# ARE INDIAN CITIES BECOMING BOURGEOIS AT LAST?*

Or, if you prefer, we could exclaim: Are Indian cities becoming bourgeois, alas?

I

No matter what the underlying sentiment, there are several reasons for asking a question such as this. First, it is evident that there has been in the last decade or so a concerted attempt to clean up the Indian cities, to rid streets and public lands of squatters and encroachers and to reclaim public spaces for the use of proper citizens. This movement has been propelled by citizens' groups and staunchly supported by an activist judiciary claiming to defend the rights of citizens to a healthy environment in which everyone abides by the law. Second, while there continues in every Indian metropolis a process of the suburbanization of the middle class, there has been at the same time a growing concern, expressed in the form of organized movements and legal regulations, for the preservation of the architectural and cultural heritage of the historic city, whether pre-colonial or colonial. Third, even as public spaces are reclaimed for the general use of proper citizens, there is a proliferation of segregated and protected spaces for elite consumption, elite lifestyles and elite culture.

This is in many ways a reversal of the pattern established by the post-independence Indian city. That pattern was one in which - in the 1950s and 1960s - the urban elite produced in the days of colonial rule exercised their social and political dominance over the city, replacing the Europeans in positions of governmental authority and working out methods of control over the new institutions of mass electoral

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representation. In the city of Calcutta, for instance, wealthy landlords and professionals became the patrons, and often the elected representatives, of the ruling Congress party. The wealthy were at the forefront of a general middle-class involvement in providing social, cultural and moral leadership to the urban neighbourhood. There was usually a quite dense network of neighbourhood institutions such as schools, sports clubs, markets, tea shops, libraries, parks, religious gatherings, charitable organizations and so on, organized and supported by the wealthy and the middle classes, through which an active and participatory sense of urban community was created and nurtured. It was then normal rather than exceptional for middle-class children to go to the neighbourhood school and play in the neighbourhood park; for young men to assemble for *adda* in the neighbourhood club or tea shop; for housewives to take out books from the neighbourhood library or buy clothes at the neighbourhood market; for the elderly to converge on a neighbourhood institution to listen to religious discourses and devotional music. Most neighbourhoods were mixed in terms of class. A street front lined by large mansions or elegant middle-class houses would invariably hide crowded slums at the back where the service population would live. The industrial areas of the city, of course, contained huge slum-dwelling populations. The urban poor were, however, frequently tied to the wealthy in patron-client relationships that were not merely personal but often mediated by charitable organizations and even proto-unions, as Dipesh Chakrabarty showed in his book on the jute workers of Calcutta.[1] Even when the industrial working class was organized by political activists, the unions provided an active link between the middle-class intelligentsia and the slum-dwelling workers.

At least as far as the city of Calcutta is concerned, I would argue that the social and political dominance of the wealthy and the cultural leadership of the middle class were sustained in the first two decades after independence through a grid of neighbourhood institutions that attempted to create and nurture neighbourhood communities. Calcutta neighbourhoods were not homogeneous by class, and they were frequently mixed in terms of language, religion or ethnicity.[2] While social boundaries between the classes were clearly maintained in different contexts, the sense of community cutting across classes was also actively fostered through the idea of the neighbourhood or *para.* Apart from the daily support provided to this idea by the neighbourhood institutions, there were also periodic congregations of large numbers of residents on occasions such as a football match between the local team and a team from another *para*, or the open-air theatre and music performances in the local park, or the annual Durga Puja. However, these community formations, mixed in terms of class, were, for the most part, homogeneous in terms of language, religion or ethnicity. Nirmal Kumar Bose, who studied this phenomenon closely in the early 1960s, found that in their social ties, if not always in their residential choices, ethnic groups in Calcutta tended to cluster together. Each ethnic community, defined by religion or language, although overlapping with others across the space of the neighbourhoods, was in effect separate. Not only Bengalis, but Marwaris, Oriyas, Urdu-speaking Muslims, Anglo-Indians, Gujaratis, Punjabis, Chinese – each had their own network of associations. Bose's somewhat disheartening conclusion was that "the diverse ethnic groups in the population of the city have come to bear the same relation to one another as do the castes in India as a whole."[3] In fact, given the proportion of Bengali speakers in the city – about 63 per cent

in 1961 – and the fact that the only ethnically homogeneous neighbourhoods were the ones peopled by Bengali speakers, the position of Bengalis in the city of Calcutta could be said to have been somewhat similar to that of the dominant caste in many regions of rural India. The density and visibility of public life in the Bengali neighbourhoods produced the appearance of the city itself as a predominantly Bengali city.

But a caste-like associational life sustained by patron-client relationships with the wealthy and the powerful is not exactly compatible with the definition of bourgeois public life in a modern city. Clearly Calcutta, like other Indian cities in the 1950s and 1960s, had failed to make the transition to proper urban modernity. Nirmal Bose, in a famous article in the *Scientific American* in 1965, called Calcutta a "premature metropolis … out of phase with history … having appeared in the setting of the traditional agricultural economy in advance of the industrial revolution that is supposed to beget the metropolis."[4] Dipesh Chakrabarty's conclusion about the nature of working-class organization and consciousness in industrial Calcutta was no different: the persistence of pre-bourgeois modes of sociality in factories and slums, he argued, impaired the ability of workers to act as a class.[5] I remember after my first visit to Bombay in the early 1970s feeling envious of what I took to be a wonderfully modern and organic relationship between that city and its bourgeoisie. Greater familiarity with the history of Bombay soon disabused me of the idea. If Calcutta was not modern and bourgeois, neither was Bombay. The discovery was comforting.

II

The old structure of social-political dominance was largely transformed in the 1970s and 1980s by the twin effects of democracy and development. On the one hand, there was an

intensification of efforts by rival political parties to mobilize electoral support in the cities. On the other hand, the huge increase in the population of the big cities, caused mainly by migrations from the countryside, created explosive social conditions marked by political unrest, crime, homelessness, squalor and disease. This led to a new concern for providing housing, sanitation, water, electricity, transport, schools, health services etc. aimed specially at the urban poor. In these decades, there was a proliferation of developmental and welfare schemes, mostly with central government funding and often with substantial international aid from agencies such as the World Bank, for accommodating the burgeoning population of the poor within the structures of urban life, even as those structures were being pressed to their limits.

The demands of electoral mobilization, on the one hand, and the logic of welfare distribution, on the other, overlapped and came together. I have elsewhere described this terrain as *political society*, to distinguish it from the classical notion of civil society. Governmental administration of welfare for the urban poor necessarily had to follow a different logic from that of the normal relations of the state with citizens organized in civil society. The city poor frequently lived as squatters on public land, travelled on public transport without paying, stole water and electricity, encroached on streets and parks. Given the available resources, it was unrealistic to insist that they first mend their ways and turn into proper citizens before they become eligible for governmental benefits. The various urban development projects of the 1970s and 1980s took it for granted that large sections of the poor would have to live in the city without legitimate title to their places of habitation. The authorities nevertheless provided slums with water and sanitation, schools and health centres. Electricity companies negotiated collective rates

with entire squatter settlements in order to cut down the losses from pilferage. Suburban railway authorities in Bombay and Calcutta, when calculating their budgets, routinely assumed that half or more of daily commuters would not buy tickets. Populations of the urban poor had to be pacified and even cared for, partly because they provided the necessary labour and services to the city's economy and partly because if they were not cared for at all, they could endanger the safety and well-being of all citizens. The general attitude of the times was represented almost emblematically in the widespread revulsion around the country when the news spread of the forcible demolition of slums and eviction of residents from the Turkman Gate area of Delhi during the period of the Emergency. Sanjay Gandhi's zealousness in cleaning up the city was seen as antithetical to the democratic culture of the postcolonial city. The attitude was also reflected in the general willingness of the judiciary in the 1980s to come to the aid of the urban poor, virtually recognizing that they had a right to a habitation and a livelihood in the city and that government authorities could not evict or penalize them at will without providing for some sort of resettlement and rehabilitation.

It would be wrong, however, to think that this process represented an extension of citizenship to the poor. It did not. In fact, as I have argued at greater length elsewhere, a careful conceptual distinction was made between citizens and populations. Populations are empirical categories of people with specific social or economic attributes that are relevant for the administration of developmental or welfare policies. Thus, there may be specific schemes for slum-dwelling children or working mothers below the poverty line, or, say, for settlements prone to flooding in the rainy season. Each scheme of this type, or the broader policy within which it is formulated, will identify distinct population groups

whose size and specific socio-economic or cultural characteristics will be empirically determined and recorded through censuses and surveys. Populations then are produced by the classificatory schemes of governmental knowledge. Unlike citizenship, which carries the moral connotation of sharing in the sovereignty of the state and hence of claiming rights in relation to the state, populations do not bear any inherent moral claim. When they are looked after by governmental agencies, they merely get the favour of a policy whose rationale is one of costs and benefits in terms of economic, political or social outcomes. When these calculations change, the policies change too and so does the composition of the target groups. In fact, if I could make a general theoretical point here without elaborating on my reasons, I would say that the governmental administration of development and welfare produced a heterogeneous social, consisting of multiple population groups to be addressed through multiple and flexible policies. This was in sharp contrast with the conception of citizenship in which the insistence on the homogeneous national was both fundamental and relentless.

There were obvious reasons why population groups belonging to the urban poor could not be treated at par with proper citizens. If squatters were to be given any kind of legitimacy by government authorities in their illegal occupation of public or private lands, then the entire structure of legally held property would be threatened. Large sections of the urban poor could not be treated as legitimate citizens precisely because their habitation and livelihood were so often premised on a violation of the law. And yet, as I have mentioned before, there were powerful social and political reasons for extending certain kinds of benefits and protection to these populations as necessary inhabitants of the city. Officials from diverse agencies such as the municipal authorities,

the police, the health services, transport departments, electric supply companies, etc. devised numerous ways in which such facilities and benefits could be extended on a case-to-case, *ad hoc* or exceptional basis, without jeopardizing the overall structure of legality and property. One might say that this was perhaps the most remarkable development in the governance of Indian cities in the 1970s and 1980s – the emergence of an entire substructure of para-legal arrangements, created or at least recognized by the governmental authorities, for the integration of low-wage labouring and service populations into the public life of the city.

These arrangements were not, and indeed could not be, worked out on the terrain of relations between civil society and the state. That was a terrain inhabited by proper citizens whose relations with the state were framed within a structure of constitutionally protected rights. Associations of citizens in civil society could demand the attention of governmental authorities as a matter of right, because they represented citizens who observed the law. The authorities could not treat associations of squatters or pavement hawkers on the same footing as legitimate associations of civil society.

The relations of government agencies with population groups of the urban poor were determined not on the terrain of civil society but on that of political society. This was the terrain of the heterogeneous social, where multiple and flexible policies were put into operation, producing multiple and strategic responses from population groups seeking to adapt to, cope with or make use of these policies. Policies on this terrain of governmentality are never simply a matter of disbursing charity. Rather, there is always an attempt to calibrate rewards and costs, incentives and punishments, in order to produce the desired outcomes. Thus, slums may be provided with sanitation in the expectation

that slum-dwellers would not dirty the streets or parks. If this does not work out as expected, a different structure of rewards and costs might be tried. Clearly, this creates a field of continuous negotiation between the authorities and the population group. What benefits would be given to which groups and for how long depend on a series of strategic negotiations.

This is the field of political society. We are not talking here of relations between the state and citizens in civil society. On the contrary, these are relations between population groups and governmental agencies administering policy. To play the game of strategic political negotiations with the authorities, population groups too must organize themselves. Governmental policy will always seek to deal with them as discrete elements of the heterogeneous social. It is the task of political organization to mould the empirical discreteness of a population group into the moral solidarity of a community. This is what was frequently achieved in urban political society in India in the 1970s and 1980s.

It involved opening up a field of mobilization and mediation by political leaders and parties. The old structure of patron-client relations between the wealthy elite and the middle classes on the one side and the poor on the other was rapidly transformed. The politics of governmental administration of welfare schemes for the poor produced an entirely new field of competitive mobilization by political parties and leaders. One of the most significant processes that took place in this period in old industrial cities like Bombay and Calcutta was the decline in the effectiveness of trade unions organized around the factory and the rise of organized movements centred on the slum. In Bombay, the communist-led trade unions were crushed, first, by the movements led by the maverick labour organizer Datta Samant, and then through the organized network of

neighbourhood-based branches of the Hindu-chauvinist right-wing Shiv Sena. In Calcutta, there was first an assault of state terror in 1971-72 on activists of the CPI(M-L) and the CPI(M) in which more than a thousand were killed and several thousand put in prison or driven away from their homes. Until the end of the Emergency in 1977, there was virtually no political activity of the communist parties allowed in the city. It was in this period that the younger leaders of the Congress Party of Indira Gandhi put in place the structure of the new urban political society. Once again, it was based primarily on the neighbourhood, often meticulously demarcated to identify as clearly as possible who belonged to which local association. These local groupings then sought representation by the political leader or party in order both to protect themselves from punitive action by the authorities and to seek the benefits of governmental policy. When the communists returned to the city's politics after 1977, they too proceeded to organize the neighbourhoods along the same lines. Interestingly, even though the Left parties have now ruled in West Bengal for more than twenty-five years, many of the structures of support built by the Congress leaders in the older sections of Calcutta in the early 1970s have remained intact.

Competitive electoral mobilization of the poor in the 1970s and 1980s afforded them a new strategic resource. They could now exercise, or at least threaten to exercise, a choice. If one leader or party could not get things done for them, they could threaten to switch sides and vote for the rival party in the next election. This, in fact, has happened on numerous occasions in the big Indian cities. Of course, since a great deal of these negotiations in political society involves activities that violate the law, there is always more than a hint of violence in them. Often, effective mobilization in political society

means the controlled organization of violence, precisely because the security of the peaceful legality of civil society is not always available here. One can produce numerous examples of this from the *chawls* and *juggis* of Bombay, Delhi, Calcutta or Madras. The recent book by Thomas Blom Hansen on the Shiv Sena in Bombay contains the most systematic study I know of this phenomenon.[6]

III

The situation has now changed once more. Since the 1990s, and perhaps most dramatically in the last five years or so, there is an apparent shift in the ruling attitudes towards the big city in India. This is what prompted my initial question in this talk: Are Indian cities becoming bourgeois at last? It is not that there has been a retreat of political society as it existed in the 1980s. It may simply be that along with a change in governmental policies towards the city, the particular population groups organized under political society have changed. But there has been without doubt a surge in the activities and visibility of civil society. In metropolis after Indian metropolis, organized civic groups have come forward to demand from the administration and the judiciary that laws and regulations for the proper use of land, public spaces and thoroughfares be formulated and strictly adhered to in order to improve the quality of life of citizens. Everywhere the dominant cry seems to be to rid the city of encroachers and polluters and, as it were, to give the city back to its proper citizens.

To understand the reasons for this change, I believe it is necessary to consider the place of the city in the modern Indian imagination. It has often been pointed out that unlike the numerous innovative and passionately ideological projects to either preserve or

transform rural India, the period of nationalism produced little fundamental thinking about the desired Indian city of the future. Gyan Prakash, in his article in the *Sarai Reader* on Cities, has carefully considered this question.[7] The paradox is indeed very curious, because the place of colonial modernity in India in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was obviously the city and that is where India's nationalist elite was produced. Yet, two or three generations of social and political thinkers, scholars and artists, poets and novelists, living and working in the era of nationalism, devoted most of their imaginative energies to the task of producing an idea not of the future Indian city but of a rural India fit for the modern age.

The answer to the paradox perhaps lies in a perceived lack of agency by the Indian elite in thinking about the city. The industrial city, like modern industry itself, was unquestionably a creation of Western modernity. The colonial cities of British India were largely creations of British colonial rulers to which Indians had adapted. There was, it seems to me, always a sense among the middle classes of the great colonial cities of India of not being in control of their surroundings. Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, who wielded considerable spiritual influence over the Calcutta middle class at the end of the nineteenth century, often told his devotees about the housemaid who spent a whole lifetime living and working in a rich household in the city. She would call her employer's house her home, but in her heart of hearts she knew that that was not her home; her home was far away in the village.[8] For a long time, perhaps not until the 1950s, the metropolis did not acquire in the minds of the Indian middle class the moral security and stability of home.

Even when it became an irrevocable fact that their lives and futures were necessarily tied to the fate of the city, the middle classes were deeply ambivalent.

Something of the popular attitude towards the big city as a deeply profane place, corrupted by money and commerce and littered with dangerously seductive amusements, was shared by the urban middle classes as well. This can be seen from as early a period as the 1820s when Bhabanicharan Bandyopadhyay wrote *Kalikata kamalalay*, possibly the first text of urban sociology in India.[9] In time, as the extended family crumbled under the pressures of economic change, a new ethic of the nuclear family was sought to be created. But this new ethic regarded the external world of the city – its schools, streets, parks, markets, theatres – as dangerous for the family and especially for children growing up in an urban environment.[10] The middle class proceeded to exercise its moral influence over these urban institutions, building in the process the structures of the moral community of the neighbourhood that I earlier described for Calcutta in the 1950s and 1960s.

But there was still something that was apparently beyond control. What was the imagined morphology - the moral map, if you will – of the Indian industrial metropolis? The Western models had been copied under the aegis of the colonial rulers, with mixed results. When the models failed to deliver the predicted outcomes, urban Indians simply adapted themselves to the imperfect copies of the original, often producing reactions like Nirmal Bose's lament about the "premature metropolis". But there were no new models of the Indian industrial metropolis. When Jawaharlal Nehru invited Le Corbusier to build Chandigarh, a city of the future untrammelled by Indian history and tradition, it was probably not so much a utopian dream as a sign of desperation, because no organic idea of the Indian city of the future was available to him.

As the Indian metropolis exploded in the 1970s, the attempt was made, as I have said before, to contain the impact and pacify the threatened consequences through welfare policies aimed particularly at the urban poor. It meant putting up with numerous violations of civic norms and regulations for the sake of accommodating population groups that did not have adequate resources to afford a decent life in the city. Urban services were often strained to the point of collapse and the quality of the urban environment deteriorated rapidly. For the most part, the overcrowding and squalor were accepted as inevitable elements of third world industrialization. It was unfair, the argument went, to expect the same quality of life as in Western cities. Wasn't the same thing happening in other cities of the third world – in Mexico City, Sao Paolo, Lagos, Cairo, Bangkok, Manila, etc. etc.?

The management of the urban poor on the terrain of political society in the 1970s and 1980s meant, among other things, not only the passing of the old dominance of the wealthy over the politics of the city but also, more significantly, a disengagement of the middle classes from the hurly burly of urban politics. This, it seems to me, was an important precondition for the transformation of the 1990s. While the messy business of striking deals between municipal authorities, the police, property developers, criminal gangs, slum dwellers or pavement hawkers was left to the unsavoury class of local politicians, proper citizens retreated into civil society. Middle class activism, even when it engaged with the lives of the urban poor, as it often did, was deliberately restricted to the strictly non-political world of the NGOs.

It was in the 1990s that a new idea of the post-industrial city became globally available for emulation. This is the city that has seen the demise of traditional

manufacturing that was the engine of the industrial revolution. The new city is driven not by manufacturing but by finance and a host of producer services. As national economies around the world become integrated with the globalized network of capital and as manufacturing and even services are dispersed from the old industrial cities of Europe and North America to locations all over the world, the need for centralization of managerial control becomes greater rather than less. The new city is characterized by a central business district with advanced transport and telecommunication facilities and office space. This is the node of an inter-metropolitan and global network carrying out information processing and control functions. Apart from management and financial operations, certain kinds of services such as advertising, accounting, legal services, banking, etc. tend to be centralized in the business district. The new organization of business firms creates a demand for a large range of service inputs bought in the market rather than produced in-house. The growth of the new metropolis is fundamentally characterized by a shift from industrial manufacturing to a service-dominated urban economy. Outside the central business district, therefore, the rest of the city is characterized by an urban space that is increasingly differentiated in social terms, even as it is functionally interconnected beyond the physical contiguity of neighbourhoods. Thus, there are new segregated and exclusive spaces for the managerial and technocratic elite. These could be in exclusive suburbs as in several American cities or in renewed and refurbished sections of the historic city as in Paris, Amsterdam, Brussels, Rome or Milan. The new high-technology industries tend to be located in the newest and most environmentally attractive peripheries of the metropolis. At the same time, while the new metropolis is globally connected, it is frequently locally disconnected from large sections

of its population who are functionally unnecessary and are often seen to be socially or politically disruptive.[11]

This idea of the new post-industrial globalized metropolis began to circulate in India sometime in the 1990s. Bangalore was the city that was said to be the most likely to fit the bill, but Hyderabad soon announced its claim too. I suspect, however, that the idea of what a city should be and look like has now been deeply influenced by this post-industrial global image everywhere among the urban middle classes in India. The atmosphere produced by economic liberalization has had something to do with it. Far more influential has been the intensified circulation of images of global cities through cinema, television and the internet as well as through far greater access of the Indian middle class to international travel. Government policy, at the level of the states and even the municipalities, has been directly affected by the urgent pressure to connect with the global economy and attract foreign investment. The result has been, on the one hand, greater assertion by organizations of middle-class citizens of their right to unhindered access to public spaces and thoroughfares and to a clean and healthy urban environment. On the other hand, government policy has rapidly turned away from the idea of helping the poor to subsist within the city and is instead paying the greatest attention to improving infrastructure in order to create conditions for the import of high technology and the new service industries. Thus, manufacturing industries are being moved out beyond the city limits; squatters and encroachers are being evicted; property and tenancy laws are being rewritten to enable market forces to rapidly convert the congested and dilapidated sections of the old city into high-value commercial and residential districts. If

this is the new global bourgeois vision of twenty-first century urbanity, then this time we may have successfully grasped it.

However, the expected social and political costs have probably not yet been estimated. There is little doubt that the new metropolis will be a place of new social disparities. Unlike the middle class produced by state-led industrialization and import substitution, the new metropolitan economy is unlikely to produce an expanding middle class. Rather, it will depend on exports to the international market and consumption of services by organizations rather than individuals. The new metropolis will belong to the managerial and technocratic elite and a new class of very highly paid workers – professionals, middle and lower-level managers, brokers and middlemen of all kinds. The elite will form its own community – a spatially bound, interpersonally networked subculture built around the business centre, segregated residential areas, exclusive restaurants, country clubs, arts and culture complexes and easy access to airports. While it may concede the general administration of the city to democratically elected representatives, the managerial elite will probably resist any interference by the political leadership in strategic decision-making that affect business prospects. The new consumer industries will be driven not, as in the old days, by the market created by thrifty middle-class families, but by the new high-spending workers. This is where a new, globally urban, consumer lifestyle and aesthetic will take root. There will be segregated and exclusive spaces for shops, restaurants, arts and entertainment aimed at this clientele. The new economy will also need its share of low-wage workers. They will probably commute long distances because, without the protection of the old developmental state, they could hardly afford to live in the city. Large sections of the older inhabitants of the city will,

however, become unnecessary to the new economy. Will they accept their redundancy without protest? Will they react to the new and glaring social disparities? If democracy has indeed taken root in India's cities, will political society provide the instruments for negotiating a controlled transition to a new urban regime or will it explode into anarchic resistance?

These are the great unresolved questions that confront our urban present. Perhaps there will be no catastrophe. As Ashis Nandy has reassured us so often, like science, cricket, cinema, medicine and even terrorism, this time too our native vernacular genius will corrupt the imported model of the post-industrial city and turn it into an impure, inefficient but ultimately less malevolent hybrid. I must confess, however, that the evidence so far is not very comforting. In the city of Calcutta, located in a state that has seen in its rural areas some of the most positive results of the operation of political society, historical conditions have ensured the painful death of traditional urban industry. This, combined with the new market forces, has caused a steady decline in absolute population over the last two decades in more than half of the wards of the northern and central parts of the city. Thus, there has been a growing suburbanization of the Bengali middle class – so much so that in the Calcutta metropolitan district as a whole, Bengali speakers are now only 51 per cent of the population, while within the old municipal area they probably number no more than 40 per cent (compared to 63 per cent in 1961). Even more striking is the fact that whereas 22 per cent of the city's population are migrants from other states of India, only 12 per cent are from other parts of West Bengal. Clearly, unlike in the 1960s and 1970s, the demand for low-wage labour in the city is no longer supplied by rural migrants from Calcutta's hinterland. This is corroborated by another

striking fact: as much as one-fifth of the city's Bengali-speakers, both men and women, are university graduates.[12] This is a tribute to the success of land reforms and agricultural development in rural West Bengal that has stopped the impoverishment of small peasants and provided work throughout the year in the countryside to the landless. But it has had the unintended, and profoundly ironic, consequence of threatening the cultural leadership of the Bengali middle class over its beloved city.

The response, as far as I can see it, is thoroughly confused, almost mindless. On the one hand, after tripping over numerous ideological hurdles, the political leadership has been finally cornered into acknowledging that the economic revival of Calcutta depends on high technology industry, supported by foreign investment and producing for the global market. To create conditions for this, the city must be refurbished and new infrastructure put in place. All of the processes I have described of reconstituting the urban space to fit the model of the post-industrial city have been initiated in Calcutta with government sponsorship, including eviction of squatters and pavement stalls, clearing of slums to make way for office blocks and apartment buildings, exclusive shopping malls, segregated and rigorously policed residential areas for the affluent, etc. If there is a plan behind these policies, and if that plan is to succeed, what we should get is a metropolis integrated into the circuits of global capital, culturally dominated by the new managers, technocrats, professionals and middlemen belonging to, or at least aspiring to belong to, a globalized cosmopolitan subculture. Yet, the other response of the political leadership has been to assert a new Bengali-ness, beginning with changing by law the English and Hindustani names of Calcutta to Kolkata and threatening to enforce several other

measures to reinscribe the cultural dominance of the Bengali middle class over a city that it has physically abandoned.

It is possible that the absence of a plan - a moral map or an imagined morphology - is not a bad thing. Perhaps that is how vernacular resistance to global designs ultimately succeeds. And yet, I seriously worry about the capacity of unselfconscious local practice to beat back the formidable challenges posed by the material as well as the imaginative forces of the new regime of globality. May be it is only an occupational disease I suffer from, but I cannot help imagining that gatherings of self-conscious people like us at this conference, seriously reflecting on our shared urban present, will provide some clues to thinking through, rather than merely stumbling upon, the path leading to the future of Indian cities. It will make no difference to history if I am wrong. But if I am right, it will be a considerable reward for our collective efforts.

**Notes**

[1] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working-Class History: Bengal 1890-1940* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989).

[2] For a statistical analysis based on the 1961 Census, see Arabinda Biswas, Partha Chatterjee and Shibanikinkar Chaube, "The Ethnic Composition of Calcutta and the Residential Pattern of Minorities", *Geographical Review of India*, 38, 2 (June 1976), pp. 140-166.

[3] Nirmal Kumar Bose, *Calcutta 1964: A Social Survey* (Bombay: Lalvani, 1968).

[4] Nirmal Kumar Bose, "Calcutta: A Premature Metropolis", *Scientific American*, 213, 3, pp. 91-102.

[5] Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working-Class History*.

[6] Thomas Blom Hansen, *Wages of Violence: Naming and Identity in Postcolonial Bombay* (Princeton: Princeton Univrsity, 2001).

[7] Gyan Prakash, "The Urban Turn" in *Sarai Reader 02: The Cities of Everyday Life* (Delhi: Sarai, 2002), pp. 2-7.

[8] Ma [Mahendranath Gupta}, *Srisriramkrsna kathamrta* (1902-32; reprint, Calcutta: Ananda, 1983).

[9] Bhabanicharan Bandyopadhyay, *Kalikata kamalalay* (1823; reprint, Calcutta: Nabapatra, 1987).

[10] See, for instance, the discussion in Pradip Kumar Bose, "Sons of the Nation" in Partha Chatterjee, ed., *Texts of Power: Emerging Disciplines in Colonial Bengal* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), pp. 118-144.

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[11] There is now a large literature on the new global cities. See, for example, Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

[12] All the above figures are from a CMDA survey carried out in 1996: Nandita Chatterjee, Nikhilesh Bhattacharya and Animesh Halder, *Socio-economic Profile of Households in Calcutta Metropolitan Area* (Calcutta: Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority, 1999).