians, Arabs, Jews, Marwarrees, Armenians, Cashmeerees, Malabars, Goorkhas, Afghans, Seiks, Turks, Parsees, Chinese, Burmese and Bengalis.
(Smith 1849)

Another European account from 1900 declared that:

one of the most wonderful sights in Calcutta is the Burra Bazar, yet how few Europeans . . . ever visit it! . . . The houses are all very high, many rising to more than four storeys. They are built of stone or brick and, as a rule, are ornamented within and without, with rough but not unpleasing coloured frescoes. Some have balconies of wonderfully carved wood.
(Quoted in Evenson 1989: 130)

Barrabazar or Ward VII was the area behind Writers’ Buildings (the seat of government) and Lalbazar (the police headquarters) up to Cotton Street in the north; it was bounded by the river on the west and Lower Chitpur Road on the east. This area was diverse and included shops, godowns, residential buildings and *bustis* (slums), though commercialisation had lent the whole ward a distinctive

character. Overbuilt with narrow streets, which made it mysterious and impenetrable to government agencies, its insanitation worried administrators because of its close proximity to the centre of government. Things were compounded by the high value of land in this area, which rivalled that of commercial London. Throughout the nineteenth century, official views swung from the romantic (see the quote above) to the denunciatory; the latter harboured fantasies of razing this commercial hub to the ground, removing what was seen as an important locus of disease in the city. By restoring order in this ward, the government planners wanted to create a kind of buffer between Indian neighbourhoods to the north and British ones in the south. The dilemma and prevarication of sanitary policy in Barrabazar seemed to have been resolved when the search began for a suitable site for the proposed Central Railway Station. European engineers, doctors and bureaucrats in the city wanted the Central Station to replace this historic core. In 1899, when doctors Clemow and Hossack were asked to prepare a report on the area following the plague scare, they too recommended demolition (Clemow & Hossack 1899). Throughout the nineteenth century the railway was seen as the purveyor of sanitation, and it was thought that its benefits far outweighed any disruption caused to communities (Kellett 1969: 2, Wohl 1977: 39). Needless to say, the question of social and financial costs took second place to fantasies of order and control. Perhaps the enormous cost of demolition and rebuilding was a deterrent to the government, but the railway station was never built in Barrabazar – it was instead built across the river in Howrah in 1906 – and the area escaped this dreadful fate. However, concern with regards to Barrabazar did not diminish in the official mind.

The Geddes report of Barrabazar

Despite Geddes being present in India, two of the most desirable planning commissions slipped through his hands. First, New Delhi had already been given to Lutyens (and Baker). Geddes was no architect and had an idiosyncratic reputation among planners, and it did not help that he had criticised the New Delhi plan (Meller 1990: 236; Mumford 1966: 11), and perhaps it was for this reason that he was never accommodated, even in an advisory role. Acolytes of Geddes, such as the architect and planner H.V. Lanchester, also failed to get a slice of the Delhi pie. Second, the autonomous Calcutta Improvement Trust (CIT) was set up in 1911; it was a major project to restructure the city, but Geddes failed to get in even here. His private papers reveal that he tried to get a place as an advisor through his friend, the scientist Jagadis Bose, who unsuccessfully put in a word to the Indian minister in government, Surendranath Bannerjee.¹⁰ Clearly Geddes was keen to secure a big project, and he had made the appropriate noises before leaving England, even going so far as to praise the published plan of the CIT as a 'stately volume' in his *Cities in Evolution* (1915) (Meller 1990: 231, fn 37).

Eventually Geddes was asked to submit his views on one ward in the city – Barrabazar – by the rival Calcutta Municipality, who were resentful of the Trust having encroached on their territory. The Municipality had been deliberately

kept at a distance by the Trust because the latter saw popular representation as a liability. This was Geddes's first proper commission in a colonial metropolis; his previous reports had been on smaller towns or princely capitals, none of which faced problems on the scale of Bombay or Calcutta. Planning models also valorised the big city, for example the restructuring of Paris (by Haussmann, c.1850–1870) and Chicago (plan by Burnham and Bennett, 1909). Clearly Geddes had to reconcile his cautious and piecemeal approach to the larger scale.¹¹ In Calcutta he had to confront two major opposing strains in modern planning. First, the close association of business needs with urban planning; the proliferation of capital had always meant the restructuring of spaces. Second was the bane of modern planning – how to rehouse the displaced working classes without provoking class conflict.

Haussmann's plan was the official inspiration for restructuring Calcutta, and E.P. Richards – who put together the blueprint for the CIT – acknowledged his debt to this planning model (Richards 1914). Haussmann achieved his emphasis on imposing a new functional order on the city with an eye to the efficient circulation of goods and services through the connection of economic nodes such as docks and railway stations, and the creation of voids for 'respiration' (boulevards, parks) (Smith 1980: 101, Choay 1970: 15–16). Richards's plan for CIT (he offered several alternative proposals) shows a similar logic: a Calcutta criss-crossed with rectilinears and diagonals that reduced the city into manageable blocks for commerce and the trades. Commenting generally on the carving up of space in the modern city, Lewis Mumford (Geddes's principal disciple)¹² wrote that such a move signified the rapid turnover of real estate in capitalism, a 'convertibility' and 'replaceability' of space for 'possible traffic, possible commercial opportunity, possible conversion from residence into more exclusive business use' (Mumford 1961: 427, 438). Schemes such as the one pursued by Richards thus implicitly acknowledged the importance of private investors in the property market in Calcutta.

Geddes had to contend with Richards's plan as well as several others already in place. Clemow and Hossack's report (1899) has been mentioned above, and the CIT commissioned another up-to-date report on insanitary wards from Dr Crake (Crake 1911). Geddes also had to take as his benchmark the plans that the CIT had made specifically for Barrabazar. Albert de Bois Shrosbree, the chief valuer, had prepared such a report in 1916 and found that the 'fundamental evil' in Barrabazar was overbuilding. The tone of his recommendations was more cautious than the 1899 report, and he suggested various solutions, common to which was the demolition and partial rebuilding of insanitary areas and the widening and construction of streets throughout the area. Shrosbree urged that the matter could not be delayed as the cost of improvement would rise prohibitively (de Bois Shrosbree 1916: 5, 14). In intent at least, it was no different from the earlier reports. In an early testimony to the CIT, the Marwari Traders' Association had proactively supported such proposals and had recommended more through roads and the clearance of slums to facilitate commercialisation (*CIT Annual Report*, 1912–13 1913: 27–28). To sum up, the logic of these plans

indicated that the 'allocation' of streets, sewers and railway lines seemed the only way to order the city (Boyer 1983, 1994: 288). It was at this juncture that Geddes was asked to give his opinion, and he submitted his plan in 1919.

Geddes began his investigations by conducting, literally, a house-to-house survey. He knew there were no short-cuts, as only through painstaking investigations would he be able to get an accurate picture of the problems of Barrabazar and also expand his conclusions for a wider comparative perspective with the city as a whole (Geddes 1919a: 27–28). He knew that extant plans followed 'the conventional aesthetics of the rigorously straight line of the older Paris–Berlin–American school' (Geddes 1919a: 5), but Geddes saw no reason why a costly monotony should be the target of planning, when local traditions offered a cheaper and more aesthetic result (Geddes 1919a: 5). Even though he was dealing with only one district of Calcutta, he effectively managed to critique the normative standards that the CIT had set up for itself. Geddes's report was categorical that there was more to Barrabazar than just large blocks of insanitary and overcrowded property. Barrabazar, he pointed out, had a distinct architectural and urban form of its own, and it would reduce the trauma of demolition if this character was allowed to survive, provided some changes were made. Geddes found that Barrabazar encompassed two distinctly different areas. Big business was situated in the south and the west, and it was here that abatement of traffic congestion and general improvement was most needed. He had alternative plans for the fully fledged development of this business area. He found that the north and east were primarily residential, and Geddes saw it as his job to try to preserve this character – to save housing stock and minimise the dislocation of residents. He also felt that the argument of the Trust that the business quarters would inevitably 'spill' into the residential was unconvincing (Geddes 1919a: 6).

Geddes also observed that the movement of goods and traffic occurred principally across the city from west to east and vice-versa, and much less along the river (north–south) or on roads parallel to it. This was borne out by the organic growth of the city after the nineteenth century, which clearly shows a majority of the city's roads take a west to east alignment (Gupta 1993: 35). Instead, the Trust was planning north–south cuts, in total disregard of the needs of local trades. The logic here was dictated by the British mercantile establishments, which were placed along the river (still a major channel for transport) and which disregarded Indian businesses further inland. Geddes also noticed that in the business areas the existing godowns were basically domestic buildings adapted for commercial use – and thus actually afforded less storage space. The courtyards became dirty from constant use, and the dust raised contributed to the unhealthiness of the living quarters in the upper storeys. Most of the houses also had a narrow frontage but great depth, and the space behind these houses had been overrun by the haphazard growth of stables and irregular housing for domestic servants and the working population (Geddes 1919a: 6–7, 10–11, 13).

Geddes's recommendations for Barrabazar basically fell within three broad parameters. First, he insisted that street alignment be developed along the west–east axis, following the natural movement of goods and traffic, and not north–south

as the CIT was planning. Second, while making a plea to retain the residential character of the north-east, he was keen to see the west of Barrabazar develop into a modern business district. Third, even when he realised that demolition of insanitary property could not be avoided, he wanted to rebuild, keeping traditional urban forms in mind so that the character of the district would remain intact.

Geddes was convinced that Barrabazar should be set up as a modern business district and nothing less. He wanted to develop the business locality along the west because of its proximity to the river and shipping. For this purpose, he recommended that the Mint (1831) be shifted out, but typically for Geddes he urged the re-use of the ancient structure as a public school for children in the area. Geddes was aware that large plots of land in Calcutta were controlled by the government (the largest landowner in the city), and his suggestion was in fact a gesture towards a more creative and public use of such land, which at that time was blocked by moribund structures. The grouping of business interests in different quarters represented an 'old world survival', which Geddes argued gave Barrabazar a familiar character of its own. Far from condemning this traditional grouping of business, Geddes wanted to retain it. At the same time he urged the adoption of modern American and German methods of goods handling in Calcutta. He envisaged a vast 'Produce Exchange' next to the railway lines of an associated goods depot, where goods would be lifted vertically from wagons to warehouses with great economy of handling. The upper storey of this building was to house offices, and there would even be a roof garden for relaxation and business meetings. He wanted old residential houses being used as godowns to be rebuilt as modern warehouses, with offices and shops on the upper floors, connected with ramps. Footbridges over lanes would be built to decongest the narrow lanes. Barrabazar thus re-planned and concentrated would relieve the congestion from other parts and make available once again building stock for much-needed housing (Geddes 1919a: 16, 18–19).

Geddes's penchant for conservation did not mean that he doubted the need for more lanes and streets through Barrabazar. Business sense also suggested that instead of widening existing streets as the CIT was planning to do, it was more reasonable to open new thoroughfares through the back lots of the houses, which Geddes had shown to consist of run-down property. Thus at one stroke, new frontages would be opened up cheaply, lines for sanitation would be easier to provide and the local business traffic would also remain undisturbed. He suggested three alternative west–east routes and condemned the north–south system because 'its origin appears to lie more in drawing-office routine than in City Survey' (Geddes 1919a: 8, 11). All CIT plans were made with the future needs of motorised transport in mind, yet according to Geddes the pressing need of the hour was to improve pedestrian circulation within Barrabazar, since the evidence of mass circulation by foot was only too evident, as was the continuous use of human portage and hand-driven vehicles. On the value of preserving and extending lanes, he was particularly eloquent. Arguing that people like short-cuts, he wrote that 'a lane after all is a pavement without a road beside it, and some

people value its quietness; while its narrow width and shade give coolness also' (Geddes 1919a: 12).

Geddes's plans in fact show a gradation of roads – lanes for pedestrians, streets for heavier mixed traffic and large roads for intra-city communication. The logic behind such a move was to avoid clogging up a single large avenue, overburdened with humans, animals and vehicles, reducing mobility to crawling level. A simple separation of traffic functions would enable both speed for vehicles and faster mobility for commerce. Such a move would also help preserve existing channels of circulation rather than condemn them unequivocally.

Despite his caution, Geddes was practical enough to realise that some demolition would always be necessary. He knew that sanitary problems had become acute in Barrabazar and needed urgent attention, and thus Dr Crane's survey won his sympathy. 'As a life-long cobbler of old buildings and also with more respect than most for the courtyard type of house I take a less severe view than his', he wrote, 'but in a general way I am compelled to confirm and support his criticism. His figures are well worth consulting' (Geddes 1919a: 22). Geddes's plans to rebuild demolished areas included innovatively designed four-storey blocks of houses, which followed the traditional use of space closely. The lower two storeys would be used for business purposes, while the upper two would be laid out like the traditional Indian courtyard home and house residents. By raising the residential quarters to the top floors, Geddes hoped to avoid the dirt and dust of lower floors. The warehouses built below would be on modern lines, with enough provision for light and air (Geddes 1919a: 14). In these plans for the newly built four-storey houses, Geddes envisaged some displacement. But it would be balanced, he hoped, by creating adequate and in most cases better places to stay (Geddes 1919a: 15, 19, 33). In some blocks only a few insanitary houses would be removed, and the space created would be converted into small open areas and parks, providing relief to local residents. Knowing that the creation of space for gardens would prove very expensive in a high-value site such as Barrabazar, he urged again for the conversion of roofs into small gardens. For women who were reluctant to step out because of a lack of recreational space outside, he suggested earmarking small parks as exclusive 'purdah gardens' (Geddes 1919a: 20–22).

Writing just after the First World War, Geddes was sensitive to the fact that large-scale demolitions would lead to business losses and the dislocation of the labouring poor. He was no doubt aware of the rumblings of discontent among the working classes in Calcutta and its outskirts that had broken out after the war.¹³ Geddes realised that it was vital for those workers dependent on casual work to live close to their place of employment. In sharp contrast to Richards, he argued that the poor would not be able to travel from the suburbs to the city, a luxury that only the upper classes could afford since only they had the means and time to commute long distances daily.

Preserving and investing in existing housing stock was paramount for Geddes. Too often, he urged, buildings were judged on superficial grounds, 'so that dirty whitewash, broken plaster, and bad smell are enough to evoke a cry for demolition;

for these only need easy cleansing and brightening, and economical repair' (Geddes 1919a: 33). He well understood the value that Indians placed on family homes. Far from deriding this attachment as old-fashioned conservatism that impeded progress, he was keen to turn it into an effective plea for their repair and sanitation. He knew that for British planners in the CIT, the notion of a family home was an alien concept. 'Family homes' in the west belonged to the aristocracy, and the majority of people in cities lived in tenements and flats. He suggested that in its own way, the Calcutta Municipality could take the 'paternal' step of granting loans to citizens for repairing their houses. Geddes felt that the investment in housing was too strictly seen through the prism of financial gains and losses in the market; he wanted the governing classes to invest in housing, so that socially at least they could expect returns in the form of a satisfied and prosperous working class (Geddes 1919a: 29–30, 34). Implicit in this was an argument challenging Engels's famous study on the condition of the English working classes. Engels had almost suggested that the worsening housing conditions would further radicalise the workers and that the goal of socialist revolution was to 'occupy' the houses of the propertied. Geddes argued against such a view; the elites according to him lived in upper-class super-slums. A far more genuine revolution would be to set new norms for more humane and communal forms of living space (Mumford 1961: 464–465).¹⁴

Geddes's ideas, unusual for their time, met with scepticism and were resisted even before his report was published. Shroobree, the chief valuer, whose report on Barrabazar is referred to above, was critical of Geddes's attempts at solving the problem of 'nuisance corners' by erecting small temples in their place. Shroobree predicted that this would freeze in perpetuity areas that needed reconstruction work (de Bois Shroobree 1916: 6). Shroobree's criticism showcased why Geddes's ideas were mistrusted. According to official planners, epidemics and overcrowding needed solutions on a war footing, whereas Geddes seemed not only insufficiently interventionist, but also far too sympathetic to the community. Geddes was, however, accustomed to such attacks. To the Calcutta Corporation's charge that his scheme for small, open spaces between houses would come to nothing since they would rapidly become repositories for dumping refuse (*Report on the Municipal Administration of Calcutta, 1919–20* 1920: 18), he had effective answers. Geddes argued that 'neutral' issues like that of garbage actually hid a deep-seated antipathy for common people. To the British administrators, Indians were inherently filthy and prone to desecrating public places; to Geddes the problem was the very opposite. Rubbish accumulated, he wrote, when neither the municipality nor the local landlord made adequate arrangements for carting it away. Besides, planting a few trees would indeed maintain the sanctity of these small areas between houses and encourage people to keep them clean (Geddes 1919a: 32). In other words, open spaces that were integrated into community life had more chance of surviving than parks, the sanitary 'voids' that modern planners tended to prefer, premised on the negative concept of a space that was just to be left empty. Consequently, constant policing of such spaces had become necessary, threatening to overturn the very notion of a park made for the people.

Helen Meller, in her important reevaluation of Geddes's Barrabazar report, has shown that he was often a victim of his own propaganda and was totally unresponsive to any point of view other than his own (Meller 1990: 283). He was also prone to repeating his ideas irrespective of the context; some of his pet schemes, such as 'purdah gardens', resurfaced in all his reports. For all his enthusiasm, Geddes was perhaps too sanguine about the rejuvenating effects of modern business organisation in Barrabazar. He misunderstood the constraints at work in a colonial economy and failed to understand the mercantilist nature of industry in Calcutta, which, eager to do business on the cheap, was unlikely to support his long-term plans for a modern refurbished Barrabazar. A modern produce exchange with the latest mechanical goods-handling facilities meant the redundancy of casual labour. In Chicago, John Fairfield has pointed out that such a scheme was also proposed by Bennett, with an eye to quelling labour militancy (Fairfield 1993: 121). One wonders if Geddes was aware of the implications of some of his schemes for Calcutta, which had an overwhelming presence of unskilled labour. Helen Rosenau has written that Geddes lacked architectural vision; she comments: 'The form of the image seems to have eluded Geddes' (Rosenau 1974: 150). But this view misrepresents Geddes and is not based on any serious engagement with the full range of his published reports. The question of form in cities is often reduced to the profile of monumental buildings and is a hangover from architectural history. The assumption is that since Geddes had little to offer in terms of the palpable built environment, his ideas were therefore not relevant or that he had failed. Perhaps more pertinent is Françoise Choay's comment that:

Patrick Geddes evolved the survey method at the beginning of the 20th century. But while the method acted as a corrective for urbanism by respecting the complexity of reality and rejecting the apriori, it was nevertheless used by Geddes within the context of a cultural system of values and it remained dependent on the creative intervention of a planner. Consequently it did not fundamentally alter the course of critical planning.

(Choay 1970: 109)

However, the far-reaching implications of Geddes's work have eluded these critics. Lewis Mumford has written that Geddes rejected the 'cult of the state', and central to his thought was not the planner but the citizen (Tyrwhitt 1947: 12).

The Barrabazar report shows that Geddes was willing to enter into a strategic dialogue with official planning. However, those who professed sympathy with his plans in official circles often rejected his schemes on the grounds that they were idealistic in nature. Anticipating such a ploy, Geddes wrote in his Barrabazar report that:

every worker who ventures upon the application of science, beyond the traditional mechanical level on which the 'practical man' prides himself, is

taken by him for ‘an idealist’ – a term which often conveniently dispenses him from hearing what the idealist has to say.

(Geddes 1919a: 35)

Over the years, as Geddes’s reputation for dissent grew, his India reports attracted a motley group of planners. In the 1920s and 1930s, the library of the CIT became a ‘Mecca’ for young British planners who were keen to consult the complete set of Indian reports that were kept there (Meller 1990: 203).¹⁵

Geddes’s hopes of attracting Indian nationalists also failed. While the scientist Jagadis Bose, whose biography Geddes wrote, Ananda Coomaraswamy and Rabindranath Tagore became his friends and supporters, they did not respond to his ideas on urbanism; the only exception was the academic Radha Kamal Mukherjee. Others, such as Bipin Chandra Pal, were dazzled by the prospect of an Indian metropolis founded on modern European models, despite their strident anti-colonialism. The response of Indian nationalists to alternative models of urbanism was therefore quite ambivalent at best.

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Notes

- 1 This needs to be qualified. The 1857 uprising provoked a major crackdown on cities by the British. Delhi and Lucknow had to be re-occupied and were extensively restructured in order to control recalcitrant populations. For some historians, military occupation initiated modern town planning in India. See Gupta 1981; Oldenburg, 1984.
- 2 Lanchester worked in India and published a plan on Madras (Lanchester 1918).
- 3 I owe this insight to the late Professor Satyesh Chakrabarty, Calcutta.
- 4 Sekhar Krishnan made available to me a typescript of this unpublished talk.
- 5 See also, Guha 1992.
- 6 This is an important anthology of extracts from his Indian reports.
- 7 Here it was C.M. Villiers-Stuart’s *Gardens of the Great Mughals*, which had a great influence on Geddes (Meller 1990: 219).
- 8 Most famously in his report on Indore city. See Geddes 1918.
- 9 Geddes did not homogenise the community, nor did he romanticise it as a perpetual bulwark against the state. Planning for Geddes was a creative way to raise the standards of civic life in general. For a view of how modern sanitation adjudicates and destroys communities, see Chakrabarty (1991), but also see Kumar’s (1997) riposte.
- 10 Patrick Geddes, papers, University of Edinburgh, Ms 10576.

- 11 Ram Guha has raised the question of whether Geddes's penchant for the 'middle or human scale' proved to be a limitation. See Guha 2001.
- 12 Though he rebelled against his mentor, Lewis Mumford (1966). For the Geddesian approach to the American city as exemplified in Mumford's life-work see the excellent account by Guha (1991).
- 13 For details see, Datta 1993.
- 14 According to Mumford, Geddes described the downward movement of building and housing in the modern city as: 'Slum, semi-slum and super slum, to this has come the Evolution of Cities.'
- 15 For another sympathetic reading of Geddes's Barrabazar Report, see Beattie (2004). Grateful thanks to Indrani Chatterjee who drew my attention to this essay.

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5 Islam and development in urban space

Planning ‘official’ Karachi in the 1950s¹

Markus Daechsel

The gain of independence in 1947 brought with it both the need and the opportunity to ‘build’ Pakistan as a postcolonial country. This not only meant nation building in the abstract sense, but also raised the challenge of how the new state could inscribe itself – ideologically and structurally – in the urban environments of major cities like Lahore, Karachi, Dhaka, and eventually Islamabad. Urban planning and housing policy were both new and obvious priorities for policy makers in the 1950s: the impact of partition had made many of the large cities of Pakistanis ungovernable, and this required urgent administrative interference that went beyond the much more limited practices of colonial urban planning. Moreover, as the successor state to British India that did *not* inherit the symbolic and infrastructural assets of a historic capital city, Pakistan also had to face the challenge of creating a new urban focal point that would express the significance of national liberation. Also, the international context was favourable to an age of city building. The experience of the Second World War had brought urban reconstruction to the forefront of international development discourse, with new bodies such as the United Nations and the Colombo Plan actively encouraging comprehensive state intervention to control rapid urbanisation. International entrepreneurs and architects operating in ‘developing’ countries around the world looked to Pakistan in search of projects and business opportunities, among them greats such as Michel Ecochard and Le Corbusier, or Doxiadis Associates, the future creators of Islamabad.²

Like other countries seeking their place in the new post-Second World War order, it was essential for Pakistan to make use of the new opportunities offered by ‘development’. Although the worldview of the leading Pakistani bureaucrats, military men and politicians of the era was not always entirely aligned with all aspects of the new global discourse, they nevertheless understood its importance for creating new political alliances, not least with the United States of America. ‘Development’ was in many ways the ideological glue that cemented the ever-closer strategic relationship between Washington and the Pakistani establishment, which culminated in open support for Ayub Khan’s military regime at the very end of the decade (see Jalal 1990, Kux, 2001: [chs 3 and 4](#)). But ‘development’ – especially when it came to its expression in symbolically significant projects of urban reconstruction – was by no means easily reconcilable with the

ideological requirements of Pakistan's official identity. At the most basic level, 'development' was a universalising discourse, a way of making sense of the world by using a range of categories and concepts that applied anywhere from Latin America to Africa and South-East Asia. As a nation state that had to fight harder than most to establish its right of being 'separate', Pakistan could not afford to slot into the world as just another example of 'underdevelopment', not least because such a position erased any essential difference between itself and its defining 'other' and next-door neighbour, India.

At the very heart of establishing difference was, naturally, the matter of religion: Pakistan's character as a state for Muslims, or even, as some would have it, as an 'Islamic state' was at stake.³ This chapter discusses how this identity requirement could be brought together with 'development' as far as city planning and architecture were concerned. The international consultants then operating in Pakistan occupied an uneasy position on the frontline between the two contradictory ideological pulls. While they were indispensable by virtue of their expertise and for the prestige they brought to Pakistan, they were without exception not of Muslim background, and as such always open to suspicions and challenges from all sorts of official and self-appointed spokesmen of religious rectitude in Pakistan. It did not help that there was a good deal of debate within the country itself over how exactly Islam could or should be represented in urban space. Being unable to find any consensus among themselves, Pakistani policy makers were sometimes only too happy to reframe the debate as a simplistic binary, one that pitted a non-Muslim foreigner against a now magically united front of committed nationalists. As this chapter will show, this often occurred at the expense of the actual projects in question, which either never got finished or remained aesthetically unsatisfactory.

The Karachi of this chapter is an 'official' Karachi, a series of 'national' ventures rather than the living and breathing locality with its rich local landscape and distinctive politics that the city also was at the time. The conclusions proposed here about how Islam and development came together – or rather failed to come together – in urban space pertain to Pakistan as a whole. Almost as soon as the port city was designated as the new capital in 1947, there were discussions between foreign consultants and architects and local power holders over finding the right mixture of religion and modernity, of Islam and development, that would speak to the nation. The reference frame for where and how an appropriate representation of Pakistan's dual aspirations in city space should be achieved shifted over time: it could be the city of Karachi as a whole, a designated 'federal capital area' within it or in the near vicinity, or an even more confined cluster of official buildings and monuments. The geographic focus (but importantly not the substance of the debate) was re-directed to an entirely new location when Ayub Khan announced the Islamabad project shortly after his 1958 military takeover. But Karachi's significance for the encounter between religion and development was by no means over. Parallel to Islamabad, the generals also instituted the enormously ambitious Korangi project, a new satellite town for hundreds of thousands of destitute partition refugees, separated from the old capital by

several miles of wasteland. Representing a unique opportunity to construct an entire city for exemplary Pakistani citizens, this was once again an occasion on which issues of religious identity and development were contested between foreign experts, local residents, generals and bureaucrats.

Islam and modernity for a capital city

Nowhere was the need to express ‘Islam’ and ‘modernity’ in a cityscape more pressing than in the first city of government, Karachi, which after all had to serve as a representative space for the nation as a whole. The city had few existing buildings that could produce such a representation organically or on the spot. Unlike in Lahore or Dhaka, or Delhi across the border, there were no direct remnants of the times when Muslims had last run a powerful state in South Asia, no imperial mosques and no Mughal palaces and forts. In fact, leaving aside some Sufi shrines of local significance and historic Islamic ruins some distance away, there was no building or part of the city that represented any particular association of Muslims and state sovereignty at all. Karachi had been largely a colonial creation. Its modernity was not in doubt; there were several commercial buildings, hotels, residencies and, with the new Sindh Assembly building of 1941, even a major public structure, all of which represented the latest stylistic innovations of colonial art deco. Yet this was in no sense an Islamic modernity; above all else it represented the political supremacy of an outside power over a cosmopolitan population, of which Muslims formed only one and by no means the most affluent or influential part.⁴

Unsurprisingly, the new Pakistani state elite perceived Karachi’s deficit in terms of ideological significance very early on. Alongside the city’s ungovernability in times of rapid population transfer, this was one of the main issues that the first postcolonial Karachi ‘master plan’ of 1949 was intended to resolve. It had been commissioned in the aftermath of partition to a conglomerate of European consultants called Merz Rendel Vatten Pakistan (MRVP).⁵ The circumstances of this commission were highly revealing of the haphazard manner in which development matters were handled by the Pakistani leadership. Only one of the partner firms involved in MRVP – a Swedish company called Vattenbyggnadsbyrå – had some limited prior experience in urban planning in the Soviet Union, the Baltic countries and Scandinavia, but nowhere in the Muslim world. At any rate, the main reason they were hired had nothing to do with this particular qualification (or lack thereof); MRVP came to draw up the Karachi Plan because they were appointed as monopoly engineering consultants to the Government of Pakistan who advised on everything from hydro-electric power generation to railways, harbours and airports. Urban planning was the last and least important of the conglomerate’s responsibilities, scarcely an afterthought in the eyes of the Pakistani bureaucrats who made the appointment.⁶

The lack of familiarity with Pakistan among the MRVP planners was obvious in the vagueness of many of the provisions of the first Karachi ‘Master Plan’, be it with regards to zoning control, transport or housing. They had neither the time

nor the necessary data to conduct anything more than a cursory survey of the city and effectively drafted the document in less than a year. Nevertheless, it is clear from the very first page of the plan that they appreciated their patron's ideological needs; indeed the 'identity' aspect of the plan is so thickly applied throughout that one might conclude it was actually being used to mask the plan's less convincing technical suggestions. The very first image a reader encountered when opening the published version of the plan was a view through a distinctly 'Islamic' arch towards a monumental mosque in the middle of a large square; next to it was a quotation from Surah 14 ('Ibrahim') of the Holy Qur'an, which represents a foundational moment of the Islamic prophecy, affirming God's promise of protection to his community and inserting it into the larger story of similar promises to Abraham and Moses. This is where the new Pakistan was positioned – as a form of reenactment of the very creation of Islam itself.

Hot on the heels of 'religion' followed 'modernity'. The very next page presents the reader with a picture of Pakistani children and a programmatic statement:

Pakistan stands at the entrance to its life as a free and independent nation. Economic, cultural and political conditions will differ markedly from those of the past. These new conditions must constitute the background for planning the capital of Pakistan.... Faithful to the Islamic tradition, Pakistan will remain a democratic state. The country will be open to international intercourse in all fields, economic, cultural and political, while at the same time asserting its own individuality and that of Islam.

(Merz Rendel Vatten (Pakistan) *et al.* 1951: 1)

The task ahead was to achieve a new 'Islamic tradition blended with international culture' while avoiding 'spiritual and ideological errors' (Merz Rendel Vatten (Pakistan) *et al.* 1951: 2). This warning already indicated a sense of potential problems ahead. How could a country be open to all 'international intercourse' and assert its 'own individuality *and* that of Islam [emphasis added]'? (The conjunction 'and' introduces further complications here, as it seems to suggest that Islam was not in fact all there was to Pakistani identity, and that there were additional, not strictly religious needs to be considered as well.) There was no obvious way to bring Islam and modernity together, but getting it right was nevertheless necessary to safeguard Pakistan's identity as a state (the 'ideological') as well as the individual wellbeing of its people (the 'spiritual'). But despite such difficulties there were ample grounds for optimism. The document continued:

The standard of living in western countries some centuries ago was probably not unlike that which now obtains in the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent. However, the progress which required several hundreds of years in the West can probably be achieved in a considerably shorter time in Pakistan if the lessons from other parts of the world are assimilated and skilfully applied. It

has therefore been assumed in the Master Plan, that, by the beginning of the next century, the standard of living of the population will, in the main, have reached the present level of that in Europe.

(Merz Rendel Vatten (Pakistan) *et al.* 1951: 3)

Leaving aside that this point has now come and gone without satisfying such high hopes, what did the new Karachi, as imagined in the late 1940s, actually look like? The heart of the city was to be a giant central square – ostensibly based on Islamic precedents like the *Maidan-i Shah* (now *Maidan-i Imam*) in Isfahan, but in fact immediately evocative of Soviet city centres – where all the main institutions of the new state, the Parliament, the Secretariat, a National Library and Museum, the Karachi University, the national Central Mosque and the tomb of Muhammad Ali Jinnah were to be concentrated. The stated aim was to create a monumental but democratic public space where people of all walks of life would mingle and creatively work out ‘ideological tension’. Mass housing was to be provided in high-rise flats located close to the monumental square to encourage widespread participation in civic activity. Community facilities were to be provided on the assumption of residential clusters containing 5,000 inhabitants each, which ideally should be located close enough to places of employment to allow residents to walk to work; and to add a little glamour to the entire set-up there was also to be a ‘Riviera of the East’ along Karachi’s beaches and waterfront (Merz Rendel Vatten (Pakistan) *et al.* 1951: 4–9).

The plan did not reflect only the desire to create a new capital city that expressed Pakistan’s ideology for the benefit of its own population and a worldwide audience; cityscapes of this kind were also agents of social change in their own right. Quoting the research of the American planner and urban historian E.A. Gutkind, the plan distinguished between ‘family group’, ‘mosque group’ and ‘bazaar group’ as the main building blocks of the urban fabric of the Islamic city (appropriately illustrated with a picture of the holiest of holy sites of Islam, the Ka’ba in Mecca, on the opposite page) (Merz Rendel Vatten (Pakistan) *et al.* 1951: 31–35). This stable and beneficial constellation was in danger of being disturbed by the impact of industrialisation, a potential ill-effect that any new planning would have to address, not necessarily by preventing it, but by channeling it in a positive direction:

This breaking away from the local group must be regarded as undesirable, but it need not necessarily be repeated in Pakistan. . . . Pakistan may now create a community which need not suffer from the growing pains of industrialization. [...] the culture of Pakistan is a sociable and unitary culture, it may be possible for the local urban group to instil into the life of the individual a stability and a spirit of community.

(Merz Rendel Vatten (Pakistan) *et al.* 1951: 36)

Despite their copious references to religious tradition, the MRVP representatives could not hide the fact that deep down they were ardent modernisers rather than

conservatives. They asserted in the planning document that while the Muslim cities of the past were built for 'feudal' rulers, the Muslim city of the future had to help create democratic communities of individuals:

In a democratic community it is the duty of the town planner to balance the form to be given to the different elements of which a city is composed, so that they, together, form a whole, rich in contrasts, full of excitement, varied and interesting. A city must express both the requirements and wishes of the individual and those of the social groups; it must provide for and emphasize the peaceful life in a residential area, the productive co-operation in the place of employment, the swarming life in the bazaar, the 'joie de vivre' in the community centre and the ideological tension in the large meeting places.

(Merz Rendel Vatten (Pakistan) *et al.* 1951: 44)

A few pages later, it was again emphasised that the urban layout of a capital city had to be specifically designed to facilitate

mass-contact with the people without which the sense of community cannot survive. Great open squares and boulevards are planned; where the people may gather for public assemblies, Idd [sic] prayers and parades. Small quiet parks and open-air cafes will be the setting for everyday private discussions and exchange of ideas. As a background for the whole picture the Mosques and public buildings will, by their disposition and architectural character, be a visual manifestation of the fundamental common ideal.

(Merz Rendel Vatten (Pakistan) *et al.* 1951: 80–81)

The free flow of such a democratic spirit was precisely what the emergent military bureaucratic oligarchy that usurped power at the central-government level after the 1951 assassination of Prime Minister Liaquat wanted to avoid – in particular, the presence of large groups of university students close to the main organs of power proposed in the plan. This, at least, has been the most widely quoted reason in the secondary literature for why the MRVP proposal was never officially endorsed (Hasan 1999: 25–26), although it was published and haunted the office shelves of Karachi city planners and property developers as some sort of ghost document for the rest of the decade. It is not entirely satisfactory as a full explanation, however. If the fate of the plan is followed through the documents of the Pakistan cabinet office, a more basic incompatibility becomes apparent.

Most sections of the bureaucracy, particularly the Ministry of Finance, never entirely appreciated what a city master plan actually was and repeatedly delayed the project on grounds of insufficient 'costings'. Pakistani bureaucrats thought about the future shape of the capital in strikingly different ways from what was proposed by MRVP. What they expected to see was a replication of the British New Delhi project, a bifurcated combination of 'old' existing Karachi as a bustling city of commerce and a yet-to-be constructed 'New Karachi' as a serene

space of government, with little contact and confluence between the two.⁷ As the Finance Ministry insisted, the building of a new city from scratch – as opposed to the planning of an existing one – would indeed have to be carefully ‘costed’, and in the early 1950s was simply unaffordable for Pakistan. This effectively ruled out the possibility of tackling the question of how to represent Pakistan’s new identity through urban planning. It could not be, as some of the foreign consultants had proposed, the city layout and its impact on social life that made Karachi simultaneously modern and Islamic. Instead, solutions had to be found in the more limited and less expensive field of the architectural style of individual buildings. The quest for Karachi’s future shifted from capital to *capitol*, from a whole city – or at least governmental district – to an assemblage of iconic buildings that represented the state and its aspirations in a more limited and compact form.

‘Beyond domes, arches and minarets’

The first ambition was to have at least a new secretariat building and parliament – the core elements of a capitol – ready by the time of the first general elections, scheduled for 1954 (although not actually held until 1970). An international search for suitable architects was started at the same time as the MRVP master plan disappeared in the quicksand of ministerial interventions. By 1951, only one serious submission had been received. It was from Jose Maria Muguruza Otaño, a highly conservative – if not reactionary – architect from Spain, whose better-known older brother Pedro had designed the most infamous of all of Generalissimo Franco’s architectural projects, the monument in the ‘Valley of the Fallen’ (*Valle de los Caídos*), which to this day triggers outrage and disgust from the descendants of Franco’s republican victims.⁸ For some unknown reason, the Pakistanis believed Muguruza to be particularly adept at creating a modernist/Islamic synthesis. His designs were eventually rejected, largely at the behest of Pakistani professional architects such as the modernist Mehdi Ali Mirza, then working for the Ministry of Health and Works. Mirza himself thought Muguruza’s plans ‘mediocre’ with ‘elevations of buildings very poor and unimaginative, and too domestic in scale’,⁹ while his superior, the Ministerial Secretary G. Mueenuddin attacked Muguruza’s engagement with Pakistani identity from an altogether more culturalist angle:

the essential and undefinable spirit of Islamic architecture is not contained in domes, arches or minarets and [...] that spirit has not been caught in the designs under consideration. The arches and domes provided in the plan do not belong to any well marked period of Islamic architecture in this subcontinent and clash with the rest of the design. [The minaret] adorned with a cone derived from Mecca ... does not conform to any style known in this country [and] looks back not forward.¹⁰

Mueenuddin’s intervention summed up the key questions that still haunt Pakistani architects today, and also addressed basic fissures in official Pakistani state

ideology: how historically, and by implication geographically rooted, could a new Pakistani architectural style be? To what extent was the creation of Pakistan a turning away from its subcontinental legacy, and if it was, where could alternative inspirations for what it meant to be Muslim be derived? Faced with a lack of immediate alternatives to Muguruza's proposal, the Cabinet capitulated in the face of such questions and advocated, certainly more out of despair than by design, a radical break between local religious tradition and a transnational modernist future:

It was better to give up the idea of introducing Islamic features and to have strictly modern architecture. The latter would be cheaper and quicker. Besides, we could not improve upon what had been produced in the Islamic period with the result that we would get only second rate buildings from the architectural point of view.¹¹

In short, if 'Islamic' could not be adequately defined to be easily representable, then 'modernity' could at least, and that was what the state should endorse. This spirit was not shared universally among the bureaucrats that mattered, however. The cabinet records on the reconstruction of the capital contain a revealing note by Lalshah Bokhari, a member of the Pakistani legation to Syria, who wrote to cabinet secretary Aziz Ahmed in 1955 that he was 'greatly struck by [the] artistic design of Syrian Parliament House' which to his eyes appeared to be both modern and 'exclusively Islamic'.¹² In a similar spirit, it was soon decided to try yet another foreign architect with 'experience of designing modern buildings but giving them an Islamic touch'.¹³ This time it was the German-born K. Heinz, who had designed the United Provinces Assembly building in Lucknow before partition – a particularly ornate example of late colonial architecture. He was interviewed by a cabinet subcommittee soon afterwards and offered what he saw as a trans-historical and non-territorial – and consequently next-to-meaningless – definition of Islamic architecture:

[The] Islamic concept consisted of clean lines, a geometrical pattern, an orderliness in detail and a perfection in proportion so that the various parts of a building were in an exact mathematical relation to its centre which is usually a courtyard.

The assembled ministers and bureaucrats felt that this was the right approach but that Heinz was not famous enough to be entrusted with a major commission.¹⁴ He eventually got to design the Pakistani High Commission in New Delhi, which to the Pakistani architectural establishment (and to Z.A. Bhutto) turned out to be so embarrassingly ugly that its huge domes would be better covered by giant cardboard boxes (Khwaja 1998: 60–61).

At around the same time the future creator of Islamabad, Constantinos Doxiadis, from Greece, made his first attempt at involvement in the capital city project. He had come to Pakistan in 1954 to advise the Planning Board on the

drafting of the First Five Year Plan, and was looking for potential follow-on projects for the time after this first task was completed.¹⁵ Demonstrating the new importance of development and development funding, Doxiadis approached the then Prime Minister Chaudhry Muhammad Ali in 1955 and proposed that Ford Foundation funding could be used to finance at least the planning of a 'New Karachi'.¹⁶ As it happens, Chaudhry Muhammad Ali had been in charge of the Finance Ministry earlier in his career, and was directly responsible for shelving the MRVP plan on financial grounds. Doxiadis's intervention apparently overcame some of Chaudhry's concerns, as the capital city project was once again opened to another round of international bids, underwritten by Ford. While Doxiadis had hoped that he, as a previous Ford Foundation beneficiary, would naturally be in an advantageous position to secure the project, he was in fact ignored by the Pakistani bureaucrats in charge, who set their sights much higher. Their preferred bid was a cooperation between Michel Ecochard, a Frenchman with prior experience in Pakistan itself and a reputation for dealing sensitively with Muslim architecture in a modern setting, and the high priest of twentieth-century modernism, Le Corbusier himself. The other names on the shortlist were equally impressive: Luckmann-Pereira from the United States, Raglan-Squire from the UK, and even the creators of Brasilia, Niemeyer and Costa.¹⁷ For a brief moment it seemed the pendulum had once again swung to the opposite end of the artistic spectrum, to a complete endorsement of international modernism. But after Chaudhry's resignation and another round of revolving-door cabinet reshuffles, it never came to pass. Unlike Heinz and Muguruza, who were at least able to present concrete plans to the Pakistani leadership, none of the short-listed greats were even invited to Karachi to propose actual designs.

Meanwhile, a much more public debate about national architecture in Karachi demonstrated just how far such proposals had strayed from conservative mass taste. The project in question was a mausoleum (*mazar*) for Muhammad Ali Jinnah, which is the only national monument from the old Karachi Federal Capital project that was actually built (Khwaja 1998: 63–66). In order to secure an internationally outstanding piece of architecture, bureaucrats under strong influence from professional architects decided to assemble a jury of foreign luminaries and then to invite bids from around the world. The process produced a clear winner – a highly modernist design with a hyperbolic paraboloid at its centre, proposed by the British company Raglan Squire, but conceived by the aforementioned Pakistani architect Mehdi Ali Mirza. The proposal immediately attracted a barrage of criticism in the letter pages of *Dawn* and other newspapers, accusing the architects of being out of touch with popular opinion and being un-Islamic. Eventually, Jinnah's surviving sister (and later unsuccessful presidential candidate) Fatima was drawn into the debate and, by power of her personal authority and closeness to the Qaid-e Azam, vetoed Mirza's proposal. Instead, the Bombay architect Yahya Merchant was invited to draw up the design that was eventually built, as he had allegedly been involved in building the Jinnah residence in Bombay in the 1930s. His combination of a dome and arches with a general late-colonial flavour clearly satisfied middle-class taste better than an Islamicate version of international modernism.

The context: Islam and middle-class housing

The selection of men like Heinz and Muguruza, and the subsequent *mazar* controversy, were indicative of where the gravity of taste among leading sections of the Pakistani elite lay at the time; conservative solutions were preferred, and echoes from the colonial period were not considered particularly problematic as long as they could be hidden behind some international glamour. Apart from some generalities, it was far from clear what made a new architecture 'Islamic', and apart from an almost compulsive need to have this aspect present in some form or other, there were no firm preferences. Significantly, it was only when it came to official buildings of state that the question of how to represent an Islamic modernity in architecture really excited tempers. As far as the domestic architecture of the affluent and moderately affluent 'middle classes' was concerned, there was even less of a break between the colonial and postcolonial, and usually not even any particular preoccupation with a particular 'Pakistani' aesthetic.

The prevailing tastes were particularly visible in the new middle-class suburbs that sprang up in most cities following partition. Many moderately well-to-do residents of these spaces simply designed their own houses without reference to any trained architect at all. When asked about the shape of their first home after independence in Gulberg – a suburb in the Punjab capital of Lahore – an informant from a typical middle-class family picked up a sheet of paper and drew a single-storey bungalow shielded by a perimeter wall, with a veranda at the back and three rooms. This is how she had herself drawn up a plan for the house back in the 1950s, without much attention to style beyond climatic and practical issues, and confident that local builders usually knew what to do. Further, the simple plan could be easily extended when the prices for cement and other building materials became less exorbitant than they had been for much of the 1940s and 1950s. The representation of any self-conscious ideology or identity was certainly not a main consideration, even if the woman and her family had been politically active and committed Pakistani nationalists.¹⁸

An ever-present reference point for home-made structures of this kind was colonial government housing, which constituted a whole catalogue of standard designs that were carefully calibrated according to a civil servant's status and income, but in all other respects remained unconcerned with representing any cultural or religious inheritance. For a different source of inspiration, one could look at booklets provided by Pakistan's largest cement producer, Dalmia, which remained Indian-owned until well into the 1960s – a striking anomaly – and which imported these booklets from across the border.¹⁹ They principally contained scarcely updated versions of the kind of colonial art deco that had been used across the subcontinent for decades; and as designs produced in India, they were unlikely to provide much inspiration for a self-consciously Pakistani architectural style.²⁰

The better-off new residents of such suburbs did sometimes involve architects. A few patronised the leading figures among Pakistan's first generation of

academically trained architects, men like Mazhar ul-Islam in Dhaka and Mehdi Ali Mirza in Karachi, who certainly attempted to make a statement about their nation's relationship with modernity. However, they only ever built houses for a small number of very rich clients. The industrialist Syed Babar Ali (who in the 1950s acted as C.A. Doxiadis's local partner) had a residence designed by Mirza, for instance, which remains an iconic example of Pakistani modernism today. Mazhar ul-Islam, meanwhile, was given a relatively free hand to build as he liked in East Pakistan, in his own estimation because the Karachi government, in its obtuse arrogance towards anything Bengali, did not believe that matters of Islamic identity mattered very much there.²¹ As far as West Pakistani establishment taste was concerned, however, other figures must be examined to get a sense of prevailing tastes.

A good indication was the work of Chishti Brothers, the only commercially successful firm of architects in Lahore and the only one that had been run by Muslims prior to partition.²² It did not matter that the two main partners, Moinuddin Chishti and Naqi Raza Chishti, were in fact not architects with academic qualifications at all, but draughtsmen who had, after an aborted career as furniture designers, been trained (and risen to senior positions) on the New Delhi project under Baker and Lutyens. The brothers soon became trendsetters of new suburban housing. Their designs attempted to mark a conscious shift from the colonial styles of the nineteenth century, but like so many others they could express a 'post-colonial' identity only through the more or less wholesale adaptation of 1930s metropolitan art deco. Curved fronts, pillars and some discrete elements of sculpted decorations soon became the norm for most of their designs. Although Moinuddin Chishti at some point in the late 1950s published a booklet entitled *Homes of the Day* for the Punjab Religious Book Society, it is hard to detect much reference to specifically Islamic building traditions in the pre-eminent Chishti Brothers style. This did not mean they did not care about such matters in different contexts, however. Moinuddin Chishti later raised his voice against Doxiadis and other foreign architects involved in the Islamabad project because he felt that, as non-Muslims, they did not have the ability to adequately express Pakistan's religious sensibility.²³ But when forced to address the question of how a Pakistani identity could be translated into architecture himself – after winning a commission to design the new Dacca High Court in the 1960s (present Supreme Court of Bangladesh) – Moinuddin Chishti had to fall back on his New Delhi experience. His solution of an Islamic-modernist synthesis combining domes and colonnades appears as a throwback to the likes of Heinz and Muguza.

Korangi: city of Muslims – city of development

Having for a few years been overshadowed by other issues – such as the fate of Pakistan's first constitution, the rapid degeneration of its economy and the disintegration of parliamentary authority – the capital city debate was dramatically revived by General Ayub Khan's 1959 decision to appoint a Federal Capital

Commission with the authority to reconsider both the location and shape of the seat of government from scratch.²⁴ Following colonial-era convictions about the need to keep administration as far away as possible from all other aspects of national life, the commission rubber-stamped one of Ayub's own ideas, already mooted earlier in the decade: the need to relocate the new capital city to a site close to Army General Headquarters in Rawalpindi in the north of the country.²⁵ The formation of 'Islamabad' – as the new city came to be known – lies outside the purview of this chapter, but a few observations, elaborated in greater detail elsewhere (Daechsel 2012),²⁶ are useful for the larger argument.

In important respects, the overall story of development and identity in Islamabad resembled what had happened in Karachi in the late 1940s and early 1950s. As before, a foreign consultant, the aforementioned Constantinos Doxiadis, was hired to plan a city, and leaving aside several important differences, his vision resembled the ill-fated Merz Rendel Vatten proposals for Karachi in its fundamental aim: it sought to create a space that was both Muslim and modern *by virtue of the way it was planned*. While much in the older Karachi plan had been grand but insubstantial, Doxiadis had much more time to think through the identity content of his proposals, and in working on 'virgin' territory, also much greater chances to realise his vision. Islamabad was built largely according to his provisions. But as had been the case in Karachi, the Pakistani establishment was not really interested in any attempt to represent a possible fusion of Islam and modernity, of religion and development, in the way a city as a whole was designed. As in the days of Heinz and Muguruza, bureaucrats continued to believe that it was *architectural style* rather than city planning where such questions were to be resolved; and as before, they were unable to agree what exactly this kind of stylistic fusion should entail. While Doxiadis himself was increasingly sidelined from the Islamabad project, a host of foreign star architects, from Walter Gropius and Kenzo Tange to Louis Kahn and Arne Jacobsen, were invited to enter competitions for landmark buildings, only to stand publicly accused of not being properly 'Islamic' for one reason or another. Many chose to quit at this point, while others had to enter into often unworkable compromise solutions (Khwaja 1998: 109–131, Mumtaz 1999).

The decision to shift the capital was taken in tandem with the commission of a parallel, and in many ways no less ambitious project in Karachi itself: the Korangi Pilot project, intended to resolve the ongoing housing crisis for poor refugees from India who continued to pour into Pakistan even a decade after partition. Korangi is significant in this argument for two reasons: first, it was not just an urban rehabilitation project, but one invested with symbolic significance. Nationalist discourse had made the *muhajirs* – Urdu-speaking migrants from Northern and Central India – into a particularly politically significant category of people. They had left the territory of their neighbouring arch-enemy because of ongoing persecution and discrimination, and come to Pakistan to settle and be protected. Building an entire city for their benefit was not simply a way of dealing with irregular construction and urban degeneration in Karachi, it was also an act that symbolised what Pakistan as a national project was all about.

Second, Korangi was to a greater extent than the older 'New Karachi' proposals, or even Islamabad, a city of development. It was funded by the combined efforts of the Ford Foundation and the newly established USAID, and closely watched by the international development community. The designer behind the project was once again Doxiadis, self-consciously an urbanist of development and closely connected to pro-western development functionaries, who was hired specifically to lend an international developmental credibility to Ayub's newly installed regime (Daechsel 2013: 93).

The history of the project has been described in detail elsewhere, but a broad outline is useful for the purpose of this chapter (Ansari 2005, Daechsel 2011b: 131–157). Korangi was announced in late autumn 1958, only a few weeks after the military takeover itself, and heralded as the most concentrated effort to solve the problem of uncontrolled urban growth that Pakistan had ever seen. Fifteen thousand new housing units were to be constructed within six months; in the first instance for slum dwellers, who were to be resettled from existing refugee camps and *kacha-abadis* in the city centre. In the long run, the establishment of a socially inclusive and self-sufficient township for half a million inhabitants was envisioned, complete with urban facilities and an adjacent industrial zone. In an effort that has since passed into the mythology of military efficiency, the Ministry for Reconstruction and Refugee Rehabilitation under General Azam Khan kept its promise: the first 15,000 housing units were in fact completed one month ahead of schedule, and by December 1959 the first residents were allotted their new homes with a great deal of official propaganda. Despite its great visible impact – a sea of nicely ordered rows of low-cost houses stretching to the horizon – the shortcomings of the project soon became obvious. Houses had been constructed very quickly, while all other aspects of the project lagged far behind; in the first instance, there was no proper road connection with Karachi itself and very little public transport. Employment opportunities were meagre as the industrial zone only began to develop several years after the bulk of the inhabitants had already been settled, thus leaving many of the new inhabitants jobless or with substantially increased costs of commuting. Furthermore, there was no storm-water drainage, only a rudimentary water supply, and no electricity. Even while the housing stock itself continued to be showcased, it became clear that Korangi would never work as the satellite town it was planned to be. Having never been particularly enthusiastic about the project beyond the initial phase, the regime decided to stop further funding for it in 1964, placing the blame for failure on the foreign consultants who had planned and executed it.

Although it was almost certainly only a secondary consideration in giving him the Korangi job as far as the Pakistani regime was concerned (those close connections with pro-development circles in Washington mattered most), Doxiadis himself attached great importance to cultural sensitivity in his planning designs. As a commercial development consultant, he had to showcase a distinctive global profile that would set him apart from contemporaries such as Le Corbusier, who were often accused of being too expensive and not paying due regard to local climatic or cultural requirements (Bromley 2003: 316–340),

points that were directly taken up by Doxiadis in his critical assessment of the Chandigarh project, for instance.²⁷ In contrast, Korangi (and later also 'Islamabad') was to be a city built with the specific needs of Pakistani Muslims in mind. Throughout his work and in line with own trademark doctrine of 'Ekistics', Doxiadis spent considerable time on historical and cultural research, and on travelling the countries he was meant to serve. Over his years in Pakistan before 1958 he had produced a corpus of writings and photographic documentation addressing the character of Pakistani folk architecture, its difference from both colonial and 'Hindu' architecture, and the distinct needs of regional Muslim identities.²⁸ However, a much more substantial contribution to his understanding of 'Muslim needs' came from outside South Asia. Doxiadis Associates had also gained a bonanza of large commissions in Iraq, then still under the Hashemite monarchy eager to control an increasingly hostile population with the help of comprehensive urban reconstruction. In consultation with Egyptian architect and champion of vernacular styles Hasan Fathy, Doxiadis had built up a veritable archive of the cultural and physical living environment in the country, covering in depth the development of local building norms since ancient antiquity and the difference between various local styles. The objective was to be able to synthesise a comprehensive blueprint for new Muslim urban communities from this material which could then be mass-produced with prefabricated parts, and despite their cheapness and artificiality, provide a culturally satisfying life to their inhabitants (Pyla 2007: 28–39).

Doxiadis's Korangi plan was meant to be a showcase for mass housing in Muslim environments in general: when he designed the modest one- and two-room houses for erstwhile slum dwellers, Doxiadis made constant reference to the needs of privacy, gender separation and sanitary norms. He added asbestos wind-catchers to the roofs in order to harness the Karachi sea breeze for cooling and to acknowledge a stylistic element that he had seen both in Sindh and Iraq and therefore understood as characteristically Muslim. Houses were to be grouped together around small and enclosed gossip squares to simulate the life of the *muhallah* and enable women to interact in a semi-private space. Muhallahs were to be clustered around small civic centres where there would be a covered market area, a mosque, schools and – another Muslim characteristic that he had closely observed and much commented on in his Iraq material – a tea or coffee house where men could gather after work and discuss politics. In making a virtue of his inability to deliver more extensive sanitary facilities in each home, there was also to be a communal bath, which in Doxiadis's eyes again represented an established institution of Islamic communal life.²⁹

To Doxiadis there was actually no contradiction between Islam and development once Islam itself had been made intelligible as a set of sociological indicators that resembled other parts of development discourse. Islam to the expert was not about personal belief, or even about collective solidarity, but about objectively definable and quantifiable 'needs'. Just as planners would have to account for particularities of local terrain and climate, they would also have to accommodate religious 'variables' in their work. Doxiadis's 'developmental'

Islam was in essence ‘flat’. It was ahistorical in the sense that although its genesis over time could be easily reconstructed, no further changes were expected within the time frame for which planning was made; and it was apolitical, in the sense that these religious ‘needs’ simply existed and required to be satisfied but were not seen as embedded in a complex and dynamic field of social conflict and power.

As it happened, this developmental Islam satisfied neither Korangi’s Pakistani sponsors nor the first residents of the township. Ayub’s regime had no problem with a language based on social needs as depoliticised descriptors of underdevelopment requiring a technocratic solution as such, but they did not see this language as the appropriate place to make statements about the nation’s religious distinctiveness and ambition. Unsurprisingly, Doxiadis’s religious prescriptions were not emphasised in public propaganda material about Korangi, and apart from some minor episodes of half-hearted engagement with his way of understanding religion, did not agitate the official mindset. If anything, some bureaucrats found Doxiadis’s attempts to preserve tradition in living space at best patronising and backward-looking, and at worst positively misguided (Daechsel 2011a). The residents of Korangi similarly rejected many aspects of Doxiadis’s blueprint for a synthetic Muslim urban community, sometimes out of sheer economic necessity and sometimes because their own experiences in living communities set different cultural requirements. The biggest casualties in the Korangi plan were the public and semi-public spaces that Doxiadis had so carefully designed. Even several years after the new township was settled, most of the shops in the central market areas proved impossible to allot, while restaurants and smaller commercial concerns began to thrive in backstreets and residential properties. The proposed civic centres remained desolate and underused, while smaller public spaces in the mohallahs themselves were either encroached upon by neighbouring houses or filled with unauthorised religious structures (Daechsel 2011a).

Particularly illustrative of the clash of a synthetic and lived urban community was the issue of mosques. Doxiadis and Fathy had tried to establish on the basis of statistical calculations what the basic requirements of mosque space were, much in the same way as they calculated the width of roads or the number of shops in the market place.³⁰ These calculations produced an, on its own terms, perfectly reasonable provision to build one mosque for every mohalla cluster, for which space was then provided in the master plan and building designs drawn up. The residents of Korangi, in contrast, began almost immediately to claim open spaces elsewhere as open prayer grounds, then began to collect money from the local community and sometimes from notables in the city and soon erected unauthorised mosque structures, often in much closer proximity to each other than the plan provided. This led to heated disputes not only between local residents and the representatives of DA or the Karachi Development Authority responsible for the execution of the master plan, but also to sectarian clashes between different groups of residents. Sunnis tried to have the unauthorised structures erected by Shi’as pulled down on grounds of illegality or noise pollution, and vice versa (Daechsel 2011a). The precedent of legalising unauthorised

mosques, through which the local authorities tried to calm the situation, was often translated into a language of competitive community entitlement, which quickly drew in ‘community leaders’ from a range of religious factions.³¹

The battle over mosques quickly translated into some form of surrogate religious politics – ironically the only form of politics that could somewhat legitimately be carried out under the straightjacket of military rule – which was later fused with economic grievances in a series of violent attacks and rent strikes.³² What Doxiadis and Fathy had so spectacularly failed to appreciate was not only the highly sectarian nature of Pakistani society – far more intricate than the Sunni–Shi‘a division, for which hasty readjustments were made to the master plan – but also the fact that for the new residents of Korangi, religion was far more than an objective need that had to be satisfied in the same way as their need for shelter and nutrition. Islam provided them with a political language to articulate their demands for recognition. More importantly, it was the all-important glue that enabled them to bond together as communities, which in both the inner-city slums and in the new wastelands of Korangi itself was a precondition for survival. The collective effort of erecting mosques was a way for these communities to claim parts of Korangi as their own, to put the stamp of their own agency on a pre-designed space. While official community activities and life in official civic spaces, assiduously planned by Doxiadis in collaboration with local ‘social workers’, never really took off, it was only in these much smaller networks that a sense of solidarity could be maintained.

Islam, urban development and the Pakistani state: some conclusions

Subsequent efforts to bring together Islam and development in ‘official Karachi’ – first in the ever-changing incarnations of the federal capital project, later in the Korangi satellite town scheme – were never entirely able to resolve the inherent contradictions between the two ideological pulls. Being unable to face the problem on its own, the Pakistani state elite brought in a roll-call of foreign development consultants and architects to suggest solutions – from the urban engineers of Merz Rendel Vatten to the Catholic aesthete Muguruza, and from modernist grand master Le Corbusier to development urbanist Doxiadis. But rather than resolving the problem, their involvement made matters even more intractable, only serving to externalise and displace the inherent contradiction between Islam and development into a confrontation between foreign consultants and representatives of the Pakistani state.

The main problem – how Pakistan could defend its sense of religious distinctiveness while also copying enough from western experiences of modernisation to achieve rapid catch-up and prosperity – was already recognised in the MRVP ‘Master Plan’ for Karachi. But the contradiction was briefly revealed only to be immediately hidden again behind a thick veneer of developmental optimism and religious rhetoric that suggested that a resolution was easily possible – even natural – without actually providing any sense of what this solution should entail

in practical terms. Ten years later, at a time when development discourse itself had become far more sophisticated, and with a great deal more time and underlying research at his disposal, Constantinos Doxiadis came much closer to an actual 'solution' to the problem of Islam and development.

What Doxiadis proposed was a dual move: he first operationalised 'Islam' in terms of a set of variables, of specific settlement 'needs' which allowed religion to be slotted into the conceptual universe of development discourse; second, he proposed to bring religious identity and 'modernity' together through a careful separation of spatial scales, a solution that closely resembled what religious reformers and colonial notables across South Asia and the Muslim world had argued since the late nineteenth century.³³ While religious identity was to be nurtured in the more intimate spaces of life – the 'inner' world of women and children, the home and the neighbourhood – it was in the 'outside' world that modernity should be allowed to reign, in the predominantly 'male' sphere of work, administration and commerce.³⁴ In Doxiadis's eyes, a truly modern and Muslim city was one where most public spaces conformed to the norms of international modernism, while most private spaces could remain as traditional as necessary, even if this sense of tradition was, in his mind, a question of everyday religious functionality more than making religiously inspired stylistic statements.

Strikingly, this spatial solution to the problem was almost exactly the opposite of what Pakistani policy makers and the general public had in mind. Although Doxiadis was duly hired to design and build Korangi and Islamabad according to his principles, his Pakistani patrons never changed their longstanding belief that it should be in the most public spaces – buildings of state – that the most conspicuous display of a 'religious' identity should take place. Meanwhile it was the private spaces – housing colonies for the poor, middle-class residencies – that a representation of religion was least needed. This was reflected even at the grass-roots level. To Doxiadis's consternation, Korangi residents were to bring the outside world of work and commerce literally into their living rooms, while externalising their religious identity in the conspicuous construction of mosques.

In the last instance, the problem of Islam and development was a problem of the nature and character of the Pakistani state itself. The fact that the Pakistani bureaucracy did not see much need to move beyond colonial ideals of city planning throughout the decade, and that Ayub's junta had little use for Doxiadis's provisions of Islamic community facilities, did not demonstrate that they thought religion did not matter to Pakistan, only that religion as it was actually lived on a daily basis could be safely left in the hands of ordinary Pakistanis. Just as there was no need for even a devout architect like Chishti to make a statement about Islam in the houses he designed for private citizens – and just as these citizens themselves could be comfortably observant Muslims while living in a latter-day version of colonial art deco – there was no need for a state of Muslims to look after Muslim community facilities. Such matters could literally be left to 'the community'. It was development thought, as exemplified by Doxiadis, that actually suggested that these matters should be within the purview of official intervention, that the state should somehow be worried that the Muslim citizens of

Pakistan could not properly look after their religious needs themselves. The replication of a welfare state under the guise of development would not only mean an increase in services to the people, it would also make this state more inclined to police its 'ideological boundaries', to use the infamous phrase coined by a later military dictatorship.

The fact that the Pakistani state found it largely impossible to find a successful representation of its Islamic identity and modern aspirations in official architecture and city planning throughout the 1950s (and arguably also in the 1960s) was not simply a failure. It also marked an ongoing respect for the political nature of religious identity as something that could never be exhaustively described as a mere variable, a mere set of needs, but was always open to contestation, differences of opinion and relationships of power, whether between bureaucrats who disagreed about domes and minarets, between foreign consultants and nationalists eager to preserve Pakistan's cultural autonomy, or in the vying for space between different groups of Korangi residents. *Not* being able to bring together Islam and development was perhaps the best representation of what their relationship should be like.

Notes

- 1 An earlier version of this chapter was presented at 'The Long 1950s', International Conference at the Centre for Social Science Studies Calcutta (CSSSC) in 2008. I am grateful for comments by Keya Dasgupta, Rajarshi Dasgupta and Janaki Nair as well as other conference participants. Research for this chapter has been funded by a British Academy Small Research Grant and a travel bursary from the Carnegie Endowment for Scottish Universities. I am also grateful for the support I have received over the years from Panagiota Pavlidou at the Constantinos Doxiadis Archive, Athens.
- 2 For a comprehensive assessment of Doxiadis in Pakistan, see my forthcoming monograph Daechsel (2013).
- 3 The ongoing debate over the role of religion in 1950s Pakistan has been covered in many publications; for instance Rehman (1982), Munir (1980), Shaikh (2009).
- 4 For Karachi's recent architectural history see Khuhro (1997: 95–112), Hasan (1997: 171–196, 1999), Cheema (2007).
- 5 It was never officially endorsed and was eventually published as Merz Rendel Vatten (Pakistan) *et al.* (1951).
- 6 National Documentation Centre Islamabad (hence NDC): Case 564/78/48, Appointment of Messrs. Merz Rendel Vatten as Consulting Engineers to Government of Pakistan, 27 October 1948, Records of Cabinet Meetings held during the year 1948, Film 1405, p. 2567. National Archive of Bangladesh: File 3A-72/48 Appointment of consulting engineer.... MRVP, 20 January 1949. S11, Commerce and Industry proceedings, Bundle 6.
- 7 This was actually explicitly rejected by MRVP (Merz Rendel Vatten (Pakistan) *et al.* 1951: 83).
- 8 See <http://museodelprado.es/enciclopedia/enciclopedia-on-line/voz/muguruza-otano-jose-maria> [accessed 10 October 2010].
- 9 NDC: Cabinet Records, File 385/CF/48 Land Control – Capital of the Federation, Memorandum (25 March 1952).
- 10 *Ibid.*
- 11 *Ibid.*; Minutes Cabinet Meeting (23 July 1952).

- 12 NDC: Cabinet Records, File 232/CF/47 II, Site for the Federal Capital, Letter Bokhari (12 September 1955).
- 13 NDC: Cabinet Records, File 385/CF/48 Land Control – Capital of the Federation, Minutes Cabinet Subcommittee (30 October 1952).
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 For the full back-story of his engagement in Pakistan, see Daechsel (2013).
- 16 Constantinos A. Doxiadis Archive, Athens (hence CADA): Pakistan Vol. 6, pp. 350 ff.
- 17 NDC: Cabinet Papers, File 213/CF/47 Federal Capital, Progress Report 1 August 1956; also (same file) Minutes of Cabinet Meeting, 19 December 1956; Briefing paper Ministry of Health and Works.
- 18 Interview, Fatima Kaniz Yusuf, Islamabad (1 December 2007).
- 19 Interview, Mehmood Alam, Managing Director ACC, later Pakistan State Cement, Lahore (5 November 2007).
- 20 A yet-unpublished analysis of this literature is offered by McGowan (2012).
- 21 Interview, Mazharul Islam, Dhaka (August 2007).
- 22 Interview, Parvaiz Chishti, Lahore (2 November 2007).
- 23 Letter to *Pakistan Times*, transcribed without date and attached to CADA: R-PAK LU 12, Pak Vol. 202, Housing and Settlements Agency, 1964.
- 24 CADA: Government of Pakistan, unpublished 'Report on the Location of the Federal Capital of Pakistan'.
- 25 NDC: File 232/CF/47 II, Minutes of Cabinet Meetings, 14 April and 2 July 1955.
- 26 For a more extensive discussion of the project in terms of architecture see Mahsud (2008). For the political negotiations from an official perspective, see Yakas (2001).
- 27 CADA: India Vol. 3, Notes pp. 54, 104.
- 28 CADA: Report Dox 21, Pakistan Diary, Pak Vol. 3.
- 29 For an overview of these facilities see CADA: Government of Pakistan – Ministry of Rehabilitation, National Housing and Settlements Agency: *The Korangi Township in Karachi: special issue on the occasion of the visit to Pakistan of the President of the United States of America Dwight D. Eisenhower*, Archive File 25310.
- 30 CADA: C-PKH 1865 13/10/1960, Vol. 71; Islamabad Development Agency Library: Dox PA 97 (26/02/1961) 'Islamabad: Community Buildings for Sector G6'.
- 31 CADA: J.A. Khan, 'Social Needs in Neighbourhood Planning', unpublished dissertation, Athens Institute of Ekistics, 1961.
- 32 CADA: 'Demand and Collection in Korangi (Arif)' C-PKH 5047 13/10/1962. ArchiveFile 17928.
- 33 Sir Sayid Ahmad Khan, leading Muslim reformer of the nineteenth century, for instance, advocated education outside the home and in western scientific disciplines for boys, but emphatically not for girls (Lambert-Hurley 2006: 22–23). For a general statement of this division as a feature of Indian nationalism, see Chatterjee (1993).
- 34 CADA: C.A. Doxiadis, 'The Arab Metropolis', lecture delivered at seminar 'The New Metropolis in the Arab World', Congress of Cultural Freedom, Cairo 1960; General reports R-GA-211.

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6 Slums and the global city

Housing plans in Dharavi, Mumbai

Roma Chatterji

Since the 1990s there has been a renewed emphasis in India on megacities such as Mumbai as symbols of economic growth – as organisational nodes in the global economy. Slums such as Dharavi, once located on the urban fringe, now constitute the residence of more than 50 per cent of Mumbai's population and are becoming the focus of attention in the 'new' developmental discourse which brings terms such as participatory governance, public–private partnership for inclusive growth, social capital and local level entrepreneurship to the fore. Media representations of slums seem to have undergone a dramatic change over the years, from earlier representations which described them as spaces of urban disintegration where the state had abandoned its civic responsibility, to current descriptions that talk about entrepreneurial slums and economic success stories. This chapter argues that these shifts in representation are tied to changes in the way in which the state is perceived: from initially being an 'agent of development', it is now commonly seen as an 'enabler' whose role is to coordinate the activities of other administrative and financial bodies. To this end, this chapter makes use of ethnography based on research on housing issues in Dharavi since the 1980s.

Dharavi: an entrepreneurial slum

Spread over 216.51 hectares, with a population that varies between 600,000 and one million people depending on how the boundaries of this area are drawn, Dharavi is the largest slum in Asia, if not the world.¹ Yet, this is not the only reason why Dharavi is so widely known. In recent years it has become famous as an 'entrepreneurial slum', producing goods that are exported all over the world, with an annual turnover of approximately US\$600 million.² Most production units are very small and belong to what is known in India as the 'informal sector', as they are located in residential areas, often within dwelling sites, and have non-legal status. Slum redevelopment programmes and low-cost housing schemes have had a direct impact on the production process and on the economic contribution that Dharavi makes to the city as a whole. It is, however, only recently that Dharavi's contribution to the economy has been acknowledged, at a time when the state is withdrawing from its role as an agent of development in

the society at large under pressure from neo-liberal reform policies. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs) first began to mobilise resources around slum development issues in the 1980s, in the context of social movements for development and civil rights. They have now become even more important as they can provide crucial services to marginal populations that the state is no longer willing to. In fact, they have taken over many of the concrete developmental activities that were once the responsibility of the state.

Until the late nineteenth century, Dharavi was an island inhabited by Kohli fisherfolk. However, the marshy land around the island then filled up, new migrants from Gujarat and Maharashtra began to move to Dharavi and Tamil migrants arrived to man the tanneries that were being set up. Some of the earliest migrant communities to have settled there are Kumhars (potters) from Gujarat, leather-working castes like the Charkars, Dhors and Mahars from other parts of Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, and artisans from Uttar Pradesh who set up industries dealing in ready-made garments, shoes, bags and metal work. Today Dharavi is known for its garment and leather industries. It also has a flourishing recycling business that processes recyclable waste from other parts of Mumbai. This chapter is not so much concerned with the activities that have given Dharavi its extraordinary status as an economic hub, but rather with the documentary practices of the state that led first to its public recognition as a slum and then to some of the redevelopment schemes that have given it the shape that it has today.

Populations or citizens: slum dwellers and the state

A key term in this analysis is the 'state', looked at not so much as an autonomous entity, but rather as a complex of governmental practices among which are documentary practices that are crucial in shaping political entities such as slum populations. The perspective of this chapter is shaped by Foucault's work on 'governmentality', in which he shows that the articulation of power and knowledge in the practices of governance leads to the development of technologies of mapping and enumeration by which the state makes society legible to itself (Foucault 1991). In the process, however, official practices also constitute new types of social collectivities. Populations generated by these practices of enumeration often begin to see themselves as communities with a capability to resist the very technologies of power-knowledge that helped bring them into existence. Foucault's argument is posed in the context of the development of the liberal democratic state, wherein issues such as welfare and the rights of citizenship configure state-society relationships. Practices of governance assume as a corollary that citizens are free and capable of self-reflexivity. Citizenship, then, is constituted in the very practices of governance, as concrete rights and duties involving both public action and the expression of a particular kind of subjectivity (see also Procacci 2001).

Is it possible to apply this argument to democracies like India, which are riven by divisions that severely test the notion of nation state as a political community

based on consent? It is sometimes assumed that conditions of extreme social inequality make the articulation of citizenship impossible in any meaningful sense. Thus Partha Chatterjee (2004) makes a distinction between the domain of citizenship that is civil society and political society that is the domain of population. Even though governmental practices open up the domain of ‘population’ so that it becomes a site for contestation and negotiation, it still remains the domain of ‘extra-legal’ practices. Chatterjee calls this the ‘domain of political society’, where governments interact with poor people as populations rather than as rights-bearing citizens who are full-fledged members of civil society. Governmental policy, in Chatterjee’s view, carries an enormous potential for violence – especially when it targets people as populations. This violence is a structural feature of governmentality and arises from the ambivalent status of slum dwellers as populations outside the purview of civil society who then become the target of state policy and control without the attendant claims on the law.

While not denying the non-legal dimension of governmental practices as far as slum dwellers are concerned, this chapter takes a somewhat contrary view to the one described above and regards citizenship as a state that is aspired to by many slum dwellers. Housing is one of the sites on which citizenship claims and claims to alternate community formation are articulated (Appadurai 2002).

Slums and governmental schemes

To understand the relationship between state and community, this section begins by examining some of the important policies and schemes for slum redevelopment in Mumbai, specifically with a view to examining the process of community formation in Dharavi. Each of the three schemes discussed marks a significant moment in the process by which the inhabitants of Dharavi are first constituted as a population, which is then transformed into a community attributed with agentive capacity.

This section starts with a review document produced by the public housing policy, taken from the ‘Draft Report of the Brihan Mumbai Regional Development Authority (BMRDA) 1991–2011’. This review document is interesting primarily because of the way the government is presented in the discussion of each policy – acknowledging major shifts in its self-presentation while trying to rationalise these shifts by presenting them within a single frame of reference. Thus, the report categorises slum legislation into three types, which are supposed to reflect the three different types of roles that the government has taken vis-à-vis the slum population of Mumbai. These roles are: controller, provider and facilitator. This formulation is interesting because it recognises both that government legislation is constituted from a specific point of view, but also that this can change over time. It seeks to rationalise this by articulating these three roles within an evolutionary perspective. Despite claims of chronological development, however, specific legislation from all three categories co-exists in Bombay; this makes it difficult to interpret slum legislation in terms of a rigid chronology. To take just one example, the controller phase of the government is

used to describe the various health and safety measures that date back to the British period: the rent control legislation of 1948; the municipal regulations stipulating use-zones, tenement densities, floor space indices (see note 7) and so on that date back to the 1960s; the Urban Land Ceiling Act of 1976; and the Coastal Regulations Act of 1991.

According to the report, The Maharashtra Slum Areas Improvement, Clearance and Redevelopment Act of 1971 marks a radical change in the attitude of the government to its slum population. With this act the government recognised for the first time that, rather than being a problem that had to be resolved, slums could provide an answer to Mumbai's chronic housing shortage. Thus, the government moves from the role of 'controller' to that of 'facilitator', providing facilities to slum colonies. It is claimed that this change of role is not only accompanied by a radical change in viewpoint, but also legitimises that which was previously thought to be illegitimate in terms of housing legislation.

Gautam Chatterji, Chief Executive Officer of Slum Rehabilitation, Maharashtra Housing and Area Development Authority (MHADA), spoke to me about the 'unintended consequences' (to use his own words) of urban land ceilings and rent control. He explained that the official restrictions on legitimate land use by private owners helped to create an 'illegal' nexus between land owners and slum-lords so that rental housing came to be taken over by the 'informal sector'. Similarly, the Slum Clearance Act of the 1960s reinforced the power of slum-lords by creating an unofficial nexus between them and the government officials doing the clearing. The Act, as Chatterji said, did not specify that the rubble produced when illegal structures were demolished had to be cleared, meaning that the rubble could be used to re-construct houses on the same location, and government agents sometimes demolished the same structure over and over again and reported each instance as a new demolition.

It should be obvious that the articulation of new domains of legitimacy is accompanied by procedures that must make them legible. Cultures of bureaucracy often use procedures of enumeration to accomplish this (Blau 1963). The Slum Improvement Programme (SIP) of 1972 that followed the Maharashtra Slum Areas Improvement, Clearance and Redevelopment Act of 1971 and was supposed to provide basic civic amenities like water, electricity, latrines and sewage disposal to slum areas could not be implemented properly since no comprehensive census of the slum areas of Mumbai existed. Such a census was carried out in 1976, but since it was restricted to slums on state government land it was thought to be incomplete.³ The SIP is still being implemented in Dharavi on land that is owned by the municipal corporation. But it has not been very successful because it has failed to make provisions for the day-to-day maintenance of the amenities that were provided under it. It is said that the lack of a comprehensive and centralised plan for the whole of Dharavi, indeed for the total slum population of Mumbai, means that all slum development schemes are implemented in a piecemeal fashion.

The inability of any state government to formulate such a plan is thought to be a consequence of the segmented nature of land ownership in Bombay.

However, the SIP was an important step because it recognised for the first time that the slum dweller had a legitimate status and had, as Chatterji put it, a right to acquire land in slum areas. There is some ambivalence around the term 'legitimate status', however. After 1976, residents of the surveyed slums were issued photo identity passes and were required to pay a licence fee of 20 rupees, of which one rupee was taken as 'land rent'. For most residents of Dharavi, however, it was not clear whether this amount of one rupee was a fine for occupying government land 'illegally' or a kind of 'ground tax' (*bhumi* tax). The term 'rent' circumvents the question of legal status articulated in terms of ownership. Instead, acquisition is thought to refer to right of use and to the responsibility of the state to provide alternative accommodation if it has to displace the population residing on its land. This ambivalence is built into the Slum Areas Act itself, which empowers the government to declare particular slum colonies as unfit for human habitation while simultaneously affirming its objective of slum redevelopment for those colonies that are declared safe. Here both roles of the government are seen to co-exist; its role as controller is hidden behind the fiction of facilitator (Desai 1995).

The *Slum Upgradation Programme* (SUP) of 1980 is the next important scheme that will be discussed in this chapter, not because it intends to provide a chronological account of slum development in Mumbai, but rather to demonstrate how sites of legitimacy are constantly shifting as each new governmental action seeks to redress the unintended consequences of previous schemes. Thus the SUP will be discussed together with the SIP and the 1976 slum survey, as each one of these schemes has unintended consequences only revealed in the implementation stage, which are then taken up by the next 'improved' scheme.

The SIP was instituted as part of the government's new initiative as facilitator after the Slum Areas Act was passed in 1971. However, it only became effective after the registration of slum pockets that occurred with the 1976 census. The security of land tenure given to slum dwellers upon registration allowed for the implementation of concrete developmental schemes that required stable populations if they were to be effective. With the World Bank-aided SUP, the focus of government intervention is seen to shift from the category of population to that of community. The SUP required that slum dwellers organise themselves into housing cooperatives which could then be given secure tenured rights in land at the rate of one rupee a month as mentioned above.

The importance of the SUP is that tenure was given to a cooperative formed by a group of contiguous huts rather than to individuals. This was supposed to enable the housing societies to undertake 'upgradation' work in their respective colonies. This proposal, it was felt, would take care of the problems of maintenance of amenities that had not been catered for in the SIP of 1972. The SUP makes a distinction between 'upgradation' and 'rebuilding'. Houses could not be rebuilt as regular apartments or as reinforced concrete structures (RCCs), but could instead be reconstructed with materials such as plaster and brick, instead of tin, mat and plastic sheeting. Also, provision was made to extend the habitable area of these residential units to allow for the construction of lofts by raising the

maximum permissible roof height. Water and electricity were also provided. However, this scheme was underutilised and was thus wound up in 1991.⁴ The poor response to the scheme on the part of slum dwellers was attributed to administrative difficulties, especially regarding the complex procedures involved in forming and registering housing societies and also the fragmented nature of land ownership, along with the fact that it was easier to implement this programme on state government land that came under the direct control of the municipal cooperation. It was thought that developmental activity could not be undertaken on private land that was under the de facto control of slum-lords who would interpret this as an encroachment of their power base.

The next landmark as far as Dharavi is concerned is the Prime Minister's Grant Project (PMGP), which started in 1985 with a grant-in-aid of 100 crore rupees sanctioned by the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, of which 30 crore rupees was reserved for Dharavi alone. The PMGP, like the slum projects that came before it, tried to address the perceived lacunae in the way that slums had been conceptualised. All projects that became effective after the 1976 slum census talk about the security of tenure for slum dwellers as being an essential prerequisite for the amelioration of their living conditions, yet their concrete proposals belie this. Slum development, according to Kalpana Sharma (2000), is conceptualised in a piecemeal fashion not merely because of inadequate information regarding slum populations, as mentioned earlier, but because slums are thought to be inherently unstable dwelling sites. Recollect, for example, the SUP of 1980 that permitted improved material for the construction of dwellings, but insisted on their impermanent status. The PMGP was the first scheme that actually considered slum redevelopment in a systematic fashion and planned for the construction of new residential structures for slum dwellers on the same site where they squatted.

It was also acknowledged in this scheme that slum communities were capable of taking the initiative where issues such as housing were concerned. It allowed housing societies in Dharavi to appoint their own architects who would be accountable to them, with the proviso that the government would appoint the building contractors, even though they would be working under the supervision of the architects. It was also recognised, for the first time, that slums in Mumbai often formed centres of commercial activity and slum dwellers needed to live near their place of work. Huts were not just dwellings but also commercial resources – places from which people could generate income. Dharavi was no longer considered to be peripheral to Mumbai. Its location near a new business district – the Bandra-Khurla complex – gave it a new significance. Thus, there were attempts to broaden roads within Dharavi, to make it more accessible for vehicular traffic and so on. However, despite its promising proposals, the PMGP, like all the schemes that preceded it, was not able to implement its plans in the way that it had conceived them. The reason was simple – it had failed to consider the fact of spatial density, and the development work that it was able to undertake was largely confined to the area along the two main roads that skirt Dharavi.

The state government commissioned the architect Charles Correa to head a committee that was to prepare a proposal for the redevelopment of Dharavi in 1986. Since there was no comprehensive survey of structures and settlement patterns in Dharavi, the Correa Committee ordered an aerial survey of the area. Given the layout of Dharavi – the fact that boundaries between settlements and sometimes even between tenements are blurred – it is not surprising that the survey came up with a population estimate that was far less than that which later and more detailed surveys provided. On the basis of this estimate, the Correa report proposed that 43,000 households be accommodated in Dharavi, while the rest of an estimated total of 55,000 households be moved to sites nearby so as to provide open spaces for parks, civic amenities and other recreational facilities (Sharma 2000). Even though this recommendation was never implemented, it remains important to the extent that it is one of the more significant governmental actions around which a public voice is constituted. Local CBOs say that the PMGP almost led to the disintegration of the slum voice that they had so assiduously tried to cultivate over the years. If successful, the PMGP would have led to divisions within Dharavi's population by creating new categories of legal and illegal residents. Organisations like the People's Responsible Organisation for United Dharavi (PROUD) claim that it was through its initiative in organising a public protest that the withdrawal of the proposal made by the Correa committee came about. CBOs became important players in the field of housing in slums like Dharavi in the early 1980s, especially after the implementation of the SUP and the PMGP, which required slum dwellers to organise themselves into cooperative housing societies.

In the narrative of Mumbai's slum development, the motif of plan failure punctuates the discussion of each redevelopment scheme. It also provides the connecting thread between the different episodes in the story – the failure of one scheme leading to the emergence of the next. The causes for failure are the same each time – spatial density and inadequate mapping. It is also assumed that this inadequacy is a result of the failure of the government to rationalise its practices and to exercise more centralised control. Newspaper reports, as well as more scholarly accounts of slum redevelopment policies, often attribute this to a lack of political will (Verma 2002). However, an analysis of the political process itself – its role in the formulation of housing policy – is rarely undertaken. This is surprising, because slum housing is probably one of the most emotive political issues in Mumbai. This section will discuss this with reference to the 'Free Scheme', a new housing scheme that became an election issue in 1995.⁵

Each successive government in Maharashtra has drawn up its own plans for slum redevelopment and low-cost housing. The Shiv Sena came to power in 1995 on the promise of a 'peoples' government'. Symbolic gestures such as performing the oath-taking ceremony in Shivaji Park, the 'heartland' of Shiv Sena support, instead of in the Raj Bhavan were supposed to reinforce this (Purandare 1999). The declaration of the free housing scheme by Balasahib Thakerey also seems to partake in this symbolism. Balasaheb Thakerey, the Shiv Sena leader, made an election promise to house 40 lakh⁶ slum dwellers at the government's

expense. However, within a year of its formation, the Shiv Sena/BJP government had to climb down and modify the number to 50,000. This is elaborated upon below.

In 1995, the government proposed a new slum rehabilitation scheme soon after it had come to power, to implement its election promise. It proposed that the charge of building these free tenements would be given to private builders, who would be offered extra FSI and TDR⁷ in exchange. However, owing to the sudden collapse of the real estate market, very few private builders took up this offer. The government then decided to float its own company – Shivshahi Punarvasan Prakalp Limited (SSPL) – through which the ‘free scheme’ was to be implemented. The Maharashtra Housing and Area Development Authority (MHADHA) and the Mumbai Metropolitan Regional Development Authority (MMRDA) were asked to each transfer 300 crores of rupees to the SSPL as seed money. In January 1999 the SSPL finalised a plan to construct 10,550 houses in seven different locations across the city. However, by the time of the next elections, which were held at the end of 1999, only 78 apartment blocks had been completed, one of which is the Milind Nagar Cooperative Housing Society in Dharavi (cf. *Indian Express*, Mumbai 25 August 1999). The next government, formed by the Nationalist Congress Party and Congress Indira, decided that the ‘free scheme’ was not viable and thus concluded that no further housing projects would be initiated under it.

Newspaper accounts of this period give dramatic reports of ministerial squabbles and bureaucratic wrangling. Using the print media, ministers publicly blamed bureaucrats, the law courts and each other for the failure of the ‘free scheme’. The newspapers also described the almost desperate search for land that could be used for the ‘free scheme’. To give a few examples, Suresh Jain, the housing minister, accused Narayan Rane, the revenue minister, of deliberately delaying the signing of documents pertaining to the scheme, and the administration of creating ‘unnecessary’ complications in its implementation (cf. *Indian Express*, Mumbai 20 December 1998). Balasaheb Thakerey accused the courts of holding up his ‘dream project’ at a public meeting. (He was referring to the Bombay High Court’s ruling, in January 1996, restraining the state government from building on land that fell under the Coastal Regulation Zone. Since much of the marshy land that falls under this zone has already been subject to illegal filling and construction activity because of lack of supervision by the government’s environment department, those in charge of implementing the ‘free scheme’ were probably unaware that the MHADA and MMRDA plots that had been earmarked for slum housing could not be used for this purpose.)⁸

What is most interesting about the ‘free scheme’ is the gap between political compulsion and the pragmatics of governance, and not only this, but also the fact that these contradictions were articulated publicly in newspapers on a day-to-day basis. Thus, the minister of housing accused the bureaucrats who worked under him of insubordination and of ‘adopting an approach against the democratic system of government’ (*Indian Express*, Mumbai 20 February 1999). In turn, officials in the bureaucracy accused the ministers of populism, saying that

the free scheme was not economically viable. Housing activists, who were also interlocutors in this debate, accused the 'state' of having a hidden agenda. According to activists such as Stephen Rego (cf. *Humanscape*, Mumbai September 1995), slum colonies like Dharavi can become valuable properties if developed, leading to houses passing on from slum dwellers to the gentry. He argued that since the 'free scheme' makes participation obligatory on the part of the slum dweller, it may well lead to the gentrification of the resident population. Rego and other activists suspected that with an enhanced transferable FSI a large proportion of the built-up slum area would increase in value, and slum dwellers would not be able to afford the maintenance costs of apartment buildings. Thus the hidden agenda, they suspected, was to clear the area of slum dwellings, thereby accomplishing what government-organised demolitions could not. This chapter goes into more detail on the question of the gentrification of slum populations later. In the next section it seeks to draw attention to the enormous costs that slum redevelopment projects usually entail and the violence that ensues when centralised schemes are undertaken.

Demolitions and slum redevelopment schemes

If we examine the period between 1971, when the Maharashtra Slum Areas Act was introduced, and 2004–05, when large-scale demolitions of slums took place in Mumbai, it becomes clear that events of large-scale displacement and the implementation of radical slum redevelopment schemes occur side by side. Thus the Maharashtra Vacant Lands Act of 1975, by which all residents of slums on state government and municipal land were declared illegal, was followed by the first slum census of 1976, after which slum dwellers came to acquire an acknowledged presence. The Kerkar Report of 1981 for slum renewal coincided with the mass displacement and deportation of slum and pavement dwellers from Bombay. (This was temporarily stopped when NGOs and CBOs filed a series of writ petitions against the state of Maharashtra.) However, 1985, the year that saw the initiation of the PMGP and the active implementation of the SUP, two very progressive slum redevelopment schemes, also saw the Supreme Court give a negative ruling against slum dwellers when it vacated the stay order against the government's demolition drive.⁹ In recent memory, the 'Free Scheme' of 1995 followed the riots of 1992–93. (To recollect, the Shiv Sena, one of the political parties implicated in the riots, was also the initiator of the Free Scheme.) Finally, the mass demolitions ordered by Vilas Rao Deshmukh, the chief minister of Maharashtra in 2006, occurred at a time when the Slum Rehabilitation Authority (SRA) was in the process of implementing large-scale rehabilitation schemes in the slums of Bombay.

In 1980, the Congress (Indira) government in Maharashtra, led by the chief minister A.R. Antuley, ordered the mass eviction of pavement dwellers from the city of Bombay. Responding to the large number of petitions that were filed against this move in the courts, the Supreme Court ordered a stay on the so-called 'Operation Demolition'. However, in 1985, the stay order was evicted, following the judgment of the Supreme Court which declared the use of pavements for the

purpose of shelter illegal. Hundreds of pavement dwellers were dumped outside the city limits (Heredia 1985). The three most important NGOs that were established after these demolitions are Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres (SPARC), Nivara Hakk Suraksha Samiti (NHSS) and Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action (YUVA). SPARC was set up in 1984 by a group of professional social workers who were dissatisfied with the more traditional 'welfare orientation' of conventional social work and its inability to deal with the demolitions. NHSS was set up in 1982, when 26 mass organisations came together under the convenorship of the documentary film maker Anil Patwardhan. He and Shabana Azmi, the noted film actress and member of parliament, led a series of high-profile *morchas* (demonstrations) and hunger strikes against various demolition drives in the 1980s.¹⁰ YUVA was established in 1984 by a group of students and teachers from Nirmala Niketan College of Social Work in Bombay.

The accounts that NGOs produce about themselves often privilege unique events that have had powerful social effects, as observed in the last chapter. These events become the 'conditions of possibility' for some future development – in this case the self-institutionalisation of NGOs. Thus, events like the mass eviction of slum dwellers in 1980–81, the 1985 PMGP for the development of Dharavi, the riots in 1992–93 and the 'Free Scheme' in 1995, have all been responsible in different ways for the manner in which NGOs perceive themselves vis-à-vis slum populations. The one feature that these seemingly disparate events have in common is that they all lead to the *perception* of destabilisation and mass displacement initiated by the state. This is followed by an immediate response from the public in the form of massive mobilisation to resist these actions (Heredia 1985). They have also had long-term institutional effects. Many of the NGOs discussed here developed federated structures – that is, networks and alliances with other organisations – to resist such forms of state intervention. Side by side with the growth of institutional networks is the perception that slum dwellers need to organise themselves into communities to develop a public voice that will be heard by governments and by the larger population.

Most of the important NGOs that played significant roles in the development of slum communities as political pressure groups in Mumbai are involved in slum redevelopment projects today. Can NGOs still represent the interests of the poor while simultaneously serving as 'delivery systems' for the state as it retreats from its traditional welfare role in the wake of neo-liberal reforms (Mendoza & D'Souza 2002)? It is paradoxical that NGOs and CBOs that once played a seminal role in constituting the public voice in slums like Dharavi are also contributing to the depoliticisation of that voice today. As they come to occupy an increasingly important role in the development process, they are also criticised for indirectly legitimising neo-liberal reforms¹¹ and the new forms of exploitation that follow from this process. However, most of the NGOs see this as a fallout of their successful interventions on behalf of slum dwellers and regard their new role as a natural progression from protest movements and advocacy to development work.¹²

Scholars such as Foucault (2008) and Ranciere (2010) say that the idea of economic freedom that is the foundational principle of liberalism

produces a permanent consensus of all those who may appear as agents within these economic processes, as investors, workers, employers and trade unions . . . which is a political consensus in as much as they accept the economic game of freedom.

(Foucault 2008: 84)

The change of orientation among NGOs and CBOs – to work with rather than against the state – is related to changes in their orientation to slum areas and slum populations. Dharavi, built on reclaimed marshland at the edge of the city, is now close to a new financial hub, and land prices have risen. Dharavi itself, as an ‘entrepreneurial slum’, is supposed to be a major contributor to Mumbai’s economy, as stated earlier in this chapter. This is in spite of the informal nature of all the industries and the threat of forced eviction. It is this vision that is behind the latest project in Dharavi. Conceptualised and developed by the architect Mukesh Mehta, the Dharavi Redevelopment Plan (DRP) was announced by the government in 2004 and conceived like other recent programmes as a state-supported public–private partnership. Like the PMGP, the DRP is conceived as a centralised project in which Dharavi will be divided into five separate residential and commercial sectors, and the development of each assigned to a separate private developer. However, inordinate procedural delays in the tendering and bidding process, the complexities regarding land ownership, the fall in real estate prices, economic recession and policy changes regarding floor space area for the apartments that are to be given to the slum dwellers have created insecurity among the prospective bidders, meaning that the project has still not got off the ground. Much is made of grass-roots opposition to the project, but to the best of my knowledge opinion is divided on this count. The people with whom I have worked are aware of the benefits to be gained from legalised property rights and the increase in property prices that the project will lead to and are by and large enthusiastic about the project. Dharavi, however, has a mixed population, and there are old residents, such as the Kohli fisher folk, who are the original inhabitants of Dharavi, and the Kumhars – or potters – both of whom own large tracts of land, which they would lose if they had to move into residential apartment blocks.

In-situ development strategies that involve the upgrading and improvement of slum houses have had mixed success, partly due to procedural complexities, as seen in the case of the SUP. A pilot project conducted by the PMGP that involved redeveloping a limited area in Dharavi and constructing apartment blocks was a popular scheme among the local population. Most critics of centralised slum redevelopment plans, including NGOs and CBOs who have worked on issues pertaining to low-cost housing, are silent when it comes to questions about property value in slum areas and the fact that land may be seen as an economic investment. It is commonly assumed that slum residents think of their

dwellings purely as spaces of habitation. It is also assumed that residents prefer to live in ground-level dwellings because of the home-based nature of their occupations. A study of the Markandeya Housing Society conducted by Vinit Mukhija (2003) shows that slum dwellers preferred apartments on the third and fourth floor, in order to be away from the noise and the dirt of Dharavi. Gentrification is an aspiration that many slum dwellers nurture. However, centralised projects for redevelopment are unlikely to be successful, and if they are it will be at an enormous human cost. It is hard to know whether any elected government that is dependent on the slum population for its vote will want to pay the price for this kind of development.

Most critics of centralised planning for slum redevelopment say that such programmes increase the scope for corruption. As the lines between legal and illegal residents are re-drawn, the scope for underhand negotiations and the misuse of power increases. Slum dwellers want their status to be legalised, and government officials use their powers to create long-term dependency relations based on corrupt practices. Critics also say that the failure of such programmes may be less to do with poor implementation and planning and instead be a sign of a 'failed authoritarianism' of the planning process itself and a broadening of participation in the self-fashioning of Mumbai (Hull 2010). My own study leads me to believe that some centralisation of the planning and implementation process would be welcomed by the residents of established slums such as Dharavi. It would make for efficiency and perhaps quicker implementation of redevelopment projects. However, centralised planning is unrealistic in cities that have heterogeneous interests, such as Mumbai, and cannot be implemented in a democratic fashion, as has been shown here. Perhaps only a pragmatic mix of centralisation with a focus on local-level conditions can work in the long run.

Notes

- 1 Downloaded from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dharavi> on 8 December 2010. This chapter is a summary of some of the arguments presented earlier in a book I co-authored with Deepak Mehta, entitled *Living with Violence: An Ethnography of Events and Everyday Life* (Delhi: Routledge, 2007).
- 2 'Harvard Students get Lessons on Dharavi', *Wall Street Journal* (19 May 2010). Downloaded from www.livemint.com/2010/03/23000503/Harvard-students-get-lessons-o.html.
- 3 The land on which slums have emerged can be classified into three types depending on whether it belongs to the state government, central government or is owned privately. Slum colonies on state government land are called surveyed slums, as opposed to notified slums on private land. There is virtually no official data on the status of populations that comprise the slum colonies on central government land, as they have never been officially surveyed (Source: Gautam Chatterji, private conversation; *Indian Express*, Mumbai 11 May 1996). The land on which Dharavi is situated is partly owned by the municipal corporation, partly privately owned and partly 'collector' (state government) land.
- 4 According to a *Times of India*, Mumbai, report of 19 May 1996, only 200 housing societies came forward while World Bank expectations were that at least 1,000 housing societies would participate in the programme.

- 5 Officially designated 'The Slum Re-development Programme' (SRD), it is popularly known as the 'Free Scheme'.
- 6 A lakh is 100,000.
- 7 The Floor Space Index or FSI refers to the ratio of the total permissible built-up area to the total available land area on a particular plot of land. There was a tentative proposal that private builders would be offered an increased FSI as an incentive to participate in the 'Free Scheme'. They would be permitted to construct apartments for sale on land that was left over after they had constructed the required number of apartments for the slum dwellers (cf. *Indian Express*, Mumbai 13 September 1998). Transferred Development Rights, or TDRs, are used in cases in which the FSI is transferable. Government land in premium locations can be given to builders as cross subsidies for their participation in the various slum development schemes, specifically for the building of houses for slum dwellers.
- 8 Newspapers also report proposals made by the urban development department to redraw the boundaries of central government plots already encroached upon by slum dwellers so that land could be made free for slum development. There are also accounts of work started by the SSPL that could not be completed because of the lack of approach roads, especially in cases where this required building the roads on central government land. The juxtaposition of state-owned land and central government land make large-scale building extremely difficult.
- 9 The Shiv Sena has traditionally been anti-slum because it believed that slum populations were largely made up of immigrants. In 1985, when it won the municipal council elections in Mumbai, it announced a massive slum demolition programme called 'Operation Slum Wreck'. However, the party soon realised that a substantial portion of its voter base lived in the slums of Mumbai (Mukhija 2003).
- 10 *The Daily* (Bombay, 14 May 1986).
- 11 This term is used to characterise the process of 'destatisation', which has been taking place in many countries since the 1980s. As Andrew Lakoff (2005) says, 'the goal of neo-liberal reform was to limit the role of the state in overseeing human welfare, and to extend market rationality to areas that had not previously been seen as economic'.
- 12 SPARC has always tried to implement its goals by working with the state and has always been slightly sceptical of the ideological slant of many of the other NGOs that worked within the social movement framework. See Hilhorst (2003) for a comparative account for what seems to be a worldwide trend in NGO discourse.

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7 Cities within and beyond the plan*

Solomon Benjamin

Bangalore's elitist policy, programmes and modernist developmentalism

In 1998, S.M. Krishna, then chief minister of Karnataka, portrayed Bangalore as India's 'Silicon Valley' as part of his vision to transform the city into another 'Singapore'. Such rhetoric was also seen as a lesson for the country's economic development and as a justification for high-grade infrastructure and services to particular Master Plan-designated areas and to counter 'non-planned development' and 'slums' (Benjamin 2000). Fifteen years later in 2013, Bangalore, a city of around 11 million inhabitants, was urged by international development agencies to address its failed infrastructure.¹ Other public controversies that have gained political ground are those of land regularisation via 'Akrama Sakrama' (setting prior wrongs right). A previous work explored how Bangalore's elite capture and rationalise the space of plan and policy via the rhetoric of 'good governance' (Benjamin 2010). The city's vastly increased territorial boundary locks mega-projects, rationalised within a master-planning frame, towards a competitive 'productive' city. When accompanied by a political shift towards empowering special-purpose agencies under the rubric of hi-tech modernism, this frames other practices of governance within a binary of 'traditional and customary' (Benjamin 2010, 2014). Bangalore drains off its 3,200 ft plateau into three major valley systems, via a series of wetlands of 'tanks' or ponds called '*keres*' in the local language, Kanadda.² The *keres* are sites of intense contestations, which are revealed when one looks closely at the reworking of land tenures: a range of tenures connected to various seasonal agro practices, including fishing rights. This chapter points to the politics of these territories being conflated by higher levels of the government, but also via elite actions mobilising the judiciary into a homogeneous wasteland categorised as 'public'; this re-categorisation feeds a land acquisition process used under eminent domain. It also opens up territory to large private developers for high-end housing or landscaped lakes under more recent forms of 'public-private partnership' management with elite resident welfare associations (RWAs).³

The important conceptual point here is that the homogeneous re-categorisation of wastelands portrays a singular logic of territoriality where both 'urbanisation'

and market-based political experiments attempt to turn wetlands into manageable ‘lakes’. The logic of plan and policy with technical inputs from corporate partnerships is seen to serve as a counterweight to the threat from amorphous groups. It is important to note that even in neighbourhoods considered to be of very high income in terms of their plot sizes and relative level of infrastructure (and of course the occupations of their residents), not all are homogeneous in their attitudes towards the poor – including street hawkers and small shops. For instance, in Koramangala’s 3rd Block in south-east Bangalore (a case discussed later in this text), several residents blocked the dominant group who sought to mobilise the official machinery to act against ‘un-authorised hawkers and vendors’. This same group has fought to ensure free and open access to a library set up in the ‘neighbourhood’ park. Despite these relatively progressive actions, the only imaginary of these groups remains within the ‘plan and policy’. The intervention of techno-managerial policy planners and academics tends most often to co-produce a singular logic of territoriality and in turn notions of singular forms of private property. Scholars have astutely observed that such readings of law premised on private property are generative of violence.⁴

This framing of a ‘public common’ is, on closer examination, a privatised public to be managed via a ‘public–private partnership’ (PPP) whose market-based business model is seen to replace what are posed as ‘traditional’ and customary practices. Significantly, two well-meaning groups of academics are supporters of this perspective: first, environmental academics who are driven by ‘scientific rationality’ (rather than politicised perspectives); second, environmental planners of a positivist persuasion who also seek techno-managerial systems as an approach, combined with de-politicised ideas of ‘participatory and inclusive planning’.⁵ The way forward is to soften the blow of the market by a humanised technocracy – adding another ‘P’ (standing for ‘people’) into the PPP and setting in place by participatory planning and NGO-driven consultation ‘inclusive’ policy and programmes that will protect ‘public interest’ in the ‘common’ (Unnikrishnan & Nagendra 2014, last page, concluding paragraph). This perspective is evidenced not just in legal argumentation, but also, as we shall shortly see, in descriptions of the ‘lakes’: ‘The lakes are now facing severe challenges due to pollution, *encroachment* and disruption in connectivity following urbanisation [emphasis by author]’ (Unnikrishnan & Nagendra 2014: 3). Located in ‘slums’, the poor are seen to be in exploitative existence within the ‘unorganised informal sector’ that marginalises them as ‘encroachers’ on ‘unplanned’ areas. All this serves to justify the ‘rule of law’ for the enforcement of mega-urban planning to control ‘slums’, while ‘governance reforms’ cut down ‘vote-bank’ politics. Such a framing entails the elite posing as a ‘civil society’ seeking to transform their neighbourhoods into micro-scapes of ‘India Shining’, uncontaminated by vote-bank politics.⁶ This is not a very different language and tone to that used in directives from the higher levels of courts, which a wider scholarship shows to be anti-poor in motivation. One intersect between these two sets of academics located in a nostalgia of ‘tradition and custom’ in the loss of a ‘common’ poses territorial contestations as ‘traditional and subaltern’ groups

conflicting with feudal power structures or the ‘land mafia’. The elephant in the room – the huge influence of elite residents and their well organised lobbying – is given a miss.⁷ Ironically, as witnessed in web-based group discussions, some well-meaning academic circles assist in producing technical reports framed for the legal process to feed a legal process to protect and hegemonise the plan and policy frame.⁸

In effect, progressive activists, academics, and some policy makers, tacitly accept the inevitability of ‘economic growth’ to be tapped for welfare purposes, but do so in seeking a constitutionally derived Habermasian space to frame ‘inclusive policy and programs’ (Flyberg & Richardson 2002). Unsurprisingly, there is an expansion of techno-rationalistic research – ‘evidence-based’ policy. This involves the extensive mobilisation of econometric data, the analysis of which justifies corporate partnerships dressed up as stakeholders to seek public funds and conducive, growth-oriented policy.⁹ Like ‘participatory planning and consultation’, these realms too emphasise cartographic logics – a visual aesthetic that frames the neat, landscape, colour-zoned plans with ‘unplanned’ territorial forms located as ‘encroachment’. These critiques located in contrasting ideological planes treat territory and land as a passive setting, set within homogenised tenurial categories. Other criticisms locate their efforts in a much higher conceptual frame of meta-historical changes – treating and constructing material terrains as a ‘local’ contingent on consciously received contractions in capitalism.

Using cartographic law and order to reinforce aesthetics of private property

Bangalore’s context as a conceptual setting underlines how terms and categories are mobilised to fuel an elitist politics of urban space. At the centre is a hegemonic project of planning that in the attempt to resolve and define ‘rights’ set within the logic of inclusive ‘market-based’ arrangements moves towards the ‘settlement of property’ into singular tenure forms. It is framed under ‘expert rules’ to define ‘inclusive’ development ‘balanced’ within an overall economic development. The emphasis is on survey-based cartography co-joined with a particular reading of law around ‘urban decentralisation’ for ‘inclusive participatory planning’. Also of central concern here is how such rationality is built around ‘lawful’ planning and policy, openly accepted by even progressive NGOs in their endorsement (if not lobbying) for the 74th Constitutional Amendment. These narratives adopt a conception of law that is framed in binaries of ‘legal–illegal’, divorced from its spatialisation, which emphasises notions of ‘developmentalism’ whose narrative is constituted around ‘rapid’ urbanisation rates, inclusive economic development and a nostalgia over a loss of tradition. Such a construction builds an underlying message of ‘inaction’ that will result in violent chaos.¹⁰

If one assumes a normative logic of ‘plans and policy’ then let us consider where this can lead, in territorial imaginaries shaped by planning regulations to claim city territories in unexpected ways. For instance, just at the time when the

courts were coming down heavily on roadside shrines in Bangalore, a religious mega-business was mobilising this rhetoric to claim far larger territorialisation. Land issues shaped by the legality of planning run deeper in Bangalore's religious cults. In June 2010, a spectacular news item, accompanied with a colour image, spurred the imagination of ISKCON followers and also a more general audience: ISKCON Bangalore announced the foundation stone *puja* ceremony for a massive Rs. 350 crore, Disney World-inspired Krishna Lila theme park outside the city.¹¹ Curiously, within days, it also published a strikingly detailed press notice that read like a legal response to its 'sister', ISKCON Mumbai. ISKCON Bangalore claimed greater legitimacy than the 'illegal' ISKCON Mumbai, and attempted to demonstrate its legitimacy by publishing a very detailed list of its real-estate activities. This included hi-tech townships and the Krishna Lila Park, all of which were portrayed as following modern practices of raising finance and real-estate management facilitated by PPPs (ISKCON Bangalore 2009). These arguments were circulated in the media via YouTube, and such reports were perhaps intended to counter opposition not just from ISKCON Mumbai, but also Karnataka's senior Congress I leader, who accused ISKCON Bangalore of illegal real-estate activities.¹² The claims to legality and territory are often complex and not new to religious cults. For instance, June 2010 witnessed media-spurred excitement concerning an allegation by Bangalore's famous don turned journalist and land broker, 'Agni' Sreedhar.¹³ Agni claimed that the self-styled guru Sri Sri Ravi Shankar's 'Art of Living' (AOL) Foundation had 'illegally grabbed' 14 acres of land near their ashram.¹⁴ The AOL, with extensive membership from the elite of India and certainly of Bangalore, has had a central presence in higher-end policy and administrative circuits, and it is well known among residents of south Bangalore's Kanakapura Road as a very significant owner of rapidly developing real estate acquired in 'stealth like' ways and also by outright purchase with some state support.

Conceptualising cities beyond plan and policy

One way to counter cartographic de-politicisation and its associated violence can be to spatialise legal pluralism via the concept of Occupancy Urbanism (Benjamin 2008, 2014). Here, the intent is to mobilise a heuristic around the embedded histories of land tenures and to bring into conversation non-cartographic logics of territorial formations to reveal a criticality in our understanding of space (Lund, 1998).¹⁵ It allows engagement with complex understandings of property in terms of how these are shaped by cultural meanings to view land made alive: to consider territory as an open-ended political space and build a conceptual frame for unpacking contestations. Such a critical perspective rejects anxieties of chaos resulting from a lack of planning and law and order, to consider four overarching themes.

First, thinking beyond the 'mess' of everyday life. In exploring the 'south' of cities beyond 'northern' perspectives, the intent is to take seriously the complexity of how people engage with land, infrastructure, economy and politics, exemplified

in works by Ananya Roy (2004) and Jennifer Robinson (2006) on the ‘ordinary city’. Of particular importance is the work of Abdou Malik Simone (2006, 2011), who introduces the concept of the ‘surfacing of urban life’. In particular, in these diverse practices there is a central need to recognise the social underpinnings of how law is constructed and to consider a particular perspective within legal pluralism, and what is termed as ‘street life’, as a political space (Kalpagam 2006).

Second, the entry via ideas of land tenure and constitution of property helps us to reject narratives of modernity and tradition, and to seek out complex ways in which territories are occupied but also ‘possessed’. For instance, territorial formations in ‘high-growth’ South Canara in south India are shaped by sites of possessions – known as the Bhoota (pre-time) Kola. These are not just seen by the groups involved as a way of reviving ‘tradition’, but form one of the multiple realms and registers that co-exist with the courts, the village and the city council administration, to negotiate and address conflicts over territory, objects, and personal conflicts of honour. In effect, these are non-cartographic, yet deeply materialised spaces, which include political realms. The point here is that one must recognise the close intertwining of complex logics and rationalities that move beyond cartographic ones, and the material and transcendental aspects of such space. This effort towards the impossibility of modernity is also a way to think about its mobilisation as a politics of claiming elite status. Here, following Dean and Lamarre (2004), it seems far more useful to focus on transformation. As they argue, the adoption of a modernity perspective assumes the inevitability of a rupture from ‘tradition’ that in effect relegates the latter to a narrow ritual of no real material significance.

Finally, the function of the ethnographic method is to underline the political. This way of understanding cities is not intended merely to reveal some interesting curiosities of ‘third-world cultures’. Rather, it is essential to understand contests over territory, institutional space and economy. The emphasis on the ethnographic method is, then, not just to compliment economic data (as an illustration of the material consequences of a meta-force) but rather to generate politicised conceptual categories (Lund 2014).

The intent here is to make a different point about how singular logics of territory are a source of violence. These are inherent in the aggressively pursued elitist policy agendas, including those witnessed as Bangalore’s mega projects: an IT corridor, a regional expressway and its recently built international airport.¹⁶ Previous work on the city’s contested governance pointed to the shortage of basic services, while the demand for hi-tech infrastructure necessitates massive investments, many times that of funds allocated to infrastructure forms that cater to popular groups.¹⁷

With this discussion of Bangalore’s context, we now consider the fluidity of politics on the ground. The idea is not to portray the poor as being victorious from a perspective of a resistance set within a defined order. Rather, the intent is to show city terrains as being necessarily rife with political uncertainty by moving to consider more nuanced versions of city histories rather than being

disciplined by ‘western’ genealogies of city development and contests. Cities are born out of complex processes ‘beyond the plan’, where spaces (political, institutional, legal) are shaped by the complexity of politics on the ground and constituted by everyday practices. Such fluidity in identity politics is not new and has been documented in previous research exploring how poorer groups established claims to highly contested territories in Whitefield in IT-dominated east Bangalore, where social and political relationships are just as complicated (Benjamin 2008). The eastern fringes of the city in Whitefield and parts of the south have the glass–steel–granite complexes that most upper-class Indians and people abroad associate with India’s IT capital. But set within these hi-tech IT terrains are vast territories of small plots strung together into what is known locally as ‘revenue and *gramthana* (or village) layouts’. An important practice here, common to the creation of large plot developments for high-end residential and also IT complexes, is to convert land from common pasture *gowmala* categories to public land, which then is consolidated and allocated to private development.¹⁸ Here, many settlements, termed as ‘encroachments’, non-planned or slums, pre-date master planning, but the important point is that almost all of these are territories developed under very different institutional, legal and territorial processes. The second important point here is that they embody action by both occupants and small developers, and various levels of public administration, especially the local government that problematises the term ‘informal’.

Contesting logics and territorial conflicts

Shifting political governance and conceptual frames have environmental consequences. The geography of Bangalore’s *keres*, the lace-like wetland system, has been constructed and refined over the past 400 years. These wetlands are managed via a sophisticated set of customary practices embedded in turn into sacred grounds associated with various protective deities (Figure 7.1).¹⁹

Such ‘mystical’ associations with territory are not associated with wetlands only, but a variety of spaces and places: street-side religiosities are embedded in how most groups mobilise deeper associations.²⁰ Such practices of working territory remain outside the ‘modern’ grid of master planning and are assumed by many elite groups to be vestiges of tradition that will soon die out. It is little wonder that popular street-side temples and shrines, along with small shops and workshops, are considered irritants as unauthorised developments and illegalities. The Supreme Court, for instance, has issued directives with stringent liabilities to city commissioners for their removal. A significant part of the territorial logics of the *kere* is its functionality as a sacred realm: protective goddesses are associated with the *keres*. But these too are contested – some goddesses are deemed to be more important and powerful than others, and their believers topple older ones. This does not dissolve the sacredness, as this resides not in the physical attributes of these places, but rather their location as space.

Sarukkai and Baidur make the important point that often it is not the deity but the place that is important.²¹ As they astutely note, these ‘sacred spaces’ also



Figure 7.1 Protective goddesses associated with Bangalore's wetlands or *keres*.

function as wetlands and are contested, perhaps more seriously with recent entrants into Bangalore's social and political moorings: the richer and usually IT-connected groups. For such groups, influential in policy circles and especially as 'good citizens' located in what the media and some academic circles respectfully term 'civil society', these spaces impair Bangalore's modernity. With this embedding in place, it is also materialised in more complex ways through land tenures. The temple lands of the famous Temple town of Kancheepuram and Udipi underpin an extensive weaving economy. Similarly, most wetlands that appear to be just 'water and land' are constituted around a range of groups who work their range of territories for seasonal agriculture and fishing, and as a source of silt-rich soils. Such 'commons' are often located under the protective sphere of a deity, demonstrating the thin line between the metaphysical and material realms. These are not just 'traditional', but located in the contemporary. Poorer groups evicted to peri-urban areas of Bangalore attempt to reinforce their claims to their resettled housing by way of *naga* (cobra) shrines built on anthill mounds. Jane M. Jacobs (1996), arguing for non-cartographic counter-mapping in the context of Australian Aboriginal claims, points to a deeply material politics. Should the 'mystical' beliefs ascribed to the protective goddess associated with Bangalore's wetlands be placed as rationally as the economic data sheets that imbibe territories set aside for special economic zones (SEZs)? If so, is the

politics of the rationality claimed via cartographic–economic–managerial located in its mystical projections? If so, just as ‘all law is customary’ this border between rationality and irrationality is very thin.

This work does not attempt to undertake an anthropology of sacred spaces, but rather seeks to explore the political consequences of such diverse logics. Here a conceptual frame of substantiating territory as an open-ended political space is central to unpacking the spatial constructions mobilised by an elite politics.

Landscapes of power shaping rationality²²

To explore the wider political consequences of adopting a conceptual frame of legal pluralism, this chapter focuses on the everyday practices of territoriality, centering on the *Mayestripalya Kere*, a wetland in Koramangala’s 3rd Block – one of Bangalore’s most elite neighbourhoods. The following section is a critical analysis of the city’s elite ‘civic’ politics, which mobilise a language of citizenship and good governance and appeal to the logic of plan and policy. Ironically, claims that its rationality subsumes notions of power in an attempt to subsume poorer groups comes full circle when elite utopian visions for the large neighbourhood district are threatened by a mega-development by one of Bangalore’s largest land developers. Here, master planning can be explored through questions such as: Who plans and at whose cost? What is the city beyond the plan? Are there multiple realms of law, and how do these connect with power structures in society? Such questions set the tone for the type of analysis that looks at city contestations beyond the frame of policy and the plan.

We begin with a news item on roadside religious shrines:

In the case of multi-religious structures constructed by various religious groups illegally in parks and other public places, which could trigger tension, then all such structures will have to be demolished. [It’s curtains for illegal shrines in the state.]²³

This press report about the adoption by the Karnataka State Government of the April 2009 Supreme Court directive would gladden Bangalore’s elite, who are vehemently opposed to illegal shrines and hawkers that block pavements, and who pressure city commissioners to come down hard on the unauthorised, non-conforming structures that generate slums. As one of the four most exclusive areas of Bangalore, Koramangala’s 3rd Block RWA had, in the past, seriously discussed how to restrict the expansion of, if not remove completely, road-side shrines and small shops.²⁴ Leading the other relatively less advantaged RWAs, the 3rd Block association view themselves as esteemed citizens of Bangalore, and have consolidated significant political and administrative acumen. But most other blocks too, such as the 4th Block and the 1st Block, see themselves as collectively forming a substantive interest group influencing senior administrative officers, higher levels of the political class and, most importantly, the Bangalore Development Authority (BDA).²⁵

The crises and anxiety always remain. Their political clout and the recent municipal elections witnessed renewed activities, such as the ‘Smart Vote’ campaign, and evidenced that the new ward boundaries are framed to exclude poorer groups and their threatening, patronage-based vote-bank politics.²⁶ This invoked a mythological construct of Bangalore as a possible Singapore: clean roads, landscaped parks and managed by PPPs devoid of ‘riff-raff’ (as one association member from the 1st Block called them during a meeting).

Koramangala had, until recently, a huge open space within the 3rd Block that was intensively used by the youth of the wider district, mostly of lower income and from castes/ethnic groups that contrast with the surrounding 3rd Block. This also included school children from nearby – again mainly from lower income groups. However, persistent efforts by the 3rd Block RWA to lobby the BBMP administration²⁷ (pressured in turn by high-level political and administrative circuits) eventually paid off. This included lobbying to landscape half of the ground into walking paths, exotic plants and flowers, and most importantly, a 16 ft high chain-link fence to demarcate this from the open ground (Figure 7.2). Thus, one section was converted into a park for senior citizens to walk dutifully along the paved path that encircles a ‘touch-me-not’ landscaped green (Figure 7.3). Every Sunday, even in the rain, the remaining ground, the size of a football field, witnesses between nine and twelve teams playing an adapted form of cricket and occasionally football all together. Smaller children are pushed out due to the severe pressure on space. If this is not enough, the RWAs are moving towards landscaping this remaining part too. The neat architectural plans include a swimming pool, tennis and badminton courts. Also central to such policing, as in other landscaped parks, was a locked gate whose timings were maintained by the RWA to ensure ‘immoral’ activities and ‘anti-social’ elements were excluded. Curiously, children are excluded from playing in the landscaped area, with restrictions on stepping on the grass. Faced with increasing maintenance costs, this was arranged with an adjoining luxury hotel.²⁸ These actions were seen by the RWA to be a victory – taking space back into proper ‘planned use’. Of



Figure 7.2 Youths on open ground – subsequently walled off by Koramangala RWA.



Figure 7.3 Landscaping a neighbourhood park in Koramangala’s 4th C Block – curtailing use by poor youths.

central importance was the use of planning logic – calculating the percentage of master-planned open space – irrespective of how almost no other residential areas have such access. In interviews, the cricket-playing youths were found to have travelled almost 5 km from more densely developed areas with few open spaces to play soccer or cricket.

Around 2009 a new warfront opened up for Koramangala’s 3rd and 4th Block RWAs, as they set out to reclaim an open green space, *Maistripalya Kere*, one of the city’s many wetlands, as a ‘lake’.²⁹ This was to be landscaped, inspired by what many of these wealthy residents and avid international travellers had seen in North America. Being well connected to the highest administrative circles, the RWAs lobbied their way into the city’s highest administrative policy-making and legal circles, including India’s Supreme Court. They were also assisted by two of the city’s party bosses: a Member of Parliament (MP) residing in their block and a Member of the State Legislative Assembly (MLA).³⁰ This lobbying was mainly to counter claims by earlier settler groups around the *Maistripalya Kere* who enjoy customary rights. The RWAs see these groups as encroachers on the master-plan-designated boundaries, facilitated in this illegal act by vote-bank politics and promoted by the ‘land mafia’. The RWAs mobilise particular forms of legal argumentation premised on a cartographic logic built around the

master plan. This logic is premised on three realms of ‘expert’ knowledge: landscape architects and planners – the creators of the ‘cartographic frame’ – and lawyers to demonstrate the correct rule of law around the logic of the master plan and earlier Geological Survey of India maps. A more important goal is to access the Supreme Court to pass directives and pressure senior administrators to act stringently against lower-level administrative staff, many of whom live in similar ‘encroachments’ and usually stonewall such pressures by way of administrative loopholes. The court directives lay out a central role for the BDA as the city’s main planning agency, as well as a role for the more recently constituted Lake Development Authority (LDA). Both the BDA and LDA are institutional realms that counter claims established by the city’s elected municipal corporation – viewed as a location of political subversion of the grand plans. These plans were summarised by a judicial committee as follows:

Encroachments are rampant in lake areas due to high value of land consequent to the unprecedented rapid urbanisation of the city, especially during the past two decades. . . . Land grabbers in the guise of developers and builders pose serious threat to the protection of all public lands; lakes are no exception. Fabrication of records and documents is resorted to, leading to grabbing of lake lands. . . . Lakes have a great recreational value in urban setting. If parks are developed surrounding the lake at the time of layout development, they add to the quality of urban life. The jurisdiction of the [LDA] extends over the lakes in metropolitan area of Bangalore inclusive of BMRDA area. Besides the LDA has jurisdiction of lakes over other City Municipal Corporations and Town Municipal Councils in the State. LDA is the regulatory, planning and policy making body with nodal functions for protection, conservation, reclamation, restoration, regeneration and integrated development of lakes in the jurisdiction of the authority.³¹

This case is conceptually useful in another way. More recently, the RWAs confronted a mega-development adjoining their neighbourhood: Bangalore’s biggest-ever high-end housing and commercial development to cover, in part, the city’s largest wetland, Belandur. Significantly, the land developers mobilised the same cartographic logic now extended under the SEZ procedures. As of the present, both projects remain incomplete. The first was stalled by municipal bureaucracy and the second, connected to global financial circuits, stalled in both clearances but also because of the uncertainty of an over-built housing and commercial market.

The RWAs sought to evoke pristine nature, where the *Maistrypalya* wetland *kere*, perceived as a dangerous wild area, was to be ‘projectified’ as a natural lake. Just as the 3rd Block open ground was converted via a plan, the strategy included a PPP with the BDA – the city’s de-politicised planning authority – the LDA, and a range of technical experts and lawyers. Interestingly, in this ‘public process’ the documentation mobilised included a map from the Geological Survey of India whose representational categories hid earlier histories of land

claims, especially those of the *Maistrypalya* village. The survey map used by the Koramangala groups, like many colonial projects, is suitable to use as a modern zoning plan, including a lake, an 'eco' zone and a sunbird corner. When instrumentalised via a PPP governance model, these zones are in effect the first steps towards a public private commons. They claimed that in part their reaction was also against the wetland being sought for development into housing for senior politicians.³² Some members of the RWA proposed converting the small remaining water body into a swimming pool. In a public presentation, one of the vocal 'citizens' of Koramangala 3rd Block (nicknamed 'Privatisation M' by his colleagues), provided a vivid history on how they became organised against the opposition – powerful politicians protecting their vote-bank. He explained how, by lobbying the BDA, they had been successful in securing the removal of most of the 150 families, with only 6–8 remaining. This was not an easy path, as the occupants claimed that the acquisition of their land in the 1940s by the City Improvement Trust Board (CITB) had taken territory of religious and ritual value and subsequently re-conveyed it back to the owners. The RWA now had to not only confront this earlier decision but also hire the best lawyers and garner support from senior politicians and administrators to successfully appeal to the Supreme Court against the second decision.

The RWAs sought to landscape this territory with the assistance of the LDA PPPs. Assisted by a good lawyer, the RWA claimed this to have been allocated to them under the master plan norms and that this territory was intended for redevelopment into high-end housing for politicians. Thus the idea was to convert this wetland into a landscaped lake – fenced in for proper management, with a sunbird section and jogging paths inspired by North America.³³ An extract from the PowerPoint by the 3rd Block Association for the BDA is revealing in its portrayal of the existing settlers as an SC-ST vote-bank; of the eclipse of 'traditional' (and 'rural') fishing activities to be replaced by a proper urban ecology; and most important, of the expansion of the encroaching settlers that would engulf the entire area if nothing was done.

An extract from Meistrypalya Lake Development Technical Report reads:

5.5 Sociological

A detailed report on the socio economic status of the residents of the Meistrypalya village was conducted. Highlights of the survey:

1. 30 years back only 30 families lived there – now there are 150–200 houses, and the total population is around 2000.
2. The overflow of Madivalalake used to come into this lake and from this lake into Bellanduramanikere [wetland] upstream of Shinivagulu tank. Upstream to the lake there was dry agricultural land, and fishing done in the lake about 20 years ago.
3. The area is a SC vote bank.
4. Conservation in urban settings requires concerted, committed action from a number of sectors, that takes into account principles of ecology,

along with a proper recognition of the role played by nature in an urban setting, where recreation, access to greenery, and considerations of technical and economic feasibility must be taken into account along with designs that incorporate the requirements of citizens from varied socio-economic and cultural backgrounds.³⁴

The last ‘inclusive’ point remains symbolic and rhetorical when viewed alongside the actual development plan, earlier actions on hawkers in the area and the 3rd Block grounds. The interesting issue is that of incomplete success on behalf of the elite RWAs. In the case of the open ground to park, only half of this was converted. For several months, the chain-link fence had a huge hole through which youths would enter the park to retrieve cricket balls that had crossed over. Even when this was fixed, they would simply climb over. The attempt to transform the *kere* into a lake take time. It was only in February 2013 that the dumping of waste building material formed the basis for landscaping. The *Maistrypalya Kere* is constituted around diverse older tenure forms under which the wetland, but also associated upstream and downstream territories of the maintenance of the ecological-economic system, are categorised as government land, and then allocated under various forms of planning processes to particular groups in society – in this case via the BDA – towards uses and visions lobbied by the elite RWAs. In effect, although occupied by other groups, this territory became naturalised as a wilderness to be tamed according to the norms laid out by ‘rationalistic’ policy frames. These norms also help the consolidation of smaller territory to one larger plot that facilitates the master planning of it – in this case as a ‘civic eco-friendly’ project. The city’s elite ‘civic’ politics, as illustrated in Koramangala’s 3rd Block, mobilise a language of citizenship and good governance, and appeal to the logic of plan and policy. Their projection of plan and policy as a rational, ‘legally endowed’ space helps them to subsume notions of power. This in turn allows the elite to subsume poorer groups. There is, however, a distinct irony. Ending in 2012, press reports emerged of a mega IT complex development that threatened the elite’s utopian vision for a large neighbourhood district.³⁵ The Manipal ETA Infotech, spread across a massive 72 acres, is promoted by a very powerful lobby. Here again, in a process not different from that of the *Maistrypalya* case, planning and policy allow the developers to appropriate a significant part of the wetland of the adjoining *Belandur Kere*. For the Koramangala residents, this was a shock, particularly on issues of depleting groundwater and the increased ‘through’ traffic causing congestion and pollution.³⁶

Counter politics operate not within the logic of planning and policy, with calls for ‘inclusive participatory planning and public consultations’, but rather as contesting occupancies. On a rainy day in early October 2011, my then 11-year-old son and I went to Koramangala’s BDA commercial complex to meet our guest, Aya Ikegame, who was visiting us for the day. On the way back home, we passed *Maistrypalya Kere*. The nursery, sheltered by a massive ‘rain tree’ that forms a natural shade for the sensitive plants below, is a territory that pre-dates

the master-planned Koramangala. A family of Tamil Thigalas³⁷ runs this nursery, as it does others surrounding the city's botanical garden, Lal Bagh, but also in close proximity to Dalit families, some of whom claim their land has been taken over by the BDA. The light drizzle had not deterred some families congregating at the adjoining nursery and, as we drove past, we noticed the beginnings of a ritual as they walked past the nursery into the wetland beyond. Reversing my car, I thought this would be a way for the three of us to explore the scene: for Ikegame, as an anthropologist; for my son who, with a deep interest in anything Japanese or Chinese, was excited to show her around; and myself, drawn into the local politics that had over the last six months centred around the *Maistry-alya Kere*. The ritual we meandered into was the eleventh day memorial ceremony, and moved some of the close relatives deep into the grass adjoining the water body. The Thigalas and their claims over territory had been in the news some years ago, when the BDA confronted several court cases contesting their acquisition of land around the Lal Bagh.

Such a complexity of claims is witnessed in most *kere* that dictate most of Bangalore's territorial ecology. Ending in 2009, as part of a NIAS project, a group of researchers, including this author, visited several community-managed *keres* in Bangalore's peri-urban areas, some dating back to the eighth century. The group observed small shrines that marked various types of wetland territory – representing particular ethnic groups that managed particular activities. Meera Baidur explained how, in previous studies of wetland management practices conducted by herself and other researchers, there were serious contestations over such rituals and their shrines (Baidur *et al.*, 2008). We could ourselves see deities broken and moved aside to make space for newer ones. Some of the wetland activities, such as fishing, were made possible via actions of the Karnataka fisheries department, which set about planting seedlings after the summer months when the *kere* would dry up, allowing one group to de-silt the water body and thus replenish adjoining farmland. The monsoons would soon replenish the water body. There were other locations where these practices were replaced with 'high-end' paid-for recreation – facilitated by the LDA established in 2007. Thus, a key theme of earlier research in these wetland locations termed this politics as the movement from *kere* to 'lake', the latter representing a form of beautified landscaped territory, with edges stone-clad and boating introduced.³⁸ Most importantly, the management under the LDA, assisted by the BDA, opened up space for adjoining elite gated residential housing complexes involved in the redevelopment of these areas.³⁹ But to view this process as a complete erasure of the traditional by the modernist neo-liberal would be to miss its complexity. The PPP mode, like other market-based mechanisms, is prone to financial crises, made more complicated by the usually messy internal politics of elite RWAs. This occurs especially when RWAs cannot maintain control. This inability manifests in poorer neighbourhoods, with other groups 'gradually encroaching' and developing their own counter-claims via both political and bureaucratic circuits.

The counter-politics do not appear as explicit 'social movements', but rather as a range of contesting 'force fields' (Nuijten 2005). Territories are constituted

by multiple rationalities that do not necessarily form mirror images of each other, nor can they be placed in oppositional ways. There are several other examples of such political openings; some located within administration, others located in the intersect of law and religiosity.⁴⁰ When it is the latter, these ‘strange’ logics make news in both academia and elsewhere. For instance, even the use of the term ‘Thigalas’ in the issue is complicated. In the final months of 2010, Thigala claims over territory had been in the news as the BDA confronted several court cases contesting their acquisition of land around Bangalore’s central green space, Lal Bagh. At that time, a very interesting report appeared in *The Hindu*, focusing on the Thigalas and their rituals in various locations, including *Maistrypalya Kere*. While Sudipto Mondal terms these groups and their practices ‘subaltern’, what is interesting is the fluidity of identities.⁴¹ Most interesting is the sense of appropriation and perhaps subversion. Perhaps it is precisely such fears that may both explain, in the context of the Supreme Court order, which shrines become regularised and which demolished, and also allude to a politics that is difficult to discipline – a politics that is constituted beyond what Blomley (2003) terms the ‘grid and the plan’. This perspective contests portrayals of city politics where the poor remain marginalised and ritual remains enshrined as a dying tradition, and then subsumed by a hegemonic plan. Such arguments of marginality and an assumed hegemony of the plan feed narratives mobilised by the city’s elite that see such actions as violations, a breakdown of ‘law and order’ driven by a fear that the unplanned and unsanitised represent a frontier for the ritual of modernist planning.

There are other indications of more subtle politics being mobilised. A closer look at roadside shrines suggests that here, too, stealth-like actions are the way the poor, among other ‘subaltern’ groups, appropriate and transform space. Some illustrations emerge from wonderful fieldwork by Rohan De Souza and Manjunath, conducted as part of a NIAS–ATREE research project. The larger project looked comparatively at the politics of wetland management within the city territory and adjoining ones under the control of village councils. These sites included locations of resettlement of some poor groups from squatter areas located in the central city to outer-city wards. This was done by building two-storey blocks as per the rehabilitation and resettlement policy (R&R). [Figure 7.4](#) shows a snake goddess shrine used to secure territory in a resettlement-housing block where residents face constant instability.

The process was revealed as complex and interesting, unfolding over several months of site visits. It quickly became evident that the poorer groups, resettled into four-storey, walk-up apartment blocks deep within the southern metro areas, were thoroughly disempowered in multiple ways. They were located far from jobs, had no school or health facilities to speak of, and environmental sanitation was at its worst. Most significantly, many had lost their right to vote due to the elite-group-driven new form of voter ID, aimed at flushing out ‘bogus’ voters.⁴² Unsurprisingly, many other poor groups refused to move and continued to maintain their older places in central-city squatter areas. The new location was also an extension of a wetland, where the *kere*-associated forms of tenure allowed the



Figure 7.4 Snake goddess shrine securing territory for poor residents (resettled from central Bangalore).

public authority to portray this territory as an unused wetland, and thus an uncontested public space.

In the bushes in front of the two-storey blocks lay an old anthill. De Souza and Manjunath observed how this formed the location of a shrine, which, over six months, rapidly transformed into a larger one – signifying a marker for both caste-specific and religious rituals. Manjunath noted that such shrine building is a common process in establishing claims. This was significant in the current R&R, when, to prevent eviction groups claiming their new locations, the specific flat and house number is missing on electricity bills, which provide instead only the ID number of the resettled person. Thus this is seen to reduce all claims to the allocated flats. Based on the trajectory of rapid construction around the anthill into a ‘proper’ shrine, we were reasonably sure that this expansion was, over the coming years, to become a site in the intertwining of ethnic politics shaped by real estate and other factors.

There are several other ‘out of the plan’ political realms; not all can be categorised as ‘resistance’. De Souza and Manjunath revealed, for instance, that the resettled groups, though predominantly mixed-caste Dalit groups, mobilised a fluid identity in shaping realms of politics. First, as occupants in squatter settlements in central city areas, they engage with other central-city ethnic groups via trade-based credit and other relationships. During election time, these connections shape their political strategies through building coalitions. Such coalitions are played out during the ‘resettlement project’ – this involves working both the bureaucratic system and state-level party politics, including the higher realms of the Dalit Sangrash Samati (DSS). For those settlers choosing to occupy the allocated flats, their move into the housing includes moves to establish wider territorial claims via the anthill shrines. In parallel, this also serves to gradually make an entry into the lower-level cadres of another DSS faction, which has a constituency among the poorer agricultural workers in these outer areas. This second

group is also attracted by the potential of real-estate profits when such apartment blocks are occupied and rented out, sometimes to better-off groups who can afford to stay further away from the job-providing city centres. This last factor may explain why poorer groups are facing a very harsh resettlement in the central city area of Ejipura.⁴³ Here, activists paradoxically noted that a substantial number of the poor voted in support of politicians who may have played some role in the real-estate-shaped politics that moved them out in the first place. The point here is not to minimise the pain and trauma of eviction and resettlement, but to make the point that there are realms of politics that are not easy to categorise as ‘resistance’. These locate and operate in complicated ways to manipulate the bureaucracy, parts of the organised party politics, and also identity-based political organisations and particular factions within them.

Substantiating territory

These are unruly place-making events which undermine colonial authority not by a shrill oppositional ‘resistance’ but by a subtle, subversive interplay with the colonial constructs of and jurisdictions over cultural property. [Such a] reclamation presents a ‘new territory’. This is a space that is neither the panoptic, flattening space of imperialist visions nor a restoration of the pristine or pre-modern. The J.C. Slaughter Falls art trail is a remapping, which is intended to herald a new territory. Its hybrid form suggests the demise of the persistent and static binary oppositions that are so fundamental to the culture of colonialism.

(Jacobs 1996)

This extended quotation suggests the need to recognise spaces that refuse the conceptual category of ‘economic growth shaped resistance’ and the disruptions associated with the transition from ‘tradition to modernity’, as Dean and Lamarre (2004) explain. The important point is to reinforce these ideas rather than seeking homogeneity, as is often the project of cartographic developmentalism. Instead, as argued by Pottage (2004) and Saumarez Smith (2004), it is useful to recognise the political spaces that emerge from disconnects, especially temporal, between map and identity, and between maps and overlapping social practices, and finally the differentiation of continuous terrain. One can see these as reflections of diverse logics where political opening relates to the impossibility of hegemony via cartographic practices.

Jacobs’s counter-cartographic strategies are central to visualising ways of rethinking critical planning practices. A closer consideration of ‘active’ political spaces reveals that ‘popular’ groups confronting elite groups, empowered by policy-developmentalism and urban renewal, adopt non-cartographic modes of claiming space. These methods may not be intent only on resistance. For instance, ways of thinking about the ‘sacredness of place’, of locations believed to be protected and possessed by guardian spirits, are legitimate logics and should be treated as equally legitimate as claims by policy experts who promise

to bring about economic growth by reforming regulatory architectures, often in ways that cut off political opposition. The possible weakness of expert-driven resistance is the acceptance of an overarching logic of their opposition. As such, a closer look at political practices opens ways to re-define a criticality of ‘community planning’, to move beyond normative frames built around the ‘grid’, and also to consider closely the politics on the ground via the lens of legal pluralism that helps us to understand multiple rationalities in the construction of space. At a time when normative approaches seem distant from those exploring the practice of politics, substantiating territory may help us to bridge normative concerns with practices of community-based planning. This conceptual shift may help to re-politicise and bring ‘criticality’ into community-based planning. This shift is based not just around normative logic; it also comes from recognising realms where the practices of politics go beyond cartographic ones. A closer consideration of these practices helps us recognise the fluidity of political space and openings. ‘The plan’ is thus implicated in the rationalities of developmentalism, anxieties of modernisation and, most centrally, a failure to recognise the construction of law as a social process that is necessarily ‘customary’ (Webber 2009). From this perspective, institutional realms are seen not so much through the lens of the nation state, but rather are located within a conception of legal and institutional pluralism (Falk Moore 1973; Razzaz 1994; De Sousa Santos 1992, 2004).

Cities remain to be constituted out of fluid and unresolved realms that demand conceptual frames beyond those of a normative promise. Careful ethnography can uncover the production of contested political space that is necessarily fluid: shaped by complex and ‘thick’ relationships with a variety of groups, including middle-income ones. Much of this politics is ‘stealth-like’ and points to a vast city undisciplined by ‘the plan and policy’, and one that contests the disciplines imposed by a centralised political party politics. To conceptualise such contested city terrains, we start with Ananya Roy’s (2004) call for a ‘situated’ urban theory in considering and taking seriously the density of politics. These realms lie beyond Chatterjee’s (2008) binary disciplined by the nation state; we look into Merrifield’s (2012) ‘encounter’. Here, ‘the encounter’ gives substance to writings of Singerman and Simone’s deep ethnography on an everyday politics and economy. It also gives substance to Robinson’s (2006) arguments concerning ‘the ordinary city’. The city in these conceptions is heterogeneous, with contested spaces constructed around the complexity of land claims. In effect, rather than an overarching frame, ‘plan and policy’ becomes one of the many realms of contestations, and one that may not be emancipatory. Instead, we should consider what Blomley (2003) refers to as the ‘grid and survey’ and its associated ‘geography of violence’. While shaping most of the territorial production of Indian cities, the dense opaque form of city politics beyond policy and plans unsettles singular forms of private property that form the foundation of planning practice and its associated institutions. Much in the line of De Sousa Santos’s porous legalities (2004), these reveal multiple registers of claiming, which fall beyond the grid and the survey and instead around contested territory created during the processes of urbanisation.

Political space, then, represents uneven and conflictual spaces with unexpected turns. As Rancière (1998) argued, it is such spaces that open up political possibilities that, arguably, defy/bypass/contest ‘the grid and survey’.⁴⁴ Thus, we are interested in a politics that may be necessarily opaque and dynamic, and reject the inevitability of being disciplined by the ‘grid’ instituted by planning institutions and processes.

Notes

- * I would like to thank Professors Minoru Mio (National Museum of Ethnology) and Crispin Bates (University of Edinburgh) for the invitation to the Conference, Cities in South Asia, July 2010, and also my fellow participants there. I would also like to acknowledge and thank Rohan De Souza, Manjunath and Meera Baidur for their keen insights on practices of religiosity during our joint field trips in 2010 to various wetlands around Bangalore as part of my course on ‘City as Lab’ at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore. The Lichtenberg Kolleg in Göttingen, Germany provided a conducive location to finalise this chapter. Early versions of this chapter were presented on several occasions, especially at a deeply engaging workshop at the JNU, Delhi: ‘Keeping out the “riff-raff”’: The elites’ panoptic desires confront an unruly poor’, in *Power in Modern India* (25–27 March 2010; Centre for Political Studies JNU). This acknowledgement comes with the usual disclaimers.
- 1 KIG 2020 Report, ‘Urbanization beyond Municipal Boundaries: Nurturing Metropolitan Economies and Connecting Peri-Urban Areas in India’, World Bank, 2013.
 - 2 Rohan De Souza, ‘When lakes were tanks’, *Down to Earth*: www.downtoearth.org.in/content/when-lakes-were-tanks [accessed 31 August 2014].
 - 3 For a vivid illustration of this, see: Vaishnavi Vittal ‘Public Interest Litigations: “I always knew I would get the lake”’, *Citizen Matters*: <http://bangalore.citizenmatters.in/articles/2133-advocate-laila-ollapally-on-koramangala-lake-case> [accessed 31 August 2014].
 - 4 Blomley (2003) has useful observations on how such perspectives are internalised within practices. See also Nedelsky (1990) and Valverde (1996).
 - 5 See, for instance, Jayaraj Sundaresan (2011), H. Unnikrishnan and H. Nagendra (2014) and E. Nagendra and H. Ostrom (2014: 67).
 - 6 For an excellent account of this in other Indian cities, see John Harriss (2005).
 - 7 Sundaresan (2011): for instance, in his discussion of a central Bangalore case, he completely misses out the actions of the elite residents. While names of people and places are changed, his footnote 11 reveals this to be the case of the ‘Meistripalya Lake Development’ set in Koramangala’s 3rd Block.
 - 8 See: (1) Meistripalya Lake Development – Technical Report posted 5 September 2010, 10:07 AM by MC K3BRWA [updated 5 September 2010, 10:12 AM]: <https://docs.google.com/fileview?id=0B44uV7e9ROqPNTY40ThjMTEtN2RmOC00NDBhLTlIMzUtMjkyYWZhMzNhZTlj&hl=en> b). Message 1 of 3, 3 February 2011 ‘For those who have been fighting so hard to restore the Meistripalya Lake to its pristine glory, I am attaching a judgment from the Supreme Court just passed, about illegal occupation of common lands. This judgment could help to evict the few houses on Meistripalya land as the Government had no right to sanction these constructions and these must now be demolished as directed by the Supreme Court’: <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/savekoramangala/conversations/topics/4906>. (2) Message 1 of 1, 4 February 2011 Message 4909 Fwd: Judgment on Common Lands by Supreme court of India (Civil Appeal No. 1132/2011 @ Slp(C) No. 3109/2011 (Arising out of Special Leave Petition (Civil) CC No. 19869 of 2010): <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/savekoramangala/conversations/messages/4909>.

- 9 For an illustration of such lobbying and speculation legitimised into ‘vision’ documents, see: Karnataka Information and Communication Technology Group 2020 (KIG 2020) Report: www.bangaloreitbt.in/docs/2013/1/KIG%202020%20final%20report.pdf [accessed 10 June 2014].
- 10 Ranjitha Gunasekaran, ‘Please Don’t Repeat a Paris or Nairobi: Marginalising Migrants Will Only Lead to Tension, Warns Jeb Brugmann in his New Book, *Welcome to the Urban Revolution*’, *New Indian Express*, 5 July 2009: <http://newindianexpress.com/lifestyle/books/article91086.ece> [accessed 10 June 2014].
- 11 Images of the planned new Iskcon Krishna Lila theme park are available at www.iskconbangalore.org/krishna-lila-park.
- 12 See, for instance: ‘Financial Strategies for Iskcon Bangalore Krishna Lila Theme Park’: www.youtube.com/watch?v=3bDRpgAgthg&feature=player_embedded [accessed 12 June 2014]; ‘BV Shiva Shankar Land Row Stalls, Krishna Leela Park’ *Midday*, Bangalore edition (20 July 2009): www.mid-day.com/news/2009/jul/200709-Krishna-Leela-Park-Disney-style-theme-park-Land-row-work-stalled-Bangalore-news.htm [accessed 12 June 2014].
- 13 ‘Agni’ Sridhar had, in the early 2000s, partnered with the Karnataka’s biggest don who organised land for Bangalore’s largest real-estate developers catering to large global IT brand names. Video at: http://video.wired.com/?&fr_story=FRdamp310968&referer=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.wired.com%2Ftechbiz%2Fpeople%2Fmagazine%2F16-11%2Fmf_mobgalore%3FcurrentPage%3Dall&autoplay=true&skin=oneclip&rf=ev [accessed 12 June 2014].
- 14 ‘Art of Living Rejects Allegation of Land Grabbing’, *IANS* (Bangalore edition) (6 July 2010). The AOL spiritual guru Sri Sri Ravi Shankar Tuesday denied allegations that it illegally grabbed 14 acres of land near its ashram in Bangalore.
- 15 Lund (1998) makes two central points, that ‘property’, as an abstraction, needs to be materialised and contextualised; and, in a close ethnographic approach, to reveal political movements that reveal the play of power.
- 16 See, for instance: Urvashi Butalia, ‘India’s Elites Have a Ferocious Sense of Entitlement’, *New Internationalist* (January 2013): <http://newint.org/features/2013/01/01/india-elite-sense-of-entitlement/> [accessed 10 June 2014].
- 17 See Benjamin (2010) and G.V. Dasarathi, ‘Who Rules the City: The Oligarchic Republic of Bangalore?’ *Citizen Matters* (6 May 2013): <http://bangalore.citizenmatters.in/articles/view/5161-is-bangalore-turning-into-an-oligarchy?s=rss> [accessed 11 June 2014].
- 18 See, for instance, G. Manjusainath, ‘The Gobble Story of Gomala Land’ (20 May 2013), *DHNS*: www.deccanherald.com/content/333657/gobble-story-gomala-land.html [accessed 12 June 2014]. Here the issue is the conversion of land via a deputy commissioner without the knowledge of the local village council. This has been made possible through the centralisation of such decision making due to the new ‘e-governance’ forms of land management.
- 19 Rohan De Souza, ‘When lakes were tanks’, *Down to Earth*: www.downtoearth.org.in/content/when-lakes-were-tanks [accessed 31 August 2014].
- 20 These are also not just ‘traditional’ – the ‘visa shrines’ in the city of Hyderabad are a hot favourite of IT aspirants in the city who seek a US visa. Bangalore’s CBD has a ‘beer-Ganesh’ that is prayed to for those seeking success in high school and college examinations. M. Tata, ‘At The Embassy of Lord Balaji Visa Temple Hyderabad: Andhra Pradesh: The Engineering Student’s Port of Call for a Passage to America’ (13 January 2014): www.outlookindia.com/printarticle.aspx?288977 [accessed 12 June 2014].
- 21 S. Sarukkai, ‘Swirls of Yearning’ and P. Sen, ‘The Crimson Thread: Ajmer Sharif’ *Outlook* (13 January 2014). See also Meera Baidur (2014).
- 22 In framing this heading I am inspired by Bent Flyberg’s excellent work, ‘Rationality and Power: Democracy in Practice’ (1998).

- 23 Krishnaprasad, 'Illegal Shrines in Karnataka To Go', *The Hindu* (Bangalore Edition) (11 July 2010): www.hindu.com/2010/07/11/stories/2010071163341000.htm [accessed 10 June 2014].
- 24 See, for instance: 'Verdict Barring Shops in Residential Areas Stuns, Creates Flutter', *Citizen Matters* (27 January 2012): <http://bangalore.citizenmatters.in/articles/view/3761-verdict-barring-shops-in-residential-areas-stunner> [accessed 14 June 2014].
- 25 See: (1) Poornima Nataraj, 'After 7 years, Mestripalya Lake May See a Fresh Lease of Life Bangalore', *Deccan Herald* (6 January 2013): www.deccanherald.com/content/303479/after-7-years-mestripalya-lake.html [accessed 10 June 2014]; (2) Vaishnavi Vittal, 'Open Space Saved in Hard Fought Case Citizens, BDA Partner to Restore Key Koramangala Kere', *Citizen Matters* (19 June 2010): 'After a prolonged legal battle, the Meistripalya kere in the heart of Koramangala will be restored and revitalised by the BDA, much to the relief of residents': <http://bangalore.citizenmatters.in/articles/view/2109-residents-bda-restoring-meistripalya-tank> [accessed 10 June 2014].
- 26 The very few studies of urban vote-bank politics via a rich ethnography reveal serious problems with this concept and its construction. See Björkman (2013).
- 27 What is referred to here is the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (Greater Bengaluru Metropolitan Council), but also specifically its senior administration rather than its elected council – a distinction that is central in understanding the politics.
- 28 'Koramangala 3rd Block Park Gets Sponsored' (by an adjoining luxury hotel under a sponsorship arrangement with the City corporation), *Citizen Matters* (11–24 February 2012): http://issuu.com/citizenmatters/docs/citizen_matters_11_feb_2012_koramangala_edition [accessed 10 June 2014].
- 29 The opening lines of the RWA website are revealing in this regard, in their ability to prevent 'misuse' of 'open green space':
- Koramangala 3 Block has experienced active citizen involvement in civic matters for many years now. It was a group of such citizens from 3rd Block who extracted a commitment from BDA in 2001 at the Karnataka high court to provide 6.7% of open green space in all BDA developments. *This landmark judgment is now the basis for preventing misuse of open land by public and private bodies* in Bangalore [emphasis added]
- (<https://sites.google.com/site/k3brwa/about> [accessed 10 June 2014]).
- 30 Rohan De Souza, 'When lakes were tanks', *Down to Earth*: www.downtoearth.org.in/content/when-lakes-were-tanks [accessed 31 August 2014].
- 31 Extracts from the Report of the Committee constituted by the Hon'ble High Court of Karnataka to examine the ground realities and prepare an action plan for preservation of lakes in the City of Bangalore, pages 9–12 (Hon'ble High Court of Karnataka's Order dated 26/11/2010 in WP NO.817/2008 & others): www.karnataka.gov.in/ldakarnataka/Committees%20Constituted/LakeReport_26thFeb2011.pdf [accessed 10 June 2014].
- 32 'Koramangala Residents to Draw Up Report for Lake', *Times News Network* (15 June 2010).
- 33 For a vivid illustration of these landscaped areas, see: S. Subramanya, 'Recommendations for the Development of Mestripalya Lake, Koramangala': http://bcity.in/system/document_uploads/66/original/Recommendations_-_Mestripalya_Lake.pdf?1350917602 [accessed 10 June 2014].
- 34 'Meistripalya Lake Development – Technical Report': <https://sites.google.com/site/k3brwa/announcements-7/meistripalyalakedevelopment-technicalreport> [accessed 10 June 2014].
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- 37 The Thigalas are a group of Tamil-speaking horticulturists who are said to have been settled in these parts of Bangalore by the British to promote horticulture for their consumption.
- 38 Rohan de Souza, 'Privatising Bangalore's lakes', *Infochangeindia* (11 May 2013): <http://infochangeindia.org/agenda/enclosure-of-the-commons/privatising-bangalore-s-lakes.html> [accessed 10 June 2014]; Jagannath Shruthi, 'Commerce Over the Commons', *Tehelka Magazine* (12 July 2008): http://archive.tehelka.com/story_main39.asp?filename=cr120708commerceoverthecommon.asp [accessed 10 June 2014].
- 39 See: (1) LDA activities: www.karunadu.gov.in/lda/activities.html; (2) 'Neighbourhood in Action: Citizens Clean Agara Lake, Strong Participation', *Citizen Matters*: <http://bangalore.citizenmatters.in/articles/view/826-agara-lake-cleaning-drive> [accessed 10 June 2014]; (3) C.G. Sankar, 'With No Power to Protect Lakes, LDA Limp', *Citizen Matters* (14 June 2012): <http://bangalore.citizenmatters.in/articles/4252-lda-has-no-power-to-curb-violations> [accessed 14 June 2014].
- 40 In 2001, the western desert town of Pushkar saw a priest of its Brahma temple go to the local court, demanding that offerings made to the Goddess Savitri should by right come to the God Brahma. His rival in the town's Savitri temple argued that this should be the other way around since Brahma owes Savitri alimony: www.business-standard.com/india/news/desert-draws/375565/ [accessed 10 June 2014].
- 41 S. Mondal, 'When the Meek Inherit the Festival', *The Hindu* (Bangalore edition) (21 December 2010): www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Bangalore/article967516.ece [accessed 10 June 2014]. Such politics of shifting identities remains under-researched. Some exceptionally good studies of this can be seen in Monique Nuijten's (2005) fascinating work on the Peruvian highlands, which opens an analysis of the way property relations collide with established understandings of 'community' to open up useful uncertainty. Nuijten's (2003) work in Mexico City's Ejido lands complicates notions of patron-client relationships around land issues.
- 42 One of the important agendas of the 'smart vote' campaign by Koramangala, among other associations in Bangalore, is that of 'electoral reforms' to define forms of ID card listing and survey mechanisms, and a re-definition of political constituencies.
- 43 This eviction was one of the harshest witnessed in Bangalore in recent times. It was also controversial as, once its occupants were evicted, the territory was allotted to a private company undertaking to build a mall and resettlement colonies for those evicted, under a 'PPP' arrangement with the city corporation. See 'Ejipura, Only a Water Tank and Shrine Remain', *The Hindu* (Bangalore edition) (27 January 2013): www.thehindu.com/news/cities/bangalore/ejipura-only-a-water-tank-and-shrine-remain/article4348684.ece [accessed 10 June 2014]; 'Don't Build Mall on Ejipura Land', *New Indian Express News Service – Bangalore* (24 April 2013): <http://newindianexpress.com/cities/bangalore/%E2%80%98Don%E2%80%99t-build-mall-on-Ejipura-land%E2%80%99/2013/04/24/article1559044.ece> [accessed 14 June 2014]; V. Sriram, 'More Land to Maverick Holdings: 97 More Families Likely to Lose Homes in Ejipura': <http://bangalore.citizenmatters.in/articles/view/5262-more-land-to-maverick-holdings> [accessed 14 June 2014].
- 44 Also see an essay by Jodi Dean on 24 March 2008: <http://ranciere.blogspot.com/2008/03/zizek-rancire-democracy.html> [accessed 14 June 2014].

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Part III

The city as an arena for struggles among multiple identities

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8 The city as nation

Delhi as the Indian nation in Bengali *bhadralok* travelogues 1866–1910

Sandeep Banerjee and Subho Basu

In 1906, Gordon Hearn, a captain in the Royal Engineers of the British Indian Army and an associate of the Institute of Civil Engineers in India, published *The Seven Cities of Delhi* (Hearn 1906). Combining myth and reality, Hearn posits a ‘Hindu’ Delhi and a ‘Muslim’ Delhi as if they were two neatly divided historical eras with distinct affiliations of religious ideology. Despite aligning Delhi with the ‘Muslim empires’, he mentions the ‘Hindu King Yudisthir’ whose capital, Indraprastha, was supposedly located in the Purana Killa (Old Fort) region of the city (Hearn 1906: 68–85). Hearn, however, refutes the ‘myth of Indraprastha’ but does gesture towards Delhi as a city from ‘time immemorial’. Moreover, Hearn compares Delhi to Rome, and narrates the proverbial history of the Indian city, focusing on its architectural landmarks (Hearn 1906: 1). By stressing its built environment and erasing the people from his description of the city, he implicitly projects Delhi as a living museum of history.

Hearn’s depiction of Delhi as both an ancient imperial centre of India and a living museum underlines the British conception of the city. The British retained the notion of Delhi as an imperial centre by making it the site of colonial ritual through much of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The centrality of Delhi was repeatedly enacted by the British as they reinforced their claims as the legatee of the Mughal Empire. In 1876, the Prince of Wales (the future Edward VII of Britain) was entertained at a ball in the Diwan-i-Khas (Hall of Special Audience) of the Mughal palace at Shahjahanabad within what came to be known as the ‘Red Fort’. The following year, the viceroy Lytton proclaimed Queen Victoria the Empress of India – not from Calcutta, the capital of British India, but from a durbar in Delhi. In 1903, the viceroy Curzon celebrated the coronation of Edward VII at a durbar in Delhi; in 1911 George V was crowned Emperor of India in Delhi. There, following Mughal tradition, he appeared for *darshan*, or viewing, on a balcony of the ‘Red Fort’ (Cohn 1983: 165–210).

Importantly, the iteration of Delhi as the imperial power centre of India was coupled with its projection as a museum of India’s past. This owed largely to the selection of the city as the symbol of the lost empire by the leaders of the 1857 Rebellion, which had underlined the dangers of projecting it as a living embodiment of ‘India’. Consequently, the British emphasised the image of Delhi as a symbol of a past imperial tradition that could be re-enacted and re-lived only

through British imperial agency. This necessarily obscured from view the lived dimension of the city and transformed Delhi into a historical relic; a living museum of India's past. This perception of Delhi – engendered by a certain territorialisation of Indian history by the colonisers – also informed the attitudes of the emergent nationalist elites of India between 1858 and 1911, the zenith of the British Empire.

This chapter focuses on late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century travel accounts of Delhi by visitors from Calcutta, the quintessential 'modern' colonial city of India and Delhi's urban antithesis. It argues that the Bengali middle-class viewed Delhi through the lens of colonial modernity and, following what Nicos Poulantzas has termed the 'territorialization of history', it contends that the Bengali middle class constructed a dialectical pairing of the spaces of Calcutta and Delhi.¹ Early travellers from Calcutta perceived Delhi as a relic of Muslim authoritarianism, often dismissing it as antiquated in comparison to Calcutta's modernity. Yet as the nineteenth century progressed, the material basis of the intelligentsia changed from that of portfolio capitalists to intermediate tenure holders who failed to become a hegemonic capitalist force in Bengal.² As the Bengali middle class supplemented their incomes through work in the colonial bureaucracy, their identification of Calcutta with colonial modernity produced new doubts and a sense of alienation.³ Though Muslims remained a symbol of backwardness in these writings – a perspective undoubtedly characterised by their class position as landlords, that is, appropriators of the surplus produced by the predominantly Muslim Bengal peasantry – Delhi gradually emerged as the symbol of the glorious past of India. The cityscape of Delhi came to be seen as the graveyard of both Hindu and Muslim India, owing to the ravages of colonisation.

This chapter examines representations of Delhi in a number of Bengali *bhadralok* travelogues. It begins by discussing Bholanath Chunder's *The Travels of a Hindoo to Various Parts of Bengal and Upper India* (1869; hereafter, *Travels*), one of the first Indian travelogues written in English. Subsequently, it engages with Durgacharan Ray's *Debganer Martye Agaman (The Gods Visit Earth; hereafter, Gods)* (1880), a farcical documentation of the travels of Hindu Gods across India. The chapter concludes by discussing Nabin Chandra Sen's *Prabasher Patra (Letters from Distant Lands; hereafter, Letters)*⁴ (1892) and Dharanikanta Lahiri Chaudhuri's *Bharat Bhraman (Travels across India; hereafter, India)* (1910). These texts devote considerable attention to Delhi and, importantly, demonstrate the divergent attitudes of Calcutta's middle class towards that city. First, however, this chapter will briefly look at Delhi and Calcutta in the late nineteenth century under colonial rule.

Delhi is located between the ridges that divide the Indus-centric Punjab plains and the Gangetic plains of north India. The history of the city's urbanisation stretches back to 1052, under the Tomar ruler Anangpal. The seven cities within the region of Delhi achieved fame during the time of the Delhi Sultanate, established by Qutubuddin Aibak in 1206. Rai Pithora, the fort established by the Chauhan king Prithviraj in the twelfth century, became the centre of the city

during the early period of the Sultanate. In the later years, various Tughlaq monarchs established their own capital cities around their royal palaces. This early urbanisation impulse came to an end with the invasion of Timur in 1398 (Hambly 1986: 45–62). Subsequently, the Sayyid and Lodhi dynasties, Sher Shah Suri, and the Mughal kings all contributed to a renewed drive for urbanisation, which further contributed to the expansion and evolution of Delhi's landscape. It was in 1648, however, that Delhi gained a new status when the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan completed the new, walled city of Shahjahanabad and made Delhi the capital of his empire. This remained the modern city of Delhi until the British 'new' Delhi was completed in 1931 under the guidance of Edwin Luytens and Herbert Baker. The final years of Shahjahanabad were characterised by ravages and plunders by both foreign and Indian conquerors, such as Nadir Shah in 1739, Ghulam Qadir Rohilla in 1787 and, finally, the British army, victorious after suppressing the 1857 Rebellion.

The model of urbanisation in Delhi was driven primarily by the political impulses of ruling dynastic or capitalistic imperial regimes. Stephen Blake has focused on Shahjahanabad to highlight the symbolic significance of such a dynastic capital using his concept of 'sovereign city' (Blake 1991: 31–32), defined as the capital of a patrimonial bureaucratic empire that represents a particular early-modern state-building process in Asia (Blake 1991: 183). The sovereign city in micro-perspective, Blake notes, was an enormously extended patriarchal household of the emperor himself; the organisation and production of space within the city itself reflected the social and spatial organisation of the palace (Blake 1991: xxii–xiii). At a macro level, it was the kingdom in miniature. Drawing on Max Weber's notion of 'patrimonial realm', Blake contends that in the political characterisation of state formation, the emperor extends personal patrimonial control over the space of the kingdom through a bureaucratic arrangement where the bureaucracy was loyal to the emperor through complex military, political and economic arrangements. Shahjahanabad as a 'sovereign city', then, was an urban spatial expression of such political authority where the city acted as axis mundi, with the palace symbolising the centre of cosmic order created and validated by the presence of the emperor himself.

The idea of the Mughal state as patrimonial has been substantially revised by scholars such as Sanjay Subrahmanyam and Muzaffar Alam (Subrahmanyam & Alam 1998). However, the symbolic significance of Shahjahanabad can be asserted through the notion of loyalty not so much to the person but to the Mughal crown. The political culture of this symbolic capital of the early modern era thus provided Delhi with a special characteristic that owed particularly to the presence of the emperor as the symbolic head of the realm. Delhi retained this special status despite the eclipse of Mughal rule and the plunder of the city by Nadir Shah in 1739 and subsequently by Afghan chieftains.

In 1803, the British general Lord Lake extended British sway over the city by replacing the Marathas as the custodians of the Mughal Emperor who, in reality, had authority only over his palace (Gupta 1981: 13). Under British protection, the city witnessed a social revival. The 'White Mughals' – to borrow William

Dalrymple's evocative term – continued to support the cultural and academic fabric of Delhi, which witnessed the last efflorescence of the Indo-Persian Mughal culture (Dalrymple 2002).⁵ Many British officials became crucial participants in this process despite the gradual eclipse of orientalist scholars among the imperial bureaucratic elites. Despite the decline of the Mughal patrimonial bureaucratic empire, the city continued to survive as a living symbol of Mughal imperial culture with a benign British imperial benediction.

This culture continued to seek the accommodation of diverse religious traditions within the Mughal imperial domain.

It was during these years that the Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar continued to ban the slaughter of cows while the British sought to allow it (Gupta 1981: 10). At this time the western-educated Mughal aristocrat Syed Ahmed Khan scaled the Qutub Minar not only to decipher the script on the tower but also to prove that it was originally built by a Hindu monarch. His work, *Aasar us Sanadid (The Ruins of the Cities of Delhi)* was a first of its kind. His article was subsequently published in the Archaeological Survey of India proceedings and brought him fame and government employment. Delhi thus remained a living symbol of the syncretic Mughal culture and is commemorated in the contemporary lyrics of Mirza Ghalib.⁶ In this sense it represented the early modern cultural framework of northern India.

The 1857 Rebellion altered this balance of power. The British became convinced that Muslim aristocrats sought to restore the pre-eminence of the Mughal elites, while Delhi's Hindu bankers were loyal to them. After quelling the 1857 Rebellion, the British army murdered the Mughal princes and sent Bahadur Shah Zafar into exile; they also systematically dismantled the Muslim aristocracy. Muslim households were plundered and the prize money found its way into the pockets of Delhi army soldiers. The Muslim residents of Shahjahanabad were evicted from their homes and not allowed to return for a decade. Further, parts of the fort were destroyed; barracks were set up to house the army while Mughal palaces were occupied by British officers; the Jama Mosque became an army storehouse, and the Akbarbadi Mosque was razed to the ground. The Fatehpuri Mosque was auctioned off to Chunna Mal, a Delhi banker who had been loyal to the British during the rebellion, and eventually gifted back to the Muslims during the Durbar of 1877.

Likewise, the British replaced the old aristocratic elites of Delhi with bankers who came from Hindu and Jain money-lending families (Gupta 1981: 27, 73). These groups framed policies for the city and petitioned for the extension of the railways into Delhi. Between 1867 and 1878 the railways connected Delhi to Calcutta and the Punjab; this railway extension further destroyed Muslim habitations in the city. As colonial capitalism triumphed over the proto-capitalistic patrimonial bureaucratic imperium, the city was transformed into a town of commerce (Gupta 1981: 30, 39–49). In an ironic twist, Delhi came to be administered from Lahore, originally a city of provincial Mughal *satraps*. The new city became a museum of history for the tourists – British and Indian – brought in by the railways (Gupta 1981: 26–31). British taverns and hotels catered to tourists,

and Shahjahanabad, with its palaces, mosques and ruins, was transformed into a relic without a place in the colonial capitalist modernity of India. Delhi's transformation from a sovereign city to a nondescript trading town was complete. This museum city – an instrument of nostalgia – reminded some visitors from Calcutta of oriental despotism; others perceived it as a graveyard of Indic civilisation.

Calcutta: colonial capitalism and Hindu modernity

In contrast to Delhi, Calcutta was a thriving commercial city during the late nineteenth century. A transit point for Indian raw materials, labour for overseas colonies and manufactured products for distribution within India, it emerged as the second city of the British Empire. This period also saw the rapid industrialisation of the neighbourhood, particularly with the development of the jute industry.⁷ Jute not only provided a stimulus to the cash-starved peasant economy but also acted as a cash crop that was traded with the outside world to meet the trade deficit of the British Empire vis-à-vis the newly industrialising zones of the north Atlantic.⁸ Importantly, the rise of colonial capitalism diminished the significance of land revenue for the colonial state. It facilitated an amalgamation of banking and industrial capital through umbrella economic institutions such as managing agency houses, leading to the emergence of new Indian intermediaries such as the Marwaris – the backbone of the later Indian bourgeoisie in Bengal (Timberg 1977).

The indigenous Hindu Bengali community was, however, not directly involved in this new direction of the colonial economy. This contrasted starkly with the preceding century, when Bengali merchants acted as portfolio capitalists as well as the intellectual leaders of Bengal. For instance, Dwarkanath Tagore, Ram Mohan Roy and other members of Calcutta's Bengali mercantile community were not only intermediary capitalists but also key members of the cultural life of eighteenth-century Calcutta. Combining their Indo-Persian education with training in western knowledge systems, they helped shape a distinct cultural identity for the city. They were capitalist elites who were either directly involved with, or patrons of, cultural production. Importantly, these elites increasingly adopted the progressive bourgeois perspective on global history. They sought to fashion themselves as custodians of Indian modernity which was introduced through the agency of the colonial state. However, the depression of 1848 radically altered this socio-economic topography. Many pioneering Bengali industrialists lost their fortunes with the collapse of the Union Bank, a pivotal business organisation in Calcutta. Consequently, an entire class of indigenous entrepreneurs lost their ability to participate in the industrial development of nineteenth-century Bengal.⁹ This class of Bengalis sought pecuniary refuge in the land revenue that was guaranteed them by the Permanent Settlement.

Instituted in Bengal in 1793 by the British East India Company, the system of permanent settlement gave tenure holders ownership of the land and the right to its revenue. In return, these landlords were expected to pay an annual tax to the

British East India Company which was fixed in perpetuity. In the aftermath of 1848, the Permanent Settlement provided a secure source of income for the erstwhile merchant class (Ray 1975: 263–292; also see Ray 1979). Interestingly, this class's move towards the colonial capitalist economy veered away from instead of towards absentee landlordism. Introduced by the British to foster a rule of property in Bengal and incubate a class of improving yeomen farmers, the Permanent Settlement in effect produced an intermediate, tenure-holding social class of rentiers who survived by appropriating the surplus of the Bengal peasantry.¹⁰

This intermediary class reaped the benefits of the colonial education system and supplemented their income from land revenue by either joining the colonial bureaucracy or working in the colonial 'service sector' as lawyers, doctors, journalists, teachers and clerks. High-caste Hindu men became the overwhelming majority among professionals and landholding elites, while Muslims constituted a substantial segment of the peasant, artisanal and working classes in Calcutta as well as in the Bengal countryside.¹¹ By 1872, census reports clearly established non-Muslims as a minority in Bengal proper. As members of the colonial bureaucracy, and as professionals, this class was placed at the middle of the colonial Indian social formation. They were subordinate to their colonial masters, especially because of the racialised nature of colonial labour space. However, the middle class enjoyed a superior economic position in relation to the Indian working classes, the peasants and artisans. Further, in Bengal and elsewhere the middle class also formed the backbone of the colonial governance machinery. As a managerial class, they helped to maintain colonial domination, and aided the colonisers' appropriation of surplus value produced by the working classes even as they aspired to the position of dominance over their colonising British masters.

From the nineteenth century, periodic discontent among the working classes and peasantry on one hand, and the racist attitudes of the colonisers on the other, made this intermediary class of English-educated, upper-caste Hindu men acutely aware of their own location in the social formation of Bengal. This combination of class anxiety, demographic insecurity and a subordinate position within the colonial social hierarchy informed their quest for political modernity, marked by a putative nationalism. Over time this group adopted for themselves the appellation *bhadralok*, literally meaning 'the courteous folk', replete with connotations of refinement and culture. Moreover, this indicates that the *bhadralok* separated themselves from the *itarlok* (literally, the 'rude folk') while simultaneously positing themselves as more rational and progressive than the *abhijatlok*, the precolonial aristocracy (see Banerjee 1989).

While critical scholarship has indicated the limitations of emerging intermediary social constellations in Calcutta and their quest for modernity, little attention has been paid to their production of the space of India against the background of such insecurity.¹² Indeed, the discourses of modernity promoted by the Bengali middle class located the British colonial state space as the space of the putative Indian nation.¹³ Importantly, this class made a distinction between

the ethno-linguistic homeland, or *patria* of Bengal, and the Indo-Persian cultural space of Hindustan.¹⁴ With the development of Indian nationalism, these various homelands were seen to be accommodated under the hegemonic sign of India that represented unity in diversity.

In their self-fashioning, the Bengali middle class appropriated the colonial historiography of India pioneered by James Mill, John Stuart Mill, James Todd, Henry Elliot, and Mountstuart Elphinstone, and indeed the colonial ‘territorialisation of history’ that presented Muslims as tyrannical foreign conquerors of India.¹⁵ As the Bengali middle class shed their Indo-Persianate moorings to adopt an Anglo-vernacular sensibility, this mode of historiography, along with precolonial Indic myths and legends, constructed Hindus as the principal inhabitants of India. The relationships between Hindus and Muslims were imagined differently by various writers.

With the advent of the railways since the 1850s, the Bengali middle classes began to travel widely across the subcontinent. This growth of travel coincided with the group’s discovery of India’s nationhood and resulted in a large body of travel narratives which provided readers with a crucial way to experience the history and nationhood of India. They focused on Delhi, which became an epitome of India’s past, in contradistinction to the modernity of Calcutta. The implicit dialectical pairing of capitals became a strategy of territorialising history in which cities became a metaphor for the past – and future – nation.

Visions of Delhi in Bengali *bhadralok* travelogues

Almost all the *bhadralok* travel narratives documenting the travels of the Bengali middle class in north India focus on Delhi; however, they articulate divergent visions of the city’s past. The earlier texts follow the normative colonial logic of aligning Delhi with the Muslim imperium. They reject the city by portraying it as a symbol of Muslim tyranny and medieval backwardness, often by contrasting it with the modernity of Calcutta. The later travelogues complicate this antithesis between Delhi and Calcutta and implicitly question the assumptions regarding Delhi’s backwardness and Calcutta’s modernity. Instead, these texts project Delhi as a symbol of India’s Hindu and Muslim pasts. They transform the city into a space that articulates the loss of India’s glory resulting from British colonisation of the Indian subcontinent. The city becomes a means of experiencing, and a vehicle for expressing the narrators’ lived reality of colonisation. In other words, these later travelogues produce Delhi as a spatial metaphor for the Indian nation.

Bholanath Chunder’s *Travels* (1869) is one of the earliest Indian travel accounts written in English. It provides a detailed account of Delhi based on Chunder’s journey to the city in 1866. *Travels* presents a survey of Delhi’s built environments under different rulers, as well as the mythical city of Indraprastha, before proceeding to describe Shahjahanabad in detail. This is interspersed with accounts of historical events such as the invasions of Timur and Nadir Shah, and the 1857 Rebellion and its subsequent pacification by the British.

In his narrative, Chunder also focuses on the gradual degradation and the poverty of the Mughal court. This allows him to construct his argument of Mughal rule being emblematic of a moral degradation of Muslims. While noting that the British heaped ‘slights and insults on the head of the Moghul’, Chunder proceeds to note that the Mughal emperor and ‘his progeny went on multiplying by compound multiplication, till ... his palace, styled the paradise upon earth, became [a] ... sty, by being crowded with Sultans and Sultanas, who lay about in scores, like broods of vermin’ (Chunder 1869: 346). A loyal supporter of British rule in India, Chunder writes approvingly of the public killings of Bahadur Shah Zafar’s sons by General Hodgson after the British takeover of Delhi in 1857. Indeed, he is thankful for the end of Mughal rule. He writes:

It is well that the Great Mughal is extinct. ... No curse that has afflicted the human race has ... been so baneful as ... Mahomedan rule ... to mankind. The Moslem rose as a storm-wave to entomb all the great works of ancient power and wisdom ... and to plunge the world into a state of barbarism that has perpetuated despotism, ignorance and anarchy.

(Chunder 1869: 355)

This disparaging tone continues in Chunder’s description of Delhi, which he finds – despite its former glory – to be lacking in the ‘elements of true greatness’ (Chunder 1869: 243). It had ‘no intelligence that enlarges the mind ... no fraternizing sympathy ... no public spirit ... and no patriotic devotion’ (Chunder 1869: 244). Describing the central marketplace of Chandni Chowk, he notes that the ‘moving throng of richly-dressed natives riding on caparisoned horses, lounging on elephants, or borne ... in palankeens [sic] have passed away for ever’ (Chunder 1869: 279). However, Chunder cautions the reader against feeling too nostalgic: this may indeed be a pity for lovers of the picturesque, but ‘the British residents of Delhi probably feel more certain about their lives now that the offscourings of Bahadur Shah’s court are no longer in place’ (Chunder 1869: 279).

Shahjahanabad, for Chunder, is the ‘living city’ in contradistinction to the ‘heaps of ruins ... and tombs’ of the earlier settlements that provide the viewer (and by extension, the reader) with sermons in stone (Chunder 1869: 270). While Chunder calls Shah Jahan the first and richest monarch on earth, the emperor remains a tyrant who obtained the wealth with which he built the Mughal city ‘partly by presents, partly by purchase, and partly by plunder’. Shahjahanabad is for Chunder, ‘the city of a despot – no colleges, no hospitals, no museums, no public squares, no promenades, and no ghauts [sic]. He builds only ... for himself, and leaves the people to shift for themselves’ (Chunder 1869: 274).

Chunder also gently taunts Shah Jahan’s desire to build a new city, which he puts down to imperial whimsy. He notes that these days, money has to be made by ‘honest and life-long labours – and not by looting: ‘[The] health of the viceroy cannot be a reason ... for the building of a new City’ (Chunder 1869: 273). Any attempt to move the capital from Calcutta, Chunder observes with an

air of quiet confidence, would not only jeopardise the fortunes of the city's house owners but would also devalue the crores of rupees invested in building Fort William, the Government House, the Town Hall, the High Court, the Bank of Bengal and the Post Office. Of course, these comments appear extremely ironic in light of the British decision to shift the capital from Calcutta to Delhi a few decades later, in 1911.

Chunder ends his description of Delhi by comparing it explicitly with Calcutta. For him, this great capital of northern India undoubtedly has features of a metropolis, but Calcutta has the 'advantage in general magnificence' (Chunder 1869: 375). Delhi, Chunder claims, has nothing like Calcutta's splendid squares, and no places for driving and walking like the Maidan or the Strand (Chunder 1869: 375). The view of Delhi across the Yamuna is not, according to him, 'half so grand and striking' as the prospect of Calcutta, the 'City of Palaces', from across the Ganges (Chunder 1869: 375). Chunder notes that

it is much to be doubted whether, in its best days, Delhi had any such tasteful buildings as our Fever Hospital, our Metcalfe hall, and our classical Mint. It is not fair ... [to compare] a fallen and a rising city.

(Chunder 1869: 376)

Durga Charan Ray's *Gods* appeared in 1880, a little over a decade after the publication of Chunder's *Travels*. *Gods* belongs to the late nineteenth-century tradition of farcical imagined travelogues in Bengali. It depicts some members of the Hindu pantheon taking advantage of modern transportation systems such as railways and steamboats to traverse the expanse of the Indian subcontinent. Importantly, this tradition of writing is scornful of colonial modernity and the anglo-vernacular *babu* culture of Bengal it engendered. This self-ridicule can be understood as an attempt to negotiate an upper-caste, upper-class male Hindu identity with the fact of colonial capitalist modernity.

In *Gods*, the Hindu gods Brahma, Vishnu (Narayan), Varun and Indra visit the historic spaces of Delhi and narrate its history through events associated with these architectural landmarks. Their itinerary mimics that of their more earthly Bengali *bhadralok* followers. They begin by visiting the Purana Killa area built by Sher Shah Suri, purported to be the site of Yudisthir's capital, Indraprastha. After this, the gods proceed to the Qutub complex, which was the centre of the city during the Delhi Sultanate. Subsequently, they travel around Shahjahanabad and visit the Mughal fort and its palaces, as well as the Jama Mosque, before leaving the city for the north Indian pilgrim town of Mathura. As the protagonists of this narrative encounter the various sites, they discuss them among themselves, their exchange fusing empirical facts with traditional myths to generate a sense of Delhi's history. This construction of popular historical memory by the Bengali *bhadralok* class is crucial as it indicates their attempts to interpret India's past through a specific territorialisation of history. Interestingly, though written only a few decades after 1857, there is no mention of the Rebellion in the narrative.

In *Gods*, the section on Delhi opens with Varun explaining to the other gods the reason for the presence of temples, mosques and churches in Delhi. He notes that the city was the capital of India's Hindu and Muslim empires and continued to be the seat of British Indian political authority (Ray 1984: 45).¹⁶ He therefore re-inscribes Delhi as the imperial centre of India. Varun also comments that present-day Delhi was located on the site of Yudisthir's capital city, Indraprastha. He observes, further, that the kings of the Anga, Vanga and Kalinga regions came to pay tribute to the emperor Yudisthir at Indraprastha when he performed the *Rajsooya Yagna*, or fire sacrifice (Ray 1984: 46). The spaces of Anga, Vanga and Kalinga roughly correspond to what would come to be known, respectively, as Bihar, Bengal and Orissa in the colonial cartographic imagination. Published just over a decade after the Delhi Durbar of 1877, this appears to be a veiled reference to that event. Moreover, Varun's mention of these spaces not only draws upon the precolonial notion of ethno-linguistic homelands, but also situates them in relation to Delhi. In other words, it replicates the hegemonic identity of Delhi as the centre of Indian space.

Gods combines historical events with mythical ones in order to construct a meta-narrative of Indian history. For instance, answering Brahma's query about the provenance of the Koh-i-noor diamond, Varun glibly conflates it with the famed Syamantak gem (Ray 1984: 53–54). Mentioned in the *Vishnu Puran* and the *Bhagavat Puran*, the Syamantak gem belonged to the Sun god, Surya, and was supposedly invested with magical powers. Surya's gift of the gem to Satrajit, a *Yadav* nobleman, begins the jewel's earthly life. The *Puranic* narratives describe its theft and subsequent recovery by the mythical Krishna. This equation of the Koh-i-noor diamond with the Syamantak gem, and the association of the historical events around the Mughal diamond with the mythical stories of the *Puranic* gem are, of course, significant. It allows for a certain classicisation of tradition through which a larger historical narrative can be constructed.¹⁷ According to such a narrative, Mughal India (and indeed, British India) is made a function of an earlier Hindu India. In this schema, the Koh-i-noor diamond, whether in British or Mughal hands, becomes a form of the original Hindu Syamantak gem; the court of the Hindu king Yudisthir becomes the original archetype of the Mughal court or the Delhi Durbar of 1877. Importantly, this transforms the Mughal city of Shahjahanabad – or any of the other urban complexes of Delhi built by other rulers or the British – into belated versions of the originary space of Indraprastha. Crucially, this move projects Hindus as the original inhabitants of Delhi, and by extension, the Indian subcontinent.

In *Gods*, this strategy of positing the primacy of Hindus is coupled with a process of othering Muslims. Brahma, for instance, is scared at the sight of Muslim women in burkhas; he is calmed after it is explained to him that it is a Muslim social custom (Ray 1984: 50). Likewise, he is also stupefied at the sight of Muslim men performing namaaz (Ray 1984: 55). These Muslim customs are presented as incomprehensible and strange, with the aim of provoking laughter among the readers. This humour, however, also has the effect of distancing the subjects of the narrative, reifying them into antiquated and passive objects for consumption by the reader.

At the time of their departure from Delhi, Vishnu proceeds to purchase tickets for their outward journey but comes running back from the counter without them. When asked about the reason for his frantic return, Vishnu says that he could not bear the bad breath of the people at the counter; the smell of garlic emanating from their mouths had made him nauseous (Ray 1984: 56). This singling out of garlic as the cause for bad breath draws upon the common Bengali Hindu misapprehension that Muslim food is laden with fried garlic, onions and ginger. Moreover, it attempts to portray Muslims as unhygienic and unclean.

The lack of cleanliness and poor hygiene of Muslims are further underlined by referencing the Muslim custom of halal. During their journey through the city, the gods see a dilapidated mosque by the roadside. From within it, a Muslim slits the throat of a hen and puts it out on the street through the door. The hen flaps about in pain and lands at the foot of Brahma. At this, Brahma stands aside, muttering a word of disgust (Ray 1984: 54).

This extract projects halal as an essential feature of Muslim identity by situating the act within the premises of the mosque in Delhi. This alignment of the mosque, the city of Delhi and the act of 'brutality' in the narrative can be read as symbolic of Muslim culture in India at large; the description carries within it an implicit characterisation of Muslim daily life and the culture in general as cruel and disgusting. Interestingly, neither Brahma nor Vishnu – respectively considered the creator and preserver of life in the Hindu pantheon – save the hen. When Vishnu asks Brahma why he did not save the hen, he replies that he cannot overturn the dictates of fate. The god's acknowledgement of this is, of course, significant as it articulates the Bengali *bhadralok's* sense of powerlessness in the face of recent history, and the class anxiety about their lack of historical agency.

The question of gender inflects the spatial conception of Delhi in significant ways. During the gods' visit to Shahjahanabad, they see the constructions of the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan. At this, Vishnu comments on the similarity between the Muslim emperors and women. He notes that the badshahs, instead of saving their revenue, seem to spend it on thrones and mosques, just as women spend money on jewellery and clothes (Ray 1984: 52). Importantly, women here are not labelled along ethnic or religious lines; instead the 'natural' wastefulness of the female gender becomes the means for expressing the profligacy of the Mughals. The question of women also becomes important in the gods' critique of Calcutta's modernity. While Varun notes that the Mughals and the Muslim nawabs of Bengal kept their women under *purdah*, he also pokes fun at the Bengali babus who 'not being satisfied with keeping their families in their street-side houses with many windows, take their wives to enjoy the air of Calcutta in open carriages' (Ray 1984). This, then, is not just a critique of the Muslim medievalism of Delhi, but also structures the angst against the colonial capitalist modernity of Calcutta.

The notion of Delhi as a museum is also prevalent throughout the narrative of *Gods*. At the outset, Vishnu sees his image among the ruins of the Qutub complex (Ray 1984: 47). Noting that this is a museum of Delhi's past, he rues the fate that has placed his idol in such a place. Later, observing the prevalence

of graves in the city, he comments that Delhi must be filled with *mamdo* and *mamdi* ghosts (Ray 1984: 53). *Mamdo* and *mamdi* ghosts abound in Bengali folklore and refer, respectively, to male and female Muslim ghosts. This, of course, aligns Delhi with a Muslim past. It is important to note that Vishnu's point of view reveals a Hindu perspective that sees the Muslim past as dead and buried; the city's Hindu past – evidenced by his own idol at the ruins – is acknowledged as living, if scarcely so. In effect, this underlines the Bengali *bhadralok's* attempt to recuperate and enliven what it sees as his own past.

Nabin Chandra Sen's poetical works define the Bengali canon of the late nineteenth century. Considered one of the most important literary figures of Bengal of his time, he was prominent in the years between the death of Michael Madhusudan Dutt and the rise to prominence of Rabindranath Tagore. Written a decade after Ray's *Gods*, Sen's *Letters* (1892; Sen 1974: 65–118) portrays Delhi as the site of history that conveys the rise and fall of empires. Combining myth and history, Sen narrates the past of Delhi, where legends of the *Mahabharat*, the preachings of the Buddha, the kingdom of Ashok, the kingdom of Pritviraj Chauhan and the Mughal Empire all intermingle to form part of one unfolding saga (Sen 1974: 82–83).

Significantly for Sen, Delhi has been the 'capital of India through centuries and from time immemorial' (Sen 1974: 87). This articulation of the space of India and its symbolic centre is important as it highlights the emergent awareness of a nation-space among the Bengali middle class. The city is not only the centre of the putative nation for Sen, but also the symbol of the nation under the yoke of the colonisers. This is aptly conveyed by his image of the city as the 'great cremation ground of Hindu empires, the graveyard of Muslim imperium, and the playground of Fate' (Sen 1974: 82). In his travelogue, Sen details his elation at the thought of Delhi's past greatness, and despairs at its loss (Sen 1974).

Sen is unlike Chunder and Ray in so far as he reserves his barbs for the British colonisers and speaks about the Mughals in glowing terms. He calls the British 'heartless' for turning an Afghan general's tomb in the Qutub complex into a bungalow (Sen 1974: 84). Sen also comments on the travesty of fate that transformed the descendants of the great Mughals into British pensioners. He follows this up by praising the Indians for the 1857 Rebellion. The British General Hodgson – who murdered Bahadur Shah's sons in the aftermath of 1857 – is for Sen a blood-thirsty specimen of humankind who 'showed how humans could be worse than animals when their baser instincts are aroused' (Sen 1974: 88).

Likewise, the Mughals – as symbols of a precolonial India – are worthy of special respect for Sen. He writes that he paid his respects at the tombs of Akbar and Shah Jahan's daughter, Jahan Ara, for they were exemplary individuals (Sen 1974). In fact, in another virtuoso display of combining myth and history, Sen even claims the Mughals belonged to the *Yadav* clan, whose most famous member is the mythical Krishna, worshipped by Hindus as a god (Sen 1974: 84). The construction of this genealogy of the Mughals is significant as it once again foregrounds the Hindu classicisation of tradition. It posits Hindus as the original inhabitants of India. Moreover, by positing the Hindu identity as hegemonic

in the context of India, it positions Hinduism as the civil religion of India.¹⁸ This construction of a hegemonic Hindu identity is critical for Sen's articulation of an inclusive vision of India, and Indians. For Sen, then, Delhi as the symbol of the Indian nation reflects this inclusive ethos.

This inclusionary impulse is further highlighted in Sen's recurrent description of Delhi as both graveyard and cremation ground. The juxtaposition of Hindu and Muslim funerary sites indicates his attempt to construct a sense of shared oppression for the two communities under the British. Moreover, it underlines Sen's gesture at producing a shared space for Hindus and Muslims. Again, Delhi stands in as a symbol of the lost (and future) Indian nation. It is a space – like India – that belongs to both Hindus and Muslims; it is a space to which Hindus and Muslims belong.

Dharani Kanta Lahiri Chaudhuri was the scion of a great Hindu landholding family from the predominantly Muslim district of Mymansingha in eastern Bengal. Though a landlord, he trained as a doctor. Lahiri Chaudhuri travelled widely and wrote Bengali with a hint of drama, following the style of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. His high professional standing, well known erudition, fabulous wealth and deep political loyalty to the British Raj earned him a berth in the Indian Legislative Chamber. His travelogue, *India*, was published in 1910, a year before the British shifted the capital from Calcutta to Delhi. A narrative rich in historical and ethnographic details, it claims to have been inspired by his desire to know and experience the natural and man-made beauties of India (Chaudhuri 1910: Preface). *India*, as its name suggests, documents Lahiri Chaudhuri's travels across the Indian subcontinent. It is modelled on the Grand Tour of continental Europe, popular with British travellers since the eighteenth century. His narrative devotes considerable space to the city of Delhi, which he portrays as a peerless Indian city (Chaudhuri 1910: 134).

Chaudhuri's description of Delhi opens with the panoramic view of the city's surroundings from his rail car. In a description that recalls Sen, he imagines the old mosques and temples and ruins of palaces as a crematorium for India's glorious past (Chaudhuri 1910: 134). These fleeting images inspire in Chaudhuri thoughts about Delhi's history and marauding invaders such as Nadir Shah and Ahmad Shah Abdali (Chaudhuri 1910: 134). Interestingly, in his description of the cruel invaders of the city he fails to mention the pillaging British Army and its attendant destruction of Shahjahanabad in the aftermath of the 1857 Rebellion. His description of Delhi is laced with nostalgia for its lost glory; however, as Chaudhuri proceeds, it becomes apparent that Delhi is little more than a living museum of history for him. After reaching Delhi, Chaudhuri briefly mentions the everyday city, noting that although the ancient goddess of prosperity has deserted it, Delhi still retains a sense of comfort and wellbeing. Describing the city he sees, Chaudhuri mentions the rows of stores, Indian and European hotels, inns and Turkish baths, and the Queen's Park opposite the station (Chaudhuri 1910: 135). These for him are markers of Delhi's contemporary glory.

Subsequently, he proceeds to provide his readers with an extended survey of the city's history, following the normative colonial mode of narrating Delhi's

history based on architectural landmarks. Like the British narratives of Delhi, this too fetishises the city, excluding from its ambit the lived social relations that produce the cityspace. Moreover, Lahiri Chaudhuri cites from a wide variety of British and European sources during his re-telling of the city's past. Not only does this claim, implicitly, authenticity for his narrative, it also uses British historiography to legitimise his accounts of Delhi's past.

Unlike Chunder and Ray, Chaudhuri does not present the Mughals as medieval tyrants and oriental despots. He cites a British source to underline that Shah Jahan, the founder of Shahjahanabad, 'reigned not so much as a King over his subjects, but rather as a father over his family and children' (Chaudhuri 1910: 138). However, Chaudhuri's narrative repeatedly omits any mention of the British impact on the city. In fact, during his visit to Shahjahanabad, he elides over its plunder by the British forces in the aftermath of the 1857 Rebellion. He cautiously notes that the 'diamonds, pearls and rubies that adorned the ceiling and floor of the Hall of General Audience [Diwan-i-Am] of the Mughal fort (the "Red Fort") at Shahjahanabad were now missing. The British government has replaced them with colored glass' (Chaudhuri 1910: 140). He also observes that the gold plaque that extolled the virtues of the palace was replaced with a brass one by the British (Chaudhuri 1910: 141). As a loyal subject of the British crown, Lahiri Chaudhuri avoids mentioning these as acts of active pillage by the colonisers.

Chaudhuri quotes a Persian couplet regarding the beauty of the Mughal palace at Shahjahanabad: 'If there is paradise on earth, then it is here, it is here, it is here.' However, concluding his description of Delhi, Lahiri Chaudhuri displays his colonised subjectivity by relying on the poetry of Lord Byron to articulate the (lost) greatness of Delhi. Reworking lines from Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, he writes, 'Oh *Delhi!* my country city of the soul!' (Chaudhuri 1910: 168). In this configuration, Chaudhuri replaces Rome with Delhi, once again attesting to Delhi's status as the spatial metaphor of the putative Indian nation-space. Yet, this imagining itself manifests the stranglehold of colonial knowledge systems as it underlines the epistemic colonisation of the Indian subject.

Conclusion

This chapter deals with the interaction between the idea of a putative Indian nation-space and various readings of Delhi's history. It examines the place of Delhi as an ancient capital city within that imagined nation-space of India. It studies the representations of Delhi, the capital of the Mughal Empire, by the Bengali intelligentsia from Calcutta, the capital of the British Empire in India during the nineteenth century. Those who were committed to the notion of colonial modernity and who remained influenced by the emerging colonial historiography of India viewed Delhi as the antithesis of modernity and representative of the oriental despotism of earlier Muslim dynasties.

As these narratives demonstrate, their authors combined the progressive historiography of India produced by the colonisers with indigenous myths and

legends. This underlines the processes through which Indian nationalism emerged through the interactions and interpenetrations of discourses and spatialities, both indigenous and colonial. Delhi remained at the heart of the imagination of the Indian nation-space. The city was conceived as the representative symbol of, often divergent, threads of national history, significantly informing and impacting the debates around who did (or did not) belong to the putative national space; and to whom that space belonged. Crucially, these travel writers engaged with the question of nationalism within the limits imposed, and pressures exerted, by the socio-economic and ideological structures of colonialism. A strand of the homespun notion of Hindu nationalism incorporated and synthesized the claims of colonial modernity to regard Delhi as specifically Muslim, and therefore irredeemably medieval and barbaric. And as the country's Hindu Right continue to scream out about India being a Hindu country, it is evident that some of these ideas continue to haunt the imagination of the Indian nation-space and the question of who is (or is not) 'truly' Indian.

Notes

- 1 According to Poulantzas, the state establishes a peculiar relationship between history and territory, between spatial and temporal aspects of nation formation. He notes that the capitalist state marks out frontiers when it constitutes what is within, the people-nation, by homogenising the before and after of the content of this enclosure. National unity or modern unity thereby becomes the historicity of a territory and territorialisation of a history – in short, a territorial national tradition concretised in the nation state, the markings of a territory became indicators of history that are written into the state. See Poulantzas (2000: 114).
- 2 According to Sanjay Subrahmanyam, portfolio capitalists comprised a group of persons who gradually emerged into prominence from the second half of the sixteenth century, eventually assuming formidable proportions in the first half of the seventeenth century. These persons, who we have termed 'portfolio capitalists', occupied a shadowy middle ground between the state and the productive economy, and combined a role in the fiscal structure with participation in inland trade, currency dealing, movements of bills of exchange, and even seaborne trade on a quite considerable scale. See Subrahmanyam (1990: 355).
- 3 The Bengali middle class's identification with, and alienation from, Calcutta is best reflected in Sinha's *Hutom Pyanchar Noksha* (1862), which provides a series of satirical vignettes about nineteenth-century Calcutta life. See Sinha (2008).
- 4 A note on translation: 'prabash' in Bengali refers to spaces in the Indian subcontinent that lie outside the ethno-linguistic homeland of Bengal. There exists no equivalent word in the English language. Since it refers to places within the spatial conception of India and not to foreign spaces, we have translated it as 'distant lands'.
- 5 Dalrymple highlights the story of James Achilles Kirkpatrick, the British resident at Hyderabad who married an Indian and embraced Islam. He also questioned many of the decisions of his superiors. In the twilight years of Mughal rule, Delhi too had its share of such characters. Ochterlony, an Indianised Englishman of Delhi, had 13 wives and was popularly known to the locals as Loony Akhtar. For details, see Gupta (1981: 10).
- 6 For details, see Prigarina (2000).
- 7 For details, see Basu (2004).
- 8 For details, see Goswami (1991). Also see Bose (1993).

- 9 For details, see King (1976). For later developments, see Misra (1999).
- 10 For intellectual antecedents of the Permanent Settlement, see Guha (1963). For the effects of the Permanent Settlement, see Islam (1979).
- 11 For details regarding the composition of the artisanal classes of Calcutta, see McPherson (1974).
- 12 The social and intellectual history of Calcutta has attracted enormous critical attention. Prominent among these works are Chakrabarty (2000); Sarkar (1999); Chatterjee (1993); Kaviraj (1993).
- 13 Manu Goswami has pointed out how colonial rulers created a homogeneous economic space of India and delineated a process of territorialisation of history within it. However, she refrains from analysing how this space was appropriated as a lived space from a historical perspective. See Goswami (2004). For a different interpretation of the process of the production of space, see Basu (2010: 53–79).
- 14 We follow Chris Bayly in our understanding of patria as a precolonial conception of space that is coeval with the notion of an ethno-linguistic homeland. See Bayly (1997).
- 15 For the impact of James Mill's ideas on Indian history, see Majeed (1992). For the cumulative impact of these scholars, see Dirks (1993). For an analysis of Elliott's engagement with Islam in Indian history, see Eaton (1993) and for Todd's influence on nationalist imagination of Indian history, see Peabody (1996: 185–220). For an analysis of the role of historiography in informing Hindu–Muslim relationships, see Basu and Das (2005).
- 16 All citations from the Bengali texts are the authors' translations as there exists no known English translation. Page numbers refer to the original Bengali text.
- 17 For an elaboration of the idea of 'classicization of tradition', see Chatterjee (1993: 72–75).
- 18 For a detailed discussion on the construction of Hinduism as the civil religion of India, see Banerjee and Basu (forthcoming).

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9 The multilingual city of Bombay and the formation of linguistic states, 1947–60*

Riho Isaka

This chapter examines the way in which Bombay state was reorganised after the independence of India and what influence this process had on the social and political situation of Bombay city. Although the Indian government conducted a large-scale reorganisation of states based on linguistic differences in 1956, it was not until 1960 that Bombay state was divided into Maharashtra and Gujarat. This was mainly because there were conflicting opinions on the position of Bombay city, namely whether it should be included in the linguistic state of Maharashtra, if the state were to be created. While there had been a demand among the Marathi-speaking elite for the creation of Maharashtra with Bombay as its capital,¹ there was strong opposition to this idea, mainly among the Gujarati-speaking elite in and outside the city. They argued that Bombay was a multilingual city and was connected historically, economically and socially not only with Marathi-speaking areas but also with Gujarati-speaking ones. While repeatedly rejecting the idea of including Bombay in Maharashtra, the Indian government suggested alternative solutions, which caused serious disturbances. This chapter will examine in detail various ideas of the city presented in this process by different groups of people, and show how the notion of Bombay as a city for Marathi speakers increased its influence in the late 1950s. This development not only led to the birth of Maharashtra in its present form, but also made an important impact on Bombay politics after 1960. By examining this process from the perspectives of different communities and groups, in particular those who were opposed to the inclusion of Bombay into Maharashtra, this chapter tries to understand the implications that the formation of linguistic states had for a large city like Bombay, which was bound to be multilingual and cosmopolitan and continued to be so even after it became part of a linguistic state.

The idea of linguistic provinces and the city of Bombay

The demands for the redistribution of provinces on a linguistic basis had already begun among the elite in several regions of India in the late nineteenth century. Under the influence of English education, the elite in these regions took an active interest in reforming their vernacular languages and developing literature based on what they considered as the ‘western’ model. In this process, they articulated

their identities based on languages that were associated with specific regions. In many cases the 'regions' they discussed in this context did not correspond with existing administrative units, and it was not long before the elite began to demand the reorganisation of provinces based on linguistic differences. In western India, this demand began to be expressed by Marathi-speaking intellectuals as early as the late nineteenth century. For instance, in 1891, an editorial in a Marathi paper, *Kesari*, edited by B.G. Tilak, criticised the situation in which the Marathi-speaking people were divided into different provinces and princely states (Phadke 1979: 66, King 1998: 59).

The Indian National Congress also began to pay attention to the issue of the reorganisation of provinces at the time of the partition of Bengal in 1905 (King 1998: 59, Schwartzberg 2009: 143). In 1920, the Congress officially accepted the principle of 'linguistic provinces' in its Nagpur session and accordingly decided to form the Provincial Congress Committees. The so-called 'Congress provinces' created at that time were, however, significantly different in shape from the linguistic states that were to be formed in postcolonial India; for example, the territories of princely states were excluded from the Congress provinces. In the case of Marathi-speaking areas in British India, it should be noted that they were divided into as many as four Congress provinces, namely the City of Bombay, Maharashtra, Central Provinces and Berar (*Report of the Thirty-fifth Session of the Indian National Congress*, 1920: 109–110).

The fact that the city of Bombay was given the status of a separate Congress province presents a clear contrast to other presidency towns, that is, Calcutta and Madras, which were included in the Congress provinces of Bengal and Madras, respectively. This was partly because the Marathi speakers formed only half of the entire population in the city, while the Gujarati speakers formed more than 20 per cent (Mead & Macgregor 1912: 164). However, other reasons, which were related to the way in which Bombay developed after it came under British rule in the seventeenth century, seem to be more important. The East India Company, in the process of developing Bombay as the centre of trade and commerce, encouraged the trading communities in Gujarat, such as the Parsis, Vaniyas (Baniyas) and Bohras, to move to Bombay. They came in large numbers and played an important role in its economic activities (Dobbin 1972). From the early nineteenth century, with its victory over the Marathas, the British further developed Bombay as the capital of the Bombay presidency ('Bombay province' after 1935), consisting of the Marathi-, Gujarati- and Kannada-speaking regions, to which the Sindhi-speaking region was later added. Bombay city thus became the centre not only of trade and commerce, but also of administration and education for all these regions. The elite from the different linguistic communities came here to receive higher education and became involved in social reform movements, cultural activities and then political activities, which, from the end of the nineteenth century contributed to the rise of the nationalist movement. It should also be noted that from the late nineteenth century, the growth of industry such as the cotton industry attracted a large number of Marathi labourers, who migrated from the hinterland. The population of the city, which was only 10,000

at the end of the seventeenth century, expanded to 800,000 in the late nineteenth century.²

For the Gujarati elite in the colonial period, Bombay was an important centre for their economic, social and cultural activities.³ They occupied a dominant position in commerce and industry. Those from elite families in Gujarat came to look for opportunities for higher education and better jobs. The Gujarati publishing industry began to develop in Bombay from the early nineteenth century, before it started in other places. Various Gujarati social reform organisations and literary associations were also founded; among them, Bombay was considered almost as part of Gujarat.

From the middle of the 1940s, with the prospect of independence, the elite in several regions in India began to make more vocal demands for the creation of linguistic provinces. In the Marathi-speaking region, the demand for Samyukta Maharashtra (United Maharashtra) was expressed in the Maharashtra Sahitya Sammelan and the Maharashtra Unification Conference, which were both held in 1946 (Palshikar 2007: 31–32, Samyukta Maharashtra Parishad 1954: iii). The latter was chaired by a Congress leader, Shankarrao Deo. As a result of this conference, an all-party organisation, the Samyukta Maharashtra Parishad (SMP), was formed, which expanded to have as many as 13,803 members by the end of October 1946 (Phadke 1979: 74). It became the main organisation leading the Samyukta Maharashtra movement.

In contrast with this development among the Marathi speakers, there was hardly any political movement for the creation of a separate province of Gujarat before independence. Although some Gujarati intellectuals began to stress the unity of the Gujarati-speaking territory (which they sometimes called ‘Maha Gujarat’),⁴ which was at the time divided into a part of Bombay province and many princely states, they showed little interest in the idea of a separate province for Gujaratis. It might be partly because in Gujarat, where the nationalist movement under the leadership of Gandhi had a great influence on society, the elite was generally hesitant to organise a political movement based on their linguistic/regional identity. A more important reason, however, seems to be their attachment to the city of Bombay. As described above, this city occupied an important position for various activities among Gujaratis. It is likely that those who had strong links with Bombay preferred not to change the current form of Bombay state to avoid the possibility of losing their claim on Bombay.

The debates over Bombay after independence

Although, as mentioned above, the Congress had already accepted the principle of linguistic provinces in 1920, when it took power after independence its leading politicians, including Nehru and Patel, showed their reluctance to reorganise provinces accordingly.⁵ They feared that it would weaken the unity and stability of India, which had only recently gone through great confusion and tragedy because of partition. Yet, in response to the increasing demands for the creation of linguistic provinces in several regions, a commission was appointed

by the Constituent Assembly in 1947 to study the desirability of creating the states of Andhra, Karnataka, Kerala and Maharashtra.

The appointment of the commission, officially called the Linguistic Provinces Commission but commonly known as the Dar Commission, triggered active debates in different parts of India. In western India, as expected, the future of Bombay became one of the major issues of debate. In August 1948, a meeting of some Congress members of the Bombay Legislature passed a resolution that declared their support for *Samyukta Maharashtra*, which included Bombay. In the same year, B.R. Ambedkar, the then Minister of Law in the Government of India, individually submitted a memorandum to the Dar Commission in which he strongly objected to the idea of making Bombay city a separate administrative unit, arguing that Maharashtra and Bombay were 'one and integral' (Ambedkar 1948: 39–40).⁶ The SMP also submitted a memorandum, demanding the creation of Maharashtra state and insisting that Bombay city be part of Maharashtra.⁷

A few organisations in Bombay city, such as the Indian Merchants' Chamber and the Bombay Committee, however, presented to the Commission their strong objections to the inclusion of Bombay in Maharashtra.⁸ The Bombay Committee, claiming to represent different communities in the city, argued that the creation of new provinces be postponed in the wider interests of the country and that if, however, the reorganisation of provinces on a linguistic basis was to take place, Bombay be constituted as a separate province 'on the strength of political, economic, strategic and cultural considerations and its cosmopolitan and multi-lingual character' (Bombay Committee 1948: 26). This organisation, dominated by Gujarati industrialists and businessmen, also stressed that Bombay owed its development to 'all communities, such as Parsis, Gujaratis, Cutchis, including Khojas and Memons, Maharashtrians, Canarese, Tamilians, Telugus and Christians, including even the foreign settlers' (Bombay Committee 1948: 9). It expressed the opinion that the Marathi-speaking population actually constituted only 36 per cent and that, from the viewpoint of trade, commerce and industry in the city, the dominant language was Gujarati (Bombay Committee 1948: 16–17).

The Dar Commission also received a memorandum on this issue from an influential Gujarati politician, K.M. Munshi, in which he criticised 'linguism' and the demands for the creation of linguistic provinces.⁹ Regarding the case of Bombay province, he too argued that Bombay should be made into a centrally administered area if the province was to be divided. To support this view, he emphasised the historical, cultural and economic unity of Gujarat, North Konkan and Bombay city and the contributions of the Gujaratis to the growth of the city (Munshi 1948: 18–51).¹⁰ If the city was handed over to Maharashtra, Munshi argued, its non-Marathi-speaking majority would be subjected to the 'political domination of aggressive linguism' (Munshi 1948: 50).

The Dar Commission submitted its report to the Constituent Assembly in December 1948. This report concluded that the formation of provinces on linguistic considerations was not in the larger interests of India. As to Bombay city, the commission was of the opinion that it should be kept outside the 'vortex of

linguistic politics' (*Report of the Linguistic Provinces Commission* 1948: 13). Soon afterward, the Congress also appointed its own committee to examine the question of linguistic provinces. The committee, officially called the Linguistic Provinces Committee but generally known as the JVP committee, reached more or less the same conclusions as those of the Dar Commission (*Report of the Linguistic Provinces Committee* 1949). However, the situation surrounding Bombay changed significantly after Andhra state was founded in 1953 as a central government response to disturbances in the region during the previous year. These disturbances occurred as a result of the death of a Telugu leader, Potti Sriramalu, who had been fasting to demand a separate state of Andhra.¹¹ The government, while creating Andhra state, also appointed the States Reorganisation Commission, chaired by Fazl Ali, to re-examine the issues of linguistic states. Again the issue of Bombay city became the subject of heated debates among different individuals and organisations in western India.

While the SMP again submitted a memorandum to the committee to demand the creation of Maharashtra, which included Bombay (Samyukta Maharashtra Parishad 1954), the Bombay Citizens' Committee (BCC), previously known as the Bombay Committee, also repeated its objection to its inclusion in Maharashtra (Bombay Citizens' Committee 1954). Among the members of the committee were leading figures in Indian commerce and industry, such as Purshottamdas Thakurdas, J.R.D. Tata and Rameshwardas Birla. The members of the committee consisted mainly of Gujaratis, Parsis, Marwaris and Muslim mercantile communities from Gujarat (Stern 1970: 45–46). The Committee frankly expressed its fear that the protagonists of Samyukta Maharashtra would utilise the resources of the city for the development of Maharashtra, even to the extent of diverting industries from the city of Bombay to Maharashtra under the name of decentralisation (Bombay Citizens' Committee, 1954: 27). It quoted the words of a Marathi leader, G.V. Deshmukh, in which he asked whether Maharashtrians were content to play a secondary role in their own city. From the perspective of the BCC, it was highly likely that the inclusion of Bombay in Maharashtra would directly affect Bombay's economic activities and their lives.

Along with the BCC, several other non-Marathi organisations in Bombay and Gujarat expressed their views that the present Bombay state should not be divided on a linguistic basis and that, if it were to be divided, Bombay should form a separate administrative unit.¹² These organisations include the All-India Sindwork Merchants' Association, the Parsi Federal Council, the Bombay Pradesh Congress Committee,¹³ the Gujarati Sahitya Parishad, the Gujarat Pradesh Congress Committee, the Maha Gujarat Sima Samiti (the Great Gujarat Boundary Committee) and the Indian Merchants' Chamber. It seems that, on the issue of Bombay, opinions were thus clearly divided between the Marathi elite and non-Marathi elites in western India.

However, outside Bombay a somewhat different idea began to gain support among some sections of the Gujarati elite. The Maha Gujarat Parishad, founded in 1952 in Vallabh Vidyanagar, a town in Kheda district, argued in its memorandum that the Gujarat region had been exploited historically by Maharashtra and

that 'the common man of Gujarat' now felt that without the formation of Gujarat, his vital problems could not be solved (Maha Gujarat Parishad 1954: 56). This memorandum seems to indicate that by then the idea of a separate state for the Gujaratis had begun to attract some portions of the elite in north and central Gujarat, who were likely to benefit from this administrative change. As to the city of Bombay, however, the Maha Gujarat Parishad was also of the opinion that it should not be included in Maharashtra (Maha Gujarat Parishad 1954: 77).

The States Reorganisation Commission submitted its report in 1955. It admitted that the demand for a united Maharashtra, in which Bombay was included, had already 'gathered considerable momentum' (*Report of the States Reorganisation Commission* 1955: 112). However, it also observed that important sections of public opinion in the Marathi-speaking districts of Madhya Pradesh did not subscribe to the ideal of Samyukta Maharashtra, and thus it proposed that these districts form a separate state of 'Maha Vidarbha'. In regard to the problem of Bombay city, the commission concluded that the special position of Bombay should be recognised, taking into account the mixed population of the city and the 'views and apprehensions of the minor language groups' (*Report of the States Reorganisation Commission* 1955: 116). Having examined various possibilities, the Commission proposed that Bombay state be reconstituted as a bilingual state. According to this proposal, the reconstituted state of Bombay would comprise the areas of the existing Bombay state minus the Abu Road *taluk* of the Banaskantha district (which was to be merged into Rajasthan) and the Kannada region (to be merged into Mysore), plus Marathi-speaking Marathwada (then included in Hyderabad) and Gujarati-speaking Saurashtra and Kutch.

The 1956 disturbances in Bombay

The central government, however, soon began to examine another alternative in response to the objection of the Maharashtra Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC) to the above proposal. This alternative, which was called the three-state formula, was to create Maharashtra, Gujarat and Bombay city as separate administrative units. In spite of the fact that the MPCC opposed this proposal even more strongly, in November 1955 the Congress High Command decided to create the following three states: (1) Maharashtra, including Vidarbha and Marathwada; (2) Gujarat, including Saurashtra and Kutch; and (3) the City of Bombay.

This three-state formula was received with strong resentment by the supporters of the Samyukta Maharashtra movement. While the Marathi-speaking Congress members were negotiating with the central government, the leadership of the movement began to pass into the hands of leftist politicians. They projected this movement as a fight against the Congress and Congress-allied capitalists. On 18 November, when the Chief Minister of Bombay State, Morarji Desai, moved the resolution to create three states in the Bombay Legislative Assembly,¹⁴ a procession was organised by the leftist leaders to protest against this resolution. Another large-scale procession, organised three days later, led to a clash

between the crowd and the police near Flora Fountain in which the police opened fire, killing demonstrators. There were disturbances afterwards in different parts of the city, including attacks on buses and trams (Phadke 1979: 135–138, Palshikar 2007: 55–60).¹⁵ The ‘battle for Bombay’ thus began to affect the lives of a wider range of citizens.

The incident of the police opening fire immediately increased the tension between Marathi and Gujarati politicians. While the former criticised the police and the state government for the loss of lives, the latter blamed the leaders of the Samyukta Maharashtra movement for the disturbances.¹⁶ The supporters of Samyukta Maharashtra claimed that the Gujarati Chief Minister, Morarji Desai, represented Gujarati ‘vested interests’ and thus protected these interests, to the cost of the Marathi people. The debates over the status of Bombay now began to be interpreted by the advocates of the Samyukta Maharashtra movement as a fight between the ‘Marathi masses’ and the ‘Gujarati capitalists’. In this context, questions such as which linguistic community Bombay ‘originally’ belonged to and whose interests should be protected were also openly debated.

On 16 January 1956, the Indian government announced the creation of the states of Maharashtra and Gujarat and the placement of Bombay city under central administration. This was immediately followed by a series of large-scale disturbances in the city, which continued for nearly a week. Buses and trams were attacked, and shops, offices and houses were looted; a curfew was announced and a large number of police were called out to quell the riots.¹⁷ This time there were attacks on Gujarati shops and houses, as a result of which a number of Gujarati residents were forced to move to safer places within the city and outside of it. According to an article in the *Times of India* dated 22 January, 400 men, women and children had sailed for Kutch-Mandvi the previous day, and another ship was to sail that day with over 600 evacuees. The booking offices of the Bombay Steam Navigation Company were crowded with people ‘anxious to leave the city’.¹⁸ Passenger trains leaving for Gujarat and Saurashtra were packed, with the majority of the passengers being women and children. Probably the men stayed behind to look after their businesses and properties. According to the same article, about 3,000 people had sought shelter at the ‘Kutchi Visa Oswal Jain Mahajanwadi’ in a place called Masjid Bunder. These people, the article noted, comprised petty traders whose shops had been looted, and their families, as well as those who had been compelled by ‘unsocial elements’ to leave their homes.

Later these disturbances were discussed at length in the legislature of Bombay state. Again, the interpretations of the event were largely different between the Marathi and Gujarati members. One Marathi member expressed his view that these disturbances had been created not by Maharashtrians but by ‘cosmopolitan goondas’.¹⁹ This argument was strongly criticised by Morarji Desai, who asserted that these ‘goondas’ had been utilised by a section of the Maharashtrian community who were not ‘goondas’ themselves.²⁰ In his view, these disturbances were intentionally created by these leaders to make non-Marathi people agree to give Bombay to Maharashtra.

In this process, even the linguistic identities of policemen became a matter of concern for both Gujarati and Marathi politicians, as they suspected that the policemen belonging to the other community could be biased against their own community. For instance, in his memoir, Desai mentioned that at the time of the disturbances 95 per cent of the Bombay police were Maharashtrians 'whose natural sympathy was with Samyukta Maharashtra' (Desai 1978: 58). Desai also wrote that the action taken by the police to quell the disturbances was 'therefore half-hearted, which gave a fillip to the riots'. Similarly, soon after the riots, a Marathi member of the assembly asked the government for the number of police officers, police constables and home guards stationed in Bombay city, and then the number of Gujaratis and the Maharashtrians among these officers of each rank. He further asked Desai whether the government had recently increased the strength of Gujarati officers.²¹ The fact that the number of those dead due to police fire reached as many as 76²² created great suspicion among the Marathi leaders about the impartiality of the police. The tension between the two linguistic communities thus increased both inside and outside the legislature.

The events of January 1956 had a great impact on a wide range of residents in Bombay. The psychological impact on the Gujarati residents was particularly significant. A Gujarati family in Mumbai, whom I interviewed, recollected how Marathi people began to throw stones at the building in which they lived, and how they left the building and spent the night in a nearby Jain temple that had become a temporary shelter for Gujaratis in the area. They also recollected that Marathi people shouted slogans such as 'Mumbai amchi (Bombay is ours)' and had black flags in their hands. The family went to their relative's house in a safe locality the next day and afterwards left Bombay for their home village in Saurashtra. Soon the father came back to Bombay, as he could not leave his business for long; several months later, the other family members also came back. It seems that life gradually returned to normal for them, though the memory of the events lived on.

Soon after these disturbances, one of the Gujarati members in the Legislative Council argued in its session that the Gujaratis in Bombay, as well as other communities, identified themselves as 'Bombayites', thus trying once again to emphasise the multilingual and cosmopolitan character of the city. He stated: 'We are Bombayites. We do not call ourselves Maharashtrians, Gujaratis, Kutchis or Kathiawadis but we call ourselves Bombayites.'²³ Their language and mode of living might be 'Gujarati', he argued, but they were Bombayites, not Gujaratis. Attempts to stress the 'Bombayite' identity, however, attracted little attention in the contemporary political context.

In February 1956, under instructions from the centre, Shankarrao Deo, the MPCC leader, who had been involved in the SMP, dissolved the organisation. In its place, the Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti (SMS) was formed under the leadership of leftist politicians (Phadke 1979: 96–97, Palshikar 2007: 63–64). In June, when the session of the All India Congress Committee was held in Bombay, the SMS organised fierce agitations to express its disagreement with the three-state formula, which again caused a clash between them and the police (Phadke 1979: 177–179; Palshikar 2007: 66).²⁴

In August, the situation took a new turn. In the parliament, an attempt was made among its members to replace the three-state formula with that of a bilingual state. One hundred and eighty members of parliament submitted a memorandum to Nehru that endorsed the creation of a bilingual state of Bombay, and he willingly accepted this proposal (*Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* 2005: 124). The shape of this bilingual state of Bombay was similar to that which the States Reorganisation Commission had suggested, except that Marathi-speaking Vidarbha was now included in this state. The MPCCC also accepted this decision readily to avoid the separation of Bombay from Maharashtra.

Ironically, this time it was the Gujarati elite in Ahmedabad that expressed their strong objection to this change of government policy. They had expected that 'their' state with Ahmedabad as its capital would be formed soon and thus felt betrayed by this sudden change of policy. On 8 August, a large-scale demonstration was held in Ahmedabad and marched towards the Congress House. The police fired on the crowd, causing several deaths. Disturbances soon spread through the city, and a series of demonstrations were organised throughout August. These deaths, especially those of the students, aroused great sympathy as well as severe criticism of the Congress among a wide range of people.²⁵ In September, the Maha Gujarat Janata Parishad (MGJP) was founded under the leadership of Indulal Yagnik, who was once known for his involvement in the nationalist movement. The MGJP became a major organisation leading the movement for a separate state of Gujarat, which was generally called the Maha Gujarat movement. Although it tried to project itself as a body that was representative of Gujaratis as a whole, in reality its supporters were mainly limited to north Gujarat. The elite in south Gujarat, Saurashtra and Kutch did not show much interest, as it was likely that the creation of this new state would for them result in the loss of Bombay city and the dominance of Ahmedabad over other Gujarati-speaking areas. Yet the Maha Gujarat movement, while emphasising the violence of the state, gradually succeeded in diverting the public attention from the 'battle for Bombay'.

Bifurcation of Bombay state and the city of Bombay

On 1 November a bilingual state of Bombay was established with a Maratha politician, Y.B. Chavan, as its Chief Minister. What Nehru later called 'the bilingual state experiment' was, however, only short-lived. In 1957, the Congress lost a significant number of seats in the Legislative Assembly and Lok Sabha elections, throwing the future of a bilingual state into question. In both elections, most of the seats went to SMS-backed candidates in western Maharashtra. In the city of Bombay, the seats were shared almost equally by the Congress and the SMS (Sirsikar 1995: 40–41). In Gujarat, the Congress won on the whole, though in Ahmedabad district, the MGJP-backed candidates gained more seats than the Congress in the assembly election (Pathak *et al.* 1966: 66, 76, 136, Sanghvi 1996: 148–149). The Congress again lost in by-elections and the Bombay Corporation election in 1957 (Sirsikar 1995: 41, Phadke 1979: 217). With the next

general election in mind, the Congress, both in the state and at the centre, now began to explore the possibility of bifurcation.

Meanwhile, the SMS and the MGJP started negotiations on issues related to the bifurcation. The MGJP accepted the claim of the SMS that Bombay city be included in Maharashtra, while at the same time demanding safeguards be made to avoid discrimination on a linguistic basis. The MGJP also suggested that financial support be provided by Maharashtra for Gujarat (Phadke 1979: 258). Indulal Yagnik believed that the criticism against the inclusion of Bombay in Maharashtra was made by the 'Gujarati capitalists of Bombay', who 'wanted only to exploit the poor people of Gujarat and Maharashtra by joining hands with the Congressites in the bilingual state' (Yagnik 2011: 586). Here, again, the 'battle for Bombay' was projected as a class struggle in the same way as it was defined by the leaders of the Samyukta Maharashtra movement. From the viewpoint of the supporters of the MGJP, a separate state for the Gujaratis with Ahmedabad or some city near Ahmedabad as its capital would mean more opportunities for better jobs and promotions. A Gujarati couple in Ahmedabad, whom I interviewed, told me what they thought about the creation of Gujarat in those days. The wife, who had not been married then and who lived with her family in Bombay, was unhappy about the prospect of leaving Bombay city, since her family had been living in Bombay for about 150 years, and she had been born and brought up there. In contrast, the husband, who was then a professor in a college in Gujarat, was excited at the thought of bifurcation, because he could see more prospect of promotion in a new state. According to him, many people were in fact promoted after the bifurcation, in the way in which many people had been promoted in India after partition.

In August 1958, the MGJP renewed its campaign to demand the creation of Gujarat, which was combined with the campaigns to erect memorials for the 'martyrs' who lost their lives when the police opened fire in August 1956. This again led to serious disturbances and deaths as the result of police gunfire in Ahmedabad.²⁶ This event further encouraged the government to revise its policy on Bombay state. In December 1959, the Nehru government decided to bifurcate Bombay state into Maharashtra, with Bombay as its capital, and Gujarat.²⁷ Some parts of the border areas that were claimed both by Maharashtra and Gujarat, for instance, the Dangs district, were included in Gujarat. Chief Minister Chavan later described this decision as being 'in the nature of a compromise', implying that these areas were given to Gujarat because the latter gave up its claim on Bombay.²⁸ It was also decided that Maharashtra would provide financial support for Gujarat for the next ten years and in addition furnish ten crore rupees for the building of its new capital (Phadke 1979: 224).

In March 1960, the Bombay Reorganisation Bill was presented to the legislature in Bombay State for discussion. Some Gujarati members voiced their unhappiness about the loss of Bombay. For instance, one of them argued that Gujaratis had 'almost poured their heart and soul' and had 'shed their blood, tears and sweat in building Bombay'.²⁹ He further stressed that the majority of Gujaratis did not vote for a separate Gujarat, a view that was also expressed by

the first Chief Minister of Gujarat, Jivraj Mehta, just before the day of the bifurcation.³⁰ In spite of the rise of the Maha Gujarat movement in north Gujarat, the idea of bifurcating Bombay state and giving up Bombay city was not necessarily supported by a wide range of the Gujarati elite even at the last stage.

It seems that the sense of Gujarat being deprived of Bombay remained among the Gujarati elite for a long time after 1960. According to Aseema Sinha, a political scientist who interviewed state bureaucrats, businesspeople and politicians in Gujarat in the 1990s, almost all of her interviewees discussed the role that Bombay played in 'fashioning an ideology of competitive developmentalism' in their state (Sinha 2005: 182). One senior IAS officer, answering the question about why Gujarati leaders pursued development in the state, said: 'Bombay had been taken away from us, we had to replicate that here.' (Sinha 2005: 182). Sinha's analysis concludes that the inclusion of Bombay in Maharashtra provided the regional context for the competition between Gujarat and Maharashtra and that this became the motivation for Gujarat's developmental strategy.

It should be also noted here that Chavan, before the debates on the Bill started, read out in the Legislative Assembly the 'Statement of Government Policy', in which he gave assurances that the cosmopolitan character of Bombay City would be preserved and that special attention would be paid to its proper development.³¹ The fact that such assurances had to be made, however, seems to indicate the deep concerns of the non-Marathi population in the city about the birth of Maharashtra. Now, with the inclusion of Bombay in Maharashtra, it was officially recognised that the Marathi speakers were the 'majority', while the non-Marathi speakers were 'minorities'; since they were 'minorities', their rights had to be assured by the government. The Gujarati family in Mumbai whom I interviewed, after recounting the 1956 disturbances, mentioned that Chavan had later assured the Gujaratis that they would be safe in the city. The fact that the family mentioned this also seems to indicate that the situation on the eve of bifurcation required the government to make such assurances, which were carefully noted by non-Marathi-speaking residents.

Just before the formation of Maharashtra and Gujarat on 1 May 1960, a large number of government employees, mainly consisting of Gujarati speakers, moved from Bombay to Ahmedabad,³² further enhancing the public perception that Bombay would from now on be the capital of a Marathi-speaking state. Various events organised in the city to celebrate the formation of Maharashtra must have strengthened this perception too. Importantly, now the incident of the police opening fire near Flora Fountain in 1955 was depicted in the discourse of the government and the main political parties as a historic moment in the fight for Samyukta Maharashtra. Those who died there, along with others who were killed by the police in the 1956 disturbances, were glorified as 'martyrs [*hutatma*]' for their homeland. On the eve of bifurcation, a torchlight procession organised by the SMS marched toward Flora Fountain, where a special memorial pillar had been erected (Palshikar 2007: 221). The next year, the foundation stone of the memorial to the martyrs was laid in the same area.³³ This area, which was officially renamed Hutatma Chowk (Martyrs' Square), continues to

be projected even today as a place to invoke ‘patriotism’ towards Maharashtra, with a bronze sculpture on a tall pillar of a farmer and a worker jointly holding a torch and a slab on which the names of 105 ‘martyrs’ are inscribed. On 1 May 2010, as part of the government celebrations of the golden jubilee of Maharashtra, the Governor and Chief Minister paid tributes to the ‘martyrs’ of the Samyukta Maharashtra movement on this spot.³⁴ The stories of martyrs were thus presented repeatedly by the government and other political forces, while the conflict between the two linguistic communities over Bombay was largely marginalised in their discourse.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the debates over the future of Bombay in the late 1940s and 1950s. As discussed above, the idea of creating linguistic states posed an extremely difficult problem for the multilingual city of Bombay. With a large population of people that spoke languages other than Marathi, among whom the Gujarati speakers were the most prominent, there were individuals and organisations that raised their voices strongly against its inclusion in Maharashtra. However, with the reorganisation of states on a linguistic basis in other parts of India in the 1950s, and with the rise of political forces which associated those opposing the bifurcation with ‘vested interests’, it became increasingly difficult for the government to pursue other possibilities besides the formation of linguistic states and the inclusion of Bombay in a Marathi-speaking state.

In the words of Sujata Patel, Bombay ‘became firmly integrated within the state of Maharashtra and its ethnic and cultural heritage’ after the state’s formation and started being redefined both politically and in the imagination (Patel 2003: 5). This development is reflected most evidently in the rise of a regional party, the Shiv Sena, in Bombay politics. The party was founded in 1966 by Bal Keshav Thackeray, whose father was an active leader of the SMS and who himself had been involved in the Samyukta Maharashtra movement. Thackeray started publishing a Marathi weekly, *Marmik*, in 1960, in which he claimed that Bombay was still not in the hands of Marathi speakers, for the city had been invaded by non-Marathi speakers, particularly south Indians, who deprived the former of their jobs (Palshikar 2007: 238, Gupta 1982: 61, Lele 1995: 190, Hansen 2001: 46, Prakash 2010: 231–235). The ideas and the expressions that were presented in this weekly were strikingly similar to those presented in the Samyukta Maharashtra movement in the late 1950s, though this time the main target of criticism was not the Gujaratis. The Shiv Sena claimed to represent the interests of Marathi speakers irrespective of class differences and succeeded in obtaining support from a wider range of Marathi residents. The rise of this organisation, according to Aseema Sinha, ‘created some apprehensions in the minds of the Gujarati population’ (Sinha 2005: 183), even though at the time south Indians were the target of its criticism. The first stage of the investment of Bombay-based Gujarati businesspeople in Gujarat began, Sinha argues, as a

result of this. The Shiv Sena later changed their target and attacked Muslims and north Indians, whom they also projected as ‘outsiders’.

Paradoxically, the continuous attempts by the Shiv Sena and another party, Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (which was founded in 2006 by Raj Shrikant Thackeray, a nephew of Bal Thackeray), to marginalise ‘outsiders’ in fact show that the multilingual and multicultural aspects of Bombay (or Mumbai, as it was renamed in 1995 under the state government consisting of the BJP and the Shiv Sena) survived, despite such attempts to suppress them. This is reflected even in the policy of the Shiv Sena itself, which gradually changed its notion of ‘Maharashtrians’ to include the non-Marathi speakers (Palshikar 2007: 256–258), while at the same time trying to maintain its claim as the representative of the Marathi speakers. What emerged in Bombay from 1960 was the paradoxical situation in which this multilingual and cosmopolitan city was expected to play a symbolic role as the capital of a linguistic state, the situation that was also shared to some extent by capitals of other linguistic states. The situation was certainly able to be exploited by political forces, which led to tensions among different communities and sometimes even cases of violence. However, it is evident that, among the residents of Bombay/Mumbai, there has been a widely shared perception that one of the biggest strengths and unique aspects of the city lies precisely in the diversity of its population in terms of their social and cultural backgrounds. This is often vividly illustrated in works of fiction and films set in this place. The politics of language in Bombay/Mumbai has been and will be bound to keep swinging back and forth like a pendulum in response to these competing ideas of the city.

Notes

- * This chapter is largely based on the following article of mine, in Japanese. Riho Isaka, ‘Indo ni okeru Syu Saihen Mondai: Bombay Shu no Bunkatsu Katei (Debates over the Reorganisation of States in India: The Bifurcation of Bombay State)’, *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 81 (2011): 71–103. Interviews mentioned in this chapter were conducted in Mumbai and Ahmedabad in 2009.
- 1 Several scholars have examined in detail the movement for the creation of Maharashtra. See, for example, Phadke (1979); Palshikar (2007); Stern (1970).
- 2 For the details, see *Imperial Gazetteer of India, Bombay Presidency* (1909: 224).
- 3 For the details, see: Gujarat Pradesh Congress Committee (1954: 13–18); Mallison (1995); Shukla (1995).
- 4 For instance, see Munshi (1939, 1967: 234).
- 5 On the reorganisation of states in postcolonial India, see: Sarangi & Pai (2011); Guha (2007: 180–200).
- 6 Ambedkar, however, changed his views later and submitted different opinions to the States Reorganisation Committee in 1955, in which he argued that Maharashtra be divided into four states, that is, Bombay city (Maharashtra City State), Western Maharashtra, Central Maharashtra and Eastern Maharashtra (Ambedkar 1955: 21).
- 7 ‘Memorandum Submitted by the Samyukta Maharashtra Parishad’s Deputation to the Linguistic Provinces Commission on 4th November, 1948’, in *Maharashtra’s Case before the Linguistic Provinces Commission*: Memorandum (n.d.: 29–39).

- 8 The Indian Merchants' Chamber had a close relationship with the Bombay Committee (which later became the Bombay Citizens' Committee) (Stern 1970: 46).
- 9 On Munshi's ideas on languages and linguistic states, see Isaka (2012).
- 10 The same view was expressed also in the memorandum of the Gujarat Research Society, the organisation established in 1936 in Bombay to encourage research on Gujarat (Gujarat Research Society 1948).
- 11 On the demand for the creation of Andhra state, see Mitchell (2009).
- 12 'Resolutions Passed by Organisations in the City in Support of the Memorandum Submitted by the Bombay Citizens' Committee', in Purshotamdas Thakurdas Papers, subject file 383, Nehru Memorial Museum & Library.
- 13 The Bombay Pradesh Congress Committee (BPCC), which avoided expressing its view on Bombay at the time of the Dar Commission, this time openly opposed the inclusion of this city in Maharashtra, though there were also members within the BPCC who supported the Samyukta Maharashtra movement (Bombay Pradesh Congress Committee 1954, Phadke 1979: 112–113).
- 14 *Bombay Legislative Assembly Debates: Official Report [BLAD]*, Vol. 30, No. 1, Part II, 18 November 1955, p. 4.
- 15 *Times of India*, 22 November 1955, p. 1.
- 16 *BLAD*, Vol. 31, No. 49, Part II, 20 April 1956, pp. 2391–2430.
- 17 *Times of India*, 17–23 January 1956. There were disturbances also in Belgaum, Nasik, Kolhapur and other areas.
- 18 *Times of India*, 22 January 1956, p. 1.
- 19 *Bombay Legislative Council Debates: Official Report [BLCD]*, Vol. 34, No. 26, Part II, 7 April 1956, p. 945.
- 20 *BLCD*, Vol. 34, No. 26, Part II, 7 April 1956, pp. 951–52.
- 21 *BLAD*, Vol. 31, No. 5, Part I, 24 February 1956, pp. 105–106.
- 22 *BLAD*, Vol. 31, No. 13, Part I, 8 March 1956, p. 343; *BLAD*, Vol. 31, No. 17, Part I, 15 March 1956, p. 472; *BLCD*, Vol. 34, No. 6, Part I, 29 March 1956, p. 105.
- 23 *BLCD*, Vol. 34, No. 20, Part II, 29 March 1956, p. 699. It should also be noted that many Marathi-speaking or Gujarati-speaking Parsis, Muslims, Christians and Jews did not necessarily call themselves Maharashtrians or Gujaratis. For instance, see *Times of India*, 23 November 1955, p. 5.
- 24 On the opinion of the SMS on the States Reorganisation Bill, see Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti (1956).
- 25 For the details, see Isaka (forthcoming).
- 26 For the details, see: *Times of India*, 13–14 August 1958; Kotval (1959); Isaka (forthcoming).
- 27 *BLAD*, Vol. 10, No. 9, Part II, 14 March 1960, p. 392; see also Phadke (1979: 224).
- 28 *BLAD*, Vol. 10, No. 9, Part II, 14 March 1960, p. 394.
- 29 *BLAD*, Vol. 10, No. 9, Part II, 14 March 1960, p. 425.
- 30 *Times of India*, 1 May 1960, p. 1.
- 31 *BLAD*, Vol. 10, No. 9, Part II, 14 March 1960, p. 391. It also assured that the medium of instruction in the University of Bombay would continue to be English until it was replaced by Hindi.
- 32 *Times of India*, 7 April 1960, p. 3; 24 April 1960, p. 12.
- 33 *Times of India*, 22 November 1961, pp. 1, 7.
- 34 www.hinduonnet.com; <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com>; www.indianexpress.com, 1–2 May 2010.

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10 Durga Puja and neighbourhood in a displaced persons' colony in New Delhi

Tetsuya Nakatani

Chittaranjan Park, formerly known as the 'East Pakistan Displaced Persons' Colony', in Delhi was constructed by the government exclusively for Bengali displaced persons. This chapter discusses how this neighbourhood has been formed and influenced by urbanisation by examining two aspects of life in Chittaranjan Park. One is the ritual aspect, namely the changing processes of the annual Hindu Durga Puja festival. We describe how Durga Pujas have changed alongside the transformation of neighbourhood in the colony, becoming progressively more commercialised as the size of the urban neighbourhood expanded until the residents moved to improve the neighbourhood and adapted the celebrations to a more appropriate scale. It further demonstrates how rituals such as Durga Puja not only help to integrate and maintain urban neighbourhoods, but also are organised as afterimages of neighbourhoods that physically no longer exist. Our second focal point is the ethnic aspect of the urban neighbourhood, exploring the impact of urbanisation – specifically rapid urbanisation in Delhi and the redevelopment of two squatters' markets in the colony – upon the ethnic composition of Chittaranjan Park.

Before describing the case of Chittaranjan Park, it is appropriate to comment briefly on the terms 'community', 'neighbourhood' and 'locality', and place this chapter conceptually in the context of those related terms. These terms have likely been used uncritically as interchangeable in urban studies in India (De Neve & Donner 2006: 7). However, they have also been used in the specific context of this discussion.

First, 'community' has generally been treated as synonymous with traditional society, pre-industrial agrarian Europe or the non-western civilisations of the east (Jodhka 2001: 18). The same tendency can be found in Indian social studies. In a review article on the concept of community in the Indian context, Upadhyya (2001: 33–36) points out that 'community' has been associated with social organisations considered fundamental to traditional or precolonial Indian society such as *jati* (caste), village or religious sect. Community is usually regarded as being in opposition to the individualism of modern society as well as market, class and the state; it is considered to belong to culture, and hence is more authentic than other social units. Upadhyya concludes that although conceptualisations of community have shifted from such primordial or 'substantivist'

notions to constructivist understandings, community continues to belong to the realm of culture but not economy, and represents genuine social formation and the principal source of identity (Upadhyaya 2001: 53–54). In the context of this chapter, Chittaranjan Park might represent an ethnic ‘community’ of Bengalis who share language, culture, religion and identity. However, the Bengali community in the urban environment of Delhi goes far beyond the community explained by Upadhyaya. Chittaranjan Park was the outcome of negotiations with the government (state). It is not a traditional community but a newly constructed colony whose residents are disconnected from their homeland; it is under the influence of domestic and global markets. The identities of its residents are not based on caste but on educational qualifications, occupation and being urban middle class.

Second, though the ‘neighbourhood’ is the principal concept in this chapter, the local has received much less attention and tends to be treated as a less central concern in contemporary social analysis of globalisation (De Neve & Donner 2006: 2). However, De Neve and Donner emphasise the importance of studying the local, and state that places themselves are highly political and fluid, and gender, caste and community identities are constantly produced, negotiated, and challenged through spatial practices and shifting spatial concepts (De Neve & Donner 2006: 3). According to them, previous studies have assumed neighbourhood as the only site within which the real concerns of the study – namely caste, gender and family – could be researched, and thus barely explored the form and meaning of neighbourhoods as socially constructed places. For De Neve and Donner, exploring the ways in which neighbourhoods are made into meaningful places is fundamental to understanding urban life (De Neve & Donner 2006: 7); the local, particularly the neighbourhood, is not a mere space but the locale that actually produces social relationships in urban India. Though their approach is weighted on the political sphere, this chapter basically shares their concern. Chittaranjan Park is the space where political struggle has been deployed and the impacts of market, commercialism and globalisation are seen. It is also a space whose characteristics have been created by the processes of bordering and attributing specific meanings – namely cultural, historical and religious – to particular places. The spatial practices associated with Durga Pujas clearly illustrate how the residents of the colony manipulate the neighbourhood to make it favourable to them.

Our final discussion concerns the relation between neighbourhood, locality and globalisation. In his well-known discussion, Appadurai defines locality as primarily relational and contextual rather than scalar or spatial. It is a phenomenological property of social life, a structure of feeling that is produced by particular forms of intentional activity. He defines neighbourhood as the actually existing social forms in which locality, as a dimension or value, is variably realised. Neighbourhoods are situated communities characterised by their actuality and their potential for social reproduction (Appadurai 1997: 178–179, 182). While neighbourhoods are prerequisites for the production of local subjects, local subjects also contribute to the creation of contexts that might exceed the

existing boundaries of the neighbourhood (Appadurai 1997: 185). However, he states, in a world that has become deterritorialised, diasporic and transnational, the task of producing locality is increasingly challenging (Appadurai 1997: 188–189). In the context of this chapter, his categorisation of neighbourhood as an actual social form, and locality as non-spatial property, is suggestive: Chittaranjan Park has not only spatial neighbourhood, but locality, which is observed on the occasion of Durga Puja and may be shared beyond the area of the colony. However, his emphasis on deterritorialisation and disjuncture among his so-called five dimensions of global cultural flows (Appadurai 1997: 33) must be treated carefully. Though the urban environment and middle-class characters connect the colony and its residents with global flows, locality has been continuously produced in the colony.

Urbanisation in Delhi

After the transfer of the capital of colonial India from Calcutta to Delhi, the area of Delhi expanded rapidly, and New Delhi and the cantonment area were constructed. The secretariat was located in Civil Lines until the construction of New Delhi was complete. After independence, the 'urban area' of Delhi expanded further; the urban area has increased from 326.54 km² in 1961 to 591.90 km² in 1981, 700.23 km² in 1991 and 924.68 km² in 2001. The urban area took up 22 per cent of the total area of Delhi in 1961, 40 per cent in 1981, 47 per cent in 1991 and 62 per cent in 2001 (Government of NCT of Delhi 2009: 164). The current area of the National Capital Territory of Delhi is 1,485 km². Hereafter, 'Delhi' means the NCT of Delhi.

The rapid increase of population is another feature of Delhi. The population of Delhi, which was 413,851 in 1911, had increased to 13,850,507 by 2001. The decennial growth rate of the population was 18 per cent in 1911–21, 30.3 per cent in 1921–31, 44.3 per cent in 1931–41 and 90.0 per cent in 1941–50, which was caused by the influx of partition refugees from Pakistan. Due to partition, the population of Delhi increased from 917,939 in 1941 to 1,744,072 in 1951; the trend to increase also continued after partition. The decennial growth rate had been 51–53 per cent from 1951 to 1991 (Government of NCT of Delhi 2002: 22, 178). In Delhi the urban population percentage was 52.8 per cent in 1901, and it had risen to 93.2 per cent by 2001, which represents the highest percentage of urban population in India (Government of NCT of Delhi 2009: 30).

The projected population of NCT Delhi as of 1 March 2009 was 174.4 lakh. It is estimated that the population of Delhi would continuously increase, reaching 182 lakh in 2011, 199 lakh in 2016 and 230 lakh in 2021 (Puri 2010: 7). It is worth mentioning that in-migration has played an important role for population growth in Delhi. The impact of in-migration has been greater since the 1990s; from 1994, population growth by in-migration has generally exceeded natural growth.

In the Indian context 'urbanisation' means a high rate of urban population (Sivaramakrishnan *et al.* 2007). The high rate of urban population has coincided

with the expansion of the urban area. Thus, in this chapter ‘urbanisation’ is defined as the process of urban population growth and urban area expansion, which is usually accompanied by development/redevelopment works and often results in the rise of land prices in urban areas.

Chittaranjan Park and Bengali displaced persons: a brief history of Chittaranjan Park

Chittaranjan Park was formerly known as the ‘East Pakistan Displaced Persons’ Colony’, and its original residents were ‘displaced persons’ from East Pakistan. In 1954 they formed an association which was later known as the East Pakistan Displaced Persons Association (EPDPA), and appealed to the Indian government to rehabilitate them.

On 4 January 1966 the government released a first press note inviting applications for the allotment of plots of land. The government invited applications on two further occasions, in 1967 and 1977. According to the layout plan prepared by the Department of Rehabilitation, the total area of the colony was 218.3 acres with 2,072 plots in sizes of 320, 233, 160 and 533/450 square yards.¹

In July 1970 development work in the colony was, by and large, completed, and about 100 houses were under construction.² The year 1970 was also memorable as the starting point of community activities. Some interested residents formed a committee to organise the centenary celebration of Chittaranjan Das, after whom the colony was later named. The ceremony was held in December 1970 and attended by then prime minister, Indira Gandhi. The first community Durga Puja was also celebrated in 1970. Since then, the population and number of residences in the colony have gradually increased (Ray 1982: 26–28).

The Department of Rehabilitation issued a third press note on 14 January 1977, ten years after the second. This third allotment differed from the previous two in that it led to many people being unable to get plots despite the fact that they were declared equally as ‘eligible’ as others who had succeeded in getting allotments. Some of them did not accept this result; they formed the ‘Association of Displaced Persons from East Pakistan Declared Eligible for Allotment of Plots in Delhi’³ and started appealing both to unlucky applicants and the government. This association was commonly known as the ‘714 Group’ as it consisted of 714 members. It was later officially registered. The 714 Group was lucky enough to get unused zonal park spaces adjacent to the colony and some fringe spaces inside it. In 1984 the government decided to allot plots to them⁴ and the actual implementation of this began in around 1990. Their plots were scattered across nine locations adjacent to the main area of Chittaranjan Park and its fringes. For details, see Nakatani (2007).

Some characteristics of residents in Chittaranjan Park

This section outlines some characteristics of the present Bengali residents of the colony.⁵ The data was collected by a household survey conducted by the author

in August 2002 using a sample of 122 households (see detail analysis in Nakatani 2007). First, although the place of origin of most Bengali residents is East Bengal, there are some with other places of origin, such as West Bengal, Assam and Bihar, but who received plots as they had ancestral origin in East Bengal or received plots in the names of their wives. Second, about 10 per cent of residents today are not allottees of the land; they are Bengalis both from East Bengal and West Bengal and had purchased or were renting flats in the colony. Third, only 16.3 per cent of residents had lived in Delhi before partition, despite the common perception of the residents.⁶ However, 56 per cent of the allottees had migrated to present Indian territory other than Delhi by 1947, and 32 per cent migrated between 1947 and 1949. This means that allottees were earlier migrants and shared the characteristics of middle-class Bengalis from East Bengal.⁷ They came to West Bengal, particularly Calcutta (Kolkata), for higher education and were employed there or in Delhi after the transfer of the colonial capital from Calcutta to New Delhi. This stream continued during and after partition.

Fourth, their middle-class character is reflected in the fact that 91.5 per cent of allottees came from the higher castes (Brahman, Kayastha and Baidya) in Bengal. These are precisely the castes that predominate among the *bhadralok* class (middle-class Bengali Hindus) who, as mentioned above, had an English education and were employed in Calcutta (West Bengal) in white-collar services, such as government officers, lawyers, doctors, teachers, journalists, and so on. Many of them had landed property in their native home in East Bengal. Fifth, the educational and occupational backgrounds of the allottees reinforced their *bhadralok* character. Out of the 98 available samples, 79.6 per cent of allottees hold a Bachelor's degree or higher qualification, including four with doctorates, two Doctors of Medicine, and 18 holders of Master's degrees. Most of them are highly qualified persons relative to average educational standards in India. Regarding occupations, 59.1 per cent of allottees had engaged with government services, 14.5 per cent with professions such as doctor, journalist, editor, architect, priest, engineer, professor, teacher, painter and consultant, and 13.6 per cent as office workers in a private company. They are generally oriented towards services rather than businesses. These service persons constitute the core group in Chittaranjan Park. Finally, allottees included those who fled the violence and disturbances that followed partition. Thus, some allottees were de facto refugees.

Chittaranjan Park as Mini Bengal

Chittaranjan Park is often called 'Mini Bengal', and many Bengali elements are noticeable in the colony. Visitors may wonder to see the building complexes such as those run by the Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Memorial Society and Bipin Chandra Pal Memorial Trust, both of which were named after Bengali heroes of the nationalist movement in colonial Bengal. The former maintains a Bengali library and provides free medical services; the latter has a big auditorium where Bengali dramas, music fairs and other festivals are often organised. The Bangiya Samaj is another organisation concerned with Bengali culture. It publishes

Bengali periodicals and organises Puspā Mela, a famous festival in Bengal. If locals want Bengali cuisine, they can purchase their favourite fish and vegetables or sample Bengali dishes at the restaurants in the market. When Bengalis wish to pray to Mother Goddess Kali, the principal goddess of Bengal, the neat and well-maintained temple complex of the Kali Mandir Society welcomes them. A number of religious and cultural programmes are organised there, aimed at satisfying the religious needs of Bengalis.

Chittaranjan Park has brought together more than 2,000 allottees and their family members who had lived scattered all over Delhi, thus creating a centre of Bengali settlement. While Chittaranjan Park is not the only Bengali settlement in Delhi today, it is undoubtedly the biggest. That is why non-allotted Bengalis desire to live there. Most of the non-allottees explained that they shifted to Chittaranjan Park in order to enjoy its Bengali environment. Nowadays, nearby areas such as Govindpuri and Alakanada have become satellites of Chittaranjan Park. Bengalis come to settle in these areas because of their proximity to Chittaranjan Park: they can taste the Bengali flavour, and the cost of living (the price of land and house rents) is lower than in Chittaranjan Park itself.

Durga Pujas and Bengalis in Delhi

Durga is one of the important Hindu Goddesses who are spouses of Siva and represent *sakti* (power) of Siva. In Bengal, Goddess Durga and Goddess Kali are the favourite deities. It is often said that there will be a Kali temple in any place where Bengalis have settled. Though cases of a permanent temple being established for Durga are rare, Durga Puja, the annual festival for Durga, has been widely celebrated in Bengal and those places outside Bengal where Bengalis have settled.

According to one story, Durga Puja was first celebrated in Delhi by a feudal lord from Rajisahi, a region in East Bengal, in 1842 when he visited the city for work (Chittaranjan Park Kali Mandir Sosaiti 1998: 49). The oldest *sarbjānin* (community) Durga Puja in Delhi is known to be the ‘Kashimiri Gate’ Durga Puja in north Delhi. It started in 1910 and celebrated its ninety-ninth puja when the author visited in 2008.⁸ Delhi Durga Puja Samiti, the puja committee for the Kashimiri Gate Durga Puja, printed a leaflet for the coming centenary celebration as follows:

This year is special to us because it is the 99th year of our Delhi Durga Puja Samiti. Imagine 100 years back – 1910, in the city of Delhi which was still then a small town surrounded by a fortified wall. And in there, in a long winding lane, hardly 8’ wide (which still it is) called Ballimaran – a handful of devoted Bengalees celebrating Durga Puja with all the reverence and joy as we do today. Not for long did this group remain a handful. Because soon after, the capital of India moved up to Delhi from Kolkata, bringing in a large number of families, most of them Bengalees. And as the families grew so did the city and Durga Mai blossomed.⁹

Following the transfer of the capital, Bengali bureaucrats, who mainly came from the Bengali Hindu middle class, also moved from Bengal to Delhi. As the number of Bengalis increased, so did the number of Durga Pujas. At the time of partition there were Bengalis working not only for the government, but also in the private sector. The flow of Bengalis from West Bengal to Delhi continues today.

According to an unofficial estimate, the Bengali population in Delhi is 5–8 lakh (Chittaranjan Park Kali Mandir Sosaiti 1998: 8, 50). The official statistics, for instance the mother tongue report in the census, shows the number of Bengali speakers as 121,938 in 1991 and 208,414 in 2001 (Government of NCT of Delhi 2009: 36). Though confirmation of the exact size of the Bengali population in Delhi is difficult, it is certainly very large, and their numbers have been increasing over the last few decades, probably because of the economic growth and the expansion of job opportunities in Delhi. As the population of Bengalis in Delhi has increased, so has the number of Durga Pujas; it is said that there are now over 250 celebrated in Delhi (Chittaranjan Park Kali Mandir Sosaiti 1998: 9).¹⁰

Development and change of Durga Pujas in Chittaranjan Park: outline of Durga Pujas in Chittaranjan Park

Today, hundreds of Durga Pujas are celebrated in Delhi. Nine *sarbajanin* Durga Pujas are celebrated in the colony. As visitors can enjoy nine pujas in a single colony, many are drawn to Chittaranjan Park each year, and the pujas are overcrowded. Even the residents face difficulty getting in.

Durga Puja is celebrated in the month of Asvin (September–October) in the Bengali calendar. In 2008, the main parts of the Durga Puja in Chittaranjan Park started on 5 October (19 Asvin, in the year 1415 in the Bengali calendar). The rituals performed in Chittaranjan Park are basically the same as those performed in West Bengal as priests are often summoned from there.

In Chittaranjan Park many non-ritual events were also organised, even before the commencement of the puja rituals. Competitions were held for songs (children's song, Tagore song, Nazurul song, etc.), recitations, karaoke, instrumentals, dance, fancy dress, quizzes, art and musical chairs in different puja sites around the colony. There were some ritual-related competitions such as one for *alpana* (a kind of art drawn for domestic rituals), *sangkha dhvani* (conch-shell blowing) and *arati* (holy flame and smoke). A household food exhibition called *ananda mela* was a unique event in which residents prepared any food of their choice, including Bengali cuisine, and sold it to the public. Sports competitions were also held. Cultural programmes like music concerts and dance shows were held every night. Thus, Durga Puja does not only have implications as a ritual, but also includes aspects that function as a neighbourhood/community event in which local residents get together, participate and enjoy themselves.

Figure 10.1 shows the locations of nine Durga Pujas in Chittaranjan Park. Durga Pujas today cover the entire area of the colony. Chittaranjan Park is divided into 20 blocks and two DDA flats (group houses constructed by the



Figure 10.1 Durga Puja site locations in Chittaranjan Park.

Notes

* Numbers in brackets show the locations of the respective puja sites.

- 1 Kali Mandir Society; 2 Cooperative Ground; 3 B Block; 4 Mela Ground; 5 Navapalli; 6 Dakshin Palli; 7 D Block; 8 E Block; 9 Milan Samiti

Delhi Development Authority). Each block is given a letter from A to K and then given the prefix ‘Pocket’ 40, 52, K, L, M, N, O, P, K1. The names listed from (1) to (9) are the names of the organising committee for Durga Puja. Members of the puja committee are not necessarily confined to the residents of the respective block or site; they often transcend the blocks.

First stage: united Durga Puja, 1970–75

The first house was built in the colony in 1969, when the development works were almost over; the first *sarbjayanin* Durga Puja was organised in 1970. Only 18–20 households were living there at the time, and they formed ‘Kalkaji Puja Smiti’ and celebrated Durga Puja at the site of J Block zonal park in front of No. 1 market. After three years, they shifted the site slightly eastward to C Block and changed the name of the committee to ‘Chittaranjan Park Puja

Samiti' after the name of the colony was changed in 1973. During this stage, Durga Puja was organised as the sole *sarbajanin* puja for all residents of the colony.

Second stage: split and expansion of Durga Pujas in the second half of the 1970s

The colony was planned to provide over 2,000 residential plots. However, it took some years to fill the plots because not all allottees had enough funds to construct houses when the development works were complete, and those who had services far away from the colony had plans to shift later.

When the number of residents increased and the area of residential plots was expanded, Durga Puja became crowded and inconvenient for those who lived far from the puja site. According to an article in the silver jubilee commemoration volume published by the Kali Mandir Society, some residents demanded the shift of the puja site from C Block to Mela Ground (see (4) in [Figure 10.1](#)) in 1976. Residents of Blocks A, B and K opposed the demand, as Mela Ground was far from their residential plots. In the end, Chittaranjan Park Puja Samiti, the sole committee, did not organise the puja, and Durga Puja was organised in both Mela Ground and J Block in 1976. Thus Durga Puja split into two. Residents in the eastern side held it at Mela Ground and those in the western side held it at J Block (Kali Mandir Sosaiti 1998: 46).

Though the commemorative volume provides the version of the events of 1976 given above, according to interviews and souvenirs published by the respective puja committees, Durga Puja in the colony might have split into three in 1976. Three Durga Pujas – Mela Ground, Cooperative Ground in J Block (see (2) in [Figure 10.1](#)), and B Block (see (3) in [Figure 10.1](#)) – celebrated their thirty-third anniversary in 2008, meaning those pujas started in 1976. On the other hand, Chittaranjan Park Puja Samiti started its puja inside the temple complex of the Kali Mandir Society (see (1) in [Figure 10.1](#)) in 1977. This committee operated until 1992 and was abolished in 1993 when the Kali Mandir Society started to organise a puja in its own name. Thus, the Durga Puja was split into four in 1976–77. Mela Ground, Cooperative Ground, B Block and Kali Mandir Society are the four big pujas which represent Durga Puja in the colony. The single puja for the colony disappeared and pujas were handed over to various committees. The split of the Durga Puja was not necessarily seen as a negative thing, as a member of Mela Ground commented, 'The split of puja is natural. It is like a family process. If a family has some sons, sons grow up, become independent, and separate from the original family.'¹¹

One of the factors that allowed the split of Durga Pujas in the colony was that Chittaranjan Park had enough open space to accommodate new pujas. All of the sites of the big four have huge open spaces in which even a large-scale meeting or sports event can be held. There are other middle-scale open spaces, i.e. parks, in the colony which can be converted into puja sites. In this sense, from a planning perspective Chittaranjan Park has a good spatial environment.

Third stage: Durga Pujas organised by new residents, 1992–95

After the Durga Pujas in the colony split into four in 1977, there were no further splits until 1992, when the situation changed. The government allotted new plots in and around the colony to the allottees of 714 Group, who started living there from the early 1990s. These new residents started their own pujas for 714 Group residents. The Navapalli committee started its puja from 1992, covering the residents of Pocket K1 and 40 blocks (see (5) in [Figure 10.1](#)). The Dakshin Palli committee started its puja in 1995, covering the residents of Pocket 52, M, N, O, P (see (6) in [Figure 10.1](#)).

Fourth stage: magnificent Durga Pujas and commercialisation from the mid-1990s

There were six Durga Pujas in Chittaranajan Park from the 1990s. As it is easy for visitors to pass through many pujas in one place, the number of non-resident visitors increased substantially. This situation attracted advertisements from private companies, and Durga Pujas became advertising media. Such links with commercialism have become particularly clear since the mid-1990s. The more money companies contributed to pujas, the more puja committees spent and competed with each other over the magnificence and entertainment of Durga Puja. For puja committees, the inflow of money from advertisements was easy money. Today the sums acquired in this way greatly surpass the money collected from individual residents.

As a result of the inflow of company money, the budget for Durga Puja has increased hugely. Cooperative Ground spent Rs. 20.1 lakh in 2000, 22.4 lakh in 2005 and 24.6 lakh in 2007. Similarly, the Kali Mandir Society, which in 2000 spent Rs. 17.9 lakh for all ritual expenses, including Durga Puja, spent 25.9 lakh on Durga Puja alone in 2007. The competitiveness between puja committees has accelerated this trend. A founding member of Cooperative Ground explained:

Durga Puja changed very much. Today's puja is completely commercialised. There was personal attachment and good relation among people. But those who can raise money take the leadership now. The tradition of puja was lost. Each committee wants to organise better pujas than others. We became rivals. As a result, competition became very hard and the elements of entertainment became crucial for puja. Committees try to attract more visitors by performing better cultural programmes.¹²

The competition can be seen not only in secular entertainment, but also in ritual aspects. The scale and inner decoration of the temporary shed erected for puja (*pyandal*), the uniqueness and beauty of the idol of Durga and the number of food offerings (*bhog*) provided to visitors are the most important concerns. For instance, Cooperative Ground tries to win the prize for 'Best Idol' in the



Figure 10.2 Durga idol.

competition sponsored by *Times of India* every year. It won ‘Best Idol’ in the south Delhi area in 2008 (see [Figure 10.2](#)).

With this trend puja committees rely heavily on company money. The source of revenue from companies is divided into (1) advertisements on souvenirs, (2) sponsorship for any particular programme, (3) banner advertisements inside and outside the puja complex (see [Figure 10.3](#)) and (4) stalls inside the puja complex for restaurants, food companies, banks, toy sellers, mobile companies, car dealers, real-estate developers, magazine publishers, religious bodies, etc. According to the account settlement of Cooperative Ground for the 2007 Durga Puja, the expenses were Rs.24.6 lakh and the revenue procured by the four revenue streams noted was Rs.25.2 lakh, which means that money from companies exceeded the expenses of the puja and created a surplus. The total amount of donations from individual households was only Rs.1.3 lakh, and the amount collected in the donation box was Rs. 43,000. Thus, today’s big Durga Pujas are heavily dependent on company money and have deviated from the neighbourhood as regards money. B Block has given up collecting donations from individual households and is solely dependent on company money.

The link between Durga Puja and company money seemed to start in the mid-1990s. An old member of the Mela Ground committee explained:



Figure 10.3 Banner advertisements.

At the initial stage, our puja was small. The population was less and puja was organised based on the individual donations by residents. However, puja gradually became big in its scale. It was in 1995 that we got sponsorship from Coca Cola and received 16,000 Rs. We then understood that companies would offer money for Durga Puja. The expense of our puja, which was only 2–4 lakh before, is 25 lakh now.¹³

Nowadays company money is indispensable for any *sarbjayanin* pujas, irrespective of scale. However, some people became very anxious about the loss of personal attachment and intimacy among residents that were found in traditional Durga Puja. Thus, neighbourhood pujas were restored by some willing people.

Fifth stage: return to neighbourhood Durga Pujas from the mid-1990s

The idea to return to the neighbourhood Durga Puja emerged simultaneously with the process of commercialisation. Three new committees were formed: Milan Samity in 1995, D Block in 1998 and E Block in 2000 (see (9), (7), and (8) in Figure 10.1). While all members of Milan Samity committee had split from Cooperative Ground committee, members of D and E Block came from

different committees. An old member of D Block most clearly expressed their intentions regarding neighbourhood pujas:

At that time we feel that Durga Pujas in Chittaranjan Park became commercialised. The personal touch was lost and the participation of residents was getting less. Durga Puja became impersonal as the large-scale pujas were organised with money power. That is why we thought to go back to the traditional form of neighbourhood Durga Puja. We placed the importance not on the commercialism like food courts and shops, but on the ritual aspect of puja. We wanted to go back to the traditional style. We organise Durga Puja very simply and are careful not to become commercial. Of course we need funds, but a balance between religion and commercialisation should be made. Therefore, we do not invite expensive musicians from outside. Most of our cultural programmes are performed by local children and adults.¹⁴

Similarly, the president of Milan Smaity emphasised the importance of neighbourhood puja; he also referred to the discord among members of the Cooperative Ground puja committee, from which they separated, as a reason for the separation:

One of the purposes for which we organise our Durga Puja is to perform the ritual. Another purpose is to create the opportunity for neighbouring families to get together. That is why we arrange minimum cultural programmes. If we organise a big programme, many visitors would come to see our puja and the puja would be overcrowded. We want to observe the tradition of puja. Getting together for puja is our concept. Taking leave for puja, sitting together, eating together, talking together, and celebrating puja together are our way. We have such fellow feelings.¹⁵

It is worth mentioning that the idea of returning to neighbourhood puja is realised in the personal household Durga Puja too. It is difficult to find out how many household Durga Pujas are arranged in Chittaranjan Park; the author found at least two such pujas in B Block in 2008. The household head of one of them explained:

We started household Durga Puja from this year. I had engaged with the B Block committee for 30 years. I still have personal communication with them. But B Block is overcrowded and personal relations among people are fewer. If we organise Durga Puja at home, we can celebrate it within the relationship of family and neighbours. It costs us some 50,000 Rs. We do not collect donations. But some neighbours propose to us that they would take charge of some part of the puja. Other neighbours give us daily food offerings. We invite a priest from Kolkata who has been in charge of rituals at our relatives' house, where Durga Puja has been celebrated every year for 95 years.¹⁶

In brief, Durga Puja in Chittaranjan Park, which was a single puja until 1975, split into four in 1977, when the number of residents increased and the residential area was expanded. Since the mid-1990s Durga Puja has linked up with commercialism in the urban environment of Delhi. Contrary to this trend, some residents sought the idea of traditional neighbourhood Durga Puja and started pujas that had a personal touch. This process indicates two aspects of urban characteristics. One is that residents who have a Bengali background are very conscious of their religious culture, and their regional-ethnic culture is maintained in the cross-cultural environment of Delhi. The other is that where urban neighbourhoods have expanded beyond a certain limit, the neighbourhood Durga Puja has been resized on an appropriate scale (see the four big pujas) and the neighbourhood has further converged into a small unit driven by words such as ‘personal’, ‘get together’ and ‘traditional’ (see Milan Samity, D Block, E Block and household pujas).

Durga Pujas as an afterimage of neighbourhood

There are cases in which Durga Pujas have been maintained despite physical changes in the urban environment. Old Durga Pujas held in Kashmiri Gate and Timarpur in north Delhi have been maintained even though most of the residents have disappeared from those neighbourhoods. Urban space always faces changes. While new townships emerge, it is not unusual for existing townships to decline. Natural change by generation also has an impact on urban space. Despite all this, Durga Puja has been celebrated as an afterimage of the neighbourhood in Kashmiri Gate and in Timarpur.

Timarpur Civil Line Puja Samiti, which celebrated the ninety-fifth anniversary of its Durga Puja in 2008, is a good example. There had been many Bengali government employees in Timarpur, where the secretariat of the colonial government was located until the completion of New Delhi. Though there are fewer Bengalis today, former residents get together only to organise the Durga Puja. A member of the committee explains:

Timarpur had been a settlement for government employees before as it is today. Those who were transferred to Delhi following the shift of the then capital had got residence here. Timarpur Civil Line Puja Samiti organised the first Durga Puja in 1914. As this settlement is for government employees, different people have come to stay here and gone away. Only 20 Bengalis are living here now. As my father was a government employee, he had got residence and I was born here. Many people were born here like me. However, the children of government employees did not necessarily become government employees. I am not a government employee myself, so I do not live here. I live in Bikashpur, 20 km away from here. I come here for Durga Puja. We get together for Durga Puja and rent rooms nearby for 4–5 days during puja. We are all friends with each other.¹⁷

In Timarpur, the locality and friendship of the old days have been maintained in the context of Durga Puja, even after the neighbourhood was lost. Similarly, no members of the Kashmiri Gate puja committee live in the original neighbourhood, and committee members get together only for Durga Puja.

Urbanisation and its influence on the ethnic composition of Chittaranjan Park

This section deals with urbanisation and its influence on the ethnic composition of Chittaranjan Park. The rise of real-estate prices accompanied by rapid urbanisation in Delhi has resulted in the draining of Bengali residents from the colony. The redevelopment of two squatters' markets in the colony produced the same trend. Thus, urbanisation in Delhi has shaken the ethnic composition of Chittaranjan Park, which had been established exclusively for Bengali displaced persons.

Impact of real-estate development

As discussed above, Delhi has experienced a consistent process of urbanisation. Chittaranjan Park has undergone the same process. Real-estate developers intervened in the colony from early on in its establishment. A typical method of the development of residential plots is as follows: the developers demolish the original house and in its place construct a three-storey building with a basement. The allottees get the ground floor and some money, and the developers sell the other floors. Since residential plots were granted on a 99-year leasehold, the disposition of land is banned. This method bypasses this restriction.

In some cases the pressure of land development extended to the land itself and the developers obtained 'power of attorney' over the land from the allottees. This was not a transfer of the ownership rights, but gave an overall legal right to manage a piece of land. Using this method, the developers constructed houses and sold all the floors. Allottees got money from the developers and bought a new residence elsewhere. If the money received exceeded the cost of the new residence, the surplus money could be kept. This was another method to bypass the restriction of leasehold. However, this method was against the intent of rehabilitation, and the EPDPA cautioned against such intervention in the mid-1970s (*Purbacaler Katha* 1975).¹⁸

Rapid land development has raised the price of land in Chittaranjan Park. When allottees were granted land by the government, the price of land (premium) was Rs. 30 per square yard, which means a total of Rs. 4,800 for a 160 square yard plot. According to interviews with allottees, their monthly salary was Rs. 400–500 at that time, so the price of the plot was equal to their annual income. In 2007 a local real-estate dealer said that the price of a 160 square yard 'flat' (the flat only, without land) with three bedrooms was Rs. 1 crore and that the price of a 125 square yard flat with two bedrooms, which had cost Rs. 21 lakh in the early 2000s, cost Rs. 60 lakh in 2007.¹⁹

This rapid rise in property prices created a situation where the original Bengali allottees were unable to purchase new or extra plots when they wanted

to separate households. As a result, those who purchase and come into the colony are largely non-Bengalis, mainly Punjabis. A former secretary of EPDPA estimated in an article published in 2005 that 17–18 per cent of plots in the colony were already sold to non-Bengalis (Cakrabarti 2005). Similarly, when the author checked the names found in the resident directory published by EPDPA in 2001, 16.7 per cent of the names seemed to be non-Bengali. Bengali residents are anxious for the future of Mini Bengal.

Market redevelopment

The redevelopment of squatters' markets has also affected the ethnic composition of the colony. There are four markets – Nos 1–4 – in the colony. They were all incorporated in the layout plan of Chittaranjan Park from the planning stage. However, No. 1 and No. 2 markets were occupied by squatters (shopkeepers) from an early stage, and their naturalisation and redevelopment had been a long-standing issue.

As both markets grew as squatters' markets, they developed depending on the needs of consumers. The variety of shops met the daily needs of the residents. There were shops related to the Bengali lifestyle. The variety of shops resembled markets in Kolkata. When the author visited the two markets in the early 2000s, the shops were mostly huts and were set out facing each other, with a narrow pathway between them (see [Figure 10.4](#)).



Figure 10.4 No. 1 Market before redevelopment.

Shopkeepers from both squatters' markets jointly founded the EPDP Traders' Association in 1975. Though the markets were illegally occupied, the association was officially registered and its members were all displaced persons from East Pakistan. The association had 49 members from No. 1 Market and 47 members from No. 2 Market; there were also non-member shopkeepers around the markets, so the market areas were congested.

The Delhi Development Authority started redevelopment work in the early 2000s. The purpose of this redevelopment was to end the illegal occupation of the land and provide shop spaces to displaced persons from East Pakistan. Therefore the eligibility of each shopkeeper was examined by the authority. While the eligibility of all 96 members of the EPDP Traders' Association was sanctioned, there remained 64 in No. 1 Market and 126 in No. 2 Market who were declared ineligible. Later, an additional 12 shopkeepers were declared eligible, making a total of 108 in all.²⁰ However, as non-eligible shopkeepers claimed that they also needed new shop space for their livelihood, additional space was incorporated in the plan. Shopkeepers could obtain space if they were able to pay the prescribed price to the authorities.²¹

Redevelopment work was completed around 2005.²² The market building was reconstructed as a two-storey building (see [Figure 10.5](#)). Each space was uniformly partitioned as a small compartment 9.5 feet wide by 9.5 feet long. Although eligible shopkeepers held the right to a place in the new buildings, things were not easy. They had to pay a certain amount of money to the authorities.



Figure 10.5 No. 2 Market after redevelopment.

An old shopkeeper who has dealt in real estate since the pre-redevelopment period explained:

The cost of the new shop space was 394,000 Rs. for the ground floor and 675,000 Rs. for the first floor. 28 percent of the total cost was to be paid in advance and remaining 72 percent was to be paid after the construction of building was over. The cost was high for some shopkeepers. There are quite a few people who could not afford it. They sold the right for space to someone else and got out from the market. The current price (in 2007) of space for the ground floor is 50 lakh and 20 lakh Rs. for the first floor. The most expensive spaces are at the front facing the main road, they cost 60 lakh Rs. As buying and selling of space is very active, the percentage of Bengali shopkeepers is about 70 percent in No. 1 Market and 60 percent in No. 2 Market. There are many Punjabis among the new shopkeepers, though there are some Bengalis.²³

What happened with the residential plots happened in market redevelopment too. As a result of the rapid rise in property prices, the percentage of original Bengali displaced persons shopkeepers has declined.

Concluding remarks

This chapter described how the urban neighbourhood is formed under the process of rapid urbanisation in Delhi. The case study of Durga Puja celebrated in Chittaranjan Park has shown that the residents of the colony hold a sense of spatial neighbourhood. Once they feel the scale of the neighbourhood has exceeded their permissible range, they try to adjust its size until it meets their sense of neighbourhood.

The case study of Chittaranjan Park has explored the fact that ethnic diversity is a remarkable aspect of urban space in Delhi. As the Anthropological Survey of India identified, 147 communities have settled in Delhi (Ghosh & Nath 1996: xxii), which, as in other megacities in India, maintains its ethnic diversity.

Chittaranjan Park represents an ethnic community of Bengalis. However, it is neither a primordial nor a traditional community. It is one of the new residential areas developed in the suburbs after independence. While its residents are eager to maintain their Bengali culture, their identities are not confined to ethnicity. Rather, they are heavily influenced by educational qualifications, occupation and being part of the urban middle class. A statement made by the former president of EPDPA in the early 2000s clearly shows this:

Most residents of this colony belong to middle class or lower middle class. There are some scheduled castes in this colony, though they do not disclose it. But, we do not care whether someone belongs to schedule caste. We are all Bengalis. It is enough. Rather we find our respective identity on occupation.²⁴

The activities in various cultural organisations and religious festivals in the colony are based on Bengali culture, but they are not maintained on the conventional relationships of caste, family and gender. The organisations are run by volunteers, and the board members are elected. The temple priests are recruited through newspaper advertisements. This means that although 'community' belongs to the realm of culture, it is managed not through traditional social relations but through the meeting of the contemporary urban environment and the sense its members have of being urban dwellers.

Neighbourhood is not a cultural concept like community, but a spatial one. When the construction of houses in Chittaranjan Park started in the late 1960s, the colony held a single neighbourhood. As the number of houses increased, a single neighbourhood became several neighbourhoods in the context of ritual organisations for Durga Puja. Simultaneously, the neighbourhoods in the colony have been sites of political struggle for colony acquisition, struggle between old residents and newcomers – namely the 714 Group – and the intervention of business enterprise and market, commercialism and globalisation. The drainage of Bengalis from the colony also illustrates how the neighbourhood has been affected by urban environment through rapid urbanisation and redevelopment. The case study of the colony has thus clearly illustrated that the urban neighbourhood is a space that is always being negotiated and reproduced.

Durga Pujas have shown an interesting aspect of locality in Delhi. The locality, defined by Appadurai as a structure of feeling, has been shared by the residents of the colony through the organisation of Durga Pujas in neighbourhoods. It is also widely shared among Bengalis in Delhi as a whole. However, the case in Kashmiri Gate and Timarpur has shown a relationship between locality and neighbourhood where the locality or a local subject remained even after the neighbourhood had dissolved or even disappeared.

While cities in India are increasingly affected by the impact of economic growth and globalisation, it is necessary to combine cultural and ethnic, and political and economic perspectives. Focusing on neighbourhood as locales in which both cultural and economic negotiations take place would greatly benefit research on urban life in India.

Notes

- 1 Standard Note issued by the Department of Rehabilitation: Chittaranjan Park (formerly known as EPDP Colony) near Kalkaji, New Delhi – Development and Allotment of Plots to Displaced Persons from former East Pakistan, 31 March 1980.
- 2 *Lok Sabha Debates*, Written Answers, 27 August 1970, Vol. XLIV, p. 104.
- 3 'Appeal', a mimeograph issued by the Association of Displaced Persons from East Pakistan Declared Eligible for Allotment of Plots in Delhi, 23 May 1978.
- 4 A letter from Minister of Parliamentary Affairs, Sport and Works & Housing, 4 June 1984.
- 5 As discussed later, today there are quite a few non-Bengalis in Chittaranjan Park. However, this section deals with only Bengalis to outline the sociological background of the colony.

- 6 Between 1947 and 1949, 13.5 per cent of the allottees migrated to Delhi, and 64.4 per cent migrated in the 1950s and 1960s. This fact is not strange because the eligibility for application was defined in the first Press Note issued by the government as applicants having been continuously in residence therein from a date prior to 31 March 1958. The second Press Note further relaxed the date and included those who had lived in Delhi for a total period of at least four years after partition up to 31 March 1966 (Standard Note issued by the Department of Rehabilitation, 1980).
- 7 It is said that the migrants between 1946 and 1949 were old migrants who had pre-partition ties of occupation or kinship with West Bengal, belonged to upper and middle castes and tended to gravitate to urban areas. Following the outbreak of communal conflict in Khulna in December 1949, migrants from East Pakistan were chiefly rural – peasant proprietors, traders and artisans (Chatterjee 1990: 72–73).
- 8 The author conducted fieldwork on Durga Puja in Chittaranjan Park and some other places in October 2008. Other related data on Chittaranjan Park were mostly collected from November 2001 to September 2002.
- 9 ‘Delhi Durga Puja Samiti 1910–2009’, a leaflet, Bengali Club, Kashmere Gate, Delhi, 2008.
- 10 The estimate of Durga Pujas being carried out in 250 places in Delhi is not exaggerated. There had been only one immersion committee in Delhi before, which arranged the immersion of Durga’s idol in the river on the last day of the puja celebrations. As the number of Durga Puja increased, the committee was separated into two, South and North in Delhi. According to an interview with the committee officials in the southern part on 9 October 2008, the registered number of Durga Puja in the south part was 125 in 2008, and there were also non-registered pujas. South Delhi has over 125 Durga Pujas, so the north has the same or more. Thus, Delhi has more than 250 Durga Pujas today.
- 11 Interview with a member of the Mela Ground committee on 7 October 2008.
- 12 Interview with a member of the Cooperative Ground committee on 4 October 2008.
- 13 Interview with a member of the Mela Ground committee on 7 October 2008.
- 14 Interview with a member of the D Block committee on 4 October 2008.
- 15 Interview with the president of the Milan Samiti committee on 7 October 2008.
- 16 Interview with a household head and Durga Puja organiser in B Block on 7 October 2008.
- 17 Interview with a member of the Timarpur committee on 4 October 2008.
- 18 Since the 1990s it has become possible for allottees to change the land status from leasehold to freehold if they apply with certain fees to the government.
- 19 Interview with a local real-estate dealer in No. 1 Market, Chittaranjan Park, on 31 August 2007.
- 20 A document issued by the Land and Development Office, Ministry of Urban Development, Government of India on 16 July 2001.
- 21 The list of shopkeepers the author obtained in No. 1 Market shows from the names on it that most of the people who were declared non-eligible were also Bengalis. However, they were not displaced persons; they were Bengalis from West Bengal and other places.
- 22 An article in the magazine issued by EPDPA in 2005 reported that No. 1 Market was already completed and No. 2 Market would be completed soon (*Purbacaler Katha*, 2005). When the author visited in September 2006, No. 2 Market was already completed.
- 23 Interview with a local real-estate dealer in No. 1 Market, Chittaranjan Park, on 9 September 2007.
- 24 Interviewed on 15 December 2001.

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11 Urban thresholds

Crevices, crossroads and magic remainders

Parvis Ghassem-Fachandi

A series of contradictions mark the urban experience of Ahmedabad. The city is one of India's major commercial centres and the largest in the province of Gujarat, with an official and fast-growing population of over five million residents. It is generally felt to be safer than most metropolitan Indian cities; residents are proud to point out that instances of rape, murder and robbery are much more frequent in Bombay, Bangalore or Delhi. Yet, there is something conservative and staid about its cultural scene. Notwithstanding the general perception of safety, many of its younger residents – across class divisions – aspire to move to other large urban centres in India, or even to international destinations such as London or New York. I was often asked 'Why did you come here?', as if the place from which I came – wherever it was – must be better.¹

Despite the fact that Ahmedabad has witnessed calamitous events like floods, earthquakes, pogroms and communal riots, it is also, for many of its residents, a city of calm and prosperity. In quieter times the city busies itself with infrastructural improvements in an atmosphere of endless growth. Its entrepreneurial class has proved capable, to a large extent, of insulating the local economy from the devastating ups and downs of international capital markets. Ahmedabad consists of three distinct urban spaces, relating uneasily to one another, each one connected to a specific urban imaginary as well as to concrete facts on the ground: the walled city, the eastern periphery and new Ahmedabad on the western river shore (Nandy *et al.* 1995: 110–123; Yagnik and Sheth 2005: 229–230). The city is strongly divided along class, caste and communal lines, but remains integrated through community borders, the cyclical occurrence of violence and an economic division of labour (Breman 2004: 31–39, Rajagopal 2010: 529–556).

Divisions of the city fall into relief during times of violence or in its aftermath, when one difference is able to bridge all others and becomes more prominent. In recent decades the Hindu–Muslim divide has been the default mode of all divisions. In periods of violence, the city behaves like a massive organism, closing the many interfaces between areas and communities as if it were a giant cell reacting against chemical intrusion: bridges become structures of confinement; permanent police posts define community borders, which in turn become spaces for provocation and violent performance; sacred structures become sites of conversion, identity assertion and injury. Thus, at such times any traversing of

urban space is fraught with immense psychological stress and incalculable risk. This chapter describes experiences of separation and how they come to be expressed with reference to two specific elements in the city's hardware: roadside temples and the use of interstitial space for urban expiation rituals.²

Mushroom temples

If bridges link an urban expanse that remains psychologically divided, and permanent police posts configure a split intimate space that is physically shared, then street temples and shrines cluster within the matrix of these existing fault lines. And yet, these miniature city constructions frequently seem to have a will of their own. The ubiquitous miniature structures chaotically expand into the middle of roads and onto street corners, only to be ruled in by city officials or disappear out of sight. They either grow larger and impede traffic or recede back to the margins at the side of the street.

Urban micro-politics determine the spatial growth, expansion and shift of these structures. Small-scale religious entrepreneurs compete with residents, city officials, extremist organisations or the police, who are charged with regulating traffic or controlling unauthorised building in the city. Although these structures increasingly flag city corners as belonging to one particular religious community, their spread and growth are not reducible to political or communal machinations. Much of their will to live has to do with the indifferent flow of money and traffic through the city.

There are many religious sites in Ahmedabad. While large historical temples and shrines, or modern prestigious edifices, are depicted on city maps and tourist guides, the more dynamic minor structures are not. Counterintuitively, the slighter and more insignificant a temple or shrine, the more it connects the residential contiguity to its spatial signification. The reason behind this is simple and has to do with the social background of the clientele that makes use of the structure. If a temple grows large and becomes well known, it will attract a different set of visitors from all over the city; if it remains small it will draw mainly those who are residents of its immediate vicinity.

In extreme cases, such as the fancy Akshardham temple on the Ahmedabad–Gandhinagar highway, or the series of wealthy ISKON temples, visitors often include middle-class Muslims and Christians who want to see spectacles of the divine during Sunday picnics. Likewise, the Usmanpura Dargah, the fourteenth-century tomb of Sayid Usman, located in a middle-class Hindu neighbourhood, attracts many Hindu visitors in search of a cure for possession by spirits, broken hearts or disease. By becoming tied to diverse categories of visitors, the more developed edifices escape the immediateness of their surroundings, overcoming boundaries of class, caste or religious composition within a respective neighbourhood. In other words, the physical growth of religious structures encourages transcendence of the sociological make-up of the surrounding space, and although physical size makes a structure more visibly present in the urban landscape, its visitors tend to be much more transient and less tied to its physical location.

Successful sacred places become the site of inner-city pilgrimage and official recognition, patronage and, finally, protection by the city police. An attack on such a structure will lead to investigations, arrests and trouble with the authorities (this in no way excludes their destruction during extraordinary events such as pogroms in which violent unanimity can reign supreme). In contradistinction, minor improvised structures are more dependent on their immediate surroundings, supportive neighbours or the demographic dominance of a particular community. When the air is filled with communal posturing they inadvertently become, or are turned into, community markers.

Small structures often make it big. Bulging constructions on major traffic arteries frequently expand to fill what was earlier an empty traffic island. Several of these can be found on Ashram Road and other major traffic routes in the city. In one case, an adolescent street temple grew into a place for street worship for middle- to lower middle-class commuters. The success of such structures is predicated on the creative ability to attract passing residents into short-lived economic and spiritual transactions during their daily journey to work and back home. Some temples emerge near bus stops or other sites where a potential spiritual client is likely to pause or slow her movement in urban space.

Most miniature street temples or shrines have doors that can be closed, and even if they do not, their walls create an enclosed space, protected from the outside and framing and symbolically demarcating the inside. Usually, but not always, the walls and doors, as well as the cement platforms on which they are frequently erected, are added later, after the structure has become economically viable or some patron has offered a religious gift to improve it. The platforms create an open space that is kept clean and serves as a seat for neighbours on the street. The edifice is elevated above the dust of the road and hence set part.

On occasion the entrance of the structure is positioned so that it angles towards the street in such a way that passing drivers feel compelled to look into the temple when its tiny gates are open, lights are lit and deities are present. Conversely, some doors face away from the traffic to allow visitors to stay safely off the road when performing *darshan*, the visual exchange with the divine. As they grow, temples in particular have a tendency to gravitate sideways towards the centre of roads; in some cases they balance on slim road dividers or traffic islands. All such growth invites congestion and even accidents at times, but although commuters often express annoyance, the general atmosphere is one of great tolerance. This tendency to encroach imperceptibly onto the road tentatively reverses the rationale of enclosed space. The protected inside of the temple is brought into direct contact with the roiling vitality outside, placing itself directly in the way of passing movement.

The impulse of small religious structures to expand, slide sideways, encroach and insert themselves into the busiest of urban flows is constantly perceptible. Methodologically, one can best take account of such shifts when visiting specific sites in the city frequently over a longer period of time, equipped with a camera to document these movements, and then discussing the matter with local residents and shop owners.

The hierarchical distinctions of social distance in city space, expressed most pointedly through guards, gates, and bridges, are supplemented through these structures, which introduce a more encompassing verticality of the sacred: in relation to invisible forces – gods, goddesses, ghosts, demons or, for that matter, the distribution of destiny and bad luck – all city residents are truly equal. And where are these uncontrollable forces more palpable than in the interminable commuter traffic?

Traffic, by connecting all unequal places, leaving no one unaffected or isolated, is a collective phenomenon that, like the circulation of money, defines the experience of modernity. While it always implies the danger of misfortune through accidents, road travel becomes restricted during violence, constituting one important element of the peculiar atmosphere that pervades during violent conflagrations. During such periods, devices that minimise distance – vehicles such as cars, scooters and motorbikes – are removed from the street; and if not, they are frequently destroyed (usually burnt). If the transience of space is interrupted when the city engages in violence, in peaceful times it is not hampered but tapped strategically by improvised religious structures. Without crossroads and traffic circles where passage axes interlock, these structures would never multiply in this way.

The smaller concrete temples, round or rectangular, are usually decorated inside with convenient white or coloured bathroom tiles, and on the outside even more colourful deities are depicted. The Muslim version of the small street structure is a shrine, a *dargah*, painted in green and with the grave of a saint or two. Sometimes small street structures mark a particularly busy corner, or a large tree where cows gather, producing a localised charm that residents enjoy and often attribute to the supernatural powers of the divinity or saint in question; this is sometimes tongue-in-cheek. The aesthetic value of such sacred assemblages is appreciated across religious lines, as both Hindus and Muslims hold similar ideas about where in this dusty city one can comfortably sit and share a cup of tea.

Since the BJP took power in central Gujarat in the 1990s miniature temples have progressively been springing up everywhere, not just in urban Ahmedabad. Recently, in the eastern expanses of the city, a series of identical Hindu structures – always rectangular – have been placed strategically in communal border areas one after the other in quick succession. Many of these structures were patronised by the Vishva Hindu Parishad, in line with its purported goal to further ‘Hindu culture’. They are frequently built with walls and doors, grills and platforms all at once, displaying a more aggressive, colourful presence. They seldom impede traffic by horizontal shift or displacement.

Although erected by local neighbours from specific castes and communities, these square structures signal a generalised ‘Hindu’ presence in urban space. During the 2002 violence such structures on Gita Mandir road became gathering places for armed killers who stopped Muslim ambulances or individual vehicles on the major east–west city axis. Another strategy, visible in front of PRASHANT – a Jesuit Centre for Human Rights, Justice and Peace in west Ahmedabad – is to erect such structures immediately in front of peace activist or

NGO buildings that are considered to be in opposition to the chauvinist goals of Hindu organisations. It is dangerous to oppose such planned and wilful construction as it can invite conspiracy theories and unpleasant accusations of anti-Hindu bias. Ultimately, however, while initially easily recognisable because they resemble one another in size, height, material and overall monotonous appearance, the city soon swallows these structures, and they become part of the usual urban hardware.

For the author of this chapter, most of the miniature structures in the city offered wonderful opportunities to sit, drink tea and ask locals about their Gods and beliefs in an informal setting. My questions about the age of the temple and the actual context of its erection were, however, generally considered intrusive; most street temples were erected illegally. Once a temple is erected, it is very difficult to demolish, since followers insist that no human agency was involved in its emergence. It is claimed instead that the deity or saint in question ‘chose’ the place of its appearance and magically surfaced in some form, usually through an idol or image growing out of the ground beneath the asphalt. Something amorphous was taken to be a sign of a divinity, which was then given form through human agency. In fact, bubbles and lumps in the asphalt due to overheating and heavy vehicular traffic are often interpreted as signs of sacred intervention. This source of authority joins humble structures in kinship to larger and more successful structures in the city. The Gods can appear to the poor as well as to the better off, and once a divinity makes its presence felt all that is left to do is to erect the structure.

The social lives of bathroom-tile temples track the intersection of religious interest with small-scale economic entrepreneurship in contested urban space. If there is enough room, small temples invariably grow into big ones within a few years. And the larger they become, the older they are claimed to be. When traffic flows past, riders on two-wheelers greet the deities with a nod or the brief placing of a hand on the heart, risking accident, but amazingly optimistic that nothing will harm them at that very moment. Often a *paan* or teashop, or both, quickly arises next to them. Ultimately, most religious entrepreneurs seek to pronounce themselves as *sadhu* (one who renounces the world). Then they and their followers tell elaborate stories and draw pictures of their spiritual predecessors and of the ancient origin of the temple, even when residents of the locality know very well that five years prior there was only a traffic island poured in concrete in the place where the temple now stands, on which traffic police smoked their *bidis*, spat their *paan* and wielded their *lathis*.

One such *sadhu* now runs a former street temple the size of a small truck off a busy commercial road. He told me that the biggest reward for him after all these years is to see people greeting the Goddess when they drive by. A congenial elderly man, he felt proud to participate in the road traffic on a lifeline of the city. He had become part of what rolled by and used to ignore him: the people with work, with jobs, with families, on their way to the west and back. He speaks to them and he feels acknowledged. As he explained, he is with but not *of* them: a true world renouncer.

This particular man had managed to eke out a living by inhibiting traffic, slowing down time and providing an increasingly hurried clientele with the means to worship on their way to work. Around his structure, a minuscule and bare bazaar area has grown, inclusive of a street barbershop, a Muslim garage repair station, a teashop and a humble fruit-juice vendor. Through the attraction of the Goddess Chamunda Mata, he has provided work for members of the city's informal economic sector.

The final sign of the upward integration of street temples into urban public life occurs at the moment when not only neighbours but city residents from far-off places come to visit during religious temple festivals. The temple then becomes their central place of worship. Electricity lines or prestigious telephone lines are suddenly provided, although the latter are in fast decline due to the spread of mobile phones. Neighbours 'offer' electricity, allowing a connection from their houses to the temple. The supply of electricity to a temple becomes a religious gift and a sure sign of patronage and status. Those who openly disagree with this practice do sometimes accuse the temple entrepreneur of power theft.

Once the temple is large enough, it is often protected by a ceiling and encircled by a large red grill to keep out thieves, monkeys, dogs – and stray cows. During 'riots', the grill also protects from vandals, Muslims and Molotov cocktails, which people, in street-fighting jargon, call 'petrol bombs'. If a stone lands on a temple during collective violence, newspapers report 'Hindu temple stoned.'

At some spots small Islamic structures attempt to rival the mushrooming Hindu temples. But, given the demographic dominance of Hindus and the financial patronage of the VHP, the territorial competition in Ahmedabad has so far obviously been one-sided. In the end, there are always many more Hindu deities than there can ever be Muslim holy men for whom it would be suitable to build shrines. There is also a pronounced and openly acknowledged bias in the city municipal authority itself against small Muslim structures. Also, Muslims lack a powerful and feared organisation such as the VHP to seriously challenge and pressure the city administration on urban religious matters.

The distribution of shrines compared to temples reflects the general configuration of city space. Muslim community presence is concentrated in delimited zones, while Hindu markers spread and mushroom all over. In many regions of Gujarat, a Muslim shrine defines a marked sacred space that signifies a sphere symbolically separate from society, external to caste, identity and community division. In Ahmedabad, however, Muslim shrines increasingly signify the same thing that mosques do: Islam and a local Islamic population which stands apart from other communities.

In areas formerly inhabited by Muslims, local Jain and Hindu proprietors often still tend to older shrines if they have not been converted into temples. The reverse can equally be true, but is more atypical and increasingly rare. I have discovered former temples used as storage space in what are today Muslim neighbourhoods, but never one that has been transformed into a Muslim place of worship. While these urban transformations have much to do with inner-city

migration, especially from the old city, which left Muslim and Hindu religious structures abandoned, they also indicate a shift in worship styles.

Since the 1990s Muslim shrines have become primary targets of violence (Nandy *et al.* 1995: 104). In the 2002 pogrom, many smaller urban shrines simply disappeared; some were destroyed, others converted into Hindu temples. Some of the converted structures were referred to as ‘Hulladia Hanuman’ – angry, riotous, Hanuman.³ The marked tendency to destroy and convert Muslim shrines has much to do with eliminating sites where religious boundaries were transcended. Muslim shrines have tended to be places that attract people from all social or religious backgrounds.

As spoils of urban warfare, converted structures loudly proclaim Hindu-ness. Aesthetically, the religious iconography, especially the idols dwelling inside, lacks the individualist creativity and inventiveness of other, smaller improvised Hindu religious sites. The retainers at these temples prohibit photography within the sanctum; this is in opposition to most other street temples, where visitors are usually strongly encouraged to take a photo. Ironically, the prohibition is most acute where there is no need for a photo anyway since the representations offered are rarely particularly original and can be acquired in shops that specialise in religious paraphernalia. While small Muslim shrines provided an easy target during violence, in the pogrom even large historical edifices were attacked and partly destroyed with the help of the city administration.

These developments correlate with larger social shifts. In a curious way, the ideologies of Muslim reform movements concur with the ideas of Hindu nationalism. Whereas for the former, traditional worship practices at Muslim shrines are a symbol for a false or anachronistic Islam that is too ‘Hindu’ to be acceptable today, for the latter the very fact that Hindus visit Muslim places of worship for supernatural help renders them formally ‘Hindu’ in the first place, and hence places that have been forcibly converted. The frequent correspondence in religious conception and practice between Hindus and Muslims – the product of a long history of religious synthesis and mutual cultural imbrication – does not vitiate claims to irreconcilable differences. Rather, today such correspondences often provoke negative responses as part of a psychological process that continues to produce what it claims to only describe.

Perhaps most significantly, a fundamental asymmetry structures the relation between religious locations in space and their alleged emergence in time. While every Muslim sacred spot is easily believed to hover over an older destroyed or abandoned Hindu or Jain site, the reverse claim is never deemed possible. Although recently, as well as in former decades, a series of Muslim shrines have actually been violently ‘reconverted’ to Hindu sites, Muslims rarely claim temporal prior-ness for any of their sacred sites, even when historical priority is highly likely. Reacting to this asymmetry, Muslims will sometimes self-importantly claim that this is so because their shrines are actually of ‘historical’ and not ‘mythical’ origin. In regard to smaller and more insignificant Muslim urban structures, however, this certainly cannot be affirmed since small-scale Muslim religious entrepreneurs, too, are constructing new miniature structures whenever they can.

Reminders of urban magic

Temples, shrines and police posts visibly delineate inner-city space. As central markers or sites of worship placed to the side, in the middle and between things, they separate what is otherwise locked together through the use of doors, platforms, gates and projected dangers. But it is not only deities and policemen that dwell in the open city. There are also structures such as bird-feeders (*chabutaro*) – often hailed as symbols of non-violence – animals such as cows, goats, pigs and dogs, and humans, including beggars, saints and migrant workers. And finally, there are elemental beings, such as ghosts, who inhabit the in-between crevices of the city.

There is something transient about these interstitial places where one can be invisible without disappearing. This transience is heightened when traffic rolls by and the street is busy. The space between divergent roadways, the centre of a road crossing or intersection, the centre of four-ways or six-ways (*chhar-* and *chho-rasta* in local idiom), in which all directions meet, where everything begins and everything ends, are also the preferred site for reminders of urban magic. These in-between spaces are not only inhabited by benign beings but also by an evil that is to be avoided at all cost. In fact, a popular superstition, often disavowed but never disappearing, haunts street crossings. The evidence consists of magical waste that has been left behind, the stuff of *bhutprêt* (ghosts), often flattened by the rolling traffic.

If an evil spirit is identified and held responsible for some misfortune or disease, residents of the city perform an exorcism in a quick ritual called *utar* – a word denoting a ford or threshold. The reminders of that ritual become potent magical waste that must somehow be gotten rid of. In the case of such remains, the usual means of garbage disposal will not do. In the residential areas in which I lived, which were all middle- to lower-middle-class housing societies, normal garbage was either picked up at the door by garbage workers or thrown out of balconies onto the street itself, where it was scavenged by the very poorest of the poor, and animals such as dogs and sometimes – in Hindu areas – pigs. What remained after this was burned, lending a peculiar tangy smell to many residential neighbourhoods in the mornings. But it is more difficult to get rid of magical remains, as they may contain possible evil that does not lend itself easily to elimination without some form of concerted action. The remains after *puja* worship are called *prasad*, the food remains of the Gods, and they are a form of blessing. But the magical reminders of small exorcism rituals are a dangerous pollution, the symmetrical opposite of *prasad*, and a form of the impure sacred.

The small exorcism ritual, sometimes also performed merely pro-forma, consists of placing several objects such as red thread, red powder, red or green chilli, limes and a coconut onto a metal plate. The plate is then waved or circled around the afflicted person seven times in order to confuse and constrict the evil element within him or her. That element, usually a *prêt*, becomes entangled in the thread and enclosed in the objects on the plate. The reminders then have to be disposed of at road crossings.

Josephbhai, a converted Catholic from a scheduled caste background, who lives in Navrangpura, calls coconuts or other remainders left on the streets ‘cast down evil spirits’ that were taken from a family member or from the dark corners of a house. The term *utar*, a masculine term, was translated by Joseph as ‘I cast down, descending, the evil spirited material.’ The evil substance is then caught in various items, which become the carriers of the evil spirit: magical remains. ‘No one will even touch it,’ Joseph warned. The ghost becomes caught in the coconut, and this is *utar*. In a way, the coconut is now possessed. ‘One goes away from it, one does not touch it.’

At the end of the ritual it is absolutely incumbent to leave the object demonstrably behind. The physical movement away represents the symbolic departure from the ghost’s location. Preferably, the possessed substances are placed at road crossings, traffic junctions from which everyone is moving away, where divergent directions lead away from a single centre.⁴ According to Joseph, the practice is particularly prevalent at certain times of the year, for example during Diwali, the Indian festival of lights.

Salim, a Muslim in his late thirties, and Matuben, in her mid-forties and a member of a scheduled caste, discussed with me the practice of *utar*. Both have performed the ritual several times. In the morning one has to circulate the chillies, limes and an earthen vessel (*matlo*) over the head of the person afflicted by disease or misfortune. The substances that cause harm through disease or from the evil eye (*najar*) are thus captured in the objects and the ware, but not the ghost itself. According to Matu and Salim, the ghost is still haunting the road. Only the effects of the evil spirit are confined into the earthen vessel or the coconut, which is thus called ‘*utaro*’, which they described as an evil remainder. As in the case of Joseph, they stressed that the pollutants of the purification ritual have to be left behind demonstrably, acting out a definite departure from them, by placing them where others pass by: in-between roadways, or in the middle of squares or intersections.

The former president of the city’s Muslim butcher community similarly explained to me his views on these common practices of urban magic. He made a distinction between visiting specific religious sites and roadside rituals, although both are comparable in that they relate to an urban threshold. During the college examination period, for example, business and health problems are particularly prevalent in the city. Therefore, some residents of the city visited places of worship, while others sought help by performing the ritual of *utar*. He explained:

They give some donation, sometimes only stone of green and red, and then they wish for something: If God gives me success, I promise to come [to worship] every day until my death. I will give my presence every Thursday there [in the shrine or temple] until my death and by the will of God, if he gives me success, then I will have to fulfill [that promise].

It is some element we can’t see, like horror, like *shaitan* (satan), invisible powers. If they [the forces] are harassing me, someone will suggest to me to

take one coconut, circle it seven times around [my] body, and then keep it in a four corner [a cloverleaf road junction].

This is done in order 'to escape from that element who is punishing me'. Butchers perform the same practice with the remainders of animal slaughter. An animal liver is circled seven times around an afflicted person's head and then left at the junction. 'The vultures will eat it.' Thus the evil is carried away. I asked if one could touch the remainder; he responded, 'It is indeed dangerous.... If you enter or touch these spaces where this is kept, you will become patient of that *tatvo* [that is, you will be the victim of that element, that elemental force].'

The magical remainders of misfortune and disease are placed on unoccupied traffic circles, at crossroads or in the middle of a square, between at least two roads and four directions, and with at least a coconut or some red powder to symbolise blood, and a lime, or both, which carries the evil pollutant that was extracted from the person. Sometimes there is an unbroken coconut, sometimes a broken earthen vessel. Sometimes, but not always, the substances are concealed in a black, red or green bag.

Other residents told me that, formerly, live chickens were slaughtered at four-ways, meaning intersections, and the blood was spilled about. I was unable to witness such a practice, and the residents claimed that this was no longer performed. Today all the chickens have been replaced with coconuts, but blood is still indicated by the red colour of the thread and powder. As with so many things in Gujarat today, exorcism has largely become a vegetarian affair, with the exception of the butcher's reference to liver.

These small rituals are practised by all groups within Ahmedabad's diverse society. Although one might expect that members of the middle class would perform them less frequently, these practices are prevalent across caste, religious and even class divisions. There is no group or community that can convincingly claim not to be harmed by misfortune or to be immune to the attraction of such convenient ritual solutions. There is, however, a stronger tendency to deny engagement in such practices among the urban middle- and upper-class.

Threshold offerings do not require an expert specialist and can be performed by anybody at any time. Accordingly, magical waste from these offerings can be found in all parts of the city. It does not accumulate necessarily only among specific social status groups, but instead in neighbourhoods where street dividers and traffic islands abound, the in-between spaces of the city, where all directions begin or end. City crevices, mostly poured in asphalt and concrete, thus have a unique role to play for residents. If such raised circles and pavement structures are absent, the magical remainders are also sometimes placed simply in the middle or on the side of a road, always halfway off it, but never completely out of the way.

In a society concerned with distinctions in worship and religious practice, the universality of this behaviour is unusual. The reason behind it is that these acts are not exactly based on a particular positive belief-system, but rather constitute the underbelly of all existing forms of 'religious' belief. It is difficult to substantiate

and describe in detail the procedures at hand and their rationalisations as they vary and somehow demand to remain hidden or obscured. They have a decidedly negative core; this was expressed by all interlocutors in one way or another.

People will speak about these practices in different ways. When speaking English, many a city resident will use the word 'doubt' where a native English speaker might have used the word 'belief' to describe this sort of urban ritual behaviour. For example, the speaker might say, confusingly, 'Yes, he is doubting' (in English), when he means to indicate that someone believes in, say, a ghost or an attack by an evil spirit or element and engages in the practice of *utar*. Here, the statement 'he is doubting' does not mean that the person in question doubts whether there are ghosts, but that he is in doubt of the assertion that there is no such thing as ghosts. In other words, he is entertaining a doubt (*vahemavu*, to entertain a doubt, to be suspicious).

This 'doubt' is not to say that he positively affirms a belief in ghosts either. The speaker is not affirming the existence independently, as if a ghost were a car, a house or an elephant. The person in question is not thought to be delusional, but rather, despite having been unable to see a ghost so far, he doubts the fact that they are consequently not there. In relation to such harmful forces, caution is in order. Since ghosts cannot be seen anyway, there are other indicators that can perhaps provide evidence of their presence, such as repeated and inexplicable misfortune. That evidence is the stuff of everyday personal lives and varies from case to case. In other words, even when people claim that they do not believe in 'it', this is merely to say that their belief is not *of it*. To believe in something means to draw closer, constituting access and proximity, and at times forcing an obligation. To perceive is to be perceived, as is the case in the mutuality of *darshan*. Stating '*hu manto j nathi*' (I do not believe in this or that) can therefore imply a suspicion, or a doubt, indicated by the Gujarati term *vahem* (suspicion, superstition).

In Ahmedabad, most religiously inclined individuals are acutely aware of the fact that the divine is a *Vorstellung* (a re-presentation, an imagination), representing the truth of the one engaged in the particular act of imagining. There is a certain inbuilt reflexivity at work where the believer is related to his or her manner of belief. Many competitive caste, religious and sectarian divisions are motivated by claims to a privileged access to divinities, or to a better cognitive or emotional method of comprehending the divine or the supernatural. That is why members of higher castes will often refer to deities associated with and propitiated by lower castes, for example those demanding blood offerings, as 'superstitions'. But when prompted, they will not claim that these propitiated entities do not exist as such, but rather, that their particular form (including the forbidden objects they demand as offerings) reveals the nature or qualities of those propitiating them. Thus, to say one does not believe in ghosts is often merely meant to indicate that one does not consider oneself associated with such a dark belief, and by extension, the practices involved. This is not to suggest that invisible and malevolent forces are complete humbug or that such procedures might not sometimes be absolutely necessary. Belief and doubt are contingent

upon one another in what constitutes *Aberglaube* (a faith in the register of a 'however', a *super-stitio*).

In short, Ahmedabad's inner-city superstition is not simply a 'belief' that one can assume, openly affirm and believe in, or choose to dismiss. It is not a positive assertion of a presence, but rather a negative reversal of the given, a possibility which logically can never disappear. One can always be suspicious of the given, and fear its reversal. To be superstitious is to be credulous that things are connected in ways that are not obvious. Accordingly, someone behaving superstitiously is someone who is fundamentally in doubt, suspicious of the normal order of things. It would make sense if this stance were more prevalent among desperate sections of society, but it seems that there is considerable qualm among members of the middle classes too.

The other word often used locally for superstition is of Sanskrit origin, the term *andhshraddha* (superstition) and *andhshraddhalu*, denoting 'superstitious' and 'false worship'. It is the opposite of *shraddha*, the proper ceremony or ritual. Denoting the proper ritual in reverse, the term does not indicate an absence of ritual acts as such. Superstition can never cease because it is the logical underside of belief, a belief in the register of an endless 'however'.

Why is it so important to place magical remains at a crossroads? These interstitial spaces, ubiquitous urban fords and thresholds, it is said, confuse the evil spirits and ghosts, and they cannot find their way back to their bearer. Here an urban landscape of dust, cement and asphalt provides a solution to the problem of how to eliminate malignant material. In fact, Ranjitbhai explained to me, if done properly, one has to bring the evil remains to the road crossing by walking backwards (although I have never seen anyone actually do so). Walking backwards confuses the evil spirits about where one originally came from. Others claim that after one has positioned the remainders on the crossway, one has to walk away backwards – again to confuse the spirits.⁵

The beginning or end of street tracks and the centre of crossways are locations characterised by their relations to spatial directionality. At the interface of different directions, the spirit – and the affliction it causes – can better jump onto other people who are passing by. In this sinister theory, placing the remains of exorcised misfortune on road dividers and traffic islands serves the function of distributing and displacing the evil one has been able to get rid of onto others. As in comparable conceptions elsewhere, here another person's affliction helps remove one's own, especially if that person swallows it whole.

I had one such encounter with concentrated evil of the urban kind. Driving my scooter down the busy Gita Mandir road in the hot afternoon sun in east-west traffic, I came across a red cloth bag in the middle of the road. It had obviously fallen down from a traffic divider and rolled onto the street. It presented itself suddenly in front of my moving vehicle. In a moment of absentmindedness, and because the dense traffic allowed little room for evasion, I tried to drive over the bag, realising too late that something was inside of it. My front wheel slid sideways and came under the large tyres of a bus to the left of me. By chance, and because I had been driving slowly, I was able to jump off the scooter

before my legs went under the moving bus. I landed on the pavement while the bus's rear wheels, almost in slow motion, crushed the front tyre of my vehicle. The bus paused for a moment with a dramatic screech of its brakes as the driver made sure he had crushed the scooter and not me. The passengers in the bus stared at me in frozen postures from their open windows while swerving gently in unison with the vehicle. Then the bus, which had almost killed me, moved on.



Figure 11.1 Utar in urban Ahmedabad, 2013.

Recovering from my minor injuries at the side of the road, I was offered water by a friendly garage owner, who introduced himself as Ramesh, a man in his twenties whose repair shop was located close to the place of the accident. He was able to replace my squashed front wheel quickly and thus restore my precious vehicle, surprisingly, within a few hours. While recovering from the shock of the accident, I complained about the custom of placing coconuts in bags that roll in front of moving wheels. Ramesh listened silently. He agreed and nodded while competently repairing the squashed wheel. It was not the first accident he had seen at the traffic divider right in front of his garage. He finally spoke, with great confidence and authority.

Ramesh did not think my accident was a coincidence. He did not actually see the incident, as the bus had blocked his vision, but he vowed that he would never dare to go and clear the road divider of *utar*. No sane person would. The remainders rot, large vehicles crush them and animals eat them, he explained. To try and come close to them would be looking for trouble. I had tried to ignore that which had left the divider (the space where there is no clear directionality) and which had placed itself directly in front me. Thus it saw my direction; that is, the evil saw me.

I objected to this explanation of intent, but Ramesh remained unimpressed by my objections. I had dared to touch the magical remains of an exorcism. They had been placed on the road divider a few days earlier, and had rolled off into the road. They had been placed there, between where four roads meet, precisely in order to step away from them, to get rid of them. The only way to avoid the evil would have been to slow down and steer clear of the remainder, drive away from it. The concentrated evil contained in the coconut had immediately assumed a new victim and almost killed me, he was sure. From the moment my front wheel touched the coconut I had been incredibly lucky. I knew he was right, at least about my luck. Unnerved about a custom that places objects in one's way and then defines the dangerous outcome as wilful misfortune, I drove off. It was this incident that led me to investigate further into the phenomenon of *utar*, which had strangely remained invisible to me until then.

Urban crevices

Utar, an evil harvested from a person, cannot look back once it is correctly placed on the road divider. Not interrupting traffic, it seeks to be carried away and disappears into an anonymous city. Consequently, one can easily overlook these remainders, placed where others pass by. The ritual of *utar* is a ubiquitous practice that, if made explicit, remains embarrassing to many. Miniature religious structures, by contrast, loudly address the incessantly moving traffic by slowing it down and at times boldly blocking it. Their purveyors are not shy but affirmative in bringing themselves into urban presence. De-emphasising their own agency, they stress the attendance of gods, goddesses and saints in their humble constructions. Both *utar* and mushrooming structures make use of urban space by inserting themselves into the many crevices left behind after traffic has

become regulated, real-estate property has become fixed, earth has become asphalt, and municipal schemes have been implemented. In essence, they address the distance felt to an urban other and hence are part of how the city experiences itself: the immediate neighbour, the transient road traveller, the abstract other community or any other city dweller.

Notes

- 1 The research for this chapter is based on field stays in 2001–03, 2005 and 2008–09. I want to thank the Social Science Research Council and the Wenner Gren Foundation for generous financial support when I needed it.
- 2 For a more detailed exploration of the city and the configuration of bridges and police posts in relation to the experience of division, see Ghassem-Fachandi (2012).
- 3 The monkey-faced Hanuman, an important divinity in India and character of the Ramayan epic, is traditionally invoked in the struggle against evil.
- 4 In rural areas, such ritual acts are also common, but usually the remainders are buried outside of the village compound, or poignantly, within the confines of a neighbouring village, thus displacing the evil.
- 5 It is perhaps interesting to note in this context that the *chudel*, a particularly fearsome female ghost, is described as having its feet and head twisted so that they face the wrong direction.

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Part IV

Lived cities

Views of cities from the ground

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12 ‘Fight the Filth’

Civic sense and middle-class activism in Mumbai*

Yoko Taguchi

In his portrait of Mumbai, *Maximum City*, Suketu Mehta describes the familiar characteristics of Indian cities:

Indians do not have the same kind of civic sense as, say, Scandinavians. The boundary of the space you keep clean is marked at the end of the space you call your own. The flats in my building are spotlessly clean inside; they are swept and mopped every day, or twice every day. The public spaces – hallways, stairs, lobby, the building compound – are stained with betel spit; the ground is littered with congealed wet garbage, plastic bags, and dirt of human and animal origin. It is the same all over Bombay, in rich and poor areas alike.

This absence of civic sense is something that everyone from the British to the Hindu nationalists of the RSS have drawn attention to, the national defect in the Indian character.

(Mehta 2005: 128)

The filthiness of public space is often a cause of great distress for India’s ‘concerned citizens’, who blame a lack of civic sense for this nationwide problem. An article in the *Times of India* analysing the results of their ‘Quality of Life Survey’¹ showed the close association between ‘civic sense and cleanliness’, which were combined as one criterion in their chart. Mumbai’s ‘civic sense and cleanliness’ scored 2.2 on a scale of one to five. The article began by emphasising Mumbai’s lack of civic sense: ‘If there is one thing that both the BMC² and a huge number of Mumbaikars³ can be faulted for, it’s a lack of civic sense. Garbage, spit and other forms of filth litter this city’ (Sen 2011: 4). A quote from the convener of the NGO, Clean Sweep Forum, revealed another interesting component of Indian civic sense: ‘Civic sense comes when the authorities flood the masses with info and make them feel part of a larger goal... This is not the case today’ (Sen 2011: 4). Educating ‘the masses’ is identified as the most important project for middle-class activists. The widespread conviction of the need to ‘flood the masses with info’ and ‘create awareness’ demonstrates the pedagogical responsibility of Indian civil society.

This chapter offers a new perspective on these controversial movements which have multiplied in urban India since economic liberalisation in the 1990s.

It will discuss the rise of middle-class aesthetics and the history of civic activism, before investigating the attempts of the middle class to engender civic responsibility through the ‘Fight the Filth’ campaign in Mumbai.

The aesthetics of middle-class activism

Partha Chatterjee expresses concern about the recent trend of ‘cleaning up’ Indian cities by reclaiming public spaces for ‘proper citizens’ and expelling squatters and encroachers (Chatterjee 2004). The urban middle class plays the central role in these movements, and the politics of the contemporary middle class are often criticised as hypocritical, even schizophrenic. Amita Baviskar (2011), for instance, exposes the hubris of civic activists, whom she labels ‘bourgeois environmentalists’, who campaign to clean up the city by driving out cows, cycle-rickshaws and rickshaw-pullers, but ignore the pollution and congestion caused by their own use of private cars. The conventional diagnosis of the post-colonial middle class is that they are ‘split between a commitment to liberal progress and a phobic relation to the subalterns’ (Mazzarella 2011: 355; see also Varma 2007).

In order to explain the contradictory tendencies of the middle class, scholars have employed the term ‘aesthetics’ in varying senses (Fernandes 2006, Ghertner 2011, Mazzarella 2006, Rajagopal 2001). Leela Fernandes (2006) states that the new aesthetics represents the desire of the middle class for the control of urban space. D. Asher Ghertner, on the other hand, criticises the presumption that ‘a bourgeois, consumerist and globalist aesthetics is responsible for the rapid remaking of the Indian urban’. The formation of ‘the new Indian middle class’, he argues, is not sufficient to explain ‘the consolidation of such a “world-class” aesthetics’ (Ghertner 2011, 47).⁴ Yet both Fernandes and Ghertner seem to use ‘aesthetics’ to address the intentionality of the people: either in terms of desire and preference (Fernandes 2006), or of a ‘subjective view’ rather than ‘a sound calculative basis’ (Ghertner 2011: 45). Aesthetics as a sensuous and corporeal experience⁵ is, however, considered to go beyond the control of one’s political desire, strategy and subjectivity (Mazzarella 2006, Rajagopal 2001).⁶ For anthropological inquiry, Annelise Riles suggests that form is ‘a self-contextualizing entity’ and proposes giving ‘empathetic accounts of the aesthetic qualities of the form and its effects’ (Riles 2006: 20). Focusing on form and aesthetics helps us to remain cautious about bringing to bear established external analytical frameworks (for example, modernity, gender and class) and to consider a different reality in a given situation. Therefore, in attempting to understand the nature of civic sense, it is important to avoid directly applying the middle-class aesthetics to the framework of politics. Rather, this chapter will examine closely its forms, investigating what kinds of forms are used in a specific case and how they invoke certain actions in civic activism.

The pedagogy of civil society

As shown by phrases such as 'flood the masses with info', the pedagogical role of civil society, which is rooted in the era of colonial elites, remains crucial in recent activism. Civil society in India comprises a small number of urban elites, and many inhabitants of India are not considered 'proper citizens' by middle-class members (Chatterjee 2004). J.S. Anjaria illustrates this point in his ethnography of civic activism in Mumbai, recalling how a group of activists targeted a street vendor, exclaiming, 'We are citizens, who are you?' (Anjaria 2009: 402). Although the Indian population was legally entitled as citizens of the nation state through universal adult suffrage, the average Indian was and remains 'the peasant',⁷ someone who needs to be educated to become a real citizen. The conflict between this historicism ('the peasant is still being educated and developed into the citizen') and universalism ('Indians, literate or illiterate, were always suited for self-rule') characterises the ambiguous situation of civil society in contemporary India (Chakrabarty 2008: 10). The aspirant middle class increasingly feels responsible for educating 'the peasants' and engendering civil society. Contemporary India might have shifted from state-led developmentalism to neo-liberalism, yet the role of civil society as educators remains, and this forms the basis of the duality of middle-class activists. The form of pedagogical civil society retains a strong influence on activists and on their 'world-class' aesthetics.

Culture and the boundaries of filth

Against the predominant account of a 'lack of civic sense' being the cause of dirty public spaces, scholars of South Asia have attempted to provide an alternative explanation by using the spatial distinction of '*ghare/baire*' (inside the house/outside) (Kaviraj 1997) or 'the inside and the outside' (Chakrabarty 1992), which is not equivalent to 'the private' and 'the public'. The inside is not only clean but also auspicious, 'a realm of security: stable and patterned relationships' (Kaviraj 1997: 94). On the other hand, the outside is dangerous because it 'always carries "substances" that threaten one's well-being' (Chakrabarty 1992: 542). Moreover, the outside is also considered 'merely a conceptually insignificant negative of the inside' (Kaviraj 1997: 98) and not 'one's own' (Kaviraj 1997; Chakrabarty 1992).

Sudipta Kaviraj explains the difference between 'public' and 'outside' with the example of the transformation of Calcutta's parks, which were first created as British-style public spaces but became plebeianised or democratised by the 1960s. Parks crowded with vendors and homeless people are now filled with 'filth' (Kaviraj 1997: 107). Kaviraj suggests that this filth and disorder works as a symbolic barrier and keeps the middle class away, establishing control by the poor inside; furthermore, he argues, this 'culture of poverty' forms the resistance of the poor and is an integral factor in Indian democracy and modernity. The discourse of celebrating filth as the strategic resistance of the poor is not

uncommon. Bhaskar Mukhopadhyay also argues that the urban poor's 'public display of filth' can be read as 'metonymic of a *different* constitution of the civic as such' (2006: 226, original emphasis). This set of research has played an important role in relativising western ideas by emphasising the distinctiveness of South Asian culture. There is a danger, however, of romanticising an abstract urban poor, approved by the 'culture of poverty' on the grounds of the traditional spatial recognition of Hindu society. These relativist positions lend support to those who criticise the hypocrisy of contemporary middle-class activism. Yet at the same time, in understanding filth and the subaltern as one body, they echo the rhetoric of civil society (c.f. Ghertner 2011). Chakrabarty complicates these mirrored stances towards the urban poor and their association with filth by starkly addressing the dilemma: 'Should the "non-moderns" have the freedom to die in their "ignorance" or should we intervene with our "knowledge" and the police?' He then suggests that the more interesting question is 'Through what historical process of subject-formation did "long life," "good health," ... and "modern science" come to appear so natural and god-given?' (Chakrabarty 1992: 545), since this allows us to inquire into the values on which we stand and also helps us recognise more ambiguous relationships with filth.

Eating a bit of the street

In everyday life, the urban middle class interacts with various kinds of filth and outside substances. The outside, as the 'meeting point of several communities' (Chakrabarty 1992: 543) and 'the juxtaposition of pleasure and danger' (Chakrabarty 1992: 544), is an inescapable part of the city. The English media and activists see street vendors as the cause of significant problems: they illegally occupy public space in their private interest, sell unhygienic food and create litter; moreover, vendors prevent citizens from taking leisurely walks, ruin the scenery and provide a breeding ground for disease and terrorism (the congestion of public space helps terrorists conceal bombs). Activists claim that vendors are the main obstacles to Mumbai becoming a world-class city. Yet at the same time, the media also provides fun and exciting images of street stalls. Street food, especially, is a preferred topic, precisely because it is a dangerous act to take parts of the street into one's body. An article on street food in the popular newsmagazine *Outlook* demonstrates its mongrel charm.

What's street food without a bit of the street in it, they [street food fans] ask in one voice.... *Batata vada* without a few micro-milligrams of Mumbai's road dust, or Calcutta's famous *phuchkas* minus the excitement of guessing the water source, or Delhi's mouth-watering *paranths* without auto fumes, they say, is merely food; not street food.

(Koppikar 2011)

High-caste Hindus traditionally avoid outside food to protect themselves from impurity, since the impure food, cook and server all affect the body and

personhood of those who eat the food. Although in contemporary society the terms purity/impurity are often replaced by the more 'scientific' terms hygienic/unhygienic, the risk of taking in outside food is still commonly recognised. Nevertheless, many people cannot resist eating street food. Activists often criticise middle-class patrons of street vendors as selfish and irresponsible (see Anjaria 2009). However, whether it appears as the idealised subaltern or as irresistible street food, 'filth' appears to hold an ambiguous appeal. In hyperdense cities, the middle class take care not to expose their bodies to filth or transgress boundaries, but simultaneously cannot avoid filth and other outside substances altogether. 'Filth', here, denotes physical garbage and dirt, but it also connotes the aesthetically immoral, danger and disgust. Both interpretations influence the actions of middle-class activists in their attempts to 'clean up' the city, as will be demonstrated through an analysis of the 'Fight the Filth' campaign in Mumbai.

The 'Fight the Filth' campaign⁸

Tabloids and citizens

The 'Fight the Filth' campaign, launched by the *Mumbai Mirror*, a local English daily tabloid,⁹ was one of several 'clean up' campaigns organised in recent years. Pavan K. Varma (2007), in his pioneering work on the new middle class, strongly criticises the social insensitivity of contemporary middle-class activism as the direct opposite of M.K. Gandhi's ideology. Varma himself wrote a fortnightly column called 'People Like Us' for the *Hindustan Times* to educate the middle class to become concerned citizens. And since economic liberalisation, English newspapers and magazines, such as the *Times of India*, *Hindustan Times* and *India Today*, have inspired 'bourgeois environmentalists', 'endorsing and celebrating this group's sense of itself as the guardian of "public interest"' (Baviskar 2011: 406). This hints at how intellectuals' criticism of the middle class is entangled in newspaper discourse, setting moral benchmarks for middle-class activism. In Mumbai, local English tabloids are especially proactive in inciting and endorsing middle-class activism, by publishing big, colourful pictures, attractive headlines and sensational articles. Civil society activists also highly regard newspapers, displaying article clippings about their activities in their offices and sharing articles among members.

A few months before the 'Fight the Filth' campaign, the *Mirror* reported on a series of events triggered by a 19-year-old female student's video of a street vendor urinating into a food utensil in Thane, in suburban Mumbai. The vendor was beaten up by local residents before being taken to the police station and fined Rs. 1200 (Moghul 2011).¹⁰ This news was followed by familiar reports of street stalls being demolished both by the local nativist party, the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS), and then the Thane Municipal Corporation. The purpose of these reports was to create awareness about the filthy condition of street food, and several readers, disgusted by the incident, left comments on the

Mirror's website to honour the student as a citizen journalist. This story once again painted a picture of at-risk citizens fighting against the filth. Just as newspapers in the cosmopolitan city of Bombay once invoked the 'people' and triggered the development of populist politics in the 1960s (Prakash 2010: 158–203), tabloids today continue to stimulate the imaginations of their readers by invoking the idea of 'the citizen' in contemporary Mumbai.

Citizen, target and method

'City's Biggest Clean-Up Drive', declared the centrepiece of the *Mumbai Mirror* on 27 June 2011. The front-page article introduced the campaign 'Fight the Filth', while adding at the bottom of the page '(And You Can Be a Part of It)'. The article inaugurating the campaign began:

There was nothing unusual about the scene. After wiping clean her dabba, a local train commuter readied to chuck a mass of plastic and paper out of the train window. When a journalist from this paper requested her not to litter the tracks, she looked at her curiously and asked if she suffered from any psychological disorder.

Our lady in the local is not alone. Anyone who has ever tried to stop people littering the city will be met with cynicism, mistrust and disbelief. In the financial capital of the country, it is alright if you spit, litter and throw garbage wherever you fancy. Mumbai is after all an open dumping ground.

It is not enough to blame the civic body for the cesspool the city has turned into. We as citizens have a role to play. *Mumbai Mirror* strongly feels that a city teeming with the world's most talented, most beautiful and most charismatic people deserves to be clean, free of litter.

(Menon & Pawa 2011: 1)

The authors began the article by showing the great divide between the journalist (we) and the littering person (they). Praise for the city ('the financial capital of the country' and home to 'the world's most talented, most beautiful and most charismatic people') followed, with a hint of disgust towards the things that do not match 'our' aesthetics. The article continued that the *Mumbai Mirror* and the BMC, along with seven 'top educational institutions', had stood up to clean their 'beloved city'. The *Mirror* also called the readers to action: 'Most importantly, the campaign will have to be driven by you, dear reader, as we embark on what we believe will be the biggest-ever citizen initiative' (8). It then presented an outline of the campaign: the newspaper chose seven colleges and seven 'filthy spots' and created student groups as the main actors in the campaign. In the first phase of the campaign, the students would physically clean the filthy spots with BMC staff. In the second phase they would 'create awareness against littering', which was presented as the most important activity.

The *Mumbai Mirror* called for reader participation, invoking the second-person 'you' as 'citizens'. However, it is unclear who the actual addressees were.

It dubbed the campaign a 'citizen initiative', but on the front-page the implication for citizens' participation is only modestly added in brackets: '(and you can be a part of it)'. A similar statement is found after the plan's description: 'During the camp, residents of the neighbourhood are also welcome to join in' (8). This wording shows that readers were not the core members; rather, the campaign was to be conducted by the tabloid, colleges and BMC. In fact, very few readers responded to the interpellation, 'you', by joining the campaign individually. Published reader comments typically praised the campaign's efforts and agreed that a lack of civic sense was the most critical issue, and hence awareness the key solution. These voices, however, did not always share the spirit that might be expected of a 'citizen's initiative'. Several people requested that the campaign team come and clean their neighbourhood. Others thought it was wrong to have students clean filthy places created by the BMC. These reader reactions suggest that there was no consensus on the identity of the 'citizens' who would take the initiative. The citizen's opposite, however, was clearly identified from the beginning of the campaign: the 'targets' of the campaign, consisting of slum dwellers, hawkers and vegetable market vendors, were considered not to be part of civil society. The aim of the campaign, as a representative of the citizens and with the official help of the municipality, was to educate and 'create awareness' among its targets. Creating awareness represented the most important mission of the campaign.

The method that campaigners adopted to create awareness was the 'survey'. In these surveys, groups of students visited houses in slum areas or small street shops and asked questions such as 'Do you use a dust bin?' or 'Where do you dump your garbage?' When the targets answered that they were using dust bins, the students thanked them and requested that they keep doing so and spread awareness by telling other people. There was no questionnaire or firm structure in these surveys, and no notes or recordings were taken. The survey worked under the premise that the fundamental problem was the ignorance, or lack of civic sense, of the people (targets) – once they became aware, the problem would be solved. The ideal scenario often presented in the tabloid was as follows: students educated people about the health hazards of littering; after listening to the students, slum residents and hawkers realised the importance of hygiene; they would now be more careful about their behaviour, and thus, the city would become clean. In contrast to this ideal, the lack of basic facilities and public services, such as toilets in slum areas and daily garbage collection, were often observed. The targets clearly could not improve the situation without such fundamental amenities. Nevertheless, these issues were not the focus of the campaign. The ideal scenario and its aesthetics were instead circulated as an artefact by being repeatedly expounded in the *Mirror's* reporting of the campaign.

The students' campaign

The original seven 'filthy spots', located around the city centre of South Mumbai and the posh suburbs in northern Mumbai (Churchgate, Dadar, Matunga, Bandra,

Juhu, Andheri, Chembur), were chosen arbitrarily by the reporters: places near their houses or near the campuses of the colleges that the participants attended and places known from previous work. When asked about the criteria of selection, a *Mirror* reporter put it simply: 'Anywhere dirty. There is no shortage of dirty places in Mumbai.' Convenience and dirtiness were the only factors for selection, in notable contrast to Hindu nationalist parties' targeting of 'Muslim immigrants from Bangladesh' under the name of clean-up campaigns (Fernandes 2006).

During the campaign, college student clubs became the main actors in conducting the drives, and the areas of activity were expanded beyond the original spots. Of the ten spots in which I participated, six were managed by Rotaract Clubs (the youth branch of the Rotary Club), three by NSS groups (National Service Scheme, a college-based national programme) and one by a non-affiliated group of students with two professors. At each drive, one or two *Mirror* reporters and a few municipal officers met the club members and carried out the campaign activities, typically for about an hour. The students were from mixed religious backgrounds, and Muslim and Christian students acted as leaders in several groups.

Importantly, the term 'civil society' was not familiar to many of the students of these English-medium colleges. When I explained that my study was about 'civil society in India', one student talked about traditional festivals and another brought me to a crematorium in the neighbourhood to help me understand their civil society. The salient recipients of students' service were 'community', 'society' and 'country'. Students often described their motivation for joining the campaign in terms of national service. One NSS student explained, 'We feel very nice serving the nation. We can't help the people working on the border, but we are just doing what we can do.' The BMC was understood to be the closest and most concrete entity through which students could serve the nation, and they sincerely tried to help the BMC. They relied on BMC officers and often preferred that municipal representatives accompanied them when conducting the surveys. They explained: 'If we go by ourselves, they [the vendors] will take us lightly.' Students were afraid that the targets would 'argue back' and 'abuse' them.

At one of the review visits at a vegetable market, two BMC officers and a Rotaract member marched together around the market, the officers overbearingly scolding the vendors when they found messy spots and demanding that the vendors collect littered cabbage-leaves and squashed tomatoes with their bare hands. Because the treatment of street vendors during this procession was quite uncomfortable to watch, I asked one of the Rotaract members about the difference in roles between the club and the BMC, and if he was not worried about giving the vendors the wrong impression about the club being with the BMC. He replied,

Unlike the BMC, we can't work every day and we don't get paid. We just want to do something good and feel happy at the end of the day.... It's the

same as with the police: we can't catch a thief ourselves, but we report it to the police when we see one – just helping them. So, if we see a person who is littering, we try to report it to the BMC.

(2 August 2011)

In this manner, many participants understood their role to be the BMC's voluntary helpers, who thereby work for the improvement of the nation. In practice, this zeal sometimes carried them beyond a mere helping role; some students even playfully improvised steep fines as warnings designed to inspire fearful compliance. The *Mirror* and the students accepted without difficulty the idea of the 'target' to be surveyed and educated. Among hawkers, *paan-wallahs* (tobacco sellers) were a favourite target. Sometimes the campaign turned into a *paan-wallah*-finding game, with excited students shouting 'Target!' and pointing their fingers when they found one. However, due to the self-sufficient capacity of the 'survey', awareness-building was surprisingly easily 'achieved'. This made the position of the target somewhat elusive. In a second-round drive at another market, a Rotaract leader commented that 'the vendors are much more aware now', and suggested spreading awareness among the customers as a next step.

On 5 September, the *Mirror* announced the end of the campaign with a cheerful and triumphant picture of the students on its cover page. The article praised the enthusiasm of the students, citing a conversation from the campaign: students 'very hesitantly' requested shopkeepers 'to use dustbins and ask their customers to use them. One of them shot back, "kiske liye kar rahe ho yeh? [For whom are you doing this?]" The eager students were quick to reply, "Bharat ke liye [For India]" (Chandrasekharan 2011: 8). Here, the students' activities and organisational characteristics were summarised and portrayed as Hindu-nationalistic heroes rather than as the representative citizens that the tabloid had first tried to invoke. In this article, two reviewers were also introduced for the first time in the campaign. They had not participated in the campaign, but were deemed to have the authority to provide an evaluation of it because they were eminent activists. One of the reviewers repeated the importance of the survey: 'Understanding the demographics and lifestyle of the slum dwellers is important. The college students should conduct a survey, understand the lifestyle of the people, and work with the residents of the slum to come up with a solution' (8). In this way, the appropriateness of the survey was reiterated. The sudden appearance of outside experts at the campaign's climax also seemed a necessary form, making it clear that the position of civil society is a privileged one, and that common readers need to work more to become true citizens.

Forms and aesthetics

Arjun Appadurai applauds the self-surveying used by Mumbai's civic organisations working with slum dwellers as an example of 'governmentality from below', or 'governmentality turned against itself' (Appadurai 2001: 35). In

the 'Fight the Filth' campaign, however, the 'survey' did not seem to represent either side (the above or the below) of governmentality, as it was invoked in the abstract as the proper form. As the reviewer pointed out, the survey was an appropriate form of civic movement that guaranteed interaction and understanding among different social groups, which promoted the goal of awareness-building. Similarly, the term 'service', the translation of the Hindu concept of *seva*, meaning devotion to a deity or guru, was a vital form of the campaign. The concept has been widely mobilised by social movements, including associational activities in the colonial era, the independence struggle and Hindu nationalist movements, each changing the recipient of the service (Watt 2005). The term and attached practice had positive but vague connotations for the students, whose affiliation was neither exclusively with nationalists nor right-wing parties, but with civil society organisations. Using these familiar and available forms, new ways of serving, and of becoming a citizen, were attempted.

Several other important forms were used in the campaign. The certificate issued for each participant, along with the group photo shoot for the final cover, represented the end of the campaign and thus enabled it to emerge as a complete achievement. Planting saplings after removing garbage was another material aesthetic performance that presented the image of final accomplishment, even if in many cases the saplings were eaten by cows and goats within a week. Photo shoots were conducted at each drive, and big pictures of students wearing rubber gloves and masks or talking to slum dwellers appeared in the next day's newspaper. These forms were not merely tools or symbols, but composed the campaign itself. Wearing gloves *was* cleaning, even without touching actual filth, and pictures became the proof of this action. Just as they kept planting saplings even after they were eaten by goats, the importance of surveying was continually invoked: forms were repeatedly used regardless of the effectiveness of their outcomes.

Conclusions

Middle-class activists have been criticised for their neoliberal logic in reducing social and administrative problems to the value or 'awareness' of individuals and for their exacerbation of the oppression of poor and marginal groups. This chapter, however, has examined the forms and aesthetics of this activism rather than interpreting the politics of the middle class. The forms used in the campaign – 'awareness', 'survey', 'service' – produced a coherent pattern for action. Although contemporary activists do not hesitate to pursue pleasure and self-achievement, at the same time, no matter how much they represent themselves as 'the common man', they must accept this pattern of pedagogy and self-sacrifice to be a member of civil society, which is responsible for society at large. The newspaper articles and the campaign framework examined in this chapter revealed the expectations for the middle class in public culture, and the students' descriptions illustrated their experiments and different interpretations

concerning what was presented as the proper citizen. People without civic sense are conjured to represent filth and serve as the targets of civic movements. However, the middle class has a more ambiguous relationship with filth than what is represented in the media. The target itself eludes the activists as the campaign proceeds and awareness-building is achieved, much as the position of the citizen escapes when one attempts to pin it down.

Kaviraj criticises social scientists' 'transition narratives' for creating 'illusions' such as that 'Calcutta would turn into London, and the Bengali rich and poor would "understand" the principles of being private and public in the right ways'. He suggests that we should instead look at 'the shapes and forms our modernity is taking' (Kaviraj 1997: 113). As shown above, the campaign to create awareness and make Mumbai a world-class city is increasingly based on this 'transition narrative', applied by both the media and activists. Social scientists' narratives are not transcendent descriptions or diagnoses of the world, but shape Indian modernity by influencing people's practices and by providing new forms for analysing and perceiving the world. 'Transition narratives' are, thus, not something we should abandon; it is more important to look at the forms of Indian modernity by examining these illusory 'transition narratives'.

Notes

- * The research for this chapter was funded by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (2010–2011). I am grateful for the generous assistance of the *Mumbai Mirror* reporters and campaign participants.
- 1 This survey was an opinion poll conducted by the market research firm IMRB. They first published the results on 11 December 2011.
- 2 Mumbai city's local government, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation.
- 3 Who is included in 'Mumbaikars' or 'Mumbaites' is flexible and highly contextual. Despite its cosmopolitan appearance, in the case of English newspapers such as in this quote, Mumbaikar could be read as synonymous with 'citizen', that is, the educated urban middle class, and thus as excluding the poor immigrants and their descendants.
- 4 Through a discourse analysis of court orders and judgments and civic petitions, Ghertner delineates the process by which 'nuisance' as an aesthetic category is applied to the very existence of slums, such that the term has become a legal basis for slum demolition (Ghertner 2011).
- 5 Birgit Meyer suggests returning to the older and more encompassing notion of aesthetics, that is, 'our total sensory experience of the world and our sensitive knowledge of it' (Meyer 2009: 6).
- 6 William Mazzarella states that aesthetics always 'appeal[s] to a basic and universal capacity for sensuous experience, a capacity which ... will never be reducible to authoritative formulae'. Thus, aesthetics is both a 'resource for hegemony but also ... resistant to all reifying agendas' (Mazzarella 2006: 104). Since consumerism is based on a sensuous language of the body, even the 'illiterate' are potential fluent speakers. For this, Rajagopal (2001) suggests its democratising possibility of encompassing formerly marginalised social groups. But Mazzarella (2011: 341–342) observes that liberals and cultural conservatives, antagonists within censorship debates, have been in perfect agreement on averting this radically democratic possibility.
- 7 Chakrabarty (2008: 11) clarifies the meaning of 'peasant' as 'a shorthand for all the seemingly nonmodern, rural, nonsecular relationships and life practices that constantly

leave their imprint on the lives of even the elites in India and on their institutions of government’.

- 8 The *Mumbai Mirror* reported on the campaign 33 times from 27 June to 5 September in 2011. I joined the clean-up and awareness drives 11 times and later conducted interviews with participants and activists.
- 9 The *Mumbai Mirror*, published by the Times of India Group, is packaged with the *Times of India* in Mumbai. The Indian Readership Survey (Media Research Users Council 2011) shows that the *Times of India* was the most read among English dailies at the national level, and the *Mumbai Mirror* was seventh.
- 10 This case might remind us of the man who was beaten to death by local residents and police constables after using a park as a bathroom (Baviskar 2003) or of the movie *A Wednesday*, in which ‘the common man’ punishes terrorism suspects. The relationship between the rise of civil society and vigilantism needs to be further explored.

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13 Community of retrospect

Spirit cults and locality in an old city of Rajasthan¹

Minoru Mio

Since its construction as the capital of the Mewar kingdom in the sixteenth century, Udaipur, an old city in the south-eastern part of Rajasthan, has developed as the political, economic and cultural centre of this region.² The population was about 550,000 (Census of India 2001) in 2001 and it ranks as the fourth largest city in Rajasthan today. It is not a metropolis like Mumbai and Delhi, but, like other cities in India, it is transforming rapidly under the influence of economic development and globalisation.

A large yield of minerals such as marble and zinc around Udaipur has attracted buyers from abroad. Further, palaces, gardens and artificial lakes constructed by kings and feudal lords have become an important heritage resource, attracting foreign as well as domestic tourists. Following the relatively early example of royal properties, the palaces of many Rajput lords have been converted into tourist hotels. What was once the location of vassals' palaces is now a busy street dominated by foreign tourists. Places of royal life have become objects for the romantic aspirations of the new Indian middle class, and the palace hotels are often used as venues for their luxurious, fashionable wedding receptions (Mio 2005: 30–31). In the suburbs, large shopping complexes, symbolic of the consumption culture of this class, have sprung up one after another (Mio 2007a: 24).

On the other hand, a spirit cult centred around the medium of a deified Rajput hero of the medieval period has rapidly become popular among people in Udaipur. The spirit possession of this medium, a tribal woman, only began in the autumn of 2006, but according to the medium and believers, the spirit is a Rajput warrior who was killed in battle in the fifteenth century, before Udaipur was founded. There were various interferences against this medium's activities in its initial stage, and some dwellers still doubt its authenticity. But now, in the evenings when sessions for curing sickness and solving the problems of various believers take place in front of the statue of this hero situated in a room of the medium's house, those who seek solutions to their problems queue up in front of the house, and the session often lasts until midnight. Most believers are relatively poor but highly educated, and wealthy merchants are not rare among the earnest followers of the medium. Other similar newly founded spirit possession cults can be found in Udaipur; these kinds of cults cannot be considered exceptional cases or examples of archaic traditions failing to modernise.

This chapter aims to analyse the factors concerning the reconstruction of locality in the traditional city of Rajasthan through examination of the formation process of the Rajput spirit cults. These cults have developed on the fault line where local sites, loaded with the unique memories and traditional meanings of the old capital city, have been incorporated into the space of the modern nation state. The cults are tracing the practice of the traditional spirit possession cult of the Rajput lords and warriors, but they show certain features that deviate from the traditional pattern. This deviation reflects the social situation of contemporary Indian cities; the cults based on the habitus of the traditional relationship between lords and subjects become the basis for forming a local agency in contemporary Indian urban society where neighbourhood communities are rapidly disappearing.

In his study of the production of locality in the modern world, Appadurai grasps the locality 'as primarily relational and contextual rather than as scalar or spatial' (Appadurai 1996: 178). He also sees it 'as a complex phenomenological quality, constituted by a series of links between the sense of social immediacy, the technologies of interactivity, and the relativity of contexts' (Appadurai 1996: 178). According to him, local subjects are actors who properly belong to a situated community of kin, neighbours, friends and enemies, and they are constructed by the inscription of locality onto bodies through ritual actions (Appadurai 1996: 179). On the other hand, neighbourhoods are defined as 'the actually existing social forms in which locality, as a dimension or value, is variably realized', and as 'situated communities characterised by their actuality, whether spatial or virtual, and their potential for social reproduction' (Appadurai 1996: 178–179). Appadurai also points out that traditionally locality has been produced in the spatially limited neighbourhood, and that locality and neighbourhood stood in a dialectic relationship as the local subject which was first produced in the neighbourhood then actively produced the neighbourhood (Appadurai 1996: 184–185). But in the modern globalising world, nation state projects, diasporic flows and electronic and virtual communities mean that the neighbourhood cannot be produced as a spatially limited place loaded with locally specific meaning, so local subjects or the production of localities themselves are now facing an 'immense new set of challenges' (Appadurai 1996: 188–198).

Appadurai's discussion is still stimulating for its consideration of the contemporary Indian urban situation. This chapter therefore basically follows his definition of locality and neighbourhood. However, even when the effects of globalisation penetrate into every corner of the world, global flows of people, commodities and information do not necessarily appear or bring about the same effect in every sphere of society or the life-world of every person. Appadurai pays much attention to those who move (or are forced to move) globally or dexterously handle electronic media to transcend the traditional neighbourhood and interact with each other. But local Indian cities do not consist only of this kind of subject. This chapter pays attention instead to those who do not or cannot move or handle electronic devices and considers how they try to make their local lives

meaningful in the context of the contemporary situation, which has been more or less influenced by nation state projects and/or globalisation.

In this sense, this chapter shares the perspective of Donner and De Neve (2006). In the introduction to a set of essays exploring the meaning of the local in Indian cities in the 2000s, they deplore the situation of the local, claiming that it 'increasingly derives its meaning from its juxtaposition to the global while the latter is privileged in the writings about globalization' (Donner & De Neve 2006: 2). They try to reorient our attention to the urban people's ways of 'place-making, and the role that locality plays in the construction of social relations against the background of changed global–local connections' (Donner & De Neve 2006: 3). Their emphasis on the study of the meaning of the local is understandable when one considers the above-mentioned situation of urban Indian people. However, they point out that neighbourhood is still maintaining its social reality in Indian cities, and even where there is little interaction among neighbours, the neighbourhood retains its institutional and administrative role. They also try to clarify the meaning of the local, focusing on the neighbourhood (Donner & De Neve 2006: 10–11). The strength of the social reality of neighbourhood may differ from one city to another or from the position of one subject position to another; however, as described below, the neighbourhood has lost its traditional form and plays limited roles in making the locality that produces local subjects in Udaipur, even in its old town. Besides, as Appadurai pointed out, and as can be discerned by the case study of Udaipur used here, the administrative power in the nation state tends to exert itself to deprive the indigenes of the neighbourhood that produces the locality (Appadurai, 1996: 189–192). So it is important to be wary of the perspective of Donner and De Neve, which sees the relationship between the neighbourhood and administrative power as somewhat affinitive.

Through the examination of the practices of mediums and followers in the possession cults of the old city, this chapter considers how the local can be constructed in situations in which the neighbourhood cannot remain as a spatially limited community. As Appadurai suggests, locality can be produced and maintained without being based on people's physical contiguity. Social contexts where the immediacy of people's everyday lives can be maintained are important for the existence of locality. The possession cults provide their members with such contexts even though they are not living in physical contiguity because they can meet with each other regularly at the time of spirit possessions and other ritual occasions, and intimacy among them can be nurtured through sharing their pains. They do not belong to neighbourhood, but form a community based on network relationships. Ritual practices are important for the embodiment of community feeling in members of these cults. At the same time, sharing mythical stories about local Mewari heroes is also important in forming this possession cult. The formation of this kind of cult and the means of inheriting the story of the heroes at its core strongly reflect the contemporary condition of locality in a local Indian city.

'Colonisation' of mohalla: transformation of Udaipur

Like most other northern and western Indian cities which have existed since pre-colonial times, Udaipur is divided by its rampart into the walled old town and the new town, which was developed after the colonial period. The two parts show a clear contrast both in the constitution of their populations and in the social relationships in their neighbourhoods. After its foundation by Maharana Udai Singh in the middle of the sixteenth century, the ramparts were expanded several times. The current rampart is said to have been completed in the middle of the nineteenth century.³ Prior to independence, the residential and commercial area is supposed to have been confined in the walled town, except for the residential area for British residents. However, after independence, lots of residential areas and shopping streets were constructed outside the rampart. The rapid growth of the new town area after the late 1980s is particularly remarkable. It is in this new town that numerous shopping complexes and condominiums have been constructed in the past 15 years.

The new town is characterised by planned residential areas which are connected by broad roads. These are developed by public housing corporations and private real-estate developers. A newly developed residential area is named with a suffix such as 'pura', 'nagar' or 'colony'.⁴ Though the demarcation method of plots and the style of houses show similarities in a developed area, and apparently the area constitutes a unit as a physical space, its inhabitants are heterogeneous as their castes, occupations and native places are different. Public administrations and policy making are carried out by a ward *panchayat*, set up in a ward unifying several residential areas. Its members and a leader (ward *panch*) are chosen by election, but the new town dwellers often know their ward *panch* only indirectly.

On the other hand, various life rituals connecting neighbourhood with locality were traditionally carried out by each family in the new town area, and other religious festivals were rarely celebrated in the neighbourhood collectively. As I have described elsewhere (Mio 2007b, 2009), new types of religious festivals suddenly became popular in Udaipur. In the new town, these festivals are organised by voluntary associations of the young males of a ward or a 'colony', but the contents of these festivals are adaptations of the traditions of other regions. Besides, these festivals have become similarly popular in other north-western Indian cities and tend to be organised by young people who sympathise with Hindu nationalism. The fashionable religious festivals in the new town of Udaipur connect its neighbourhood not with the locality but with the imagination of the nation.

While the new town can be described as the space of 'colony', the old town can be said to be the space of 'mohalla'. Small alleys form an intricate maze inside the walled town. Relatively large streets are the domain of animated commercial activities, but relatively quiet residential areas stretch back from them. Residential buildings of four or five storeys line up on both sides of narrow alleys, and the living areas are divided into neighbourhood units called mohallas.

The mohallas are often named after *jati*. Even today, the traditional occupational activities of a *jati* still sometimes take place in a mohalla with that *jati*'s name. There is a Charbhujia temple in almost every mohalla, which is worshipped as a guardian deity of that mohalla's *jati*, and shrines and temples of Hanuman and Behru, which protect the borders of a mohalla, can also be found. The living expenses of the priests and mediums of the shrines and temples were borne by residents of the mohalla, who used to celebrate the yearly festivals of these temples and shrines cooperatively. These temples and shrines were also places for life rituals such as hair cutting rituals for children, which used to be held as a community event. The bheru is a god which possesses a medium, and the mohalla's people used to complain of and seek solutions to their hardships and troubles at their mohalla's bheru shrine. The inhabitants of one mohalla were also believed to share the pollution that arose from births and deaths in that mohalla.

Buildings stand in an unbroken row in the old town, but for the dwellers the borders were clearly demarcated by these temples and shrines, and their neighbourhood area used to be constructed as a meaningful life space by these religious sites. These life spaces were sites for the creation and inheritance of the habitus of everyday lives, and functioned as neighbourhood-formulating local subjects. There was another kind of living space, the *haveli*, peculiar to the castle towns in Udaipur. A *haveli* is a palace where buildings of several storeys surround a large courtyard from every direction; such palaces were used as the residences of Rajput lords in the capital. Later, wealthy merchants also built this type of house in the city. A *haveli* was equipped with the facilities necessary for everyday life and also contained shrines for the life and yearly rituals of its inhabitants. Thus the lives of the inhabitants tended to be enclosed within its boundaries, but they obtained various services from other *jatis* who lived separately in the town in mohallas. The relationship between the Rajput lord and various *jatis*, and the demarcations of the living places of the *jatis* are said to be features of the traditional Hindu villages of north-western India. The same features can also be clearly found in the old town in the capital city.

The basic structure of life space in the old town is disappearing rapidly. First, *havelis* have ceased to function as a unit of living space for Rajputs. Most Rajput lords have sold theirs because of land reforms and changes in their lifestyles. As a result, the *haveli*, which used to house only members of a single *jati* with blood or marital relationships, is now sold or leased to many owners or borrowers, and various families of different *jatis* come to live in a single *haveli*. It is not uncommon to find *havelis* that have been wholly or partially converted into public institutes such as schools and post offices. Most of the *havelis* that are still owned by Rajputs have been reconstructed into tourist hotels since the latter half of the 1990s.

On the other hand, remarkable changes are occurring among mohalla dwellers, and in many mohallas more than half of the population belong to *jatis* other than that after which the mohalla is named. The idea of sharing the pollution of births and deaths is disappearing as the heterogeneity of the inhabitants increases. The yearly festivals of Charbhujia are still celebrated, as former dwellers come

back to their original mohalla at festival times, but some Charbhujā temples have already lost their priests. In many Hanuman and bheru temples and shrines, the number of people who come to worship and seek solutions to the troubles of their daily lives has decreased.

Wards have come to take over the public functions of mohallas in the old town. In other words, wards are set up in both the old and the new town, and modern administrative logic and technology cover the entire city. The border of a ward does not overlap with the border of a mohalla. Rather, it is changed at the time of the ward *panchayat* election according to changes in the population, so it is difficult for the dwellers of a ward to engender a sense of community. The ward panches hold a seat in the municipal assembly, and through assembly activities they try to provide similar administrative services in every ward, such as road cleaning and the implementation of water tanks. As the heterogeneity of the inhabitants of mohallas increases, the homogeneity of administrative services and the physical characteristics of the old town's streets are also increasing. Further, the new type of religious festival has rapidly become popular since the mid-1990s, even in the old town.

In the old town, living places such as mohallas and havelis used to be the exclusive spaces of homogeneous inhabitants and these spaces were the neighbourhood that became the basis for the construction of locality. Such closed homogeneous neighbourhoods cannot exist once the inhabitants of mohallas and havelis have become heterogeneous. Wards have been set up as substitute organisations by the nation state, and they carry out a part of the public function of the mohalla of olden times. Through the functions of the wards, modern administrative services and ideas penetrate into every corner of the old town, and the views and characteristics of the old town's streets show a certain similarity. Accordingly, religious places have lost their functions as places for traditional religious practices, and new religious festivals connected with the imagination of the nation have rapidly become popular.

Neighbourhoods in the old town are transforming into neighbourhoods with the character of the new town. In other words, the 'mohalla' has become the 'colony'. Such social change causes the loss of memory and practice of the place, which are rooted in the past of the inhabitants of the mohallas and havelis. The transformation and destruction of havelis and the changes of religious practices in mohallas are clear evidence of such a loss of memory and practice.

The revival of the Rajput warrior's spirit and its increase in popularity among the city dwellers occur against the background of this transformation of neighbourhood. What kind of divine spirits and people are the agents of these phenomena? And what does the revival of its popularity mean against the backdrop of these social changes?

Sagasji: a contemporary meaning of the community of retrospect

Features of the sagasji as a god

A sagasji (or *sagasji bayji*), which possesses a medium who has become popular in the old town of Udaipur, is the spirit of a Rajput male who died a tragic death, for example on a battlefield, in a struggle or by poisoning (Harlan 2003: 71–87). The spirits of warriors who died on a battlefield are worshipped as *jhunjarji* among Rajputs, and they are distinguished from sagasji who died a different kind of death. In particular, the spirits of those who were beheaded by the enemy on the battlefield and continued to fight without their head until they fell down are believed to be *jhunjarji* (Harlan 2003: 14–16). But the distinction tends to be vague among other people, and even the spirits of those who died on the battlefield are worshiped as sagasjis, as described later.

Sagasjis do not possess Rajputs, except on rare occasions. Among Rajputs, a stone or clay image of a sagasji is enshrined at the place of death and worshipped at times of family or clan rituals. The spiritual power of those who died a heroic death in fights for justice is believed to be particularly strong, and, if properly worshipped, it is said to provide happiness to its descendants. When the spiritual power is especially strong, its boon is supposed to extend to all those who come to seek its protection, not only its descendants. In this case the image is enshrined in a special altar or temple and served by a priest. The sagasji enshrined at Sarv Ritu Vilas in the old city area is one of the most popular such examples.

Sagasjis often also possess people from other jatis. In this case, the possessed spirits have a conversation with followers and grant their wishes through the medium. Such sagasjis often clarify their own identity and talk about their history through their medium at the time of possession. These sagasjis were royal family members or warrior landlords, and when possessed, the mediums speak and behave like these ruling nobles. Visitors also attend to mediums just like they would to nobles. Usually the sagasji possession takes place every Friday evening in every shrine. Visitors at this occasion talk about their problems in front of the medium and other followers and seek solutions from the spirit. This occasion is called *chauki* in the Mewari language.

The troubles brought to the *chauki* are various and include troubles in the family, educational problems, success in business, wanting to have a baby, various diseases and the extermination of various kinds of demons. As everyone who wants to may visit a sagasji shrine, an exclusive group of followers cannot be formed. If one cannot solve one's trouble in one shrine, one often visits another. But when one's wish is granted in a shrine, one tends to visit that shrine constantly and entrust it with the solutions to all of one's troubles. This kind of follower becomes a regular visitor to the shrine even when he/she does not have any specific troubles, and takes care of the personal life of the medium and, in the case of major festivals of the shrine, comes to play a central role in its celebration.

In Mewar there are various kinds of spirits that possess persons in order to communicate with people and intervene in the events of this world. One of them is the mataji. Rajputs worship matajis as their *kul devis* (clan goddesses), which are enshrined in specific temples, and they believe these goddesses to be the most powerful deity. An image of the mataji is always enshrined in sagasji temples and shrines, and people pay respects to the mataji before the sagasji in everyday worship. In this sense, the sagasji is subordinate to the mataji (Harlan 2003: 124–135). There are numerous mataji shrines in Mewar, and they have been the focus of Navratni festivals.⁵ At the time of this festival, matajis possess male mediums, known as *bhopa*, demand sacrifices of goats or buffaloes⁶ and grant the wishes of people after *chaukis*.⁷ In the case of matajis, however, *chaukis* do not necessarily take place at their shrines on a weekly basis.

The bheru has been the most popular possessing god in Mewar. The bheru is said to be the divinised form of the god Shiv's rage and is believed to destroy demons and obstacles, heal illness and sterility and grant wishes through *bhopa*. The bheru is also believed to protect the borders of certain areas (see also Harlan 2003: 135). The bheru is also believed to be a god who serves the mataji, and its role as a harbinger of the mataji to sweep away demons is often represented iconographically and sung about in folk songs. In the shrine of a mataji, a bheru is often set up at its border or at the place for the mataji's attendants. In this regard, there is similarity between the bheru and the sagasji. *Chaukis* are often held weekly (usually on Sunday mornings) at Behru shrines, which are at the border of villages and mohallas. On such occasions local dwellers are the main visitors to the shrine, but some shrines which are especially famous for their powers to grant children, or antidotal boons against dog and snake bites are visited by people from distant places. When their illness is healed or wishes are realised, they become frequent visitors to the shrine and sometimes build intimate relationships with the *bhopa*. Therefore the followers of a bheru shrine cannot be said to be a totally exclusive localised group.

Another important possessing deity is the ancestral spirit generally known as the *purvaj*. Persons who died an extraordinary death are believed to keep deep attachments to this world and appear as spirits. If they are not worshipped properly, they bring evil events upon their family and descendants, but when worshipped properly, following the advice of mediums, they come to possess one of their family members and give boons to them. A *purvaj* is said to show the tastes and habits it had during its lifetime through its medium. In many cases a *purvaj* possesses a newly married bride of the family. In other words, unlike the cases of the mataji and bheru, *purvajs'* mediums are often women. However, they are not known as *bhopa* nor are their boons extended outside of their family and descendants. Further, their possession usually takes place only twice a year.⁸

There are some similarities in the features of the sagasji and the *purvaj* as far as the sagasji is also worshipped among Rajputs. A sagasji, however, does not possess a Rajput. However, when a sagasji possesses a medium its spiritual power extends to the general populace without being limited by *jati* or neighbourhood. The origin of the spiritual power of a sagasji is not rooted in any

deity, as in the case of the mataji and bheru, but in human beings, yet its range of power is as large as those of other deities. Like the mediums of matajis and bherus, the sagasji's medium is known as a bhopa.

A sagasji retains the name it had during its lifetime, and each sagasji's tastes and events from its life are revealed by its bhopa, with followers trying to give gifts that their beloved sagasji will like and to memorise episodes from its life. Though some especially strong mataji or bheruji are named after the location of their shrine, the forms of the images of these deities are stereotypical. In contrast, in the sagasji's shrine a portrait from its lifetime is often displayed. In other words, a sagasji keeps the individual characteristics from its lifetime while behaving like a deity, granting boons to general followers. The sagasji also shares some similarities with the bheru in that these two deities are characterised as servants of the mataji and periodically hold chauki for their followers. However, in the case of a bheru, the bhopa retains his ordinary appearance when he is possessed, while in the case of a sagasji, the bhopa takes on the appearance of a Rajput prince during the chauki. A bheru's bhopa holds a stick made from peacock feathers as a symbol of dignity and uses it to sweep evils out of his followers, while a sagasji's bhopa holds a sword. In sagasji shrines, items and clothes symbolising Rajput princes are always used.

Among Mewar's spiritual deities, the sagasji's features are ambiguous. It is similar to the bheru in its relation with the mataji and in its powers, but, like the purvaj, it retains its distinctive character from when it was alive. The sagasji is also peculiar in the sense that although it is a Rajput ancestor spirit, it possesses a medium who is not a Rajput. The episodes of its lifetime are co-memorised among non-Rajput followers, and its lifetime behaviour as a lord is retrospectively represented and worshipped. The sagasji is a spiritual deity whose life is preserved in people's retrospect on Rajput lords.

Through the precolonial and colonial past, and even in the postcolonial period (Harlan 1992), Rajputs have played central roles in Mewar society. They were rulers and warriors, and they have been the hub of gift exchanges of castes. They have also played central roles in several local festivals, such as Navratrri. The activities of Rajput kings and landlords have been the focus of the interests of lay persons, and their histories have been well-known to lay persons in Mewar. In other words, Rajputs have occupied the focal point of people's co-memory of their past. In the case of the extraordinary deaths of lineage ancestors, they touch upon their descendants' lament and become the focal point of its lineage's co-memory. In the case of Rajputs, their acts and extraordinary deaths were nodes of co-memory for Mewaris generally, transcending the boundaries of lineages, clans and castes. This is the reason why spirits that are revived from the heroic deaths of Rajputs alone can be the core of possession cults that involve a wide range of Mewaris.

The sagasji of Kothari Gali

Let us consider the case mentioned in the introduction, of the spirit that possesses the tribal woman. The spirit is enshrined in a room in the medium's home

in the mohalla of Kothari Gali, which is in the central part of the old town. The medium and her family live in rented quarters in an old haveli that was once owned by a wealthy Jain merchant but was later divided and sold off. The medium, in her mid-thirties, is a Bhil, which is the largest tribal group in the Mewar region. She had been working as a peon in an elementary school in an adjacent region of Mewar, but was transferred to a girls' school in Udaipur and moved into this residence with her husband, who is a painter, and their four children.⁹ An old haveli which had been owned by a Rajput family was reformed into the girls' school and is very near to the medium's residence. A statue without any clear identity was enshrined inside the school and, though no one knew its identity, the school's peons had been serving it every day. The medium took over this role in early 2006 and continued serving the shrine devotedly, until one day, in autumn of that year, the spirit of the statue suddenly possessed her while she was performing the serving ritual.

After the possession, the spirit identified itself as Dhan Singh, who was killed in a battle at an old well in the castle of Chittorgarh, the old capital of Mewar, about 600 years ago, and declared it would come to this world through this woman from that time on. At first many people denied the possession's authenticity, claiming that it was impossible for the spirit of a Rajput warrior to possess a tribal woman. Some of them strongly opposed the creation of an active religious place in the government public school.¹⁰ For the medium and her family and close acquaintances, the possession was unquestionably real, even though it happened without any premonitory symptoms. They believed they had to pay attention to the will of the possessing spirit and thus moved the shrine from the school to her residence. The medium made an artist draw a portrait of the spirit during its lifetime, based on the figure that had appeared in her dream, and put it up in a room in her residence. The spirit possessed her again to declare that it would possess her on the evening of every Tuesday, Friday and full moon day to preside over a *chauki*.

No one had previously heard the spirit's name or the place of its death. However, when the medium and her followers visited the castle of Chittorgarh after the foundation of the new shrine, the spirit possessed her and told them the place he had been killed, where they found a small rock pillar carved with his name. The spirit also told them that in his last battle against a Muslim army he had been beheaded but had fought without a head until he fell.¹¹ The spirit claims that his family was related to the Mewar king's clan. But his name does not appear in the historical record of the Mewar kings and nobles, and nor can his 'last battle' be confirmed by historical records. There is indeed an old rock pillar carved with his name, but there are no legends about him other than the tale that the spirit itself told to the followers.

For the followers, the fact that possession actually takes place and their wishes are granted by the spirit is itself the basis for the authenticity of this spirit's power and story. At the time of *chauki* they talk with each other about the miracles that occurred to them and convince one another of the reality of the spirit's power. During *chauki*, the medium answers the visitors' wishes and

troubles one after another decisively in the language of men, addressing the visitors as *bheta* (children), seated on the throne with a sword in her right hand and headgear peculiar to Rajput lords on her head. For the followers, this is ideal behaviour for a feudal lord. The followers address the medium as *raja* (king) and show the highest respect to her, revering her words and saying '*kanma gani*' (long live the king). The pronounced efficacy of this shrine in solving various wishes and troubles is being spread by word of mouth throughout Mewar, and the number of visitors to the shrine is increasing rapidly.

The woman stresses that she did not become a medium of her own will; she is a mere servant of the spirit and accepted the destiny decided by the spirit as her lord. As for the feature of belief concerning this shrine, it is clear that the authenticity of the spirit possession is mutually constructed through the performative actions and words of the medium and the followers, and this performance further enhances the popularity of the shrine. This accords well with a feature of other spirit possession cults in Rajasthan described by Gold (2008: 85–86). The mode of relationship between the deity and the medium is also very similar to the case of an urban shrine in Chennai, analysed by Hancock (1999: 202–205). The behaviour of the medium of Kothari Gali is deeply rooted in features of Hindu religious practice. In the case examined by Hancock, the woman also denies her own will to be a medium of a shrine, emphasising instead the will of the deity. In both cases, mediums undertake their own roles as servants of gods by order of the deity. But they are not mere subjects of destiny. After undertaking their roles, they show initiative in leading the followers. In the case used in this chapter, the tribal woman adamantly resists the oppositional group and tries to keep her shrine intact. Still, she keeps her position as the servant of the spiritual deity. She is not a self-directive independent subject in the sense of the western modern conception, but an agent who feels that she is made to live her life by some being. We should also note that her position as medium is not only directed by the deity, but also constructed by the attitude and expectations of followers. She is exercising her agency amidst the spirit's will and its followers' desires for miraculous solutions to their troubles delivered by a legendary heroic spirit revived from the local past.

The main assistant to the medium at the time of *chauki*, called the *hanjaria*, is a male colleague from the Kartik jati, who had been an eager follower of another *sagasji*. He was one of the medium's first followers and happened to see the first possession of this spirit. He manages the whole process of the *chauki* as he is well versed in *chauki* procedures, having attended *chaukis* in another shrine for a long time. He controls the order of consultations by visitors while preparing various items necessary for the *chauki* in response to the demands of the spirit.

Another female colleague is also among the regular followers of this shrine. She always says '*Kanma gani*' during the *chauki*, in response to the words of the spirit, and mediates between the visitor and the medium, saying 'Please grant this person's wish, oh *raja*.' She also advises newcomers to the shrine about the proper behaviour before the medium. Other regular and new visitors spend time in the courtyard of the *haveli*, talking about their present condition and interpreting

the words of the spirit before going back to their homes. When a *chauki* is over, the medium's family serves tea to regular followers and chats for a while. Though the medium and other followers belong to different *jatis* with different social backgrounds, they talk with each other quite intimately on such occasions. They have even come to support each other during times of hardship or family events, so social networks of followers and the medium have been formed based on belief in the shrine.

Community of practice based on 'the retrospect'

There are several features of the relationship between the medium and followers of the shrine. First, it is based on the traditionally constructed *habitus* concerning the belief in the possessing spirit. Second, this *habitus* is inherited and produced through the mutual relationship between the medium and the followers, as well as relationships among the followers. The newcomers to the shrine learn and master the *habitus* and worldview of regular followers through 'legitimate peripheral participation' (Lave & Wenger 1991: 1–18) and deepen their faith for the *sagasji*. In the learning process, however, not only verbal communication but also physical action and experience, such as behaviour in front of the medium, are important. Third, there is a vague hierarchy of the medium, the regular followers, and the newcomers. Fourth, participation in and withdrawal from the followers' group is done at one's free will. Finally, there is an intimate relationship among the regular followers who take care of each other, which transcends their differing social backgrounds. These features accord with Tanabe's concept of the community of practice, which was proposed through revisions of the original concept of Lave and Wenger (Tanabe 2003, 2005).¹²

Such communities of practice can be found among the followers of shrines of possessing deities in Mewar. Though the followers of a *bheru* shrine tend to be exclusively local persons, the membership of a *sagasji*'s following is not confined to a specific neighbourhood. This difference is based on the character of each deity. While a *bheru* is basically believed to be the guardian deity of a certain area, in the case of a *sagasji*, belief is rooted in the retrospect for the Rajput who died an extraordinary death. In other words, anyone who sympathises with the story of the *sagasji* and is willing to take part in a hierarchical relationship with the deity and its medium can be a follower of a specific *sagasji*. The *sagasji* stories may not be acceptable outside of Mewar, but in Mewar they are quite understandable to everyone who is born in this region against the background of a long history of Rajput dominance.

Though the religious practices of Kothari Gali's shrine show similarities with those of other shrines, there are also certain differences. The attribution of the medium is remarkable; the origin and story of the *sagasji* itself can also be said to be extraordinary. Among the 21 *sagasji* shrines in Udaipur that could be identified during the research,¹³ spirit possessions take place in 13. In these 13 places, only two, including Kothari Gali's, became active after the 1990s. In other shrines, the current mediums have been active for more than 30 years, and in

some there have been several generations of mediums. Also, in these two new shrines, women have become mediums.

The enshrined spirits also share a similarity in these two shrines. In the other 11 shrines, the lives of the spirits can be confirmed by historical books or clan genealogies of Rajputs. The stories of the spirits' lifetimes are also well known to those who are familiar with the history and legends of Mewar. In other words the spirits' origins are rooted in legends outside the community of practice of the medium and the followers. However, in the two new shrines no one had heard of the names or their stories before the possession actually took place. Salumbar Haveli, where another new spirit is enshrined, had been owned by the Rajput lords who had been granted their estate in the Salumbar region, which lies in the southern part of Mewar, but it was divided and sold off to other owners. The medium of this shrine is the widow of a craftsman from the Suthar jati. Her family bought a part of this haveli in which to live in the late 1980s, but since then she and other family members had been afflicted with various sicknesses. She visited several deities' shrines, seeking their solutions, and a spirit suddenly possessed her at a bheru shrine. The spirit identified itself as a Rajput named Bhim Singh Chunderwat who was killed in battle in the mid-eighteenth century and demanded proper worship. She and her family discovered a stone statue abandoned in the backyard of the haveli while following the directions of the spirit to set up the shrine. Since then the spirit has periodically possessed this medium to preside over *chaukis*. Neither the medium nor her family knew anything about this Rajput or the stone statue before this event. They are trying to confirm the spirit's story through other sources but cannot find any clues for its identification. The uncertain situation surrounding the identity of the original statue of Kothari Gali's *sagasji* was similar to the case of the Salumbar Haveli. Further, here too the spirit of the statue appeared to this world through a woman's body, seemingly opposing the oblivion of the memory concerning this haveli or the warrior.

As mentioned above, lots of neighbours had strong doubts about the authenticity of Kothari Gali's spirit and its medium. The ward panch and his brother were among the leaders of these neighbours. They were also opposing another *sagasji*'s shrine in a different school, just in front of the school where the original statue of Kothari Gali was enshrined. This *sagasji*, known as the *sagasji* of the Kanwar Pada School, is the spirit of a Rajput noble named Bhaktawar Singh who was drawn into a dispute over succession in the king's family and was slain there in the eighteenth century. The Kanwar Pada School was originally a haveli of a branch of the royal family, but was transformed into a school for the children of Rajput nobles in the colonial period. After independence it became a public school, but the shrine of Bhaktawar Singh remained and its medium continued *chaukis* at this shrine. When the medium died in the 1990s, however, a dispute arose over the shrine. One of the persons concerned in this dispute is a Brahman priest. He was serving the medium as the *chauki* assistant. After the medium died, the possession ceased to happen, so the *chauki* in this shrine stopped. However, this priest still serves the shrine and assists people who come

to worship there, saying that he was asked to do so by the medium during his lifetime. He is trying to maintain the shrine's traditional religious practice.¹⁴

The group led by the ward panch and his brother takes a different, negative attitude towards the shrine in the public school, and opposes at least the continuation of the ritual presided over by the priest. They are trying instead to make the shrine a new centre of festive activity for the whole ward. In the 1990s they organised a youth group to renovate the traditional Navratri into a new event-like dance festival, following the trend among Udaipur city dwellers at that time. Though they did not deny the religious festival itself, they intended to organise a new festival which newcomers to the ward could easily participate in. As an expansion of this idea, they are now organising another youth group to hold an event-like festival at the time of the annual ritual of Bhaktawar Singh's shrine. At the same time, they criticise the activities of the priest, saying that he is only trying to misappropriate the shrine's property, and demanding his dismissal. For this group, the appearance of a new sagasji shrine in another public school in the same ward is a backlash to the newly introduced festival. They denied the existence of the spirit, claiming that an old Rajput spirit could not reappear into this world in this modern age. They went on to criticise the tribal woman, saying that she is just swindling people out of what little money they have by pretending to be possessed by a spirit. They were also strongly opposed to the practice of *chaukis* in the school, saying that this kind of religious activity should not take place in a public facility.

Around this time, the medium was troubled by various physical ailments and a muddling of consciousness that could only be explained by the possession of some evil spirits. The medium and her followers interpreted this event as the result of sorcery¹⁵ and suspected that the ward panch employed the sorcerer responsible. For the priest of the Bhaktawar Singh shrine, this attack by the ward panch and his group on the newly appeared sagasji shrine was the same kind of attack as was carried out on his own shrine. He set out for the shrine in the other public school immediately after hearing about the predicament of the tribal woman medium to save her by taking her to the nearest mataji shrine, which is famous for its strong powers of exorcism.

Behind this event, conflict can be discerned between those who wish to make all spaces in the ward rational and modern, and those who are trying to maintain local and traditional spaces in their life-world. The ward panch acts as the local agent of the modern Indian state, and, as is clear from his eager promotion of the new event-like festival,¹⁶ he also supports Hindu nationalism. He can be interpreted as the agent of the power that transforms the neighbourhood from the space in which the local subject is produced into the space of the production of the national subject. This power, correlating with the dynamism of globalisation, erases the memories of the past which have been harboured in the neighbourhood and transforms people's life space into a modern, flat space that is suitable for the base of modern nation-building. This power concurs with the 'colonisation' of mohallas.

The new sagasji shrine is formed as a place of memory against this power. Though the locality backed by the neighbourhood is disappearing, people still

long for some kind of locality as the basis of their social existence. One way to reconstruct the locality is to form a community of practice based on sharing their traditional memory of familiar Rajput heroes. In order to do this, it is necessary to recall some new but more-or-less familiar legend and the medium who undertakes the agency to perform the leading role of this community of practice. But this rediscovered memory cannot help but be considerably deprived of concrete episodes by the effect of the modernising power mentioned above. Even then, the frame of 'legend' is indispensable in forming this kind of community. The deviational features of the episodes of the newly appeared sagasjis can be explained as the result of actions that make up for the emptied local space with the repertory of collective memory. Corresponding to these deviational features, the mediums who undertake their agency in responding to people's expectations are recalled from relatively peripheral positions in society, namely tribal or widowed women.

At the location of the new sagasji shrines, the memories of Rajputs, through which sagasjis can reappear in the religious practices of Udaipur citizens, are just coming to the edge of oblivion. Therefore, the stories of new sagasjis lack concrete episodes and become stereotypical, tracing the common legends of beheaded fighting warriors shared by citizens of Udaipur. The behaviour of mediums, too, becomes a patchwork of various habitus concerning faith in possessing spirits and gods.¹⁷ The religious practices of the community of retrospect have been fragmented and patched together, reflecting the fragmentation of memories of sagasji and Rajput warriors.

Conclusion

The community of practice that is centred on the newly revived sagasji is the result of people in a traditional regional Indian city searching for communal ties in a locality when the traditional neighbourhood is dissolving because of social change.

The new festivals organised by neighbourhood youth associations, which are popular among citizens in Udaipur, can also be interpreted as attempts to reconstruct communal ties corresponding to the transformation of the neighbourhood (Mio 2007b, 2009). Some organisers clearly state the purpose of these festivals as nurturing familiarity among rapidly changing neighbourhoods. The festival participants actually find opportunities to make the acquaintance of their neighbours through taking part in the events of the festivals. However, the communal feeling that they experience in these events tends to be temporary and cannot grow into the intimacy through which one can share with other persons the darker aspects of everyday life, such as troubles and pain.

These 'traditional' festivals newly reinvented as dance festivals in Udaipur, such as Ganesh Utsav and Navratrri, are becoming popular in other major Indian cities, so participation in these festivals enables people to partake in the imagined national community. Several youth organisations for these festivals have developed from temporary and purpose-specific organisations into permanent

associations engaged in various public activities. Thus some youths have established continuous social relationships with others through participating in the organisation of festivals. However, as described elsewhere (Mio 2009), most of these associations have been affiliated with Hindu nationalist organisations. The invented 'traditional' festivals related to the imagination of nation may make participants experience temporary communal ties, but cannot be the basis of a community rooted in local memories and habitus.

In contrast, in the case of the community practising sagasji worship, the followers share the sufferings that arise from everyday life, so the group can be the basis for the experience of deep communal ties. Although a bheru is also a deity that may form the centre of this kind of 'community of suffering', since it is the deity of the boundary of a certain social space, it cannot be the core of such a community in the contemporary social situation of Udaipur. In the case of the sagasji, everybody in the region can become a member of such a community as far as they are able to share the retrospect of Rajput lords or warriors, which is one of the master narratives peculiar to this region.

The sagasji is revived from the depths of the collective memory of Mewar and gains a new life-force as a spirit that responds to the demands of people who are searching for local and deep communal ties when the neighbourhood in this region is transforming rapidly. The followers of the newly revived sagasji cult recall the local collective memory by taking part in the practice of this cult and, based on the communal ties experienced within it, gain the power to survive the rapidly changing, unstable social life of today. The vitality of this possession cult lies in the strength of collective memory. When the memory is completely consigned to oblivion, this cult will also disappear. The social and cultural situation surrounding the sagasji is now forcing this memory to transform radically or face extinction. The warrior's spirit, which has appeared to this world after 600 years of solitude, is an agent that lives in and sheds light on the front line, where local cultural practice is resisting the forces of nation building and globalisation.

Notes

- 1 The majority of the field research for this article was carried out with a grant from the Japan Society of Scientific Research from 2006–10. I also went to Mewar in 2010 to do complementary research granted by the National Institute of Humanities.
- 2 The Mewar kingdom was founded in the eighth century by the Rajput. The kingdom is famous for its stubborn resistance against the invasions of the Muslim kingdoms, but its old capital, Chittorgarh, was captured by the Mogul Empire in the sixteenth century. As a result, the new capital, Udaipur, was constructed in the western hill area of the Mewar kingdom at the time of Maharana Udai Singh.
- 3 The details of the development process of Udaipur are not clear. This information is based on an interview with an aged intellectual Brahman who is well-versed in the history of Udaipur city.
- 4 Even in the case of a north Indian town described by Jeffery *et al.*, the new town area consists of 'colonies' (Jeffery *et al.* 2006: 118–119).
- 5 These days the Navratrri festival of Mewar has been transformed from one which centred on the mother goddesses's shrines and sacrificial rituals into one which

centres on a street dance dedicated to the statue of the mother goddesses erected on the street, influenced by the style of Gujarat (Mio 1994, 2007b, 2009). The dance at the time of Navratrri is a typical example of the new festivals recently introduced into Udaipur. However, possession at the mother goddesses's shrines and sacrificial rituals are still important, especially in rural parts of Mewar.

- 6 Rajputs who were killed on the battlefield are believed to dedicate themselves to the mother goddess. The sacrifice of oneself is thought to be more valuable than the sacrifice of animals as the substitute of oneself. Indeed, it is believed to be the highest form of sacrifice. Jhunjarji and sagasji are believed to acquire the status of a deity because of the commitment of this highest form of sacrifice (Harlan 2003: 125).
- 7 In principle, every male can become the bhopa of a mataji. However, neither a female nor a Rajput becomes the bhopa of a mataji. In the case of the bherujis described below, it is quite common for male members of certain specific castes (especially the Gujars) or tribal groups (especially the Bhils) to be the bhopas of bherujis. In the case of bhopas of mataji, we cannot find any such clear tendency of the caste or tribal affiliation.
- 8 These two occasions fall on both the full-moon day of the Vaishakh and the Kartika month of the Hindu solar-lunar calendar of northern India.
- 9 One of the only two rooms of their residence has become the shrine. I did participant observations of the interviews in this shrine in November 2007, July 2008 and January 2010.
- 10 In the next section I will consider further this opposition to making shrines in the school.
- 11 This rock pillar is now ensconced near the old well.
- 12 Though Tanabe recognises that Lave and Wenger presented for the first time the concept of the community of practice where the habitus is produced and succeeded through the transactions among participants of this community, he points out that their concept overlooked the importance of non-verbal communication in the legitimate peripheral communication, the internal power relationship in the community and the relationship between the community and the political power from outside, and he reformulates the concept of the community of practice.
- 13 Shrines were located by newspaper articles, interviews with old Udaipur city dwellers and interviews with visitors of these shrines. Out of 21 shrines, 19 are located in the old town. One of the other two is on the street just outside of the old town, and the final one has been relocated to the new town's colony from the original one enshrined in the old town. Sagasji shrines can be said to be peculiar to the old town.
- 14 He always invites the descendants of Bhaktawar Singh at the time of the annual festival of this shrine to do the necessary rituals. On one occasion at this annual festival, the spirit of Bhaktawar Singh suddenly possessed one of the descendants, and from then on, Bhaktawar Singh possessed this Rajput male only at the time of the annual festival. The spirit possession of a Rajput is quite extraordinary. A further examination of the meaning of this case should be carried out.
- 15 An evil spirit of this kind is known as *muth* in Mewar.
- 16 He stood for and was elected as the ward panch from BJP.
- 17 The reason why the chauki is also held on Tuesdays at this shrine may be related to the fact that Tuesday is thought to be a good day for rituals for Hanuman. Hanuman is believed to be the god who saves people from troubles and is one of the popular deities which possess mediums in Rajasthan (Kakar 1982: 53).

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14 Solving family problems

The role of religious practices for the Indian middle class

Mizuho Matsuo

On a Marathi TV talk show discussing the necessity for the state law to ban superstitious practices, a well-known Pune-based anti-superstition activist argued that superstitious practices are not undertaken by only uneducated, illiterate people, as commonly expected, but also by the well-educated.¹ He gave as an example Hindu rituals that are aimed at getting rid of misfortunes and erasing sins. Another panellist, a Brahmin priest who conducts these rites, opposed him on the grounds that it is ‘our culture’ and that it is essential for people to have faith. Later, when I was with the priest, he told me that despite opposition from anti-superstition activists in the media, the number of educated, middle-class people who come to him has increased in the last 20 years.

The debate surrounding whether some Hindu rituals are ‘superstitious’ or ‘cultural/traditional’ is a further point of interest, but this chapter will limit itself to asking why certain religious practices have become so popular among middle-class Indians in recent years. It seeks to understand the meanings and roles of religious practices for the urban middle class by focusing on one particular ritual, called *Narayan Nāgbali*. This ritual is believed to solve family misfortunes such as infertility, the lack of a male child and other domestic conflicts caused by the curse of restless ancestors or the sin of killing a cobra (*nāg*). It begins with an astrological diagnosis by a local astrologist (*jyōtiṣī*), which is followed by three days of mourning rituals and various other procedures. The ritual is mainly conducted by certain Brahmin priest groups at Trimbakeshwar, a small pilgrim centre in Maharashtra, India. Although owing to time and cost this is not accessible to everyone, it has become popular with the middle class. Through a detailed analysis of the Narayan Nāgbali and the people gathering there, this chapter demonstrates that the growing popularity of these religious practices can be understood as a reflection of rapid changes in the lifestyles and values of the middle class seen in contemporary Indian society.²

First, it is necessary to note the categories of the urban middle class in India. Discussions of the growing middle class usually assume that it is a group which prospered as a result of the economic liberalisation in the 1990s and subsequent globalisation. However, it was in fact a ‘new’ middle class that came on the scene and benefited most from economic liberalisation and globalisation. Members of this class are now ‘the powering of the engine of economic growth,

empowered as they have been by economic liberalisation, fanned by MNC operations, newer job options and an unprecedented boom in the service sector of the economy' (quote from *CNN Magazine* 2005, Ganguly-Scrase & Scrase 2009: 2). Leela Fernandes points to the internal stratification within the 'Middle Classes' (emphasis by the author) and says the middle class itself is never new in terms of its social and economic structure (Fernandes 2006: xi). Rather, its 'newness' is within a new culture which is characterised by certain tastes, the consumption of commodities and an identity constructed through the sharing of certain values and habitus.

The typical image of this new middle class, who represent 'India shining',³ ranges, for example, from the young male college graduate who works in the business process outsourcing (BPO) of a US-based multinational insurance corporation to the senior IT engineer who graduated from a top engineering college such as IIT (Indian Institute of Technology) and works in Bangalore. It has been emphasised that the new middle class, whose members symbolise the globalised economy, have different social, as well as cultural, values and habits from their parents' generations, such as drinking alcohol, eating non-vegetarian foods, smoking and pre-marital sexual relations; this has been frequently featured in the media. If the new middle class is constructed by sharing a certain lifestyle and habitus based on the specific value and practice of consumption, there are possibilities for the sons of the working class and lower middle class to adopt a 'credentialing strategy' to incorporate themselves into that category (Fernandes 2006: xi).

To take one example, Mr Gadgil is a 56-year-old Chitpavan Brahmin who has a Master's in Engineering and has worked at a big automobile manufacturing company for the last 30 years. His monthly salary of 20,000 rupees at retirement age was the same as the starting salary of his 22-year-old nephew who works in the BPO sector in Pune, Maharashtra. A monthly salary of 20,000 rupees is not classified as being in the 'low income' group in India, but when compared to the pay-scale of multinational companies, it seems relatively low to people such as Mr Gadgil. Commodities such as cars, luxurious flats and overseas travel are beyond his reach. However, his nephew, who appears to be benefiting from globalisation, also feels uncertain about his future career, as it is difficult to make out a clear career path in the BPO sector. This uncertainty forces him to carry on studying for an MBA for the sake of future career security. Thus, the middle class are a broad social group, which includes both old and new categories even within the same family. After the economic liberalisation and globalisation, the fluctuation in the relative positions within the middle class is striking. That is why middle-class parents invest so heavily in their children's education: they expect their children to improve their position within this group.

While the spotlight is on the new middle class and new consumer cultures, the exclusive Hindu nationalism of Hindu nationalist parties such as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and regionalist parties such as Maharashtra-based Shiv Sena, which are strongly supported by the lower-middle and middle-middle classes, is also notable. The increasing scarcity of secure jobs and dissatisfaction

with modern urban life are key factors in mobilising people in support of these movements, which incite violence against minority groups. Previous studies have placed significant focus on the religious-political phenomena that aim to reconstruct India as a nation consisting solely of ‘Hindus’ and to reaffirm the sense of identity among the lower middle class (van der Veer 1994, Hansen 1999, Fernandes 2006). However, the reaction of the middle class to modernisation and globalisation is not limited to violent religious nationalism. Maya Warrier discusses the increasing popularity in recent years of gurus and charismatic religious teachers among the urban middle class (Warrier 2005). Devotion to the spiritual leader enables individuals to harmonise the self with modernity: modern guru faith emphasises personal choice and individualisation. Unlike the construction of a violent self-identity against a Muslim ‘enemy’ among Hindu nationalists, faith in the popular guru creates the identity of a ‘modern Hindu’ for the urban middle class in the post-modern world.

In considering the religious practices of the urban middle class, the Narayan Nāgbali rituals discussed in this chapter seem to be rather traditional and orthodox Hindu religious practices in comparison with such distinctive phenomena as immersion in Hindu nationalism or self-formation through personal devotion to a modern guru. Ancestor worship and funeral rites among families have occupied an important place in Hindu religious life since the Vedic era. In contrast with previous works on the religious practices of the urban middle class, which discuss either collectivisation or personalisation of the self, this chapter tries to show a family-oriented lived experience of social transformations for the urban middle class in contemporary India.

First, this chapter will look briefly at Trimbakeshwar and the Narayan Nāgbali ritual performed there. Trimbakeshwar is a Hindu holy site located around 30 km away from Nashik (see [Figure 14.1](#)). Nashik has become a commercial city and its outskirts have expanded in recent years, as it can be reached from India’s biggest industrial city, Mumbai, within 3–4 hours. It was, however, originally famous as a religious centre that was home to a *Ramkund*, a holy bathing tank, in which, according to the ancient Hindu mythology of the Ramayana, it was believed Rama had bathed. The Ramkund has been known since medieval times as a high-rank place for performing ablutions to purify the sins of contact or sharing foods with lower castes (Kotani 2008). Nashik and Trimbakeshwar also constitute one of the sites for the *Kumbhamēlā* festival – others include Hardwar and Allahabad – and once every 12 years, millions of devotees visit there.

Trimbakeshwar, despite being a small town with fewer than 10,000 inhabitants, has various features that mark it as a sacred place. According to Hindu cosmology, the place where two rivers cross, called a *saṅgama*, is holy; there is a saṅgama of the sacred Godavari River, the so-called ‘Ganga of the West’, and the Mahilya River in Trimbakeshwar. Kuśvarta-Tīrtha,⁴ a bathing tank in the centre of the town, is believed to be the source of the Godavari River. In addition to bathing at Kuśvarta-Tīrtha, pilgrims visit in order to go to one of the 12 *vyotir-linga*, Trimbak Temple. The deity of the temple is rare as it has the three faces of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. There are also many institutions (*gurukulu*) where

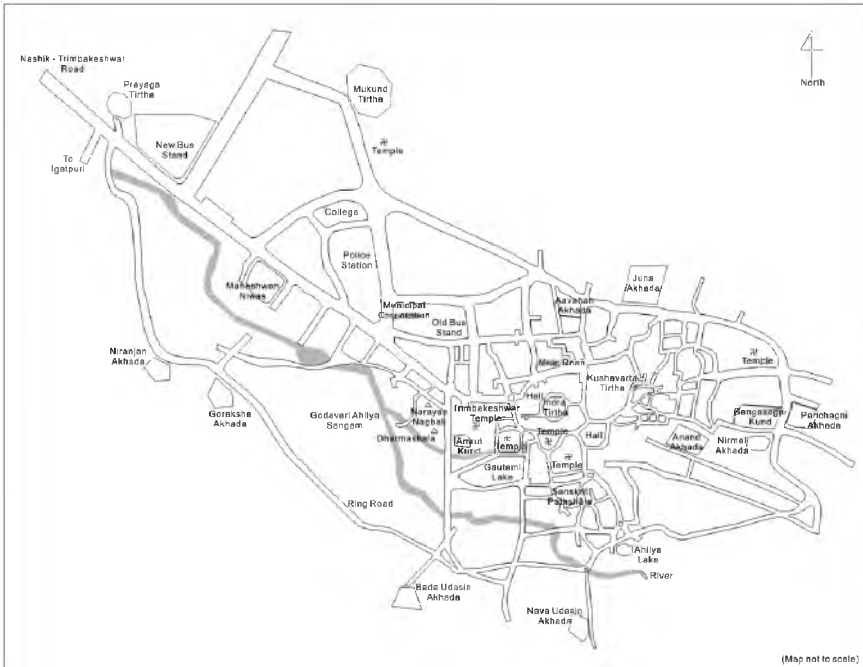


Figure 14.1 Map of Trimbakeshwar.

sons of Brahmin families from all over the Maharashtra come to stay for several years from childhood in order to learn Vedic rituals and prayers. As such, socially as well as economically, Trimbakeshwar largely depends on the 'religious industry', consisting of 300 Brahmin families and many other groups related to the performance of the rituals. Trimbakeshwar has gained particular importance in relation to the Narayan Nāgbali as it is thought that performing it here renders it more authentic and effective in comparison with other areas. Thus, aside from occasions when pilgrims visit for an important event such as Kumbhamēlā, Trimbakeshwar has recently become widely recognised as the principal place for performing Narayan Nāgbali and related ancestral rites.

Narayan Nāgbali and priest groups

In this section a brief explanation of the procedure of Narayan Nāgbali will be given. This ritual originated in Vedic times, and two different rituals (*Narayanbali* and *Nāgbali*) became one, known as Narayan Nāgbali. In summary, Narayanbali is a short version of the funeral rite, in which the usual 13-day funeral is held over three days for the ancestors, and the Nāgbali is performed as an expiatory rite for cobras.⁵ Five rituals (*viddhi*) are offered to Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva,

Yama and Preta during the three days. But the ritual for Brahma is now hardly seen outside of Trimbakeshwar, and few priests know about it. Therefore, people think it is most authentic and desirable to perform this ritual in Trimbakeshwar.

People who perform the ritual are known as *yajamāna* (a patron) or *bhakta* (a devotee), and they visit Trimbakeshwar as a couple or as a family and stay at the priest's house for three or four days. In light of this it is becoming common nowadays for priests to renovate their houses in order to have independent rooms and modern bath facilities to meet the needs of their visitors. The basic cost of Narayan Nāgbali ranges from 4,000 to 5,000 rupees, but the total cost would be more than 10,000 rupees, as new cloths, a small golden idol of a snake, and personal gifts (*dān*) for the priests are also required.

About 300 Brahmin families engage in this ritual in Trimbakeshwar, and they constitute highly exclusive professional groups.⁶ In Hindu society, priests who engage in funeral rites are called *mahābrahmin* and are generally seen as much lower and more inauspicious than priests (*purōhita*) who are only involved in auspicious events (Fuller 2002). In fact, one village *purōhita* during my field research in Maharashtra told me that he cannot perform Narayan Nāgbali as it is associated with the inauspicious. According to him, the relation of a *purōhita* to a *mahābrahmin* (funeral priest) is equivalent to 'a family doctor and a specialist'. The family doctor gives a diagnosis, writes a medical certificate and sends patients to a specialist if necessary. An apparent difference here is that the hierarchical relations between a family doctor and a specialist are contradictive in the case of a *purōhita* and a funeral priest. Marriage between them is strongly prohibited. However, the situation is quite different in Trimbakeshwar. The exclusive, highly professionalised Brahmin priest community forms almost 30 per cent of the population of Trimbakeshwar and is economically as well as politically quite dominant. They do not conduct actual funeral rites and mostly concentrate on performing Narayan Nāgbali and other rites such as Kālsarpa. After all, in such a unique place, where there are 300 priest families and most of the inhabitants other than Brahmin are also involved in the 'religious industry', to be a priest conducting ancestral funeral rites and removing sins from people does not have negative connotations and is not considered inauspicious at all by other social groups.

Characteristic features of devotees

This section briefly describes the characteristics of the devotees using the case study of the *A* priest family, more than nine generations of whom have worked in this profession. The current *A* family consists of nine members, including the father and his three sons, aged 35–45, and their wives and children. The father and his sons work as priests, and the elder son has a reputation in the community for being a knowledgeable and innovative priest. According to the records of the *A* family, 110 families asked them to perform the Narayan Nāgbali ritual in the 33 days from 20 June to 22 July 2009 – an average of 3–4 families per day. The family charges around 4,000 rupees for performing the ritual, and in addition

to this they also receive donations (*dān*), so during the peak season they earn approximately 400,000 rupees per month.

From this it becomes clear that the priesthood in the 'religious industry' in Trimbakeshwar is very lucrative now. However, this happened only after the 1990s. People recall that there were at most 1–2 Narayan Nāgbali rituals in a month before that and it was very hard to continue the priesthood for many families. Most of the families used to keep only one son to succeed in the priesthood in Trimbakeshwar, and let other sons work outside the town for their livelihood. But now, all sons tend to remain and work as priests as it has become a good business.

Let us now try to understand who the devotees are. Through a brief look at where the devotees come from, the geographical spread of the people gathering at Trimbakeshwar becomes clear. Table 14.1 shows their residential area by state and country.

The table shows that almost half of the families are from Maharashtra. After Maharashtra comes Chhattisgarh, a newly formed state created from Madhya Pradesh in 2000 and which thus shares a lot of similarities with Maharashtra. Also, because Trimbakeshwar is located on the north-west side of Maharashtra, which is near to Gujarat, there are many devotees from Gujarat. Therefore Trimbakeshwar attracts devotees not only from Maharashtra, but also from North and Central India. This is reinforced by the fact that, excluding Andhra Pradesh, there are no devotees from southern states like Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Among the devotee families, there are two NRI (non-residential Indian) families who live in Dubai and the United States, but both belong to the Vaisha (trading or merchant caste) and are originally from Gujarat. Therefore the geographic reach of the sacred place, Trimbakeshwar, extends from Maharashtra to North Central India, and to overseas Indians who originate from these areas.

Table 14.1 Residential state of devotees

<i>State</i>	<i>No. of families</i>
Maharashtra	52
Chhattisgarh	14
Madhya Pradesh	13
Gujarat	11
Uttar Pradesh	6
Orissa	3
Rajasthan	2
Andhra Pradesh	2
Delhi	2
Haryana	1
West Bengal	1
Jammu and Kashmir	1
Dubai	1
United States	1
Total	110

Source: data collected by author.

Figure 14.2 shows the population size of the cities where the 108 families reside, excluding those from the United States and Dubai.

What is most striking here is that many families – 48 in total – reside in big cities with populations of more than one million. The megacity of Mumbai, with a population of 14 million, is at the top of the list, which also includes such capital cities as Delhi, Kolkata, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad and other metropolitan cities like Pune, Nagpur, Indor, Bhopal and Jaipur. Thirty-three families came from cities with relatively small populations, ranging from 110,000 to 500,000. This is because multiple families came from the same city; for example, 13 families came from Gondiya (Maharashtra, population of 120,000) and five families from Anand (Gujarat, population of 130,000) in those particular two months.

As for the caste composition of the devotees, during my fieldwork at Trim-bakeshwar there was a majority of Brahmin families, but families of the Vaisha caste were also prominent in the data collected by the *A* family. Although the caste identification shown in Table 14.2 is vague and remains inadequate, it gives a rough idea of the nature of the caste groupings of the devotees.

The families included in the Vaisha category, such as Agarwar, Thakkar and Gandhi, are traditionally associated with business and trading. The Irani⁷ and Jewish⁸ families are identified according to their origin for the sake of convenience in Table 14.2, but as their communities are usually involved in business, it can be said that they also belong to a business community, similar to the Vaisha and Jain. In terms of their social character, families from the business community formed almost half of the devotees of the *A* family during the research period. Brahmin families are also dominant, and it is reasonable to suppose that they are the group traditionally most familiar with ancestral funeral rites and

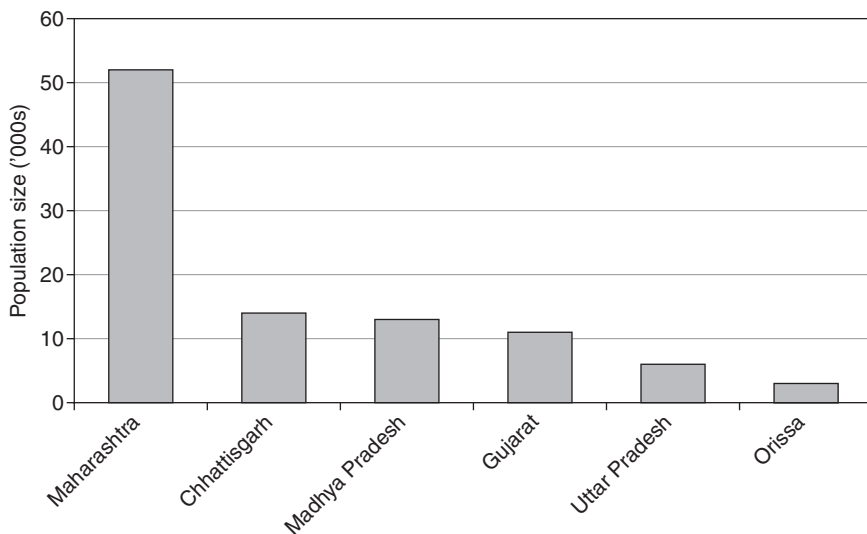


Figure 14.2 Population size of cities where devotees reside (source: GOI 2001).

Table 14.2 Caste identity of devotees

<i>Caste/religion</i>	<i>No. of families</i>
Brahmin	34
Vaisha	33
Kshatriya	19
Jain	14
OBC	4
SC	2
ST	1
ST	1
Shindhi	1
Irani	1
Jews	1
Total	111

Source: data collected by the author.

Brahmin priests. Therefore they are more likely to visit Trimbakeshwar for Narayana Nāgbali, which is deeply rooted in Sanskrit culture. The relatively high percentage from the business community can be said to be unique to the *A* family, compared with other priestly families. As mentioned before, the eldest son is known as an innovative priest, and he works on ‘business strategies’ with a view to expanding his ‘market’ to non-Marathi people. Thus, compared with other priests, he attracts more devotees from Hindi- and Gujarati-speaking business communities.

Although to an extent the appeal to business communities is particular to the *A* priestly family, there is a significant point of similarity between the Brahmin and business communities: ‘urban-ness’. They are groups engaged in ‘urban’ professions which are not directly connected with agriculture, such as trading, merchandise, finance and white-collar jobs, particularly since the beginning of the nineteenth century. The majority of devotees coming for Narayan Nāgbali are Brahmin, Vaisha or from other business communities, including the Kshatriya (Maratha Deshmukh and Rajput). This shows that it is only people from upper to higher-middle castes who become devotees. According to priests, all types of people from all over India come to Trimbakeshwar, but in fact, the data collected reveal that villagers and low-caste people hardly ever participate in this ritual. It is illuminating that the Kunabi, who are the dominant agricultural *jāti* in Maharashtra, rarely feature in the data. Thus two important characteristics of the devotees are established: first, that they come mainly from Maharashtra and north central India; and second, that they are characterised socially as urban-based high castes. The next question, then, is what motivates these devotees to practise Narayan Nāgbali.

The motives of the devotees and new developments in the ritual

The lack of a male child

As the booklet sold in Trimbakeshwar clearly states, Narayan Nāgbali is ‘the ritual for ancestors’ souls’ satisfaction and prosperity of the family’, so the practice is very much tied to the notion of the family and family issues. The most important issue regarding the prosperity of the family in India is often the discontinuity of the family line; that is to say the failure to produce children, especially a son. The Narayan Nāgbali is therefore mostly associated with the birth of a child, and priests from Trimbakeshwar have stated that two-thirds of the devotees who practise this ritual do so to cure infertility. Those who have had their wish fulfilled are expected to revisit Trimbakeshwar to perform the ancestor rites again. Thus priests believe that the number of repeat visitors indicates the effectiveness of the Narayan Nāgbali ritual.

Letters from devotees to the *A* family also show the news of the birth of a son in the family and gratitude towards the priests and the ritual itself. For instance, one letter from a Brahmin of Uttar Pradesh, dated 14 March 2006, says that he is very happy to revisit Trimbakeshwar with his newborn son, expressing his gratitude towards Narayan Nāgbali and thanking the priest for performing the rituals with sincerity. The next letter, written by a Maratha Deshmukh of Pune, says that he is writing this letter 15 days after the birth of the child for whom he had been waiting for the last seven years since performing Narayan Nāgbali. He writes ‘he is the *prasād*⁹ of God Shiva (*shri shiva śhakti chā prasād*). As guruji told, I wish to visit Trimbakeshwar again with my son.’ Furthermore, a Deshastha Brahmin of Maharashtra wrote a letter to the priest the very day after the birth of his first son, on 24 August 2000.

Two brothers from the Maratha Deshmukh family, who live in a traditional, affluent neighbourhood in Pune, have failed to produce sons. The 38-year-old elder brother lost his first wife in childbirth and has a two-year-old daughter with his second wife. The 37-year-old younger brother has two daughters, three and seven years old. The elder brother of the family was pressured to have a son as his younger brother and his wife were reluctant to have another child. Then the family performed Narayan Nāgbali with their 67-year-old father as the chief mourner, in line with advice given by the family astrologist. The Chitpavan Brahmin family from Nashik also consists of parents in their seventies and two brothers in their thirties and forties. The elder brother and his family live in Karnataka, from where their family originates, and the parents live with their younger son and his family. The younger son works at the local bank in Nashik, and his wife works at the post office; they have two daughters. The elder son and his wife lost their son to cancer at the age of three and have a 17-year-old daughter. The younger couple are reluctant to have more children as they already have two daughters, but they were requested to visit Trimbakeshwar by their parents who strongly wish to have a male descendant.

It is interesting to note that if neither of the brothers have male children, pressure is put on the couple with the youngest wife to try to have a male child, regardless of whether her husband is the elder or younger brother. Furthermore, in addition to not having any male children, both the Maratha Deshmukh and Chitpavan Brahmin families also share the experience of losing a family member. Experiencing such a family tragedy probably provides the families with a particularly strong motive to perform Narayan Nāgbali and to reject the idea that childlessness is simply a medical predicament to be treated in a hospital.

Conflicts and problems in the family

Although Narayan Nāgbali is well known for curing the lack of a male child, devotees also visit Trimbakeshwar for a variety of other reasons, most notably wider family issues such as conflicts and friction among family members, and difficulties in the marriage or employment of children.

A family from Kolhapur, Maharashtra, who run a jewellery shop, were worried for several years about the unsuccessful marriage of their college-educated daughter. They performed Narayan Nāgbali upon the advice of their local priest and immediately got a 'good result'. Not only that, but they received unexpected benefits such as improvement in their business, and they also observed that the head of the family, who had previously had a bad temper, became quieter and calmer. After five years they revisited the priest to perform the ancestral rituals.

In the case of the Maratha Deshmukh family, the husband worked in the state government office and had experienced difficulties at work for more than ten years. He worked in Aurangabad, but his wife and daughter lived in Pune for the sake of his daughter's education. The wife explained that the reason for performing Narayan Nāgbali was to alleviate their anxieties regarding the husband's work difficulties and their daughter's education.

It is evident from these examples that issues ranging from a daughter's marriage, which is traditionally of the utmost importance for Indian parents, to more contemporary issues such as education and employment, place a great deal of pressure on the parents of today. It is these practical problems which have come to be the objects of Narayan Nāgbali in the present day.

Other reasons

As well as practical issues, there are people who visit Trimbakeshwar in order to try to solve superstitious issues, such as possession by spirits and poltergeists. For instance, a family from Mumbai came to Trimbakeshwar to consult with the priest about their ten-year-old daughter's 'disordered behaviour'; they described how she would shake her body suddenly and give out a strange sound. The mother's sister, an ardent devotee of the God Shiva, who went on pilgrimage to Trimbakeshwar every year, introduced the priest to the parents. Then the family, including the grandfather of the girl – the head of the family – performed

Narayan Nāgbali. The grandfather, describing the first day of rituals that evening, said, 'I was filled with purified feelings during performing the ritual today. The confidence grew in my mind that the situation of the family will surely change for the better soon and something good will happen to us.'

As shown above, people gather in Trimbakeshwar to conduct Narayan Nāgbali to resolve various anxieties and uncertainties concerning issues such as childlessness, marriage, employment and so on. Such anxieties, however, do not extend across the wider social realm of caste, community and kinship group. They are rather seen as much more personal issues. They are limited and expected to be solved within the 'family', which here usually indicates the household. It can also be said that the anxieties and problems behind the motivation for performing Narayan Nāgbali reflect the lifestyle and priorities of the urban middle class in contemporary India.

The new role of priests

It is the Brahmin priests in Trimbakeshwar who, as specialists, help to remove the misfortunes and sins of devotees. Most of them learned prayers and rituals from childhood and succeeded their fathers in the family business. As mentioned before, this 'religious industry' in Trimbakeshwar creates a monopolistic business market and brings a relatively high income and status for these priests. This popularity is also one of the outcomes of patient efforts undertaken by priests to expand their business. It is common practice for them to prepare their own business cards and distribute them to everyone who visits. I have several business cards that were given to me by village priests with whom I worked at my research site before going to Trimbakeshwar. Many of the devotees who come to Trimbakeshwar have also received such business cards from their family priests or astrologists in their home towns. There are wide networks of local astrologists and priests from all over the various regions, connecting them to the priests in Trimbakeshwar and consequently making it possible for the people of these regions to contact the recommended priests with ease. Furthermore, some priests have even set up their own websites and started online booking systems for Narayan Nāgbali. These 'management efforts' are certainly designed to target the main customer of this ritual – that is, the urban middle class.

Some of the priests have expanded their 'business market' beyond Maharashtra by taking note of regional variations, as the auspicious timing for ancestral rites differs according to different regions and communities. They sometimes also provide the service of conducting the rituals in Hindi. Therefore during seasons when there is a lull in custom from the Marathi people, priests can fill the gap by performing rituals for other communities. By appealing to devotees from different regions, priests try to secure a stable number of visitors throughout the year.

Recently there has been a further attempt by the young generation of priests, aged in their thirties and forties, to modernise their role by becoming counsellors of a sort to the devotees. Mr Dixit, for example, is a learned astrologist as well

as a priest, but his role is not limited to consulting the constellations (*patrika*) of the devotees; he himself studies infertility and reproductive disorders, checks the medical reports of the devotees, gives advice on medical treatments rather than rituals, and even arranges for a doctor to give their diagnosis if it seems necessary. In terms of devotees seeking to practice Narayan Nāgbali because of their childlessness, Mr Dixit believes that both medicine and astrology are ‘sciences’ that work in different fields and that it is important to use both complementarily to solve infertility. If there are any special medical disorders, Mr Dixit thinks that it is important to listen to people’s anxieties and suffering with care and give guiding principles to them using the science of astrology. He says:

the role of astrologists and religious specialists should be modified according to the times. People especially need good astrologists in these times. To have a good astrologist for them is to get a good friend who gives you advice and to get a family doctor and family counsellor who gives you guidelines. And astrologists can become counsellors to show the appropriate way forward in such uncertain times. So now it is very crucial to have a good astrologist in one’s life.

He studies the results achieved through medicine and psychology and, as a local specialist, is interested in the relation between infertility and astrology. Such innovative priests are not yet common, but his practices have enabled him to expand his business. There is the possibility that devotees from the urban middle class are more likely to accept his modern understanding of religion and science. The practices of Mr. Dixit described here are quite indicative of the modern role of local religious specialists in contemporary India, which goes beyond that of charismatic religious teachers such as gurus.

Conclusion

This chapter examines the people who gather for Narayan Nāgbali in Trimbakeshwar and shows that they are mostly from the urban-based, high-caste middle class. It also reports that, although this ritual originates from Vedic times, the role of the priests varies according to the transformation of society and the times.

Three concluding observations are significant. First, the hierarchy and stratification within the middle-class category, as described in the introduction, is also recognised among devotees in this study. People gathering for Narayan Nāgbali certainly belong to the urban middle class, but most of them are from the so-called ‘traditional’ middle class. Many are engaged in small-scale business or have relatively conservative professions such as school teachers, bank employees and government officers. It can be said that they belong to the groups that have experienced a decline rather than an improvement in their economic position as a result of the rapid economic growth after economic liberalisation.

The most frequently heard motivation behind performing Narayan Nāgbali is to have a male child, and this seems natural as this ritual is well-known for

solving male childlessness. Regardless of caste, class, religion and locality, for most Indian people it is hard to imagine spending married life without having any children. However, the meaning of having a child has changed for the middle class. The relatively new expectations surrounding children's education increases the financial burden for middle-class parents but, on the other hand, children are expected to use this investment in their education to improve the social situation of the family. The fact that many devotees in Trimbakeshwar were worried about their children's marriages, education or job opportunities may reflect the uncertain social situation surrounding the urban middle class who are anxious about maintaining their former status.

Second, in understanding the desires and aims of middle-class devotees and their motivations for achieving these through religious practice, it is important not to underestimate the significance of the family. As already mentioned, previous studies of the religious practices of the contemporary urban middle class have focused, on the one hand, on self-identification, with the collective and the fictional category appearing in Hindu nationalism movements, and, on the other, on self-formation as a modern Hindu through devoting themselves to a certain guru. In this chapter, however, Narayan Nāgbali puts the family at the forefront, the smallest social group, which connects the self and society. Many devotees live in extended family units, and it is the head of the patrilineal family who is expected to perform the rituals as the chief mourner, even if his sons are middle-aged. Thus, through participating in this ritual, people reconfirm their family ancestors and definitise the boundary of the 'family' to include them. This reinforcement of such family ties through ancestral rites, based on the patrilineal family, indicates that there is a social tendency to consider religious practices in terms of the common man, and not in terms of the collectivisation of the self into larger categories such as 'Indian' and 'Hindu' or individualisation, which have been examined in previous studies. However, at the same time this also suggests that the issues of childlessness and spirit possession are perceived as being limited to the category of 'family' matters and thus as not having any connection with wider social relations any more. People are expected to solve such problems within the 'family', especially when this means only the limited household. Even among brothers, if they are not sharing a residence together, they are usually not deeply involved in such personal issues. On the contrary, in the village where I work in Maharashtra, for example, childlessness is never seen as merely a 'family' problem; rather, it is feared as the curse of an angry goddess upon women or the black magic of kinship members. So such misfortune involves various actors and social groups, and creates several patterns of stories in the community (Matsuo 2010). This wider circle of involvement is not seen in the practices of urban middle-class devotees, as described in this chapter. This reflects the mixed situation of modern and traditional social relations in which the urban middle class now live.

Lastly, traditional religious specialists, such as priests in a small pilgrim town, have also changed their practices according to the needs and social aspects of their 'customers'. The transformations of religious practices are not only caused

by the urban middle class. From environmental improvements such as distributing the business cards of priests, renovating accommodation facilities and advertising through the internet, to content enrichment such as marketing strategies to attract new devotees and additional services for consultation using the knowledge of astrology and medicine, the efforts of priests also work towards adjusting the Narayan Nāgbali ritual to fit in with contemporary Indian society. As seen from the case of Mr Dixit, the new role of a modern counsellor who gives advice to people can be well accepted by the urban middle class in such a period of instability.

As discussed in this chapter, Narayan Nāgbali, ancestral and funeral rites, which are believed to solve family problems, and their transformation to fit the modern world, can be understood as one response to the dilemmas, struggles and anxieties faced by the urban middle class in their day-to-day lives.

Notes

- 1 The law was finally promulgated as the Maharashtra Prevention and Eradication of Human Sacrifice and Other Inhuman, Evil and Aghori Practices and Black Magic Bill on 24 August 2013, after the anti-superstition activist Narendra Dabholkar was assassinated in Pune.
- 2 This chapter is based on my periodic fieldwork in Trimbakeshwar from 2005.
- 3 This was the campaign slogan of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the general election of 2004.
- 4 *Tirtha* literally means ‘ford’ and ‘crossing place’. It refers to riversides and crossing rivers where not only Trimbakeshwar, but also Varanasi and many pilgrimage sites are located. In addition to that, this word implies the halfway point between this world and a different world (Fuller 2002: 207).
- 5 Regarding Hindu funeral rites, see Parry (1982), Gold (1988), Fillippi (2005). Gold’s ethnography *Fruitful Journey* is especially insightful on the practices and experiences of pilgrims.
- 6 Only families that inherit and possess records of the details of all past devotees, called *namavali*, from previous generations are permitted to perform Narayan Nāgbali and be recognised as members of the priest association (*tīrtha purōhita sangha*) in Trimbakeshwar. There are 42 clans in the 300 families, known as Godavari’s original priest (*Godavariche muḷ upādhyāya*), which consist of Yajurvedi and Rigvedi.
- 7 The Irani group migrated to Peshawar from Iran (Persia) about 500 years ago and spread into western India, especially western Maharashtra (Singh 2004: 821).
- 8 Jews here refers to Bene Israel, who migrated from Persia to Konkan region, western Maharashtra. They are culturally familiar with Maratha and speak Marathi as their mother tongue (Singh 2004: 840).
- 9 Prasād is ‘food returned by a deity to his or her worshippers’ (Feldhaus 1995: 86).

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Part V

**Subaltern practices and
discourses in urban
situations**

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15 News, gossip and humour

Street perspectives from colonial Calcutta

Anindita Ghosh

The history of nineteenth-century Calcutta is usually identified with a concurrent history of the *bhadralok*. And yet it was peopled by a whole host of other groups: migrant workers, shopkeepers, labourers and an army of clerks. What were their experiences? As a huge low-to-middling workforce arrived in the city, they constituted a significant layer in the urban experience, even self-consciously acknowledging the tremendous role that the city played in their everyday lives. Contemporary street songs on Calcutta, which this chapter studies, provide important entry-points into this mental world of the city's lower social orders. Popular street and print culture, particularly songs, consistently foreground the city as a site for discussions on social and topical themes. While offering quotidian images of city life, they also constituted vital social commentaries on modernity, colonialism and urbanism. In addition, they acted as crucial circuits of information and gossip, news and rumour that constantly shaped and reassured their moral and mental worlds.

Calcutta's prominence as a colonial metropolis for British India in the nineteenth century cannot be overstated. Originally starting out as a small trading outpost in the late seventeenth century, Calcutta grew in size and impact after the East India Company captured power in the region. With its spacious European classical-style villas lining the eastern and southern reaches, and official buildings along the Esplanade marking the nerve-centre of British trade and administration, it was a place that evoked a sense of grandeur and elegance, giving rise to the expression 'City of Palaces' in the eighteenth century. The rapid growth of Calcutta that followed, stretching longitudinally along the banks of the Hooghly, also saw segregation in the residential settlement pattern – with a White Town with largely European inhabitants populating the area surrounding the fort, and a teeming Black Town peopled by Indians squeezed into the northern part of the city.¹

Visual and textual representations of the city produced by Europeans in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are remarkable in how they completely shut out the presence of the indigenous populations except by way of foil for the White Town. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the figure of the lone Indian servant hovering over the British master had come to be replaced by the images of the brash irreverence of the jubilant crowds attending the

hook-swinging festival, or filthy and chaotic masses in bazaars and streets. The Black Town in such narratives was 'a sprawling appendage that only survived because of the white town and remained the great defect in this capital of empire' (Chattopadhyay 2005: 29).

From the nineteenth century onwards we have educated Indians offering their own perspectives on the urban experience that was Calcutta, but even these remained largely negative. The *bhadralok*, we know, were never at home in the city. The city was not worth habitation because of the pollution, dirt and disease that was rampant within its limits. Despite the novelty of the metropolitan experience, the city was looked upon as a place of ruin and corruption, decay and deprivation. The countryside was fresher, purer and idyllic in contrast (Sarkar 1999: 176–177, Chattopadhyay 2005: 32). Not surprisingly, one would think, given that the metropolis symbolised, among other things, the material and political triumph of the Raj and the concurrent enslavement of the educated Bengali, whose sole reason of existence in the city, ironically, was service to the colonial state. What is missing from this spectrum of representations, however, is the experience of the lower social tiers. While undoubtedly some views were shared vertically across the layers – such as those on women, migrants etc. – other, more specifically socially ordered perspectives, were an inherent part of the city's long-standing traditions of popular street cultures.

Traditional musical performances, entertainment in the form of *jhumurs* and *khemtas* (rhythmic sensual dances) and *panchalis* (couplets based on mythological themes), had been around for a while, but there emerged new urban variants in Calcutta at this time in the form of *kobi*-songs, with their strong abusive elements in the form of *kheud*. While often simply sharply observant and amusing accounts of city life, the songs could turn loudly and unambiguously critical, packed with pungent hatred of the wealthier residents, and not surprisingly, erring women. A strong culture of humour overlapped with these performative cultures which allowed the airing of critical opinions on the city and found effective expression in irreverent couplets and verses circulating in the streets.

There was yet another category of songs on the city that developed independently of this performative tradition from the late nineteenth century onwards and was shared by reading/singing and listening groups. Printed as short pamphlets and composed in sometimes stylised and sometimes rudimentary, colloquial Bengali, such songs offered perspectives and comments on dramatic happenings or major developments that presumably affected all city dwellers. Despite anxieties about surviving in a harsh environment, Calcutta's material munificence and technological marvels provoked awe and admiration. As bridges spanned mighty rivers, and electricity dispelled evening darkness, people were awestruck by these events and wrote prolifically about them. Unlike the educated middle classes lamenting the passing of old days,² there was a joyous celebration of city life. Poems and songs composed in the traditional style of rhymed couplets marked the construction of the Pontoon bridge over the Ganges in 1874,³ the illumination of the same bridge in 1879, the laying of the tramway in the city in 1880, and even the municipal drains in Calcutta (*Drener Panchali*) in 1874. But

frailty in the face of natural disasters, disease and death also drove home the ephemeral nature of modern civilisation. The cyclones of 1867 and 1877, the scare of worms in edible fish in 1875 and the spread of dengue fever in 1872/74 fanned fears of an impending apocalyptic doom in which the city's residents would have to pay for their sins. There was also the sharing of everyday news – often sensational – like the explosion at the Colvin Ghat in 1876 and the Sonagatchi murder in 1875.

This chapter studies such songs from this period, exploring the interstices between a largely pre-modern, pastoral and deeply indigenous sensibility and the onset of a rushed modernity and urbanity in nineteenth-century Calcutta, the consequences of living and working in a harsh colonial environment, and their wider significance for the newly emergent public sphere in the city. There are two characteristics of the songs that I wish to emphasise here: one, that the songs were vital bearers of 'news' and gossip, and acted as circulating newspapers for a population living outside or marginally within the limits of literacy; and two, how these were interwoven with discursive layers on social themes and debates relating to urban life.

A broader meta-language underlying the songs, I would like to argue, is that of 'knowingness', as Peter Bailey suggests in the context of the nineteenth-century music hall songs of the working classes in England. In Bailey's study, 'knowingness' represented a new alertness that was part of the cosmopolitan urban sensibility, which had to 'know' its world in order to survive. The 'knowing intimacy' displayed in popular song motifs and tropes with urban themes thus enabled sizeable constituencies to collectively identify with the songsters and song writers. In nineteenth-century Calcutta, as I show, the knowingness did not just translate into being canny in a new urban environment, it also invited thought and reflection on that experience – prodding at the boundaries of urban social hierarchies, airing the debate between the right to sexual freedom and conjugal obligations, and questioning the legitimacy of municipal and taxation regimes.

The educated Bengali, too, wrote about Calcutta, but their concerns were very dissimilar. Their acknowledgement of the technological marvels of the British empire was indifferent, at best tardy. When they did speak about these it was to complain about the inconvenience caused by the city being dug up all over or the lack of clean water supply (Tagore 1930: 81–82). Registering mixed feelings about Calcutta, with its abundant wealth and opportunity, and an alien lifestyle rivalling one that was habitual and sanctified by custom, *bhadralok* writings closely interrogated their own social and cultural investment in the city. One such literary response, the *Kalikata Kamalalaya*, recorded the changing times as indexed in contemporary popular perception.⁴ Set up as a dialogue between a city dweller and a villager, with the latter confronting the former as his alter-ego, the work posed the author's own self-doubts to a wider readership. Under the onslaught of the countryman's impeccable reasoning, the city man puts up a tough but spirited defence of his city, but the response is riddled with ambiguity.

Such divided selves were to form an endemic feature of educated writings in the times to come.⁵ There is a constant dialectic of identity and alienation for the

bhadralok within the colonial urban space. Anxiety persisted particularly on the upsetting of Hindu ways of life and codes (Dutta 1981: 127–153). In *Kantalaler Kolikata Darshan (Kantalal Vists Calcutta)* the author, an academic and novelist, presents mixed messages. When Kantalal, a young man, visits Calcutta from a neighbouring village, he is swept inadvertently into a circle of intrigue and crime (Chaudhuri n.d.). Even as he manages to escape, slowly adapting and learning to survive under harsh conditions, Kantalal's seeming inexperience is replaced by canny urban sense. As a friend remarks on meeting Kanta sometime later, 'the Calcutta wind has got you', the metaphor summing up pithily all that the city was capable of inflicting on the outsider – corruption of the moral fibre, stripping of innocence and a hardening of the soul (Chaudhuri n.d.: vol. 1, 91).

Kantalal in his pristine days is the epitome of Arcadian virtues. On his arrival he is shocked to find the city abounding in cheats and swindlers – from the fake blind and lame beggars to embracing strangers who steal all his worldly possessions. He witnesses the avarice of lawyers and the illicit trade in girls (Chaudhuri n.d.: 11–12, 20–21, 41–42). But in the end, he emerges unscathed, albeit wiser.

Despite his eventual adaptation to city life, Kantalal is amazed by what he sees in Calcutta, his heightened appreciation of the view from the top of the Ochterlony Monument being aestheticised by the author thus:

What he saw transformed him into a state of stupor. The golden rays of the sun setting over the Ganges in the west had lit up the distant red clouds in the horizon filling it up with an enchanting glow. There were hundreds of ships visible on the river, while the countryboats with their white sails disappeared slowly and gracefully like white birds into the tree line. Millions of buildings all around him stood tall and proud testimony to centuries of industrial success... Down below one could see numerous small hackney-carriages and electric vehicles, and thousands of people on the move resembling armies of ants. A grand, dazzling scene! Kantalal remembered the proverb that did its rounds in the *mofussil*, and marvelled at its aptness: 'if one has not seen Calcutta, one literally remains unborn'.

(Chaudhuri n.d.: vol. 1, 22)

The sight of technological wonders like trams and aeroplanes fill Kantalal with fear and amazement. But modernity is crippling, encourages laziness and drains one of vital energies. Kantalal witnesses the sad plight of worried clerks trudging to work during a tram strike, anxious to make it to the office on time, and yet without either the vitality to undertake the short journey at a brisk pace or the means to hire a cab. As a posed critique of a Marwari businessman points out, ease of living had made the Bengalis lazy, and unfit for the delivery of self-rule promised every day in their fiery public speeches (Chaudhuri n.d.: vol. 1, 36).

Not just the physical and material, but the social and cultural topography of the city was also fast altering. The increasingly visible and disturbing presence of women in public spaces triggered images of a world turned upside down in contemporary popular art and literature. It seemed indicative of the moral decay

of the new urban world. Migrants, in the shape of up-country labour and numerous menial servicemen and women in the city, constituted another source of anxiety. Most importantly, the opening up of urban space as a sphere of arguably freer circulation and exchange, not bound by caste and ritual restrictions, and subject to the same municipal regime, inserted new aspirants into the scene who challenged the comfortable boundaries of the educated and propertied classes.

Street performances as social critique: humour and the city

Sumanta Banerjee's seminal work has highlighted a world of pungent lower-order hatred of the urban successful in the street cultures of Calcutta (Banerjee 1989). The target of attack was the perceived lifestyle of luxury and hypocrisy of the nouveau riche fops and dandies of the city, who came to be described as *babus*. The constant ribald and derisive references to the human body expressed irreverence towards the refined and successful urban world. The patrons of such street cultures were the first generation of the rich in Calcutta – old landed aristocracy, East India Company compradors and commercial barons of the city, who still strongly identified themselves with country life.⁶ They were also a means of consolidating social networks and patronage, as we shall see.

Doggerels and street humour on the city were unrelenting and acrid in their critique of the overflowing wealth and corruption among some residents. What was involved was a zealous policing of its moral economy. Thus: '*Jal, juyochuri, mithye kotha, Ei tin niye Kolikata*', i.e. 'forgery, cheating and lies, these three together make up Calcutta' (Seth 1934: 314). Banerjee notes the resentful mockery of the lavish lifestyles paraded by Calcutta's rich in the street songs of the time (Banerjee 1989: 87):⁷

Belgachhiar bagane hoy chhuri-kantar jhonjhonani
Khana khawar koto moja
Amra tar ki jani?
Jane Thakur Company.

(‘What do we know of the fun and food at the Belgatchia house, where knives and forks clang in merriment? It is but an affair of the Tagore Company’ – referring to the sumptuous garden parties hosted by Dwarkanath Tagore on behalf of Carr, Tagore and Company, his mercantile firm, at his Belgatchia villa.)

Contemporaries noted in particular the power of street musicians and singers to hurl abuse in the rudest colloquial on perceived wrong-doers, ranging from parsimonious patrons⁸ to wealthy cheats, even reflecting the personal rivalries between different aristocratic patron groups or *dals*.⁹ Thus when Raja Nubkissen Deb, merchant and top servant to the East India Company, lost a court case against another landed notable, Chudamani Dutta, drummers paraded triumphantly in front of the Deb residence with the corpse of the latter, beating to the rhythm of a verse that congratulated Chudamani even in his death (Mullick 1935: 59):

*Yam jinte yayre Chuda, Yam jinte yay;
Japtap karaki, marte janle hoy.*

(‘Chuda thus goes on to win against Yama, the God of Death; even daily worship and ritual is not enough to guarantee a death as glorious as this.’)

But the critical net could also be cast further afield, in highlighting the evils widespread in the larger society and government (Mullick 1935: 83). When the Insolvency Act was passed in 1830, in pursuit of the self-aggrandising policy of the East India Company, an appropriate verse circulated in the city to express the scepticism of its inhabitants (Mullick 1935: 167).

Sawng or pantomime tableaux performances emerging from darjipara (tailor colony) and jelepara (fishermen’s colony) during the *gajan* (hook swinging) festival, alongside those of prominent aristocrats, offered bold social commentaries (Sur 1988: 67, 77). Mocking representations of priests/holy men, meditating and counting beads while eyeing the women lining the balconies of overlooking houses, were among the themes that were on display.¹⁰ The sawngs were far from benign in their representations of contemporary city life, and instead ‘specialised in throwing the spotlight on social, administrative, municipal corruption and wrongdoings in religion and education, the sharp wit of the songs lashing mercilessly at their targets’ (Sur 1988: 77). A contemporary recalls one such procession emerging from the Bowbazar jelepara area, with a participant performing as a female sweeper or *mehtrani* and singing a song aimed at the Calcutta Municipality:

My name is Hari Mehtrani
I am the grandma of the Municipality
If anyone accuses us of *chhota zubaan*
We quit work in unison¹¹
Our caste is very well bonded.
But the babus are different.
They shamelessly lick the half-eaten plates (of sahibs)
Despite their gratuitous kicks.
And then they say ‘do not touch us mehtrani’,
Sprinkling cowdung water on us ... (for ritual purification).
Oh, we will wed Brahmin priests
And marry off the Sens with the Deys (signalling caste disharmony).
(Sur 1988: 77)

The female sweeper had an analogous presence in other contemporary popular folk forms as well, such as Bengali indigenous theatre or *jatra*, where the play would invariably begin with her farcical appearance on stage (alongside sometimes other such characters performing menial jobs such as the water seller, coachman, etc.), upbraiding the establishment and singing parody songs using a peculiar pidgin Hindi-mixed Bengali¹² and full of swagger and commonsensical social wisdom.

Sin and depravity in street songs: women and the city

Kobi songs formed an integral part of the vibrant street scene described above. With their antecedents rooted in communal festivities at the end of the harvest season in rural Bengal,¹³ *kobi* songs in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries came to be sponsored by nouveau riche patrons in Calcutta and the surrounding area and were usually performed on the occasions of prominent festivals and feasts. Over the course of the nineteenth century, however, the venues shifted from the more private domain of influential families to that of market places, riversides, temple courtyards, and even burning-ghats, giving the genre a more decidedly 'street' character (Sinha 1993: 65, 71, 84, 87, 100).

Itinerant folk poets/songsters or *kobis* who had travelled to the city in search of better fortunes performed before large – often similarly uprooted – urban audiences and were immensely popular for their ready wit, lyrical prowess and song and dance routines.¹⁴ An added-on aspect to the songs that the street audience particularly enjoyed was a piece called *kheud*, usually sung extempore, which allowed space for abusive verbal duels between rival poets. The songs were rendered to a background of rhythmic music, using a combination of traditional folk percussion and metal instruments, as well as the violin (Sinha 1993: 61). A related genre was the *pnachali*, also pastoral and devotional in origin and similarly adapted to reflect more contemporary concerns in the nineteenth century.

While still faithful to the conventional formats of the Radha-Krishna and *Agamani* (invoking Durga) themes from Hindu Pauranic legends, *kobis* made use of tongue-in-cheek allusions and telling imagery to offer cheeky commentaries on the city's social scene. The insertion of more earthly, mundane and contemporary subject matter into the songs from this period onwards was to prove an enduring feature, thriving well into the twentieth century (Sinha 1993: ch. 4; also see Pal 1994: 48–53). Thus the illicit love affair between Krishna and Radha (married to Ayan Ghose) was repeatedly invoked to offer veiled illustrations of real-life clandestine relationships. Far away from the sobering influences of domesticity, it was not unusual for petty service men to fall prey to the attractions that the red-light area of the city had to offer (see Raychaudhuri 1975: 23). Radha thus complains in a song:

So here you are Shyam! Having spent the night elsewhere,
You return with an empty soulless body;
Who have you entrusted your heart to?
What reminded you of Radha, why have you come here,
Now that your dawn was spent with someone else?
... Oh, I can't bear to look at your face.¹⁵

The imagery of the housewife alone in the family household while the husband was elsewhere – presumably Calcutta – for the purposes of work, was also distinctly palpable in such motifs. A large service population from the city's

hinterland travelled to Calcutta every day, leaving their families back in their village and suburban homes. The possibility of their wives losing their honour in their absence was a constant and gnawing fear. In fact, many believed that thus uncared for, some of the more daring women found solace in clandestine sexual relationships with other men.¹⁶ The *kobi* Ram Basu also warns his audience of ‘bad things happen(ing)’ when women past the age of puberty are seen by men other than from their own family (Pal 1994: 44).

With the audience increasingly seeking instantaneous pleasure and bodily excitement in the songs, kobis turned to the sensational and erotic themes in Pauranic tales, usually involving double entendres (Sinha 1993: 74–77). The description of *biraha*, or Radha’s agony and physical desire at separation from her beloved, could be both poetic and erotic (Pal 1994: 313, 337). A deserted wife in the guise of Radha thus sings:

My ripe sixteen-year-old body perishes like the waning moon,
 While the rightful owner of this treasure has deserted me.
 And guards someone else’s riches without looking after his own.
 Leaving his woman behind to pine for him, he shamelessly cohabits with
 someone else...
 Tell him dear friend that my youth decays with each passing day...
 While the monthly flower blooms, I hope it does not run astray.
 It is a shame that I, a *sati*, have to live through this agony, when my husband
 is alive and hearty.¹⁷

Another song referred to Krishna – using a clearly phallic innuendo – as a crafty thief, wielding his flute like the trusted tool used for cutting a passage into an earthen house, and similarly robbing women of their virginity.¹⁸ But the kobis quite clearly blame the men for the plight brought upon their married womenfolk.

An aspect of the songs that the audience particularly enjoyed, as explained earlier, was the *kheud*. Songsters made use of this opportunity to attack and abuse their rivals – often in a very personal way – loudly encouraged by their supporters. These were also occasions where patrons and social superiors were criticised, with poets publicly – and with evident relish – denouncing their authority and showcasing their weaknesses.¹⁹ On one such occasion, Ram Basu attacked his opponent, Ramprasad, who had recently taken charge of the singing troupe upon the death of his brother, Nilu:

Oh, Ramprasad is nothing but a tin can in Nilu’s ensemble;
 Like the small drum slung along the left side of a drummer, which never
 gets played.
 Like the religious mendicant’s attendant or bowl bearer;
 Who never chants the name of *Hari* [Vishnu] but is more keen to pick up
 the rice grains thrown at them by people.
 He is a good for nothing, that Ramprasad Sharma,

Struts about with airs though absolutely worthless,
Just as futile as a *dhobi's* [washerman's] Vishvakarma [patron god of
craftsmen].

(Pal 1994: 37)

The standard literary tropes in topical print and song for talking about the times were those of rot – moral and material – some of which we have encountered above. An added dimension to the flamboyance and corruption created by wealth was the corrosive effect of women of easy virtue on the moral fibre of its male residents. Calcutta in the nineteenth century seemed to offer endless attractions to young men. Night-life in the city sizzled with opium dens and shops selling alcohol, and the vigorous business generated by the red-light district.

A 16-page pamphlet outlined the typical nightly delights of the metropolis on a Saturday in 1863.²⁰ It paints a picture of roving bands of youths indulging in drunken and disorderly behaviour, courting prostitutes and being generally dissolute. The cartography of the city's entertainment district comes alive in the vivid descriptions – the alcohol shops of Mechhuabazar and Radhabazar, the prostitute quarters of Sonagatchi, the busy streets of Harkata and Siddheswari.

Saturday has arrived to quell all despair,
The alcoholic is steeped in sweet delights.
The banner of the bottle is fluttering happily
Abuse and merry-making, oh what fun!
... only the night is beautiful, the day stinks!²¹

The opportunities provided by the city in the evening are not socially restrictive. The author notes with evident disdain the day-labourer in the city sprucing up in elegant clothes at night.²² While providing a graphic account of urban revelry, however, he barely attempts to hide his own contempt for such light-headed fun. In his model world – outlined in the [second part](#) of the work – the working man returns to his home in the village loaded with grocery and merchandise from the city, to be lovingly waited upon by his devoted wife.

Calcutta in the nineteenth century was fearful of its women, and young men were constantly warned of the dangers posed by prostitutes adept at baiting the likes of them. The figure of the enticing and wily prostitute, who lurks in the city's red-light districts waiting for the earliest opportunity to deprive men of their hard-earned money, is a recurrent motif in contemporary street literature. Dasarathi Ray, the pnachali composer, thus sings:

When I was in Calcutta recently one evening
I saw [prostitutes] sitting in the verandahs on both sides of the streets; Like
lightning they were!
Covered in jewellery, they were singing *tappas*.
While the *babus* tried hard to win their hearts in a manner most servile.

(Dasarathi Rayer Pnachali 1899: 90)

The day their pockets are dry, the brainless babus end up being struck by the prostitute's chastising broom. For Dasarathi, these men are better off hanging themselves (*Dasarathi Rayer Pnachali* 1899: 81–82). A typical example of banter, full of sexual innuendo, between two singers posing respectively as the male and female partners in such a relationship ran thus in a *kobi* song, echoing Dasu Ray's sentiments:

The moon shines and flowers bloom in the sky so blue
 O *chokori*-bird, come and drink the sweet moonbeam that is meant for you.

The woman adds:

Oh my black bee, do come and drink my honey so sweet.

The man retorts:

It is a shame that other stray bees too get this treat.

(Pal 1994: 40)²³

One of the chief efforts of the Contagious Diseases Act, passed in 1868, to protect the health of European soldiers needing access to local prostitutes was the restriction of the prostitutes' visibility. Confining them to licensed quarters and Lock hospitals in specific areas where they could be put under strict surveillance and their movements controlled seemed to ease the official Victorian mind, faced with the unsettling prospect of the growing sexual powers of the lowly prostitute. The *bhadralok*, too, despite frequenting these quarters openly themselves, backed such official perceptions, to keep their fears of social disorder at bay. In the cheap racy literature circulating in the city, however, the representations were more ambiguous. The overt and rampant sexuality of these women, their firm control of the streets in the evenings, and their proverbial witty abuse – all constitute a powerful counter-discourse to the *bhadralok*'s gentility and challenge his access to certain social spaces within the city (Ray 2008: 150–152).

The general import of the songs was very conservative: the values that were constantly driven home were those of marital fidelity and honesty, filial love and domesticity. They seemed to provide succour to the audience in a rocky social environment. Singers routinely mobilised the collective interests of the listening public playing to different sub-sets at different points of the performance – women, lovers, office workers and the socially less privileged. For people caught up in the social and geographical upheavals of agrarian disorder and urban migration, the words of the songs could provide a direct link with their past, access to and knowledge of a new social world, and visions of a more egalitarian social order. In an analogous study of Calcutta's street songs of lower-caste sects of Bauls, Kartabhajas and Sahebhdhanis, Hugh Urban, too, has observed the evocation of community identity and a certain moral economy in the face of material adversity.

The songs did not just reflect on core social discourses, they were also a means for the circulation of news in the city. Kobis thus reported natural disasters such as floods and cyclones, describing the havoc caused, sympathising with the predicament of the victims and appealing to the Gods to show mercy.²⁴ The songs acted as conduits for channelling collective expressions of wonder at the technological achievements executed by the British rulers, commenting on the telegraph, trains, steamer and other motor-driven machinery.²⁵ The financial burdens of urbanisation on the residents, as evident in the string of taxes they were subject to – income tax, licence tax, residential tax, motor vehicle tax and chowkidari tax – were also bitterly protested, symbolising the increasing pressure on lower-income groups in cities.²⁶ As we shall see below, the trend was simultaneous to and extended in contemporary topical print literature as kobi songs were prosecuted for being ‘obscene’, lost out to theatre in the city and migrated to east Bengal in the early twentieth century.²⁷

News, gossip and the everyday: knowing the city

Trying to make sense of the new city, there emerged a flood of cheap printed literature in Calcutta towards the end of the nineteenth century, recording the dramatically transformed social, material and technological realities in metropolitan life. The literary genres in which this found expression were various, from novels, dramas, satires and songs to periodical pamphlet literature. Of these, by far the most articulate and emblematic were the songs in rhymed couplets based on contemporary events and themes, which had visibly impacted on city life. Authors were invariably among the better known who had made a name for themselves in the writing trade, moving seamlessly between songs, dramas, novellas and trivia. The language is stylised but with a tendency to slip into coarse imagery and vocabulary, racy alliteration, as well as sensationalised rhetoric – all suggestive of a non-serious, superficial readership.²⁸

Small pamphlets of no more than 15–20 pages, they gave shape to the emotions, anxieties and concerns of residents during catastrophic events or spectacular occasions, and through familiar idioms translated for them their own lived experiences. Although locating the specific readership(s) for this genre is difficult, it is possible to infer from their considerable print-runs of 2,000–3,000 the prevalence of well-known authors of the popular press, as well as evidence of wide readership of such ephemeral vernacular literature in contemporary Bengal, that they reached a substantial audience of not very well educated, marginally literate readers.²⁹ These were literate and semi-literate groups operating below the level of educated literary associations and newspapers, and positioning themselves quite clearly in that social bracket. Their concerns were not with the high arts, literatures and sciences that constituted ‘useful knowledge’ for the many *bhadralok* societies crowding the frontal stage of the public sphere, but more with aspects of day-to-day living. Alongside mainstream newspapers, I would like to argue, these pamphlets also circulated select news from the city, acting as equally valid, if more expressive, emotive registers of urban experiences and events.

Events that dominated the local news found ready representation in these quick-selling pamphlets, bringing together both factual information and views on the topic at hand. The inadvertent explosion at the Colvin Ghat in 1876, which resulted in the death and injury of innocent sailors, boatmen and passers-by, is an incident recorded in great detail and with the greatest sympathy. On an autumn afternoon in 1876, there thus occurred perhaps one of the greatest mishaps recorded in Calcutta's municipal history. When attempting to remove the wreck of a sunken ship in the Hooghly River off the Colvin Ghat (also known as the Police Ghat) with the help of explosives, the operation got out of hand. A tremendous blast resulted, blowing up not only the adjoining boat from which the manoeuvre was being conducted, but also a great number of vessels and boats nearby. In fact, so great was the explosion that glass windows and facades of structures lining the riverfront were shattered to bits and cracks appeared in mighty buildings like the Metcalfe Hall. Charred and disfigured bodies of the dead and injured were strewn all along the adjoining street and floated on the river (Shil 1876, Dasi 1876). While one pamphlet described the incident as 'The Fire at the Police Ghat', another was quite outspoken in its position, calling the event 'Murder at the Police Ghat'. We thus get two factually comparable accounts, but with two distinctly different viewpoints.

The 'Fire' song, penned by a well-known contemporary song writer, recorded this as an unfortunate event, blaming it on the mysterious workings of fate (Shil 1876: 4). The 'Murder' song, however, was more unequivocal in its claims. Authored by a relatively low-profile, apparently female songster, it accuses the British of wanton carnage and destruction. The song builds up a narrative of the devastating power of gunpowder, which had allowed the people of Britain to conquer India by slaughtering the 'Muslims' (Mughals) with cannons and superior firepower. It also underlines its use in the relentless destruction of and penetration of the native landscape to facilitate technology and exploitation, including the blasting of tunnels through mighty mountains for railways. The author asserts that the recent killing of innocents is testament to the blazing trail of wreckage that gunpowder leaves behind wherever it goes (Dasi 1876: 5–6).

The works present graphic details of headless and limbless corpses within a stylised format to heighten the elements of both sensation and pathos. Empathy with the victims – most of whom, in these versions, were petty office workers returning to work after the annual Durga Puja (autumn festival) holidays and who probably represented the biggest constituency of readers of this genre – and their families are made evident in messages of deepest condolence and sorrow:

It breaks my heart to think of the unfortunates
 Who lost their lives in the blast.
 Is this what Fate had written out for them?
 Alas! Alas! It is like being struck with sudden lightning.
 ...Leaving family, friends and relatives behind forever
 They did not get a chance to say their goodbyes.
 Nor did their loved ones manage to see them.

When they hear the news, will they be able to take the shock?
Who would have dreamt of losing their husband, son, father or brother?
Having left after their morning meals, everyone expected them to return
After five o'clock (in the evening).
Who would have known that they would be seeing them for the last time?
That they would be killed today?

(Shil 1876: 8)

Heart-rending images of women and children left behind, and loving families ripped apart by the explosion are generously sprinkled all over the works. Such personalised messages from the authors drew readers together within a tight community, engendering fellow-feeling and support for those affected, and must have reached out to the audience in a way that dry reportage in newspapers could not. There are other indices of solidarity. Both works are quick to report the high-handed nature of police intervention following the incident, where police appear to have terrorised relatives and onlookers, driving them out forcibly from the scene with loud cries (Dasi 1876: 10, Shil 1876: 7). The unpopularity of the police, reported in other songs and contemporary memoirs, was beyond doubt.³⁰ By reaching out to readers with common referential frameworks of bereavement and bewilderment, wrongdoing and suffering at the hands of colonial administration, the pamphlets were prising open private experiences and turning them into matters of public debate and reflection. As such, they carried currency beyond the realm of just news, acting as valuable registers of the emotions and sentiments of the residents of the city.

As demonstrated by Tanika Sarkar, social scandals, emerging more publicly than ever before in the city's law courts, gripped the imagination and worked collective anxieties on women, Hindu conjugality and its Other – adultery and rape – to a feverish pitch (see Sarkar 2001: ch. 2). Contemporary scandals involving transgression of normative sexual boundaries were reported with alacrity and sensation in the journalistic and commercial print world. The well-studied Elokeshi–mohanta scandal of 1873 powerfully fed into such anxieties – as did the murder in the red-light area of Sonagatchi in 1875.³¹ Both involved the brutal murders of disloyal or apathetic women by their partners in a fit of rage. In the previous case, a young, married woman by the name of Elokeshi was beheaded by her husband, Nabin, on suspicions of adultery. The priest, or *mohanta*, of the temple at Tarakeshwar was later convicted of seducing Elokeshi. In the second case Golap, a prostitute, was hacked to death in broad daylight by her paramour, Kali Rakshit, for refusing to entertain him.

Out of the two, the Sonagatchi case has received less attention. And yet for its sheer audacity, raw brutality and the passionate nature of the crime, the murder of Golap too created considerable ripples. One local press commissioned two pamphlets – one on the murder itself, and another on the trial and conviction, both written by the same author and published in 1875 (Datta 1875). While detailing the horrific nature of the murder and chiding the perpetrator for attacking a 'weak and defenceless woman', the author in the end makes use of the opportunity to present a very conservative message to young men:

All of you out there, do remember
 How the woman bewitches by weakening your mind.
 This is the price of abandoning your family and loved ones.
 Coming in contact with a prostitute is a sin;
 ... You lose both your present and your future.
 And are in grave danger of losing your life.

(Datta 1875: 11)

The account of the coroner's inquiry and the trial is incredibly detailed, citing penal codes and names of individual judges, doctors and lawyers involved, and trial dates. While the case against Rakshit is outlined in great detail – including post-mortem reports, witness statements and the confession of the accused – his defence is summarised in a few lines. Rakshit is apparently unrepentant, even on hearing his sentence of death by hanging, and mutters mockingly in approval 'Good, good, good!' (Datta 1875: 12).

The reportage on the Sonagatchi case in the pamphlets is intriguing. To begin with, compared to the Elokeshi case the commentary is reduced, almost non-existent. While Nabin, the murderer and husband of Elokeshi, was acquitted of his crime in the public mind, the stance is not so clear in the case of Rakshit. Nabin was to be exonerated as he was acting in defence of Hindu conjugality and fighting the corruption among certain sections of the contemporary priesthood. But Rakshit was sinful of cohabiting with a prostitute outside wedlock and therefore less worthy of sympathy. And yet, even here it is possible to trace a hint of sympathy for him as the author makes a direct connection between the killing and Golap's betrayal, suggesting 'there must have been a reason' (*thakibe kono karon*), almost justifying the act (Datta 1875: 5). In particular, the reporting of the arrogance with which Rakshit greeted his sentence seems to betray a certain admiration for the accused.

Cases such as these helped police the boundaries of normative conjugality, sending out clear warnings to errant men and women. It specifically addressed the problem of young men wasting themselves in the red-light district. Rakshit was a case in point. A son of a wealthy man, he inherited part of the estate when his father died in 1872. Since then he had allegedly led 'a riotous and dissipated life', and at some point must have arrived in Calcutta to pursue his pleasures.³² This was one of the most recurrent and dominant themes of street and reformist literature of the period.³³ Also, extended beyond the realms of family and home, it seemed to transmit a message, especially to women, about loyalty and fidelity to sexual partners. In Sonagatchi it came perilously close to imposing the conjugal framework on a libertine profession.

The city is also celebrated. Thus the arrival of the Prince of Wales in Calcutta in 1875 and the illumination of Calcutta on that occasion were enthusiastically recorded in a commentary on 'Extravagant Lighting' in the city (Das De 1875). It describes Calcutta being lit up under the orders of the local municipal government. It is a grand occasion and, fittingly, all around the Lal Dighi resembles Lord Indra's splendid celestial palace (Das De 1875: 5). The principal landmarks

– the General Post Office, Wilson Hotel, Medical College Hospital, Sanskrit and Presidency Colleges and the Beadon Square – have all been illuminated. The commentary also reports twinkling electric star lights on terraces, lotus-shaped illuminations, stars and crowns, and Queen Victoria Regina's name being lit up.

The wry critique apparent in the title, however, hides mixed messages behind the apparent enthusiasm. Householders have been asked to light up their homes, and notices to that end have been pinned up all over the city. All residents – from carters and labourers, pigeon-sellers and prostitutes to the much better-off citizens – comply. Earthen lamps and expensive chandeliers are used alike. But it has driven up the price of bottles (most commonly used for lamps) and oil (Das De 1875: 6). There is also a strong military presence in the city that seems to frighten the author (Das De 1875: 5, 7–8). The disjuncture between metropolitan civic celebrations and the lives of ordinary residents can be read in the forced participation of Calcutta's residents. Sudipta Kaviraj has commented on the 'regimentation of conduct' imposed by modern municipal regimes in colonial cities to produce order out of chaos, and obedient subjects out of potential recalcitrants (Kaviraj 1997). The lighting of lamps to welcome the Prince in Calcutta must have acted as one such test of loyalty to the regime, with public buildings taking the lead on this occasion.

Changing nature of the urban public sphere in colonial Calcutta

Urban social space in Calcutta in the nineteenth century was a contested terrain. With huge influxes of immigrants to the city, the new organisation of work schedules, restrictive laws regulating movements in certain areas under the pretext of policing, the thriving sex industry and its attendant opium dens and alcohol shops, and the increased visibility of women, Calcutta seemed a disconcerting place. The forceful entry of such diverse social constituencies, each with different claims to social and political authority, into a fractured, heterogeneous public sphere signalled turmoil and struggle.

Writing in the mid-nineteenth century, Kaliprasanna Sinha described the city during the Chadak Puja (hook swinging festival):

The church bells chimed for seven o'clock (in the morning). The city had started getting incredibly noisy. The streets were filled with people. The drums could be heard everywhere; the smoke from the burning incense and the stench of alcohol filled the air. The *sannyasis* carrying spears, snakes, split bamboos and other iron tools were approaching from the Kalighat side, dancing in frenzy. The verandahs of the prostitutes' houses had filled up with bhadrakok viewers and *pnachali* and *half-akh dai* singers ... who had been coming in since early morning to catch a good view of the procession.

(Nag 1990: 43)

The dense urban experience is something that finds repeated literary representation in Bengali writings, and not just in official discourse. The comfortable and

assuring social boundaries regulating caste and community identities in the villages had broken down on account of the forced proximity of the urban spatial ordering. Marginal social groups repeatedly spilled over and out of their ascribed roles and locales into the public streets. As Swati Chattopadhyay comments in her recent study of architecture in colonial Calcutta, the densely linked urban form had become too easy for the lower-class culture to infiltrate through the many interstices of the urban fabric (Chattopadhyay 2005: 259). In addition, the blurring of distinctions between the *chhotolok* (lower classes) and *bhadralok* (respectable classes) haunted the social imagination of the prosperous. The seeming social anarchy and commotion prevailing in the streets did not help.

So visible and disruptive was their presence that the *bhadralok*, together with the colonial administration, was forced to act. The Society for the Suppression of Obscenity set up in 1873 thus played a significant role in initiating a strict surveillance of the popular cultural traditions. It coordinated its own efforts with those of the government for bringing to task primarily publications that were deemed 'obscene'. Laws prohibiting lampooning carnivalesque processions of sawngs or pantomimes were introduced which stifled the exercise of ritual social disaffection. Along with these, songs and street performances came under trenchant attack and gradually disappeared around the turn of the century.³⁴

The *bhadralok* experience, however, was not shared by all other social constituencies in Calcutta. The city as represented in the songs studied here celebrates the arrival of technological marvels in the colonial metropolis and strikes an entirely different note. While sharing with the *bhadralok* some gendered anxieties of social disorder, they are full of contempt for their profligate and decadent patron class, as well as the lowlier, dissolute prostitute-courting and housewife-luring *babus*. The songs are very petty bourgeois in their sensibility, sharing concerns about oppressive police and taxes, rising prices of essentials, vulnerability to natural disasters and the daily toil of office workers. And they are deeply involved in the local and the everyday, as opposed to grand views on society, history and culture like the *bhadralok*.

Conclusion

This chapter shows how, contrary to the urban experience of the educated middle classes, the city afforded opportunities to other social groups to claim a space for themselves in a very public manner. The same textual evidence of the widening participation in *public spaces* can also be read as testimony to a widening of the *public sphere*. By the end of the nineteenth century a vibrant street presence and increasing visibility in print of marginal social groups matched the growing social and economic opportunities presented by the colonial metropolis of Calcutta. And there was no doubt about the way in which the new urban regime fundamentally dominated, reconfigured and regulated the lives of its residents.

In an illuminating essay, Sumit Sarkar is quite right in dismissing the central position that has been accorded to the supposed Renaissance in nineteenth-century Calcutta. One result of the 'persistent elitism', he points out, has been an

explicit dichotomy in history-writing about Calcutta, between intellectual or cultural studies, on the one hand, and social and urban history, on the other:

The renaissance ... floating more or less in a social vacuum, constitutes the central assumption or debating point in the first. High culture in sharp contrast is marginalized or all but omitted in the second, where the thrust is towards aggregates – ‘hard’ census or other statistics, ‘objective’ tendencies.

(Sarkar 1999: 161)

Departing from these straight-jacketed dominant representations of Calcutta and its inhabitants, and steering a mid-course between these two extremes, I hope this chapter demonstrates how the city was imagined by different social groups in different ways in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Notes

- 1 Although it should be said that the distinction did not ultimately survive as strongly as perhaps intended. The areas ran into each other in the east, where, as Pradip Sinha describes it, an ‘intermediate’ zone thrived, peopled by mixed race and diverse mercantile populations such as Armenians and Greeks, as well as those offering menial labour, like servants, milkmen and washermen. See Sinha (1978: 7–8).
- 2 See e.g. Bose (1874), and Dutta (1981), originally serialised in *Navyabharat* between 1901 and 1903.
- 3 *Ekei Bole Pol (Only This Can Be Called a Bridge)*; *Poler Kobi (The Poet of the Bridge)*; *Poler Panchali*; *Poler Toppa*. All published in 1874.
- 4 Bandyopadhyay (1823), reprinted in Gupta (1987).
- 5 For a useful discussion on this, see Chatterjee (1994).
- 6 A contemporary observer, Bholanath Chunder, recalls: ‘It was in these days, the innocent diversion of the rich Hindoos to listen to witty sayings, to laugh at antics of buffoons, to hear ventriloquists, story-tellers, and songsters, for relaxation after the serious business of the day’. Bholanath Chunder, *Travels of a Hindoo*, quoted in Chaudhury (1982).
- 7 He cites from Soudamini Devi, ‘Pitrismriti’, *Prabasi*, Calcutta 1319 BS, p. 232.
- 8 On one such occasion phallic innuendos were used to describe the meagre offerings made to departing Brahmins and pundits by the host, Raja Nabakrishna Deb (Mullick 1935: 13).
- 9 Social and intellectual life in early nineteenth-century Calcutta was dominated by a Hindu brahmanical culture of aristocratic families. They were almost invariably merchants, bankers, banians and landowners from high-caste groups, and served as leaders or *dalapatis* of local caste societies or *dals*. They built palatial residences and lived opulent lifestyles, acting like miniature feudal chiefs and providing patronage and protection to their caste members. As de facto units of social and political importance, the government recognised the dals and consulted them on important matters. See Mukherjee (1970: 33–78). Also see Mukherjee (1987: 39–58).
- 10 *Jnananvesan*, 27 April 1833, cited in Sur (1988: 77).
- 11 The threat represented here was more than dramatic. Sweepers in colonial Calcutta were in constant conflict with the municipal administration, struck work repeatedly and were notorious for bringing the city to a standstill. See, e.g. *Administrative Report of the Calcutta Municipality for 1867*, Appendix VIII, p. 5; *Administrative report of*

- the Municipality of the Suburbs of Calcutta, 1873–4*, pp. 22–23. Vijay Prashad (2001) discusses colonial Delhi Municipality's similar dependence on manual labour when it came to the organisation of sanitation.
- 12 This was probably to authenticate the figure of the mehtrani, who in real life would usually be an up-country Hindi-speaking migrant from Bihar and the United Provinces.
 - 13 See Sinha (1993: 54) and Pal (1994: 7–10).
 - 14 For a useful account of the historical evolution of kobi songs, see Pal (1994) and Sinha (1993), the latter particularly focusing on the living traditions of kobigaan in eastern Bengal, present-day Bangladesh.
 - 15 Song by Horu Thakur. See Pal (1994: 91).
 - 16 This was not entirely unfounded. Surveys in Bengal in the early 1870s showed a large influx of rural women in Calcutta's brothels, not all of whom had been forced into the profession by economic distress, intimidation or treachery. A number of upper-caste Hindu women, usually widows, are reported to have strayed from their families of their own volition. WBSA Report, Judicial Department, no. 76, 1872, p. 73, cited in Chattopadhyay (1992: 53). A contemporary, Shib Chunder Bose, also mentions this development. See Bose (1881: 35).
 - 17 Song by Ram Basu. See Pal (1994: 226–227). The reference to the 'monthly flower' or the menstrual cycle, and the dangers that desertion can bring in connection with it, is a recurrent feature in the songs.
 - 18 '*Nabadvarer kopat kete, kon ramanir joubon lute, bnodhu chhute ele probhate? Tomar bnashiti jeno shnidheler kati, kate onayashe shnidher mati, jana ache.*' Song by Horu Thakur. See Pal (1994: 92–93).
 - 19 Thus Bhola Moira, a famous songster, took little care to disguise his contempt for 'Lalababu' (real name Krishna Chandra Singha), wealthy descendant of a prominent aristocratic family, for his alleged miserly habits. And on another occasion, Ram Basu reminded the ageing Horu Thakur of his imminent death when the latter pronounced Basu's rival the winner in a song competition. See Pal (1994: 38, 34).
 - 20 Chandrakanta Sikdar, *Ki Mojar Shonibar (What a Fun Saturday)*, 1863.
 - 21 Sikdar, *Ki Mojar Shonibar*, p. 2.
 - 22 Sikdar, *Ki Mojar Shonibar*, p. 5.
 - 23 Chokori is a mythical bird said to delight in drinking moonbeams.
 - 24 Thus one kobi song reports a great flood. Manuscript of poet Nabinchand, 1886. See Sinha (1993: 116).
 - 25 Manuscript of poet Ramkamal, 1889; Sinha (1993: 117).
 - 26 Cited from a manuscript (probably late nineteenth century) in Sinha (1993: 115).
 - 27 *Saurav*, vol. 2 (7), Baisakh, 1321 B.S. (1914), cited in Sinha (1993: 81).
 - 28 Isvarchandra Sarkar, *Kartike Jhoder Pnachali [The Song of the Autumn Storm]*, Calcutta, 1867, pp. 4, 14.
 - 29 Typical print-runs were between 2,000 and 3,000. See, e.g. *Quarterly Reports of the Bengal Library* for 1874, 1879. For a detailed discussion of readership of cheap ephemeral Bengali tracts in late-nineteenth-century Bengal, see Ghosh (2006, ch. 4).
 - 30 See, e.g. Amritalal Basu's memoirs, in *Amritalal Basu Racanasamagra* (n.d.), p. 342; Giris Chandra Basu, *Sekaler Daroga Kahini*, Calcutta; Anon. *Great Barber's Drama: Napiteswar Natak* (n.d.) [possibly, 1873].
 - 31 Apart from Sarkar (2001), this has also been studied by Sripantha (1984).
 - 32 *Report of the State of the Police of the Town of Calcutta*, 1875, p. 4.
 - 33 See Goswami (1974) for numerous examples of this genre.
 - 34 See Banerjee (1989) for an account of this process.

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16 The postcolonial street

Patterns, modes and forms

Ajay Gandhi

The streets of Old Delhi are not places of restraint. They are not even simply places of passage. On arrival there, the street may seem incomplete or spoiled; it is less a smooth asphalt carpet and more a misshapen organism. But it may be that this limitation is ours, not that of the street. If we examine its genealogy and enduring logic, especially in residual urban spaces, the street might make sense. The problem at the outset is that we are used to thinking of the city street, through time and space, in limited ways. Often, the street is understood merely as a functional conduit, intended for movement between one bounded place of sociality and another. Therefore, the street is relegated to a mere aside to where things are really happening: home and office, factory and field, temple and park. The street is a place to tune out, a necessary banality that we endure.

That streets should not be positive spaces but places leached of sociality is given impetus by the city map. This representation of the city streets does not change, whether we unfold the paper map or jab at a smartphone's Google Map. Stranded on a concrete pavement, we ceaselessly scan, in our mind's eye, seeking the panorama that gives comfort. To the modern person, trained to see from above, what is most comforting is that, on a map, streets always look the same. Two lines going left and right, up and down, the blankness within reminding us that the street is ideally vacant. This is the planner's street, overseen by the 'citizen's gaze' (Chakrabarty 2002). No wonder they have long been used to enforce strict segmentation: 'people here, traffic there; work here, homes there; rich here, poor there' (Berman 1982: 168).

Another, more romantic view of the street is based on the *flâneur*, who first emerged in the Parisian arcades of the nineteenth century: a bohemian who wandered the European street, both aloof from and immersed in the crowd. He specialised in roaming, avoiding a predetermined route or final destination. The street was the feedstock of this urban intellectual, a ceaseless source of inspiration.

Flânerie was of course not a democratic right; the street required, as for the planner, a cultivated manner. As the flâneurs' foremost exponent, Charles Baudelaire, wrote, 'Not everyone is capable of taking a bath of multitude: enjoying crowds is an art' (1997: 21). The flâneur turned the street, that seemingly equalising backdrop, into a high-brow text, legible only to those with a subscription.

This snobbishness could only preclude empathy with those at the same altitude. The bohemian wanderer was intoxicated, yes – but also, inevitably, alienated (Benjamin 1983 [1973]: 50).

The flâneur – though rooted in a particular time and place – nevertheless found his way into the street at large. In the 1960s, the situationists of Paris, self-styled radicals, amplified the flâneurs' aloofness with their notion of *dérive* or drift (McDonough 2009). The one who drifted, the *dériviste*, also specialised in aimless walking, certain that state control was shaken with every step (no word on whether French authorities were commensurably troubled).

Other twentieth-century thinkers took up the mantle of the flâneur and *dériviste*, divining radical possibility in the humble street. The walker on Manhattan's streets, for example, was said to practice a 'delinquent narrativity', defying larger imperatives (de Certeau 1988 [1984]: 130). Walking in the city, with 'tactile apprehension and kinaesthetic appropriation', was a radical statement (de Certeau 1988 [1984]: 97).

Prevailing notions of the street, then, encompass the citizen's gaze and the planner's inscription. We also remain in thrall to the flâneur's wanderings and *dériviste's* hubris. These ideas have found periodic popularity far afield, in places such as India. In the mid-1970s, during what came to be termed 'The Emergency', democratic rights were suspended. Fetishists of civic sense and rational planning in Delhi used the opportunity to carry out an extreme makeover: its streets became laboratories for a high-modernist vision borrowed, predictably, from Paris's facelift after the French Revolution. Nexuses and mafias were to be smashed, the streets fastidiously scrubbed. The planners's zeal underwrote, in the form of demolition squads and police arrests, the erasure of tens of thousands of members of the streets' underclass (Tarlo 2003).

If this was a ruthlessly efficient vision of the street, there was also its self-conscious romantic. So it is that observers of Kolkata note how its rooftops, parks and streets host *adda*, a genteel form of gossip and debate (Chakrabarty 2000: 201). Just as proponents of flânerie saw themselves as superior to capitalists, *adda* ideologues give it an anti-teleological aura. The practice is 'opposed to the idea of achieving any definite outcome' and stalls the march of progress (Chakrabarty 2000: 204). The *adda* and the street, in this view, belong to a high-minded class coeval with, if ambivalent about, urban modernity.

On closer inspection, these become celebrations of privileged outlook, not descriptions of commonplace experience. They universalise a certain kind of bourgeois, modernist city, even where art-deco arcades are absent and sidewalks are chewed up. Imagine if citizen and planner, flâneur and habitué of *adda*, were dropped onto the streets of Old Delhi. Their turf would be unrecognisable. The planner, anticipating a linear, functional void, would see instead, on Lal Kuan Bazaar Road, a space used for card-playing, slogan-raising, cow-grazing, procession-conveying, and tooth-brushing. Far from being an innocuous and aseptic space, the street would be abundant and multifarious.

On Ballimaran Road, the flâneur, determined to stay removed from the crowd, would be accosted for money, jostled by hand-carts and rickshaws, assaulted by

fumes, and overcome by honking. Rather than extricating himself from the crowd, he would be assailed, drawn helplessly into the vortex of the street. On Fasil Road, the adda-seeking poet, in search of bourgeois company, would find a different scene: workers from the countryside congregating in *ganja* addas, huddled circles of hashish smokers. Capitalism, no doubt, would be deficiently realised – and the canon of verse may not extend to Bengali poets. Adda in Old Delhi is a male activity associated with unemployment and undesirables. At the tea stall or crouched at a traffic junction, high on various stimulants, men verbally joust, taunt women and horse around (Jeffrey 2010, Mehta 1997: 226). That other admirer of the street, the *dériviste*, might find it less conceivable to drift on the streets bordering the Meena Bazaar, should a political *jaloos* or procession, with thousands waving placards and shouting slogans, impede his passage. All these icons of the street, after visiting such an area, would need to go back to their blueprints and notebooks, and re-imagine the street on its own terms.

How can we make sense of these features of the postcolonial street? This chapter employs concepts that may help to revise this ubiquitous feature of urban life. Any visitor to the Indian city will know how distinct the street is as a social space. It is perpetually charged and potentially dangerous; it contains the ordinary friction of difference and desire, which can suddenly mutate into a malevolent crowd. Yet we lack a vocabulary for understanding how sociality unfolds – in aggressive, organic and disorienting ways – on the street.

Instead, writers often revert to the notions advanced above, the stern gaze and romantic musings of those who objectify the street but rarely dwell on it. Based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in 2007–09 in Old Delhi, this chapter tries to sketch some of the street's defining features. These reflections are packaged with some rubrics for conceptualising the street. The following terms are suggestive of recurring patterns, modes and forms that define an Old Delhi street, and likely other postcolonial streets as well: abundance and plasticity, osmosis and porosity, and altitude and adjustment.

Generic and specific streets, material and spectral streets

When I began my fieldwork, I did not plan to spend much time on the street. The street, if ever I thought about it, was the mere in-between: from home to shop to bazaar, and back to home. Over time, however, I realised that I was sometimes spending hours on the street. It was to me what an interior space, the living room or factory floor, would have been to another anthropologist. My fieldwork was concentrated in two markets, Meena Bazaar and Khari Baoli, and nearby *mandis*, or congregations of construction labourers. It was on the streets that day-labourers sat while they waited for work. It was there that religious processions or political demonstrations unfolded. It was there that the euphemism of urban rationalisation came alive as police charges and municipal seals.

To subsume these material–psychic dynamics under the rubric of a generic street is to gloss over subtle distinctions. Just as circumpolar peoples have an

intricate taxonomy for snow, Delhi's residents possess various names for the street. There are *galis* or lanes, usually no more than a few feet wide, found within dense *mohallas* or residential clusters; the lane is not simply a cramped space, but a sociological marking: this extended family, those sect members, live in that lane. Related are *kuchas*, usually referring to slightly longer lanes, still horizontally compressed, but extending further than a mere lane.

Kuchas and *galis* were the most distinctive features of medieval urban planning. Originally they were clay and dirt; they are now covered with an ever-vanishing veneer of asphalt. They lack separate spaces for vehicles and pedestrians, and they do not possess the right-angled corners and straight lines of this-or-that road, place or circus, names which mark the colonial and postcolonial street (Vidal & Gupta 1999). *Galis* are perhaps the best evidence of how state power was not definitively inscribed into the functioning of the street. Rather, lanes are known by several names simultaneously, referring to long-disappeared objects or residents, as well as newer structures and nationalist heroes (Oldenburg 1976: 30–31).

After *galis*, there are larger, more prominent streets in the old city; these are *sadaks*, literally streets, or *chowks*, referring to prominent commercial avenues. These are of precolonial or postcolonial vintage, and are usually wider and more congested. *Nai Sadak*, for example, literally, New Street, was a straight line built by the British in the late nineteenth century; it now houses a textbook and garment bazaar. *Chandni Chowk*, the main commercial thoroughfare of the old city, was constructed by Mughal planners as a canal-lined promenade. It is now an exhaust-and-people filled avenue packed with religious institutions and cloth shops.¹

One could think of these various street as different formats, as a techno-material substrate which catalyses expression. Urban scholars often use the metaphor of city as text; yet if its constituent spaces are thought of as legible, they cannot be read with the comfort of linear pagination or an actual text. Their constitution and makeup demand reading between the lines, dispensing with the notion that they are singly inscribed. Nor do such places have a single author. This is the perennial problem for Indian planners: there are too many encroachers, too many loafers, who write themselves into the city, contributing towards 'unauthorised' hawking and dwelling. A more enduring analogy for the street may be provided by other techno-material formats. The streets of the old city were overwritten many times, like a re-writable tape, scratched and grooved by its many handlers. Indeed, the street groaned under such intense activity. Broken and potholed through overuse, hissing and crackling, overrun by its many encroachers-cum-unauthorised-authors, the street was a form that nevertheless hummed the city's tune.

Sheer abundance

In the circular whorls of the old city lane or the straightness of the street, there was no segregation of activities. Rather, the street was a place of sheer abundance; there was hardly a financial deal, political statement or bodily activity

that did not occur there (Chakrabarty 2002: 73). For example, on Chandni Chowk, my path was frequently interrupted by political rallies. Local parties would set up a tent and dais on this street, in front of a municipal office. Where vehicles ordinarily skirmished, hundreds of the faithful sat, becoming animated when speeches were given. They became even more animated when food was served afterwards. Speeches were to be endured; at least one got some food out of it (*chalo, kuch khane tho mila*). At such moments, the street easily became a place for political spectacle.

This abundance was also evident on Gali Mata Wali, where men rolled carts loaded with kerosene burners, chickpeas and potatoes. Thick smoke blew over hungry passers-by, and they doled out some local culinary favourites, such as *tikkis* – fried vegetable discs containing potatoes and peas, served with a tamarind sauce or ketchup. The street was, with little contradiction, kitchen and dining room. Indeed, the thrill of eating on the street was part of the seduction of the old city; to consume street food was to ingest something true about the place. Another facet of the street's abundance could be seen at night. As the sun set and the old city, unevenly lit, became dark, Urdu Road, bordering the Meena Bazaar, became dotted with prostitutes. This was no red-light area, just a regular street, used to drive and hawk and beg during the day, where single women with bright makeup and bold stares stood at night. The street was, thus, also a boudoir.

In these ways, the street's florescence, on mere grey asphalt, was somehow hum-drum: a low-level volatility rendered ordinary. But its kinetic energy could be amped up, punctuating the entire area. When a religious procession moved through or when rumours emerged of a municipal raid, the streets of Old Delhi became an ordinary space where extraordinary tensions could suddenly swirl. It was on the old city's streets, for example, where hours after Indira Gandhi's assassination in 1984, crowds stoned, stabbed and bludgeoned Sikhs.² The street's abundance overrode original design. It was overwritten and overbrimming.³

Too close for comfort

The old city's streets – its intimate alleys and appropriated sidewalks – were radically unlike the roads and flyovers of New Delhi. Like its prosperous classes, the new city had ever-enlarged and ever-clogged arteries. These diseases of prosperity required multi-lane bypasses and flyovers, emergency measures in a wheezing megalopolis. The grey totems of progress were much-heralded in Delhi's newspapers: finally there would be clear flow. But often the opposite occurred: more sclerotic jams and road rage. These streets nevertheless suggested a single-minded competition to get ahead, to keep ahead of the scrum. On the flyover, the sheer volume of metal and exhausts arcing through the air blotted out human presence, save for the beggars at stop-lights.

In contrast, what was undeniable about the old city's streets were the breathing, sneezing, laughing and sweating others, the pushing, elbowing and spitting evidence of humanity. One could, without much effort, go sideways and backwards,

pause and listen, feel and touch. Intimacy mingled, in such places, with prosaic routine, and bodies with snippets of devotion. On streets such as Malliwara, jewellery merchants made orders on their mobile phones, their chatter mingling with devotional songs from speakers. On Tilak Bazaar Road, migrant labourers had their ears cleaned and stubble trimmed over the sidewalk drain, alongside commuters haggling with bicycle-rickshaw drivers. The street was replete with many such instances of ‘wild connectivity’ (Hansen & Verkaaik 2009: 21).

What about the relationship of the subject to his peers in the crowd? In the old city, the street was not a place, as with the *flâneur*, where the pedestrian could mentally retreat from the crowd, gazing undisturbed at the arcade. The daydreamer, both lost in and aloof from the crowd, gave way to the self-conscious and ever-vigilant walker. In my experience, the streets of Old Delhi were the venue for endless, often involuntary, negotiation. *Dalals* or brokers hashed out deals and filled in paperwork for railway tickets and government certificates on the kerb. Touts exhorted passers-by to purchase things they might not need: sex, dried fruits, a four-pack of underwear.

For women especially, the street was suffused by the male gaze, and often a place of unwanted advances. Women were loudly compared to buttery sweets and fried snacks, gastronomic and sensual pleasures. The inability to conceptualise the female street-walker except in pejorative terms is not surprising. The imagination of urban India – in films, gossip and innuendo – often focuses on a male protagonist. The women of Delhi were not neutral wanderers on its streets. Their mere presence on the street made them fair game for grabbing and glaring, fondling and cat-calling.

A similar discomfort in being the watched, not the watcher, was evident amongst the street’s underclass. For migrant workers, thinking of the street as a distanced muse, as it was for Parisian bohemians and Kolkata’s poets, made no sense. The street involved involuntary intimacy and exchange, a perpetual jostling where one could not, like the *flâneur*, forget oneself. One was in the thick of, not removed from, the street and its gossip, deals and threats. And being of the street meant that one could not have a bourgeois propriety over it. Those deemed to have a proletarian disposition – of a particular complexion, with a scrawny build, often wearing plastic sandals – were frequently targets of interrogation: for sleeping on the streets, for not possessing valid identification and for simply being in Delhi.

An equal altitude

However unequally they were experienced, these streets could be considered the most democratic in the city. They were open to all comers: educated and impoverished, engineers and junkies. In the old city the street functioned, as the ‘Arab street’ did in a different context, as a shorthand for authenticity, for the pulse of the polis. Old Delhi’s streets were the parts of the city where adventurous citizens got their dose of culture (consuming potentially lethal street food), and the popular classes gravitated for work (minus life-saving safety equipment).

Migrant labourers, for example, avoided New Delhi, which sprawled in all directions away from the walled city. Befitting its colonial origins, the new city was defined by gates and *chowkidars* (night-watchmen). Police posts and concrete walls frosted with shards of broken glass separated out the right and wrong kinds of people.

In contrast, if there is a singular feature that connects Indian streets, it is their startling heterogeneity. In this respect, my disorientation in comprehending Old Delhi echoed the seeming mutual unintelligibility of its residents. On the streets of Old Lucknow, 'people do not conform to any single social system, tradition, or standard of public conduct through which their diverse identities can be mutually understood' (Hjortshoj 1979: 35). This state of enduring disinterest shown by myriad kinds of people to one another on the street offered, especially for the urban proletariat, some entertainment and a resting place, a conduit of news and opportunity.

Eyes on you

The abundance and indifference of the street did not preclude individual focus. People on Indian streets seem to possess innate noise-cancelling capabilities, dulling the roar of the crowd. Indian leaders and intellectuals have long argued that denizens of the Indian city are selfish or un-self aware (Chakrabarty 2002). But it may be that those on the street are simply determined, despite its distractions and threats, to get their work done. I found it common, for example, to have conversations with *arhatiyas* and *baniyas* (commission agents) on the streets of the Khari Baoli spice bazaar. I had trouble keeping up with our conversation; they had no trouble, on the other hand, conducting an interview, negotiating on multiple mobile phones, dealing with the packaging of various goods, calling out for tea, directing *palledars* or loaders to move things here or there, with ceaseless honking and bartering all around. This watchfulness was also evident when I habitually returned to a few *chai* stalls squatting on the street, prime venues for gossip and rest. More than two dozen mobile and stationary tea-sellers dotted the vicinity of the bazaars and labour mandis where I conducted fieldwork, selling tea to labourers, brokers and merchants.

Shortly into my time there, it emerged that two of the tea-sellers I frequented were *khabaris*, or police informers. They mastered the quotient of milk, cardamom, tea leaves and water, while keeping in mind the squat clay or plastic cups doled out here and there. Alongside these banal tasks they mastered and kept mental track of the street's coming and goings. Listening in on conversations, knowing who was doing what, they were conduits of *khabar*, or news. As such, they were indispensable to Delhi Police constables, whose beat mostly consisted of sitting in the dark, cool chowkis nearby. It was through the tea-sellers' eyes and ears that the volatility of the street was regulated. By dispensing *khabar*, officially notified BCs – Bad Characters – were tracked, and *hafta* – protection money – levels regulated. The *chai-wallahs-cum-khabaris* were not simply the eyes of the state, outsourced panoptic functionaries. These same men were put to

use by traders in the old city's bazaars, tipping them off when municipal raids occurred. It made little sense to think of the citizen's gaze on the street as hegemonic; the man of the street had dispersed loyalties. Therefore, the street planner never subdued his target; people simply stared back.

Liquidity

It was striking, during my time in the old city, to see which street presences endured or disappeared. However useful the tea-seller was, the informer's hold over the street was not to be taken for granted. The tea-seller-cum-informer, too, had a tenuous claim on the street, at once indispensable and interchangeable. They were kept on edge by their uniformed protectors and invariably embroiled in contentious negotiations with their neighbours on the street. Months passed and more than one such stall, overseen by men who doggedly returned to the same spot over time, vanished. When I asked around, people seemed hardly to notice. It seemed to be a matter of course that the street could take on one avatar and then another. There were other tea stalls at which to congregate, different informers that the police could cultivate.

This fluidity inflected the legitimacy of the street's persons and buildings. Bicycle-rickshaws, repeatedly outlawed by the Delhi courts, nevertheless proliferated in the old city. According to the law courts, they were gone, a menace erased; but hundreds nevertheless remained. Elsewhere, in the Meena Bazaar, around the Delhi Junction railway station, and all around Chandni Chowk, many hawkers sold their wares. Singularly powerless, they were expressions of the power of local patrons, facts on the ground that affirmed the sway of big men. Despite the rising temperature of Delhi's High Court justices, it seemed that the logic of the street, not legal prescription, was sovereign. Landlords and businessmen I met were guilty of 'encroachment', the official term for improvised building. Their hotels, now three storeys instead of two, their shops jutting past their legal perimeter were, nevertheless, here to stay. When faced with official pressure, the owners would 'regularise' them by paying a fee and obeisance to officialdom.

Street as adjustment

We have seen how the Indian street is not the same symbolic ground on which the storied flâneur of nineteenth-century Paris roamed. There was, in western cities, a clear distinction between the pavement and arcade, and vehicular and pedestrian traffic. For Delhi's officials, too, the pedestrian pavement, clear and clearly demarcated from the vehicular road, residential colony and commercial arcade, was an abstract ideal. The street, after all, was the circulatory system of the city, critical to its productive momentum.

We might imagine the flâneur in the old city, falling into open sewer drains, shoes covered in the excrement of goats and cows, twisting an ankle on the sidewalk's abrupt holes and jagged crevices. The street of the old city, in physical

and social form, was not so much imperfectly realised as differently enacted. Ending abruptly, colonised by entrepreneurs, uneven and broken, Old Delhi's residents traced an unpredictable route through crowds, vehicles, stray animals and other obstacles. All of this is why the Indian street seems so untamed in the scholarly imagination. The men invariably urinating on Indian streets are paraded as examples of defiant unruliness (Khilnani 1999: 124, Chakrabarty 2002: 68). Yet, despite the appearance of chaos, the longer I spent in Delhi's old city, the more the street's internal logic became evident. As in many Indian black towns, this most undifferentiated of urban spaces was precisely allocated and occupied: to a cigarette seller here, to a public-phone vendor there and everywhere to the enterprising and strong-armed.⁴

In this milieu, the Indian street was governed by the metaphysics of adjustment. One of the chai-wallahs mentioned earlier, whose stall I habituated and who later vanished, told me about his observations of the Biharis and Rajasthanis and Jharkhandis who worked in the old city's bazaars. Yes, he said, there is tension, and regular sorts of *panga*, scuffling. Moreover, on streets, one's nerves frayed and one wearied from *dhakka-mukki*, being tossed to and fro in the crowd. But on the street, he said, '*sab adjust karna padta hain*': 'They all have to adjust.' The planner has to adjust and realise that the master plan for the city will never be realised; the home-owner has to adjust and share his alleyway with workers and encroachers; the police have to adjust and accept a certain unruliness and opacity. And of course the chai-wallah, elaborating this theory to me, had to adjust to the fact that he was then on the street but might soon disappear. *Adjust karna* – to adjust oneself – means that one cannot reliably control the claims of others on your space. It also means accepting that your own claim to that space can be solid today, and melt tomorrow.

Porosity and osmosis

On the street where one had to adjust, no enduring division could be made between public and private activities (Appadurai 1987: 17, Chakrabarty 2002: 66). Yet public and private seem to be inapt categories for what happened on the streets of Old Delhi. Better terms for street life might be osmosis and porosity. Certain things we think of as private or intimate, done out of compulsion or habit, crossed the permeable barrier of comfort or shame from one domain to the other. For example, on Sita Ram Bazaar Road, merchants of nearby iron-ware stores soldered and assembled goods in the middle of the street. Like other bazaars in the old city, resembling closets that had burst, goods were invariably scattered in the street, to be processed and shipped in due course. No conscious decision had been made, nor official sanction given; imperceptibly, as if by osmosis, things moved from one place to another. The streets of the old city were simply full of stuff, which was moved from *godown* (storehouse) to pavement, from trader's desk to kerb, from basement workshop to goods carrier.

This is not to say simply that things moved from a clean, private domain, to an unruly, public one. The street has been described as 'the outside, the space for

which one did not have responsibility' (Kaviraj 1997: 98). Against the home, a seeming sanctuary, the street has been seen as a place of moral impurity and strangeness (Chakrabarty 2002). But these distinctions confuse the gaze of the citizen with the street's autonomous ethos. Both people and things on the street belong to someone, and are subject to overlapping claims. The circulation of everything from hazardous chemicals to Nepali prostitutes from interior to exterior does not mean order becomes disorder. If anything, the old city's street allows a different kind of public, one unimaginable on the flyovers of New Delhi. A writer discussing similar streets, the *galis* or lanes of Banaras, notes that residents 'always treat the lanes outside their house as truly public space, as belonging to them. There is no clear or closed boundary between house and outside. Almost all recreations – sitting and relaxing, drinking tea or having pan – take place in the *galis*' (Kumar 1988: 77).

The street's avatars

If this is correct, Old Delhi's street can be considered a set of disguises or masks. The Indian street does not revert to a 'normal status' or 'normal function' (Kaviraj 1997: 106). When one looks at photos of Old Delhi's street life over decades, it is difficult to ascertain when they were taken. It is not as if the street has become more or less frenzied, with more or fewer people. Looking at a street scene over time, no one configuration of stalls, hawkers and encroachments can be considered the true or lasting one.

Old Delhi's streets may have had different material incarnations – from clay and dirt in the nineteenth century to metallised asphalt in the twentieth – but temporally no predestination. The municipality's reiterated promise to clean up the street was itself a kind of disguise, a contrivance which held that its real face, underneath all of the handbills and wires, was obscured by illegitimate improvisations. If one took the streets surrounding the Jama Masjid and Meena Bazaar, for example, there was neither a strict daily routine nor seasonal rhythm to street life. I initially noticed a division of labour that matched this space: during the day, these streets were occupied by hawkers, visitors and beggars; at night, they were taken over by prostitutes, migrant labourers and junkies who slept in the open. What the streets were meant for, driving and walking, were merely two things happening on them. During religious festivals such as Eid, or national holidays such as Republic Day, the temporality of these streets changed once more; families could be found strolling and snacking at night, or the entire area shut down and darkened because of police curfew. There was no normal or default in such streets, simply accretions and deletions, one visage superimposed on another.

The shifting avatars of the street were most clearly visible in the Lego-brick-like additions and subtractions to kerbs in the old city. I heard shopkeepers and residents narrate how tiny religious idols, placed next to an electricity transformer, evolved into a tiny shrine, and then, years later, a hulking temple. As in other Indian cities, the street could be imprinted with religious posturing. A good

example was near the Kashmiri Gate auto-parts bazaar, where I often passed a roadside agglomeration of Hindu deities. Nested into a sparkingly white-tiled frame, about waist-high, were statues of Ram and Sita. I had done some interviews with Punjabi traders nearby. A group of them had pooled some money – no one could precisely remember when – to build this edifice. What was intriguing, though, was that this hijacking of the kerbside was not just an exercise in piety. Several of the traders had been threatened by various archaeological and municipal authorities with the closure of their storage and commercial premises. Much of this was because their bazaar – widely known to recycle auto-parts from cars stolen and stripped in Delhi and Uttar Pradesh – had appropriated swatches of a heritage zone, awash with Mughal and British colonial buildings.

In cities, what reigns in the present may sideline the past. The trader's shrine was modest in comparison with the towering churches and 100–300-year-old walls nearby. But their humble agglomeration of deities made municipal action against traders inconvenient. Those traders were the ones, after all, who held sway over the authorities. And even if the street-side shrine was a fig leaf that they were holding in front of naked commercialisation, a municipal demolition of their premises would have been less an act of authority than of callousness. An analogous process occurred elsewhere on India's urban streets. In Bangalore, the profusion of shrines gobbling up its streets was met with municipal silence; so as not to tramp on religious sentiments, and to keep order, the law was overlooked and sidestepped (Nair 2005: 154). Seen in this light, the Kashmiri Gate street temple, at one level an illicit appropriation of public space, was on another a down-payment on the future presence of the traders. It created facts on the ground, material evidence of the wilfulness of certain parties.

All such material manifestations in the city, of course, are expressions of power. Good examples could be found near the auto-parts bazaar. The old city's imposing Jama Masjid was built on elevated ground by Mughal emperor Shah Jahan in the late seventeenth century; a similar desire to awe supplicants underwrote the British-built Parliament complex in New Delhi. One hundred years hence, writers of Old Delhi might see its heritage in terms of the street improvisations of the present. The humble white-tiled clumping of Hindu deities, located in a near-forgotten side street near Kashmiri Gate, would perhaps by then have grown from waist-high sapling into something much grander. For now, though, the temple was simply another brushstroke on the street's crowded facade.

The street as *shauk*

The pressures of the street – open to all takers, yet claimed by few – were made further visible by the old city's migrant workers. Consider the case of Rahul. A *mistri*, or construction labourer, who assisted a mason, I met him at Haus Qazi Chowk, close to the Meena Bazaar, along with dozens of fellow migrant labourers, their tools and paintbrushes arranged before them. As the old city came to life, cows, rickshaws and cars circumnavigated this roundabout, where several wholesale bazaars – selling paper, iron, kites and tools – converged. The men,

almost all of them migrants from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan, were usually between their early twenties and late forties. As day labourers, they were entirely at the mercy of contractors who inconsistently offered painting, plumbing or masonry work. The men began their vigil early in the morning, by 7 a.m. By 1 p.m. whatever work that was to arrive had come. On many days, the numbers of men remaining at Haus Qazi Chowk testified to the lack of work, at least of the consistent kind.

The street, more by default than proprietary claim, belonged to them. Only for the richer and more productive was it a conduit to more pressing business. For the workers at Haus Khazi Chowk, the street itself was where they were coming from and going to. Others in the old city, traders and brokers and tourists, went to and fro. Their physical posture and mechanical accompaniments suggested people already somewhere else: sitting on rickshaws and in cars, a mobile pressed to their ear, wearing ironed, brand-name clothes.

Meanwhile, a few dozen of the labourers at Haus Khazi Chowk sat, crouched and lay down on the street. For them, the street to somewhere was too often a way-station to nowhere. Still, when the street did not serve as an avenue to work, it allowed one to do activities that disguised how stuck one really was. On the Chowk itself, workers had a number of options: playing cards (*tash khelna*), drinking country-liquor (*daru peena*), reading the newspaper (*khabar parna*) and following the numbers game (*satta-bazzi karna*). These were activities that comprised the long-standing economy of shauk, enjoyment and effervescence (Kumar 1988).

A special taxonomy of activities comprised language games. Among men who may not have work and were wandering in situ, verbal jousting substituted for action. There was everyday gossiping (*gup-shup marna*) and simple chit-chat (*baat-chit karna*). When talk of one another or families had run its course, things got silly: the time for idle or nonsense talk, so pointless it was termed ‘the fucking of words’ (*bakchodi* or *muhchodi*). Restlessness and masculine one-upmanship led to teasing. A whole afternoon could be passed by pulling one another’s legs (*ek dusre ko lena/ek dusre ko chedna*). Usually these were accompanied by a barrage of *galiyen* or abuses. A similar need spawned a vast corpus of *mazaak*, homoerotic puns or pranks (cf. Ramaswami 2007). The more creative of the men at Haus Khazi Chowk would recite famous *filmo ka dialogue*, or lines from Bollywood films. Some rehearsed *sher-o-shayaris* – rhyming couplets about love and loss. Sometimes these were subtle and chaste; at other times they veered towards the vulgar and irreverent, putting them in the category of salacious stories (*mazedar kahaniyan*).

Time-pass

When I met him, Rahul was a young man in his early twenties, not yet sufficiently skilled at his work to become an *ustad* or *guru* – a master who would train others. Like the other young men at his mandi, by midday, if no work was to be had, he started *ghumna-phirna*, or roaming Old Delhi’s streets. Rahul

usually had very little money in his pockets; his aim was hardly ever to buy something or fulfil a task. But this roaming was not done with the flâneur's conquering passion or superior lording over the crowd. For the migrants of Haus Khazi Chowk, whatever pleasure there was to be had was in time-pass, referring to the state in which someone could be doing something better or productive but was condemned otherwise. A middling 1980s Bollywood film, watched at the nearby Excelsior cinema, was time-pass. In a similarly unenthusiastic way, squatting with friends on the street, listening to a *qissa*, a meandering historic tale, was time-pass. Sitting with an anthropologist, who asked unnecessary questions over and over again? A quite unsatisfactory form of time-pass.

Time-pass was not simply an adjective referring to an activity done in down-time. It could encompass the condition of an entire class of underemployed and frustrated men. Shopkeepers at Haus Qazi Chowk, for example, termed young men like Rahul *sadak-chhap admi*. To be *chhap* was to be stamped or moulded, in this case by the *sadak* or street. The *sadak-chhap admi* were not just men who happened to be on the street, but men who were rather stamped by and melded with the street. A similar conflation of locale and person was found when I interviewed police about law and order problems. For them, crimes were mainly caused by the *footpath log* or *pavement log*, literally, sidewalk or pavement people. Moderately educated or skilled, but lacking job opportunities in government service or the private sector, tens of millions of men like Rahul were to be found on the streets of Indian cities. Loitering at traffic intersections, clustered around chai stalls, they are among many considered to be “wanderers”, “useless men” or people engaged only in “*timepass*” (Jeffrey *et al.* 2008: 169). Added to their numbers are the drivers, cleaners, street performers and beggars who physically overwhelm the street but are absent from its consciousness.

I heard Rahul sometimes refer to his life and that of his friends in the same pejorative vocabulary hurled at them by their social betters. Describing himself as illiterate (*anparh*) and careless, he spoke with irreverence – as if he did not care – and bleak self-assessment. Usually in debt, hobbled by illness and insecurity, Rahul's fellow workers also talked of their doomed fate and wasted lives. Here time-pass was not simply a few transitory hours or months, but a default state of being.

Pathway to somewhere

This immobility did not mean that Rahul retreated from the streets. For him and his friends on Haus Khazi Chowk, the street was the only guaranteed place to rest one's head, while away the time, and find an opportunity. It was most obviously a place for *ghumna-phirna*, wandering or roaming about (Kumar 1988). *Ghumna* was an ambivalently undertaken ethos that pointed to the street's simultaneous flux and immobility. On the one hand, it was an aspect of city life that cost nothing, and so precluded workers' discomfort at being in other spaces. Simply to be a migrant to the city, to have the dubious privilege of sleeping on Delhi's streets, was an outcome of being a *ghumnewale*.

Rahul and his friends, most of them from eastern Uttar Pradesh and western Bihar, were in their twenties. This was the time when, back at home, in their villages and towns, it was normal for a man to wander about. The *ghumnewale* was the one who wandered from the streets of their smaller, less promising village or town, and headed for the promise of the metropolis. This implied not a local walkabout, but a metaphysical transformation; such men were expected to go to bigger cities and higher pay-cheques. Rahul himself had spent time in other major Indian cities, working on construction projects in Meerut and Nagpur, after which he ended up in Delhi's old city.

For workers in the city, *ghumna-phirna*, on a local scale, was the one thing that was in their control. Indeed, from the vantage point of the *ghumnewale*, the streets of Old Delhi were qualified places of pleasure. If someone like Rahul had tried to enter a middle-class temple complex, he might be shouted at by its caretaker, based on his tatty plastic slippers. He told me about walking in the posh shopping arcade south of the old city, Connaught Place, known as CP. He did not like how he was stared at and made to feel *ajib*, strange and uncomfortable. Chastened by the memory of being amidst the middle-class people who strolled there, he would not contemplate a return visit: '*accha nahin lagega*' – 'I won't feel good'. Seen in this way, the streets of Old Delhi precluded being under control, and also allowed for certain small pleasures, unlike in the regulated colonies of the new city. Despite worries about money and work, the men of Haus Khazi Chowk seemed by and large to prefer their casual, freelance lives. I was told that unlike salaried work, which made one a slave (*gulami*) to time and vertical pressure, the intermittent nature of construction work made them free birds (*azad panchi*).

Seen from this perspective, the ability of men such as Rahul to piss where they liked – on a shuttered storefront at night, against the compound wall of a government building during the day – reflected a relaxed disposition towards the city (Kumar 1988: 79). For such men, the street was a place relaxed enough to let one's bladder and sphincter slacken at will, without shame or discomfort. (Conversely, for women in Delhi, the tension with which they experienced the street was reflected in the consequences of holding things in.)⁵

The Indian street, in the enabling ways of the *ghumnewale*, has long been overwhelmingly male and popular. In nineteenth-century Banares, in Uttar Pradesh, 'recreation for lower-class males frequently consisted of simply "roaming" the streets of the *mohalla*' (Freitag 1989: 123). In Bombay, mill workers in the early twentieth century also used the street for roaming, pausing to congregate in front of liquor shops or street entertainers (Chandavarkar 1998: 103–104). Historically in Lucknow's old city, 'the street itself was a destination and an event', a place to gossip, mingle, and barter (Oldenburg 2001 [1984]: viii).

Treadmill to nowhere

Yet there is another association to the street. For, despite these men talking and dreaming on the streets, they could not completely disguise their inactivity. Once

in the city, the migrant who engaged in *ghumna-phirna* could become stuck. The city's promise could be illusory; the big payday deferred once again, over and over. Thus the other meaning deriving from *ghumna* – against the romance of a young man wandering cities for a time, before heading home triumphal – was of the *ghumte phirte admi*. This was a pejorative term applied to migrants, wanderers with a lack of employment and status.

Rahul's relationship to the street differed in this sense from that of the flâneur. The bohemian was supremely confident, at all moments superior to the crowd; the migrant labourer might enjoy the street too, but this was tempered by pathos. The same freedom that the street brought to plumbers and masons could become a millstone around their neck. Consider the language used to describe such men in Delhi: *bekaar*, useless and idle; or *lafanga*, an idle and useless wanderer (Jeffrey *et al.* 2008). The lack of a formal work contract that the workers saw as making them free birds was at other moments seen as a cause of shame. Rahul, for example, admitted that his inability to save a significant sum for the marriage of his siblings had ruined (*barbad*) his family relations and led to him drinking more and more.

Indeed, the terminology for forward momentum on the street could come to mean thwarted fate. Rahul's colleagues sometimes had trouble collecting their payment from contractors. Often, when they demanded their due, they were told excuses: come back tomorrow, there is a delay, you will get it next time. '*Ghumate rathe hain*', they said – 'They simply turn you round and round.' In the old city, these men had imagined their life going forward, like the long, straight street; but often they spun in circles, their paths blocked. The street could take on a darker tone, where one was not simply immobile, but obsolete. Indeed, like other members of the old city's underclass, such as drug addicts, the workers at Haus Khazi were not briskly walking on the street, but stuck sitting on it. *Baithne* or sitting allowed for entertainment, like the reciting of *sher-o-shayaris*, as mentioned above. It was a creative posture, one that was in some ways productive of dialogue and exchange. But it was also one that indicated one's idleness and immobility (cf. Dhand 2006). '*Hum log bas baithe rathe hai*', the workers would say in frustration: 'We are doing nothing but sitting.'

The street, for such migrant workers, was both pathway and trap; the latter valence was evident in the use of the term *lawaris*. Monthly, migrants who had become destitute or addicts, were found dead on Old Delhi's streets. The police would post notices in front of stations or in newspapers; the men, usually lacking identification, were termed 'unclaimed' or 'lawaris'. The old city's police also sprung into action when forgotten objects were left on the street, such as large parcels or suitcases (*lawaris vastu*). But most of all, *lawaris* was applied by migrants to one another, in jokes that carried an undertone of anxiety. To be *lawaris* was to be a bastard, lacking clear parentage, like the dogs that slept alongside the men at Haus Khazi Chowk. Metaphorically, though, it denoted a certain type of unrooted person in the city, the migrant labourer most of all. The street contained the freedom of *ghumna-phirna*, or wandering, and the danger of becoming *lawaris*: unrooted, forgotten and unclaimed.

The stubborn street

The citizen did sometimes show up on Old Delhi's streets. The monument-visitor, bazaar-shopper and atmosphere-seeker, though, came with numerous injunctions, orders and recommendations. Behaviour was scrutinised and condoned or condemned in a capitalised officiousness. The municipal signboard, suitably vague and terse ('commit no nuisance') to encompass almost anything, was the best example of the 'standardising techniques' of the Indian city (Kaviraj 1997: 85).

Outside of the street, these were urban instructions for mis-use or non-use. The visitor arriving at the Delhi Junction Railway station encountered this sign: PUBLIC NOTICE: STOP PUBLIC FEEDING OF MONKEYS. At the Golcha and Excelsior cinemas in the old city, signboards and tickets noted a long series of items under the heading: FOLLOWING ITEMS STRICTLY PROHIBITED. At the Delhi Metro stops located at Chandni Chowk and Chawri Bazaar, the two old city stations, there was a long list of Dos and Don'ts, of Dangerous Materials and Offensive Articles. At the Mahatma Gandhi park, located near the old city's Katra Neel textile bazaar, a hand-written sign stood in one section that was closed off with a chain and lock. It read, without further explanation, 'No Entry: By Order'.

Within the Meena Bazaar, numerous Delhi Police signs could be found: *Sandict Vykation Evam Vaston Se Shavdhan Rehein* (Be aware of suspicious people and objects); *Bhagdhar naa Machayein* (Don't rush/crowd); *Bhid-bhad wale ilakon mein Vishish Dhyan Rakhein* (Pay special attention to crowded localities). In the Town Hall, a municipal building thronged by citizens completing paperwork, one found this notice: *Sediyon ke Kono Mein Na Thu Kein* (Please do not spit in the corner of staircases). At the Red Fort, the most prominent heritage building in Old Delhi, a loudspeaker at a police checkpoint played an endlessly looping tape, with exhortations including: *Kisi aanjan vyakti se dosti naa karein* (Please do not befriend any unknown person). At the Moti Cinema Hall, a popular cinema off Chandni Chowk, which often played Bhojpuri films for labourers, there was a huge placard outside the ticket line, listing the hypothetical possibilities and non-possibilities for cinema-goers. A list of things proscribed, 'Don't', *Na Kare*, and a list of things allowed, 'Do', *Kare*, stood in front of the ticket queue.

In the parks, cinema halls and government offices of the old city, 'spatial etiquette' was demanded (Srivastava 2007: 185). In Delhi's other spaces – the residential colony, the private club – there were 'instructions for use' (Khilnani 1999). In contrast, it was hard to imagine that any rule could be enforced on the street. The impossibility of reform of the street tells us something of its stubborn implacability.

The street: hypertexts and hyperactivity

In part, it is the street's porosity and stubbornness that has allowed a wider public culture to circulate. I write 'circulate' instead of 'view' or 'see', because

writers invariably refer to the optic metaphor when thinking of the street. The citizen's gaze over the street, in this telling, demands 'a particular way of seeing', a requirement of orderly urban space (Chakrabarty 2002: 66).

A good example of the failure of such vision had to do with attempts to standardise storefront fonts. In the Khari Baoli bazaar I learned that municipal officials, as part of their move to beautify the area, demanded that the signs in front of stores be taken down and made uniform. Looking at the bazaar, it was clear that this effort had failed: there were signs in modern, twentieth-century Helvetica; but there were far more that competed frenetically in older, outdated fonts, such as Times and Arial. Indeed, the boards in front of stores were emblems of the individual will of storekeepers rather than impositions of uniformity. Boards overlapped, many tilted precariously and not a few were obscured by handbills or stickers.

Clearly, the planners's desire for soothing uniformity was unfulfilled on the streets of Old Delhi. In other areas, municipal ordinances were pasted over with adverts for aphrodisiacs; modest doorways barely hinted at the frayed courtyards lying beyond them; the jumble of merchants' signboards and plethora of fonts denied easy orientation. Perhaps most importantly, one's vision was constantly overruled by other senses: odorous waves from gutters and railway tracks that make one double over, or inviting scents from kebab sellers; the tinny fragment of film music from a passing bus, or the over-long mobile phone conversation foisted upon you. To reduce the street to a space of middle-class surveillance is an act of impoverishment; there is much happening alongside the citizen's gaze.

The sensory overload of the street is long-standing. In the 1960s, in Agra's old city, the radio was the primary conduit for news, as well as the 'nationalized cult of the popular movie song' (Lynch 1969: 168). In the 1980s and 1990s, the television, attached to the tea stall or a shopkeeper's shelf, became the venue around which the masses huddled to compulsively watch television serials. During my time in Old Delhi, the primary medium for communication and entertainment had shifted to the mobile phone. Even men of humble means, such as Rahul, had, or shared, a mobile phone, on which they rang distant relatives, downloaded ring-tones and listened to cricket matches. The acoustic cacophony of the old city's street was thus given added dimension by this conduit to elsewhere.

Visually, the old city's street was similarly fecund. Sensational murder stories in Hindi newspapers and gossip magazines could be found in front of sidewalk vendors. They focused on lurid scandals of the present: politicians caught with prostitutes, murders by and of servants, internet videos of teenagers having sex. These topics provided the feedstock for *taaza khabar*, or salacious news, or *chatpati baat*, literally spicy talk, the currency of exchange between the city's residents. Advertisements for English classes and sexologists were plastered on urinals and walls, both offering self-improvement of a kind. They reaffirmed, if only in their conjunction, the male and vernacular character of the street (Srivastava 2007).

In these ways, Old Delhi's streets were emphatically physical spaces; their churn left its mark on one's clothes and eardrums. But they were also dream-worlds to elsewhere. Keyboard-clicks allow one entry into parallel experiences. Similarly,

standing on the city's streets, listening to the conversations and music nearby, looking at the posters and billboards, 'pockets of space are experienced like hypertexts: omnipresent but not always clicked into activation' (Varzi 2006: 128). We could extend this insight further, because the streets of Old Delhi are not just full of hypertexts; the barrage of visual and audio stimuli results in hyperactivity. A good amount of that churn has, of course, to do with film. Even before the urban dweller sees a Bollywood film, or one from smaller film industries in different states, they are floating in its posters and coasting along to its playback music.⁶

Standing in its midst, the street is like facing a desktop with many browser windows open simultaneously, or a TV show overwhelmed by competing adverts and news banners that frame the screen. On those mediated screens, as on the mediated street, there is no main or true or normative street activity. Think of the links you can follow when you surf the internet; do they not make you forget what you were supposed to be doing, constitute a parallel universe, easy to delve into? On the street, one has selective focus, as from a website with too many links, or a TV programme with scrolling news bites. Fragments of information on the street compete for and exhaust one's attention span, deadening as well as enhancing one's senses. This is central to the modern condition of 'anaesthetics', where the shock of work and exhaustion of consumption results in sense-deadening (Buck-Morss 1995).

The workers at Haus Khazi Chowk, dealing with muscle aches, seeking a reprieve from ordinary dullness, imbibed *nashas* or intoxicants: *desi daru* or *desi sharab* (country liquor), as well as tobacco-related products such as *beedis*, *paan*, *gutka* and *soorti*. The men knew, like most addicts, that these intoxicants accelerated their physical decline. But they felt them necessary, to gain the energy to work, or to receive some peace of mind (*aram*) and retreat into oneself. The street offered dreamworlds to elsewhere, but its sheer abundance, its endless proliferating desires offered in advertisements and bazaars, deadened one's capacity to domesticate. The mind lit up when men ingested stimulants on the street; the body powered-down through the taking of depressants. The street, as conduit for movement and self-transformation, and site of debasement and anomie, embodied the modern condition. One had to ingest stimulants to work the inhuman hours demanded by the city, building the new emblems of the urban; but they resulted in a subject too wasted to work, staring out, eyes glazed, both distant from, and intertwined with, the street.

Urban beautification and urban ugliness

I have argued for the street's association with the 'floating population' or popular masses. This relation is pervasive, as the streets of Old Delhi show, but not absolute. A contrast is provided by the middle-class *addas* of Kolkata, a defining feature of twentieth-century urban modernity in that city. They were, and in a more modest way still are, congregations of friendly gossip between city-dwellers, often conducted on the street (Chakrabarty 2000). In a more general way, the iconography of the Indian street – with billboards for the affluent and

storefronts for the middle class – presume a stratified population, able to imbibe the deluxe creams and foreign cola advertised (Appadurai 1987: 19). Nevertheless, the altitude of commercial sentiments – always located above the sleeping homeless or hunched-over day labourers – tells us something about the street's symbolic gradient. Moreover, in recent years, as the underclass ethos of the black town has seeped into other parts of the Indian city – through slums on public land, for example – elites have become more wary of the street, retreating into their drawing rooms (Mazumdar 2008).

In colonial and post-independence India, the street – a space of bazaar rumours, delinquent youth and subversive nationalists – was an official obsession. The history of Indian cities is often written as a fall from grace, such that the 'plebianisation of public space appears irreversible' (Kaviraj 1997: 108). But looked at over the long term, the Indian street has always been for the plebes; their appearance is not novel, but long-standing.

Nineteenth-century regulations against gambling, for example, targeted the street and other popular gathering spots, but left such practices alone when they were carried out in the private homes of the gentry (Birla 2009: 154). In colonial and postcolonial Calcutta, *halla*, 'sudden, violent police action aimed at clearing streets of hawkers and vendors' was widespread (Chakrabarty 2002: 77). In the early twentieth century, state planners, elite reformers in Uttar Pradesh's large cities, targeted 'the immorality and vulgarity of plebeian and street culture' (Gooptu 2001: 240). This anxiety about the street's underclass ethos emerged during the Emergency of 1975–77. At that time, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi suspended democracy, and bureaucrats effected the 'beautification' of Delhi's streets, through the removal of slums and pavement dwellers (Tarlo 2003).

To return to Delhi's old city, municipal authorities, when performing their role as the guardians of law and order, often turned to its street to demonstrate their vigilance. Very Important Persons, or VIPs, constitute an important political caste in India's capital. Still, they are not so valued as to deserve one further adverb; that is the preserve of the handful within the category Very, Very Important Persons – VVIPs. When members of either exalted category toured the old city, to announce their interest in the nation's heritage, for example, Rahul and his ilk were cleared beforehand by the police. Such performances were mutually deceptive. Politicians and elite VIPs and VVIPs pretended that their presence was not the cause of the street's strange emptiness. Subsidiary officials and police pretended that they did not aid and abet the kinds of street hawking and encroachment that lined their pockets. The street was here a particularly self-conscious theatre. As soon as the VIPs and VVIPs left the streets of the old city, their official ambassadors snaking away in a coordinated series of blinking rooftop lights, the street returned to its occupied, unkempt frenzy.

For the men of the street, for workers such as those at Haus Khazi Chowk, urban cleansing of this type was a familiar pattern. It was like a rhythmic flooding of the plains that could, as with seasonal cycles, be plotted temporally. Other *causūs belli* were possible, beyond the presence of the very important. Prior to national holidays and election polls, for example, the workers of Haus Qazi Chowk

were shunted into spartan concrete shells, charitably termed *rehan basaras*, or night shelters. Another category of urban beautification reached Rahul and his fellow workers more prosaically. After shopkeepers complained to the police about pavement encroachment the labourers grudgingly retreated to nearby parks.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to identify some features that define the street in Old Delhi, and, by extension, other postcolonial streets. It has emphasised how plebeian and performative streets are, and how, for the proletarian masses, the street is both a window of opportunity and sinkhole of failure. It has put forward an analytical vocabulary for revising how the postcolonial street is conceived; abundance and plasticity, osmosis and porosity, and altitude and adjustment allow us to apprehend the street's circulatory and shape-shifting nature. In this process, this chapter has highlighted a central tension exemplified by the streets of Old Delhi. On the one hand, they are, as in many modern cities, a source of enormous anxiety: governments, in 1857, 1947, 1976 and 2010, made serious attempts to reform the streets of the old city. Yet, on the other, the street is a terminally unkempt but vital entity. The Indian street has repeatedly been a target of official rationalisation, yet it has retained its own durable character.

Like an ingeniously moulded toy, which can weather numerous blows only to return to its original shape, the street, having endured thousands of police and municipal raids, invariably returns to an enduring, autonomous shape. The plasticity of the street, its ability to persist while facing enormous, countervailing pressures, is a metaphor for the Indian old city. It lingers not out of subaltern resistance, or indigenous continuity: none of the workers at Haus Khazi Chowk, in Delhi's old city, celebrate the fact that they eat, defecate, shower and entertain each other on the street. In all of its unruliness, lacking the prescriptions undergirding other urban spaces, the street remains the defining haunt of the male, popular masses.

Notes

- 1 Oldenburg (1976: 63) discusses how the chowk, broader and busier than the lane, produces a distinct urban public. Chowks are where politicians become visible by strolling; passers-by converge there at tea and tobacco stands; and newspapers are placed on street platforms and read communally.
- 2 Indeed, the Indian street is far from neutral, public territory; the long history of religious processions, rampaging mobs and jeering crowds on the street show it can be potentially malevolent: 'during periods of riot in Hyderabad's walled city, an innocuous strip of road often becomes enemy territory. A person may well find crossing that strip of road to get to the safety of his home a terrifying experience' (Naidu 1990: 44).
- 3 Clearly, many postcolonial streets outside of India exhibit such features. For an analogous example from Africa, one could look to Lagos. There, on a map, expressways still looked like channels. Actually,

Lagos has no streets; instead it has curbs and gates, barriers and hustlers that control separate landscapes. Some areas might look like streets; they might even

look like superhighways. But even the Lagos superhighway has bus stops on it, mosques under it, markets in it and buildingless factories throughout it. Lagos is as much a system of circulation as it is any particular place ... Its roads are not plan lines between points, but perhaps its most elastic and variable scapes, made more enabling by local modifications which deny the road's insistent linearity – guardrails are removed, jersey barriers put aside. At all bottlenecks, the road is converted to allow movement in a maximum number of directions.

(Koolhaas *et al.* 2000: 686)

- 4 See Coelho (2006) for an analogous study of urban infrastructure in Chennai. Under-ground water distribution is theoretically channelled through a formal grid and pre-ordained supply levels. Actually it is subject to innumerable compromises. These provisional but actually widespread and therefore constitutive forms include bypass connections, illegal siphoning and temporary compromises.
- 5 In a city with nearly 3,200 public urinals in 2007, only 132 were for women. These public toilets are widely considered unsanitary, and surrounded by fears of sexual assault, resulting in recalcitrance in using them. Therefore, it is not surprising that health problems such as constipation, piles and urinary tract infection are more prevalent amongst urban women than men. See Aastha Atray Banan's 'Why Women Should Not Hold On', *Tehelka*, 24 July 2010: 56–57.
- 6 An observer of Tamil cinema in the south Indian city of Madurai notes:

In the city of Madurai, cinema is everywhere. Glittering billboards advertise the latest films, and smaller posters are slapped on to spare inches of wall space. Movie songs blare from horn speakers and cassette players at weddings, puberty rites, and temple and shrine festivals. Tapes of movie dialogues play at coffee stalls, while patrons join in reciting them. Rickshaws and shop boards are painted with movie stars' pictures. ... Fan-club members meet in the streets to boast about their star and make fun of his rivals.

(Dickey 1993: 3)

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17 Life stories of the urban poor in Chittagong, Bangladesh

Mineo Takada

Chittagong is the second largest city in Bangladesh, after the capital, Dhaka, and has a population of several million. As a port city, Chittagong has vast numbers of lower-strata labourers. They and their families support the city from below, and in this sense they are among the most typical city dwellers.¹ This chapter deals with cases of people who live and work in this city. All the interviewees are migrants from rural villages, and have thus experienced both rural and urban life. Therefore, images of the city and urban life can be expected to emerge from such narratives, particularly from those who have experienced life in the city.² Further, their views reflect the comparative perspective that contrasts the urban (life) against the rural (life). The urban ‘lower strata’ in this chapter is generally composed of people living in a Bangladeshi city – in this case Chittagong – and working in jobs typically belonging to the informal sector.

The author conducted interviews with many people, but this chapter presents mainly excerpts from the narratives of three individuals. They are Haydar, Hakim and Khokon, all of whom are Muslim men. Haydar (aged about 50) is a *riksha* (rickshaw) painter, and Hakim (aged about 60) is the owner of a *riksha* garage – he owns many *riksas* and a private *riksha* company. Hakim was originally a *riksha* painter, and Haydar was his apprentice. By contrast, Khokon (in his mid-forties) is a cook who prepares dishes ordered by his clients for parties. He has no relationship to the other two men.³ Complimenting these accounts, some narratives from other interviewees will also be presented. The ‘oral history’ method is employed in this chapter in order to allow the voice of the person concerned to be heard.⁴ Broadly speaking, many urban studies tend to pay attention to those people whose voices are loudest, and to ignore or under-estimate the voices, feelings or thoughts of the people who belong to what might be called the lower strata of society, or to the silent majority. For various reasons, their voices struggle to reach the ear of the hearer. By contrast, those studies that use the oral history method are exemplary in setting out to hear the voices of the people and to correct the bias of previous studies.⁵

From ‘runaway child’ to urban resident

Running away from home

It is remarkable that the topic of running away from home often arises in conversations with people belonging to the lower strata of a Bangladeshi city: ‘I left home’; ‘I ran away from home.’ They talk about this topic plainly, as if they are just talking about leaving home and going to school in the morning. Let us consider one of the most typical examples.

When I first ran away from home, I got some money from my father. I said, ‘Dad, I want to do something. Give me money.’ He gave me twenty taka. At that time, [the bus fare from the home village] to Dhaka was nine-and-a half taka. I remember it clearly, even now. Of course, I never said that I intended to go to Dhaka. If I had said so, he would not have given me money. I left home just like that.

Khokon told me this. He was only about ten years old. No father would suspect a little boy of intending to run away from home simply because he said ‘[I] want to do something.’ It did not seem to be out of the ordinary. Certainly his father had married a second time, but this cannot be labelled the decisive factor. Instead, many factors came together: leaving school because he did not like the studies; caring for cows instead, but finding it hard work and not liking it; his father’s second marriage; longing for the unseen urban life; and so forth. These factors came together, and he seemed to decide to run away from home.

The case of Haydar is a similar example. He also ‘ran away from home’ at the age of 14 or so. He had simply thought that, by going to Dhaka, he would somehow manage to live. In the case of Hakim it was not a case of ‘running away from home’; he left his cousin’s house and tried to set up his own business, regardless of how feasible it was.

Clearly the boys chose to run away simply as an extension of their everyday life. Moreover, as we saw in the typical case of Khokon, they did it deliberately to some degree, although they were children.

Harsh everyday life: the background to ‘running away from home’

Needless to say, attention must be paid to the fact that the everyday life of the runaways had been harsh and, some might say, inhumane.⁶ Khokon had been forced to take care of cows as a result of not going to school; Haydar, though he stayed at home, could not go to school and endured days of living on the edge of starvation.⁷ Although he did not ‘run away from home’, Hakim had to work as an apprentice in his cousin’s house during his mid-teens. For them, everyday life was full of hard events and experiences, although none of them were particularly unusual in this regard. Given this situation, it is easy to imagine that they were inclined to expect something good in the city, about which they had obtained

only fragmentary, secondhand information. It is significant that each of them had such a harsh everyday life, and that such a life is not exceptional. Broadly similar situations can be found in all the poor rural areas of Bangladesh.

Attention should also be paid to the fact that there are many kinds of violence in the 'harshness' of the everyday lives of these men. For example, in Hakim's case his cousin invited him to work in his house, but the cousin broke the promise to teach him how to repair and maintain riksa. Instead, his cousin forced him to work as a domestic servant. However, Hakim could not go back home, as the economic conditions there were so severe. In the case of Khokon, his experience of violence was less visible. He related the following:

[As I stopped going to Madrasa] my father introduced to me the work of caring for cows for the payment of 600 taka per year. That was pitiful work. However, we did not have money because of the payment for my mother's medical care, and we were [in the condition that we] scarcely had a meal once in a day or so. I was just six or seven years old. It was hell, but I continued working for a year, even though I hated the work. The job was taking care of cows, but the cows would never do as I said and the work was very hard for a little boy such as I was at that time.

Khokon experienced days of 'scarcely eating a meal once in a day or so', at just six or seven years old. Moreover, suffering from malnutrition, children of rural Bangladesh generally have a very small build relative to their age. Still, a boy of such small build was forced to take care of big cows all day long. That kind of labour is not housework, but a job with payment, i.e. one with responsibility. He could not flee, but instead tried desperately to drive the cows, working all day. It is a form of invisible violence. It was somewhat similar to the case of Haydar.

As [my] father was so poor, he could not feed us. I endured the days of being living on the edge of starvation.

Days of starvation constitutes a kind of torture for a small boy. This torture endures for a long time and affects not only the child's body, but also his mental health. It is so severe that it leads the boy to decide to run away from home. A riksa-repairing mechanic, Manir, who is a close friend of Khokon, related a similar experience of his own more succinctly:

I was really hungry! I was really hungry! Therefore I left home.

Conticini and Hulme (2006) point out that visible forms of violence, such as beatings and abuse, are the greatest factor in the trend of Bangladeshi children who run away from home. We may further safely conclude that various kinds of violence, regardless of whether they are visible or invisible, are closely related to the decision of children to 'run away from home'. However, it is too simplistic

to conclude that violence is the only factor in creating the phenomenon of runaway children; various other contributing factors must also be investigated.⁸

A society in which ‘running away from home’ is a common occurrence

It is strongly suspected that Bangladesh is a society in which running away from home is a commonplace occurrence. Unfortunately, there is no rigid population registration system by which to measure it; the population census is conducted every decade, but its capture ratio yields less than ideal accuracy. Additionally, although the cities of Bangladesh have large populations of slum-dwellers and people who live on the streets, it is not possible to estimate a reasonable figure based on the limited number of sample surveys. It is important to know that these are the figures of those who ‘exist’ and that there are no statistics regarding the figures of those who ‘do not exist’, such as runaway children.⁹

In spite of the above, based on the collateral evidence collected, the author suspects there have been and are many cases of running away from home in Bangladesh. For example, Hara (1972) reported many cases of runaway boys following his field survey conducted in the 1960s in rural areas near to Chittagong city. Though there has been no subsequent study on this matter, mentions of this topic can be found in studies on street children and related themes (Blanchet 1996, Conticini & Hulme 2006, Giani 2006). Moreover, the interviews the author conducted with persons of the lower strata in Chittagong suggest that one out of every five or six interviewees (mainly adult men) had experienced running away from home. These studies largely suggest the state of affairs in which running away from home is a prevalent phenomenon in Bangladesh, particularly in the case of boys, and it can be traced back to the Pakistan era at least. If there really are so many runaway cases, as indicated by the above method of calculation, all the processes that lead to running away can be understood without making a direct connection between running away and violence. The explanation will follow below and is confined to the case of boys only, as the majority of the runaway children are boys.

First, if many boys really try to run away, then younger boys will naturally hear of many examples in their immediate circle. This will lead to a state in which boys are readily able to think about running away as a means of leaving behind their frustrations. And, because they are well acquainted with previous examples of running away, the mental barrier against it will be lower, and they will easily be able to do the same. Moreover, as they hear about the many examples of other runaway boys, they come to have a rough knowledge of such facts as who tried and how they did it. In other words, it is highly probable that they possess the ‘know-how’ for running away. For example, responding to the author’s question on this topic, Manir recounted:

I heard about runaway cases so much, so much! Where they went, how they did it. All! Therefore, I thought [decided], ‘OK, I will do it, too.’

Khokon nodded his agreement to these words.

An additional factor is brought to this situation. It is possible for boys to 'run away from home' at a very low cost. The author has observed the following examples: when travelling in the rural area of Bangladesh by local bus, it is common to see little children boarding unaccompanied. In many cases, such a child will carry a water pot made of aluminium, or a small plastic bag stuffed with candy, and will start to sell water or candy to the passengers. The child will continue selling until the next stop or until the nearby local bus terminal, where they will disembark and catch the bus travelling in the opposite direction, resuming the business until it arrives at the stop where they first got on board. Among such children, however, there are also some empty-handed boys, who board alone and slump silently into a corner of the bus. These boys continue travelling to the terminal, whereupon they disappear into some unknown place. They have the following aspects in common: they are nearly all boys, ranging from six or seven years of age to their early teens. They are empty-handed, board the bus alone, sit in a corner on the floor without speaking and continue travelling to the terminal. Furthermore, they are nearly always seen on buses going uptown. After seeing several such boys, the author realised that they must be runaway boys. When explaining his own experience of running away from home, Habib, a carpenter repairing old furniture in a dark and narrow backstreet of Kursi, a housing area in Chittagong, simply said:

I climbed aboard a bus and came here [in Chittagong]; board a bus. Just that.

In the case of trains, it is much easier to 'run away from home'. If a boy hops aboard a train while it is travelling at reduced speed just outside a station or moving through a curve, and then gets off the train just before it reaches its destination, no one will interfere with him. This is exactly what Haydar did:

I ran away alone. Climbed aboard a train. I thought that, if I went to Dhaka, if I went to the big city, I would find a job.

It is easy to understand this when one sees the train moving along with its rooftops full of people. These examples tell us that it is possible to 'run away from home' with no money or at a very low cost.

Consequently, because there are so many cases of 'running away from home', there is a likelihood that boys come up with 'running away' as a simple means to escape their frustration. The mental barrier against running away is lower, it is easy to obtain the know-how of 'running away' and 'running away' can be done at very low cost. If these conditions are taken into account, the possibility of actually 'running away' will be much greater. Manir's narrative tells us that this is the case. We must also consider the fact that, as a reality, everyday life will be harsh in almost all rural areas. Moreover, in Bangladesh people share '*insh Allah*' as a kind of sentiment. Originally, this term equated to 'God willing' in

English, the literal translation being ‘God knows’. In reality, however, Bangladeshi Muslims tends to use this term with the attitude that ‘you never know unless you try’. Here the sentiment of ‘*insh Allah*’ signifies a highly optimistic outlook. Once this optimistic ‘*insh Allah*’ sentiment is combined with the factors mentioned above, it becomes apparent that boys show little hesitation about running away.¹⁰

To be street children, and then to be city dwellers

If a very young boy climbs aboard a bus or a train, it will not be difficult to reach a destination. In many cases that destination will be a big city such as Dhaka or Chittagong. However, the boy has no leads in the city, nor does he have a way of getting in touch with a person upon whom he can rely; he has very little money, if any, at hand. At this point the consequences of the act are as clear as day:

When I stayed at home, I had no money and it was difficult to obtain food. Then, I came to Dhaka. Once I came to Dhaka, many people told me, ‘Chittagong is a better place.’ So, I came here. Then, [I spent a lot of time wondering about] where should I go and where should I stay. I slept on the street for three days.

Haydar’s story, as told above, is similar to the case of Khokon, who had this to say.

You ask me about my first time [‘running away’]? Ah, I got twenty taka from my father and used the money to go [to Dhaka]. By bus. Alone, totally alone. When I got off the bus, I had only ten taka or so, and I used it up. Ate food and so forth. Acquaintances? No. None whatsoever.

Thus they became street children. Many street children can be found around the bus terminals, train stations or boat terminals. This is partly because those are the places where the children are able to make small sums of money by picking rags or carrying passengers’ luggage. Moreover, it is because these are their points of arrival in the city where, after leaving their villages, they arrive by bus, train or boat and disembark. In fact, in the case of Khokon, he started his street-child life as a ‘*tokai*’ in the bus terminal where he had first arrived from his home village.¹¹ One might assume that runaway children can return home if they want, but actually it is very difficult to do so. First of all, a child will usually know only the name of their home villages, but as the destination screen of a bus or train just shows the name of a local town or bazaar, the name of the home village is seldom listed. Additionally, there are many villages or towns with similar names. Therefore, if a child really wants to go back, it is very difficult to find which bus, train or boat he should board. In fact, there are many reports in the local paper about street children who want to return home but do not know where to go.¹² Furthermore, because many of the children run away from home

out of hatred for their life there, they would not want to go back even if they knew how to get there.

It is obvious that there are many street children in Bangladesh, especially in big cities such as Dhaka or Chittagong, but it is very difficult to estimate an accurate number. This is partly because there are few reliable studies about them, although rough numbers are given in news reports. Moreover, because they are dispersed throughout the city area and usually walk about during the daytime, it is difficult to pinpoint where they are. This matter will not be expanded upon any further here. There is, however, a completely different factor that is closely related to the current discussion. The street ‘children’ will not be children eternally. Generally they are seen strolling around separately in the daytime in search of money or food, but at night they stay together in groups in a fixed location. The group usually consists of 5–20 children, aged from 4–5 to about 14–15. It is very rare to see children older than that. In other words, they somehow get out of the condition of being street children by the age of 14 or 15. The next question, thus, is how they achieve this. The narratives instruct us on this point in vivid detail.

How did I find that first job? I just entered a restaurant and said [to the owner], ‘I’ve come from a village. Will you give me a job?’ I tried like this ten times or so, and at last [a man said to me], ‘Okay, do it.’ That was the first.

Khokon explained the situation thus. In his case, as he was working as a ‘*tokai*’ in his street-child period, he gradually became well informed about city life. Gradually, however, he started to think about finding a way out of his street-child condition. Eventually, he took action and asked around for a job. He met a man who said, ‘Okay, do it.’ This was the first step in escaping his street life. Haydar, however, was much luckier. Just a few days after arriving at Chittagong, he met Hakim and got out of the street life by becoming Hakim’s apprentice.

[Arriving at Chittagong, I was hanging around and] accidentally came upon Hakim’s garage. He had five or six riksas at that time. . . . There, in his garage. I explained that I had come here this way [and in my present situation had no place to go]. He said, ‘Okay, stay here. Will you work? I will teach you how to do it. As you practice a trade, you will be needed [i.e. you will be a needed person].’ At first, I pulled a riksa for two days, and then I started the job [i.e. painting work].

It seems that such cases are not rare. For example, in Rubel (2009), a verbatim transcript of talks with a street vendor of *Chotpoti* (a kind of snack food) in the area of Mirpur, a northern part of Dhaka, there is an episode in which the vendor employs a boy on a probationary basis as a helper. The boy had initially come to him as a beggar, but because the boy seemed somewhat promising, he employed him instead of simply giving him money. Many similar examples can be found

if we carefully read news stories based on interviews (generally they are written in Bangla instead of English).

Although street children somehow initially find a job and get out of their street-child situation, they rarely continue with it. Instead, they usually try to seek a job that seems more suitable for them. Khokon told us this:

[After finding a first job,] then, I changed jobs several times and I met a nice man. . . . When I was at the age of sixteen or seventeen, a person asked me, ‘Will you help with my work?’ That was ‘*sardari kaj*’ [in this case, catering work for wedding ceremonies and other types of gatherings]. [I] learned about the work gradually, on the job. . . . When I was about eighteen years of age, I was told, ‘You have become a man and should start *sardari kaj* independently.’ Then, I started my own job and employed others.

In this case, Khokon started his career as a helper in a restaurant and changed jobs several times, before finding a job, *sardari kaj*, that he found preferable.

I started to work as helper [for a riksa mechanic] and changed [work] places several times. At last, I got [found] an *ustad* [literally a ‘master’ or ‘expert’, but in this case, a man of a good riksa repairing skill] and became his apprentice.

This is Manir’s story. Though he first started work as an assistant to a riksa mechanic and continued in this line, he changed workplace several times and found a boss he preferred.

Such a process of ‘running away from home → flowing into the city → street children → helper → skill acquisition → settling down in the city’ is emerging from the narratives as a path by which one can become an urban resident.¹³

Many scholars have admitted that in Bangladesh the following factors trigger the movement from rural areas to cities: the search for an opportunity to obtain higher education or to get a better job, which is the most general course of action; changing one’s status from a migrant worker in order to settle down in the city; fleeing homelessness caused by land erosion or by the over-fragmentation of property as a result of *gavelkind* (equal division of the land among sons, as set forth by the Islamic law on inheritance); and escaping homelessness resulting from the loss of opportunities for wage labour in rural areas, and so forth. However, as far as the author knows, no one has discussed running away from home and being a street child as a factor in becoming an urban resident. The narratives discussed here confirm, however, that such a course has considerable importance, at least in the case of people who belong to the urban lower strata of Bangladesh.

Additionally, although they are not urban residents in the true sense, there are many people who left their villages in order to live around the city or local transport terminals. For example, boys called ‘helpers’, who usually ride on *tempo* (three-wheelers for multiple riders) are toll-collectors-cum-pullers-in for attracting customers. It is widely known that many such boys are former street children

or boys who have grown up in slum areas. Also, many bus conductors and the above-mentioned bus ‘helpers’ or truck ‘helpers’, who help to pile goods onto the loading platform and take other goods off, are said to be from a similar social background. Most of them spend the entire day in a car (or tempo/bus/truck) and often sleep there too. Despite the absence of a study written about them, many news articles or reports published in Bangla newspapers mention their personal social background. As far as we know from those reports, it is safe to say that this is an accurate representation of the situation. Based on these facts, it is easy to understand why bus conductors or helpers often ignore fare-cheating boys, as they themselves are from a similar social background.

Many hidden people cannot become urban residents

Needless to say, it is unrealistic to think that all street children make a safe transition to the status of urban resident. Attention must be paid to the other routes by which many of them simply ‘get out’ of the street life situation. Of course, some of them are fortunate enough to return to their native villages by taking advantage of certain events, but it is unlikely that the percentage of such events is high. Rather, other outcomes must be considered, such as dying while a street child, growing up and continuing street life as a squatter or some other part of a floating population or descending into the ranks of petty criminals, drug dealers, drug addicts or, in the case of girls, prostitutes.¹⁴ Concerning the street children, Tahamina (2001) reports their miserable situation of sexual abuse and exploitation; additionally Tito (2009) also reports that they are subjected to many kinds of violence – physical, mental or social – and are severely affected by those things. As a result, the sad fact is that in cities many children are dealt with as a kind of consumable good.¹⁵

Unfortunately, these examples do not appear in the narratives of the people who belong to the lower strata in cities. Moreover, those who relayed their life stories to the author were men who had already (and successfully in some sense) become urban residents. Those who do not become urban residents never have the opportunity to tell us about their lives. Considering the situation on a macro scale, this phenomenon may be explained by the ‘theory of a city as a doodlebug’s pit’.¹⁶ It is hardly possible to determine which is more common: those who become urban residents or those who disappear. However, attention must be paid to the fact that there are people whose lives cannot even appear in the narratives of the lower-strata men, because cities in Bangladesh have the pitiless and rough character of swallowing people up like ‘consumable goods’. This is one aspect of the nature of cities in Bangladesh.

Urban human relationships

(Mutual) aid

If someone successfully becomes an urban resident, what kind of a world awaits him? People who have made this transition are able to inform us about the very interesting reality of their human relationships. For example, Khokon had the following to say:

Looking around us, [those people there] are not my brothers or my old friends. Still, I gained many things from them... For example, his home [that of Manir, a riksa mechanic working beside him] is about 40 km or more away from my village home. I've never visited his home, and he has never visited my home either. I just became acquainted with him here. He helps me in many ways, and I also help him.

Responding to this, Manir said,

Hah [yes], I did not know him before. We met here [this place]. But, I believe him [Khokon] and we help each other.

These are narratives of individuals helping each other as neighbours in a city despite not knowing each other well, and this aid is part of their everyday life. Such help is not necessarily mutual, but rather is often unilateral and voluntary. This is obvious in the situation mentioned above, in which street children gain the opportunity to get out of their street life. When they ask the owners of shops or restaurants to give them jobs, some of the owners make them an offer like 'Okay, do it' (in the case of Khokon) or 'Okay, stay here. Will you work? I will teach you how to do it' (in the case of Haydar). The children are complete strangers to the owners; if the owners employ street children, they will get almost nothing, or it may even be to their detriment. Even so, they offer some jobs to the children. This is nothing but a form of unilateral 'aid'.

This kind of unilateral aid plays a significant role in turning around a person's life. For example, Hakim tried to work independently. However, he had no clear plan then; he had almost no income in the first day of his independence, nor did he have any money for his dinner that day. He had no choice but to visit a restaurant with whose owner he was at least slightly acquainted, and, with a laugh as if to joke, spoke to him. This was because he thought that his proposal would almost certainly be refused. Still, he used it as a trial.

'*Bhai* [brother], I have no money. Serve me a meal. I will pay you once I get some money tomorrow.' He did not know me well... He had no relationship with me in terms of work, and he had no reason to serve me a meal. Then, he ordered an employee, 'Hey, serve Hakim a meal. Meat dishes,

vegetable dishes or anything he wants. Serve him anything.' ... As I heard that he was saying, 'Serve Hakim a meal', I was really grateful to him.

Having eaten sufficient food and recovered his physical and mental energy, Hakim had at last achieved the independence of work. Interestingly, not only in the cases of Khokon or of Hakim, those who describe experiences like these invariably emphasise that it is nearly impossible to find such a relationship in the villages. In that sense, this kind of (mutual) aid is a form of human relationship, or an aspect of human relationships at least, in the city in Bangladesh.

Indifference and tension

Although they help each other, the human relationship in city life is accompanied by a characteristic sense of distance. The words of Khokon, who said, 'I've never visited his home, and he has never visited my home either. [I] am just acquainted [with him] here', clearly express this kind of distance, as they do not stick closely to one another. It is not accurate to say that this sense of distance is found only in relationships among unrelated persons. Earlier, using data gathered through a field study conducted in a slum area of Chittagong, the author pointed out the fact that the frequent recombination of relationships was observed among the urban poor, even among kinsmen such as siblings or close relatives (Takada 2006: [ch. 5](#)). This sense of distance, the feeling of not being very closely attached to each other, is certainly characteristic of human relationships in the city.

On the other hand, this sense of distance and the disinterest with regard to others seem to be two sides of the same coin. For example, Hakim spoke about a Bihari man in the following way:¹⁷

A little later, I went to see him, but he already had moved to somewhere. It was not clear whether he went to Pakistan or Dhaka. I asked the neighbours but no one knew. As my association with him was very limited and I had no relationship with his family, I did not know any more.

This Bihari man was not only a person who had helped Hakim a great deal in the early days of becoming independent in his work, but was also a rare man who even lent him money without any guarantee of return. Nevertheless, Hakim's association with him was limited only to the one-on-one level and, once he left, their relationship was terminated, as if it had vanished. This kind of human relationship is often described as 'plain', but instead it should be explained as 'coolness' or 'indifference' to others. This is not limited to the case of Hakim. Khokon disappeared; the author tried to find his whereabouts and asked one of his former close associates, who said the following:

He [i.e. Khokon] rarely comes here anymore. I do not know exactly where he is on the No. 3 road area. I just heard like that from the others.

This man, who used to chat with Khokon very intimately, just said, 'I do not know' once Khokon had left the area. His attitude told me: 'I am not interested in a man who has already left here.'

Considered in retrospect, the scenario of escape from street life, most typical in the case of Khokon, or that of dining in the case of Hakim, represents an initial approach taken by the person in question, followed by the reaction of the other party. Khokon asked for a job ten times or so and, at last, the other person (i.e. a restaurant owner) responded (gave him a job out of pity). In the case of Hakim, too, even though he pretended that he was joking, he asked for a meal first and then the other party (i.e. the restaurant owner) responded (i.e. served him a meal on credit). This is the kind of active 'approach' from one side to the other that is commonly needed in human relationships in cities. Of course, there is no guarantee that the other person will give an amicable response to this approach. Instead, it is more likely that such a person would give a negative or cold response. Even if there is little hope, a person simply continues to try, without quitting. Eventually, the other person might respond. This relationship is triggered from this kind of 'approach' by one side, but the relationship would evaporate if there was no active 'approach'. It is mentioned above that a kind of 'unilateral voluntary aid' can be observed among urban people. At the same time, this voluntary response seems to contain a wide range of implications, such as lack of reciprocity; being unable to expect the same act the next time; and instability. These two aspects, an initial approach taken by the person in question, followed by the reaction of the other party, and a unilateral voluntary aid, seem to be two sides of a coin.

How do people perceive this lack of stability or mutual 'coolness'? On this point, Khokon appropriately said the following:

It can be said that everywhere in Bangladesh we are exposed to tremendous tension as we come to the city... I always feel tension here, such as how I can get job or how I can get food. Or would someone treat me poorly? I have no person [to rely on].

These very simple words reveal his true feelings about human relationships in the city. It is nearly impossible to believe the narrative of that same man that emphasises mutual aid among urban residents. Even so, this seems to be his true inner feeling. However, it is very difficult to determine whether this kind of comment completely negates the positive aspect of human relationships in the city or not. Instead, it seems that they simultaneously appreciate and negate the dual aspects of the city. This is because, in referring to the city as the cause of their tension, many of them then went on to cite negative aspects of the village and villagers, for example saying that: village people are very envious; they often say 'Lend me some money'; they always interfere in other people's affairs and so forth.

It is obvious here, at least, that they clearly grasp that human relationships in the city are different from rural ones, and that two contrasting sets of human

relationships are perceived through this understanding. Mutual coolness and a lack of stability, and the mental tension that results from these, stand at the centre of human relationships in cities in Bangladesh.

Are relationships changing?

Even such an unstable or shaky relationship may be transformed into a more stable one through the process of acquiring urban residential status and with the continuation and lengthening of the relationships. For example, Haydar walked out of Hakim's life because of the ill treatment he received, and he has since been working independently as a riksa painter. Nevertheless, as they know each other well and also know each other's work behaviour, Haydar continues to receive jobs from Hakim and, although he also accepts jobs from other customers, he is still living around Hakim's garage. In a sense, this constitutes a relationship similar to the patron-client relationship. Theirs, however, is a loose one. It is not clear that there are any strict obligations or sanctions such as would be found in the typical patron-client relationship. Perhaps their relationship would quickly come to an end if one party stood back a little. A similar relationship existed in the case of Khokon, when he worked with the then boss of sardari kaj.

If the term is further prolonged and the relationship becomes more continuous, it could be transformed into one that extends beyond generations. For example, Hakim said that he would never forget the generous treatment of that restaurant owner and would continue the relationship with him until his death. Moreover, Hakim confided that he lent the owner a considerable amount of money when the owner was urgently in need and, after the owner's death, he even erased the debt his sons inherited, with an expression of thanks.

In the case of Haydar, he has a relationship not only with Hakim but also with Hakim's family. Consequently, Hakim's sons call Haidar '*mama*'. Originally, the word *mama* refers to 'maternal uncle', but in this case is a 'fictive' term of kinship addressed to a man who is nearly equivalent to an uncle. In Bangladesh the kinship terminology is widely applied to non-kin (Kotalova 1996), and 'the use of fictive kin terms not only facilitates interaction, it also creates certain obligations and rights' (Jansen 1987: 85). In this sense, such use of kin terms cannot simply be dismissed as 'fictive', because this use of kin terms is usually accompanied by a kind of mental relatedness and some kind of change of behaviour.¹⁸ As far as the author knows, in the city a person starts to use the term *mama* initially for a man for whom he/she feels a kind of mental closeness. At the same time, in addressing a man as *mama*, he/she reveals some expectations, i.e. of help or being able to rely on that man.¹⁹ Traditionally, anthropologists call this kind of relationship 'joking'. But, in this case of calling a man *mama*, intimacy is found between them only superficially. There is no joking and no other change of behaviour. Even so, in the passing of time their relationship has certainly changed on a deeper level and transformed into one of intimacy that is similar to that of kin. In this sense, human relationships in the cities may be changed in the long term.²⁰

Wavering appreciation for the 'city'

The city is good!

The interviewees's narratives about the dual facets of human relationships in the city often reflect a perception of the dual nature of the city itself. On the one hand, they said the following:

I love the city. I love it very much. It is far better than the house in *desh* [literally, one's own country, but in this case, a home village or a village home]. I have become contented, as I now live in the city. I feel restless in *desh*. The reason why I love the city is that, and it can be said of Bangladesh cities in general, there is little envy or jealousy or things like that. This is my simple reason.

This is Khokon's narrative. He appreciates the city, since he can find positive aspects of human relationships there. Interestingly enough, his reason for appreciating the city is the same reason he gave for the mental tension he sometimes felt. Namely, that a single characteristic of the city sometimes brings a person appreciation (positive recognition) and sometimes an affliction (negative recognition).

Other narratives can also be found that mention the characteristics of the city.

I love the city. The reason? Because I have lived here since my youth, working here; there are many people; the city gives many people goods and things; and we can pass the time by working here and so forth. I love the city.... We can watch TV when we go back home; there are restaurants; I have my own assets here; and I earn money doing my business. These are the reasons I love the city.

Hakim told us the above. The image of 'city', in this respect, is a place full of goods, people, work and, generally speaking, affluence. Of course, a person's evaluation of the city depends to a certain degree on his/her success there. Because Hakim is a successful person, in terms of the three men at least, what he says in this regard may be discounted to an extent. Even so, a kind of 'place of affluence' image is apparent in his narration about the city. It cannot be described categorically here, however, because Hakim is a successful person. For example, Khokon said, '[We] have no opportunity in the village, so I prefer the city.' This will be conversely interpreted as implying that 'the city is full of opportunities' or is an 'affluent city', and in this sense it seems to resemble what Hakim said. The various kinds of affluence possessed by the city seem to project, for many people, the image of a place with great potential.²¹

The city is not good!

At the same time, the people in my study emphasise the aspect of harshness that a city can have, and often convey a negative perception. For example, Haydar said the following, with a sigh:

The city is not good, not good. I came here to earn money. Life in the village is *aram* [comfortable, feeling good or calm]. *Aram* in living, *aram* in the sense of food. If I could get a job in the village, I would never have to come to the city. Why do I say ‘the city is not good’? There are too many people. Everything is expensive. The food is not good, either. We must pay to rent a room. To earn money, I came here to earn money. The village is the best place. There is nothing better than a home village.

With the exception of rare cases such as that of Hakim, for many people belonging to the lower strata in the city, the image of the city as an affluent place just seems to mean the city is a place full of jobs or opportunities. They seem to say, ‘Frankly speaking, I would prefer to live in a village’, or ‘If I could have a job in the village, it would be better to live there.’ What Khokon said – ‘[We] have no opportunities in the village, so I prefer the city’ – could be interpreted as expressing this kind of sentiment. Conversely, they perceive the city as a place where one must compete to get a job, or as a place full of competitors. For that reason, they emphasise the aspect of ‘tension’ in the human relationships in the city.

Admittedly, although this aspect of the city causes them to feel tension, it seems too simplistic to assert that they come to the city only to seek jobs or opportunities, or that the city is a place that otherwise means very little to them. For example, Khokon left his home and stayed in the city for more than ten years. During all that time, he never thought about going back, even though he was earning sufficient money to do so if he really wanted to. The author asked him the reason why he would not go back; he replied simply: ‘[I do] not want to go back.’ That is, even after he had experienced hard times on the street and human relationships full of tension in the city, the village was a place to which he would not return. In other words, village life is so harsh that boys do not wish to return for many years. Likewise, Hakim did not go back home, even though he experienced treatment similar to torture at his cousin’s house in Chittagong. Moreover, talking proudly about his work, Haydar exhibited one of his paintings to the author and said:

Riksa in the city is beautiful, is not it? There is no riksa like this in the village, is not it? I like city!

This is the narrative of the same person who earlier confessed that the city is not good.

Despite it all, still attracting people

In reality, such an evaluation of the city is largely dependent on one's human relationships within it. This is a reflection of the fact that, for many people, the city as space is intricately linked with people living in the city. There is no abstract city, at least for the people; there is the city where they actually live and which they experience day by day. Certainly, the city has a severe aspect, much like a doodlebug's pit. This is a fact that cannot be denied. However, people's narratives reveal that the same city simultaneously has completely different aspects, such as the mutual aid and indifference observed in its human relationships, or the harshness and expansiveness it displays as a place. In other words, the bivalent view that emerges from the narratives is the complex figure the city presents. That a city has such contradictory aspects is a characteristic often referred to as the 'magical charm of the city'.

Also, regardless of the arguments presented here, many people are heading to the city, even today. Of course, some of them go willingly, but some do not. Moreover, attracting these people and mercilessly grinding some of them down, the city is a place that breathes and restlessly changes its character.

Notes

- 1 Some commentators may criticise this chapter as concerning only a special type of migration and not being a study of 'true' city dwellers. However, the reality in Bangladesh is that, roughly speaking, the population has tripled since the 1980s in the Dhaka metropolitan area and more than doubled in the Chittagong city area. This rapid growth in urban population is largely a result of an influx from rural areas. This means that the vast majority of 'city' dwellers in Bangladesh consists of first-generation migrants and their families, including city-born children, and many of them belong to the lower or lower-middle strata of city population in economic and social terms. That is, they are city dwellers and they formulate city and city life itself in their own way. This point should be emphasised. Without them, the image of the city in Bangladesh would be an extremely skewed and unnatural one. Understanding them, just as they are, is essential in describing the 'whole image' of the Bangladeshi city.
- 2 Many studies have been done on the topic of 'city', from the Chicago School to recent, highly abstract discussions (e.g. city as a hetero-topia, etc.). The author does not intend to repeat these here. This chapter intends only to go back to the real place of 'city', Chittagong in this case, and try to rethink the city of Bangladesh and its dwellers in the present day.
- 3 From an economic perspective, Hakim is not poor. His behaviour and speech, however, strongly evoke typical features shared among lower-strata city dwellers in Bangladesh. On Khokon's narrative, see Takada (2010).
- 4 On the 'oral history' study in general, see Thompson (2000). He points out that few oral-history studies in the field have been conducted with respect to South Asia. In the case of Bangladesh, it is exactly true. There are many so-called 'life stories' in the literature, but almost all of these are compiled and written by researchers (e.g. Khan & Seeley 2005). An exceptional example is that of Biswas (2007).
- 5 Mamun (1999) properly expressed this point in his essay entitled 'Gariber katha shudhu goribei balate pare' (Only the poor can talk about all the things concerning the poor). This is true, and the author endeavoured to recount their explanations in their own terms.

- 6 On the recent poverty situation in rural areas, see Khan and Seeley (2005).
- 7 Giani (2006) points out the possible relationship between education and migration, including cases of running away from home. On the general migration situation in Bangladesh, especially internal migration, see Afsar (2000).
- 8 Islam (2008) reported that, based on his experience of work supporting street children, there are various factors behind the phenomenon of runaway children.
- 9 Census data for a village often includes children who have already run away from their home in the total population of the village, as the villagers tend to insist that they are their children. Certainly the runaway children are their children, but in reality they are not present, as they have already fled. In this sense, they do not exist there. As a result, in such cases the census figure for the village is over-reported. The author himself witnessed this several times in his field studies
- 10 However, it seems somewhat problematic to insist that running away from home is a corollary of the Islamic teaching (Hara 1972).
- 11 *Tokai* originally meant 'rag-pickers', but nowadays many people use it in reference to porter children in the market places, railroad/bus stations or ferry terminals. On the former pattern of *tokai*, refer to Miyake and Alam (2008); on the latter, see Blanchet (1996).
- 12 For example, such news reports can often be found in local Bangla newspapers with captions like 'Ali wants to go back home' or 'Mostafa does not know where to go back'. In these cases, the details of the report tell an almost identical story that a street child has changed his mind after running away from home and wants to return, but does not know where to return to, so the reporter asks the reader for information.
- 13 Habib, the carpenter mentioned above, also followed similar steps.
- 14 In the case of street girls, Blanchet (1996) describes typical 'work' as waste picking with begging at first, then gradually becoming a prostitute.
- 15 We can find many examples of street children being treated as 'consumer goods' not only in Bangladesh, but in many places around the world, either temporally or historically. For example, Kawakita (2008) explores a similar situation found in the English navy in the age of the British Empire.
- 16 This theory makes the assertion that cities of pre-industrial societies need large numbers of people as 'consumable goods' just to keep their temporary size, and in this sense the cities have been a kind of 'doodlebug's pit' (Hayami & Uchida 1972; Wrigley 1969; Saito 1989). The author once noted the possibility of applying this theory to urban slum areas in developing countries (Takada 2006, ch. 4).
- 17 'Bihari' is a term originally used to indicate a person from the state of Bihar, India. However, in Bangladesh the term is widely used to indicate those Muslim people who came from the northern part of India, not strictly limited to Bihar, around the time of the partition of India and Pakistan, or in the former Pakistan era.
- 18 Related to this point, Carsten (2000), Lambert (2000) and others propose the use of 'relatedness' instead of 'kinship'. The author himself hesitates to follow this proposition, because 'relatedness' implies meanings and connotations that are too broad in comparison to 'kinship'. For general knowledge on kinship in Bangladesh, see Aziz (1979), and refer to Hara (1991 [1967]) for a case study of kinship in a village near Chittagong.
- 19 Concerning this, the author's own experience constitutes a striking example. Once the author caressed an infant boy on a street in Dhaka and often fed him a banana or biscuit. Observing this, his mother (a destitute day labourer) persuaded him to call me *mama*. To do so, she evidently intended to strengthen the bond between us, practically as well as mentally.
- 20 Certainly Hakim's sons call Haydar *mama*, and express closeness, but this is just closeness between non-kin. In this sense, the author hesitates to equate such relatedness with those of kin.
- 21 More strictly, Manir said: '[There] is everything here. Works, goods and things, people, every thing. But, [it is] unfortunate [that we] have not so much money.'

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([B] = in Bangla, [J] = in Japanese).

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Part VI

**Consumer culture in
contemporary South Asian
cities**

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18 Tourism, consumption and the transformation of Thamel, Kathmandu

Izumi Morimoto

From an aeroplane descending into Tribhuvan International Airport in Kathmandu at night, a comparatively bright area is visible within the basin, glittering with electric lights, where old and new buildings stand alongside one another. This area is Thamel, at once a well-known tourist area and a town of dubious reputation for the locals. In the daytime, scores of cars and motorcycles squeeze their way through the traffic on the narrow streets, which routinely experience heavy traffic jams accompanied by noisy horns and foul exhaust fumes. Many buildings, including approximately 200 hotels, are concentrated in Thamel, which spreads out for about a kilometre in all directions. Besides the hotels, restaurants, internet cafes, travel agencies and shops stand side by side along the streets, and above them are electric wires, almost tangled down into the windows of the buildings. Wandering around the streets of Thamel, it is not difficult for tourists to find signboards with words such as ‘Shangri-La’, ‘Nirvana’ and ‘Paradise’. This tourism space has been developed by taking these images, which have been created in the west, as mystical objects that are spatiotemporally different from the real landscape of the space.

Gathered together in the streets of Thamel are not only tourists from various countries, but also would-be guides hunting tenaciously for jobs, vendors selling fruits or cigarettes on the streets, (pseudo-)sadhus wearing saffron robes, street children and women holding small babies in their arms asking tourists for charity. Thamel is the place where, as Liechty (2010: 273) points out, there are not simply ‘tourists ghettos’ if by these words we mean spaces only of, by and for tourists. Rather, as translocalities, these are spaces in which a variety of Nepalis and a variety of foreigners interact, playing roles (wittingly or otherwise) in a space where multiple imaginations of ‘others’ meet.

Many of those who haunt Thamel dream of getting job opportunities or becoming successful. On the other hand, some of them ‘pursue a dramatic public life-style built around entertainment, leisure, and commercialized/mediated images of sophistication, glamour, and sexuality’ (Liechty 2010: 300–301). Among these locals, who play an important role in developing the consumer society in Kathmandu, middle-class people have started to come to Thamel to enjoy the consumption of culture. This chapter describes how global tourism has affected and interacted with local society in Kathmandu, focusing on the transformation taking place in the tourism space of Thamel.

The tourism space has been created through a process of uneven geographical development. This space is both a relative space onto which the others can project certain images in the context of global tourism, and a physical space in which the fundamental infrastructure and institutions are improved for tourists. The landscape of the space has been transformed through the projection of the identities of the tourists, and this transformed landscape has the potential to lead to the creation of new identities, for example, those of the new middle class. Thamel is a tourism space where the processes of global economic and cultural changes bring about and interact with local social transformation. Under such circumstances, local people themselves politically appropriate and objectify a part of their self-image and reconstruct their identities within the space.

Since Nepal formally opened its doors to the world in the middle of the twentieth century, Kathmandu has become a centre of international trade, mass media, mass tourism, foreign aid and the global labour market. Tourism, which stimulates the economy, has been directly implicated in both the changing nature of place and shaping geographical imaginations and experiences of place on a global scale. Kathmandu now enjoys a full complement of mediated windows onto global consumer modernity, even if Nepal's position on the political-economic periphery guarantees that few Nepalis ever engage the new cultural economy beyond the levels of image, imagination and longing (Liechty 2006: 4). In terms of the transnational flow of goods and people, the most distinctive place functioning as a mediated window onto the global consumer modernity in Kathmandu is the tourism space of Thamel. Many people, including international tourists, come and go with money, cultures, information and goods that attract more people both within and outside Nepal, directly or indirectly, and create new circumstances. In Kathmandu, how have people accepted, resisted or ignored such new circumstances, and how has the tourism space been transformed? To answer these questions is to also consider how local people experience the changes in Thamel, which has been situated on the periphery of the world system on a global scale. This chapter also tries to depict the ongoing process led by the interaction between global tourism and social changes in Thamel.¹

The following chapter briefly outlines the tourism development of Nepal in terms of its having been absorbed into global tourism as a peripheral destination. It describes how tourism spaces have been developed along with the urban development of Kathmandu and shows the characteristics of Thamel compared with other tourism spaces in the city. Then it indicates how and why this transformation has occurred in Thamel, focusing on the commodification of culture and space not for international tourists but for the local middle class. Finally, the chapter concludes that interaction between global tourism and social changes has created, in a sense, Thamel as a space for consumption for the middle classes in Kathmandu.

Outline of the development of tourism in Nepal: changes on geographical images

In the eighteenth century, the western imperial gaze was focused on the Himalayas, and the utopian image of Shangri-La that was superimposed on Tibet came to feed fantasies of the country (Bishop 1989: 191–239). Mystical images of the Himalayas have attracted many westerners, including Blavatsky, who was a founder of theosophy and travelled to India in search of the ancient spiritualism of the East. This was also the time when Alpinism, which started in Europe, reached the Himalayas with the arrival of those seeking to climb the highest mountains in the world. Thus, these mountains have been the most important tourism resource in Nepal. However, as a result of the military ascendancy of the Chinese People's Liberation Army in Tibet following the founding of the People's Republic of China, entry into the Himalayas from the Tibetan side became restricted, especially for western travellers. On the other hand, when Nepal, located mainly on the southern Himalayas, formally opened its doors to the world, elite climbers started to try to climb the Himalayas from the Nepali side. Since a British expedition successfully 'conquered' the summit of Mount Everest in 1953, the Himalayas have been attempted by a steady stream of international expedition teams.

The imagined location of the utopian space of Shangri-La, which had been created in the western Christian view of the world, shifted from Tibet to the Himalayas in Nepal shortly after an uprising in Tibet. This shift came about because the violence contained in uprisings and massacres was not suitable for the utopian space, and also because the Himalayas in Nepal resemble the physical and cultural environment of Tibet (Shrestha 1998). In this way, westerners started to avoid Tibet, instead visiting Nepal to look for something mystical on the Himalayas. The image of Shangri-La, as Liechty states, helped to create the spatial imaginary that launched hundreds of thousands of western youth on 'The Road to Kathmandu' in the 1960s (Liechty 2005: 19). The youth, anti-industrialist and anti-modernist, escaped from their own societies, gathered on Jhochhen, located very near the centre of the ancient city of Kathmandu, and enjoyed hashish. The street was colonially named 'Freak Street' and became a famous paradise for hippies.

In the 1960s, approximately 60 per cent of Nepal's international tourists were from the United States. At that time Kathmandu, as described by Iyer (1988), was like a paradise, emanating a hippie atmosphere for visiting westerners. According to Liechty, 1973 was the turning point for the 'hippie era' in Kathmandu (Liechty 2005: 25): the United States began linking foreign aid to drug suppression programmes, and when King Mahendra died in 1972, his son, King Birendra, decided to take action to end the 'hippie era'. Thus, the Nepali government made cannabis illegal. Furthermore, the oil crises and the end of the Vietnam War in the 1970s brought about a new era in Nepal.

Tourists from non-western countries, including Japan, started to visit the city in the 1980s (Ministry of Culture, Tourism & Civil Aviation 2010), at which

time the Nepali government regarded tourism as one of the most important industries for economic development in Nepal. After the democratisation of Nepal in 1990, the number of tourists increased rapidly and tourism industries developed both qualitatively and quantitatively. Along with democratisation, the government encouraged private entrepreneurs to become involved in tourism industries, and thus the number of private entrepreneurs increased and they started to struggle with intensified competition. Meanwhile, the Nepali government began to target quality tourists, rather than the low-budget tourists who had previously formed the bulk of visitors, by attempting to improve the quality of services and trying to promote investment from the private sector in the Eighth Plan in 1992. As a result, not only budget tourist hotels but also luxury hotels began to open, one after another. In this way, the Nepali government focused on developing mass tourism. The year 1998 was designated as ‘Visit Nepal Year’ by Nepal’s tourism authority (Figure 18.1). In those days, signboards with the words ‘*atithidevo bhawa*’, literally meaning ‘guests are gods’ or ‘the customer is always right’, were seen in many places to raise awareness of tourism among local Nepalis. In the middle of the twentieth century, western people had visited Nepal to seek the mystical images of Shangri-La, where gods might be living; however, by the end of the twentieth century, people in Nepal began to call international tourists ‘gods’, as if they brought fortune, or rather, wealth.

Despite these benefits, rapid development also brought with it serious environmental degradation. In Kathmandu, as the rivers became dirty and the sky became cloudy with exhaust fumes, the image of Shangri-La became incompatible with



Figure 18.1 Signboard of Visit Nepal '98.

the physical environment of the city (Shrestha 1998). Furthermore, because of the political instability arising from the Maoist movement from 1996–2006, the number of tourists declined drastically in the early 2000s (Ministry of Culture, Tourism & Civil Aviation 2010). These factors caused radical changes to tourism in Nepal as the focus of the Shangri-La image shifted once more from Nepal to Bhutan and the Shangri-La prefecture, north of Yunnan province, near ‘original Tibet’ in China. The Nepalese royal massacre in 2001 shocked the world and added to the ongoing decline of tourism in Nepal. This decline was reversed only recently (Figure 18.2) due to the influx of tourists from Asian countries such as China that have experienced economic growth.

While environmental degradation and political instability led to a decline in tourists coming into Nepal, the number of Nepalis going abroad increased rapidly from 1996 (Figure 18.2). One of the reasons for this tendency was that the decline in tourism industries caused bankruptcy and unemployment, as it had in other industries, and the Nepali government had no choice but to encourage its people to work abroad,² since the creation of job opportunities through domestic industries was difficult to achieve under conditions of political instability. As the number of tourists who went abroad started to increase, the number of tourism agencies that began to target Nepalis as customers in manpower businesses also increased rapidly, and Middle Eastern airline services were augmented. Nepal has become well-known as a global periphery sending cheap migrant workers not only to developed countries such as the UK and United States, but also to newly developing countries as Qatar, UAE and Malaysia. Nepalis who return from working abroad and ride on the economic opportunities of this new business become the middle class who can afford to travel both inside and outside Nepal, and, as described later in this chapter, enjoy entertainment such as the consumption of cultures that they might have experienced outside Nepal.

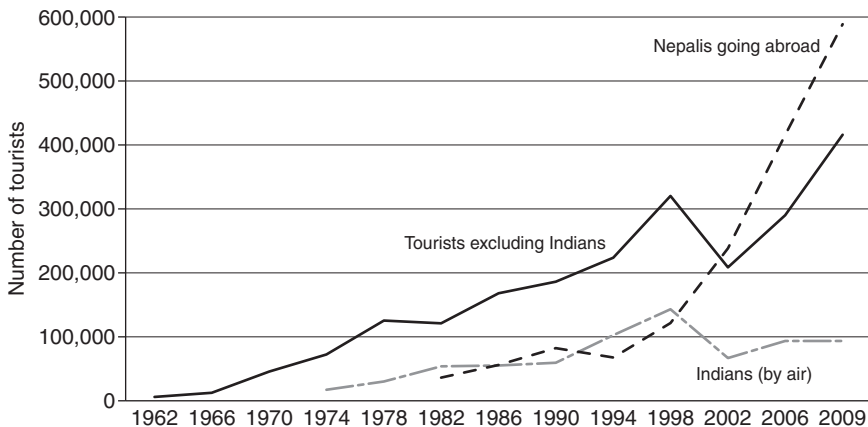


Figure 18.2 The number of tourists in Nepal (source: Nepal Tourism Statistics 200).

Tourism spaces in Kathmandu: the development and spatial segregation

Urban development in Kathmandu

Before King Prithvi Narayan Shah conquered the Kathmandu Valley in 1768, the Newar³ had created a densely populated residential area and developed their community in the valley. To avoid the settlement of the Newar in the centre of Kathmandu, under the rule of the Shah dynasty, Prime Minister Rana's family – who practically seized political power – constructed sprawling, luxurious European-style palaces with white walls, splendid gardens and roads to connect the palaces. In the middle of the twentieth century, the Rana elite introduced and imported not only European-style palaces but also European luxury goods (Liechty 2003: 40–46). The landscapes of the palaces featured huge compounds and green woods. It is possible to say that housing development by the Rana constituted the first urban development in Kathmandu. However, the construction of these palaces and roads led to the more recent unplanned and disordered urban development in Kathmandu (Gallagher 1992: 254).

As the population became concentrated in Kathmandu, the residential area and commercial markets developed accordingly along its roads (Karan & Ishii 1996: 193–194). At the time the palace complex was built, social infrastructure was principally developed around the palaces. Today some of those palaces are used as tourist hotels, shopping malls and government offices, utilising their magnificent appearance and evoking the luxurious life of the Rana. The road constructed during the Rana era is used as a main street. Urban development planning in Kathmandu today is still based on the infrastructure constructed during the autocracy of the Rana, despite the fact that it was not well planned.

Segregation of tourism spaces in Kathmandu

Since the end of the twentieth century, the income generated by tourism in Kathmandu has increased rapidly, although fluctuation has been observed. Total foreign exchange earnings from tourism increased from Rs.3,587.6 million Nepalese in 1990–91 to Rs.27,960 million Nepalese in 2008–09 (Ministry of Culture, Tourism & Civil Aviation 2010). Within the tourism industry, the accommodation sector produces far greater earnings than other sectors. As for the accommodation industry, in the 1980s about 80 per cent of tourist accommodation was located in Kathmandu, as the capital was Nepal's main international gateway. In order to weaken this trend, the Nepali government tried to alleviate the overconcentration of tourism in one area. In 2009, 422 out of 736 (57 per cent) accommodations for tourists were concentrated in Kathmandu (Ministry of Culture, Tourism & Civil Aviation 2010), and even now almost all the first-class hotels are located in Kathmandu.⁴ Thus, it can still be said that the greatest influence of tourism development has been exerted on Kathmandu.

Figure 18.3 shows the distribution of tourist accommodation in Kathmandu Nagarpālikā. Although not all accommodation may be included in the Yellow Pages, and the phone numbers of very small and unstable accommodations are unrecorded, these data are likely to be much more reliable than the official government data, which show 422 accommodations in Kathmandu (Ministry of Culture, Tourism & Civil Aviation 2010), as almost all accommodations in the Kathmandu city area have telephone lines installed, even though they are often operated without being registered.

Tourist accommodations in Kathmandu also tend to be concentrated in particular locales. Each tourist area has its own characteristics, defined by the type of tourists who visit and the historical background of the area. Darbar Marg ('King's Way' in English) is the main street in Kathmandu, and since the mid-twentieth century has been lined with not only four- or five-star hotels, but also exclusive restaurants, fashionable boutiques, international financial companies and airline offices. The hotels along Lajimpat and Kantipat are similar. These areas are characterised by high-quality and large-scale hotels, some of which have been renovated from the old Rana's residences, utilising their magnificent appearances. At the dawn of the Alpinism era in Nepal, well-known mountaineers and explorers who sought a Shangri-La image used to stay at such hotels, the courtyards of which were vast enough to use to make preparations for expeditions. However, even some of those multi-starred hotels were closed when the stagnation of tourism intensified during the recent political instability resulting from the Maoist movement.

In contrast to luxury hotels, tourist accommodation in Jhoche – the traditional residential area of Newars and crowded with western youth during the 'hippie

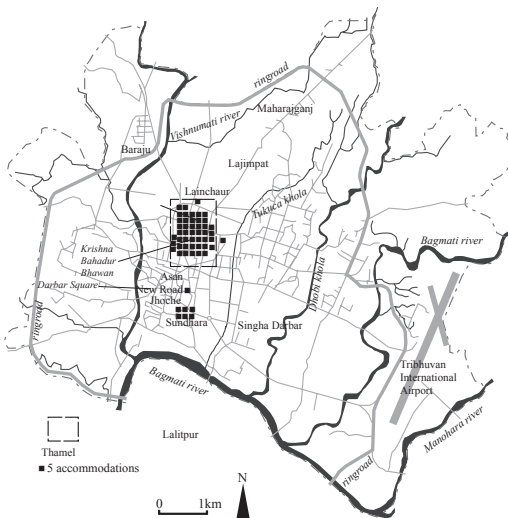


Figure 18.3 Map of tourist accommodation in Kathmandu Nagarpālikā (© Izumi-Morimoto).

era' – is characterised by its low cost. Budget lodges – which were basically flophouses – began operating in the 1960s and 1970s. They had been converted from spare space in the residential houses of Newars, meaning the ceilings were so low that westerners hit their heads on the thresholds. By 1970 there were about 30 shops and cafes specialising in the sale of cannabis (Liechty 2005: 24); almost all of them were closed down and only a few were rebuilt as budget lodges and restaurants, or local residences just as before. Today in Jhoche there are only three guesthouses listed in the Yellow Pages.⁵ People who remembered the old days of Jhoche said that nearly naked western youths used to enjoy marijuana and dancing in front of the temples. Even today the place retains an image of hippie culture, as suggested by a signboard in English with the words 'Freak Street' in Basantapur Darbār, or the words 'Kathmandu Durbar Square' in English on the road leading to Jhoche. Basantapur represents the traditional heart of old Kathmandu, in which there remain a lot of old temples. These temples, in which local people have worshipped for many years, have attracted interest because of their elaborate wood carvings that include erotic scenes, leading westerners travelling the east in search of spiritual enlightenment to refer to them as erotic temples. Today Jhoche's 'Freak Street' – once a paradise for hippies – is well known as a historical holy place.

From the end of the 1960s, low-budget lodges and guest houses started to open in Thamel, the northern part of Kathmandu's downtown, where tourists trying to escape from the hippie atmosphere of Jhoche came to stay. As [Figure 18.3](#) shows, today around 200 accommodations are located in Thamel. In the 1960s, before tourists began to visit Thamel, local people started to buy the old Rana palaces in the area, which they imagined as the residences of rich, modern and upper-class people. The palaces had beautiful chalk walls – although they had grown dirty – high ceilings, plenty of large rooms and beautiful courtyards with fine trees and fountains. Local people said that Thamel, with its large, open spaces, bamboo groves and woods, had been haunted by spirits before the tourists came.

Originally, Thamel was a small settlement of Newars in the north of the Kathmandu city area, built around a Newar Buddhist monastery named Bhagwan Bahal, but also known as Than Bahil in the Newari language, which means 'large Buddhist temple in the upper Kathmandu city area' (Shrestha 1987: 50). This etymology suggests that Thamel, although outside the city, has been attached to the northern half of the city area. The southern part of Thamel was densely populated by Newars, who had been settled there for a very long time. In this sense, in those days Thamel marked a border between the inner core and the outside of the city. During the hippie boom in Jhoche, the area called Thamel was just a single street about 20–30 metres long. In the 1980s, when the boom in mass tourism brought many budget tourists and backpackers to Thamel, this local shift in land use from a residential area to a tourism space created various new opportunities for local people to participate in business activities related to tourism. Thus Thamel came to be known as a business district, and local entrepreneurs started to enter into the tourism industry. Thamel is still the most

remarkable tourism space in Kathmandu; however, the decline in tourism brought many hotels to bankruptcy. While the hotels closed their business, local people, instead of international tourists, began to come to Thamel to enjoy consuming other cultures. This will be described later.

Although tourism was generally declining, in Sundhara hotels appeared like mushrooms, one after another.⁶ As shown in [Figure 18.2](#), from the end of the 1990s tendencies reflecting contemporary society, such as the increase in the number of migrant workers, can be seen in Sundhara. Compared with Thamel, where most of the signboards are written in English or other foreign languages, tourism services in Sundhara appear to target Nepalis who go abroad or come back, and there, unlike in other areas, Nepali *devanāgarī* are conspicuous on signboards. Walking on the streets of Sundhara, one can find many signboards advertising services which include assistance with visa applications, photos for passports, airline tickets, international phone calls/faxes, internet access and money transfers. Also, accommodation in Sundhara is generally of a better quality, with comparatively modern facilities such as TVs and telephone lines for each room. Also, in Sundhara various kinds of entertainments, such as dance restaurants⁷ and *dohorī* restaurants,⁸ can be found that are aimed at Nepalis who are able to afford to participate in the consumption of culture.

As the biggest industry in the world today, tourism has been implicated in shaping geographical imaginations and experiences of place on a global scale. With the process of global tourism development, tourism spaces have been created specifically for tourist consumption through the destruction of existing economic and cultural orders. Thus tourism spaces all over the world have become similar landscapes influenced by the 'tourist gaze' (Urry 1990). Although the space itself no longer exists in its location, it appears everywhere, as Ritzer (2003) points out, through the concept of 'places/non-places' in the realm of social consumption. Observed as a whole, these spaces seem to be similar because of built environments, but each space is intrinsically different, because local people objectify themselves and politically appropriate a part of their self-image to reconstruct their identities in the space interconnected with global tourism. Corresponding to each phase of global tourism development in Nepal, tourism spaces have represented distinctive images, for example a paradise resembling Shangri-La or Freak Street for hippies, a budget tourist area for mass tourism and a centre for migrant workers. In this chapter Thamel will be discussed as a tourism space in the context of consumerism in the contemporary society of Kathmandu.

The creation of the tourism space Thamel

Since the democratisation of Nepal in 1990, Thamel has become one of the busiest areas in Kathmandu because of international budget tourists and local entrepreneurs and their employees. After that time the area expanded and some nearby localities were absorbed into it, so the name Thamel now refers to an area of approximately one square kilometre (see [Figure 18.4](#)).



Figure 18.4 Map of Thamel.

As has been mentioned above, two magnificent old Rana Darbars, Keshar Mahal and Krishna Bahadur Bhawan – both of which are now used as government offices – stand in Thamel (*Figure 18.4*). The latter opened in the mid-twentieth century as the first international hotel in Nepal, before being converted into the government Election Commission Office. There are other Rana palaces with fine botanical gardens in Thamel; however, they are significantly smaller than these two magnificent palaces and were therefore exempt from confiscation by the government following the collapse of the Rana regime in 1951. The fact that there were many Rana palaces in Thamel shows that when tourists started to come to Nepal in the 1950s at least, Thamel was not as densely populated as it is now. Urban infrastructure such as electricity and telephone lines was already available there due to the presence of the palaces inhabited by the Ranas, who were a privileged class until the middle of the twentieth century. Thamel in those days was more modern in comparison with other areas, therefore it was not difficult to provide accommodation services in Thamel for international tourists who demanded modern facilities. Since the 1980s the price of real estate has risen exponentially in Kathmandu. While some Ranas sold land and left the area, local people and many people from outside Kathmandu bought land in Thamel. Many palaces are now used as private residences or as hotels and restaurants for international tourists by people who purchased them from the Ranas.

After 1990, entrepreneurs from various cultural backgrounds came to Thamel to seek opportunities in the tourism industry (Morimoto 2007). Some of these

entrepreneurs started businesses in profitable new fields such as pashmina production, trading companies and manpower businesses. Until the mid-1990s some non-Nepali entrepreneurs from other countries, including Indians, set up their businesses in Thamel.⁹

The increase in the amount of available accommodation intensified competition among the various accommodations and enhanced their quality. In proportion to the increase in business experienced in Thamel, these facilities became insufficient. Therefore they began to prepare candles and torches, operate generators for power shortages, and dig wells and purchase water from water-supply wagons for the safety of the tourists. Although hotel owners now often equip rooms with TVs and telephone lines, with a few even providing air-conditioning and refrigerators, when power shortages occur these utilities become only display pieces. Modernising hotel management by using the internet to enable potential customers to book a room from anywhere in the world also entails an increase in the use of electricity. Since power and water shortages often occur even in Kathmandu, entrepreneurs in Thamel have had to develop infrastructure such as electricity and water supplies independently to provide the modern facilities expected by international tourists. If entrepreneurs do not or cannot afford such investment, their only advantage will be low prices, and they will eventually be driven to close their hotels.

Among the tourist accommodations in Thamel that still exist today, the oldest was opened in 1968. The owner of this guest house has remained successful despite the unfavourable business climate. His parents had previously bought a Rana palace, and he first rented out some of the unused rooms when non-hippie tourists began to appear in the neighbourhood; this was not unusual in the 1960s and 1970s. During the 1970s, there were seven hotels in Thamel. Of these, four were run by owners of Rana palaces who used some spare rooms for tourists (interviews in 1996–97). Since the old Rana palaces had more than enough rooms for private family use and they also had beautiful large gardens suited for hotels or restaurants, neither a large investment nor any knowledge of hotel management was required to enter the hotel industry. The only thing proprietors had to do was to keep the rooms clean and quiet and the hippies at a distance. At this time almost all the hotels and restaurants were near the oldest hotel in Thamel, Kathmandu Guest House,¹⁰ which started with only 13 rooms and expanded to 120, making it the largest hotel in Thamel today (interview with the manager in 1996). The owner's family established three other accommodations, including a resort-type hotel, and the owner became a member of a decision-making organisation for tourism development at the national level. As tourism developed in Nepal, this family acquired new knowledge and business opportunities and developed their entrepreneurship; they remain prosperous today. They benefited from both entering business at the end of the 1960s and already owning a Rana palace with adequate facilities for western tourists. This meant that they had already accumulated enough capital and experience to overcome difficulties before competition intensified.

Another local entrepreneur managed to develop his business by accumulating experience in accordance with tourism development. The man, whose father had

run a restaurant for hippies in Jhoche, expected tourism to develop in Thamel. Therefore, he started a bakery and an Indian restaurant for international tourists. In the 1990s he opened a restaurant that served Thai food as well as developing a resort in southern Nepal. One of his restaurants, which had a magnificent appearance, was renovated from an old building built in the Rana era. In addition, before the decline of tourism in the 2000s he founded a manpower business to make a profit and founded a college as a social enterprise. Since demand in the manpower business did not decrease amid the political instability and slump in the tourism industry, he was able to construct business partnerships with many international entrepreneurs and develop new businesses in some fields.

Since the emergence of the tourism industry in Thamel, successful local entrepreneurs have improved their knowledge and skills in accordance with tourism development or capitalistic industrial development. At first, people could operate accommodations without knowledge and capital, because they were able to capitalise on the existing infrastructure from the Rana era. At that time many European cultural goods, such as fountains in gardens and furniture as interior decor, were imported from Europe by the Ranas. Compared to other areas, Thamel is brightly lit with electricity and images of European cultures. It was not difficult for entrepreneurs to begin to offer services for western tourists in the 1960s when infrastructure had not been developed well even in Kathmandu. In the 1980s, local entrepreneurs who had experienced various industries and learned about capitalism began to enter the tourism industry, leading to competition among them in Thamel. Thus the tourism space of Thamel not only expanded geographically, but also became a commercialised space, including its landscape, in the historical and social context of the society. In this process, Thamel has been transformed from the western modernity introduced by the Ranas to global modernity suitable for mass tourism. Because of the efforts of entrepreneurs, Thamel has been able to improve its infrastructure and equipment. When the government-managed electric power supply stops, the lights of the entrepreneurs will remain on.

Transforming Thamel: the appropriation of tourism

In Thamel and elsewhere in Nepal, the tourism industry remained weak for several years from 2000, and in 2002 the number of visiting tourists (including international tourists and Indian tourists arriving by air) was nearly half what it was in 1999 (Figure 18.2). Against this backdrop, while some entrepreneurs disappeared along with the international tourists, other local people began to become much more visible in Thamel. Because of the decrease in the number of international tourists bringing foreign currency into Nepal, local entrepreneurs were obliged to either alter their businesses or leave Thamel altogether.

The decline of tourism and its influence

A brief history of a hotel which, like many others, closed in 2003 illustrates how entrepreneurs dealt with the situation amid the changes that occurred in the

tourism space of Thamel. Until 1999, the manager of the hotel in which I used to stay ran a hotel in the eastern part of Thamel that had many – primarily western – repeat guests, and was successful. Since the hotel building was rented, the manager had to renew the rental contract with his landlord, who owned the hotel building. But in 1999 he could not renew the contract because the landlord wanted to operate the hotel by himself in order to increase his profits. This was a good time for entrepreneurs in Thamel, as the number of international tourists was increasing. So the manager rented another hotel building in another part of Thamel and opened a new hotel, which he named Hotel California, heeding the advice of an American acquaintance. However, after 1999, the decline in tourism made it difficult for him to make enough profit to pay the rent. To obtain enough income, he sublet one room of the hotel to a massage shop where young women gave massages and most likely other services to male clients.¹¹ As the number of clients who came to the shop increased, the shop began to take up more space in the hotel. In addition, the hotel manager set up a dormitory room in his hotel in order to attract more tourists who sought cheap accommodation. Some of the young tourists who came to stay were absorbed in smoking marijuana, which was easy to get in Thamel. Furthermore, he started to take in male guests accompanied by women, who asked for rooms late at night. After a while the charge for accommodation fell to only about 100 rupees (approximately US\$1.3) per night, which was around one-third of the regular charge for his hotel. The rooms began to smell and became dilapidated, with torn curtains and broken beds and toilets. Also, when the water taps were turned on there was usually no water, and even when there was running water, it was red and harmful to touch. As a result, international tourists rarely stayed at Hotel California, and in 2003 the manager decided to close the hotel and move out of Thamel.

In 2003 this hotel manager opened a travel agency in Sundhara where many hotels opened from the end of the 1990s. His wife, who had been working at another travel agency for a long time, managed this travel agency. When Hotel California was doing well, she had arranged air tickets and tours for international tourists at a travel agency in Thamel. However, as the number of international tourists decreased, local people became her clients instead. Most of them were migrant workers who were going to work abroad. Their numbers increased rapidly (Figure 18.2). Furthermore, middle-class people, who had previously tended to travel by land routes, started to travel by air to avoid traffic strikes caused by the political unrest. In response to this, she tried to shift her target clients from international tourists in Thamel to Nepali tourists in Sundhara. Unfortunately, because of the severe competition among the numerous travel agencies in Sundhara, they had to close the tourist agency operation. After a while, she managed to get her husband a visa to a developed country using her connections with an old client of the hotel, and thus he was able to go abroad to work. She began to make similar arrangements for others wishing to migrate to work overseas. In time such businesses became immensely popular and profitable.

As in this case, because of the stagnation of tourism, some entrepreneurs had to give up their tourism-based businesses and instead work abroad or try their

hand at new businesses, for example, in the manpower business. The above example demonstrates that although entrepreneurs failed in tourism in Thamel, they had alternative options to which they could apply their knowledge and skills. Working abroad and the manpower business both represent opportunities that people have been eager to take up in contemporary Nepali society.

Cultural changes: from ethnic cultures to global cultures

In the 1990s, Thamel was a place that good local girls and boys avoided because strangers, in other words international tourists, roamed the streets. The demand of tourists who came to Nepal to seek ‘Nepalness’ was the main factor behind the transformation of the residential area of Thamel into a tourism space. But the number of tourists decreased, and entrepreneurs had to exploit new business opportunities. Among the entrepreneurs, some targeted local people as their new clients or exploited new demands from them. For example, now local middle-class people come to Thamel to enjoy the consumption of culture, such as ‘exotic’ foods like pizzas, Chinese food, Thai food and Korean food. Foods that were eaten by the international tourists in their home countries are now enjoyed as ethnic foods by Nepalis. On the other hand, ethnic Nepali foods that had been cooked with catsup and fewer chillies to please international tourists have recently diversified into ‘Nepali ethnic foods’, and the number of restaurants like the Thakali¹² *dāl bhāt* restaurants has increased, allowing local people to enjoy the regional and ethnic differences of Nepal. It can be said that Nepali foods are also recognised and recreated in the process of commodification of culture and space.

During the 1990s, professional dancers in ethnic costumes performed various kinds of ethnic dances on the stages of dance restaurants that offered Nepali cuisine and drinks, and loud, live Nepali folk music. Dancers were usually professional and sometimes went abroad to present their cultures. More recently, nightly entertainments such as *dohorī* have become popular on the live stages at restaurants for local people. In these restaurants, masters of ceremonies speak to guests in Nepali because they do not expect their customers to be international tourists, even in Thamel, where the western music on the live stage once overflowed into the streets. When the customers are impressed by the songs sung in Nepali by local singers, some give 1,000 rupee (about US\$13) notes as tips; such sums are very large relative to the GDP per capita in Nepal, which in 2008 was US\$453.¹³

Dance restaurants today are also evening entertainment venues similar to *dohorī* restaurants. Even during nights when there are power outages, such restaurants have bright signboards with words like Tease Me, Masha or Natasha, and loud music coming from inside. The dancers are not always professional. They sway and wind their bodies in time with the music to show them more closely to the clients, who seem to give them a lot of money. Today in Thamel, such dubious dance restaurants are much more conspicuous than those offering classical ethnic dances. In these restaurants, whose numbers have increased

rapidly, female employees usually wear sexy costumes, and sometimes prostitutes stand at the back or walk around the hall and wait for someone to ask for their company. Under such business circumstances, one entrepreneur, who ran several restaurants in Thamel and disliked this moral disorder, said that he stopped employing female staff because people might mistake them for prostitutes, and if they did, his restaurants would fall into disrepute in Thamel.

As for sexual commodification, at the beginning of the 2000s men wearing women's clothing such as tube tops and miniskirts, high-heeled shoes or saris, used to stand as streetwalkers along the streets of Thamel and accost men. This phenomenon became famous, and people began to come to see them; however, the area was raided repeatedly by police, and after a while these men disappeared. The reason why such sexual minorities also came to look for business opportunities in Thamel seemed to be that their organisation was located near Thamel, and the high frequency of unspecified population flow made the space very anonymous. In such anonymous space, drug dealers also appeared, conducting their business on the streets. Not only international tourists, but also, or rather, local youth became good customers of these drug dealers. Generally, local people think the reason for the rise in juvenile delinquency among the local population has to do with the culture that international tourists brought from outside Nepal.

In the past, Thamel was a dubious place for local people, crowded with a lot of strangers from outside Nepal on a quest for paradise. Now it is still a dubious place, but for different reasons: various kinds of commodities, including shady ones, are becoming more prevalent, although this is attractive to some local people. The tourism space has been transformed into a town with bright lights for not only the strangers from outside Nepal but also local middle-class people who can afford this kind of cultural consumption.

Conclusion

This chapter focuses on how people have led their lives and reconstructed the tourism space of Thamel to function as a mediated window that has been peripheralised in the world economy. In accordance with global tourism development in Nepal, local entrepreneurs have enhanced their own knowledge and skills. In other words, they have begun to practise capitalism. At the same time, tourism cultures in Thamel, such as songs, dances and foods, have been created and provided for international tourists. Recently, the tourism culture that tourists have consumed as Nepalness has been appropriated for the consumption of culture by the local middle-class people. Both groups enjoy themselves in the same space, but the former come to consume Nepalness in the context of tourism in Nepal, and the latter come to consume global cultures far distant from Nepal, or something ethnic from inside Nepal. While tourism culture – including the image of Shangri-La and hippie paradise – has been commodified, Thamel is transforming as a tourism space that appropriates these historical images, although local people never think that Thamel is a paradise, but rather a dubious place they

should avoid stepping into. On the other hand, it is the place where local people can experience unusual excitement, in a sense, as if they were outside Nepal. Thamel becomes a place that, according to Ritzer (2003), is everywhere in the world, but no longer exists in its place.

Thamel has been created in the context of global consumption, such as tourism and modernisation in Nepal, and as a space onto which people, both international tourists and locals, can project their own otherness, paradise, 'forbidden' excitement or dreams of success. In the process of transforming Thamel, local people appropriate the tourism culture to reconstruct their ethnic cultures as cultures to be consumed and which bring the space translocality.

Notes

- 1 I began field surveys on tourism development in Thamel in 1995 and have carried out research in the following areas: the history of place-names in the process of regional formation of the tourist area Thamel (Morimoto 1999); the development of local entrepreneurship in accommodation industries in Thamel (Morimoto 2007); and the creation of a tourism space and changes in tourist images of Nepal that local people started to internalise as their own and utilise for themselves (Morimoto 2001, 2009). This chapter is based mainly on these former studies.
- 2 The number of Nepalese going abroad for employment was 255,742 (43.4 per cent) of 588,645 (Ministry of Culture, Tourism & Civil Aviation 2010).
- 3 The Newar, an ethnic group of Nepal, are the indigenous people of the Kathmandu Valley.
- 4 Ten out of the 12 hotels that have four or five stars are in Kathmandu (Ministry of Culture, Tourism & Civil Aviation 2010).
- 5 *Nepal Business Yellow Pages* 2000; *Nepal Business Yellow Pages* 2006.
- 6 In Sundhara there were six hotels in 2000 and 30 in 2006 (*Nepal Business Yellow Pages*), and the author observed around 60 hotels in 2005 and more than 100 in 2009 (field surveys in 2005 and 2009).
- 7 Dance restaurants display various dances on their stages, from traditional ones performed by professional dancers in ethnic dress, to erotic ones by dancers who put on sexy garments, sometimes removing them.
- 8 *Dohorī* is a type of song in which men and women exchange witty improvised verses back and forth. *Dohorī* restaurants provide *dohorī* service on the live stages. Usually guests request singers to sing their favourite songs.
- 9 From 1999 to 2006 there were three Chinese, two Japanese and one South African who registered to operate hotels in Thamel (unpublished data from Nepal Tourism Board).
- 10 According to its home page, Kathmandu Guest House was a Rana mansion converted into a hotel in 1967. Starting with just 13 rooms, it has been slowly nurtured into a sprawling 121-room hotel with more than the required amenities. Today it is reputed to be an internationally acknowledged 'best budget hotel'. It is the first hotel established in Thamel, which is Kathmandu's most popular tourist destination, with the highest concentration of tourism-based service outlets in Asia. www.ktmgh.com/kggh/default.php.
- 11 This kind of shop has become more prevalent in Thamel since the end of the 1990s.
- 12 Thakali, whose *dāl bhāt* has a reputation for being delicious, is an ethnic group from the north-west of Nepal.
- 13 www.imf.org/external.

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19 'Time gentlemen'

Bangalore and its drinking cultures

Aya Ikegame and Crispin Bates

Probably better than anybody else, the serious pub-goers of Bangalore know where the current boundaries of the city lie. This rapidly growing city has been swallowing many surrounding villages, officially and unofficially, as its area has expanded. The poor residents of nearby villages are waiting for the day when their village is included within the Greater Bangalore area and the price of their not-so-productive agricultural lands suddenly shoots up. However, the serious pub-goers will not be so happy because the expansion of the city means they will possibly have to travel even further than before to satisfy their thirst. The habit of going outside of the city to drink began when the city authority introduced a series of restrictions on alcohol consumption within the city boundary. Currently the pubs, clubs and bars have to close at 11 p.m. sharp. Surprisingly, this rule has been efficiently enforced by the police. While visiting the city's famous clubs, we often encountered policemen coming to make sure that the club was closing. Drinkers do not mind this at all; if they have the energy, they simply drive their cars or bikes (it is hoped that some of them are still sober) out of the city to continue drinking. There are numerous venues that have been established just outside the boundary for this purpose. On New Year's Eve of 2006, the city authority went so far as to entirely close the city centre M.G. Road to all business and traffic in order to prevent the recurrence of a street party that had spontaneously erupted there the previous year. Again, the young middle classes of Bangalore were well prepared: many discos outside of the city boundary offered attractive all-night parties and sold tickets in the city centre well in advance. M.G. Road was dead on that day, but there were many people enjoying themselves elsewhere.

In May 2008, over 180 people lost their lives as a result of consuming illicit alcohol in the border areas of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. At least 80 of them were from slum areas of Bangalore and another 30 from rural suburbs outside of the city. The Congress party immediately condemned the BJP government for banning the legal manufacture and sale of arrack in the state, which they held to be the cause. The newly elected chief minister, Y.S. Yediyurappa, was the architect of this ban on arrack in July 2007. Such so-called hooch tragedies seem to arise regularly in India, while the number of deaths is often especially high following the introduction of regulations restricting drinking. Gujarat, the only

remaining dry state in India, has come under special criticism on these grounds, with the horrific casualties from illegal liquor consumption in recent years attracting profound criticism and the scorn of licit distillers elsewhere in India.¹

Drinking in India has always been an extremely contentious issue. Christian missionaries encouraged a policy of temperance, while the army in cantonment cities such as Bangalore fortified its troops with copious quantities of spirits. Giving up drinking was considered to be one of the ways in which lower castes could claim higher status in the varna hierarchy. Gandhi added to this 'Sanskritising' behaviour a sense of patriotism, since alcohol was a major source of income for the colonial state (Carroll 1976). Unfortunately, the excise duty on alcohol remained an extremely important source of income for post-independence state governments, accounting for more than 20 per cent of tax revenues in most states. Inheriting as it did both the nationalist (or Gandhian) moral agenda and the financial structures of the colonial era, the postcolonial state has had to play a seemingly contradictory role.

Some states tried to introduce a total prohibition on alcohol sales, but most of them failed to continue this, with the exception of Gujarat. However, adopting a moral stance while meeting financial demands is not necessarily a contradictory aim. After all, it is all about controlling people's moral and bodily practices. The southern states have thus all of them now banned the sale of arrack, a typical working-class drink, on the grounds of health and family welfare, while encouraging the sale of Indian-made foreign liquor (IMFL), a more middle-class drink, which happens to be centrally distributed. This is a clear example of how the state has endeavoured to exercise moral authority while controlling and collecting excise revenues more efficiently. Earlier, toddy liquor was banned for similar reasons.

Studies on alcohol in general have been dominated by the disciplines of biology, public health, social policy and social psychology, which have tended to regard alcohol consumption as a question of individual pathology (addiction) or as a social problem leading to alcohol-related violence, family neglect and various other problems. Anthropological studies, especially functionalist approaches, on the other hand, have tended to emphasise the socially integrative role of drinking (Heath 1987: 105, Dietler 2006: 230). Here, drinking alcoholic beverages has been understood as normal social behaviour and even as crucially important for its socially integrative role (see, for example, Douglas 1987). However, anthropologists have notably neglected the political and economical aspects of drinking, as observed by Singer (1986), and it is only recently that socio-cultural anthropology has begun to examine historically sensitive issues concerning how alcohol is deployed within the micro- and macro-politics of society. It is noticeable, furthermore, that the wealth of studies on the social meanings of food in India (for example, Dwyer 2004, Osella 2008) have tended, delicately, to avoid the issue of alcohol altogether.

There are relatively few academic studies concerning alcohol in India, but historians have contributed immensely. Lucy Carroll (1976) has demonstrated the clear connections between nineteenth-century temperance movements in the

west and the Gandhian agitation for prohibition, which had otherwise often been regarded a uniquely Indian process of ‘Sanskritisation’ or a pure product of anti-colonial nationalism. David Hardiman (1987), on the other hand, has shown how the avoidance of alcohol in India might have had an agenda of its own, entirely unrelated to the temperance advocacy of missionaries or that of Gandhian nationalists. This agenda sought to release subaltern groups from the thrall of exploitative liquor dealers and moneylenders, and conceived of self-improvement in indigenous, but neither Christian nor Sanskritic, terms. These historical contributions have shown how intimately the consumption of alcohol is linked to power and politics, and that moralising about alcohol has commonly been adapted and interpreted in ways that suit purely material self-interests. This is perhaps most vividly illustrated by the fate of the Gandhian temperance campaign of the 1930s and 1940s, which enjoyed total and complete ideological and political acceptance at the dawn of independence, but was almost entirely abandoned over the course of the subsequent three decades. However, even half a century after Gandhi’s death, it seems that the social and political economy of drink cannot escape from the rhetoric of morality and temperance, and even perhaps demands it in order to legitimise specific practices. Thus, as alcohol consumption has diversified and increased, the discourse of abstinence has been re-born in new forms which echo the growth in inequality, new political agendas and the changing class divisions within Indian society.

The moral, economic and political tensions arising from the political economy of alcohol consumption are nowhere more intensely felt than within the confines of Indian cities. It is within Indian cities that we see most vividly the segregation of the drinking public in class terms being enacted within spatial terms as well. This is perhaps most dramatically apparent in India’s most modern metros, where whole zones of shopping malls, five-star hotels and nightclubs have become no-go areas for poorer and less prosperous city residents. This chapter focuses on this phenomenon specifically within the city of Bangalore, the IT capital of India, one of the fastest growing cities in Asia, and the capital city of the state of Karnataka, which has also, incidentally, become a gateway for the entry of the Hindu nationalist BJP into the south of India.

You are what you drink: the social stratification of alcohol in India

The types of alcohol that people consume and their consumption patterns are unique in India. Beer, for example, is the most popular alcoholic beverage in most parts of the world, but in India it occupied only 16 per cent in volume terms and 2.4 per cent in absolute alcohol terms of the total alcohol consumption in the early 2000s. The per capita consumption of beer is thus a mere 0.55 litres in India, while the world average is 23 litres (NIMHANS 2003: 22). The unpopularity of beer in India is mainly due to the relatively heavy tax on beer compared to other types of liquor. Since the tax levies are not based on alcohol content, but on volume, people tend to go for ‘value for money’ drinks which contain more

alcohol. Recently efforts have begun to produce wine on a larger scale in India, but much of it is exported (e.g. Maharashtra 'champagne') to the Middle East. The amount of wine consumed in India itself is still negligible.

One of the major categories of alcoholic beverage sold in India are the so-called IMFLs. This type of liquor, with its rather confusing name, is labelled and sold differently as whisky, rum, brandy, gin, vodka and so on, according to the colour, flavour and perfume artificially added to it. Despite their various labels, the bulk of IMFL drinks are nothing but rectified spirit distilled from molasses, a by-product of sugar. Situated in the middle of sugar cane cultivation with abundant water from Kaveri, southern Karnataka is an ideal location and one of the largest centres for alcohol production in India. The other major alcohol-producing states are Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh (NIMHANS 2003: 21). Punjab, Haryana, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka are also major centres for the industrial brewing of beer: an activity commonly linked to the location of military cantonments.

While IMFL is the favoured drink of the urban middle classes, the rural population and urban working classes prefer to drink arrack (otherwise called country liquor). In the nineteenth century, arrack could be made from distilled toddy (also known as *thalakka*, *thari*, *silpi*, *feni* and *kallu*), which is the fermented juice of the Palmyra or coconut palm (NIMHANS 2003: 7). Formerly a household activity, legal arrack is presently distilled from molasses on an industrial scale.

The system of centralised distillation was first introduced by the British in the nineteenth century. The Abkari commission of 1869 proposed a system that was intended to produce more spirits at a cheaper price than the village distilleries while simultaneously increasing the revenue from excise duties (NIMHANS 2003: 12–13). The central distillery system was originally intended to meet the demands for consumption within military cantonments but gradually monopolised the market in general throughout India. Under this system, pure spirit was distilled from sugar cane under licence. Initially the entire production process was handled in government-owned distilleries, but this proved unprofitable. It was therefore later developed into a two-tier system of distilling: the privately owned and licensed primary distillers who produced arrack, and the secondary distillers who refined arrack and turned it into different flavoured liquors. The major manufacture of alcohol was thus centralised, with the less refined arrack meeting the demands of poorer consumers, and wealthier consumers (including the military) imbibing the output of the secondary distillers. Many villagers and tribal populations continued producing their own alcoholic beverages, such as *mahua* (fermented flowers, drunk as beer or distilled), toddy and *neera* (extracted sap of palms), but this is generally discouraged as it lies outwith the government licensing and taxation system. To inhibit unlicensed production and sale, state governments have latterly introduced centralised systems for the wholesale distribution of IMFL and arrack, with only authorised retailers being permitted to purchase from this source and on condition that they buy nowhere else. What kind of alcohol a person consumes, and where, has thus become a key indicator of her/his social positioning in terms of class, caste, gender and occupation.

Drinking in Bangalore

The space of IMFL

In 2007 and 2009, we conducted a number of interviews with people who were drinking in bars or clubs in central Bangalore. We also interviewed one of the IMFL makers in Karnataka and visited their factory, and interviewed sales staff from the leading beer producer in the city. We visited dozen of clubs, most of which had a restaurant area, disco or lounge-bar. This type of bar has become very popular in Bangalore city centre and they are often situated in shopping malls rather than in five-star hotels, which are more common places for drinking in other cities such as New Delhi or Kolkata. We also visited a couple of clubs in outer suburban areas, where many call centres, IT offices and BPO centres are located. The customers of the clubs we visited were mostly middle class, especially professionals in their twenties and thirties. Not all of them were so-called ‘corporate types’, but the majority were wealthy enough to pay an entrance fees as high as Rs. 500, which (at this level) usually included a single cocktail within the price. We also visited slightly cheaper pubs where male university students shared huge pitchers of beer and sung American rock songs together, or where young migrants from the north-eastern states hung around together seeking respite from their hard working lives.

We met a group of men in their mid-twenties who were drinking in a lounge-bar on M.G. Road on a Sunday. One man was from Simla, HP, and working for a Bangalore branch of the real-estate giant Landmark. He said that they had been at the same bar for four consecutive days and explained to us where he typically went and what kind of alcohol he drank.

(Real-estate man): In Bangalore, the happening days are Wednesday and Saturday. People want to have a party in mid-week [on Wednesday] and week-end [Saturday nights]. Sunday is rest. We can drink till 11.00 in the city. After that we go out of the city in order to carry on drinking. Typical places are one near the new airport and another one in Mysore-Bangalore road. It takes 30 min to get there. It is a pain, but we can then enjoy till morning. I normally drink brandy, vodka [although he was drinking beer at that time]. Beer is just for socialising. I won’t get high. To get high, I drink brandy or vodka. I don’t drink wine, because you have to drink it a lot to get high.

The pattern he described was a six-day working week, which he maintained could not be endured without a mid-week break. This was a common practice, he insisted, and this did indeed seem to be the case as the clubs were relatively quiet on the remaining days of the week.

The real-estate man told us that his favourite bars were Zero G, Hint and Spin, where he said teenage girls hung around at the weekend. (This was probably, however, sheer bravado, as we went to Spin at the weekend but could not

find any such girls.) His friend was an Indian army captain from Rajasthan who was visiting an army base in Bangalore for a few days. They went to college together and had kept in touch since.

(Army man): I am just visiting my old friend working in Bangalore. I am going back to Delhi tomorrow. In the Army canteen, alcohol is very cheap. It depends on the state, but a bottle of Scotch costs only about Rs.60. Outside, it will be Rs.200. Yes, I earn less than my friend [real-estate man] but if you think about stability and the benefits I am receiving, it is not bad at all.

Many people to whom we talked in bars and clubs were in groups of friends and occasionally among work colleagues. They were college classmates, flat-mates, friends of friends and so on. It was quite surprising to see how many of them maintained intimate relationships outside of kin networks and in ways that were unrelated to their workplace. Many of them were not even from the same state.

The general image of pubs in Bangalore is negative. The local newspapers and tabloid magazines published in Kannada regularly report awful things going on in pubs. The pub appears in popular discourse as a place where gangs and politicians organise 'sex parties' with call-girls (serviced apartments have acquired a similar reputation). The image of the pub is thus as bad as the brothel, if not worse. When we planned to visit The Beach, a popular club in Indiranagar, a middle-class residential area where many BPO and IT companies have their offices, it was not easy to find an auto-rickshaw driver willing to take us there. We finally found one, but he was still very reluctant. Even when we offered to raise the price significantly, he said, 'Madame, it is a bad place. You should not go.' With this reluctant driver, we eventually went to Indiranagar and asked a local resident for directions. We could hear this apparently middle-class gentleman telling our driver in Kannada not to take these people to the place. 'It is a real shame we have such a place in this locality,' he said. The driver came back and said, 'See, I told you so.' However, perhaps due to its location in a residential area, we found the club to be full of friendly, relaxed, well-behaved people, including many office workers. There were even several families enjoying their dinner in the restaurant area. From talking to the several patrons, we concluded that this pub was conspicuously one frequented by friends who had come from all over India, and who had met through flat-sharing. Almost like students. They only thing they had in common was that they had travelled far from home to Bangalore to seek work. The music was loud, but the club was too crowded for people to dance; instead people added to the noise through spirited and energetic conversation.

The largest nightclub we visited was on Residency Road and situated on the top floor of an office block. In common with other larger establishments, the club served food (in this case not very good food) and this particular club had several bars, including one in an outdoor area where there was a half-empty

swimming pool. There was more than one group of young women from the north-east (chaperoned by a couple of men), who sensibly stuck together. Many clubs have a couples-only policy, which leads to some amusing negotiations outside the entrance as young men and women agree who is going to pretend to be with whom. This club had no such policy. It was the only club where there was clear evidence of drunkenness and where there was any significant number of foreigners. The hedonistic excesses were led by a group of American youths who enjoyed throwing each other into the pool. Club staff occasionally drenched the crowd with a fire hose. There was no dancing and the young Indian patrons did not stay for long.

By contrast, clubs such as Hint, which is located on top of a major shopping mall just off M.G. Road, had a determined couples-only policy, the patrons were more mature and they were very much focused on the dance floor, which dominated the establishment. Taika, located atop another eerily dark shopping mall on M.G. Road, similarly opened soon after the shops were closed. They had a bar and a small lounge area where food was served, but the club-goers were entirely focused on the professional-looking dance floor. Here, the young clientele turned out to listen to house, trance and heavy bass dance music, played by guest DJs, and were serious about their business. Alcohol consumption was light.

Perhaps the least hedonistic establishment of all was Fuga, which was located in Ashok Nagar, not far from Sacred Heart Girls' High School, the Good Shepherd Convent, Bishop Cotton and other elite private schools. This was an extremely new, spacious, and modern nightclub, cleanly decorated and serving excellent food. It was decidedly quiet, however, and we noticed that the clientele included several groups of middle-class teenage girls, evidently out to enjoy a 'nightclub' experience, who were accompanied by their fathers. Non-alcoholic cocktails seemed to be the order of the day here.

We noted that in several clubs the most popular drink was the 330ml bottle of Kingfisher beer, which was drunk directly from the bottle. The popularity of this drink was further confirmed to us by conversations with brewery sales staff. Drinking directly from the bottle no doubt looked cool, but as explained to us by the drinkers in one bar, it was also was the cheapest drink available, which you could easily carry around without spilling, and which could be made to last a long time. Often just a single bottle would be consumed per person during the evening, and groups commonly clubbed together to buy the round, with one or two men being delegated to attend the bar. Unlike a glass, no-one could see when the bottle was empty, and you were spared the expense of a second trip to the bar or (worse still) the embarrassment (for women) of having to ask a man to buy you another drink. In other words, the consumption of beer was a pre-eminently social activity. Where cocktails were consumed, this was commonly included in a relatively higher entrance fee for the club. Only in one bar did we notice any enthusiasm for people to buy a second or third cocktail, and this was in the centrally located 13th Floor lounge club, which was exclusively a drinking establishment.

Bars and night clubs in the centre were generally patronised by wealthier sections within the middle classes, especially young professionals working within the BPO and IT sectors. Lower-middle-class youth, by contrast, tend to avoid drinking in such establishments on a regular basis, preferring to consume alcohol in local bars, restaurants and dhabas, which they consider more affordable and 'more welcoming' (Nisbett 2007: 944). Below this there lies another level of drinking dens, including roadside liquor and arrack stalls and less salubrious backroom bars in poorer areas, which are clearly entirely off-limits to the middle classes of all sorts. Thus what you drink and where you go to drink is strongly related to social status.

The space of arrack

To find arrack shops in Bangalore in the first instance is not easy, but once you find one, you will see that they are everywhere. The typical arrack shop (*sarai angadi* in Kannada) in the city centre is literally a bare concrete box with an open window. On the window, there will be a huge stack of arrack in plastic sashes (*paketto sarai*) and a grumpy-looking man waiting for the customers. They are often situated on a back street in busy commercial areas. One we visited was in an area of town where the residents are largely artisans and either Muslim or Christian (hence inevitably poorer). Access was via a narrow, smelly, muddy street off the main road, which was used as a rubbish dump. The shop had a long, empty concrete counter; it was late evening and there were men sitting on the ground outside, presumably exhausted from their day's work and the liquor they had just consumed. It was altogether an unappealing environment. Another nearby was more salubriously located on a street corner, but it was similarly barren. These are not social spaces, but places where people buy a drink, consume it quickly and leave (provided they have the strength).

There are said to be 1,116 arrack sales points in the city.² We were very eager to spend more time visiting arrack shops and talking to people there but were discouraged from doing so. The timing was probably too sensitive (just one month before the banning of the sale of arrack), and being a woman and a foreigner did not help either. We were fortunate though to talk to an IMFL manufacturer in Bangalore who did their own 'fieldwork' on arrack drinkers. When we visited their office in central Bangalore in May 2007, people were excited about the prospect of the ban on the sale of arrack. They were certain that the ban would bring more profits to the IMFL makers in the state (which it did). They were energetically preparing to expand their business into the 'lower segment' of the market. To research their market, they sent their 'boys' to arrack shops and invited customers to a table set up by the manufacturer where they were asked about their preferences regarding IMFL.

One member of the family who owned the distillery, who joined this 'fieldwork', enthusiastically explained to us what he found:

They [the customers at arrack shops] are mostly construction workers, drain cleaners, etc., who need physical strength to work. They start drinking in the

morning before they go to work and drink 5 or 6 times a day. They don't spend any time in the shop, just ask '60 koDi [give me 60 ml]' and quickly swallow it at one gulp. It was interesting to hear what was said when I asked a man about his favourite IMFL. He said he likes drinking rum during the summer which is quite opposite to what we conventionally think. Our sale of rum drops during the summer because it is considered to be a hot drink and makes you hot. But he said that he likes it because his body becomes hot and he feels all the tiredness goes away. Another interesting thing was that they don't prefer gin because of its colourlessness. They are sceptical of liquor shopkeepers if the liquor does not have any colour, as they would not then notice when the shopkeepers add water to it. When they are in the shop, those who could not afford to buy any nuts or snack or pickles, they just take some salt (which is free) and lick it and leave.

He observed the arrack drinkers very carefully to the extent that he noticed one drinker, while licking salt, threw a glance at the poster of a sexy girl. He concluded that 'we need to have a sexy poster too' to advertise their drink. The distillers decided also that they needed to supply IMFL in very small bottles (possibly PET bottles) to meet the demand from this segment of the market. This was because unless the drink was in a sealed container, the typical arrack drinker would not trust the quality (hence the popularity of plastic sashes). At the same time, they would only buy in one go as much as they could consume on the spot.

Another employee of the manufacturer, who used to supply arrack, was the man who organised this 'fieldwork'. He told us that arrack manufactures (first distillers) will not lose much money after the ban since most of them were already producing IMFL, while the IMFL manufacturers (second distillers) will profit from it because their sales will extend further into the lower segment of the market. However he also said:

The 99 percent of licensed arrack shop owners will suffer. Currently licence renewal costs 4 to 5 lakhs per year, but if it is an IMFL liquor shop, they have to pay nearly twice, around 8 to 9 lakhs. Also in order to get a new IMFL shop licence you need 15 lakhs. Most of them cannot afford. Moreover, the number and area of IMFL liquor shops are severely limited. The government made clear that they were not going to pay any compensation to the arrack shops. Most of them will have to change their job.

Estimates of the number of people who were involved in the licensed arrack trade vary greatly. Prior to the ban on the sale of arrack, various organisations, such as the Arya Idigara Sangha (Toddy Tapper Caste Organisation) and Sarayi Maratagara Karmika Sangha (Union of Workers Selling Arrack), organised large rallies in several locations in the state. They claimed that the ban would throw over 500,000 (five lakh) people on the streets and would affect the livelihood of over one million (ten lakh) people.³ One report quoted a government officer as saying that around 120,000 people were in the trade and almost all of them have

turned to the illicit liquor business (Jayaramiah 2008). The Karnataka government subsequently promised to rehabilitate people who were employed in the arrack business under various schemes of the industries' departments.⁴ However, it is not known how effectively the government implemented these schemes for the rehabilitation of arrack workers and succeeded in preventing them from going underground.

The space of illicit alcohol

An interesting variation on the consumption of illicit alcohol is to be found in lower-middle-class areas of Bangalore, such as the commercial streets of Malleshwaram. Here, the arrack shop was not to be found, but the cost of pure IMFL was still prohibitive. Shops selling alcohol would commonly therefore sell beer and a limited variety of IMFL bottles at the front of the shop, but patrons would also be allowed to drink a glass on the premises. And at the back of the shop there was a section displaying bottles bearing the labels of imported brands such as 'Johnny Walker' and 'Smirnoff'. This was all arrack under another name and probably also included illicitly distilled alcohol. The taste was not dissimilar to surgical spirits. Customers here commonly drank a single glass of spirits and then left, or brought with them bottles which they asked to be filled, presumably at rock-bottom prices. It is widely known that primary sugar cane distillers produce spirits on the sly, in excess of the amount they declare and legally sell onwards to the IMFL manufacturers (who further distil, flavour and bottle it). This liquor is commonly described as 'seconds' (tax-evaded liquor) and amounted to almost two and half times the amount of IMFL legally sold in 1999–2000 (Government of Karnataka, quoted in NIMHANS 2003: 2).⁵ It is presumed that this is one typical manner in which this illegal product is provided with an outlet.

Entirely illicit production and the production of 'seconds' liquor is difficult to separate. Because it is not taxed, it sells for considerably less than the retail prices for arrack and IMFL that are set by the state. Combined, it is believed that 'undocumented consumption' amounts to considerably more than 40 per cent of total alcohol consumption (NIMHANS 2003: 2).

There are a variety of spaces where illicit alcohol is manufactured and consumed. Toddy tapping has been banned in most parts of all four southern states for decades, but coconut and palm farmers insist that toddy is a traditional food item, nutritious and healthy and beneficial for poor farmers.⁶ The toddy tappers are often rivals to the arrack shop owners, even though they are commonly from the same caste, since both are competing for the same customers at the lower end of the market.

The sample survey in Karnataka conducted by the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS)⁷ shows that 34.1 per cent of women who drink said that their preferred place for drinking is 'at home' and 22.0 per cent said 'on the street or lonely places' followed by 'in a pub, bar or arrack shop' (20.7 per cent). Among men who drink, 35.9 per cent said they

liked to drink 'in a pub, bar or arrack shop', 19.7 per cent preferred 'at the counter of the liquor shop', 19.4 per cent said 'on the street or lonely places', and only 5.3 per cent specified 'at home' as their preferred place for drinking. This clearly indicates that spaces for drinking are highly gendered. Although we observed more middle-class women drinking than ever before in public pubs or clubs in Bangalore, the majority still drink in private. The preference of women for drinking in private appears to be a reflection of both the traditional morality which Indian women are supposed to uphold and the anticipation of the possible danger that Indian women may encounter if they drink in public. Although the tendency to drink in private makes them vulnerable in other ways, for women, going to a male-dominated bar or arrack shop is still unthinkable. At the same time, for women, buying illicit hooch to drink at home is distinctly more accessible, since a large majority of the hooch sellers are women, and they often visit towns and villages to sell their produce during the daytime (NIMHANS 2003: 25).

Consumption of illicit hooch is strongly related to poverty (Manor 1993). Although the manufacturing cost of arrack was cheap, the excise levied on arrack still made it more expensive than illicit hooch. After the banning of arrack in Karnataka, it is difficult to imagine that these vulnerable sections within society would move (as hoped) towards the consumption of more expensive IMFLs. They simply could not afford it.

The advertising space

The advertising of alcohol in India is extremely restricted. Pictures of bottles of alcohol cannot be shown on any advertising material except on the internal and external walls of bars, liquor shops and pubs. It is not even permitted to specify that what has been advertised is alcohol. Since the only thing that is allowed is advertisement of the brand name, alcohol ads in India often look extremely abstract. The Bangalore distiller with whom we conducted interviews told us about their efforts to increase their 'presence' in the market by promoting the names of their various brands. They once managed to persuade a Kannada filmmaker to place their whisky in one of the scenes of a film. Since they co-funded the film, the director agreed to do so. This rather familiar technique of product placement was, however, immediately noticed by the state film board of censors, and the filmmaker was told to remove the scene in which a whisky bottle had been prominently displayed. The film was a suspense thriller featuring a Kannada superstar Vishnuvardhan, who died in 2009 at the age of 59, but it did not have much success, just like the hundreds of other Kannada films that are shown in the theatres for a few weeks and then disappear. In the giant billboard of the film alongside the highways, we could recognise the small trademark of the whisky they were promoting, but it was probably too small for most people to notice.

While small distillers are struggling to sell their brand image, India's largest alcohol manufacturer, the United Breweries group (UB group), could easily fill

public spaces with images of their alcohol products. The United UB group owns the largest private airline in India, which bears the name of their best selling beer, Kingfisher. The chairman of the UB group, Vijay Mallaya, also owns an Indian Premier League cricket team based in Bangalore, called Royal Challengers, which resembles the name of their blended whiskey and lager beer, Royal Challenge. His lavish parties, his liveried and 'personally selected' airline hostesses, his enthusiastic promotion and funding of an Indian Formula One racing team and occasional patriotic acts such as successfully bidding at an international auction for the sword of Tipu Sultan in 2004, and for the private belongings (including spectacles) of Mahatma Gandhi in 2009, have all contributed to keeping his image constantly in the media. Even his political ambitions probably have as much to do with the selling of his products via his media presence as they do with a desire to influence and manipulate political situations to the benefit of alcohol producers. In June 2010, he was elected an MP of the Rajya Sabha as an independent candidate for the second time. He allegedly paid 30 or 50 crore rupees to the JDS (Janata Dal Secular) to ensure their support (later the BJP decided to support him as well) despite the fact that he never attended a single discussion in parliament on the previous occasion that he was elected as an MP.

The advertising of alcohol is largely centred around the image of a new urban lifestyle, and particularly emphasises its consumerist tendencies. Parties, short skirts, seaside beaches, sunglasses, white jackets, catchphrases like 'the King of Good Times' (a catchphrase for both Kingfisher and Vijay Mallaya himself), all contribute to create the atmosphere of a relaxed but highly stylised social space. Even the advertisements in regional languages follow the same trend. A recent Kannada advertisement said '*tenshion yaake, saakashtu stailu* (Why do you feel tension? It is full of style)', alongside a large picture of two popular Kannada film stars walking in a relaxed posture in white suits with black sunglasses. The image of two successful men with a hint of underground gang culture suggests what the Kannada-speaking lower-middle classes most associate with drinking. It is something they might aspire to be a part of, while at the same time they morally despise it.

Morality and profits

As the Gandhian/nationalist enthusiasm for the implementation of a national policy of total prohibition gradually faded in the mid-1960s and slow economic growth pressurised government budgets, many states began to abandon their restrictive policies towards alcohol consumption (Reddy & Patnaik 1993: 1060–1061). Mysore (present-day Karnataka) was the first state to give up their partial prohibition in 1964, and other states soon followed.

Some scholars have cynically noted that this relaxation of prohibition may have been related to the growing influence of criminal elements among India's political elite (Reddy & Patnaik 1993: 1062). However, the cause of prohibition has also been supported by criminal elements in Karnataka. The state became infamous for a violent attack on the Amnesia pub in Mangalore (400 km west of

Bangalore) in January 2009, which especially targeted women drinkers. This attack was organised by a supposedly hardline Hindu and local nationalist organisation, the Sri Ram Sene, and was pre-advertised to the press so that journalists could be present to film the event. Pramod Muthalik, the national president of the Sri Rama Sene, a former member of the RSS and once a local leader of the Bajrang Dal in Mangalore, told *The Indian Express*:

We do not encourage pub culture. The girls were half-naked and dancing with the youths who were drunk. We also received information that they were all drug addicts.... Sene has respect for the women of this country. That is the reason we attacked the pub to save the girls from the clutches of bad forces.⁸

Pravin Valke, another founding member of the Sri Rama Sene, expressed his outrage in similarly misogynistic terms:

These girls come from all over India, drink, smoke, and walk around in the night spoiling the traditional girls of Mangalore. Why should girls go to pubs? Are they going to serve their future husbands alcohol? Should they not be learning to make chapattis? Bars and pubs should be for men only. We wanted to ensure that all women in Mangalore are home by 7 p.m.⁹

Women wearing sleeveless kurtas in Bangalore were targeted around the same time, and there was talk of organised demonstrations against the celebration of Valentine's Day. The Mangalore incident highlighted the reactionary shift in Karnataka politics since the BJP came to power in the state. This has seen a growth in support for another self-appointed guardian of the nation's morals, the Bajrang Dal: the militant youth wing of the Sangh Parivar.¹⁰ Unsurprisingly, the state government denied any links between these events and the Bajrang Dal while refusing to prosecute the leadership of the Sri Rama Sene for their involvement. The incident, however, successfully brought to light the evident resentment felt by many elements in urban Karnataka, consisting principally of young men who have failed to benefit from the rising prosperity within the cities and are reacting against the conspicuous consumption associated with it. Unfortunately, the moral stance of the Sri Rama Sene has been entirely discredited by an exposé in *Tehekha* magazine, which has proved that the Sri Rama Sene are willing to organise a violent demonstration anywhere for an appropriate fee, regardless of the victim or who was likely to benefit (Sanjana 2010).

The demand for the banning of the sale of arrack was initiated on rather higher moral grounds by women's movements in rural areas of south India. Especially in Andhra Pradesh, low-caste women, and especially Dalit women within villages, organised themselves with the assistance of political parties such as the CPI (M), CPI (ML) and Telugu Desam Party (TDP) to campaign against liquor drinking.¹¹ These newly assertive and often educated low-caste women claimed that their communities were the constant victims of domestic violence

and burdened with heavy debts because of the drinking habits of their husbands. They considered arrack as 'a social evil' and campaigned to force thousands of arrack outlets to close (Reddy & Patnaik 1993, Sarveswara Rao & Parthasarathy 1997). It is widely believed that the popularity of the TDP leader N.T. Rama Rao (NTR) was partly due to the fact that he strongly supported these women's cause and promised them he would introduce prohibition in the state (Vyasulu 1998: 877).

To call for the banning of arrack or the introduction of prohibition is always extremely popular in India, where temperance is associated with respectability, purity, patriotism and self-improvement. In Andhra Pradesh, the cause of women campaigning against alcohol was strongly supported by left-wing politicians, campaigning 'on behalf of' the poor. In Karnataka, women's groups such as Stree-Shakti and other organisations demanding the banning of arrack were strongly supported by religious seers, powerful Lingayat *mathas* (monasteries) and Hindu nationalist politicians of the ruling Bharatiya Janata party within the state.

Before the ban, arrack contributed nearly Rs.2,000 crore to state revenues during the financial year 2006–07. This was second only to the income from commercial taxes¹² and comprised 60 per cent of the entire excise revenue (a total of 3,414 crore rupees). It was said therefore that the introduction of the ban in July 2007 would cause a loss of between Rs. 1,800 crore and Rs. 1,900 crore.¹³ Prior to the introduction of the ban, the then deputy-chief minister-cum-finance minister Yediyurappa (who went on to become chief minister in May 2008) initiated various reforms in the alcohol industry. The Karnataka State Beverages Corporation Ltd started supplying IMFL directly to retailers and has not renewed the licences of wholesale dealers who were gaining a 5 per cent commission for providing this service.¹⁴ Simply by removing private wholesale dealers, the state government expected to increase excise revenues by 150 crore rupees.

In May 2010, nearly three years after the ban on the sale of arrack, the Karnataka Excise Department announced that they had collected a revenue of Rs. 7,500 crore through the sale of IMFL during 2009–10.¹⁵ This was more than twice what they used to collect from the sale of arrack and IMFL combined. The moral campaign to prevent the suffering of women and families thus brought about a dramatic increase in tax revenues to the state which, at the same time, has been able to significantly increase its control over the sale and consumption of alcoholic beverages.

Conclusion

There are elements of counter-culture to alcohol consumption. The advertising of alcohol draws upon aspirational ideals associated with prosperity and wealth. At the same time, alcohol consumption has a macho, bad-boy image. Elements of this are seen at all levels of society. There is also an association between alcohol and a lifestyle that is independent of conventional social mores. There can be very positive elements to this form of self-assertion: friendship and

socialising outside of the usual bounds of family, gender and caste, and the assertion of equality and camaraderie among upwardly mobile, educated middle classes. Notwithstanding the modest prosperity of those involved, this could be described as the assertion of a new subaltern form of citizenship (Pandey 2009), which lies counter to the conventions of society and which resists the demands and regulations of the state. For this reason, the behaviour of the drinking classes in Bangalore does not easily fit the dualistic model of civil society that has been described by Partha Chatterjee (2008).

At its extremes, one might argue that there is an IMFL drinking elite that is widely tolerated by society, and an arrack-consuming working class that is excluded, characterised as addictive and generally disparaged. This certainly is a feature in government legislation and a great deal of public rhetoric. However, there are clearly new cultures of drinking that are emerging between these extremes. There is also an increasing overlap between them, as new government regulations have restricted the sale and distribution of arrack and have driven working-class consumers into the IMFL segment of the market. We thus see in inner-city suburbs the growth of wine shops which cater both to lower-middle-class and working-class segments of society. At the same time, young middle-class elites resort to new social spaces created for late-night drinking beyond the boundaries of the city, in addition to consuming heavily at home. It may also be argued that for certain members of the IT/BPO sector, drinking has assumed an increased importance as a means of escaping a stressful work environment, much as it does for those involved in hard, manual work. Yet despite these complications, there is clearly still one predominant trend, and that is the shrinking space that is made available to the very poorest consumers. On the one hand, their consumption is inhibited by low-caste women activists campaigning to close liquor shops. It is also severely curbed by politicians who seek public approval through the denunciation of alcohol (while carefully avoiding any mention of middle-class drinking habits). Behind this rhetoric lies an assumption that the middle classes are responsible and mature enough to 'handle their drink' while the masses need to be guided and controlled in their access to alcohol.

Additional pressures on the lower-class drinker come from churchmen and religious zealots in an alliance with state governments, who are vigorously seeking to outlaw the manufacture and consumption of all but the highest quality, centrally distributed and most heavily taxed – and therefore most revenue lucrative – forms of alcoholic drink. Perhaps the greatest pressure of all, though, on the space of the working-class drinker derives from the embourgeoisement of the Indian city (Chatterjee 2003). For the first time since independence, Indian cities are growing beyond the role of mere marketing and service centres for cantonments or the headquarters of civil administration. They are beginning to reflect the rise of a new middle class and new white-collar industries and occupations that have the capital resources to transform the environment within which they live. Street markets, pavement dwellers and lower-class inner city suburbs are being bulldozed away and replaced by

fly-overs, shopping malls, offices and hotels. Within this milieu, a new form of youthful middle-class drinking culture has clearly developed. It is predominantly, however, a culture of prosperity: the product of an expanding middle class. The members of labouring classes are excluded from this environment as they may doubtless also be excluded from the opportunity to consume either licit or home-produced alcohol in their native village. In the process, this section of society is perhaps also being transformed, to provide better, more efficient and disciplined workers for the burgeoning metropolis. It remains to be seen whether the drinking habits of the middle classes may also become subject to similar public regulation for the benefit of their employers, and the degree to which all sections of society will continue to successfully transcend proscriptive attempts to manage the drinking social spaces of the city.

Notes

- 1 In July 2009 more than 120 people died in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, after consuming illicit liquor (*The Hindu*, 13 July 2009). For another large-scale incident in Bangalore, in which more than 300 people died, see Manor (1993).
- 2 There were 15,215 arrack sale points in Karnataka in total (*The Times of India*, 1 July 2007).
- 3 *The Hindu*, 19 January 2007.
- 4 *The Times of India*, 1 July 2007.
- 5 The Taxation Task Force of Karnataka estimated that in 1999–2000, while 28 million litres of IMFL was officially sold in the state, 67.9 million litres of IMFL was additionally sold by way of 'seconds' (Government of Karnataka, quoted in NIMHANS 2003: 2).
- 6 For example, in May 2010, about 6,000 farmers in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu staged a protest against the ban on toddy tapping. Several thousand were arrested (*The Hindu*, 27 May 2010).
- 7 Sample size was 21,276 individuals from 5,200 families in Karnataka. The survey was conducted in 2002 in four districts of Karnataka: Bangalore, Dharwad, Bidar and Uttara Kannada (NIMHANS 2003: 46, 48).
- 8 *The Indian Express*, 27 January 2009.
- 9 *The Indian Express*, 3 February 2009.
- 10 A report by the BBC has described the activities of gangs of Bajrang Dal vigilantes in Mangalore who are policing the streets and beaches to prevent what they regard as lewd behaviour (e.g. couples holding hands) and the ever-present threat of 'Love Jihad' (Muslim boys seducing Hindu girls). 'Love and Morals in Mangalore' *Assignment*, BBC World Service broadcast on 28 March 2010.
- 11 Andhra Pradesh subsequently introduced a ban of the sale of arrack in October 1993 (see also Abraham 1995).
- 12 *The Times of India*, 1 July 2007.
- 13 *The Financial Express*, 15 January 2007.
- 14 *The Financial Express*, 15 January 2007.
- 15 *The Hindu*, 15 May 2010.

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