

HISTORICAL URBAN STUDIES



The Making of an Indian Metropolis

Colonial Governance and Public
Culture in Bombay, 1890–1920

Prashant Kidambi

The Making of an Indian Metropolis

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1890–1920

PRASHANT KIDAMBI

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Historical Urban Studies

General Editors' Preface

Density and proximity are two of the defining characteristics of the urban dimension. It is these that identify a place as uniquely urban, though the threshold for such pressure points varies from place to place. What is considered an important cluster in one context – may not be considered as urban elsewhere. A third defining characteristic is functionality – the commercial or strategic position of a town or city which conveys an advantage over other places. Over time, these functional advantages may diminish, or the balance of advantage may change within a hierarchy of towns. To understand how the relative importance of towns shifts over time and space is to grasp a set of relationships which is fundamental to the study of urban history.

Towns and cities are products of history, yet have themselves helped to shape history. As the proportion of urban dwellers has increased, so the urban dimension has proved a legitimate unit of analysis through which to understand the spectrum of human experience and to explore the cumulative memory of past generations. Though obscured by layers of economic, social and political change, the study of the urban milieu provides insights into the functioning of human relationships and, if urban historians themselves are not directly concerned with current policy studies, few contemporary concerns can be understood without reference to the historical development of towns and cities.

This longer historical perspective is essential to an understanding of social processes. Crime, housing conditions and property values, health and education, discrimination and deviance, and the formulation of regulations and social policies to deal with them were, and remain, amongst the perennial preoccupations of towns and cities – no historical period has a monopoly of these concerns. They recur in successive generations, albeit in varying mixtures and strengths; the details may differ.

The central forces of class, power and authority in the city remain. If this was the case for different periods, so it was for different geographical entities and cultures. Both scientific knowledge and technical information were available across Europe and showed little respect for frontiers. Yet despite common concerns and access to broadly similar knowledge, different solutions to urban problems were proposed and adopted by towns and cities in different parts of Europe. This comparative dimension informs urban historians as to which were systematic factors and which were of a purely local nature: general and particular forces can be distinguished.

These analytical and comparative frameworks inform this book. Indeed, thematic, comparative and analytical approaches to the historical study

of towns and cities is the hallmark of the Historical Urban Studies series which now extends to over 30 titles, either already published or currently in production. European urban historiography has been extended and enriched as a result and this book makes another important addition to an intellectual mission to which we, as General Editors, remain firmly committed.

Richard Rodger
Jean-Luc Pinol

University of Leicester
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My greatest debt is to my family, who have watched the progress of this book with bemused forbearance; and to Rochana, without whose perspicacity none of this would have been possible.

List of Abbreviations

AARBIT	<i>Annual Administration Report of the Bombay Improvement Trust</i>
AFRB	<i>Annual Factory Report for the Bombay Presidency</i>
ARMCB	<i>Administration Report of the Municipal Commissioner of Bombay</i>
ARPB	<i>Annual Report on the Police in the Town and Island of Bombay</i>
B.B. & C.I.	Bombay, Baroda and Central Indian Railway
BG	<i>Bombay Gazette</i>
BGOS	<i>Bombay Gazette and Overland Summary</i>
BIT	City of Bombay Improvement Trust
BMOA	Bombay Mill Owners' Association
BPPSAI	<i>Bombay Presidency Police Secret Abstracts of Intelligence</i>
CEHI	<i>Cambridge Economic History of India</i>
EPW	<i>Economic and Political Weekly</i>
GD	General Department
GOB	Government of Bombay
GOI	Government of India
HMSO	His Majesty's Stationery Office
IESHR	<i>Indian Economic and Social History Review</i>
IPC	Indian Plague Commission
ITJ	<i>Indian Textile Journal</i>
JAS	<i>Journal of Asian Studies</i>
JD	Judicial Department
MAS	<i>Modern Asian Studies</i>
MCRP	<i>Report of the Municipal Commissioner on the Plague in Bombay</i>
MSA	Maharashtra State Archives (Bombay)
NAI	National Archives of India (New Delhi)
NS	New Series
OIOC	Oriental and India Office Collections (British Library, London)
PP	<i>Parliamentary Papers</i>
RBDC	<i>Report of the Bombay Development Committee</i>
RDPI	<i>Report of the Department of Public Instruction</i>
RIFLC	<i>Report of the Indian Factory Labour Commission</i>
RNNBP	<i>Report on Native Newspapers in the Bombay Presidency</i>
SSQ	<i>Social Service Quarterly</i>
TOI	<i>Times of India</i>



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Glossary

<i>Akhara</i>	gymnasium; meeting place; residence of religious mendicants
<i>Alam</i>	spear-headed black banner of Imam Hussein and Imam Hasan carried in procession during Muharram
<i>Anjuman</i>	an assembly; a Muslim association
<i>Arya Samaj</i>	Hindu revivalist organization founded in 1875
<i>Aryan</i>	racial category used to distinguish speakers of Indo-European languages from so-called Dravidians
<i>Ashraf</i>	respectable Muslim
<i>Badmash</i>	hooligan
<i>Bania</i>	trader, moneylender, grain dealer; also a caste name
<i>Bazaar</i>	market
<i>Bhaiyya</i>	literally, brother; colloquial term for migrants from North India
<i>Bhajan</i>	Hindu devotional song
<i>Bhangi</i>	caste title of 'untouchable' waste-removers
<i>Bigarri</i>	sweeper
<i>Brahman</i>	member of Hindu priestly caste; highest and purest order in the traditional fourfold <i>varna</i> system
<i>Budmash</i>	criminal
<i>Chamar</i>	caste title of 'untouchable' leather workers in North India
<i>Charpae</i>	cot or bedstead
<i>Chawl</i>	tenement
<i>Chitpavan</i>	sub-caste of Brahmans settled in the Konkan region of Maharashtra
<i>Crore</i>	ten million
<i>Dada</i>	literally, 'elder brother'; colloquial term for neighbourhood tough
<i>Dana</i>	charity
<i>Dharma</i>	literally, duty; code of morality and righteous conduct
<i>Dhed</i>	caste title of 'untouchable' scavengers in Gujarat
<i>Galli</i>	alley; lane
<i>Ganpati</i>	elephant-headed Hindu god
<i>Goonda</i>	ruffian, thug
<i>Halalkhore</i>	sweeper who removed refuse and excreta from houses and streets
<i>Havaldar</i>	constable
<i>Holi</i>	Hindu festival of colours that heralds the onset of spring
<i>Imambara</i>	a religious enclosure or building maintained by Shia communities in India

<i>Jamaat</i>	community gatherings of Muslims
<i>Jati</i>	endogamous sub-caste; a specific named 'birth-group'
<i>Jethawala</i>	storer of a commodity
<i>Kamgar</i>	worker
<i>Katl-ki-raat</i>	final night of the Muharram festival
<i>Kayastha</i>	title of caste with tradition of scribal livelihoods
<i>Kirtan</i>	Hindu devotional song
<i>Koli</i>	title of western Indian pastoralist and fishing community; regarded as the oldest indigenous inhabitants of Bombay.
<i>Kshatriya</i>	member of Hindu warrior caste; second highest order in the traditional fourfold <i>varna</i> system
<i>Lakh</i>	one hundred thousand
<i>Lathi</i>	a long and stout stick
<i>Mahajan</i>	merchants' guild, assembly, association
<i>Mahar</i>	title of a large labouring caste in Maharashtra; regarded as 'unclean' by upper-caste Hindus
<i>Majalis</i>	a collective gathering; here, a mourning assembly during Muharram
<i>Mandal</i>	association, committee, society
<i>Mandir</i>	Hindu temple
<i>Mandva</i>	pavilion or place with canopy above
<i>Maratha</i>	caste title of dominant 'warrior-peasants' in Maharashtra
<i>Marwari</i>	native of Marwar in Rajasthan; a community well-known throughout India for its moneylending and mercantile activities
<i>Matam</i>	collective outpouring of grief; public rituals of collective chest beating or self-flagellation during Muhurram, in remembrance of the martyrdom of Imam Hussein at Kerbala
<i>Maulvi</i>	Muslim priest or learned man
<i>Mela</i>	fair, festival; company of dancers taking part in a festival
<i>Mistry/maistry</i>	foreman, master-workman, artisan
<i>Mofussil</i>	province or hinterland
<i>Moholla</i>	neighbourhood, quarter of a town
<i>Muccadam/ mukadam</i>	foreman or supervisor, labour contractor
<i>Otla</i>	verandah or porch
<i>Panchayat</i>	council or tribunal, typically consisting of five persons
<i>Panja</i>	literally an aggregate of five; here, it refers to a model of a hand with five fingers extended, each representing a member of Prophet Muhammad's family, which was paraded during Muharram
<i>Pethi</i>	here, a model coffin paraded during Muharram
<i>Samaj</i>	society
<i>Samiti</i>	society or association; a committee
<i>Sangh</i>	association, organization
<i>Sardar</i>	foreman, labour contractor, jobber, community leader

<i>Sarkar</i>	government
<i>Serang</i>	foreman who recruited and supervised labour among stevedores and ships' workers
<i>Seva</i>	service
<i>Shair</i>	bard; poet
<i>Sheth/shetia</i>	wealthy financier; merchant; head of trade guild
<i>Shimga</i>	another name for the <i>Holi</i> festival
<i>Shimpi</i>	the caste of tailors
<i>Shivaji</i>	eighteenth-century Maratha warrior king
<i>Shiv Sena</i>	literally, army of Shivaji; militant Hindu nationalist organization in Bombay
<i>Shroff</i>	banker, money-changer
<i>Shudra</i>	the lowest of the orders in the fourfold traditional Hindu <i>varna</i> system
<i>Sonar</i>	the caste of goldsmiths
<i>Swadeshi</i>	literally 'of one's own country'; home industry; specific political campaign launched in early twentieth century by Indian nationalists to boycott British-made goods
<i>Swaraj</i>	self-rule
<i>Tabut</i>	model of the tomb of Hussain at Kerbala carried in procession during the Muharram festival (also known as <i>tazia</i>)
<i>Talim</i>	literally, education; gymnasium
<i>Tamasha</i>	folk theatre
<i>Tindal</i>	leader of a gang of labourers among stevedores and ships' workers
<i>Toli</i>	gang of men; colloquial term for the wandering gangs during public festivals
<i>Ugarani</i>	the collection of money which is considered to be due
<i>Vaishya</i>	member of a Hindu mercantile caste; third in the ranked order of the traditional fourfold <i>varna</i> system
<i>Varna</i>	the traditional Vedic fourfold hierarchical scheme of ranked orders
<i>Waaz</i>	Islamic sermon; delivered usually in mosques
<i>Wadi</i>	compact residential precinct within a town

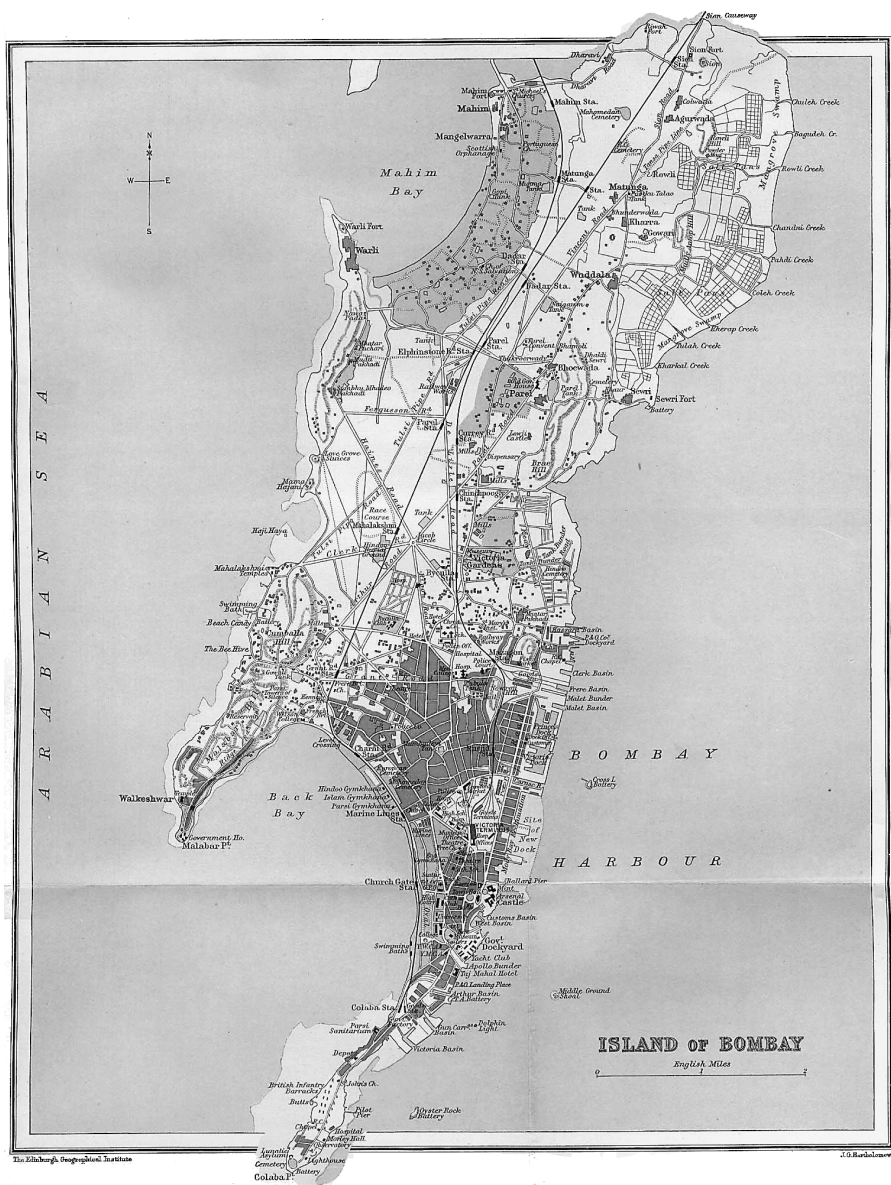


Fig 1 Map of Bombay Island, 1909

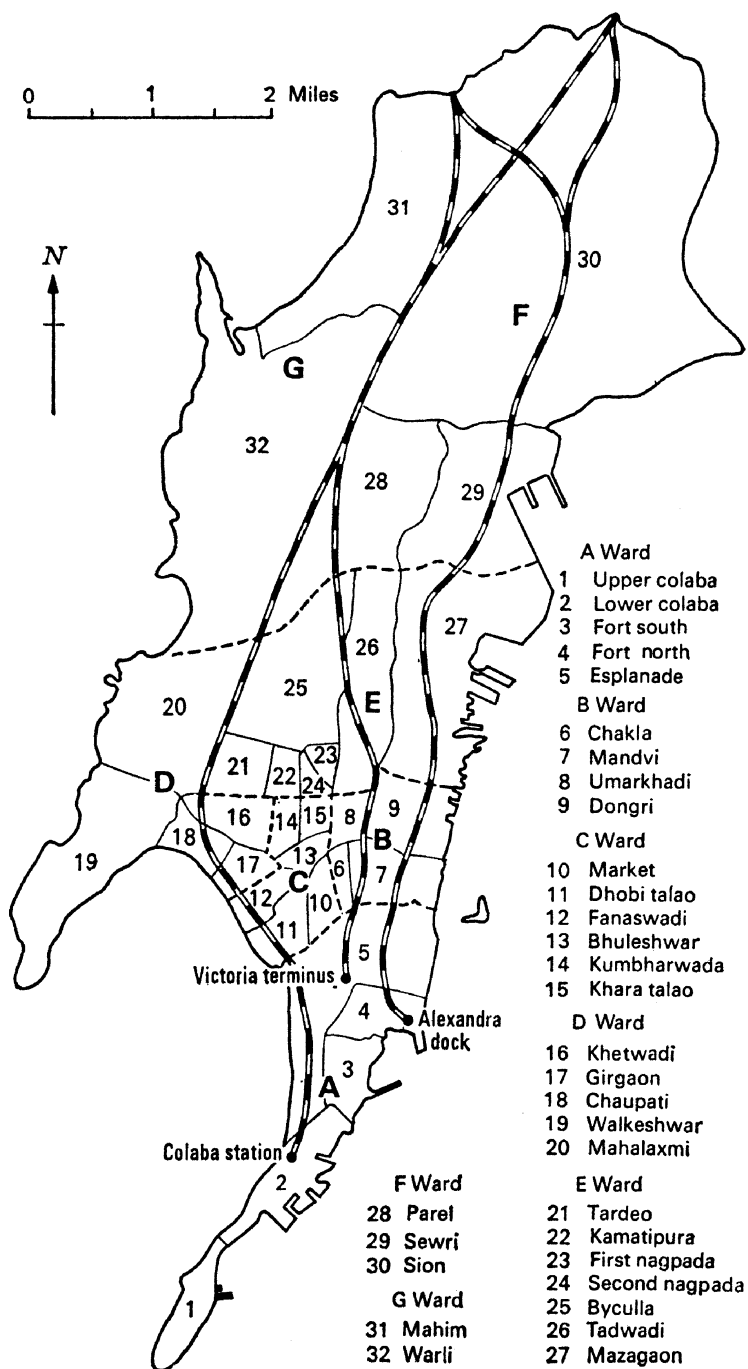


Fig 2 Map of Bombay City, c. 1919: Municipal Wards and Sections



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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 Czesław Miłosz, *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. Tothi, 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.