

Introduction

You can only express things properly by details ... Yet a detail ceases to mean anything when it becomes nothing but a colour and a shape, when we feel it's a detail and nothing more.¹

In recent years, scholarly accounts of urban modernity in Europe have focused increasingly on historical processes that transcended the boundaries of the local. The emergence of modern forms of state power and urban governance, the growth of civil society and the rise of the public sphere have emerged as key themes in the historiography. In turn, this has led to a growing recognition of the comparative possibilities afforded by the analytical study of these transnational developments. Historians have been especially keen to explore the similarities and differences that characterized the modernization of urban society in diverse European contexts.

Curiously, however, there has been relatively muted recognition of the extent to which imperial expansion and overseas colonization lent a global dimension to many of these historical processes. Yet even a cursory survey would show that many of the contemporary megacities in the former colonial societies of Asia and Africa acquired their recognizably modern characteristics during the 'imperial globalization' of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The fabric of urban life in many colonial cities was transformed by the rise of a global economic system based on industrial capitalism and its attendant technologies of power. At the same time, the dense concentration of modern factories, commercial firms, western-educated local intelligentsias and culturally diverse migrant communities rendered colonial cities decisive sites of the encounter between European and non-European societies.² A vigorous public culture emerged in these cities, buoyed by a thriving print industry and a variety of associational activities. The experience of urban modernity in the colonial context thus offers fertile terrain for the comparative analysis of processes and ideas that may have originated in Europe but became truly global in reach and scope during the age of empire.

These themes and their scholarly appraisal constitute the point of departure for this book, which explores the dynamics of urban change in a premier colonial city at a pivotal juncture in its emergence as a modern metropolis. Drawing together strands that have hitherto been treated in an isolated and

¹ Czeslaw Milosz, *The Seizure of Power* (London, 1985), pp. 42–3.

² Susan Bayly, 'The Evolution of Colonial Cultures: Nineteenth-Century Asia', in Andrew Porter (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire* (5 vols, Oxford, 1999), III, pp. 447–69.

piecemeal manner, this micro-study investigates the social history of Bombay in the late Victorian and Edwardian eras. In examining the colonial experience of historical processes that have attracted considerable attention in recent European scholarship, the inquiry seeks to highlight the global dimension to a comparative discussion of these themes. At the same time, the book does not construe modernization in the colonial context as the inexorable unfolding of industrial capitalism, ‘westernization’ or ‘governmentality’. Rather, it is interpreted here as a contested and contingent set of outcomes that flowed from the contradictory currents generated by the market, state and politics against a background of rapid technological change, demographic growth, urbanization and mass migration.³ In particular, the book highlights the manner in which the turbulent changes unleashed by European modernity were negotiated, appropriated or resisted by the colonized.

This book also seeks to contribute to the current revitalization of urban studies in India. For long, as scholars have noted, the perception that the defining feature of Indian society was its predominantly agrarian character had tended to obscure the significance of its cities.⁴ It was the village rather than the modern city that dominated the Indian intellectual landscape. As with many other representations of the subcontinent, the notion that India had been since time immemorial a land of self-contained village communities was a construct of nineteenth-century colonial discourse.⁵ Nonetheless, it was embraced by educated Indians of differing ideological persuasions and exerted a profound influence on their cultural and political imagination in the twentieth century.⁶ The village was regarded as the authentic repository of the timeless values and virtues of Indian civilization, whereas the modern city was viewed with profound ambivalence as a spurious Western implant.⁷ These attitudes also suffused the scholarship within the social sciences: anthropologists, sociologists and political scientists largely focused on the countryside since the ‘real’ India was believed to reside, literally as well as figuratively, in her villages.⁸

There were, of course, intermittent flashes of interest in the modern Indian city. One of the earliest attempts at studying processes of contemporary urbanism in the subcontinent was undertaken not very long after the

³ Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London, 1983), p. 16.

⁴ Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, *The Origins of Industrial Capitalism in India: Business Strategies and the Working Classes in Bombay, 1900–1940* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 2.

⁵ Thomas R. Metcalf, *The New Cambridge History of India, vol. III, part 4: Ideologies of the Raj* (Delhi, 1998), pp. 68–71; Louis Dumont, ‘The “Village Community” from Maine to Munro’, *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 9 (1966): 67–89; Clive Dewey, ‘Images of the Village Community: A Study in Anglo-Indian Ideology’, *Modern Asian Studies* (hereafter MAS), 6/2 (1972): 291–328.

⁶ Gyan Prakash, ‘The Urban Turn’, in Ravi Vasudevan et al. (eds), *Sarai Reader 02: Cities of Everyday Life* (Delhi, 2002), p. 3.

⁷ Partha Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World* (Delhi, 2004), pp. 140–41.

⁸ Janaki Nair, *The Promise of the Metropolis: Bangalore’s Twentieth Century* (Delhi, 2005), pp. 1–10.

embryonic field of ‘urban planning’ had begun to crystallize in Britain at the dawn of the twentieth century. This was initiated by Patrick Geddes (1854–1932), the renowned Scottish polymath, ‘social evolutionist’ and civic visionary who spent prolonged periods of time in India between 1914 and 1924. Having initially arrived in the country on the eve of the First World War with his peripatetic City and Town Planning Exhibition, Geddes stayed on to investigate the effects of economic and social change on its cities. In the years that followed, he prepared over fifty ‘town-planning’ reports on Indian urban centres. In 1919, Geddes also took up a professorship in the newly-created department of Sociology and Civics at the University of Bombay. In his writings and lectures, Geddes questioned many of the prevailing shibboleths of urban ‘improvement’ that he encountered in colonial India, regarding them as historically ill-informed and destructive. Instead, he advocated ecologically sensitive forms of town planning that were attuned to the rich architectural, civic and cultural traditions of the Indian urban environment.⁹ Geddes’s work triggered a short-lived burst of enthusiasm for studying Indian urbanism. In particular, it produced an interest in indigenous traditions of urbanism and spawned attempts to search for solutions to contemporary civic problems in the prescriptions of the past. But on the whole, his influence was restricted to a few individuals and did not have a lasting impact.¹⁰ Indeed, one of the intriguing features of the late colonial period is that even though the leading lights of the Indian intelligentsia were products of the city, they ‘devoted most of their energies to the task of producing an idea not of the future Indian city but of a rural India fit for the modern age’.¹¹ This seeming paradox has yet to be satisfactorily accounted for, but any plausible explanation would surely have to consider the impact of Gandhi on Indian intellectual life in these years.

The contemporary Indian city resurfaced as an object of intellectual scrutiny in the 1950s. The nationalist endeavour to construct fitting capital cities for newly-created regional states,¹² the need to accommodate within towns and cities the massive influx of Partition-affected refugees and the burgeoning international interest in processes of ‘modernization’ in postcolonial societies, all combined to create new political situations in which urban issues attracted scholarly attention. Several developments attest to this newfound interest in the city. A number of theoretically-driven anthropological and sociological accounts

⁹ Helen Meller, *Patrick Geddes: Social Evolutionist and City Planner* (London, 1990). See also Jacqueline Tyrwhitt (ed.), *Patrick Geddes in India* (London, 1947).

¹⁰ Narayani Gupta, ‘British Town-Planners and India’, in Narayani Gupta and Mushirul Hasan (eds), *India’s Colonial Encounter: Essays in Honour of Eric Stokes* (Delhi, 1993), pp. 243–4. The most prominent Indian followers of Geddes in the inter-war years were N.A. Toothi, his student at Bombay whom he sent to England for further training, and Radhakamal Mukherjee, who was based in the Department of Sociology at Lucknow. However, another student, G.S. Ghurye, became ‘violently’ disaffected by the ‘indoctrination in civic reconstruction’ that he received from Geddes. Meller, *Patrick Geddes*, pp. 225–7.

¹¹ Chatterjee, *Politics of the Governed*, p. 140.

¹² For an overview, see Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India* (Delhi, 1999), pp. 107–149.

of Indian cities were published in this decade.¹³ The topic of 'urbanization' also came to form a separate segment within the Indian Sociological Association and the Indian Economic Association,¹⁴ while 'Town-Planning' became a recognized subject in the undergraduate curriculum.¹⁵ Equally significant was the decision of the Indian Planning Commission's Research Programmes Committee to initiate and sponsor socio-economic surveys of a number of major cities.¹⁶

The urban surveys of the 1950s inaugurated an enduring tradition of descriptive studies detailing the economic, demographic and morphological features of contemporary Indian cities.¹⁷ But their wealth of detail was rarely matched by a depth of historical perspective. Historians, for their part, did not begin to engage with the modern Indian city until the 1960s. Two developments in that decade served to awaken their interest. First, scholars embarking on the serious study of the Indian nationalist movement were drawn to the urban centres in which 'modern' politics emerged. Thus, a number of studies sought to locate the rise of Indian nationalism within specific urban contexts.¹⁸ Second, a growing interest in the 'industrialization' of developing societies led some scholars to undertake the historical investigation of these themes in relation to particular cities.¹⁹ Common to all these works was a tendency to view the city merely as the backdrop for the larger economic and political processes that were the principal focus of analysis.

In the following two decades, however, scholars began to pursue fresh lines of enquiry that construed the social history of the modern Indian city as an important object of study in its own right. Three noteworthy strands can be discerned within this historiography. First, historians began to explore the ways in which the built environment and public architecture of Indian cities under

¹³ Khilnani, *Idea of India*, p. 235; Anthony D. King, *Urbanism, Colonialism, and the World-Economy: Cultural and Spatial Foundations of the World Urban System* (London and New York, 1991), pp. 13–14. The most noteworthy of these are Robert Redfield and Milton Singer, 'The Cultural Role of Cities', *Man in India*, 36/3 (1956): 161–94; Milton Singer, 'The Great Tradition in a Metropolitan Centre: Madras', in Milton Singer (ed.), *Traditional India: Structure and Change* (Philadelphia, 1959); and G.S. Ghurye, 'Cities of India', *Sociological Bulletin*, 11/2 (1953): 47–71.

¹⁴ Nair, *Promise of the Metropolis*, p. 6.

¹⁵ Gupta, 'British Town-Planners and India', p. 244.

¹⁶ M.S.A. Rao (ed.), *Urban Sociology in India: Reader and Sourcebook* (Hyderabad, 1974), p. 11.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 11–12; Nair, *Promise of the Metropolis*, pp. 6–7.

¹⁸ J.C. Masselos, *Towards Nationalism: Group Affiliations and the Politics of Public Associations in Nineteenth Century Western India* (Bombay, 1974); Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the Later Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1968); E.R. Leach and S.N. Mukherjee (eds) *Elites in South Asia* (Cambridge, 1970), pp. 33–78; Christine Dobbin, *Urban Leadership in Western India: Politics and Communities in Bombay City, 1840–85* (Oxford, 1972); C.A. Bayly, *The Local Roots of Indian Politics: Allahabad, 1870–1920* (Oxford, 1975). Even though many of these works were published in the early 1970s, the research on which they were based had in most instances been initiated in the previous decade.

¹⁹ Morris D. Morris, *The Emergence of an Industrial Labour Force: A Study of the Bombay Cotton Mills, 1854–1947* (Berkeley, 1965).

colonial rule was shaped by the ideology and cultural values of the European ruling elite.²⁰ Some works within this genre emphasized the centrality of the events of 1857 in reshaping colonial attitudes to urban governance in the cities of North India.²¹ Second, scholars began to explore the social history of a variety of urban groups. Some focused on particular intermediate classes or ethnic communities;²² others examined the social formation and political culture of the urban working classes.²³ Finally, there emerged a new interest in the public culture of Indian cities during the colonial period. There was an attempt to reconsider the political culture of Indian elites in the light of the analytical perspectives drawn from cultural anthropology and 'ethnohistory'.²⁴ At the same time, the growing incidence of 'communal' violence in contemporary Indian cities, as well as wider intellectual trends, prompted a new interest in urban 'popular culture' and collective mentalities.²⁵

Notwithstanding the interest exhibited in the modern Indian city by individual scholars and the formation of the Urban History Association of India,²⁶ the countryside continued to dominate the scholarly agenda in the 1970s and 1980s. Village studies revolving around caste, kinship and ritual

²⁰ Anthony D. King, *Colonial Urban Development: Culture, Social Power, and Environment* (London, 1976); Kenneth Ballhatchet and J. Harrison (eds), *The City in South Asia: Premodern and Modern* (London, 1980); Susan Nield, 'Colonial Urbanism: The Development of Madras City in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries', *MAS*, 13 (1979): 217–46; Thomas Metcalf, *An Imperial Vision: Indian Architecture and Britain's Raj* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1989); Mariam Dossal, *Imperial Designs and Indian Realities: The Planning of Bombay City, 1845–1875* (Bombay, 1996).

²¹ Veena Talwar Oldenburg, *The Making of Colonial Lucknow, 1856–1877* (Princeton, 1984); Narayani Gupta, *Delhi Between Two Empires, 1803–1931: Society, Government and Urban Growth* (Delhi, 1981).

²² C.A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion, 1770–1870* (Cambridge, 1983); Thomas A. Timberger, *The Marwaris: From Traders to Industrialists* (Delhi, 1978); J.C. Masselos, 'Power in the Bombay "Moholla", 1904–15: An Initial Exploration into the World of the Indian Urban Muslim', *South Asia*, 6 (1976): 75–95.

²³ Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, 'Workers' Politics and the Mill Districts in Bombay between the Wars', *MAS*, 15/3 (1981): 603–647; Chitra Joshi, 'Bonds of Community, Ties of Religion: Kanpur Textile Workers in the Early Twentieth Century', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* (hereafter *IESHR*), 22/3 (1985): 251–80; Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Communal Riots and Labour: Bengal's Jute Mill-hands in the 1890s', *Past and Present*, 91/1 (1981): 140–69.

²⁴ Douglas Haynes, *Rhetoric and Ritual in Colonial India: The Shaping of a Public Culture in Surat City, 1852–1928* (Delhi, 1992).

²⁵ Sumanta Banerjee, *The Parlour and the Street: Elite and Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Calcutta* (Calcutta, 1989); J.C. Masselos, 'Change and Custom in the Format of the Bombay Mohurram during the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', *South Asia*, New Series, 5/2 (1982): 47–67; Sandria Freitag, *Collective Action and Community: Public Arenas and the Emergence of Communalism in North India* (Delhi, 1990); Sandria Freitag (ed.), *Culture and Power in Banaras* (Berkeley, 1989); Nita Kumar, *The Artisans of Benares, 1880–1980* (Princeton, 1988); Gyanendra Pandey, 'Encounters and Calamities: The history of a north India *qasba* in the nineteenth century', in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies III: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (Delhi, 1984), pp. 231–70.

²⁶ For details, see Indu Banga (ed.), *The City in Indian History* (Delhi, 1991).

held sway over the disciplines of anthropology and sociology.²⁷ Historians investigating the rural order under colonial rule focused especially on the mechanisms and effects of colonial tenurial systems, the social formation of various agrarian strata and the different modes of peasant protest.²⁸ As one distinguished historian noted in 1981, the peasant continued to remain 'the favourite subject for research in India'.²⁹ The appearance shortly thereafter of *Subaltern Studies* as a powerful new intellectual current served further to overshadow urban social history for the rest of the 1980s.³⁰

However, over the past decade or so, the modern Indian city has elbowed its way back to the forefront of the academic agenda. A growing number of scholars have begun to explore the unfolding dynamics of contemporary Indian urbanism. Several public initiatives have also been launched in recent years to bring together academics, artists and activists in order to reflect collectively on the economic, political and cultural processes that are rapidly transforming Indian cities. Indeed, the new intellectual ferment surrounding the city has prompted some writers to herald an 'urban turn' in South Asian studies.³¹

Three developments, acting in conjunction, have provided the broader material and intellectual context for the ongoing resuscitation of urban studies in India. First, the rapid increase in the total number of towns and cities as well as the sheer size of the country's urban population has begun to dent the entrenched perception of India as a land of villages. While a majority of Indians continue to live in the countryside, the proportion of town-dwellers has been expanding steadily and currently constitutes about a third of the country's total population. Reckoned in absolute terms, this yields a figure of around three hundred million, a tenth of the world's urban population. Viewed from another perspective, the total number of people living in Indian towns and cities not only outstrips the entire population of some European nations like France and Germany, but also that of more populous countries such as Brazil and the United States of America. Significantly, the larger metropolitan centres have grown the fastest and according to the 2001 census there are 35 Indian

²⁷ Jonathan P. Parry, 'Introduction', in Jonathan P. Parry, Jan Breman and Karin Kapadia (eds), *The Worlds of Indian Industrial Labour* (Delhi, 1999), pp. ix–xxxvi.

²⁸ See, for instance, Eric Stokes, *The Peasant and the Raj: Studies in Agrarian society and Peasant Rebellion in colonial India* (Cambridge, 1978); Utsa Patnaik (ed.), *Agrarian Relations and Accumulation: The Mode of Production Debate in India* (Bombay, 1990).

²⁹ Narayani Gupta, 'Twelve Years On: Urban History in India', *Urban History Yearbook* (1981), p. 76.

³⁰ C.A. Bayly, 'Introduction: The Connected World of Empires', in Leila Tarazi Fawaz and C.A. Bayly (eds), *Modernity and Culture: From the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean* (New York, 2002), p. 10. For a representative sample of the early writings of this collective, see Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (eds), *Selected Subaltern Studies* (Delhi, 1988). Interestingly, Dipesh Chakrabarty's monograph on jute mill workers of Calcutta, one of the few works by a member of the group that was set in an urban context, argued that the primordial cultural values of the rural migrants who came to work in the city prevented them from attaining a modern 'class consciousness'. Thus, even in his account the shadow of the countryside continued to loom large over the modern Indian city. See Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working-Class History: Bengal, 1890–1940* (Delhi, 1989).

³¹ Prakash, 'Urban Turn', pp. 2–7.

cities with a population in excess of a million.³² Indeed, as one writer recently remarked, ‘There will soon be more people living in the city of Bombay than on the continent of Australia’.³³

Second, the far-reaching changes wrought by economic liberalization and globalization since the early 1990s have profoundly altered the face of Indian cities. At one level, these processes have hastened the demise of many of the traditional manufacturing industries that dominated the urban landscape. Cities like Ahmedabad, Bombay and Kanpur have seen their core industries decimated, leading to the retrenchment of millions of workers.³⁴ Industrial restructuring has led to the contraction of production in the so-called ‘formal sector’, even as the ‘informal economy’ has continued steadily to expand in size. Indian towns and cities today are thus teeming with millions of casually employed, low-paid workers who toil in small-scale manufacturing enterprises and seasonal industries that lie outside the purview of any protective labour legislation. These developments have triggered scholarly interest in the workings of India’s burgeoning urban ‘informal economy’.³⁵ It has also prompted them to query the classic narratives of industrialization, which saw the process as inevitably culminating in the modern, large-scale factory system, based on capital-intensive technologies and a commitment to steady levels of production and labour deployment.³⁶ At another level, the withering away of many of the staple industries that lay at the heart of India’s urban modernity in the twentieth century has been offset by the rise of economically dynamic service-sector activities that have thrived on the revolution in information technology. Indian cities have become part of a new ‘inter-metropolitan and global network carrying out information processing and control functions’.³⁷ They have also emerged as key sites in the refashioning of middle-class

³² K.C. Sivaramakrishnan, Amitabh Kundu and B.N. Singh, *Handbook of Urbanization in India: An Analysis of Trends and Processes* (Delhi, 2005), pp. 5–7.

³³ Suketu Mehta, *Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found* (London, 2005), p. 3.

³⁴ See, for instance, Darryl D’Monte, *Ripping the Fabric: The Decline of Mumbai and its Mills* (Delhi, 2002); Chitra Joshi, *Lost Worlds: Indian Labour and its Forgotten Histories* (Delhi, 2000). Of course, the signs of impending crisis were evident even before the era of economic liberalization commenced. Through the 1970s and 1980s there were attempts, both in the private and public sectors, to ‘downsize’ firms and rationalize production strategies. Employers increasingly took recourse to casual labour, which could be hired and fired in keeping with their requirements. The new era of privatization that was inaugurated by economic liberalization in the early 1990s only served further to accentuate these trends. See Jan Breman, ‘The study of industrial labour in post-colonial India – the informal sector: A concluding review’, in Parry et al. (eds), *Worlds of Indian Industrial Labour*, pp. 407–429.

³⁵ Jan Breman, *Footloose Labour: Working in India’s Informal Economy* (Cambridge, 1996). For a historical exploration of these themes in the context of late colonial north India, see Nandini Gooptu, *The Politics of the Urban Poor in Early Twentieth-Century India* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 27–65.

³⁶ Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, *Imperial Power and Popular Politics: Class, Resistance and the State in India, c. 1850–1950* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 30–73; Prabhu P. Mahapatra, ‘Situating the Renewal: Reflections on Labour Studies in India’, Integrated Labour History Research Programme, Working Paper No. 2 (Noida, 1998).

³⁷ Chatterjee, *Politics of the Governed*, pp. 142–3.

identities. Equipped with technical, professional or processing skills, middle-class men and women are the principal beneficiaries of the surge in demand for Indian services in the new global economy. Their visibility and volubility has been enhanced even further by the arrival in India over the past decade of multi-national corporations willing to offer undreamt of salaries to their white-collar employees.³⁸ In turn, the increased spending power of the middle classes has spawned a new urban consumer culture, amply reflected in the ever-proliferating malls and multiplexes appearing in Indian cities.³⁹

Finally, the so-called 'urban turn' has also been impelled by the recognition that the Indian city is now in a 'new, post-nationalist stage' marked by the deepening contradiction between 'economic inequalities' and 'political opportunities', giving rise to new claims and conflicts over its identity.⁴⁰ On the one hand, as Chatterjee has suggested, there has been an 'apparent shift in the ruling attitudes towards the big city in India'. A new vision of a global, post-industrial city has come to dominate the fantasies of India's rapidly expanding urban middle classes. The combined effects of the 'intensified circulation of images of global cities through cinema, television, and the internet' and the 'urgent pressure to connect with the global economy and attract foreign investment', Chatterjee argues, has had important consequences for the ways in which the urban poor are now perceived by social elites and the state. Thus, recent years have witnessed a 'growing 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'. Simultaneously, 'manufacturing industries are being moved out of 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'.⁴¹ On the other hand, Chatterjee contends, the poor have sought to advance their own claims on the city by forging a new domain of 'political society' whose values are antithetical to the norms of middle-class 'civil society'. Many of their 'political' practices are 'founded on violations of the law' and hence very different from the constitutionally sanctioned relations between the state and citizens within civil society.⁴² Equally, it has been argued, collective rituals of 'public protest, violence, and local mobilizations' have been integral to their sense of politics. Such 'political spectacles' in public arenas are thus regarded as having played a key role in fashioning new forms of chauvinistic and particularistic identities among the plebeian classes in contemporary Indian cities.⁴³

³⁸ Khilnani, *Idea of India*, p. 148.

³⁹ Nair, *Promise of the Metropolis*, pp. 90–99, 133–6.

⁴⁰ Khilnani, *Idea of India*, p. 144.

⁴¹ Chatterjee, *Politics of the Governed*, pp. 143–4.

⁴² Partha Chatterjee, 'On Civil and Political Society in Post-Colonial Democracies', in Sudipta Kaviraj and Sunil Khilnani (eds), *Civil Society: History and Possibilities* (Cambridge, 2001).

⁴³ Thomas Blom Hansen, *Violence in Urban India: Identity Politics, 'Mumbai' and the Postcolonial City* (Delhi, 2001); Nair, *Promise of the Metropolis*, pp. 271–98.

The urgency of the ‘urban question’ has thus reignited interest in the modern Indian city. Recent perspectives on the postcolonial city have opened up fresh lines of enquiry and brought novel theoretical concerns to bear on the study of contemporary urban trends. At the same time, there has been a tendency in these accounts to posit a rather stark contrast between the turbulent postcolonial city and its seemingly staid colonial predecessor. Yet there has never been a ‘golden age’ in the career of the modern city, when it was free of the conflicts generated by the deepening hold of market relations, state power and politics.

This book explores a watershed era in Bombay’s evolution as a modern metropolis. Like many other urban centres in the sprawling Indian Ocean region,⁴⁴ the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were a tumultuous and fractious period in the city’s history: Bombay was transformed from a prosperous port city into a major industrial metropolis. At the heart of this process lay the rapid expansion of the cotton-textile industry, whose profound influence on the city’s economy, social structure and political culture has been extensively documented by scholars over the past four decades.⁴⁵ But, as this book seeks to demonstrate, there were other ways in which the late Victorian and Edwardian eras were decisive in shaping Bombay’s identity as a modern city. Most notably, it was in these decades that the city was restructured in accordance with the dictates of modern urban planning and intrusive modes of governance deployed in response to the challenges posed by rapid industrialization and massive labour migration. Equally, the city became the site of a vigorous associational culture and ‘modernizing’ social activism that infused its civil society with a new dynamism. The legacy of these developments continues to endure in the built environment and public culture of postcolonial Bombay.

From San Francisco to Singapore, urban modernity in the nineteenth century inaugurated a profound transformation in the techniques of rule. The city was rendered into an object of knowledge in the form of maps, surveys and censuses. New imperatives of rationality, legibility and visibility underpinned the conceptualization and governance of urban space. The city also came to embody new ideals of order that valorized ‘public health’ and the unimpeded flow of commodities and people.⁴⁶ At the same time, governments and urban elites viewed with anxiety the massed ranks of the poor or racially defined ‘others’, whose norms and practices were regarded as impediments to the

⁴⁴ Fawaz and Bayly (eds), *Modernity and Culture*.

⁴⁵ Most notably, Morris, *Emergence of an Industrial Labour Force*; and Chandavarkar, *Origins of Industrial Capitalism in India*.

⁴⁶ Patrick Joyce, *Rule of Freedom: Liberalism and the Modern City* (London and New York, 2003); Mary Poovey, *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation, 1830–1864* (Baltimore, 1996); Paul Rabinow, *French Modern Norms and Forms of the Social Environment* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1989); Brenda S.A. Yeoh, *Contesting Space in Colonial Singapore: Power Relations and the Urban Built Environment* (Singapore, 2003); Joseph W. Esherick (ed.), *Remaking the Chinese City: Modernity and National Identity, 1900–1950* (Honolulu, 1999).

realization of an ordered society.⁴⁷ In turn, this induced strategies of governance aimed at taming and disciplining their supposedly ‘lawless’ and ‘licentious’ disposition.

This book addresses some of these themes in the context of a fundamental shift in the political rationalities of colonial governance in *fin de siècle* Bombay. As Chapter 2 suggests, until the last decade of the nineteenth century the city’s rulers had remained largely apathetic to the social and political consequences of industrial urbanization.⁴⁸ In particular, they had cultivated a studied indifference to the emergence in the late nineteenth century of the ‘unintended city’.⁴⁹ Thus, as the city rapidly industrialized and population expanded, the provision of civic amenities failed to keep pace, leading to excessive overcrowding and insanitary living conditions in its swiftly proliferating ‘slums’. Similarly, the authorities had generally refrained from interfering in the affairs of the urban neighbourhoods. Prior to the 1890s, the neighbourhoods had been left to their own self-regulation, with the rulers largely relying on putatively ‘traditional’ community leaders to maintain order within this domain.

Chapters 3 to 5 show how during the 1890s the city was convulsed by a set of crises that triggered a reappraisal of colonial strategies of governance. Specifically, they focus on the attempts of colonial authorities to order and discipline urban space. The outbreak of a severe and prolonged plague epidemic in the late 1890s jolted Bombay’s rulers out of their ostrich-like posture *vis-à-vis* the problems of the city’s civic infrastructure. Chapter 3 considers the ways in which the widely entrenched belief that epidemic diseases were a product of locality-specific conditions of filth and squalor in the city’s ‘slums’ exerted a significant influence over the colonial state’s war against plague. In the wake of the epidemic, tackling the problems created by the abysmal living conditions of the urban poor became a critical necessity for the city’s ruling elites. The consequence was the establishment in 1898 of a City Improvement Trust. Modelled on the English and Scottish improvement schemes of the nineteenth century, the Trust set about demolishing dilapidated neighbourhoods, opening up overcrowded areas and constructing ‘sanitary dwellings’ for the city’s poor.

⁴⁷ Andrew Burton, *African Underclass: Urbanisation, Crime and Colonial Order in Dar es Salaam* (Oxford, 2005); Frederick Cooper, ‘Urban space, industrial time, and wage labour in Africa’, in Frederick Cooper (ed.), *Struggle for the City* (Beverly Hills, 1983); Alan Mayne, *The Imagined Slum: Newspaper Representation in Three Cities, 1870–1914* (Leicester, 1993); Gareth Stedman-Jones, *Outcast London: A Study of the Relationship Between Classes in Victorian Society* (Harmondsworth, 1984).

⁴⁸ The civic projects that were undertaken prior to the 1890s, insofar as they were implemented, were either designed to bolster the city’s commercial infrastructure or provide modern sanitary amenities to the city’s elites. For an account of mid-Victorian colonial civic initiatives, see Dossal, *Imperial Designs and Indigenous Realities*.

⁴⁹ The idea of the ‘unintended city’ was first elaborated in an influential essay by the architect and urban activist Jai Sen. Originally published in April 1975, the essay was subsequently reproduced in a special issue of the Indian journal *Seminar*. See Jai Sen, ‘The Unintended City’, *Seminar*, 500 (April 2001): 38–47. More recently, Ashis Nandy has deployed the phrase to signify ‘the city that was never part of the formal “master plan” but always implicit in it’. Quoted in Prakash, ‘Urban Turn’, p. 5.

This intervention of the state in the sphere of urban development, through the creation of a special agency devoted solely to the purpose of civic restructuring, was the first attempt of its kind in colonial India. Chapter 4 investigates the functioning of the Bombay Improvement Trust, assesses its impact on the city's built environment and underscores the diverse ways in which the city's residents sought to contest, subvert or deflect its operations.

If colonial civic renewal sought to reorder urban space, colonial policing focused on its regulation. Chapter 5 argues that the outbreak of major episodes of collective violence in the 1890s, as well as the simultaneous emergence of a plebeian casual economy and public culture centred on the street, produced a significant shift in the strategies of urban policing. Attempts were initiated to modernize the police in line with metropolitan models and practices. Furthermore, the traditional colonial mode of exercising 'indirect' influence yielded to more authoritarian methods of 'top-down' control. The shift in emphasis was facilitated by a new City Police Act that was introduced in 1902. This piece of legislation vastly enhanced the powers of the police by bringing a range of activities in public spaces under their surveillance. In particular, the Act vested the police with an exhaustive array of 'special powers' for regulating and controlling collective activities in public spaces. It also consolidated and extended the formal powers of regulation vested in the police by criminalizing a range of activities in 'public' sites. In turn, their newly consolidated powers embroiled the police more directly than before in the conflicts of the street and the neighbourhood and amplified the repercussions of such intervention.

Cumulatively, the three chapters that comprise this part of the book suggest that the early twentieth century witnessed a major reorientation in the relationship between the state and local society in Bombay. The city's rulers adopted a more interventionist approach to urban governance. Integral to this shift were the crises of the 1890s, which prompted colonial authorities to set about reordering and regulating urban space. In highlighting the connection between these two developments, the book proposes an analytical framework within which the disparate events of these years, hitherto studied in an episodic fashion, can be located.

As in the metropolitan context, centralizing governmental agencies intervened in unprecedented ways. However, while this book focuses on the augmentation and application of colonial power, it queries the view that the state was a monolithic and omnipotent entity with an unlimited or unchallenged capacity to mould the spaces of the city to its will.⁵⁰ It suggests that far from constituting a unitary institution, the state was the dispersed locus of contending logics and internal contradictions. The chapters that follow also demonstrate how their strategies and mechanisms of governance ensnared colonial authorities in conflicts that they were unable easily to resolve. Furthermore, by documenting the numerous ways in which indigenous agents countered the policies and actions of their rulers – ranging from outright defiance to the subtlest forms of

⁵⁰ James C. Scott, *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition have Failed* (New Haven, 1998).

subversion – one may highlight how the city was a ‘contested terrain’, shaped as much by acts of resistance as by the operations of power.⁵¹

At the same time, the book seeks to qualify recent accounts which have suggested that the boundaries between state and society were contingent, fuzzy and porous.⁵² While the state cannot be regarded as a discrete organization that was external to society, the practices of its various agencies nonetheless produced a ‘structural effect’, simultaneously material and ideological, that set it apart as a transcendental entity.⁵³ In other words, the ‘idea’ of the state became more firmly entrenched within local society. And no matter how indistinct the dividing lines between state and society might have been, they were nonetheless regarded as boundaries.⁵⁴

Another key feature of global modernity in the ‘long’ nineteenth century was the rise and consolidation of new forms of urban public culture. This was symbolized by the proliferation of clubs, societies and other kinds of voluntary associations, which became a characteristic feature of towns and cities across the globe. It was through such associational activities, central to ‘civil society’, that men and women from diverse social backgrounds negotiated the pressures and possibilities of modern life. At the same time, urban associational culture transformed cities into veritable theatres of popular politics.⁵⁵ The emergent public sphere of civil society enabled the liberal critique of modern state power as well as the articulation of collective identities.

The period from the 1890s to the end of the First World War, it is now widely accepted, marked an important watershed in the public culture of the Indian subcontinent. These years witnessed a spectacular surge in associational activities ranging from caste societies to nationalist organizations, as well as the rise of a dynamic print industry that churned out books, newspapers, journals, tracts, pamphlets and posters. There also arose new forms of collective action in public arenas: reasoned debates in the press, as well as memorials, meetings and public demonstrations.⁵⁶ Importantly, these developments were a product of the urban context. It was in the city that Indians encountered and came to terms with new definitions of the ‘public’ and the ‘private’ and it was here too that they began to recognize the potential of novel modes of association and sociability.⁵⁷

⁵¹ Yeoh, *Contesting Space in Colonial Singapore*, pp. 9–10.

⁵² See, for instance, Chandavarkar, *Imperial Power and Popular Politics*, pp. 180–233.

⁵³ Timothy Mitchell, ‘The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and their Critics’, *American Political Science Review*, 85 (1991), pp. 77–96; Timothy Mitchell, ‘Society, Economy, and the State Effect’, in G. Steinmetz (ed.), *State/Culture: State-formation after the Cultural Turn* (Ithaca, 1999), pp. 76–97.

⁵⁴ For an elaboration of this point in the context of contemporary India, see C.J. Fuller and John Harriss, ‘For an Anthropology of the Modern Indian State’, in C.J. Fuller and Véronique Bénéï (eds), *The Everyday State and Society in Modern India* (London, 2001), p. 24.

⁵⁵ Bayly, *Birth of the Modern World*, pp. 193–4.

⁵⁶ Barbara Daly Metcalf and Thomas Metcalf, *A Concise History of India* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 123.

⁵⁷ Bayly, ‘Evolution of Colonial Cultures’, p. 450.

Chapters 6 and 7 trace the crystallization of ‘civil society’ in colonial Bombay during the late Victorian and Edwardian eras. Chapter 6 charts the growing density and diversity of the modern associational culture that was fostered in the city. In particular, it highlights the countervailing trends that were a distinctive feature of Indian civil society. On the one hand, a vast proportion of the clubs, societies and trusts established in these years were organizational ‘hybrids’ that combined voluntary and ascriptive criteria of membership. On the other hand, there also developed paradigmatic forms of voluntary association that adhered to the principle of open access based on secular criteria of membership. In focusing on the simultaneous rise and co-existence of different kinds of associations, this chapter treats within the same analytical framework forms of collective sociability that hitherto have been considered discretely. It also demonstrates how the city’s varied associational life helped to create a richly textured public culture marked by multiplicity and multivalence.

At the same time, the chapter seeks to highlight the ambiguous and contradictory effects of this associational culture. The clubs and societies that proliferated in this period served to promote in their members feelings of mutual fellowship and goodwill as well as a concern for the ‘common good’. They also helped to entrench within Indian public life a remarkably enduring commitment to debate and discussion. Yet the voluntary associations did not always adhere to the values of autonomy, equality and deliberative decision-making. Nor were they free of tensions and conflicts.⁵⁸ At times, internal rivalries ripped apart associations as their members competed against each other for power and prestige. In other instances, associational activity produced deep fissures within urban society that even resulted in riots. Furthermore, ‘modern’ forms of collective sociability served to refashion a variety of putatively primordial attachments and ‘traditional’ identities.

This chapter also draws attention to two features of associational life in Bombay that were central to contemporary Indian civil society. First, it focuses not only on the associations founded by the liberal-nationalist elite, but also those formed to espouse communities defined by caste or religion. It thus questions the view that the term civil society is ‘best used to describe those institutions of modern associational life set up by nationalist elites in the era of colonial modernity’. This restrictive understanding of the concept is premised on a ‘normative model presented by Western modernity’. The defining features of associational culture in this ideal-typical version of civil society are ‘equality, autonomy, freedom of entry and exit, contract, deliberative procedures of decision-making, recognized rights and duties of members, and other such principles’.⁵⁹ However, many of these characteristics can also be discerned in associations that were based on putatively ascribed identities of caste

⁵⁸ As one scholar has noted, ‘The discourse of social capital, with its emphasis on cooperation and collaboration, is not sensitive to negative effects in situations of social conflict’. Susanne Hoerber Rudolph, ‘Civil Society and the Realm of Freedom’, *Economic and Political Weekly* (hereafter *EPW*), 35/20 (2000), p. 1764.

⁵⁹ Chatterjee, ‘On Civil and Political Society in Post-Colonial Democracies’, pp. 172–4.

or religion, but which nevertheless adopted the same forms, principles and practices as the ideal-typical voluntary organization.⁶⁰ Indeed, such ‘hybrid’ societies were as much a product of colonial modernity as the purely voluntary associations that are the *sine qua non* of liberal models of civil society.

Second, the study also challenges the widely entrenched perception that the norms and practices of civil society were solely internalized by the Anglophone intelligentsia and were more or less alien to the cultural worldview and dispositions of the lower orders.⁶¹ It shows how the associational ventures in colonial Bombay were borne aloft by the initiatives of individuals and groups drawn from diverse social strata. In particular, it suggests that in spite of their lack of basic entitlements and the severe political constraints that they faced, the city’s working classes displayed a willingness to commit themselves ‘partially and transiently to others with the same sectional interests’ and were not unaware of the niceties of ‘associational civility’. Conversely, their awareness of the ‘advantages of social individuation’ notwithstanding, English-educated Indians were not always able to transcend their attachment to ‘a world of more complete commitments’.⁶²

The final chapter considers a novel departure in the history of Bombay’s nascent civil society. Conscious of their self-proclaimed status as the new leaders of Indian society and the arbiters of new norms of ‘respectable’ public conduct, the city’s educated elites initiated and participated in forms of social activism that sought to ‘uplift’ and ‘improve’ the masses. In particular, there developed among sections of the Indian intelligentsia a newfound enthusiasm for ‘social service’. For long, it was assumed that this concern for the poor first emerged in the Gandhian era of Indian nationalism. In recent years, however, the importance of pre-Gandhian ‘constructive nationalism’ has attracted scholarly attention. In particular, historians have begun to examine the voluntary organizations animated by the ideals of ‘active citizenship’ and ‘selfless service’ that emerged prior to the Great War.⁶³ While sharing their interest in the specific local and global conjunctures within which these developments occurred, the analytical perspective adopted in this chapter is distinctive in at least two ways. First, it locates the new concern about the poor within broader processes of urban middle-class formation in colonial India. Second, the study seeks to disentangle the specific connotations of ‘social service’ from the generic category of ‘social reform’ to which it has

⁶⁰ In this context, see Sandria Freitag, ‘Contesting in Public: Colonial Legacies and Contemporary Communalism’, in David Ludden (ed.), *Making India Hindu: Community Conflict and the Politics of Democracy* (Delhi, 1996); Aditya Nigam, ‘Civil Society and its “Underground”’: Explorations in the Notion of Political Society’, in Rajeev Bhargava and Helmut Reifeld (eds), *Civil Society, Public Sphere and Citizenship: Dialogues and Perceptions* (Delhi, 2005), pp. 236–59.

⁶¹ Sudipta Kaviraj, ‘In Search of Civil Society’, in Sudipta Kaviraj and Sunil Khilnani (eds), *Civil Society: History and Possibilities* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 310–18; Chatterjee, *Politics of the Governed*, pp. 132–4.

⁶² Kaviraj, ‘In Search of Civil Society’, p. 317.

⁶³ C.A. Bayly, *Origins of Nationality in South Asia: Patriotism and Ethical Government in the Making of Modern India* (Delhi, 1998); Carey Anthony Watt, *Serving the Nation: Cultures of Service, Association and Citizenship in Colonial India* (Delhi, 2005).

usually been consigned. In particular, it argues that while ‘social reform’ during the late nineteenth century had largely denoted the *internal* attempts at ‘self-improvement’ within particular castes and communities, the emergent discourse and practice of ‘social service’ articulated by members of the high-status Anglophone intelligentsia was directed at the destitute, the downtrodden and the disadvantaged.