

Block

8

COLONIAL CITIES - 2

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BLOCK 8 COLONIAL CITIES - 2

The Units in Block 8 continue to examine the specific features of the Indian city as it developed in the modern period, both during and after colonial rule. As we have already seen, the city could be made the space in which power and authority were enacted, either through temporary pageants and Darbars, or through certain architectural forms and devices. It was the space of different kinds of claims to space (by nationalist or religious movements) and contests over those claims. But the city in the 19th and 20th centuries could be the very crucial and well defined space of ‘modernity’ itself, with the rise of new social classes, such as the working class, new forms of association and associational practices, and several new modes of sociality and conviviality which arose around emerging mass transport systems such as railways, or mass entertainment such as the cinema. **Unit 37** introduces the student to some aspects of the ways in which modernity was inextricably linked to the city.

An important aspect of this modernity, as **Unit 38** reveals, was the introduction of urban planning and new forms of urban governance. Though it was everywhere dogged by inadequate funds and the relative indifference of colonial administrators, especially to the indigenous parts of the city where the preferred mode of governance was to continue to allow local powers autonomy, planning in India was slow and piecemeal even in the period when more Indians were drawn into the administration of cities. Cities were drastically rebuilt and refashioned by the colonial authorities in response to such political crises as the 1857 revolt, in response to the threats of plague (1896-8) and other contagions, or quite simply in response to the imperial need for new spaces for the display of power as in New Delhi after 1912. The involvement of greater numbers of Indians, as colonial rule wore on, in urban governance produced new tensions and contests, and some important changes, and a recognition of the objective limits to possible transformations under conditions of colonialism.

In what ways then did the transition to Independence refashion the Indian city? As **Unit 39** of this block reveals, the immediate decades that followed 1947 were marked by great optimism among the leaders of the new Indian nation, and a number of new industrial and administrative capitals reveal this great new vision. At the same, the exigencies of partition and the urgency of rehousing large masses of displaced people particularly in north India, defined some of the initiatives in the immediate post independence years. Urban planning was far more professionalised and yet, though every attempt was made to bring most Indian cities under its sway, remained woefully inadequate. Moreover, the limits and tensions produced by planning itself became more and more evident, as urban populations burgeoned and legalities stretched to their limits. New concerns, as this unit shows us, began to surface both among urban planners and those who constituted “civil society” regarding the multiple uses of city space, general environmental concerns, and the role of law in curbing, or controlling certain uses of space in the interest of a purported general good.

The **Unit 40** of this block is a case study of what is easily identified as India’s premier metropolis, Bombay. From its early origins as a port city, connected to an international trade network, to its emergence as the administrative capital of western India, its later development as an industrial city with all its complexities and contradictions, and finally, to its existence as the financial and entertainment capital of India, Bombay’s existence cannot be understood without reference to its economy and the ways in which it shaped city space. This unit therefore takes the reader through these economic phases in order to highlight the specific features which arose, or declined as the case may be, in response

to these broader developments. The city therefore enjoys a multi faceted profile, at one and the same time, as a working class city and as developing a specific form of cosmopolitanism.

The two Blocks on the modern Indian city focus on the very specific ways in which colonialism structured and restructured urban space, with enduring effect in the post colonial phase. Yet, as we see throughout these units, they also reveal that indigenous groups and forces, whether from elite or non elite sections of urban India, made their sense of, participated in, and shaped the features of the Indian city. Such participation in, and sometimes collaboration with, the colonial (and post colonial) regimes however rather than implying that these efforts were equally placed and on the same plane, in fact bear testimony to the very uneven and contested space that was the modern Indian city. Above all, the Units allow the student to understand and judge for themselves the principal features of the modern Indian city and the historical forces which have shaped them. The Units also introduce the student to the sheer variety of approaches and materials that have been used in the study of the modern city.



UNIT 37 MODERNITY AND THE CITY IN COLONIAL INDIA*

Structure

- 37.1 Introduction
- 37.2 The City as the Space of the Modern
- 37.3 Technologies of the Modern
- 37.4 Indian Engagements with Modernity
- 37.5 New Associational Practices
- 37.6 Summary
- 37.7 Exercises
- 37.8 References

37.1 INTRODUCTION

Since the mid-nineteenth century, cities have been naturally associated with modernity. Indeed, the main prisms through which the making of the ‘modern’ has been viewed – whether it is industrial capitalism, bureaucratic rationality or ‘governmentality’ – have frequently focused on the city as a primary site.

It is a matter of considerable debate among historians as to whether colonialism was instrumental in introducing ‘modernity’ to the Indian subcontinent, as colonial authorities themselves often claimed. Was Indian society imprisoned in ‘tradition’ until the beginning of colonial rule? The term ‘modernity’ may be said to refer not only to some material changes, i.e. industrial or print capitalism, or systems of sewage and sanitation, but also to new institutional spaces, such as museums, public libraries, and voluntary associations, as well as to new sensibilities, of individualism and bureaucratic rationality. The cities were among the earliest spaces within which these changes and transformations were made most visible and this Unit considers the colonial city from the perspective of whether or why it merits the term ‘modern’. To begin with, let us consider the ways in which cities and modernity are usually linked.

37.2 THE CITY AS THE SPACE OF THE MODERN

For some 19th century observers like Friedrich Engels and Alexis de Tocqueville, the ‘shock cities’ of Britain’s first industrial revolution symbolised the emergence of a modern economic order geared to the capitalist market and its attendant social consequences: the separation of the home and the workplace, the segregation of classes and the abysmal living conditions of the poor.

By the turn of the twentieth century, there emerged other kinds of association between modernity and the city. The spectacular capital cities of Western Europe such as London, Paris, Berlin, Vienna and Stockholm and New York in the USA – stood forth as symbols of urban modernity. Many of these cities were reconstructed (e.g. ‘Paris’, with urban space recreated ‘as a visual spectacle, opening up the monumental vista while simultaneously rendering the city a site of consumption, of window-shopping, promenading and surveillance.’ (Gunn, 2006: 123)

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Urban modernity was, however, not merely reflected in the built form of the city or its governance. The city also became a site for novel forms of urban interaction and sociability made possible by the emergence and consolidation of a new domain mediating between state and society: what is broadly referred to as the ‘public sphere’. Equally, the unprecedented density of people, technologies, commodities, institutions and information within cities generated new encounters and experiments, both individual and collective, that were distinctively ‘modern’. And, as the nineteenth-century French romantic poet Charles Baudelaire was quick to grasp, many of the fundamental aspirations and anxieties associated with modernity were most intensely experienced in the city.

These forms and ideals of urban modernity came to be adopted in many parts of the globe during the age of ‘imperial globalization’ presided over by Europeans. Cities across the colonial world took their spatial, technological and social cues from the imperial West. However, as a growing body of scholarship has begun to show, they also developed in ways that were not prefigured by the experience of the metropolitan contexts.

This chapter focuses principally on four premier cities of colonial India – Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi and Madras – as sites of ‘urban modernity’ in the period from the end of the Great Uprising/Rebellion to the end of the First World War (1918) and considers two key issues. First, it shows how the technologies and institutional forms associated with modernity transformed the fabric of material life in these cities. Second, this Unit assesses the ways in which Indians shaped the processes of modernity as they unfolded within the urban context.

37.3 TECHNOLOGIES OF THE MODERN

In the decades following the cataclysmic events of 1857, urban-dwellers in the major cities of colonial India could perceive all around them the visible signs and symbols of ‘modernity’. The most obvious and spectacular manifestation of this was in the built form of their cities. In the aftermath of 1857, colonial urban planning and policies showed ‘a more focused concern with defence, sanitation, order and above all the display of the new imperial power’. (Khilnani, 1997: 116) Like many metropolises across the globe, the built environment of Indian cities was rapidly altered in keeping with these imperatives. The fate of Mughal Delhi after the suppression of the 1857 uprising was particularly poignant. Here, as Narayani Gupta writes:

At one sweep the face of the city, so lovingly built by Shahjahan, was transformed. What the Government decided was necessary for its security led to some of the loveliest buildings of the city being destroyed – Kucha Bulaqi Begum, the Haveli Nawab Wazir, the Akbarabadi Masjid, the palaces of the Nawabs of Jhajjar, Ballabhgarh, Farrucknagar and Bahadurgarh... In the excess of patriotic fervour that prevailed in the early 1860s, the Lahore and Delhi Gates of the Red Fort were renamed Victoria and Alexandra Gate. (Gupta, 1998: 27-8)

Further changes to the urban built form of colonial cities occurred at the end of the century following the outbreak of a major plague epidemic, which gradually engulfed the subcontinent. The panic aroused by the dreaded disease prompted the colonial state to create ‘Improvement Trusts’ in order to carry out an ambitious programme of civic renewal and urban development. (Kidambi, 2007: 71-113) These bodies tore down ‘slums’ in the Indian quarters, widened existing streets, built new arterial roads and developed the commercial infrastructure of cities. They also played an important part in the creation of new urban spaces devoted to shopping and entertainment. For instance, on Bombay’s Hornby Road, one of the city’s principal thoroughfares, the Improvement Trust built unified commercial arcades where visitors could sample the latest goods and fashions imported from Europe. (Hazareesingh, 2007: 39)



1. North of Dalhousie Square, European Quarter, Calcutta (Kolkata), 1922

Source: Library of Congress; Call No. LC-B2- 68-11 [P&P] LOT 7225
<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/service/pnp/ggbain/00300/00354r.jpg>

Alongside these changes came new technologies that transformed the material quality of urban life. Some developments – most notably, the coming of the railways and steamships – were essential to the growth of many cities even as they enlarged geographical horizons by opening up new possibilities for mobility. The railways, for example, linked port cities like Bombay, Calcutta and Madras to vast new hinterlands and made them key nodes in an evolving global network of maritime trade and transport. The first train journey in the subcontinent was flagged off from Bombay on 16 April 1853 by Lord Elphinstone, the Governor of Bombay, and terminated 21 miles away in Thana. Within decades the Great Indian Peninsular Railway and the Bombay, Baroda and Central India (BB & CI Railway) had connected the city to the cotton-growing tracts of central India and Gujarat. By the end of the century, the railways were bringing commodities and migrants from all over the subcontinent to Bombay, thereby contributing both to the commercial life of the city and its increasingly cosmopolitan culture.

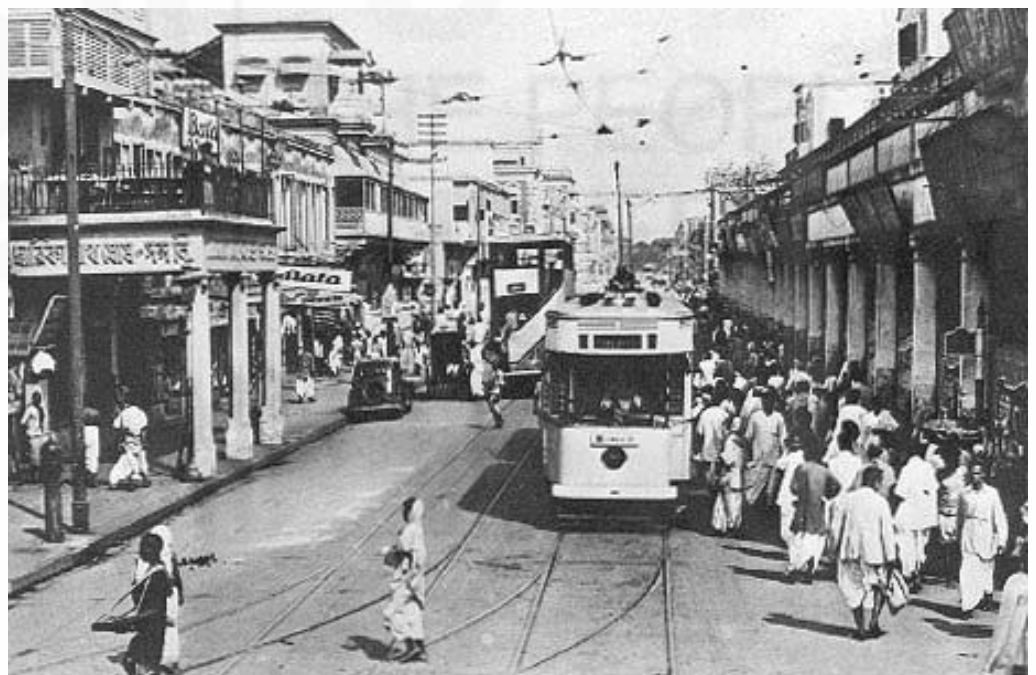
The railway companies also became important players in the urban property market, acquiring vast swathes of land for their complex operations. Moreover, they also built monumental stations ‘that would match the railway, civic, and administrative grandeur associated with them’. (Richards and MacKenzie, 1986: 70) These railway stations – like Bombay’s Victoria Terminus – became symbols of colonial modernity, with their ornate architecture, bustling stalls and the rapid movement of people and goods.



2. Bombay Victoria Station: Horse Drawn Tram, Circa 1900

Source: Library of Congress; Call Number: LOT 11948, no. 373 [P&P]

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/service/pnp/wtc/4a00000/4a02000/4a02600/4a02613r.jpg>



3. Electric Tramways of British India, Calcutta (Kolkata)

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Trams_of_British_India_In2.jpg

Equally significant was the role of the new steamships which expanded and speeded up the links between the major port cities of the subcontinent and the lands across the seas. The arrival of steamships in Indian waters not only dramatically reduced travelling times but also transformed the rhythms of sea voyages, as it now became possible for shipping vessels to operate independently of weather conditions. Moreover, it also

consolidated migrant flows and networks that connected Indian port cities to West Asia and East and South Africa, on the one hand, and to Southeast Asia, on the other. Like the railways, steamships too affected the built environment of these port cities, as new docks, wharves, warehouses and depots were built to handle the growing volume of cargo and passenger traffic that now passed through them.

The tramway represented another important mode of transport within cities. Horse-drawn trams first made their appearance in Bombay and Calcutta in the early 1870s. These gave way by the end of the century to electric tramways, with Madras becoming the first city in India to introduce the innovation (1895). As Stephen Hughes has pointed out, 'By connecting up its constituent parts with a common and habitual movement of people, the tram helped to articulate the city as one publicly shared place like never before.' (Hughes, 2006: 41) At the same time, these years also saw the appearance of privatised and elite modes of modern transport such as the motor car. In Bombay, car ownership increased five-fold between 1914 and 1924, with well over ten thousand vehicles in the city by the latter date, with important consequences for the way in which urban residents could now negotiate the street. (Hazareesingh, 2007: 64-70)

It was not only the technologies of mobility that symbolised urban modernity. In the late nineteenth century, cities like Bombay and Calcutta also became important industrial centres. Bombay's Parsi businessmen established the city's first cotton mills in the mid-nineteenth century, while Scottish entrepreneurs laid the foundations of Calcutta's emergence as the bastion of the Indian jute industry.

Writing in 1863, Govind Narayan Madgaonkar, author of the first Marathi history of Bombay, described the sense of wonder that a visitor experienced on stepping into a cotton mill:

The astonishment that one felt on seeing the mill cannot be put into words. Where does one start? The structure was about four hundred hands long and about as broad. It is full of machines and wheels which are whirring incessantly. Men are not required to power these wheels, they rotate automatically. At one place, the cotton is carded and cleaned and all the dirt is removed. In another place, this cotton is converted into fine fibrils which are then spun into thick or thin threads in yet another place....If one thinks about it, these machines in Mumbai can produce in one day what a man needs fifty years to do. It is suggested that our readers ponder about the power of these machines. (Ranganathan, 2008: 209, 211)

Over the course of the following decades, these mills came to dominate the skyline of cities like Bombay and Calcutta. At the heart of the new industrial capitalist order that they inaugurated was a new regime of 'clock time', with its emphasis on regularity, uniformity and punctuality. As Sumit Sarkar has noted, 'Through uniform office-routine, so different from the seasonal rhythms of the village, clock-time established its domination over life in the colonial metropolis: the flow of people into and away from the office-district...so crowded in the daytime but deserted at night.' (Sumit Sarkar 1990: 105) Symbolic of this shift in the conceptions of time was the ubiquitous presence in cities across colonial India of the 'clock tower'.



4. Clock Tower, Delhi; Circa 1910. Photograph by Jadu Kissen

Source: http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00routesdata/1600_1699/shahjahanabad/clocktower/clocktower.html

It was in the colonial city, too, that modern technologies of communication, which enlarged social horizons and made possible new imaginings of the self, both individual and collective, were to have the greatest impact. Here, a key development was the rise of the printing press, which transformed urban public culture over the course of the nineteenth century. Though the printed book first made its appearance in India as early as the sixteenth century, it was only from the late eighteenth century onwards that printing presses began to proliferate in the subcontinent. An unlikely pioneer in this regard was James Augustus Hicky (1739-1802), who set up a printing press in Calcutta in 1780. Hicky, 'a man with a colourful if ill-starred life', embarked on the venture to pay off his numerous debts. The weekly newspaper that he brought out – *The Bengal Gazette or*

Calcutta General Advertiser— did not survive very long, but his example was quickly followed by others and very soon printing presses across urban India were churning out a steady stream of publications. (Sarkar, 1990: 128-9) Indeed, barely a decade after Hicky had set up his printing press, one European editor of a Calcutta-based journal was moved to remark:

In splendour London now eclipses Rome...and in similar respects, Calcutta rivals the head of empire. But in no respect can she appear so eminently so, as in her publications....If in Europe, the number of publications gives the ground to ratiocinate the learning and refinement of particular cities, we may place Calcutta in rank about Vienna, Copenhagen, Petersburg, Madrid, Venice, Turin, Naples or even Rome. (Sarkar, 1990: 128)



5. Rajabai Clock Tower, Bombay

Source: <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rajabai-Tower.jpg>

By the end of the nineteenth century, the major colonial cities had a vibrant print culture, catering to a linguistically diverse and ever-growing Indian readership. The newspaper, in particular, became a familiar part of the urban landscape and served to construct the city as an object of public discourse. Moreover, it also democratised (in theory, if not in practice) access to ‘news’ in a way that was wholly unprecedented. Equally significant were the numerous periodicals and pamphlets that competed with each other in generating ideas, debates and opinions on issues ranging from the momentous to the mundane. But simultaneously, as Anindita Ghosh has pointed out, ‘The printing press unleashed a huge production of petty pamphlet literature – consisting of mythologies, fables, popular religious texts, farces, almanacs, sensational novels and the like – whose content was quite contrary to the dominant acceptable forms.’ (Ghosh, 2006: 107) Cumulatively, this torrent of publications was crucial to the making of a heterogenous public culture that was integral to the experience of urban modernity.

The emergence of new educational institutions within the urban context amplified the power of print in enlarging social horizons. In particular, once the debate about the future of India’s educational system was settled in favour of the ‘Anglicists’ as a consequence of the ‘Macaulay Minute’ of 1835, there developed a plethora of educational institutions in which the new Western knowledge was imparted. Major metropolises like Bombay, Calcutta and Madras stood at the apex of a reorganised educational system and possessed the most prestigious colleges for the study of the arts, medicine and law.

In the first two decades of the twentieth century, urban public culture also began to register the effects of new forms of mass entertainment, most notably in the form of the cinema. Film production and exhibition had commenced in Bombay with the Lumiere screenings in 1896, just a year after they had been shown for the first time in Paris. Even though it did not displace theatre as the most popular mode of urban entertainment, the cinema came to symbolise ‘modernity’ because of its reliance on electric and mechanical technologies of movement as well as new structures of commodification. Cinema halls, in particular, were places where city-dwellers came to experience the thrills and pleasures of the modern. The most famous cinema halls were constructed on a grand scale, often in the ‘baroque’ style, and located in the heart of the urban central business district: the Fort area in Bombay, for instance, or Mount Road in Madras. But the significance of the cinema hall also lay in the fact that, like the new modes of public transportation, it too ‘opened up and institutionalised new kinds of public space, which allowed for greater mixing at close proximity among those of different castes, classes, and religious communities that would otherwise not normally interact.’ (Hughes, 2006: 40)

37.4 INDIAN ENGAGEMENTS WITH MODERNITY

The previous section highlighted some of the key features of urban modernity in colonial India in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But what was distinctive about India’s experience of urban modernity under colonial conditions and to what extent did Indians shape its trajectories? Furthermore, how did Indians respond to the profound, if unsettling, transformations unleashed by colonial modernity?

Historians have differed in their answer to these questions. In one view, the history of colonial India was framed as a transition from ‘tradition’ to ‘modernity’ (which was itself construed as a force that was diffused outwards from its origins in Western Europe).

From this perspective, scholars regarded modernity positively but saw the colonial state itself as incapable of carrying it through to its logical conclusion. Further, their accounts primarily focused on the response of educated Indians to the 'modernizing' forces emanating from the West. (See, for instance, the essays in Leach and Mukherjee, 1970)

A later generation of historians, largely influenced by the writings of Edward Said and Michel Foucault, took a more negative view of 'modernity' and saw it as an all-powerful discourse that imprisoned Indian intellectuals within its 'totalising' framework. Significantly, colonial dominance was seen to be most clearly reflected in the city and it was argued that their 'perceived lack of agency' within its confines meant that educated, middle-class Indians were unable to feel 'at home' within the city. It was for this reason too, some writers suggested, that the modern city was marginal to nationalist thought in India. (Chatterjee, 2004; see also, Prakash, 2002)

In recent years, however, scholars have begun to query these perspectives. To begin with, they have become skeptical of the view that modernity in the colonial context simply replicated developments that had occurred elsewhere. For instance, historians have shown how the social formation of the urban working classes in colonial India followed a distinctive logic that was not anticipated by the historical experience of the West. Notably, the Indian working classes continued to retain close links with the villages from which they had migrated to the city. This did not mean, however, that they were insufficiently 'urban' or that they lacked a 'commitment' to the industrial setting. On the contrary, it was precisely because they needed their urban jobs to sustain their village small holdings that these rural migrants were deeply attached to the city. At the same time, their village base served as an insurance against the vagaries of the urban labour market. Further, their rural connections were often crucial in helping migrants find work, credit and housing in the city. Thus, industrial capitalism in colonial India consolidated rural-urban ties, rather than dissolving them. (Chandavarkar, 1994)

Likewise, some historians have argued that the urban public sphere in the colonial context should not be seen 'simply as a variation of the Western model'. Contrary to the Habermasian formulation, Neeladri Bhattacharya has recently noted, the public sphere in colonial India was neither 'homogeneous' nor a 'unitary space'; instead, it was 'deeply segmented'. Nor did debate and discussion within the Indian public sphere 'necessarily end in consensus'. (Bhattacharya, 2005: 153-55) On the contrary, it frequently reaffirmed differences and produced intractable conflicts. Furthermore, within the urban public sphere in colonial India the languages of reason (and modernity) and custom (and tradition) became mutually imbricated. As Bhattacharya argues: 'While reason was articulated through the language of tradition and discovered within tradition, tradition was perceived and appropriated through the framework of modern reason.' (Ibid: 154)

Historians have also begun to point to the different ways in which 'colonial modernity' in the urban context was not simply a creation of the colonizers; it was actively shaped by different sections of Indian society. For instance, scholarly explorations of colonial architecture and urban development have highlighted the Indian contribution to the public spaces of these cities. Wealthy Indian merchants, keen to express their support for colonial ideals of 'improvement' and 'progress', contributed generously to the public architecture of the great Presidency capitals. In colonial Bombay, the munificence of leading Parsi businessmen in Bombay made possible many of the city's major public buildings and monuments. Similarly, Delhi's loyalist Hindu and Muslim businessmen made substantial financial contributions to the public buildings that were erected in that city in the two decades after 1857. (Gupta, 1998: 83-86)

But it was not simply rich Indians who helped to fashion the public spaces of colonial cities. A recent study has shown how the Parsi architect and engineer Khan Bahadur Muncherji Cowasji Murzban (1839-1917) was a crucial figure in the evolution of Bombay's built environment. His contribution was two-fold. On the one hand, as an engineer in the Public Works Department Murzban was involved in the construction of some of Bombay's most spectacular public buildings. On the other hand, inspired by traditions of British private philanthropy, Murzban also designed and built hospitals and housing settlements for the members of his own community. (Chopra, 2011: 73-116)

The public life of the colonial city was also shaped by a diverse range of individuals, classes and communities. We have already noted the role of wealthy Indian philanthropists in creating the public spaces of colonial cities. But by the end of the nineteenth century, it was the emergent Indian middle classes of the great Presidency capitals who began to exert a decisive influence on urban public life.

Print culture and Western education in particular not only fostered new kinds of social interaction and sociability among members of the internally diverse middle classes but also made possible their growing dominance within the urban public sphere. This took several forms. For instance, in every major colonial city there emerged newspapers that represented the views of the emergent Indian middle class on a range of civic matters. These newspapers paid close attention to the doings of their municipal authorities. They were especially quick to seize upon, and criticize, the privileges claimed by members of the British ruling elite with regard to the distribution of resources within the city.

Nationalist newspapers, in particular, tended to highlight such inequities in arguing vociferously for a greater say in the conduct of civic affairs. For instance, the *Bombay Chronicle*, founded in 1913 by Sir Pherozeshah Mehta (1845-1915), became a vocal critic of the colonial administration during the First World War and focused on a range of pressing material issues that confronted the city's residents. As Sandip Hazareesingh has shown, the paper 'assumed the role of an active citizen seeking knowledge about, and answers to, the grave problems of urban life.' (Hazareesingh, 2007: 177)

37.5 NEW ASSOCIATIONAL PRACTICES

Members of the educated Indian middle class also took the lead in forming a variety of voluntary associations that concerned themselves with the material issues of the urban civic arena. They established and ran schools, universities, libraries, hospices, co-operative credit societies and conducted relief work during calamities such as floods and famines. Furthermore, they drew upon both Western ideas of service and associational philanthropy as well as longstanding Indian traditions of *seva* (service) and *dana* (charity) in propagating ideals and practices of active citizenship, patriotic endeavour and 'constructive nationalism'. (Watt, 2005) At the same time, these associations were also 'a rhetorical platform for launching challenges to existing policies and making claims to resources and rewards controlled by the government.' (Haynes, 1992: 155)

One of the most prominent voluntary associations in early-twentieth century India was the Social Service League. Established in March 1911 by prominent members of Bombay's liberal Indian intelligentsia, the League sought to collect 'social facts' and discuss 'social theories and social problems with a view to forming public opinion on questions of social service.' By the end of the First World War, the League had become an important player in the civic arena, especially in matters pertaining to the lives of Bombay's working classes. In particular, it campaigned for mass education, sanitary awareness and 'social purity'; tried to raise public awareness about the importance and value of social service; and conducted relief work among the urban poor during

emergencies such as the influenza pandemic of 1918. Furthermore, the League became a vocal advocate of reforms in the sphere of local self-government and called for greater state investment in welfare activities that would bring about civic equity. (Kidambi, 2007: 203-34)

But the urban middle classes also engaged in forms of sociability that were less formal and structured than the kinds of associational activity discussed above. In late-nineteenth century Calcutta, for example, the new print culture – often centred on a periodical – opened up a social space for the more relaxed and informal middle-class ‘adda’, which soon became an integral part of the city’s *bhadralok* culture. (Sarkar, 1997: 174-5; Chakrabarty, 2007: 180-213)

Equally, as Sumit Sarkar has noted, the social and civic activism of the Indian middle class also frequently ‘alternated with moods of self-critical satire, introspection and passivity.’ In particular, ‘A sense of moving forward in tune with the times was intermixed with evocations of Kali-yuga gloom.’ (Sarkar, 1990: 104) Sarkar argues that it was this tendency that accounts for the growing fascination of the late-nineteenth century Calcutta *bhadralok* for the teachings of Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the Dakshineswar mystic.

In recent years, historians have also highlighted the role of the working classes in the making of urban public culture. Notably, they have documented how the world of print far from being the preserve of Anglophone Indian elites was shaped by the activities and aspirations of plebeian writers and readers. For instance, the ‘cheap and often shoddy books’ produced in the Bat-tala area in north Calcutta were testament ‘to a flourishing world of urban folk culture’ in that city. (Sarkar, 1990: 133-4; Ghosh, 2006: 107-51) Similarly, as A.R. Venkatachalapathy has shown, Madras had its Gujili Bazaar where booksellers sold ‘chapbooks, ballads, and a whole range of popular reading material. ... characterised by their poor quality of production (and) catering to the common folk.’ Gujili Bazaar thus ‘became the metaphor for a distinct kind of “low” culture, the “other” of respectable and honourable living as well as, by extension, publishing.’ (Venkatachalapathy, 2012: 138-9)

The plebeian classes also left their mark on urban public culture in other ways. A ubiquitous feature of working-class life in the city was the presence of numerous *akharas* (wrestling clubs), whose activities ranged from cultivating the physical prowess of their working-class adherents to providing the necessary muscle power for rival parties during the periodic episodes of violence that swept up colonial cities. From the late nineteenth century onwards sections of the urban working classes also began to engage in ‘modern’ forms of associational activity, ranging from educational ventures to self-help societies. This trend intensified in the tumultuous years immediately after the end of the First World War, a period that saw a profusion of trade unions, charitable societies, reformist associations and volunteer corps among the urban poor. (Gooptu, 2001: 185-320)

Recent accounts have also begun to offer a more nuanced appraisal of the Indian responses to the changes associated with urban modernity. In particular, they have shown how these responses are not easily captured by analytical frameworks that counterpose ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’.

At one level, the technological innovations and institutional practices of modernity played a key role in the reimagining of ‘community’ and ‘tradition’ in colonial India. For instance, from the late nineteenth century onwards numerous castes and communities formed associations to make claims on the colonial state for recognition and resources. They also ‘published caste newspapers and histories, expanding the community audiences that would be receptive to critical reflections on community affairs.’ (Bhattacharya, 2005: 141)

As Sudipta Kaviraj has noted, the caste and community associations that developed in cities like Calcutta, Madras or Bombay ‘aspired to a certain kind of universal membership.’ Thus, ‘the Kayastha Sabha, a highly successful caste association, would not have relaxed its efforts at recruitment until the last Kayastha had joined its ranks; but by its very principles of membership, it could not be open to anyone else.’ In other words, such associations used ‘a strange complex of the opposite principles of universality of access and a particularity of membership.’ (Kaviraj, 2001: 311) Hence, in colonial India ‘the modern public was not one, singular and unitary, constituted of individuals who came together as anonymous beings whose social moorings were irrelevant, as equivalent citizens – an equivalence that reproduced in the public sphere the idea of universal man.’ (Bhattacharya, 2005: 141)

At another level, historians have also challenged the influential Weberian proposition that modernity is inevitably accompanied by ‘disenchantment’. As Michael Saler points, out, ‘This view, in its broadest terms, maintains that wonders and marvels have been demystified by science, spirituality has been supplanted by secularism, spontaneity has been replaced by bureaucratization and the imagination has been subordinated by instrumental reason.’ (Salser, 2006: 692) By contrast, recent historical perspectives have emphasised the ways in which the material culture of modernity itself came to be invested with ‘enchanted’ meanings. ‘Enchantment’ – admittedly an ‘ambiguous term’ – refers in this context to the persistent sense of wonder and rapture in the face of the marvellous and the mysterious. (Ibid: 702)

In an interesting study of one such ‘economy of enchantment’ that developed among the Muslims of colonial Bombay in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Nile Green suggests that ‘the conditions of industrial modernity did not necessarily lead to few “Reformist”, “uniform” or “globalized” religious forms any more than they favoured processes of rationalisation and disenchantment.’ (Green, 2011: 23) On the contrary, among the city’s diverse Muslim communities there flourished a ‘Customary Islam’, based on a variety of shrines, cults and miracle workers. As a result, ‘the growth of Bombay was not only coeval with train stations and factories but also with sites of the anti-scientific power associated with relics, rituals and holy men.’ (Ibid: 53) ‘For many of its Muslims, especially among the labouring classes,’ Green argues, ‘Bombay’s industrialisation was inseparable from the enchantment of its mills, stations and dockyards by the providers of religious services that ranged from supernatural medicines to social support networks and licit entertainments.’ (Ibid: 236)

37.6 SUMMARY

This Unit has tried to show how the fabric of urban life in colonial cities was transformed from the mid-nineteenth century by the rise of a global economic system based on industrial capitalism and its attendant technologies of power. Consequently, there developed in these cities a dense concentration of factories, commercial firms, western-educated local intelligentsias, ethnically diverse migrant communities and a vibrant public culture buoyed by a thriving print and associational culture as well as new forms of mass consumption and entertainment. But the experience of urban modernity that these cities generated, and the ways in which their Indian inhabitants responded to them, was neither a pale imitation of a Western original nor a radical manifestation of irreducible difference. Instead, urban modernity in the colonial context was simultaneously inscribed with the marks of similarity and difference both in relation to the antinomies of Western ‘modernity’ and Indian ‘tradition’.

37.7 EXERCISES

- 1) Discuss the markers of 'modernity' that are usually associated with the city.
- 2) In what ways did the colonial Indian cities embody the visible signs and symbols of modernity?
- 3) How did the concept of urban planning change during the colonial period?
- 4) What was distinctive about India's experience of urban modernity under colonial rule? To what extent did Indians shape its trajectories?
- 5) Was 'tradition' usually swept away by the forces leashed by colonial modernity? Illustrate with at least two examples.

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UNIT 38 CITY PLANNING IN INDIA UNDER BRITISH RULE*

Structure

- 38.1 Introduction
- 38.2 The Early Years: Social Relationships and Urban Form in the British-Built Capitals
- 38.3 Urban Governance and Nationalist Responses
- 38.4 The Mixed Results of Improvement Trusts
- 38.5 Twentieth Century Nationalism; Patrick Geddes and the Rethinking of Town Planning
- 38.6 Summary
- 38.7 Exercises
- 38.8 References

38.1 INTRODUCTION

British planning for Indian cities laboured under serious internal contradictions. As a colonial power, Britain ruled India primarily for its own benefit, yet it had to address all the issues of urban administration that any government confronts: design and control of space; provision of water, sewerage, roads, street lighting; and police. What were the different kinds of resolutions that were found to deal with the governance of cities under colonial rule? How did they develop or change over time? The British introduced concepts of urban planning – based largely on emerging European ideals of health and sanitation: improved roads, spaciousness, order and beautification. They implemented these concepts most fully in the parts of the city in which they resided, and which they dominated, so-called ‘White Town.’ In the areas which were inhabited by Indians, and usually poor Indians, or ‘Black Town’, they implemented less and more cheaply, with minimum taxation and minimum expenditure. They attempted to persuade their Indian subjects to accept these imported ideals as their own, though never without opposition. British engagement with local leaders – sometimes cooperative and sometimes oppositional – was determined by the imperatives of colonial rule, and in the later phases, influenced by nationalist leaders who found a space and voice in municipal politics. The physical legacies, and hierarchies of British rule were writ large on the landscape. The administrative legacies of colonial rule were less tangible, but equally significant. They included: entrusting more power to appointed bureaucrats than to elected officials; subordination of city governments to state and national authorities; use of eminent domain especially for slum removal; a policy of low taxes regardless of civic needs; a pattern of patronage in contracting out urban services; and more emphasis on impressive design and architecture for government and the elites than on the basic needs of the ever-increasing immigrant urban masses.

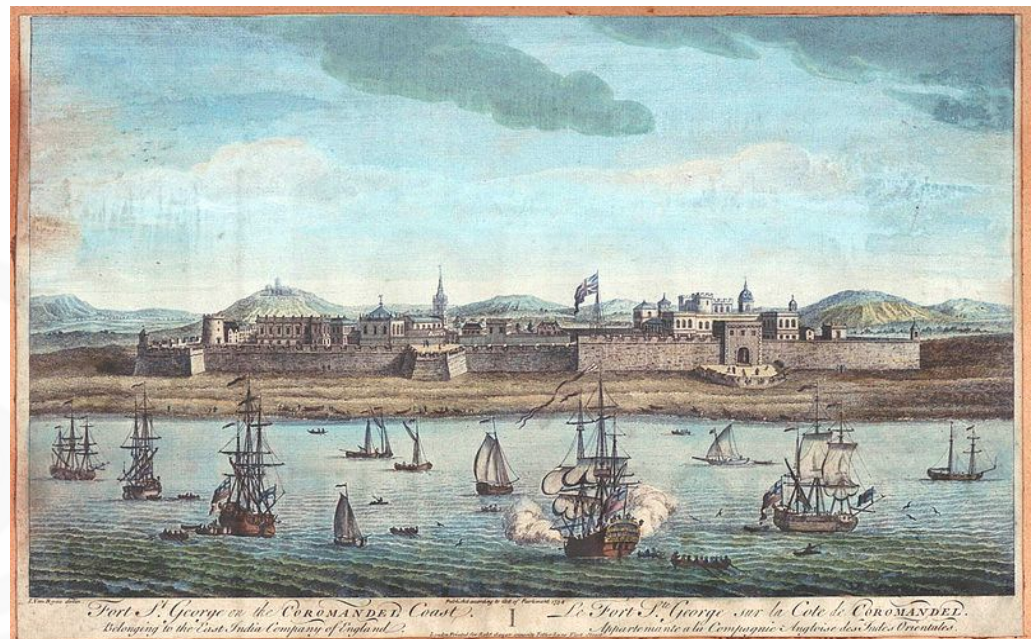
38.2 THE EARLY YEARS: SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS AND URBAN FORM IN THE BRITISH-BUILT CAPITALS

The immense size and diversity of India produced different policies in different regions and at different times; even where policies may have been similar, their implementation and reception were frequently different. Even among the Presidency cities of Calcutta,

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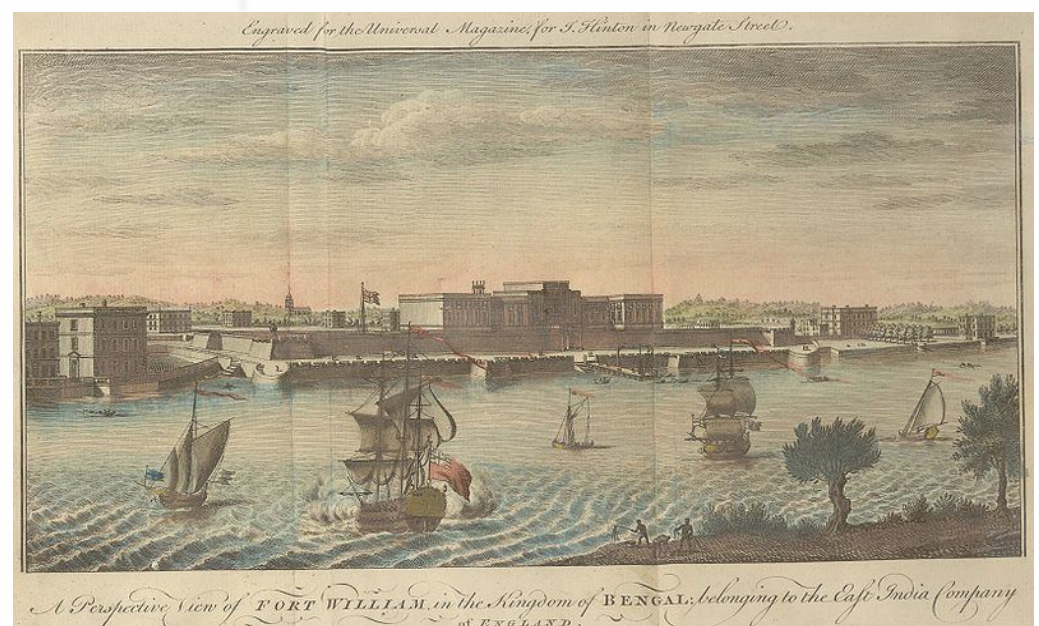
Madras, and Bombay, which the British largely created anew on rather minimal indigenous bases – long before they began to take control of already existing cities – differences soon appeared.

At the heart of each of these cities was an area dominated, designed, and occupied by the British: Forts named for St. George in Bombay and Madras, and for King William III in Calcutta. The British lived mostly inside the *fort* area, including the actual fort and the strongly defended area around it, sometimes called the *civil lines*. Here they built their homes, shops, and churches as well as their commercial and administrative headquarters, with some variations, since Fort William had few residential settlements while Fort St George was a veritable city in itself. The army was accommodated in a nearby area called the *cantonment* or *camp*. The much larger Indian area of the city was usually referred to as the *native*, or *black town*. As British control extended across India, such patterns of racial separation were repeated, although they never amounted to a system of apartheid.



1. An Eighteenth Century Sketch of Fort St. George, Madras by Jan Van Ryne

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Fort_St._George,_Chennai.jpg



2. Fort William, Calcutta

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Fortwilliam_1760.jpg

In some cities, where the British presence was great, very large areas of cantonment and civil lines were established alongside pre-existing Indian cities. Delhi, Bangalore, and Secunderabad, (adjoining Hyderabad) are examples. In other cities where the British presence was minimal, (e.g., Ahmedabad) the cantonment was proportionately smaller and it housed civilian as well as military personnel.



3. Lady Curzon Hospital, Bangalore Cantonment

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Bangalore_LadyCurzonHospital.jpg

The British areas of town and the Indian appeared to be quite separate from one another. For example, Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, citing earlier texts, writes, ‘The major geographical division in eighteenth-century Bombay was ... between “its two distinct limits, the English and the Black”.’ (Chandavarkar, 1994: 40) Anthony King notes this racial segregation for urban India more generally, but he also reveals that divisions between white and black neighborhoods were often blurred. (King, 1976) Even within the fort, only some areas were white, others Indian. When Bombay tried to evict Indian businessmen from the fort area, around 1800, many refused to leave and the government admitted that it lacked the legal tools, the detailed land use and property records, to force them to go. (Dossal, 2010: 57-8)

A survey in 1812-13, showed that, in fact, Indians overwhelmingly outnumbered the British in the Fort area. Out of a total population of 10,801 listed as dwelling in the Fort, 250 were English, 5464 Parsis, 4061 Hindus, 775 ‘Moors’, 146 Portuguese, and 105 Armenians. (Dossal, 2010: 80) These groups, however, tended to be separated even within the Fort, with Churchgate Street functioning as an intangible line of demarcation that separated the British settlement to the south, characterised by ‘whitewashed English homes with covered piazzas’, from the ‘brightly painted and carved ethnic Indian houses to the north’. (Hazareesingh, 2007: 15)

Later, suburbs began to develop outside the fort walls. As Siddhartha Sen, Mariam Dossal and John Archer point out, the suburbs were even less racially exclusive than the fort areas. (Sen, 2010; Dossal, 2010; Archer, 1997) European officials and merchants as well as wealthy Indians, found themselves forming new elite neighborhoods together as ‘many Indian magnates began to move out of their wadis and mohallas to European dominated areas such as Malabar and Cumballa Hills, Breach Candy and Mahalaxmi.’ (Chandavarkar, 1994: 41) Conversely, some middle-class and poorer Europeans lived

in the predominantly Indian sections of town, such as the Tarwadi and Byculla neighbourhoods. Meanwhile, dangerous or offensive trades of tanners, catgut makers, fat-boilers, and indigo dyers were relocated to areas farther north, beyond the indigenous settlements.

Madras' experience was similar, although suburban homes were often larger and surrounded by large gardens:

Production and trade remained concentrated in the Black Town and adjacent areas, and administration and finance took over Fort St. George, while traders, financiers, officials, and other professionals and entrepreneurs, Indian and European alike, continued to lay out enclaves of private residential compounds around the south-western, western, and north-western perimeter of the city. (Archer, 1994: 45)

In Calcutta, although the fort was European, some of the land in the white town was owned by Indians and rented to Englishmen. (Chatterjee, 2012: 6) Later, in the nearby suburbs, such as Chowringhee, both Indians and Europeans established their own individual, sizeable family homes, set in their own compounds, in a 'distinct, discrete, predominantly residential quarter.' (King, 1976: 49; Cf. Sinha, 1978) Meanwhile, 'Ballygunge was another popular place of residence for the Europeans.... Well-placed and ambitious Indians with close connections to the government also settled here.' (Datta, 2012: 177)

In the port-capitals, the areas within the fort walls and immediately around them, were the sites of maximum inter-racial interaction. At least five recent scholarly works emphasise the patterns. Swati Chattopadhyay focuses on the British-built house in Calcutta. While it may have looked like a house in Britain from the outside, inside the two functioned quite differently. In England, houses were constructed to separate servants from masters. In their homes in India, however, British rulers and employers were constantly crossing the paths of their (numerous) servants. Chattopadhyay claims that the British were uneasy about the lack of privacy, but proud of their ability to command such a large retinue of servants, and to be reminded of this command at every turn. (Chattopadhyay, 2005)

Partho Datta provides descriptions of yet another style of urban integration: the street scene jumble of wealthy European homes interspersed with huts of their Indian servants:

The appearance of the best houses is spoiled by the little straw huts, and such sort of encumbrances, which are built up by the servants for themselves to sleep in; so that all the English part of the town, which is the largest, is a confusion of very superb and very shabby houses, dead walls, straw huts, warehouses, and I know not what. (Datta, 2012: 138)

The quote is from Calcutta, 1768, but Datta argues that this style of integration was ubiquitous and enduring.

Some scholars such as Raj Chandavarkar and Preeti Chopra have shown the contribution of wealthy Indian businessmen to the public life of some parts of Bombay, to which they made their claims on power and on space.

Bombay's mercantile elites acquired a grip on important and lucrative areas of the city's economy, including and indeed especially the cotton textile industry. By marked contrast with Calcutta and Madras, the city's elites swiftly acquired a significant share of local power. From the 1830s onwards, they were firmly entrenched in local government. ...As they battled for power within the Municipal Corporation where they gained, by the 1880s, greater representation on a relatively wide franchise, they took particular pride in public standards in the city. (Chandavarkar, 2004: 73)

Preeti Chopra speaks similarly of a 'joint public realm', 'distinct from concrete and imagined ethnic, religious, racial, and class enclaves', which was 'a spatial arena that was, in theory, owned by and open to all of Bombay's citizens and helped in the construction of an imagined common public.' (Chopra, 2011: xxi) By the end of the nineteenth century, 'wealthy natives, rather than the ruling race, seemed to control the economy and space on the island of Bombay,' (Chopra, 2011: 188) though this was confined to some elite areas of the city.

Finally, writing of Lahore in the late nineteenth century, and its integrated civil station, William Glover argues that the British wanted Indians to share in the suburban experience. The 'goal was nothing less than to create a new kind of person, and the material environment was thought crucial to the task.' (Glover, 2008: 199) In large measure they succeeded, for Prakash Tandon describes Lahore in the 1930s and 1940s as two cities, 'the Lahore of the Lahorias, people who lived inside the old walled city; and the Lahore of the ring of suburbs that grew after the city began to respond to the new peace and order. ... The two Lahores were quite different in appearance and character.' (Tandon, 1968: 183)

On the other hand, the British response to the revolt of 1857, especially in Delhi and Lucknow, two of the most rebellious of the cities, demonstrated that when the British saw their supremacy and rule under attack, they could retaliate with devastating, uncompromising power. The entire Indian population of Delhi was evacuated and allowed to return only group by group, Hindus in January 1858, Muslims not till the end of that year. Muslims who wanted their own property back had to pay for it. The poet Ghalib cried out in 1858: 'Where is Delhi, By God, it is not a city now. It is a camp. It is a cantonment. There is neither Palace, nor bazaar, nor the canal.' (as cited in Gupta, 1971: 63)

In Lucknow, many key buildings that had housed rebels were razed to the ground and others were seized for British control. Still others were destroyed to make way for wide boulevards intended, as in the Paris of Baron Haussmann of about the same time, to break up the close knit residential neighbourhoods where rebels could hide and escape British forces, and to create roads along which troops could be deployed quickly. New sanitation measures included not only water supply and sewerage, they also extended to regulation and health examinations of the Indian women who serviced the British troops sexually. The British also introduced new taxes and collected them more efficiently to make the city pay for the new construction, services, and police. (Oldenburg, 1984)

The descriptions of interactions of British personnel, policies and plans with Indian people and traditions, suggest that while clear divisions and hierarchies persisted even in the later stages of colonial rule, interesting 'hybrids' were created. Jyoti Hosagrahar has argued that Delhi's classical havelis, public spaces, roads, housing clusters, and conceptions of public health were all transformed, not into British forms, but into new hybrids as a result of being adapted to new uses. (Hosagrahar, 2005)

When the British moved their capital from Calcutta in 1911, they built New Delhi, a new city outside and separated from (Old) Delhi. In the capitals of India's large princely states, and in the center of regions with numerous smaller states, they built *Residency* areas to headquarter their local administration and troop garrisons adjacent to the existing native cities. Degrees of segregation and integration continued, although they differed by time and place.

38.3 URBAN GOVERNANCE AND NATIONALIST RESPONSES

Some cities found ways of coping with British rule. Ahmedabad provides an example of a pre-existing large and important city in which only a few British officers came to work and live.¹ When the British came to power in Ahmedabad, after the third Maratha War in 1817, they sought to 'repair and restore some of the old, dilapidated structures.' (Chauhan and Bose, 2007: 77) In 1830, they shifted their regional headquarters from Baroda to Ahmedabad, and established a cantonment in 1832, which contained residential facilities and administrative offices.

In 1830, the leading citizens of Ahmedabad received British permission to establish a Town Wall Committee to repair the town walls and to raise the funds through a small increase in town duties. Water was piped from the Sabarmati river to the center of town, at Manek Chowk, in 1849, with some pipes extended even to private homes; separate water pumps and latrines were installed for low castes. Later a *dharamsala* and a grain market were added. Deeming the surrounding area to be safe, some wealthier merchants began to build new bungalows for themselves in Shahibaug, the area between the city wall and the new cantonment, as early as 1840.

Ahmedabad's early local initiatives were, however, somewhat unusual. Nationally, more sweeping legislation for urban governance was required. The East India Company passed the Improvement in Towns Act (Act 26 of 1850), which called for contributions to support Municipal Commissions that would introduce urban improvements. Ahmedabad adopted the act in 1856, as did some towns in the Bengal presidency, also in the 1850s, and some in the Punjab in the 1860s.² By the 1860s, a new regime of municipal record keeping and control over building activity in towns and cities was inaugurated through the new Municipal Committees, (Glover, 2007: 13-14) which focused largely on providing urban facilities and services and enforcing building bye laws. (Ansari, 1977: 10) Initially, persons nominated by the British rulers governed these municipalities. Later, especially after 1882, the municipalities were opened to more members elected from the city's Indian population as well.

Through his Resolution of 1882, Viceroy Lord Ripon extended the principles of local self-government to all municipalities under British rule. The Chairman, however, was the municipal commissioner, usually a British official. Civic improvement was only one part of the agenda; shifting the burden of tax collection from the British to Indians was another. Most citizens did not want to pay the taxes, especially when they perceived no benefit for themselves. Many authors such as Mariam Dossal (on Bombay), Narayani Gupta (on Delhi) and Susan Lewandowski (on Madras) have noted the shortage of municipal funds and the almost total lack of concern for parts of the city into which poor immigrants moved.

Urban government after the Ripon reforms required a series of compromises between 'financial austerity and political necessity ... No Indian town or city could approach the economic resources of a Leeds or Birmingham in the nineteenth century.' (Leonard, 1973: 251) There was enough in the budget, however, 'to make it worthwhile for local contractors to become politicians and win election to the Municipal Council ... Urban services ... expanded most in road construction and lighting ... highly visible

¹ Information on Ahmedabad is cited from Gillion, Kenneth L. *Ahmedabad: A Study in Indian Urban History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), unless otherwise specified.

² Personal communication, Narayani Gupta, April 10, 2012.

improvements that had great appeal for urban voters, cost relatively little and provided an important administrative role and patronage for politicians.’ (Leonard, 1973: 246)

Vested interests multiplied and even the highest municipal officials often felt frustrated. Arthur Crawford, Municipal Commissioner of Bombay, 1865 to 1871, complained:

Kessowjee Naik brought his dyers back to their old quarters. I prosecuted them, but was defeated. [He] spent money like water, eminent physicians swore solemnly that dye-pits were beneficial to health! Even the Press was “nobbled” by sums so large that their Editors could not resist the bait. This infamous success emboldened a powerful German firm to open a large steam Dyeing Factory close to Parbadevi Temple, whose refuse waters polluted the fair sands of Mahim Bay. ... An English firm ... dumped down on DeLisle Road a bone crushing and bone manure mill nearly opposite Cowasji Jehangir’s College in Parel Road. (as cited in Dossal, 1991: 203)

Crawford lamented that he had neither the time nor the resources to fight back and members of the Bombay Association of rate payers forced his transfer in 1871. (Dossal, 1991: 213)

More attention was paid to the commercial infrastructure of colonial cities, which had their own administrative authorities, separate from the municipal government. In Bombay, for instance, three wet docks for large ships, the Prince’s Dock, the Victoria Dock and the Alexandra Dock, were built between 1875 and 1914. India’s first oil terminal was opened at Sewri, and new wharves, depots, warehouses and railway sidings were added to handle the millions of tons of cargo annually shipped through Bombay. (Hazareesingh, 2007: 18)

In general, then, until the end of the nineteenth century, the British were concerned mostly with their own areas of the city – the administrative headquarters, the cantonment, the civil lines, and the industrial and port areas. They planted some new buildings and institutions in the native cities, drove some new roads through old neighborhoods, supplied some new water and sewerage, but did not, indeed could not, fully engage with the city as a whole.

38.4 THE MIXED RESULTS OF IMPROVEMENT TRUSTS

In 1898, following the plague that broke out in Bombay in 1896, the first Improvement Trust was initiated in Bombay (Ansari, 1977: 10). The trust was created for three reasons. First, the disastrously poor sanitation in Bombay threatened the city’s international trade. Already in 1867, at an international conference on cholera convened in Constantinople, French and Egyptian representatives called Bombay a ‘cholera nest’. (Dossal, 1991: 203) They threatened to close their ports to ships passing through Bombay. The threat became a reality in 1896 as ‘plague initially closed the ports of Europe to ships from Bombay, disrupting the city’s export trade and virtually paralyzing its commercial life.’ (Hazareesingh, 2007: 27) The Trust was to bring Bombay into compliance with international health standards.

Second, the Trust was to save lives through improving housing standards. ‘The establishment of the Bombay Improvement Trust in 1898 was the outcome of a firmly entrenched belief that plague was, in the first instance, the direct result of overcrowding in poorly ventilated and filth-ridden dwellings.’ (Kidambi, 2007: 68) Mortality rates, 1896-1900, reached 65.4 per thousand, and remained at 64.1 per thousand, 1901-05. This was more than double its rate in the previous decades. (Klein, 1986: 729) Workers fled. The population of the city which had been 821,764 in 1891 (Klein,

1986: 729) plummeted to 400,000 in 1897-98 (Dossal, 2010: 159), although, the city recouped its losses by 1911.

Ira Klein points out that there was no building code in most of Bombay, and cites the official census reports of 1901 for evidence of the grim housing conditions of the period. Worse, close to 100,000 labourers had no homes at all. (Kidambi, 2007: 38) Klein analyses the problem as follows:

Since the Western rulers believed that laissez faire methods were most efficient for development, they were not particularly concerned about tremendous disparities in wealth, crowding or urban blight; ... Bombay's leaders did not conceive of the urban environment as a separate entity to be protected for health, comfort or beauty; rather it was viewed as a resource for development, disposable as a market commodity. (Klein, 1986: 727)

The Bombay Improvement Trust was therefore charged with invoking the power of eminent domain to destroy slums and improve the living conditions of the poor. The Trust focused on physical planning: creating new streets, decongesting crowded localities, reclaiming land for urban expansion, and constructing housing for low income residents. These improvements were also intended to enhance the city's image as a center of imperial and commercial power. (Ansari, 1977: 9)

Why an Improvement Trust? Why not carry out these activities through the existing Municipal government? A third goal of the Trust was to keep key urban development powers in the hands of appointed officials, who could proceed 'unencumbered by accountability to representatives of local self-governing institutions.' (Kidambi, 2007: 72) As Improvement Trusts were subsequently extended to other large cities across India – Agra, Kanpur, Nagpur, Delhi, Calcutta – they extended the frictions between the elected municipal governments and the appointed trusts concerning division of functions and responsibilities. 'This initiated the process of multiplicity of authorities that became a major issue of governance after independence.' (Ansari, 2009: 52)

In pursuing its goals of improving or destroying slums and making available better living conditions for the poor, the Bombay Improvement Trust was a failure. At least in the short run, the Trust was actually reducing the supply of low cost accommodation, and doing it without concern for those evicted. Thousands of houses were destroyed without alternatives being provided. In order to let light and air into homes, the Municipal Corporation had rooms inside houses destroyed to create interior *chowks*. To create this space, some residents were displaced; in some cases the homeowners added storeys to their houses. The result was more overcrowding. The remaining houses rose in price, so the poor could not afford them. They left or they cramped even more tightly into the remaining space. Meanwhile, the Trust was unable to provide adequate new housing on the city's outskirts. Poor residents also could not pay the systematic collection of rent demanded by the Trust; they often preferred private owners with whom they could negotiate or delay payments.

Living conditions in the overcrowded tenements in the central districts of the city continued steadily to deteriorate. By 1911, fearing financial losses, the Trust began to raise rents. In effect, by knocking down buildings in the slums and raising building standards, the Trust had evicted the poor and created middle class housing in its place. (Kidambi, 2007: 71-110)

The dilemmas of the Trust revealed just one more example of the conflicts over land that characterised Bombay (and other cities). 'Conflict over land had a long history and been so acute that the planning efforts were marginalized and vested interests determined incremental growth in the island city. In this situation, the state had never been dominant nor determined enough to ensure that planning initiatives were actually implemented.

The essence of Bombay's history lay in the conflict between serving the immediate needs of vested interests and the long term benefits for society as a whole.' (Dossal, 2010: 164)

Although health conditions were less severe, the physical conditions of Calcutta housing were even worse than in Bombay. Calcutta had the highest percentage of slums of any city in India, 'divided into great "blocks" of buildings, ranging over 20 to 270 acres (but most commonly about 100 acres) consisting of streetless dense building. The total area covered in this way in the city in 1912, [the year after the Calcutta Improvement Trust was established] was 2,200 acres covering an area of three square miles.' (Meller, 1979: 338)

The first chairman of the Calcutta Improvement Trust, E.P. Richards, wrote a devastating 259 page report 'On the Condition, Improvement and Town Planning of the City of Calcutta and Contiguous Areas.' Revealing his frustration in dealing with the lack of planning, he said:

A casual glance at the Calcutta plans shows instantly that the city, as a whole, actually possesses no streets. There are but two small areas in Calcutta having the normal street system which is found throughout the whole area of almost every city in the world. ... 2,500 acres are provided only with highly irregular lanes and passages. It would require the creation of 110 miles of ordinary 30-40 Ft streets to bring Calcutta into line with even the old built-up sections of European cities. (Moorhouse, 1971: 263; for a fuller discussion of Richards' report see Datta, 2012: 233-53)

The Calcutta Improvement Trust was to concentrate on the populated centres of the city, thus restricting its source of income, as there was little vacant land to sell off for development. The CIT saw its mission mostly as destroying slums, or at least opening them up to circulation of traffic and ventilation of air.

The concepts advocated by the National Housing Reform Council in Great Britain, and apparent in Britain's first piece of town planning legislation, the Housing Town Planning Act of 1909, began to influence Indian planning, but the gap between British ideals and Indian realities was too great. The new British legislation called for purchasing land on the outskirts of cities and developing it for the respectable poor with a steady wage; they would then abandon their inner-city homes for the next generation of the poor. 'It was an idea based on the possibility of rising real incomes for the poor, orderly and controlled administration, and the efficacy of private initiative. ... Conditions in Indian cities could not have been more different.' (Meller, 1979: 336)

Industrialisation in India was minimal through most of the 19th century. Town planning in the late 1880s and 1890s was more 'a matter of asserting the Imperial presence by the construction of impressive buildings for colonial rulers and their officers.' (Meller, 1979: 331) In municipalities, very little professional expertise existed for drafting and implementing town planning. (Meller, 1979: 341) The key personnel in India were sanitary and civil engineers, who cleared slums or built straight roads through them; filled up tanks to get rid of mosquitoes; and made sure civil lines were well taken care of with water and sewerage services paid for by taxes on the entire city population. Social planning was virtually non-existent.

38.5 TWENTIETH CENTURY NATIONALISM; PATRICK GEDDES AND THE RETHINKING OF TOWN PLANNING

The Bombay Town Planning Act of 1915, the first town planning legislation in India, gave the Bombay Municipal Corporation powers to prepare Town Planning Schemes

for urban development or redevelopment and present them to the Governor in Council of the City of Bombay. It called for zoning, building regulations, acquisition of land for public purposes, and the collection of funds for local improvements. The need was felt especially strongly because of the chaotic growth of Bombay's textile mills and the workers' housing that surrounded them.³ The initiative vested in the local authorities, although the State Government could in special cases direct the local authorities to undertake Town Planning Schemes. (Ansari, 1977: 10; also Ballaney, 2008)

Other provinces followed, UP in 1919, Madras in 1920. All the plans were physical in orientation. Some entrusted the responsibility to local governments, some to Improvement Trusts. Some were limited to municipal limits, some to peripheral areas, some included both. Some enabled local governments or authorities to draw up planning acts. Most of the town planning legislation called for the use of eminent domain; compensation for the land acquired would be negotiated, but government had the final say.

The Bombay legislation was different, calling for land pooling where possible. Each landowner to be affected by the acquisition for public facilities would surrender a part of his land to the government, and keep a part. The land remaining after the government's acquisition would be re-parcelled out in proportion to the value of each person's land to the whole. It was presumed that landowners would approve of this process because the value of their land, even though reduced in size, would nevertheless increase by virtue of the new road or other facility introduced into the area. No one was completely dispossessed; the value of the land increased; the government did not purchase land or become a landlord. In the short run, this method was time consuming, requiring a great deal of consultation with the landowners, but, in the long run, it created less resentment and fewer protests. Nevertheless, after some time, the process of land pooling gave way to the use of eminent domain, even in Bombay Province. Eminent domain appeared so much easier to use. (In the last decade, however, Gujarat has returned to using land pooling.) (Ballaney, 2008)

The five development plans prepared in 1915 for Ahmedabad by the 'Consulting Surveyor' to the Bombay Government, Arthur Mirams, demonstrate the intersecting interests of British town planners, the colonial government, and the Indian nationalist movement, which was creating its own urban agenda. In 1915, Ahmedabad was the home of Mohandas Gandhi, just beginning his rise to leadership of the nationalist movement, and also of Vallabhbhai Patel, Gandhi's principal lieutenant in Gujarat. Patel served for many years as an elected member of the Municipality, and for several as its President. If Mirams' plans were to be implemented, the Municipality would have to be persuaded.

The town planning schemes for restructuring and bringing electricity and increased water supply and sewage lines to Jamalpur and Kankaria, areas just adjacent to and outside the walls of the old city, were generally popular and passed easily. On the west bank of the Sabarmati River, however, farmers objected to new development plans that took away their land. Vallabhbhai Patel, who felt that the city had to expand, persuaded them to comply. On the other hand, Patel felt that the plans for pulling down the city walls and replacing them with a ring road and an electric tram line were too expensive. In addition, he appreciated the symbolic importance to the Muslim community of retaining the walls, which had been built in the time of the Gujarat Sultanate, and of preserving

³ The overall proportion of urbanization in India was not rising very fast, however, from 10.8% in 1901 to 13.9% in 1941, the last census of India under British rule, to 17.3% in 1951. The aggregated numbers are more impressive, from about 26 million in 1901 to about 44 million in 1941 to about 62 million in 1951. The largest cities were growing fastest.

the Muslim cemeteries at their base. This project languished for two decades before it was implemented, without the tram line. Later, Patel also opposed plans for a road through the walled city, on grounds that Indians hadn't been consulted; road construction was therefore put off until 1933. Social and political considerations were also part of the agenda of the Indian National Congress and in 1924 the INC presided over the election to the Ahmedabad Municipality of Kacharabhai Bhagat and two other dalits, its first 'untouchable' mill worker representatives. (Spodek, 2011: 76-77; 100-01)

In 1915, Patrick Geddes arrived in India, at first as a guest of Lord Pentland, Governor of Madras, who asked him to bring to India his innovative Cities and Town Planning Exhibition. Geddes stayed on in India until 1924, the last six years as a professor of Civics and Sociology at the Bombay University. A remarkable man who has influenced town planners for a century, Geddes believed that 'the town planner was the propagandist, the inspirational genius who would raise the consciousness of the whole community...' (Meller, 1979: 343-44) He managed to get the Madras Government in 1915 to appoint the first official town planner in India, H.V. Lanchester, architect and editor of *The Builder*. (Meller, 1979: 343)

Geddes' ideas were influential but not immediately implemented. His concepts were too romantic, too organic, too rooted in planning with and for the community rather than in physical planning of buildings and roads by professional engineers. Geddes saw British planning as the problem, not the solution. 'Geddes was totally scathing about the expensive and unrealistic activities of the British engineers and sanitarians with their belief in wide, open thoroughfares, wholesale destruction of slum areas, flushed sewers, etc; whilst Improvement Trusts rarely had the powers to make a comprehensive impact on the total environment of the city.' (Meller, 1979: 345) Geddes proposed cheap and ameliorative solutions.

A few of the princes invited Geddes to make new plans for their capital cities, and some did establish Improvement Trusts. Geddes' ideas endured, but they had to wait for a time and place in which community, rather than zoning, would be the focus of planning. A few European trained urban planners came to India after Geddes. Linton Bogle, a graduate of the first British university department of civic design at Liverpool, came and wrote a treatise on *Town Planning in India* in 1929, following his experience as Chief Engineer of the Lucknow Improvement Trust. Bogle wrote of the need to address the appalling conditions in the slums. He used public health indices – a death rate of 501/1000 infants under one year of age in Bombay; 464 in Cawnpore; 330 in Calcutta – to emphasise the need for immediate action. He cited the dense overcrowding in the large cities, the lack of space for recreation and play, the need for larger residences. Bogle was an engineer, and most of the remedies he proposed took the form of physical planning, including zoning and increased room for wider roads. (Bogle, 1929) In his introduction to Bogle's manual, Radhakamal Mukerjee, of the University of Lucknow, proclaimed the need for social planning as well as engineering, in part because all of the industrial cities had enormous surpluses of male population who might be seduced by 'the thought of running away to liquor shops and brothels where there is more room space, more light, and more company.' (Bogle, 1929: 5)

Depression in the 1930s and then World War II brought about a pause in Indian planning, as elsewhere. The construction of New Delhi as a new national capital, which continued even through the depression, was a major exception. Otherwise,

the only important event from the point of town planning around this time was the publication of a report in 1946 by the Health Survey and Development Committee under the Chairmanship of Sir Joseph Bhore. It recommended the creation of a Ministry of

Housing and Town Planning in every Province, well equipped Provincial Directorates of Town Planning, appointment of an expert in the Central Ministry of Health to advise on and scrutinize Town Planning Schemes in different provinces seeking financial support from the center, and creation of Improvement Trusts in all large cities. (Ansari, 1977: 11)

Independence in 1947 revealed the limitations of town planning up to that point: shortage of professionals, non-existence of comprehensive town planning legislation in almost all the States, and lack of organisation of town planning departments. In 1951, the Institute of Town Planners, India, was created with 19 members (290 in 1971; 600+ in 1979). The central and state governments began establishing planning legislation and town planning departments at the state level. The preparation of Master Plans for major Indian cities began in the 1950s as a coordinated set of proposals for the physical development of the whole city rather than for parts of it – as the Town Planning Schemes had been – and going beyond problems of crisis management into consideration of future as well as present needs. (Ansari, 1977: 11) A new era, with new problems, was seeking new solutions, but, for better or worse, it began with the ambiguous legacy of the previous century.

38.6 SUMMARY

Town planning emerged in England as a response to the problems posed by the industrial city in the 19th century. In India, the construction and reconstruction of cities for reasons of governance, and to reduce threats posed by epidemics, was more piecemeal and partial, hampered by indifference to the problems of indigenous zones of the city, inadequate finances, and ineffective legal measures. By the 20th century, the influence of professional town planners, the growing nationalist interest in municipal politics, and the interventions of indigenous elites altered the scenario. Many Indian cities, however, continued to bear the marks of a legacy of cities divided on racial and class lines, and planned (or not planned) accordingly.

38.7 EXERCISES

- 1) How did British India confront urban issues with regard to design and control of spaces, health and sanitation?
- 2) Critically examine the altered social relationships and urban forms in the British built capitals.
- 3) How did nationalists respond to the opportunities for new urban governance in the colonial period?
- 4) What role did the 'Improvement Trusts' play in the improvement of health and sanitation in the cities during the colonial period? Were the Improvement Trusts at all needed?
- 5) Mention the chief features of Town Planning Acts. What was their significance?
- 6) Write brief notes on Geddes' and Bogle's ideas of town planning.

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UNIT 39 PREDICAMENTS OF POST COLONIAL CITIES*

Structure

- 39.1 Introduction
- 39.2 Independence/Partition and Resettlement
- 39.3 Producing the New Urban Citizen
- 39.4 A New Impetus to Urban Planning
- 39.5 Critiques of Planning
- 39.6 Social Movements and the City
- 39.7 New Risks and Contemporary Urbanism
- 39.8 Summary
- 39.9 Exercises
- 39.10 References

39.1 INTRODUCTION

The departure of the British from India signalled a new start in many areas of national life. Cities, as centres of large populations and as potential sites of economic growth and employment opportunities, also attracted the attention of national leaders, though to a lesser extent than rural areas. On the one hand, basic urban amenities had to be provided for the existing urban centres, with the larger cities posing particular difficulties. On the other, new urban settlements had to be created, and older towns revived, in order to accommodate refugees and migrants and to set up new industries and commercial ventures. Thus, for instance, were created the industrial townships of Rourkela, Durgapur and later Bokaro; so too were the cities of Faridabad, Ghaziabad and Gurgaon improved to accommodate the fresh influx of people. This Unit focuses on the nature of this transformation in Indian cities, beginning from early post-independence years leading up to the contemporary transformation of our cities.

39.2 INDEPENDENCE/PARTITION AND RESETTLEMENT

In August 1947, India became independent/partitioned, accompanied by large scale violence in which neighbours and communities turned upon each other and millions had to cross newly minted borders under the fear of death and destruction. With this, a new urban life began in the shadow of death, as cities of residents and migrants became camps of refugees. This was especially true of Delhi, the national capital and of Calcutta, then India's largest metropolis. Muslims from the rural hinterland were reported to be pouring into Delhi right through the summer of 1947 to escape the violence that they faced there, turning the city into a 'refugee-istan'. Soon, many of them left for Pakistan even as Hindu and Sikh refugees found their footholds in the capital city of independent India. The emotional pain of partition and forced migration would find expression only much later. By contrast, its physical manifestations were evident from the very outset:

These refugees flooded Delhi, spreading themselves out wherever they could. They thronged in camps, schools, colleges, *gurdwaras*, *dharamsalas*, military barracks and gardens. They squatted on railway platforms, streets, pavements, and every conceivable

space ... Houses in the old city 'evacuated' by Muslims were forcibly occupied by incoming refugees. Government officials also encountered difficulties in trying to remove various forms of unauthorized construction, encroachment and occupancy. (Dutta, 1986: 444)



1. Refugees, Purana Qila, Delhi, 1947

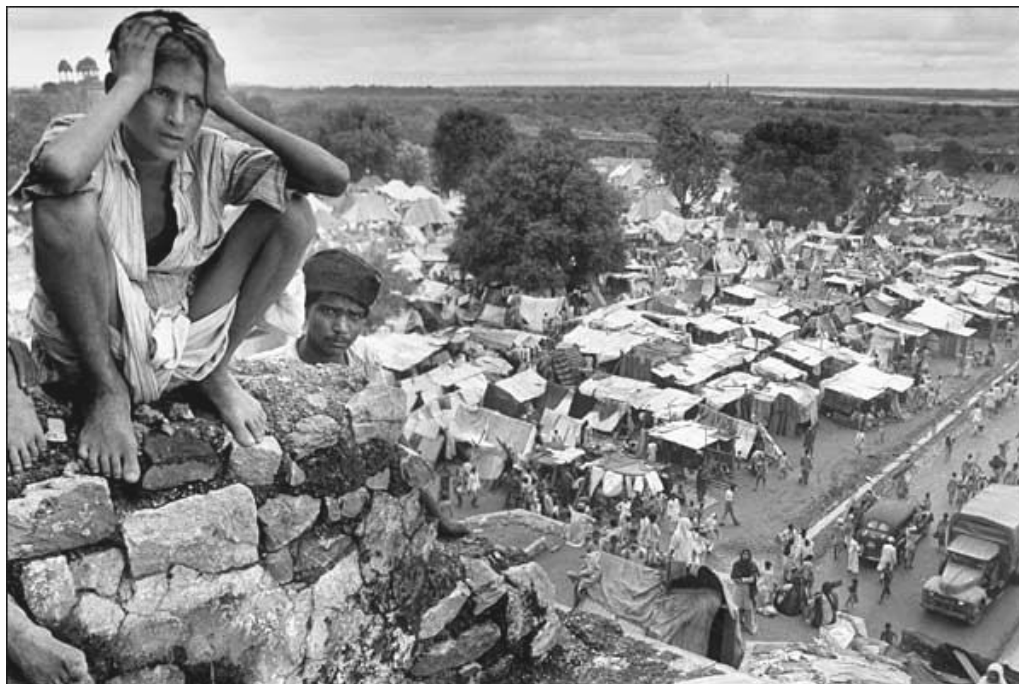
Source: The Manchester Guardian, 27 September 1947

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Manchester_guardian_purana-qila1947.jpg



2. Partition Exodus

Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Old-sikh-man-carrying-wife1947.jpg>



3. Refugee Camp, Delhi, 1947

Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Young-refugee-delhi1947.jpg>

In contrast to Delhi, the refugee migrants of Calcutta came not all at one go but in several different periods. The first group of ‘old’ migrants, consisting of slightly over 40 lakh people, were those who came to India from the former East Bengal in the period 1946-1958. Another wave of migrants came between 1958 and 1963 but seem to have been denied the status of refugees while a third wave of populations that so migrated between 1964 and 1971 were referred to as ‘new migrants’. Some among the early migrants, especially those of the middle classes, had ties of occupation and kinship and tended to gravitate towards Calcutta, while the lower and scheduled castes preferred resettlement in villages and as these *bhadralok* migrants converged on the city, an already congested city faced an even more severe housing crisis.

The resettlement of these refugee populations was an immediate and urgent necessity, perhaps more so in Delhi than in Calcutta, where providing relief was the major preoccupation of the government, at least in the immediate post-Partition years. Official narratives emphasised the humanism of the Nehruvian state and the resilience of the refugee communities. Refugees were settled at Kingsway camp (at one time housing close to 30,000 people), Karol Bagh and Shahdara. By the end of 1950 close to 300,000 refugees had been housed, two-thirds in evacuated houses and close to a third in new constructions. Over a thousand plots were allotted to displaced persons to build their own houses. The rest were put up in temporary tenements.

Historians have shown that only those who could show that they had lost property were given land in Delhi, thus leaving the poor who had been forced to migrate in the cold. The official accounts stress successful rehabilitation; by contrast Ravinder Kaur emphasises the ‘austerity measures’ that were adopted towards displaced person’s colonies with refugees having to constantly negotiate with officials for space and quality accommodation. In Calcutta, an even greater uncertainty prevailed than in Delhi, with more persistent hopes of continual exchange of populations across the newly created borders and perhaps less emphasis on immediate reconstruction through state efforts. Instead, what developed were self-help initiatives to form either private colonies or colonies of squatter settlements, the latter ranging from the forcible occupation of barracks

and empty country villas by individual families to the collective takeover of private, government and wastelands.

Of course, not all cities were thus burdened. Bangalore and Madras seem to have felt little of the brutal churning that was the experience of the northern and eastern metropolises, Bombay a little more so. In some instances, dealing with urban chaos thus emerged as a prominent theme of nationalist urbanism. In other instances, redressing the inequities of the colonial city was the more prominent concern. Finally, there were attempts at fashioning new urban spaces in industrial townships and new capitals, which envisaged the creation of new kinds of citizens. In all instances, the burgeoning slum population and the blighted state of the traditional town was a primary cause of worry.

39.3 PRODUCING THE NEW URBAN CITIZEN

The various concerns – those relating to resettlement of refugees, those concerned with chaos and disorder and those focused on housing and other amenities – came together in a common discourse of a democratic city and the anxieties around the production of the model citizen who would take the nation forward. The influential *Delhi Improvement Trust Enquiry Committee Report* of 1951 noted that housing congestion was not only a causative factor in the spread of tuberculosis and other communicable diseases but also bred juvenile delinquency, accentuated the bitterness of class antagonisms and fostered social discontent. ‘Where honest toil can produce nothing but squalor’, it observed, ‘there need be no wonder that unsocial tempers rise.’ (Vol. I: 21) Industrial progress, the Planning Commission feared, would be more than offset by ‘serious social and other problems in urban areas’, unless there was adequate forethought and planning. Cramped, insanitary living quarters also made for discomfort of body and discontent of soul and thus accentuated bitterness. Om Prakash Agarwal, in his work on *Town Improvement Trusts in India* (1945) had written that when people of the same sex shared a room, the lack of privacy dragged ‘everyone down to the same level of squalor’, degrading children and adolescents. Slums acted on the health and habits of the people and ‘encouraged a lassitude of mind’ that reacted upon the body, ‘which hit people’s resisting power and thus encouraged immorality, intemperance, gambling and other rampant vices.’ Members of the post independence Parliament continued to draw attention to the dangers on living in such close intimacy as was imperative in the slum like conditions of many cities. ‘There is so much congestion in Harpur *basti* [in Delhi]’, one member pointed out, ‘that many families live in a single room. Father, mother, son, daughter-in-law, daughter, son-in-law are all huddled in the same room. Under the circumstances how on earth can a person maintain his health (*tandrusti*), preserve her shame (*sharm/haya*) or retain their morality.’ (Bhargava, 1955:1838) The Barve Committee Report on Greater Bombay similarly reported on large sections of working people being forced to live without the benefits of domestic life, ‘with all the inevitable effect of this deprivation on social vice.’ These were matters of some concern to the newly independent rulers of India. ‘Bad environment affects us all alike; we are choked, each one of us ... by the meanness and squalor which stretch their tentacles up-wards from the lives of our less fortunate fellow citizens. The slums hold us back; while they exist, the roots of our civilization are rotten and our corporate existence as a people diseased,’ noted the *Delhi Improvement Trust Enquiry Committee* report. (Vol. I, 1951:13) A city of slums was thus hardly the place ‘from which one could “fairly expect high ideals of citizenship to emanate”’. It was therefore in the interests of the newly independent State that high priority be given to housing in any scheme of national welfare, ‘bearing in mind in particular the requirements of the poorest sections of the population.’

The primary aim of city planning from this moment would be social welfare, and

convenience and utility of largest number the main test of all city planning. What was at stake was not merely a new built form but the forging of a new society. If slums were the anti-thesis of a civic order, new planned housing projects and secure employment in public sector works would be the corrective measure – these would be the sites where the bulk of the subaltern urban population would be educated in the virtues of citizenship. Community Development Programmes were set up, with a view to creating a new urban leadership and to help communities take initiative to articulate their own needs – social, cultural and economic – while setting up a beneficial relationship between residents and local governments.

39.4 A NEW IMPETUS TO URBAN PLANNING

Democratic city spaces that were also functionally efficient could not, however, be built by good intentions alone. These needed technical expertise. Such expertise had not entirely been absent in colonial cities, but the emphasis then had been on sanitarians and engineers. Now, the practitioners of these disciplines were to be subordinated to those trained in physical planning and land-use economics. Large scale comprehensive land-use planning and appropriate zoning strategies thus emerged as key urban strategies for building a distinctive postcolonial city. Planning offered ‘a dream site for the new nation state, incorporating cosmopolitan virtues, internationalism, and an openness to new design’, writes Ravi Sundaram. (Sundaram, 2011) This was not merely a promise of ‘improvement’ but of a new beginning. ‘We are talking of construction, not reconstruction’, wrote Mulk Raj Anand in the opening issue of the journal MARG appropriately titled *Planning and Dreaming*. A similar emphasis obtained in the *Trust Enquiry Committee Report* which suggested a different approach to urban improvement than had been the case in the colonial period, to be based on a civic survey and a Master Plan. The necessary political space for the exercise of authority of the professional planner was also created. Parliamentarians argued that as people’s representatives, the burden of outlining the desired growth path was theirs. Having suffered bureaucratic developments through the Improvement Trusts they were in no mood to be subordinated to the Planner. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Minister for Health and in-charge of urban developments at this point of time, deferred to this sentiment and suggested that planning must be subordinated to legislative power, though not fully subsumed by it. Politics could not be avoided, but the appropriate relationship between the political class and the professional planner had to be clearly spelt out: ‘Non-officials do not understand anything about town planning ... But any plan that will come now will come before this committee on which there are plenty of non-official members. They can study it and make any suggestions. But the actual planning for a town or an urban area must be done by town planners.’ (Kaur, 1955:1890) Professional planners felt they were in the best position to deliver the promise of a positive urban *imaginary*. Many Indian leaders, planners felt, were indifferent to the city, if not anti-urban. Their hearts were in the villages that they considered ethically superior to the city and far more habitable. The city could be tolerated, but there was neither a creative conception of it nor a sense of identification with it. Urban dwellers thus had to be educated into the art of city building by the planning experts. Most Indian residents too, planners argued, lacked a sense of identification with the city, requiring special educational efforts in the form of media campaigns and local meetings to help them to identify with the plans made for them, and take pride in their cities.

The plans that followed had twin aims, on the one hand to improve conditions of existing settlements and on the other, to reorganise the city spatially to make a rational and enforceable separation between spaces of residence and those of commerce and

industry. The former required demolition and reconstruction; the latter necessitated the adoption of zoning principles. For possibly a decade or more after independence/partition, newly elected people's representatives insisted that demolition, relocation or any other improvement measure ought to derive their rationale solely from the extent to which they could provide better living conditions to the poorest segments of the urban society. Displacement, most were agreed, must be temporary in nature and allow for the return of original dwellers to better houses in the former slum areas. There was consensus too on providing alternative accommodation and livelihood opportunities before effecting any displacement. Prime Minister Nehru endorsed the proposition at the highest level: 'The real difficulty is the lack of accommodation for those who live in the slums at present. We have to provide housing for them before we can ask them to vacate.' His government remained committed that they would not remove slum dwellers until there was alternative accommodation which would enable them to continue to earn their livelihood. But this would not be easy. In the West 'the social conscience that demanded slum elimination' had emerged after a large build up of capital and resources, whereas in India, the moral, social and political pressure preceded 'the buildup of resources to permit of the massive attack required.' So there would be practical limits, with Rajkumari Amrit Kaur noting that 'even with the best of desire to re-house all those persons on the land which is reclaimed after these slums are cleared, all these various people cannot be re-housed in the same area, because it cannot be a slum then if all of them could be re-housed there. So a certain amount of shifting is inherent in the situation.'

The most ambitious and theoretically sophisticated Master Plan drawn up was for Delhi which became law on September 1, 1962. A few years later, the influential journal MARG published articles on 'Planning for Bombay' by some of the leading architects of the city, carrying forward the ideas for the city contained in Master Plan in Outline (1947) and Report of the Study Group on Greater Bombay (1961). Indeed, planning was undertaken at a feverish pace, so that within a decade of the preparation of the Delhi Master Plan, Central and State Town and Country Planning organisations had prepared Master Plans for as many as 372 towns and cities in the country. Some remained focused on planning for the city alone; others argued for Town and Country Planning that would include a wider region. More importantly, guiding planning principles including ideas of 'optimum population' and 'dispersal' both continued to find resonance.

Writing of the prospects for new towns, S. G. Barve pointed out that while it would be irrational or even unfeasible to arbitrarily limit the population of any metropolitan city to a particular size, a great deal was needed to 'retard' this population drive towards the metropolitan centers through a policy of industrial decentralisation. 'Numerous well chosen and well dispersed "centers of growth", he wrote, 'must be selected at suitable townships and industrial development decentralised over them by the provision of infrastructural facilities as well as other promotional measures.' (Barve, 1966:24) Others such as Robey Lal talked of planning on a human scale, urban development as an area with a boundary, the determinants of the area being the technology available for ensuring limited travel time (not exceeding 20 minutes to work and commercial areas), housing related to needs of the occupants and minimum water, power and sanitary services. Consequently, the first goal of planning was envisaged as the balanced urban development of industry, housing, education and health services in smaller towns, away from existing large metropolis, achieved through the use of studies to determine the limits of urban growth for optimum development. On the other hand, M. N. Buch ruled out dictatorial policies for preventing migration from centers of starvation to centers of potential employment, while simultaneously emphasising the role of middle level towns in absorbing such migrants.

There were more radical dissenting voices too. 'We forget', Asok Mitra wrote, 'that no vital city in any part of the world will agree to limits being set to its growth. For, no sooner does the city cease to grow, that it begins to stagnate and decay.' (Mitra, 1966: 11) It was the vitality of the city that made it attractive, Mitra argued, squalor and filth notwithstanding. Similarly Ashish Bose: 'From time to time, recommendations are made that the migration to the cities must be curbed. This stems from the philosophy that rural migrants by swarming in the city ruin everything... This is a very perverse argument which is really based on a 'colonial' view of urbanization which looks upon cities as the exclusive preserve of the rulers, the rich and the supporting middle classes with the paraphernalia of the service sector. If the city people wish to have fresh air and a nice clean environment, *they must pay for it.*' (Bose, 1973: 15)

39.5 CRITIQUES OF PLANNING

By the middle of the next decade, things had begun to veer away from the script prepared by planners, as cities grew in ways which were not foreseen, and began to trump all planned conceptions. In Delhi, for instance, planners had imagined the city as evolving into a balanced, harmonious unit, but the city soon imploded from within and stubbornly resisted being ordered within the zoning grids. Some have seen this as a critical failure of 'implementation'. For instance, Gita Dewan Verma has written of the 'great terrain robbery' that is entirely a consequence of the misplaced *humaneness* of those who would speak in the name of the slums, rather than uphold the logic of a Plan; of those who demand 'progressive' planning in place of the old-fashioned Plan. For Verma, all that is desirable is already contained in the Master Plan and only its correct implementation can ensure that an orderly and sanitary city is created rather than a chaotic and anarchic one.

There were others who saw zoning and planning as foreign ideas, ill-suited to the Indian city, a critique that was largely developed by planners themselves. John A. Hansman, advising the Government of West Bengal on behalf of the Ford Foundation, thus wrote that control of private development was extremely difficult to enforce under prevailing Indian conditions and at any rate was unimportant. Indian cities, he argued, had as a rule a mixed pattern of land use and 'it would be very difficult to secure public understanding and support of zoning ordinance.' Further, a shared use of urban space for residence and household industries was critical for the livelihood of many. Mixed activities, such as shops and residences in the same space, may indeed be a blessing in what was basically a 'pedestrian movement system'. Controls may work with industries that damaged the environment through noise, smoke or odour and in the case of traffic generating activities, but his overall advice remained that 'town planners in India should leave zoning to the foreigners who invented it and concentrate instead on the stimulation and coordination of direct public investments in the nation's growing towns and cities.' A decade later, the mid-term review of the Delhi Master Plan also noted that some of its assumptions were at odds with the realities of the city: 'As things stand, a substantial proportion of economic activities in the city are in unorganised sector and are carried out in a manner not amenable to the typically western planning approach based on a complete segregation of Land Uses. It will be long before this segment of the economy is completely eliminated (if at all), it is only reasonable to make for appropriate adjustments in Land Uses consistent with felt needs.'

The old city met with the most debilitating fate, where 'the percolation of all kinds of noxious activities and trades in areas once meant for noble and graceful living' had long continued. This was true not only of Delhi, but of several older urban cores in Hyderabad and Patna, where the walled city increasingly began to be blighted. The highly advanced

countries of the West, where the town-planners had acquired their professional expertise, S.S.H. Jhabvala wrote, could afford high cost housing and community amenities, but there was no money in India either for parks or for an adequate number of schools and hospitals. A. G. K. Menon considered 'satellite towns' and 'green belts' to be imported solutions, perhaps inevitable given that the writings on the subject was dominated by foreign scholars, but nonetheless for that reason too, requiring far greater effort in 'finding our own solutions to our own problems'. The 'natural' Indian city, Jai Sen proposed, was one that was simultaneously rural and urban, with the majority of the people in these 'rural' cities of Asia involved in service and small industry, making these very different from the heavy-industry based cities of the West that had evolved under very different conditions. And yet, planners and policy-makers, he argued, continued to draw their lessons from those cities, and tried to remake Indian cities in those terms, and in so doing, were doomed to failure.

At issue too was the nature of the built form itself. The planner in India, M. N. Buch pointed out, had to take into account the fact that the space would be filled largely by *jhuggies*, which, for years to come, would continue to be the symbol of human habitation in the country. Charles Correa offered examples of densely packed, low rise housing that could be found in Indian villages, in Casbahs of Algiers, in cities such as Jaipur, Tokyo and London, the last being the most human and livable of all the great metropolises in the world. I. K. Gujral too joined in, promoting low-rise, high-density patterns of growth in place of 'high-rise' solutions. For Jagmohan, the conscious and sub-conscious adoption of the western model of settlement was ruinous and smacked of 'fake modernity'. Instead of modern multi-storied buildings made of steel and cement, housing for the urban poor required the use of local materials – thatch, mud, wood and brick – and the construction carried out largely by the inhabitant himself, providing shelter, but also, air, light, pure water and greenery, thus building 'real and natural' settlements rather than settlements that were artificial and imposed from above.

However, not all were convinced. As one commentator wrote in the context of Bombay:

The other evening an internationally renowned Bombay architect-cum-city planner told a TV audience in all seriousness that he thought it a pity that so much cement and steel was being wasted on housing for the low income groups ... low income housing ought to be made of low cost material like coir-matting. Perhaps, he forgot that his hopes are already facts. Most low-income housing is built of things like matting, scrounged squares of tin, and bits of cardboard. The only trouble is, it gets washed away every monsoon and lets in the slush, the dust, the damp, the heat, the early morning chill during the rest of the year. ('Cosmopolitan City', *EPW*, 1972: 2275)

39.6 SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND THE CITY

As critics debated the urban question through the late 1960s and early 1970s, urban policy tended to become increasingly inhospitable to the poorer and more vulnerable sections of the society. A host of social and political movements developed in response. For much of the 1950s and 1960s, as Partha Chatterjee has pointed out in the context of Calcutta, the urban elites who had been active in the nationalist movement provided moral and social leadership to the neighborhood which emerged as an important site of cross-class associations, even if dominated by the upper and middle classes. In Bangalore, the Gokhale Institute of Public Affairs studied by Janaki Nair and in Bombay, the Save Bombay Committee and other similar institutions that feature in Gyan Prakash's *Mumbai Fables*, sought to provide similar pedagogical and civic leadership. These initiatives seem to have reached their limits by the next decade, when a variety of social movements gained prominence, some specifically addressing urban issues, and others taking on a larger national canvas. Writing of feminist movements of the period thus,

Raka Ray reveals the emergence of a strong Maoist politics in Hyderabad, struggles against issues of sexual harassment and safe contraception in Bombay, and a more 'pragmatic' set of interventions in Calcutta, centered on issues of literacy, wage employment, water and electricity. Anti-price rise movements were another prominent field of political activity, often in alliance with trade unions and feminist movements. And in cities across India, especially in Patna and Ahmadabad, movements for the 'reconstruction' of India, with huge participation of students and the youth, heralded important changes in the national political scene. Working class movements too expanded in scale, covering not only the larger cities, but also smaller urban centers such as Faridabad and Ghaziabad.

Many of the features of these struggles – the link between the countryside and the workers, the importance of the neighbourhood for carrying out struggles at the site of the factory, and that of the link between formalised industrial sector workers and the mass of organised labour – described by historians as characteristic of the colonial city, continued to remain a feature of the post colonial struggles. Caste-based movements, especially of Dalit groups in western and southern India, made similar strategic use of the neighborhood settlements as sites of protest, while also struggling to gain greater access to public spaces. They also grew more radical, with the *Dalit Panthers* of Bombay (1972) especially gaining national prominence. Movements which were more parochial and gave expression to the 'sons of the soil' argument, such as the Shiv Sena in Bombay, begun in 1966, gained political prominence in poor and middle class neighbourhoods through an engagement with everyday issues.

The responses of the state to the new social movements varied over time. It had been possible in the 1960s to be relatively sanguine about the challenges being posed, but by the next decade a more authoritarian response emerged. On the fateful day of 19th April 1976, women, men and children at Turkman Gate in Delhi faced the onslaught of an Emergency police bent upon ridding the city of the 'encroachers' on government land and resettling them elsewhere; some died, many more were subjected to extreme violence. In the ensuing clash between those who laid historic claims to this space and those who were bent upon beautifying the city by getting rid of the poor, a new lexicon emerged, one in which questions of law began to take precedence over those of justice, in which 'encroachment' began to take precedence over 'disease and darkness'; in which the improvement of slums would not be about the residents of those spaces but about ensuring that the rest of the city came to no harm on their account.

This was one response to the crisis of the city or, indeed a more general crisis of democracy itself, through the brutal suppression of subaltern voices and the forced redrawing of the existing spatial arrangements, with a new discourse of (il)legality, and (il)legitimate state violence taking centre stage. However, in the years that followed, there was another response to the breakdown of liberal urbanism, with the State intervening through a process of accommodation, extending 'exemptions' without formalising the demands for basic needs. From the 1970s, and into the 1980s, as Partha Chatterjee points out, the logic of electoral mobilisation, on the one hand, and of welfare distribution on the other, set up the terrain of what he characterises as 'political society', to distinguish it from the more conventional understandings of 'civil society' in which citizens were guaranteed their rights through law. The State, he argues, well recognised that many of the spaces and practices of the urban poor were illegal; yet it could hardly expect that they turn into proper citizens before such basic needs as housing, water, electricity and transport had been provided to them. In order to achieve this, without fundamentally weakening the Rule of Property and of Rights, it thus enunciated various policies that were carefully calibrated to extend some facilities without allowing them to be translated as matters of legal entitlements.

39.7 NEW RISKS AND CONTEMPORARY URBANISM

For a decade or so after, it seemed as if the excesses of the Emergency would yield to policies favouring accommodation of the poor and the vulnerable. Very soon, however, it became evident that the risks faced by low income groups would from now on be translated into the environmental burdens posed by the poor. The environmental question was posed as early as the 1970s when the Prime Minister inaugurated the first meeting of the National Committee on Environmental Planning on April 12, 1972. The effort was aimed at familiar domains of forests and wildlife, but also at the city, though not all were yet convinced of the importance to be attached to this. One commentator asked whether the National Committee on Environmental Planning plan would reorganise services such as water supply, water treatment, sewage disposal, sanitation etc. ? Would it spend large resources on managing industrial and radioactive wastes, planning rapid urban transportation and superfine highways, as did similar bodies in the affluent world? A piece on 'Cosmopolitan Bombay' took 'clever, modern, scientific socialists of the Raj' to task: 'some of them are now profoundly concerned about the pollution of "our" air and water, when many people get no water, polluted or unpolluted.' On the other hand, the Report of the International Panel of Experts appointed by the Secretary-General of the UN Conference on the Human Environment argued in favour of location based solutions: 'Pollution emanating from industrial development represents more of a potential than an actual threat at this time in many developing countries ... By taking sensible decisions on the location of industries and their waste disposal ... they can avoid some of the worst environmental problems that have arisen in connection with industrial pollution.' Many in India concurred, though in a more circumspect manner. To the extent that anti-pollution measures could be built into industrial development without additional cost, S. B. Mukherjee of Calcutta Metropolitan Planning Organisation argued, it might be a good idea to pay some heed to this problem. But except in such circumstances, 'let us temporarily accept the possibility of smoke nuisance, gas nuisance and noise nuisance, because attempts to eradicate them will add to the cost of industrial output ... when at a future date we will have augmented our national income sufficiently, we can use part of that income for adopting anti-pollution measures and restoring ecological balance.' (Mukherjee, 1975:24) The question, as with much else, was of finance, and the issue was posed fairly starkly – industry, even if it came with environment pollution.

For some other commentators the choice between environment and development was a false one. What was needed were different combinations of the two, subject to two constraints: an 'outer limit' avoiding development paths that would put human survival itself at risk, and an 'inner limit' defined by poverty levels and basic human needs for survival below which concern for environment could not be pushed.

By the middle of the 1990s the environmental question was no longer marginal but instead gained a new salience, often through the intervention of the Supreme Court. Together, the limit of the political resolution to questions of urban 'failures' led to greater emphasis on the issue of il/legality and the in/formalisation of urban spaces. When operating in conjunction, the consequence has been the simultaneous extension of the body of rights and the creation of new insecurities for the urban poor. On the one hand the Supreme Court has argued that 'Article 21 protects the right to life as a fundamental right. Enjoyment of life... including [the right to live] with human dignity encompasses within its ambit, the protection and preservation of environment, ecological balance free from pollution of air and water, sanitation, without which life cannot be enjoyed.'

On the other, the persistent presence of slum populations no longer evokes the automatic protection of the Court or the State. If anything, there are increasing instances where the illegality of slums and the aesthetic dislike of their apparent filth has become the pretext for their demolition. From Operation Sunshine in Calcutta to the relocation of the population living on the margins of the Yamuna in Delhi, slum politics in the 1990s has been characterised more by dislocation than reconstruction. On the other hand, new groups have emerged that once again evoke the neighborhood as the unit of politics and governance, though in this instance reflecting more the aspirations of the middle and upper classes. Resident Welfare Associations thus play an increasingly important role in cities such as Mumbai and Delhi, while larger civic formations such as CIVIC, BATF and ABIDE have gained prominence in Bangalore.

39.8 SUMMARY

The Unit has shown there was unanimity among nationalist leaders in the wake of independence that cities should be more equitable and just, and that cities would provide employment opportunities and housing benefits to all and which, in general, would be open and hospitable both to the elite and to the poor. However, even at that time, things had been harsher for squatters, those who happened to be illegal occupants of land, and those for whom there were far fewer guarantees of security than for the ordinary slum dweller: 'when people build huts in unauthorized manner and spread dirt/disease in the city', Rajkumari Amrit Kaur then observed, 'it becomes very difficult for the New Delhi municipal committee to allow them to continue to live there.' Not surprisingly, eviction of the poor from squatter settlements was a periodic feature of all the large cities of India even in the 1950s and 1960s. There is little denying, however, that since then the emphasis on legality has grown to a much larger extent, possibly even to the extent where the balance between law and justice that was characteristic of an earlier era has been lost, leading several scholars to refer to the gentrification of Indian cities, especially its large metropolises.

None of this, however, has deterred the migration of those desirous of creating better opportunities for themselves, leaving rural areas for urban ones, or moving from one urban area to another. They can no longer assert a confident *right* to the city, for they may well be on the wrong side of law in terms of their habitations. They continue, however to make efforts at obtaining some tenuous *legal* hold on a plot of land in the city, through fragmentary claims based on ration cards or names on electoral rolls that attest to their continual presence in a particular place. And when that fails, they engage in other negotiations, forcing the 'slum question' to be articulated through a series of shifting strategies – rights, when recognisable; exceptions, when negotiable; regularisation, when possible. The politics of the city, caught between formal plans and informal settlements/activities, between legal tenures and illegal habitations, between the elite desire for order and the subaltern need for amenities and opportunities, thus signals a new, more uncertain, urban future. It may still be possible that radical assertions from below may reclaim the city in the interests of all its residents, including those of the most vulnerable; it is equally possible that instead of the traditional walled cities we may increasingly encounter 'world cities' that are dotted with gated communities that resolutely keep their various proximate populations in distant, perhaps even confrontational, relationships.

39.9 EXERCISES

- 1) In what ways were cities altered in the wake of the partition crisis?

- 2) What were the urban pressures that emerged in the immediate post-independence decades, and how were they met?
- 3) What types of land use planning and zoning strategies were adopted as part of key urban strategies in post-colonial cities?
- 4) Discuss the critiques of planning strategies adopted in contemporary cities.
- 5) What impact did the 'environmental burdens' issue have on industrialisation and housing after the 1970s?
- 6) Do you think that the spurt in social and political movements in post-independence India was linked to poor urban planning?

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UNIT 40 CASE STUDY: BOMBAY*

Structure

- 40.1 Introduction
- 40.2 The Origins and Growth of Early Bombay
- 40.3 The City in the Cotton–Opium Era
- 40.4 A City Transformed: Early Industrial Bombay
- 40.5 Bombay as a Working Class City
 - 40.5.1 The Problem of Housing
 - 40.5.2 A New Worker Consciousness
 - 40.5.3 Community and Ethnicity
- 40.6 Summary
- 40.7 Exercises
- 40.8 References

40.1 INTRODUCTION

Bombay (now officially known as Mumbai) was, like several coastal towns of the Indian subcontinent that developed into major urban centres during the modern period, a product of colonial intervention in the Indian Ocean. From its early importance as a port city, it became, by the late 19th century a major centre of industrial production, and soon after, the financial capital of India. Indeed it was to become the most important metropolis in the subcontinent, in colonial and post colonial periods as well – as it became the centre of the new film industry. What are the ways in which this transition occurred from a small nondescript set of islands to a major metropolis?

40.2 THE ORIGINS AND GROWTH OF EARLY BOMBAY

Not very long after the Portuguese had occupied Goa in 1510, they established themselves at Bassein, a short distance from the port of Surat, in the early 1530s. The several islands that collectively came to be called Bombay are located in the Arabian Sea, off the western coast of India, south of Bassein. These nondescript islands remained territorial possessions of the Portuguese till the mid-seventeenth century when they were transferred to the English crown (1665). The English East India Company, which was at that time one of the minor European trading companies operating in India, acquired the islands from the crown against a token rent of ten pounds per annum and a loan of fifty thousand pounds to the government. The islands were transferred by the crown to the company in 1668. Thus, the ‘Bombay’ group of islands came under the company’s control from 1668 onwards.

Bombay comprises seven islands: Colaba; Old Woman’s Island (or Little Colaba); Mazagaon; Worli; Mahim; Parel; and the large ‘H’-shaped island Bombay (called Bombaim or Bom Bahia by the Portuguese). Over the next 250 years the physical geography of these islands was transformed by ‘reclaiming’ land from the sea to create the unified urban space designated as Bombay (in the following discussion ‘Bombay island’ refers specifically to the original ‘H’-shaped island marked by Malabar Hill at one end and the Fort on the other).

The main reason why the Portuguese, and subsequently the English, were keen to hold on to Bombay was its proximity to Surat, the premier port of the Mughal empire. After the islands passed into the hands of the East India Company they were placed under a deputy governor of Bombay who was subordinate to the English factory at Surat (the president of the Surat factory was the governor of Bombay). Although by the 1680s the Company had more or less opted for Bombay as its headquarters in western India, Surat was still thriving and continued to be the main focus of the Company's commercial activities on the west coast. Right until the end of the eighteenth century, Bombay 'was the Cinderella of the English settlements in India, the unhealthiest, the poorest, and the most despised'. (Spear, 1963: 66) In 1788 Lord Cornwallis (Governor-General, 1786-93) recommended a substantial reduction in the Company's Bombay establishment.

Ironically, it was around this time that the port was emerging as the centre of a flourishing export trade. From the mid-1780s sizeable quantities of raw cotton were being exported from Bombay to China. Pamela Nightingale (1970) dates this development to 1784. Raw cotton was required to pay for Chinese tea imported into England. As the Company (which had a monopoly of trade with China till 1833-34) sought to meet the demand at home for tea, shipments of raw cotton from Bombay to China grew steadily in the last decade of the eighteenth and the first two decades of the nineteenth century. It was in these decades that the scattered rural settlements of the seven islands became the city of Bombay.

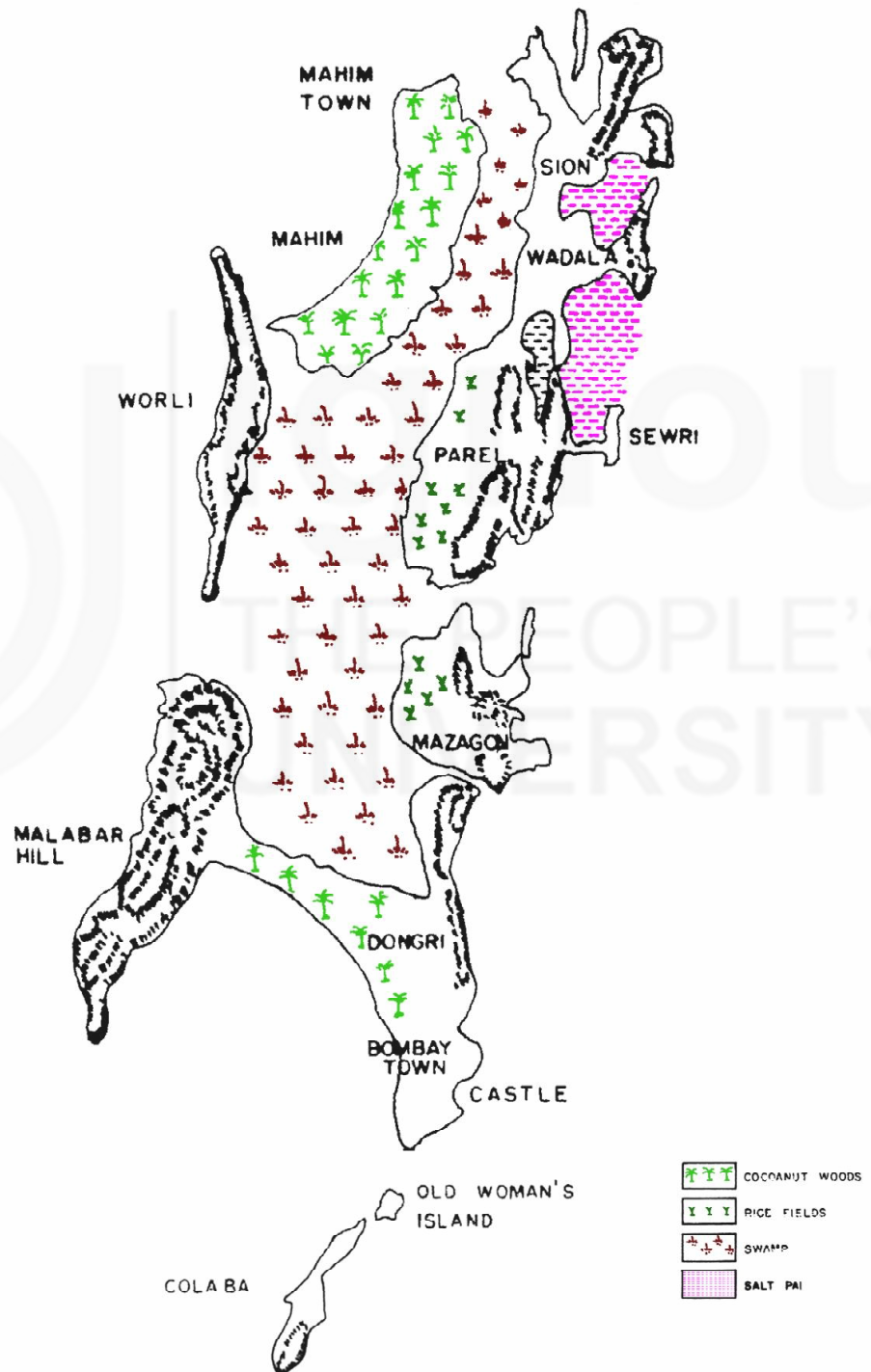
Until the late eighteenth century, Bombay was mainly inhabited by fishing communities, such as the Kolis. These communities also cultivated rice on a small scale and grew coconuts. The entire stretch from north to south, enclosed by Mahim–Worli–Malabar Hill in the west and Sion–Parel–Mazagaon–Dongri in the east was a huge swamp. There were some salt pans between Sion and Sewri. (see Map) In the initial phase of its colonial history, very few Europeans resided in Bombay. The celebrated physician and botanist Garcia d'Orta (1502-68) was among the few Portuguese who lived there. In the 1550s, he was granted possession of Bombay for life on the condition of encouraging the extension of agriculture on the islands and the payment of a nominal rent (*foro*). The East India Company later constructed its offices–cum–godown–cum–governor's residence, named 'Bombay Castle', at the site of his residence in the southeastern part of Bombay island. Subsequently, a wall built in several phases during the mid-eighteenth century protected the urban settlement that came up around 'Bombay Castle'. This area, which is known as 'the Fort' even today (though the Fort walls no longer exist) was the nucleus of early British Bombay. The 'Native Town' was the indigenous zone beyond the Fort—Girgaum and Dongri.

In the Portuguese era, the seven islands of Bombay were governed from Mahim. The island group was one of the various administrative units of the Portuguese territory of Bassein. Mahim, with its fort and customhouse, had been the head or *caçaba* (from *qasba* or small town, in this context the equivalent of a tahsil headquarters) of the administrative unit. The islands were rented or leased for varying durations to Portuguese individuals, who then collected revenues from the villages. At the beginning of the nineteenth century Mahim was still the most densely populated part of north Bombay.

After 1668, the centre of gravity of the colonial settlement gradually shifted to the island of Bombay, which, in the Company era, was the first portion of Bombay to be urbanised. Old Woman's Island and Colaba were soon incorporated with Bombay island. The fine natural harbour that the island possessed on its eastern shore gave it a distinct advantage. Subsequently, docks and shipyards came up in this part of the island. The swamp belt of central Bombay, in the vicinity of the harbour, was soon 'reclaimed' by filling up the marshes of Byculla, Parel, Worli, Dadar and Matunga. These were to

become densely populated localities in the industrial era. Mahim Creek, which separates Bombay from its northern neighbour Salsette, was the northern extremity of the settlement. A causeway linking Mahim with Bandra was constructed in the early nineteenth century, and the process of integrating the seven islands with Salsette began in right earnest. Today, the metropolis of Mumbai includes the localities of Bandra, Khar, Santa Cruz, Vile Parle, Juhu, and Kurla in Salsette, which are not suburbs but form part of Bombay proper.

BOMBAY - C. 1670, Showing the Seven Original Islands



40.3 THE CITY IN THE COTTON–OPIUM ERA

Raw cotton grown in western India was exported to China in very large quantities from the mid-1780s. This became a major reason for the emergence of Bombay as the foremost colonial urban centre of western India by the beginning of the nineteenth century. Cotton imported into Canton in English ships jumped from 12,82,829 *piculs* (one *picul* is equal to 133.33 lbs. or 60.48 kg.) in the decade 1784-93 to 27,13,062 *piculs* in the decade 1804-13 and 42,59,724 *piculs* in 1824-33 (after 1833, the East India Company gave up the China trade). However, the Company found it difficult to raise the resources for purchasing raw cotton in this area, unlike eastern India, where the conquest of Bengal (including Bihar and Orissa) in 1757 made possible the plunder of resources for the purchase of goods for the home market without actually paying for them. The Bombay establishment was unable to sustain itself financially as the Company hardly had any territorial possessions in western India.

This lack of resources was the basis of what Lakshmi Subramanian has referred to as the ‘Anglo–Banias alliance’ in western India, namely, the Company’s reliance on western Indian sarrafs for credit to solve the liquidity problem of the Bombay establishment. According to Subramanian, the ‘implications of local credit intervention became more pronounced and its ramifications more extensive’ in the last two decades of the eighteenth century. (Subramanian, 1987: 493) The complex network created by the Company that brought together Gujarati sarrafs, and Indo-Portuguese (indigenous inhabitants of Portuguese territories in India) traders, such as Miguel de Lima e Souza, who contracted to supply raw cotton to the Bombay establishment, facilitated the rise of Bombay.

Even more important for the emergence of Bombay as the commercial, financial and industrial capital of western India was the growth of seaborne exports of opium from the west coast, also to China, in the closing years of the eighteenth century. The relationship of this commodity to the city is a complicated one, especially for the first few decades of the history of the trade, and can only be understood with reference to the opium policy of the colonial state. Soon after gaining territorial power in eastern India, the East India Company established a monopoly over the opium produce of Bihar. The monopoly was extended to Banaras–Ghazipur and other opium producing areas of the Ganga region when these came under the Company’s control towards the end of the eighteenth century. In 1797, the Company introduced a policy under which all the opium produced in its territories in eastern India was directly appropriated from the peasants, and cultivation strictly regulated through the grant of licences. Opium was procured in the raw, semi-liquid, state from poppy cultivators and processed by the Company in its own establishments. The bulk of this opium was intended for export, mainly to China. The Company’s export opium was auctioned at Calcutta to private dealers who then took the risk of smuggling the drug into China where import of the drug was banned.

The Company soon had to contend with competition from the opium produce of the Malwa plateau (western Madhya Pradesh and some of the adjoining areas of Rajasthan). The Malwa opium export trade was already well established in western India, with Bombay as its main centre, by about 1800. Although the Company initially placed restrictions on the export of Malwa opium via Bombay, from 1831 onwards private traders were allowed to bring the drug to the port for onward shipment to China on the payment of a moderate duty. The opium trade gave a fresh spurt to the development of the colonial economy of Bombay, and the abolition of the East India Company’s monopoly of the China trade in 1833-34 gave it a further impetus, with several Bombay merchants working in close association with private British firms such as Jardine Matheson to push ever increasing quantities of the prohibited Malwa opium into China. This was

the backdrop against which Chinese officials tried to impose more stringent curbs on opium trafficking leading to the First Opium War (1839-42). The victory of Britain in the war implied that the Chinese market could now be flooded with opium both from eastern and western India.

Indigenous shipping and the opium trade were closely interlinked. Most of the leading opium merchants had their own ships, while most of the big shipowners of Bombay had investments in opium. The most well-known firms involved in the trade in the early nineteenth century, were Remington Crawford (which was a European company), Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy, Motichund Amichund, Nagardass Hirji Mody, Madowdass Ransordass, Mohammad Ali Rogay, Rogério de Faria, Cursetji Ardaseer and Aga Mohammad Suastry.

Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy, for instance, owned seven ships, of which the biggest were *Fort William*, *Charlotte*, *Bombay Castle* and *Good Success*. Motichund Amichund had six ships, of which *Cornwallis* and *Bombay* were the largest.

The west coast had a long tradition of shipbuilding. Bombay had two dockyards, one in Bombay harbour and the other at Mazagaon. The association of the Parsis with the shipbuilding industry of Bombay is well known. The famous Wadia family laid the foundations of shipbuilding at Bombay in the second quarter of the eighteenth century. Many of the ships that transported Malwa opium to China were built at Bombay in the early nineteenth century. (see Table)

Table : Ships Built at Bombay and Mazagaon Shipyards in the Early Nineteenth Century, Engaged in Carrying Malwa Opium to China

Ship	Tons	Shipyard	Year	Owner
1. <i>Anne</i>	788	Bombay	1812	Pestonji Bomanji
2. <i>Ardaseer</i>	422	Bombay	1836	Cursetji Cowasji
3. <i>Bombay</i>	602	Mazagaon	1835	MotichundAmichund
4. <i>Buckinghamshire</i>	1731	Bombay	1816	Framji Cowasji
5. <i>Caledonia</i>	710	Bombay	1824	Vicaji Merji
6. <i>Charles Grant</i>	1253	Bombay	1826	Cursetji Cowasji
7. <i>Charlotte</i>	691	Bombay	1802	Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy
8. <i>Clairmont</i>	328	Bombay	1826	Aga Mohammad
9. <i>Hannah</i>	457	Bombay	1811	Motichund Amichund
10. <i>Lady Grant</i>	239	Mazagaon	1835	Motichund Amichund
11. <i>Sir Robert Compton</i>	346	Bombay	1835	Aga Mohammad

It would be obvious from the names of prominent opium dealers mentioned earlier that businesspersons from several communities had a presence in the commercial world of Bombay in the first half of the nineteenth century. There were the Indo-Portuguese, Parsis, Konkani Muslims, Marwaris, Gujarati Baniyas, Bohras, and Armenians, to name only a few communities, giving Bombay a cosmopolitan character.

A significant feature of Bombay was that Indians were not entirely excluded from privileged urban locales, particularly the Fort. The southern portion of the Fort was inhabited by Europeans, while Indians tended to occupy its northern end. This was a reflection of the strength of indigenous elites in the city. On the other hand, they invested heavily in real estate, indicating their weakness rather than their strength: in a colonial society, opportunities for investment in other sectors were severely restricted. Investment

in real estate had increased in the latter half of the eighteenth century when a lot of property was bought by Indians in the Fort. Opium dealers and ship owners such as the brothers Pestonji Bomanji and Hormasji Bomanji of the Wadia family cornered much of the prime land in the area.

Bombay had over two lakh inhabitants by the second decade of the nineteenth century. The population grew at a phenomenal rate in the two decades prior to the middle of the century, by nearly 5.5 per cent per annum between 1826 and 1849. A census of 1849 recorded 5,66,119 inhabitants. After the mid-nineteenth century the rate of growth declined to about 2.5 per cent per annum. In 1864, over 8,00,000 persons resided in the city. The population was mainly concentrated in the Fort area, Dongri, Byculla, Girgaum, Mazagaon and Colaba. Almost one-fourth of the people who lived in Bombay were temporary migrant workers, mainly single males, who stayed in the city for a few years, put aside much of what they earned, 'and having saved from two to three hundred rupees', went back to their villages in western Maharashtra or Konkan. (Warden, 1861: 101) The development of the shipbuilding industry and the expansion of shipping provided opportunities for employment in the shipyards and docks. The cotton export sector created a large demand for casual labour for packaging the commodity (cotton screws used for pressing cotton were manually operated, requiring a large number of workers in the sailing season).

The distress caused by over-assessment following experiments with land settlements in the 1820s and 1830s, compelled peasants to supplement their agricultural income from other sources, bringing many of them to Bombay in search of employment for relatively short durations. The migrant workforce included peasant proprietors from this section who hoped to invest their meagre savings in land. In both cases, urban workers retained strong links with the rural economy of western Maharashtra, Konkan and Gujarat, with important consequences for the formation of new identities within the city.

Nevertheless, migration to Bombay speeded up the process of the integration of its hinterland with the international capitalist economy, exposing it further to colonial exploitation. The Bombay group of islands was physically isolated from western India till it began to emerge as the privileged focal point of the transport and communication infrastructure of the region during the course of the nineteenth century. These islands were separated from the mainland not only by the sea but also by the Western Ghats and the difficult terrain of the Konkan. The development of railways in the latter half of the century finally ended the geographical isolation of Bombay. Furthermore, as an administrative unit, Bombay Presidency had very few territorial possessions until the end of the third Anglo-Maratha war (1818). After, 1818 political control over large parts of western and central India, and the Deccan, gradually converted the entire region into Bombay's economic hinterland. It is no coincidence that there was a substantial increase in the population of the city in the two decades or so after the war. However, indigenous participation in shipping declined in the 1840s while new groups were taking over the opium trade. As we shall see in the next section, Bombay made a difficult transition to the industrial phase of its history.

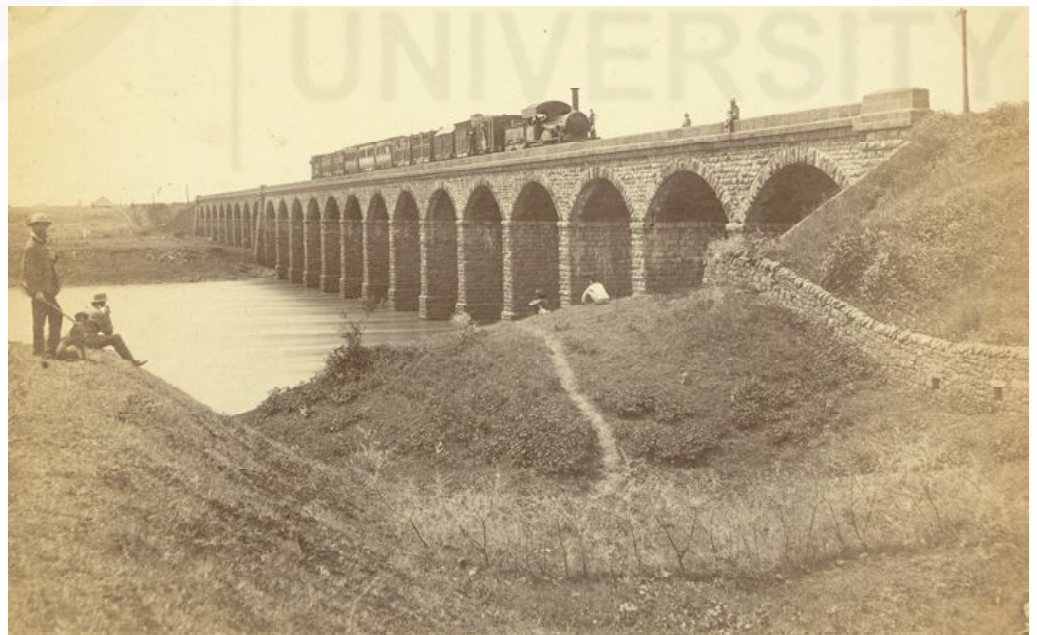
40.4 A CITY TRANSFORMED: EARLY INDUSTRIAL BOMBAY

In the late 1840s, indigenous merchants of Bombay began to withdraw from shipping and the opium trade. Asiya Siddiqi's seminal essay (1985) on the commercial activities of Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy has highlighted the difficulties faced by opium traders in transferring their earnings from China to Bombay, leading to a crisis by the end of the

1840s. Investing in opium was no longer lucrative. Mercantile groups which had participated in the trade in the first half of the century were replaced by a new set of traders, mainly Baghdadi Jews, of whom David Sassoon was the most prominent. Due to the constraints imposed by colonial rule and the inability to compete with owners of a new type of vessel known as the 'clipper' that was much faster than earlier ships, the shipping sector too had to be given up by indigenous businesspersons.

Indians still had a strong presence in the raw cotton export trade. Initially, English textile mills had shown little interest in cotton produced in western India because of its poor quality. It was not cleaned properly and contained a lot of 'extraneous matter'. Moreover, what was known as 'Surat' (Gujarat) cotton was of short staple so that it was confined almost exclusively to the manufacture of the weft, that which runs across the piece, and not the warp. Yet, Lancashire was emerging as an important market for the commodity by the middle of the nineteenth century, and trade was sufficient by the 1850s to warrant the establishment of a rail link from Bombay to the cotton growing Vidarbha region.

In the 1840s, when the proposal for the Great Indian Peninsular Railway was under consideration, the speedy transportation of opium to Bombay by rail was put forth as the principal consideration for investing in the line. By the early 1850s, the supply of raw cotton to England via Bombay became the main priority. Subsequently, the Lancashire cotton 'famine' caused by the American Civil War of 1861-65 (when cotton grown in the southern states of the United States of America ceased to be exported to Lancashire) dramatically increased Britain's dependence on Indian cotton. The line connecting Bombay with Thane (a distance of about 21 miles) was opened in 1853, creating the route along which the local trains of Bombay began to ply. Bori Bandar, the locality from which the line originated is located at the northern end of the Fort area. The grand Victoria Terminus (now Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus, a UNESCO heritage structure) was built between 1878 and 1888 at the site of the Bori Bandar station. The Bombay-Thane line passed through Parel which became the centre of the cotton textile industry in the latter half of the nineteenth century, connecting it with localities in which mill workers resided.



1. First Indian Railway: Bombay to Thane

Source: http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/20/Dapoorie_viaduct_bombay1855.jpg

Original text : <http://ogimages.bl.uk/images/019/019PHO0000254S3U00041000%5BSVC2%5D.jpg> (British Library)

During the cotton boom in Bombay, a new breed of Indian entrepreneurs, who were mainly financial operators, came to the forefront. Premchand Roychand was the most

well known of these. Some of the wealth he earned from his cotton speculations went into the construction of grand public buildings in the Fort area, such as the magnificent Rajabai Clock Tower located in the Fort campus of the University of Bombay which was founded in 1857.

But the boom ended in 1865 leading to a financial crash in which several speculators were ruined. A number of banks and insurance companies that had been established during the boom were liquidated. Nevertheless, a class of Indian capitalists in Bombay commanded sufficient resources to be able to survive the crisis, since they already controlled part of the city's financial infrastructure, dominated the trade in raw cotton, and owned a substantial portion of urban land. Indians could no longer be entirely excluded from financial institutions set up under European auspices. Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy was one of the six directors of the Bank of Bombay (established in 1840), while Juggonath Sunkersett and Ardaseer Hormasji were among the eight deputy chairmen of the Bank of Western India (established in 1842). Framji Cowasji was one of the three trustees of the latter bank. Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy, Juggonath Sunkersett, Bomanji Hormasji and Framji Cowasji were on the committee of management of the Government Savings Bank (established in 1835). The Bombay Chamber of Commerce, founded in 1836, was the product of a joint British and Parsi initiative.

In the mid 1850s, Indian capitalists also established the first cotton textile mills in Bombay. A cotton spinning mill was first set up by Cowasjee Nanabhoy Davar in 1854 (the mill began functioning in 1856), at Tardeo in central Bombay, and was entirely owned by Indians. Within half a century, the city had more than a hundred mills, the overwhelming majority of which were the result of indigenous capital investment. Bombay thus developed into a great industrial centre. The setting up of new mills was preceded by the final phase of the draining of the marshlands of central Bombay. In the latter half of the nineteenth century the population of Bombay got concentrated along a diagonal running from Dongri to Worli. This diagonal was equidistant from the factories lying to the north and north-east of it and the commercial zone lying south and south-east of it. The area came to be known as 'Girangaon' or 'mill village' with its own distinctive social and political ethos.

These developments went hand in hand with the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, and the expansion of the railway network linking Bombay with the rest of the subcontinent. The shift to the Suez route, coupled with the switch-over to steam navigation, revolutionised sea transport between Europe and India, particularly Bombay. With the expansion of traffic to and from Bombay from the 1860s it became necessary to provide more space and facilities at the port. The new dockyard at Mazagaon encouraged the development of a locality of dockworkers, where mill workers also began to live.

40.5 BOMBAY AS A WORKING CLASS CITY

Soon Bombay turned into a typical working class city, sharing the typical constraints, especially the challenge of housing. Equally linked was the rise of working class consciousness that led to trade unionism and *hartals*, a common feature of the industrial city life. Associations and loyalties based on community and ethnicity, as well as nation, also shaped collective actions in the city.

40.5.1 The Problem of Housing

As workers flocked to the textile factories of Bombay in large numbers, housing emerged as a major urban problem. The colonial state, as well as Indian elites, perceived urban development as a matter of confining the labouring poor, and apportioning as little

space and resources as possible for the huge wage-earning class that was required to sustain the city's industrial economy. Consequently millhands had to live in extremely congested residential localities that came up in central Bombay. These localities lacked basic civic amenities, were unhygienic, and overcrowded. As early as the 1860s, within a decade of the establishment of the first cotton mill, the local authorities found the situation alarming. An official report noted that workers were housed in ramshackle structures that had two or three floors, 'and the various rooms were densely peopled, and the floors of the verandahs were fully occupied, while to eke out the accommodation in some of the verandahs there were *charpaees* or cots slung up and screened with old matting to form a second tier of sleeping places for labourers that were employed in the day.' (Leith, 1864: 25) Sanitary conditions were abysmal, especially in shared facilities such as latrines where 'baskets which cannot retain liquid are used under the privy-seats, and those privies have a flat floor, and ... the accumulated soil is left to flow out on the pavement of the gullee.' (Leith, 1864: 13)

The main features of the typical *chāl* (*chawl*), Bombay's multi-storeyed workers' residential compounds, were already in place by the 1860s (Leith's report uses the term '*chāl*' for the structures referred to above). More systematic initiatives to provide accommodation for the labouring poor were prompted by the plague epidemic of the 1890s (the spread of the disease was particularly serious in 1896), which led to the formation of the Bombay City Improvement Trust (BIT), largely dominated by local elites, in 1898. Among other measures, the BIT was expected to take over for 'improvement' localities that were identified as the most unhygienic and congested. Workers were to be housed in tenements with sanitary conditions. However, the BIT ended up by providing accommodation that was even more congested than that from which the workers had been evicted. Moreover, whereas nearly half a lakh people were displaced by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century due to 'improvement' schemes, less than three thousand rooms were available in the new *chāls* constructed by the BIT. (Hazareesingh, 2007: 30)



2. Mumbai Chawl/Chāl

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Chawl_-_Mumbai_2006.jpg

The housing shortage was acute on the eve of the First World War. After the war, a Development Department was set up in Bombay to construct fifty thousand single-room tenements for workers and the lower middle class. The target was never met and the city poor did not have the means to pay the rent for the miserable dwellings that were actually constructed. Nevertheless, the 'DD *chāls* (chawls)', as these dwellings built initially in Girangaon came to be known, laid down the norm for the kind of residential accommodation and urban space to which the toiling people of Bombay were entitled. The great sociologist and critic of colonial town-planning, Patrick Geddes, remarked that the *chāls* of the city were intended not for housing but 'warehousing'. It was everyday life in these *chāls* that Mulk Raj Anand described so vividly in his novel *Coolie* (published 1936): he portrayed a 'three-storeyed tenement, built without any planning of the space into a courtyard, garden, road or a playground, but closed in on all sides by other chawls [*chāls*] separated from it by gullies barely a yard or two wide'. Echoing Leith's report, a *chāl* resident states in the novel that, 'There are seven latrines downstairs for two hundred men.' (Anand, 1993[1936]: 195-6, 198)

40.5.2 A New Worker Consciousness

These very conditions of overcrowding created opportunities for class solidarity. Living together in such close proximity fostered a consciousness of belonging to the same class. This does not mean that the ties of religion, language or caste were suddenly rendered irrelevant. What is significant is that despite these ties, the experience of living in the *chāl* and sweating in the factory with people who belonged to diverse linguistic, religious or caste communities, developed a working-class identity. The fact that Girangaon was a compact space with mills interspersed with *chāl* (about 15-20 minutes was all it took for a worker to walk from the *chāl* to her/his workplace) allowed the entire area to evolve an identity that contended with other identities and sometimes overcame them. This immense concentration of workers in a small area that contained both places of residence and work was perhaps unique in the Indian subcontinent during the colonial period. The ties of community, religion, caste and ethnicity, often held ambiguous potential; they could form the basis for a strengthening of the class ties, and at other times undermine them. As Shashi Bhushan Upadhyay has shown, the first large scale action of the working class in Bombay was the communal riot of 1893; (Upadhyay, 2004) some big, and successful general strikes were followed by communal violence, as in 1929.

The few moments of leisure that the mill-hands could spare were spent with fellow workers on the street, or in new (all male) social bodies such as *mitra mandals* (friendship clubs) or *akhadas* (gymnasiums). The *tamasha* of (plays, acrobatics, story-telling) street performers was often the only entertainment available to the residents of these neighbourhoods. By the beginning of the twentieth century the mill district had produced a rich working-class culture mainly in the form of songs, drama and poetry. This culture created possibilities for working-class mobilization with the growth of unions of textile workers and of other labouring people of the city.

The 1920s saw the formation of three major unions of mill-hands: Girni Kamgar Mahamandal, Bombay Textile Labour Union, and Girni Kamgar Union. This decade witnessed several strikes, culminating in the great textile strike of 1928 after which the communist-led Girni Kamgar Union became the main working-class organisation in Girangaon. During the 1930s and 1940s the growing involvement of artistes and writers with the activities of the Girni Kamgar Union (Anna Bhau Sathe, Amar Shaikh, D.N. Gavankar, K.A. Abbas and, somewhat later, Kaifi Azmi), gave rise to a leftwing cultural movement that reinforced and was reinforced by organisations such as the Progressive Writers' Association and Indian Peoples' Theatre Association.

40.4.3 Community and Ethnicity

As we have seen, the business class of Bombay negotiated with colonialism from a position of relative strength, which in itself was a reflection of the success and confidence of the class. Nevertheless, given the constraints imposed by colonialism, it was essential for the indigenous capitalists of Bombay to build strong ties among themselves. These bonds, cutting across communities, were more important than, as has often been suggested, links with the British. Two additional factors, namely that a large number of these merchants belonged to communities that were miniscule minorities (e.g., the Parsis) and that many did not have their roots in Bombay, made the inter-community ties among them even more necessary. That this class was multi-religious, drawn from diverse social groups, and multi-ethnic, gave to Bombay its openness.

This is not to suggest that the city space of Bombay was free of all conflict and tensions. The street emerged as the space between the home and the public sphere, as new notions of private and public began to take shape. As many historians of the city have noted, the neighbourhood was a source of information about jobs, a source of credit, a space of festivity or leisure, a site of work solidarities at a time of strike, but also a site of conflict. (Chandavarkar, 1994) 'Dadas', such as Keshav Dada Borkar, were neighbourhood toughs, or big men, who could wield power on behalf of the mill, against the mill, or for the landlord, as circumstances demanded. The 'Dada' also provided credit, organised rations, controlled jobs and job information. Whether the identities of caste, ethnicity and religion were subsumed by the development of class as a mobilising factor is a matter of debate among historians, though most would agree that large scale mobilisations of labour could exist side by side with continuing attachments and loyalties to these other rubrics. The social and cultural milieu of Bombay did develop a unique proletarian cosmopolitanism, even in such working-class neighbourhoods, which drew equally from imbibed traditions of the port's hinterland as from the vistas opened up by the Indian Ocean.

40.6 SUMMARY

Bombay, a conglomeration of seven islands, owed its initial position to its proximity to the chief Mughal port, Surat. However, it emerged in the late eighteenth century as the chief port on the western coast of India with exports of raw cotton, and later, in the early nineteenth century of opium, to China. Bombay remained isolated for a large part of the early nineteenth century. This isolation was finally broken with the introduction of the railways in the region. Bombay till 1840s was largely an 'entrepot' and only after the 1840s, with the decline of the opium trade and of shipping, indigenous business moved towards it for setting up industries. From the 1850s textile mills came up in the city. Within no time the city had over a 100 mills. These were largely concentrated in central Bombay—in Girangaon or 'mill village'. Soon Bombay emerged as the leading industrial centre of the subcontinent, with a vast work-force, assuming the character of a 'proletarian cosmopolitan' city. The city saw the growth of working class consciousness and the emergence of 'class solidarity' which led to the formation of trade unions accompanied by conflicts, strikes and, at times, sectarian violence.

40.7 EXERCISES

- 1) Trace the process by which Bombay islands were converted into a unified urban centre.
- 2) In what ways did the 'Anglo-Bania' alliance and the 'Opium trade' facilitate the rise of Bombay during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries? With what consequences?

- 3) What changes were brought about in the spatial pattern of urban locales of Bombay from the eighteenth to late nineteenth centuries?
- 4) Discuss the factors that contributed to the rise of Bombay as an industrial town in the late nineteenth century.
- 5) Examine the major issues faced by early industrial Bombay. What efforts were made to overcome the problems?

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