About Us: http://www.the-criterion.com/about/

Archive: http://www.the-criterion.com/archive/

Contact Us: http://www.the-criterion.com/contact/

Editorial Board: http://www.the-criterion.com/editorial-board/

Submission: http://www.the-criterion.com/submission/

FAQ: http://www.the-criterion.com/fa/

Theorising the Modern Urban City

Kshama Balaji
Som Lalit College of Commerce
Gujarat University

Abstract:

Cities in general are many things. It's a multidimensional aspect which has good, bad and ugly all intricately woven into the fabric. All aspects look equally important and equally evident. The politics and decision making in contemporary cities is full of conflict. The idea of justice in these metros looks very farfetched and unreal. Injustice in the form of violence, insecurity, exploitation, poverty, marginalization, ghettoism, crime etc all characterise urban life. This exploitation is usually expressed through the unequal access to social, cultural, political and economic capital that arises because of the intertwined divisions between race, class, gender and categories. The marginalized communities struggle to belong. Women's struggle for economic empowerment and safety. The trans genders struggle to claim an identity and respect in the society to which they belong. The slum dwellers struggle with the government's policy of rehabilitation which leads to their displacement from their traditional social setup and work place. The parallel economy which runs the city in the form of crime, underworld, the business lobbies, builders lobbies etc which makes a common man's life more miserable and challenging in an urban set up. How these intricacies of a city shapes or reshapes an individual's personality, how it evokes in him a sense of indifference, a strong sense of individuality, a strong drive to fight, struggle, achieve, and establish an identity which is unique and different from the rest and at the same time it also in a way pushes him to hold on to his cultural identity and stick to his roots are some of the factors that are examined in this paper.

Keywords: Urban, Social, Capital, Urbanization

Cities are many things. Among their least appealing aspects, cities are frequently characterized by concentration of inequality, insecurity and exploitation. Cities have also long represented promises of opportunity and liberation. Public decision making in contemporary cities is full of conflict, and principles of justice are rarely the explicit basis for the resolution of disputes. If today's cities are full of injustices and unrealized promises, then how would a Just City function? Is the idea of a just city just a utopia or does it have any practical relevance in a global organic world.

Urbanization is arguably one of the most dramatic forms of highly irreversible land transformation. While urbanization is a worldwide phenomenon, it is exceptionally dynamic in India, where unprecedented urban growth rates have occurred over the last 30 years. In this uncontrolled explosive situation city planning lacks data and information to measure, monitor, and understand the urban sprawl processes. This unplanned and uncontrolled urban growth has had dramatic negative effects on urban dwellers and their environment. Modern cities are facing serious shortage of water and power, housing and transportation, health facility and education, unemployment and poverty, pollution and poor public health.

Understanding the past and present urbanization processes can help in understanding the psyche, the insecurities and the aspirations and dreams of people living in the city.

Lewis Mumford in "The Culture Of Cities" declares:

The city is the form and symbol of an integrated social relationship...... It's a basic platform which reflects diversity, vitality, plurality and responsiveness to human needs and desires. It's both a container and transmitter of culture which passes on from one generation to the other. In spite of its growth and development and modernity the city is always embedded somewhere or the other in the past history. (Mumford*: 42)*

In the Old Testament, the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the pastoral idyll of Eden gave rise to the first settlement. Outside Biblical reference in the Bacchar, Pentheus surrounds his city with walls but secretly yearns for the libidinal vitality of freedom of the countryside which is lacking in the realm. This dual picture of development and lack can be constantly traced in literature and writings on cities.

From a European urban historical perspective, historian Carl Schorske, has isolated three major conceptions of the city in history since the 18th century. The Enlightenment city of virtue, which embodied the dynamics of civilization, which was praised by Voltaire, Adam Smith and Gottlieb Fichte. The next came the anti-rational Industrial Victorian city of Vice denounced by Blake, Wordsworth, Engels and Marx. And Spenglers terminal modern city which was an entity "beyond good and evil." Broadly speaking these are the three recursive stages that are often associated with the city.

In the post – modernist stage the city does not just confirm itself to the meanings that we had ordained to it in the past. The new city is going through a structural transition and is experiencing a "crisis of terminology." In the post – modernist period we now talk of a de – centred city which calls for a new understanding and a new vocabulary for urban experience.[i] The urban population growth in India has been phenomenal in the last few decades. Job opportunities, better life styles, dreams, desires and aspirations have been the driving force for people to migrate from rural to urban cities and it has also encouraged migration from small towns to cities and from one city to the other. There is a consistent growth in urban population and a stark decline in the rural population growth and agricultural economy in the last decade. Cities in the 21st century are going to be the most dominant, living, earning, and culturally growing environment for the Indians which has brought in a new interest towards urban studies.

Urban growth in developing countries is very different from that of the Western countries. The Eastern Cities have been considered a misfit for decades in comparison to their Western counterparts in terms of infrastructure and modernity and is shunned as a cosmetic, borrowed modernity as it is surrounded by slums, squalor, chaos, unorganised growth and bad infrastructure. But in spite of all its drawbacks the Indian cities have shown tremendous economic growth and has even fared better many a times than the west which has raised many questions and interests regarding urban development in India.

The concept of a city or an urban living is not entirely new to the Indian culture. Contemporary cities are products of our ancient history, culture and civilization. Culture as Benedict Anderson puts is an ever changing and evolving concept. It changes from time to time and is influenced and absorbs from other cultures as well. Urbanity in India is a product of hybridization of centuries of cultural contact with other diverse worldwide cultural influences which entered India either for trade, commerce, economics or politics and is also a

product of its exclusive ability to still retain its own generic component in the present day onslaught of Western cultural influences and its potential to tap on to the intellectual and commercial demands of the present day society. India itself being a country of diversity has its own in house cultural contributions so diversified, regionalised, localised and centralized that its understanding as a determinant factor in urban development and the socio - political, and religious characteristics of a state or a city is a very complex endeavour.

Chronologically the growth of cities in India can be put under 3 heads. 1. The Early Period of the Indus Valley or the Harappan Civilization (2500 B.C. – 1900 B.C.) which is the first documented and authenticated start up of the urban city or urbanization which is marked by well planned buildings, streets, and a good provision for water and sanitation facility which is the basic requirement of a modern city can be seen here. Though not much is known of their social and religious life style it can be well established that it was a perfect urban scenario the proof of which can be seen in relics and remnants.

Next came the 2nd Urbanisation (500 B.C.) and the janapada formations which lasted till 300 A.D. is well known for cities like Rajagriha, Ayodhya, Kashi, Vaishali, Ujjain and Taxila which were known for their political and intellectual pursuits and were characterized by decentralized authority where people of all strata in society like traders, land owners, monks etc all had control over the economic activity of the state.

The second phase of urbanization began with the Mughal period. The city during this period was divided into mohallas or wards which had a self regulatory role. They were based on either occupation or caste, or ethnicity or religion, or an organic identity through migration from same village or region. This group identity was further reinforced by walls separating them. In short a more systematized and in a way a kind of codified and divided kind of urbanity prevailed where each group had well etched roles in social and political development of the state.

The Third phase begins with the colonial period which lasted for 200 to 250 years. It marked the beginning of the British rule in India. The Britisher's who had come as traders gradually started controlling the country. Initially they monopolised the Indian market and the East India Company gained political foothold in India after the Battle of Plassey in 1756, defeating the Nawab of Bengal and then within years time without much opposition, the British under Lord Clive, Warren Hastings, and Charles Cornwallis were able to transfer the company from traders to sovereign. They brought in many new reforms, regulations and practices to make Indian cities more easily manageable. After the 1857 uprising serious attempts were made to change the city structurally as roads in Delhi and Lucknow were widened, crowded areas were demolished and new buildings in European architectural style were built to mark the colonial presence. This change was not just superficial as it caused a great change in Delhi's social and economic composition. It clearly demarcated the Old Delhi from the New Delhi, which showed a stark difference of squalor, unplanned and unorganised Old Delhi in contrast to the well planned, organised and the rich New Delhi. This disparity heralded the origin of today's dual city phenomenon. Colonialism also brought in industrial capitalism, new technology, railways, ports, factories which changed the urban economic structure and also encouraged migration. The social fabric changed as the British brought in the Victorian moral standards which were quiet prudish and were in contrast to the Indian standards but were somehow easily accepted and adapted by the Indians which has today created a serious social issue of whether the Hindu ideology which we claim to follow is really Indian or Victorian. The idea of the character of Shikhandi in Mahabharata has to accommodate the gay and the lesbians, and similarly the Kamasutra by Vatsayna and the

erotic temple architecture of Khajuraho and other ancient temples have to accommodate an open, liberated attitude towards sex and its articulation in literature, movies and paintings which the present Indian radical society fails to accept.

The fourth stage of urbanization which can be identified is the post – independent period from 1947-1991. This period saw rapid urbanization due to various reasons. One, the Hindu refugees from the newly created nation of Pakistan started pouring into Punjab and into Bengal from the Eastern border. From the Western border, the refugees headed for urban areas which created an immediate need for housing facilities and towns like Jullundur, Ludhiana, Amritsar, Ambala, and Delhi were enlarged through development and new colonies and suburbs were established to accommodate 470,000 refugees. The Bengal Famine of 1943 also led to migration which led to overcrowding of cities which lacked proper infrastructure to sustain them and this brought in disparity between the haves and have not's. The post independent city was a city of contrast. The old elite, rich, propertied remained privileged and still enjoyed the life style of the Raj days, and there was also a new emerging middle class who were firmly based in government jobs, with secure salary and government housing facilities. There were also small businessmen and traders and many more with no literacy and money had to eke out a living in small services.

The next phase that is observed is the urban growth in the post liberalisation era after 1991, which carries with it some legacies of the past like faster growth, expansion, development of suburbs, gentrification, metropolization, coming up of slums, illegal colonies etc. Along with these continuities, the city also witnessed or is still waking up to some after effects which are slowly emerging and taking on a giant proportion which is hard to ignore. Some of these after effects which have been noticed is the blaze attitude among the urbanites, crime, violence, atrocities against women, indulgence in drugs and alcohol, promiscuity, emergence of parallel economy with dons and the underworld ruling the roost and most importantly the falling apart of the institution of marriage, family and the importance of relationships and values which held the society tightly knit in the past.

The deepest problem of modern life derives from the claim of the individual to preserve the autonomy and individuality of his existence in the face of overwhelming social forces, of historical heritage, of external culture and technique of life. (Desmond: 87)

In the past, man had to struggle with nature to safeguard his existence. But the modern man in an industrialized, capitalized world has to compete continuously with the outside forces which demands exclusivity and specialization of man and his work. With such unique individuality how an individual will accommodate himself in the adjustment of external forces and what will be the consequence of such strong individuality on relationships and society is something to be analysed.

George Simmel in *The Metropolis and Mental Life* opines that the psychological basis for such type of metropolitan individuality consists in the intensification of nervous stimulation which results from the swift and uninterrupted change of outer and inner stimuli."

Modern man continuously encounters and is stimulated by the rapidly, ever changing, outward images which may be contrary to the images just gone by. This sharp contrast and discontinuity creates a psychological condition where a metro man relies more on his intellect which is the most adaptable of our inner forces and doesn't need any major shocks or upheaval. He develops an organ which protects him from all external discrepancies which can uproot him, destabilize him. He reacts with his head instead of his heart. Heightened

awareness and predominance of intelligence marks a modern man's identity. The metropolitan phenomena make him less sensitive and blaze.

The metropolis also being the seat of money economy makes a modern man more materialistic. Money and intellect are intrinsically connected which leads to a matter of fact attitude in dealing with people and things. Money asks for only exchange value and the entire question of individuality is reduced to the question How much? This idea of mere number is itself indifferent. So a modern man connects to people with whom somewhere or the other he is connected with money. This constant pursuit of success and pleasure makes one blaze because it "agitates the nerves to their strongest reactivity for such a long time that they finally cease to react at all." So we see modern men not knowing their neighbours, not reacting to the atrocities, corruption and crime around them and being indifferent to even their own family members. In the mad rush to be different, exclusive, to attract the attention of the social circle man is tempted to adopt certain metropolitan traits and mannerisms like caprice, deceit and vice. The individual's intellectual development is far ahead when compared to his cultural progress during the same period which is a serious disproportion and which leads to retrogression in the culture of the individual with reference to spirituality, morality and owning responsibility for ones action. This discrepancy alters the moral fabric of the society. The modern city is thus just not about skyscrapers, malls, subways, metros, multiplexes etc, but it's also about emerging social problems like divorce, delinquency, crime and social unrest.

Urbanization and liberalization, also leads to gentrification and commodification of places through which the property developers make millions by displacing the early inhabitants which leads to the displacement of the poor from their familiar set up to a strange new set up where they don't feel belonged and are alienated from their culture, neighbourhood and inter personal relationship they shared with their early neighbours. This does not just change the city scape but also effects the moral and cultural fabric of the city as these dislocated people may sometime lose their jobs as the new settlements are too far off to travel and finding a new employment source close by might take time which financially burdens them. Similarly women who would go to work leaving their kids behind with a familiar neighbour or a relative finds herself among strangers and prefers to stay back with kids rather than work which leads to financial loss. Financial burden which the families go through, and their inability to cope with the rising prices and demands leads to social problems like domestic violence, alcoholism, crime and juvenile delinquents.

Another potent question which can be raised regarding urbanization and capitalism is the space and safety which has been provided to women who almost constitute 50% of the total population. Since independence lot of legal provisions and constitutional rights have been provided to women to give her an equal status and position in society. But somehow when it comes to its implementation or trickling down of these rules to the concerned level our society still lags behind and women suffer as second class citizens or they get a step motherly treatment in a still patriarchal society.

It's true that more women are asserting public identities in India, but the fact is that even in the most progressive, liberated, cosmopolitan cities, women are still largely absent from public life. They enjoy only conditional and limited access to public space. They have to consciously think about how to maneavour the space between the home and the outside world. They must negotiate and strategize to be taken seriously and to maintain self respect and ensure safety. Contemporary psychoanalytic theory and feminism contend that the character trait and social roles associated with women comes from the male gaze or what we

may call the male fantasy. In other words women themselves did not invent the idea of femininity. Rather it was invented for them by men who pre decided what women should wear, what she should do or not do, who should take care of children and domestic activities, how she should behave in public...etc, etc, and all this in the garb of women safety and a notion that women are safest when secluded. In short the idea of femininity is ultimately more beneficial to males than females as it guarantees men freedom from domestic work and also the privilege of public authority, and the authority to decide on women's rights and positions.

Historically, gender division has allowed men to project onto women those personality traits in themselves associated with weakness, confusion, hysteria, dependence and fear. Gender division implies both material and emotional division of labour in any given population. Women perform menial tasks and display emotions which are deemed publicly unacceptable. As long as both genders accept their emotional task, it is easy for men to believe that they are somehow biologically predisposed to strength, rationality, intellectual autonomy and leadership qualities. But the problem arises when urban, educated, modern women actively oppose the 'naturalness' of this division of labour and in fact demonstrates its inaccuracy by challenging it in the first place. Subsequently men are forced to become aware that women can fight oppression like men do and that they are equally intelligent and rational, and if women can behave like men, then obviously there might be somewhere deep down in men, womanly traits and a powerless person fighting to voice out and claim an identity.

Women in urban cities have grown both culturally and intellectually and feel more sexually liberated which is contrary to what has happened with modern men. Men in urban cities have intellectually progressed but culturally they still have primitive stereotypical ideas of how a woman should be, which doesn't gel with the modern women who no more claim to be feminists, but demand for an equalist society. This lacuna in the process of urbanity needs to be looked into. The derogatory perception of women that still exists today under the mantle of modernism and cosmopolitism needs to be addressed. Strong women's presence in the society and in the public sphere jolts man's mediocrity who in turn uses violence, molestation, physical abuse and rape as a form of proving his power and strength against women.

The capitalist system has on the other hand has also produced a new women, who are financially independent, liberal minded, globalized and intelligent enough to decide what she should be able to do in her life. Middle class urban men is contrast who feel threatened to share the public space with her, and to also have to share the domestic duties feel insecure which results in breakup of families and relationships. Educated middle class women today are opting out of marriage as long as they can because relationship with such men can only be a downslide for them both professionally and personally. Remaining single allows them all kinds of benefits – social, economical and romantical. This lifestyle of women brings a violent backlash from the men which is quiet violent and traumatising. Added to this, it also alters the social fabric of the society, as the biological clock and the intellectual and carrier growth time of women clash so badly that it has repercussions on child bearing and child rearing process which leads to increase in childless couples, and children taken care by caretakers instead of parents which results in morally dysfunctional young generation.

Modern cities are places which bring together people from different walks of life who are total strangers and do not have any affinity with one another. The idea of community is replaced by the idea of individuality and this individuality is one of the most important factors in the making of an identity which does not carry the baggage of a family name or a

cast stamp which is one of the positive traits of urbanity where each one has an equal opportunity to make a mark for himself/herself in the society irrespective of which cast or which family one belongs to. But this extreme individuality also leaves man lonely in a crowd of strangers which leads to problems like depression, loneliness, psychotic disorders, and rampant suicides which are lately assuming alarming proportion. The post liberal economy India is experiencing an incompatibility between social conservatism that puts family and relationships first and economic liberation which puts the self first. This gap between the two creates the trauma and the angst which the younger generation display.

Urban crime and road rage are other factors that are associated with urbanity, modernity and capitalism. Growing materialism, consumerism, excessive competition, selfishness, lavishness, appalling socio-economic disparity and rising unemployment, lack of housing facilities and feeling of loneliness in a crowd are some of the primary causes responsible for alarming growth in urban crime. Not only the poor, deprived, and slum dwellers take to crime but surprisingly youngsters from well-to-do families also resort to crime in order to make fast money and meet the requirements of the lavish lifestyle which the modern city life exposes them to. The problem of urban crime becomes more complicated as the poor are made scape goats for even a minor crime, whereas the rich brats get protection from politicians, bureaucrats, police and even sometimes from the elite class of the urban society who are hand in gloves with the legal system. Politics, money power and muscle power rules the roost in urban cities which lacks moral precedence.

Road rage is not an unusual thing in Indian cities. Road rage is just not connected with rash driving, it's about being rich, being privileged, being indifferent, being callous and arrogant. Money affects people socially and psychologically. The nexus of industry, politics, and police and crime is so tightly knit that these rich brats take things for granted. Abiding by rules, life of people hardly matters to them as their crime usually goes without punishment. This lethal combination has acquired such dangerous proportion that their arrogance sounds as natural truth in the modern society.

The other social problem associated with urbanism, modernism and capitalism is drugs, alcohol, and promiscuity which again comes with liberty and exposure. The second generation whose adult life happened after globalization has access to money, technology, and education in universities abroad and they gave a new vocabulary to urban experience. They are more brash, reckless, and open minded when it comes to clubbing, drinking and indulging in drugs which the modern society accepts unabashedly. Drugs, marijuana which are legally prohibited for sale and consumption, somehow easily finds its way to all the drug addicts which is not just a personal tragedy but also a social and economic one, as such addicts prove dangerous and unproductive to the society and also such illegal consumption encourages smuggling, bribing and a parallel economy thriving within and across the borders which endangers the security of the country as smuggling leads to infiltration across the borders which leads to law and order problems for the state.

Human behaviour is affected by genetic inheritance and experience. The ways in which people develop are shaped by social experience and circumstances within the context of their inherited genetic potential. The scientific question is just how experience and hereditary potential interact in producing human behaviour. Each person is born into a social and cultural setting – family, community, social class, language, religion – and eventually develops many social connections. The characteristics of a child's social setting affect how he or she learns to think and behave, by means of instruction, rewards and punishment and example. This setting include home, school, neighbourhood, and also, perhaps, local

religious and law enforcement agencies. Then there are also the child's mostly informal interactions with friends, other peers, relatives, and the entertainment and news media. How individuals will respond to all these influences, or even which influences will be the most potent, tends not to be predictable. There is, however, some substantial similarity in how individuals respond to the same pattern of influences – that is, to being raised in the same culture. (Simmel: 47)

What is considered to be acceptable behaviour, what is moral and immoral varies from culture to culture and from time to time. Every society has certain set of rules for its subgroups and any deviation from the normal standards is usually considered unusual, distasteful, or sometimes even criminal. From the development of the country from an agro based one to a techno based one, a lot of cultural and behavioural changes have taken place in society some of which are accepted and some are still snubbed and scorned at. Such transgression of acceptable standards can sometimes take up a revolutionary proportion that it changes the social fabric of the society. For example the modern society after much struggle and strife has come to accept the marriage between the homosexuals, the live in relationships, divorce, women clubbing, single parenting etc. Migration and mass media not only leads to cultural mixing but also leads to the extinction of certain cultures and rapid development of some new ones. This creates confrontation of values and expectations which again paves way for a new world, new experience and a new vocabulary.

Today after the development of cyber cities and satellite towns now there is a growing talk of creating new smart cities and gift cities which would be self sufficient, with good infrastructural facilities, and technologically advanced to cater to the new modern Indian generation. But this kind of utopic perfection is a delusion as the city is not a static entity, it's a kinetic flow which changes according to time and situation and which also in turn creates a new society and a new culture. The advancement in technology and smart phones has brought in a young generation which is almost narcist, as it is a selfie generation, which has more virtual friends than real friends. Smart phones are also blamed for modern societies ills where people ignore partners and family, and there's a decrease in memory power of the people who are now completely dependent on technology. Google is the new god to which people resort to, for all problems and queries in life. The modern society with technology, money and modernity is becoming more impersonal and robotic.

As Santosh Desai in his article "The city as an idea: A community we create" in Times Of India, August 10, 2015 opines

The idea of a planned city is at some level a delusion, a sweet delusion, but one that is fundamentally unrealistic. Strictly speaking, a city cannot be planned, for it exists as something that flows in time and its growth is organic and a product of the context that springs up around it. A city can, however, be planned for in that instead of a grand design conceived of at a point in time that the city obeys, it can adopt a design approach that unfolds along with the city, one that overlays on some broad design principles a more fluid vision of the city as it evolves. One should plan to respond to a city as it unfolds rather than plan to create one in its entirety.

A city is at its heart a democratic device, a common facility we plug into and a community we help create. Building new cities is an exercise in humility; we need to create conditions that encourage life in all its whimsical contrariness to bloom, even as we give all the residents an equal shot at a better life. The city of tomorrow needs to work hard to erase as many

distances it can, for only then it would allow individuals to find their own calling and their own place in the world.

Works Cited:

1. Human Society Cultural Effects On Behaviour:
   http://www.project2061.org/publications/sfaa/online/chap7.htm
2. Desai ,Santosh ."The city as an idea: A community we create" in Times Of India, August 10, 2015
3. Harding, Desmond . 2003. Writing the City – Urban Vision and Literary Modernism. London: Routledge.
4. Mumford, Lewis. 1970. The Culture Of Cities. New York: Harvest.
5. Simmel, George: 1976. Metropolis and Mental Life from the The Sociology of Georg Simmel. New York: Free Press.