Of Marginality: Poverty, Migration and Memory in the Megacity

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The article addresses issues of marginalisation in the context of postcolonial migration to the megacity. Taking Delhi as an example, the author outlines first, the nature of migration during partition, and the importance of identities as central to the construction of the modern middle class mediated by a welfare-state, before moving on to examine the particular situation of migration in the context of poverty. Through the lived stories of men and women, what the author reflexively calls the 'anecdotal' mode, she attempts to identify the subaltern of the city, marginalised at once by the state, its elite citizens and the new global-market ethic. Using the rickshaw puller and the hawker/vendor as examples, the author traces the multiple pressures at play in the megacity, showing how narratives of 'planned' cities and the categorization of marginal in academia and the media have impacted these processes. However, she does not give up hope that the megacity can also be a place for subaltern cosmopolitanisms and co-lived/shared histories.

Narratives of workers' lives in Delhi unravel the story of postcolonial population movements and of poverty. An exploration of these opens a window to the constitution of marginality and memory in the megacity. Delhi is but an instance of a much wider universe.

The several cities of Dilli have been, time and again, shaped by the ethnicities of waves of migrants. The movement of populations has been a constant feature of the historical process. Individuals and groups that were Gujar, Rajput, Turk, Afghan, Mughal, Punjabi, and others came into the city. Persons both came and went to the areas we identify today as Kashmir, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Bengal, Sind, Punjab, from the Hindu Kush region, Tibet, China etc. This continued down to the partition of the subcontinent when refugees from what now became Pakistan significantly reconstituted the ethnic composition and culture of the city as they became established denizens of Delhi.

The difference between migration, old and new, has two aspects. Postcolonial migration is characterized by an unprecedented upward mobility, but is also a story of utter deprivation signaling a deepened and absolute poverty and novel sources of violence.

The mobility has been for those who have benefited from the welfare-development state. This is a story of the making of the largely Hindu new middle class. After partition Punjabi migrants to the city obtained prize urban land as compensation. This was one of the many ways in which the two new nation states of India and Pakistan mirrored each other fostering the growth of a new Punjabi elite that was Hindu on one side of the border and Muslim on the other. As Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Relief and Rehabilitation and of Home, the Sardar, as Patel was called, ensured that the refugees received adequate support that would enable the development of new commercial spaces in Delhi. South Delhi is a product of the new Indian State's support to dislocated Hindus from Pakistan. Golf Links, Defence Colony, Lajpat Nagar, Greater Kailash etc. This was the New New

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Delhi, as distinct from Lutyens' colonial project of a New Delhi and the contemporary globalized New X3 Delhi. The last is our very own Gurgaon, of Delhi's corporate world and capitalist outsourcing with all its werewithal including malls, country clubs, pubs, lounges, and not-to-forget mind-body spas that promise de-stressing for executives but also for the Barbaras and Marys (the names conferred on call center personnel) who are made to work subhuman hours!!

The rehabilitation of Punjabi refugees after partition was not just a function of state formation whereby the newfound state was compelled to take care of its citizens. There were levels of decision-making at which deliberate ethnic choices were made, favouring some and marginalising others. I have described some of these processes.[1] The Meos of Rajasthan, in the very neighbourhood of Delhi, had been forced out of their villages that were burnt to a cinder by mobs of castes that were Hindu. They flooded the state camp at the Red Fort in Delhi and the informal camp at Basti Nizamuddin, many reluctant to go to Pakistan, the so-called homeland for Muslims. Despite Gandhi's personal intervention and Vinoba Bhave's *bhudan* or land gift activism, their "compensation" was with inferior lands. Hindu refugees and Sikhs from the Punjab were instead resettled on their own far more fertile and better-irrigated lands. Patel's programme for agrarian renewal in the mid-50s was one of the first moves that would along with the Green Revolution so-called contribute to the making of a new rural middle class. The new structural layer that political scientists Susanne and Lloyd Rudolph have referred to as "bullock capitalists"[2]. While the Punjabi "refugees" then prospered and benefited, the (Muslim) Meos were sidelined both in India and in Pakistan. In India since they were not classed as "refugees" they became low priority in the rehabilitation agenda and in Pakistan their marginality was underwritten by the category *muhajir*.

Older migrants (as distinct from partition refugees) often came to the city as political, commercial and artistic entrepreneurs. The Turks brought to India the political institutions of pre-Islamic Persia referred to as the Sultanate. The quamvar Punjabiyan of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries fostered new markets and brought new skills and crafts to the city. The new migrants in postcolonial South Asian cities also do the same as also bring a raw physicality to the city. They comprise the bulk of what are called the new labour mandis (a term drawing from grain depots) where daily wage earners can be hired for limited periods for fixed (usually low) wages. Labour Chowk, in NOIDA's sector 62 displays several thousand daily wage labourers each morning.

As rural livelihoods are eroded from the growing groundwater crisis, the shrunken sizes of landholdings, and, above all, drought and other forms of distress, migrants flock to the (mega)city ready to supply the city's craving for ceaseless construction and consumption of domestic labour and services. Migrants often live in ethnic enclaves defined by kinship, village, linguistic or regional ties or a combination of any or all of these. Hence the Tibetan Majnu ka tila; the Bengali concentration in Chitaranjan Park; the Bangladeshi Muslim concentration of Yamuna Pushta now relocated at Bawana. But a feature of many slums is their multi-ethnic character that has significant implications for possibilities of subaltern cosmopolitanism in the mega-city.

One of the big academic-activist debates in India and elsewhere has been on poverty. The poverty-vallahs, defined as those who make their living by talking, writing, publishing, lecturing and

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[1] S. MAYARAM, RESISTING REGIMES: MYTH, MEMORY AND THE SHAPING OF A MUSLIM IDENTITY (1997).

[2] L. I. RUDOLPH & S. H. RUDOLPH, IN PURSUIT OF LAKSHMI: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THE INDIAN STATE (1987).

conferencing about poverty tell us about the decline in the percentage of the poor, the numbers of people below that supposed line that defines the remnant as "below poverty" so that the poor disappear into a sanitized statist acronym, the BPL (Below Poverty Line). The faultlines between economists that belong to the "right" and the "left" have been clearly established in the poverty debate that is some decades old now.

In the poverty literature that has tended to be quantitative and datacentric there is relatively far less about the *increased* intensity of poverty, the much greater insecurity that some persons have to live with, the fragility both of livelihoods and lifeworlds.

The poverty of the urban poor is qualitatively different from that of the rural poor. The latter have been and are prone to the vicissitudes of the agricultural cycle, climatic factors such as monsoon failure/floods, underemployment and unemployment and the invariant of rural life, exploitation and corruption. Tribal communities, in particular, have experienced structural poverty for a minimum two centuries and dalit groups, a ritually sanctioned deprivation for nearly two millennia.

It is the same poor who are largely dalit, sudra, adivasi and muslim, and come from Jharkhand, Bihar, Bengal, Gujarat and Rajasthan who have moved to Delhi in recent decades to escape the growing despair of their lives.

What is then different about being poor in the megacity? In the village you could at least put a face on the exploiter, he had a name. There was the evil patwari, the corrupt tehsildar and the extortionist baniya demonized by many a folktale and peasant revolt, the zamindar (often also a moneylender) so movingly portrayed in Shyam Benegal's film, *Ankur*, and that triumvirate of the development state including the Junior Engineer, the Block Development Officer and the Village Secretary. The urban poor are victims of power structures often invisible to the discerning eye.

I am a historian of marginality and have been investigating counterspectives on state and sovereignty for over a decade, but it is only as a result of a project on Asian cities that I have been able to plough the depths of what it means to be poor and powerless.

In his marvelous essay titled "Walking in the city," the celebrated theorist Michel de Certeau refers to the theory of the city that is simultaneously a statement on method. There is, on the one hand, the view from without, that is a statist perspective, that is also that of the urban city planner, the manager, cartographer, etc. In this discourse of the city as the language of power, planning, ordering and design the mass of people are reduced to "crowds." The act of reading the city must then be the task of a re-search into its labyrinths to locate practices that visualize another spatiality, asserts Certeau.[3] And one might add, explore through this, the several temporalities imbricated in the "migrational or metaphorical city" that are located in the interstices of the "planned and readable city." What is the mythology, memory and multiple mapping then of this inhabited city?

In some individual and collective maps the city is akin to the dream state contrasted with the waking state in which the city is experienced paradoxically by several persons as nightmare. In this waking state the city manifests as spatial ghettoization that derives from class formation and labour-market segregation. For certain groups, say Bangladeshi Muslims in Delhi, the experience is also of processes of labour market exclusion.

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[3]   M DE CERTEAU, WALKING IN THE CITY: THE PRACTICE OF EVERYDAY LIFE (1984).

The making of metropolises and megapolises generates an enormous sense of energy and excitement. In India the project of a megalopolis creating an urban corridor stretching from Delhi to Mumbai thus far exists only at an ideational level. Elsewhere in Asia the enterprise of urban engineering has been pushed much further. Ziauddin Sardar's book, *The Consumption of Kuala Lumpur*, describes how in Malaysia an older imperial vision has been replaced a century later by the parallel reengineering of Mahathir's Vision 2020 launched in 1991. Mahathir projected, Sardar maintains, onto the city his own personal aggrandizement, a demonstration of his absolute power. Stretched taut like a rubberband the city merged with PJ, Petaling Jaya, Subang Jaya and the new town of Shah Alam. Sardar writes, "Until the rubber band snapped....Like the Shah of Iran, Mahathir wanted to create Great New Cities, a string of cities, adjacent to Kuala Lumpur and connected as a vast urban complex-a model megalopolis for Asia." This is a vision not unalike that of the classic villains of the Bond films: Dr No's city under the ocean, the golden city of Goldfinger, the city-within-a-city hideouts so beloved of Blofeld. "Dr M, as he is known popularly, has all the necessary requirements and paraphernalia of a mad, evil megalomaniac"[4].

Sardar elaborates on how Malaysia's essentially technocratic dream is exemplified by the drive to KL's international airport that takes one into a "technovoid" located in a hundred square kilometres that colonized the forest. The "Multimedia Super Corridor" or MSC similarly incorporates three new cities and a cluster of mini-cities. It is designed to make the city the information hub of Southeast Asia and rival Singapore. Putrajaya is the core of the MSC. Putrajaya and Cyberjaya, as the imperial and intelligent cities respectively, compliment each other. In Star Trek fashion, Zia comments sardonically, Cyberjaya beams Malaysia up to a brave new cyberage of development.

Is this also Delhi's dream of a hyper-modernity? Its future? And what about the urban poor? The mass the city would like to relegate to its margins, out of sight. If only it could do without them.

In poverty studies two kinds of voices have counted, one more than others. There are, on the one hand, the dominant voices of economists of different hues whose arguments are backed by massive National Sample Survey (NSS) data. Then there are those who belong to social and ecological movements and what might be called the more critical section of civil society whose contentions come from their grassroots experience and struggles. On the periphery of this discourse are persons like me given to more intuitive ways of thinking based on conversations, but whose writing is often referred to by the former school as "anecdotal." It is in this "anecdotal" mode that I will proceed. For it is the so-called anecdotes of individuals and collective biographies that reveal the nature of being and (un)belonging in megacities.

I will begin with my own experience as a resident of a postpartition (but naturally, dominantly Punjabi) resettlement neighbourhood in Delhi for nearly the last three years. Kailash Hills derives its name from Mt Kailash and the fact that it is located on the hilly, rocky terrain of the Aravallis. I often refer to it as a Hindu sacred space within Delhi as an unusually huge number of temples are located here including the one revered as the abode of the Kalka goddess, any number of Rama-Sita and Hanuman temples, the famous lotus-shaped Bahai temple and the equally famous ISKCON of the International Krishna Consciousness Society. There is even a Buddhist vihara. The aridity of Kailash Hills has, however, ensured the poverty of its adjacent areas. With the arrival of daily water

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[4]   Z. SARDAR, THE CONSUMPTION OF KUALA LUMPUR 226 (2001).

tanker the water battles begin, people pushing, jostling to get at a few buckets of water. Adjoining Garhi almost has the quality of a village without it being an identified *laldora* area, literally "red string" enclosure that is the administrative term for villages colonized by the expanding city.

The residents of Kailash Hills are serviced by several groups of migrants. There is a small population from Tamil Nadu located in Garhi. A few date back to a decade but several persons are recent arrivals. Some of the car cleaning in my lane is coordinated by a bright young boy under twelve who made an early advent and has picked up a fluent Hindi. He brings with him two older men who work at polishing and cleaning cars but cannot speak a word other than in Tamil. Hence the tutelage of the young boy telling its story of community in the city.

The story of Saraswati, a Bengali woman who works as domestic help in this area is of the gendered aspects of migration. She tells me of how she followed her husband's movement to the city as a result of the want of water in rural Bengal. A certain cinema house owner gave the couple shelter. She lived in Govindpuri and was a witness to the massacre of the Sikhs in the very year of her arrival. From her place of hiding in a pond she saw an old man getting up from his cot. He was cut in two before my very eyes, she says. One day her husband who went to repay a debt disappeared. Fear drove her back to Bengal. Livelihood, including the upbringing of her two children forced her back to Delhi to a slum, only to be dislocated once again in a slum-clearance drive and she now lives in Madanpur Khadar near Sarita Vihar sans electricity connected with the poorest forms of transportation to the city. Saraswati pays a hard earned Rs. 40 to commute to this area. The residents of her relocated slum were typically made to pay Rs. 20-30,000 by a Delhi Development Authority (DDA) official. No complaint can be made now against this DDA official since there are no receipts. Corruption-related transactions are necessarily oral. The hutments are adjacent to the cremation ground and signs of illness, death and disease are understood in terms of the possession of vile spirits haunting the ground.

Adjacent to this neighbourhood is Okhla with its large market for fruit and vegetable produce used by vendors and consumers and the industrial area beyond. Shankar Ramaswami's doctoral work is my source of insight into the existential condition of male migrant workers in the metal industry of the Okhla Industrial Area. Their lifeworld is one that is confined to the company and their *kamra* (room). Not for them the ruling city or for that matter the aesthetic city since their exclusion is often on grounds of the beautification of the city. Ramaswami describes the vicissitudes of their poverty, a life of hard labour and low remuneration, their exposure to chronic illness such as tuberculosis and other chest problems as they work all night long. He underscores the ugliness and dehumanization of their existence as they are the victim of several exploitation regimes. Law for them is a source of fear, an overwhelming fear of the state, police and local landlords.[5]

Through my workplace in north Delhi, the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), I have been made aware of two other clusters of narratives of suffering, those involving rickshaw pullers and street vendors and hawkers respectively. For the last half decade my colleague, Madhu Kishwar, through the aegis of Manushi has been undertaking a struggle on behalf of street vendors and hawkers that resulted in a Jan Sunwai (Public Hearing) in June 2001. Kishwar describes a period

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[5] S. RAMASWAMI, MARGINAL CIVILIZENS: MIGRANT WORKERS' LIVES AND THOUGHT WORLDS IN CONTEMPORARY DELHI - DEMOCRACY'S MARGINAL CITIZENS (2004).

during which the New Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC) let loose a virtual reign of terror on street vendors. With the connivance of shopkeepers, hawkers were attacked daily in "clearance operations," their wares confiscated and their spaces given to multinational corporations like Pepsi, Coca Cola and telecom firms who organised their own promotional stalls. The hawkers include women who bring seasonal fruits in small baskets. Kishwar describes the case of Rajkol who supports five children including two of her dead brother in law. This woman who invests fourteen long hours a day to bring nutritious fruit at reasonable prices to consumers is treated as a virtual criminal by the city's legal regime. She is served a *challan* that reads, "Summon *banaam apradhi dhara* 68 of Penal Code 330 (9/264) 225 of NDMC Act of 1994 before the Special Metropolitan Magistrate." NDMC inspectors routinely take Rajkol's basket of bananas away mostly without an official receipt so that she not only loses her day's earnings of Rs. 50-75 (below the statutory minimum wage) but also her capital investment of Rs. 400-500.[6]

Delhi's population stands at nearly 13.5 million persons with 200,000 migrants entering the city every year. Of the Indian workforce 90 percent belongs to the informal sector that accounts for 30% of the country's GDP. As Kishwar points out, "Street vending absorbs millions of those who come to cities as economic refugees from villages, because they can enter this occupation with very small amounts of capital. They not only create employment for themselves through their entrepreneurial skills, but also help generate employment in agriculture as well as small scale industry." Items of daily consumption such as fruit, vegetables, readymade garments, shoes, household gadgets, toys, stationery, newspapers and magazines, are often distributed through them. Were they to be eliminated from the urban markets, a severe crisis for fruit and vegetable farmers, as well as small scale industries that cannot afford to retail their products through expensive distribution networks in the "formal" sector. Hawkers provide a low cost, decentralised and highly efficient system of distribution covering an incredible variety of products, at prices far lower than those prevailing in the established markets. Kishwar cites Irene Tinker's work titled, *Street foods: urban food and employment in developing countries*, which demonstrates that vendors of street food in Asia and Africa supply more hygienic food than restaurants. Further, they reduce pollution and congestion on streets since produce is made available at one's doorstep. They also contribute to greater security within neighbourhoods through their very circulation. But the state instead of creating an enabling environment virtually indulges in economic war against this informal sector through a set of laws invoked by municipal and police authority. Most vendors are rendered illegal encroachers because of the deliberate policy of granting few licences; their goods and push carts are made liable to seizure during raids intended to perpetrate a reign of terror and penalties cash bribes taken; and they are subject to repeated police abuse and beatings. The approximately 500,000 vendors of Delhi are made to cough up Rs. 40 crore a month.[7] Despite the announcement of a new policy at the Prime Ministerial level putting an end to the impounding, destruction and seizure of rickshaws or goods and equipment of street vendors, a new phase of a particularly brutal "clearance operations" involving the confiscation of goods, carts and rickshaws was carried out almost as vengeance. Ironically, licensing has been enhanced even though India is supposed to be in the phase of economic reforms and liberalisation.

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[6]   M. Kishwar, *Major Breakthrough For Street Vendors*, 135 MANUSHI 4, 9 (2003).

[7]   M. Kishwar, *Blackmail, Bribes and Beatings: Lok Sunwayi of Delhi's Street Vendors*, 124 MANUSHI 4, 9 (2001).

In Delhi vendors and hawkers eventually organised themselves into a Manushi Nagrik Adhikar Manch (MNAM) inaugurating their own self-disciplinary exercise in bringing order and cleanliness into a new hawkers' market. Only following a good deal of citizen activism did the Municipal Corporation of Delhi acknowledge the corruption involved in the license system and actually petition the Supreme Court of India to create a model hawker market.

At Lokayan, an organisation closely linked to the CSDS, Rajendra Ravi worked on a study that documents the predicament of the rickshaw-puller that has been published as *Riksha: ek mahagatha.*[8] Typically the rickshaw-puller comes from the strata of the poor who come into the city in search of a better livelihood affected by the mechanization of agriculture. Ravi maintains that there is no town of the National Capital Region of Delhi and its hinterland where the impact of liberalisation and globalisation is not visible. Production by multinationals has reduced demand for domestic production and household and cottage industry and agriculture have been seriously impaired. The industry that has not been shut down has been relocated in the interest of a clean environment leading to extensive unemployment. Many migrants have turned to the rickshaw as a source of livelihood. The initial responses of rickshaw-pullers to the city were positive. They felt a freedom in riding the rickshaw, the lure of a good life contrasted with the village where wages were low. But soon they underwent urban relocation under the development dispensation involving a proliferation of infrastructure including the building of new roads, malls and high rises, the metro and the "green belt." They were dumped in far flung areas (sans electricity, health and water facilities). Lokayan researchers who spoke to rickshaw-pullers in one slum, found them absent in the next round of fieldwork. Even as roads were broadened and eight lane highways built, no thought was invested on how new lanes could be provided for slow-moving vehicles such as cycles and rickshaws.

When diesel buses went off the road in the wake of the Supreme Court decision on the mandatory use of CNG rickshaw-pullers found themselves unable to come into the city from far flung areas. Rights in Delhi mean the right to own and operate any number of vehicles. The government imposes a restrictive law that a person cannot own more than one cycle rickshaw in Delhi but no such norm exists for car owners, even though the capital's roads are chock-a-bloc with cars. Further, rickshaw pullers are subject to a regime of licenses and arbitrary confiscations.[9] Car models change every six months but the marginality of the rickshaw has ensured that no investment in its technological upgradation is made. While the megapolis is to be kept pollution free, the satellite towns of the National Capital Region are not extended the same concern. High pollution vehicles such as buses and autos are taken off the streets of Delhi but have a free run in the streets of Ghaziabad, NOIDA and Meerut, contributing to a further displacement of the rickshaw. Contrast this with the role of the rickshaw in the making of Asian modernity involving the shift from the hand-pulled cart to the cycle rickshaw. Dramatic photographs in Ravi's text illustrate the arrivals of Gandhi, Nehru and Sarojini Naidu, Jinnah and Master Tara Singh at the Viceregal Lodge for the Simla Conference in 1931 seated in their respective rickshaws.

What are statist and media perspectives on marginality? In the print media there has been a significant sidelining of the question reflected in a decline in the reporting on the urban poor. In his

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[8]   R. RAVI, RIKSHA: EK MAHAGATHA (2004).

[9]   M. Kishwar, *When Victims Are Defamed: The Interdependence Of Rickshaw Pullers And Owners*, 127 MANUSHI 13, 23 (2004).

powerful book, *Seeing like a state*, James Scott develops the idea of legibility, which is the way in which state simplifications are applied to nature, space and people. Through this it makes society legible and provides the capacity for large-scale social engineering. Scott refers to the High-Modernist city that projects rational order in visual aesthetic terms and attempts miniaturization or the creation of micro-order in model cities and villages. He cites Mumford's famous work, *The city in history*, that refers to the baroque conception of the city that emphasises form and visuality. The contrast to this planned, engineered and designer city is, what one might think of as, the romantic conception of the lived city. Scott describes Le Corbusier as the embodiment of high-modernist urban design and the conception of the city as a utopian project. No comprehension is involved of the pre-existing city as the new cityscape supplants it. For Le Corbusier the existing Paris was a vision of Dante's Inferno in contrast to which his city would be "an organized, serene, forceful, airy, ordered entity." Thus, he sought geometric grids, utopias that were abstract and linear in both Chandigarh and Brasilia. In his city a planned functional segregation was sought with workplaces separated from homes and distinctive shopping and entertainment centers. Scott refers to the megalomania of Corbusier's *The Radiant City*, his work on Algiers where he wrote ominously, "The despot is not the man. It is the Plan....drawn up well away from the frenzy in the mayor's office or the town hall, from the cries of the electorate or the laments of society's victims. It has been drawn up by serene and lucid minds. It has taken account of nothing but human truths. It has ignored all current regulations, all existing usages, and channels." Le Corbusier saw slums as noisy, dangerous, dark, dirt and disease infested and felt that they should be dealt with ruthlessly. He was the prophet-architect of the exemplary city that involved a rejection of tradition, history and received taste. Brasilia was a negation (or transcendence) of Brazil as it had developed for some centuries. He heralded instead the "death of the street" inasmuch as spaces of public life such as the street and the square were to be eliminated that had been venues of civic life in urban Brazil. The only public spaces were officially designated public spaces such as the stadium, the theatre, concert hall and planned restaurants. The smaller, unstructured, informal spaces including cafes, street corners, small parks and neighbourhood squares were denied as it was made into a "city without crowds." Scott contrasts Le Corbusier's approach with Jane Jacobs' book, *The death and life of great American cities*, which is a critique of modernist, functional urban planning. Her perspective like de Certeau's is that of a pedestrian, at the level of the street. Jacobs stresses that the city must draw people, facilitate circulation, promote social exchange and contact. She emphasizes the historic diversity of the city that is the contribution of incredible numbers of people. And it is for the planned city to foster "this great range of unofficial plans, ideas, and opportunities"[10].

Regimes of urban planning in India have been influenced, more often than not, by the Le Corbusier approach. Slum dwellers who were previously near their places of work are now located some 20 km from the Delhi Railway station. This is in contrast to trends in most modern cities in which the upper classes have moved to the suburbs, the outside of the city, as it were. It is also in contrast to villages where the poorest are usually on the periphery of the village, but close to the sites of economic activity. In Delhi its most tragic consequences were witnessed during the years of the Emergency.

Tarlo's ethnography of the state during the Emergency demonstrates how the discourse of development became the logic for the mass displacement of some 700,000 people to the margins of

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[10] J. C. SCOTT, SEEING LIKE A STATE (1998).

the city in 1975-76. In the new urban design for Delhi the residents of inner city slums of both New and Old Delhi were to be shifted to the margins eastward and outward to what was seen as the *kalapani* or black waters of a resettlement colony.[11] In effect, housing was the reward for sterilisation. In Turkman Gate local resistance to family planning and demolitions for purposes of beautification occasioned a brutal massacre causing the death of some 1200 persons, according to one estimate, and a wave of rape and looting under the cover of curfew.[12] Ten years later leaders of the ruling Congress enacted another massacre this time against the Sikhs.

What does the megacity tell us about subalternity/marginality? There has been a certain universalisation of the category of the subaltern in the media and the academy. Even a political theorist such as Charles Taylor uses the term as a heuristic device. The question is how do we understand the subaltern condition? Chakrabarty rightly points out that there is no subaltern that is the sovereign subject of history.[13] The subaltern is also complicit in discourses of violence such as of exclusivist nationalism. Hawkers and vendors are known to be blackmailed even by Dalit MCD (Municipal Corporation of Delhi) sweepers. In 1984 Dalit castes were active in the anti-Sikh violence. Tarlo likewise points out that the state uses in its perpetration of violence, sections of the urban poor who belong to the Dalit castes. Thus would-be victims of the Emergency became active agents of the state. Ruksana Sultana's family planning camp was manned by Muslims and local strongmen. Tarlo also highlights a certain amnesia about the Emergency including among those who were its victims. The architect of planned urban design during the Emergency, Mr Jagmohan, returned as minister in the BJP-ruled central government.

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Megapolises are universes of a certain Dostoyevskean darkness in which alcoholism is rampant, as also domestic violence. But there are also flashes of joyfulness, of life. Interestingly, it is migrants who contribute most to the lived city. They bring to the city new tongues and new styles. In my neighbourhood the monotony of the Punjabi salwar-kameez and the north Indian sari is broken by the Tamil-speaking woman's *lahenga*. With migrants also come cultures of difference and their associated remembrances. Bhojpuri competes with Punjabi now in songs broadcast on buses. A Bangladeshi scholar tells us of the ways in which slum women in both Dacca and Delhi bring with them from the memory of the environment and use it to "green" their surroundings, to whatever extent possible. Some believe that flowers and plants attract the rain-bearing clouds of the monsoon. Anil Sinha who has worked on a project on Delhi informs me that in the Rajasthani basti, disputes are settled by a panchayat over a bottle of alcohol provided by both accuser and accused so that the entry of the police is avoided. Ramaswami points out how workers' ideas of *atma* have memories of home, childhood and youth written into it and suggest at deeper notions of a civilisational consciousness.

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[11] *Kalapani* is a reference to the colonial state's jail at Port Blair in the Andaman Islands of the Indian Ocean.

[12] E. TARLO, UNSETTLING MEMORIES: NARRATIVES OF INDIA'S 'EMERGENCY' (2003).

[13] D. Chakrabarty, *Minority Histories, Subaltern Pasts*, 33(9) EPW 473, 479(1998).

Migrants also evolve new ways of coping with the stranger. Saraswati tells me of her relationship with her neighbour from Bihar who is a Christian. The intimacy of neighbourliness helps these women adapt to the estrangement of the mega-city. Saraswati brings the Christian neighbour to my home to help her write a petition against the DDA for taking an unauthorized payment. The Christian woman, I am told, cooks dinner for her whenever she has a migraine. She, in turn, has the benefit of Saraswati's wonderful Bengal-style fish cooked in raw mustard oil, the costs of which are shared by the two families.

A subaltern cosmopolitanism emerges then if only in occasional flashes and in unnoticed and "surreptitious creativities." In Ramaswami account of worker's lives one glimpses it in the multiple languages that a migrant is exposed to and begins to speak; in the possibilities of new intimacies between men and women; in the fact of a hindu worker making *simai*, the ritual food for Id and inviting muslim co-workers for a feast. It comes, above all, from workers' visions for democracy, citizenship and justice. This vision involves both a critique of democracy and an act of creative imagination. This is the hope for a polity in which there will be *asli prajatantra* as opposed to the existential *rakshasi prajatantra*. Workers' narratives elaborate on this as a domain of *asli samman* and *asli svagata* for the *praja* contrasted with the *nakli samman* and the *dande ka svagata* that they are currently recipients of. It will, above all, be a world of *talmel* rather than of individuating competition and pursuit of self-interest. Ramaswami points to the ways in which migrants reinterpret and expand notions of belonging, what it means to be a vasi, a *dillivasi*, in this case. This has interesting resonances with the theorist, like Taylor's point that democracy has become a universally aspired mode of governance.[14]

The world over a large section of domestic migrants inhabit the margins of the mega-city veering between home and homelessness. Transnational migrants most often inhere in what are trans-border spaces relegated, in frontier borderlands veering in the domain of legality/illegality.[15] An estimated 100 million migrants, mostly women are said to be refugees of development who comprise an invisible, illegal workforce and 20 million are said to have fled ecological disasters.

The paradox of the migrants' location is their marginality and simultaneous centrality to the economy. The contribution of such migrants to the shadow economy, in a sense, is what makes possible the "world-class" city such as Kuala Lumpur, brand new global cities like Dubai and megacities such as Delhi. If this century is going to be an Asian century it is going to be built with the hands and the labour of this presence that cities regard as unaesthetic and prefer to relegate to their margins, this unauthorized migration that veers on the border of legality and illegality. Ashis Nandy refers to the areas they inhabit as the "dark city," the contrast being to the city of light that is the city of wealth and power.[16] But this is, in fact, the vital city. A city that is vital to the life of the city; burdened by despair and hopelessness but despite this the sites also of veer and vitality.

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[14] C. TAYLOR, *Cultures of Democracy* (2004) (Delhi University Millennium Lecture).

[15] D. Wong, *The Rumour Of Trafficking: Illegal Migration And The Sovereignty Of The Nation-State* (Draft).

[16] A. Nandy, *Keynote Address*, CityOne Conference (2002).