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IQAC Sri Venkateswara College University of Delhi Dhaula Kuan New Delhi -110021

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Name of Mentor: Dr. Urmi Bhattacharyya Name of Department: Sociology Designation: Assistant Professor



List of students under the SRIVIPRA Project

S.No	Name of the student	Course	Photo
1	Muskaan Kapoor	B. A. Hons. Sociology (6th semester)	
2			
3			
4			
5			

llemis

**Signature of Mentor** 

## Certificate

This is to certify that the aforementioned students from Sri Venkateswara College have participated in the summer project SVP-2242 titled "**Visualizing Difference**". The participants have carried out the research project work under my guidance and supervision from 21<sup>st</sup> June 2022 to s25<sup>th</sup> September 2022. The work carried out is original and carried out in an online mode.

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**Signature of Mentor** 

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Dr. Urmi Bhattacharyya Assistant Professor Department of Sociology Sri Venkateswara College

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## **Domination by Design:** Colonial Gaze and Hegemonic Authority in the Indian context

Muskaan Kapoor B.A. (Honors) Sociology, 6<sup>th</sup> semester Sri Venkateswara College (University of Delhi) kapoormuskaan777@gmail.com

#### Abstract

Cities as lived spaces, inhabit an extraordinary position throughout the pages of history. For they offer an insight on innumerable facets (be it the peoples, time frames or elements of cultural heritage amongst others) that go on to contribute, in their own distinct ways to our world and mould it as we know it.

The 'representative' quality of space serves as an instrument of observation and analysis, and helps in putting together a clearer and more sensible picture of how the 'character of a way of life' is fashioned and visualized explicitly by a number of wide-ranging and farreaching factors-- be it architectural renovations, organisation of census-surveys, sanitation drive endeavours, economic, socio-cultural reforms and the establishment of structured civil offices and institutions.

In this vein, here we will be focusing towards the remodelling trajectory of some Indian capital cities (roughly from mid-17<sup>th</sup> century to early 20<sup>th</sup> century) under the rule of the British Raj, to ascertain how the ambitions wielded by the "soft power of a hegemon" set out to finally end the collapsing Mughal dynasty, lay the stage for dividing and separating the Indian peoples so as to strengthen the hold of imperialist control on the collony and finally, furthering their own interests under the supposed noble guise of "The White Man's Burden".

#### INTRODUCTION

Urban planning in India has had a very uneven journey, replete with inconsistencies and contradictions that were bound to arise from being governed by an ethnocentric regime unwilling to understand, appreciate and customize their governance style according to the requirements of the native area and its people. Still while British efforts were directed towards furthering the exploitative agendas of capitalism, they could not ignore doing their bare minimum, honouring the basic responsibility of tackling issues related to urban governance in the colony. But the attitude adopted by the colonizers in this aspect was the main issue of contention- that of imposing their modus operandi by way of action-oriented policies to the vastly distinct Indian context.

The theme of colonial dominance- that rested on establishing a strong control over the "native subjects"- was the building block of ideas that influenced urban towns/cities' colonial planning in India. The initial phase of this exercise witnessed work done under the guidance of- Town Planning Institutes, Civil Works Departments and Engineering Colleges by making use of information resources such as systems of statistics, census and surveys, to legitimize the planning process in colonial India. The substantive body of collected knowledge was intended to be put to use for urban centres, keeping in mind the fundamental principle that cities are generally the most important centres of economic productivity for the colonial administrators.

A "discourse of mimicry" propounded by Homi Bhabha<sup>1</sup> asserted that the colonial state sought to cover up any evidence(s) that could potentially indicate their utter sense of vacillation and ineptitude as a governing authority. As the name itself suggests, the ideology is firmly ingrained and rationalized within the realms of popular consciousness to such an extent that an effective delusion of confidence in the "Colony" is established. This was conceptualized through the 'Promise of Modernity' within the urban context. James Scott's 1998 work is important for it provides a rich analysis of the 'high modernity' that the colonial state always promised to deliver. There are two important characteristics of the promise of modernity---- first, that it 'claimed' to speak about the human condition's improvement with the "authority of scientific (rooted in post-Enlightenment rationality) knowledge" that reigned over any other alternative approaches. Town Planning Experts and their varying disciplinary supremacy claim their legitimacy from this. The second feature was the drive to move forward towards the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> in Cooper and Stoler (1997): *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press).

future by leaving the past behind, manifesting itself through the idea of "gradual development towards a better future" by correcting the past wrongs and sacrificing the people's present lives.

All these thought-processes served to partition the people from each other by means of a unequal segregatory system, on the grounds of the supposed 'greater good' that the White Men have been burdened to perform, upon their shoulders by the will of their sacred deity(the Almighty God).

For the Britishers, prominent among their concerns whilst undertaking the challenges of the planning process in India were: the arenas of public health and sanitation, spatialsocial segregation, and establishment of the colonial dominances' unyielding control.

#### Overview

This entire research endeavour may be considered as an attempt to enact a brief summary of the journey undertaken by the forces and agents of urbanism to acknowledge the apparent visualization of colonial space within the Indian landscape during the tenure of the British Colonial Raj.

#### **Research Objective**

The objective of this research article is to trace the ideological origins, underlying principles, progressive evolution, ground realities and subjective interpretations of the colonial town and/or city planning process in the Indian colonial context.

# COLONIAL URBANISM IN INDIA- RESTRUCTURING OF SPACE FROM THE COLONIZER'S PERSPECTIVE

As the British stronghold established its unquestioned dominant status in India, a standardized pattern of urban design came into existence within most of the cities/towns and princely states. This was a rather simple division of roughly concentric geographical zones namely in Madras, Bombay and Calcutta, and also of the different peoples residing in said locations- there was a fort area designed by (or alternatively constructed alongside pre-existing cities such as New Delhi, Bangalore and, Secunderabad, nearby Hyderabad)

and for exclusive British use including provisions of their housing, churches, commercial and administrative arenas. Along with the adjacent secure area that was also under British control, this was known as the "Civil Lines". Headquarters for the military personnel's accommodation and local, yet official formalities were laid out in nearby areas that were called "Cantonment" or camps. The larger Indian populace-region that materialized around this were derisively titled as the "native" or "black towns". Thus, it would appear on a superficial level, that people were clearly spatially-segregated along the lines of social factors such as nationality, race and ethnicity in British-India creating a framework of power dynamics and dominance-dependence relationships between the colonizer and the colonized.

But the reality of these so-called 'dual cities' was not so simple. Recent discourses and studies have pointed out that reducing the complex essence of urban spaces into mere binaries has led to a neglect of the vibrant and multi-faceted nature of the said region's social demography. For cities were made up of "overlapping geographies with such conceptions of both indigenous and foreign space and territory, that existed in a state of constant re-negotiations". <sup>2</sup> These misguided categories ignored the nuanced role of indigenous peoples, who were concurrently rallying for the causes of social welfare, basic civic amenities and urban citizenship, rather they set out to validate the colonial state's apparent success in assimilating within and characterizing the Indian landscape as one fraught with differentiation. The conscious thrust of the Company's imagination upon the city and its dwellers is indicative of colonial efforts to entrench its socio-political narrative within the limelight of the official histories that were being crafted back in the day.

As the stage was being set for new forms of urban governance styles to bloom, the British East India Company passed the Improvement in Towns Act (Act 26 of 1850), an enabling Act which aimed to receive monetary contributions (in the form of taxes) in order to support the Municipal Corporations that brought forth improvements in the urban sector. Thus the Municipal Commission of Ahmedabad came into being in 1856, this was accompanied by a few towns of Bengal Presidency adopting the Act in 1850s and Punjab

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Bissell, William Cunningham (2011): Urban Designs, Chaos and Colonial Power in Zanzibar (Bloomington: Indiana University Press).

following suit in the 1860s with their own distinct Municipal Committees. The new command of municipal record-keeping and maintaining checks over properties ensured that the responsibility of providing regular stocks of community facilities and services such as water supply, sewerage, drainage, roads and streets (basic civic amenities) along with primary education to the masses came under the jurisdiction of Municipalities. this was followed by limited participation in undertaking urban development of the regions. In the beginning, these municipalities came under the leadership of British-elected foreign officials, later members from the native Indian population also got their chance to practice the fair share of representation in the administrative processes.

Viceroy Lord Ripon in his 1882 resolution furthered the principles of self-governance to all municipalities coming under the ambit of British rule. This move ensured that the cumbersome responsibilities of civic improvement and India to British tax collection for fulfilling the promises of so-called progressive governance were to be further endured by the Municipal Committees.

The philosophy of urban planning, as it was evolved and implemented in numerous colonial cities, shaped itself into an intricate web of sorts- one which boasted of a highly controlled, subjugated populace alongside a conveniently inconsistent model of rule practiced by the Britishers.

The following are concise accounts focusing on the colonial cities of Delhi, Bombay and Ahmedabad briefly- their lifespan under the aegis of the colonial dominance agenda and the impact this kind of occupation left on their innate characters for the times to come.

#### DELHI

During the course of its entire known history, the city of Delhi has always strived to imbibe the spirit of cosmopolitanism in its overall character, be it in the sphere of people or other tangible and intangible elements. Obviously, the Indian and British view of this proclamation, along with their means of 'tackling' the city differed, although Jyoti Hosagrahar's<sup>3</sup> observation- that Delhi's classical havelis, public spaces, roads, housing clusters, and conceptions of public health underwent transformations not to emerge in a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> (2005). Indigenous Modernities: Negotiating Architecture and Urbanism (New York: Routledge)

British light, but as new "hybrid" models adapted to their specific environmental surroundings, complicates the leading erstwhile status quo quite nicely- the universal assumption that the British were completely unable to penetrate the core of Indian cities and their inherent disinterest in engaging with it, is a multi-dimensional wrangle with no clear resolution in immediate sight.

But the physical impact and response of the 1857 War of Independence within the city, a crucial arena of resistance for the armed forces (which along with Lucknow was one of the most rebellious cities of the saga) strikes terror and mourning in the hearts of listeners even today. It was widely known that for more than half a century before the revolt, Delhi's administration despite being in the name of the Mughal monarch who resided there in his empire's capital, his sphere of influence and jurisdiction remained so far as the palace walls of the Red Fort (Lal Qila). The British operated as the de-facto heads of Delhi- administering justice, officially collecting taxations and revenues, seeking to repair the city's fortifications, launching efforts to improve its sanitary conditions, and maintaining overall peace and order in the region. This arrangement ensured that when the rebels set their base of operations in the capital city, the patterns of their loot and plunder attacks, killings and destruction specifically targeted all tangibly visible symbols of British authority. This list included places/property owned, used or lived in by the 'firanghis' like the-- Delhi Bank in Chandni Chowk, European houses in the localities of Daryaganj and the Kashmir bazaar, Metcalfe House (the Joint Magistrate's residence), the Main Guard (the most important point of connection between the walled city and the cant Ridge) and the British army cantonments. Religious manifestations such as Church properties were targeted with a vigorous zeal, justified by the belief that these symbolic entities of the Europeans had set themselves upon destroying the religions of Hinduism and Islam through the propagation of Christianity. The St James Church, the first ever of Delhi built in 1837, suffered a horrendous fate during the revolt. All these observations indicate that the revolt was not mere exhibition of mindless mob fury, but that there was a "method in this entire madness"

When the siege lifted in the September of 1857, the city was becoming akin to a legitimate spoil of war. Specially appointed Prize Agents and army personnel, set out to appropriate and seize property along with any other valuable objects that they could get

their hands on. Indiscriminate bloodshed was rampant. One contemporarily popular remembrance was of the Kabuli Darwaza (gateway) that got its well-known name of Khooni Darwaza (named so because the murders of Bahadur Shah Zafar's sons occurred there) post-1857. Basically, these mementos epitomized their victory over the enemy.<sup>4</sup>

The sack of Delhi radically transformed the city's material culture and social geography. The city's entire population was evacuated and allowed to return only group-wise, Hindus permitted to come back in January 1858, with the Muslims following them by the end of the year. The "intentional desacralization" (Cohn, 1987) of the Red Fort, Jama Masjid, Urdu and Khas bazaars, the Dariba and many other symbolic sites of resistance was dramatic and extreme in nature. Land resources were allotted and gifted to many 'loyal outsiders' who were not the original residents of the city whereas the Muslims who wanted their own property back had to pay for it.

{Of the narrative adopted for the commemoration of the revolt martyrs, it is interesting to note that the canvas is rife with military and race distinctions. The army hierarchy's influence divided casualties into pluralistic binaries of "Europeans", "Natives", officers, non-commissioned officers, and soldiers. Even in death, the Englishmen were privileged over their "racial others".}

When the British moved their capital from Calcutta in 1911, they built New Delhi, a new city outside and separated from (Old) Delhi. Commonplace discourses amongst scholars throughout the years have speculated that the British, whilst building their capital at Delhi strived to cast the city in an image that would take inspiration from the previous Mughal political order to assert their hegemonic position as the head of a colonial entity. The aim was to ensure that their imperial architecture must be representative of unquestioned, legitimate authority that the previous monarchical set-up enjoyed. This line of thinking can be verified by the decision of facing the new capital adjacent to the old Mughal city of Shahjahanabad. The imperial capital was to be replete with symbolic messages and meanings that were intended to convey the character, goals and purposes of the British empire itself.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Ghalib's lament did indeed rang true during that dark period of history- "Where is Delhi, By God, it is not a city now. It is a camp. There is neither Palace, nor bazaar, nor the canal".

In 1912, responding to an invitation from fellow architect Edwin Lutyens, Sir Herbert Baker set out to India from South Africa to participate in the building of New Delhi. The prospect of this interesting challenge- that such an elaborate creation of imperial architecture in the new capital must be acceptable to Britain's Indian subjects was a breath of fresh air from the colonial state's unilateral hijacking of all momentous decisions. The nitty-gritties of what exactly should such a sort of architectural typology should encompass was a big question; obviously a wholly Indian style of architecture was out of the question. Baker was rather taken up with the conceptual idea of an acropolis capital, for this was in line with his Greek sentiments. "The whole layout with the Secretariats upon the Acropolis should form one high platform expressing the importance of the unity of the Viceroy with his government"- was the cradle-borne logic of the idea. For him, an imperial architecture rested on a political objective: that of capturing in stone the spirit of the British Empire- that, India supposedly enjoyed under British rule, its spatial mapping bearing testimony to the fact that here now is a new synthesized civilization in growth, a blend of the best elements of East and West. Evidently much of New Delhi's architectural symbolism held meaning solely for British eyes (as idealistic monuments representing the cherished classical antiquity of the Empire, best expressed in the words of Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India from 1899 to 1905 - "Our work is righteous and it shall endure"), with the Indian sensibilities discovering the entire "show" to be lacklustre and alienating on their part.

As such in this context, we must understand imperial architecture to be a distinct style of building shaped by its colonial setting, which strives to make itself appealing to a wide and diverse range of audiences on multiple levels.

Additionally, the famed 'Garden City' idea of Ebenezer Howard, that was a backlash to the 19<sup>th</sup> century industrial city and its pathologies, was another prominent alternative town planning strategy adopted by the then-Government, to combat the poor quality of urban life.<sup>5</sup>

Delhi is, in another way, eligible for claiming a unique distinction within the discourse of urban planning in India. This is due to the fact that the erstwhile new capital city was the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> The idea's model objective was to combine the positive aspects that were characteristic of rural and urban living, in order to design a city where people will be close to nature while simultaneously being able to enjoy all the economic, civic, cultural and social amenities that are available in a city set-up.

only exceptional location wherein construction activities continued during the period of 1930s Depression that was followed by World War II.

#### BOMBAY

In the view of scholars such as Sandeep Hazareesingh<sup>6</sup>, the city of Bombay was not as dually-racially segregated as compared to other urban colonial centres (boasting of a "joint public realm" that belonged to and was open to all of Bombay's citizens facilitating the construction of an imagined common public). The uniqueness of the city's character was laid in the fact that its wealthy mercantile classes held some sway over power and space, in a way that was not witnessed in any other regional capitals of the time. This supremacy was evident through the fact that the Bombay's administrative in-charges had to take note of their native stakeholders' wishes when embarking on any development projects outside the area, other than being embarrassingly dependant on the philanthropy of some wealthier classes to implement their grand Victorian architectural visions in the city. Despite this, by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the discourse of differentiation had taken its roots within the common public spaces that were being subject to access solely by the "community-groups" that built them. An illustration of this chain of events can be understood by way of the Parsi (privileged minority) community, which built many hospitals in Bombay that were closed off to the peoples of other community-identities as well as to the Europeans situated there.

But let us go a bit back-- during the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the island-city of Bombay was struck by a dreaded bubonic plague that claimed innumerable lives, initiated new resettlement schemes that were accompanied by an intense resentment against the colonial government; whose reaction to the tragedy was a knee-jerked frenzied approach of segregation and isolation of the affected victims. For a prominent belief of the time claimed that the disease, being contagious in nature, must be tamed to prevent its further spread and thoroughly investigated to uncover its origin and means of spread. This localist perspective of the colonial approach towards the plague fed into the "discourse of difference" that sought to present a very conveniently ready-made and commonsensical

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> (2007), The Colonial City and the Challenge of Modernity: Urban Hegemonies and Civic Contestations in Bombay City 1900-1925. (New Delhi: Orient Longman).

explanation for why the city's poorer quarters suffered more of the plague's wrath. This implicit preoccupation of tracing the origins of the plague to the city's native quarters, alongwith a bonus justifying the high mortality and casualty rates of the slum, fits in well with the already entrenched dominant theoretical-framework of the differing dual-city model.

The colonial government then, armed with the provisions of its corrective and preventive measures, in 1898 created the Bombay City Improvement Trust (BCIT) to address the following challenges: first-the disastrously poor sanitation of Bombay earning the city its nickname of the "cholera nest", second- the rife overcrowding, believed to be the root cause of disease and the plague' s breeding ground. It aimed to demolish the dense, insanitary living conditions of the city in these two respects. And last but not the least of the challenges was maintaining the trust for governance, in the grasp of British appointed officials.

One of the main agendas of the BCIT was to provide convenient, affordable and sanitary housing for the poorer and working classes of the city. To this end, it adopted a mechanism of wholesale acquisition and demolition of slum settlements during the first decade of its life. The Improvement Trust Schemes' initiatives operated on the faith that the industrial quarter congestion can be effectively managed only by shifting the poor away from the central district hubs of the city to the northern suburbs' empty spaces. This vision aligned with the goal of maintaining the differential colonizer-colonized 's physical spatialities in urban regions. Even so if this vision was partially realized, the main agenda of 'rationalizing space' failed miserably in its implementation, for the arbitrary demolitions and dishousing aggravated the already existing problem of congestion within the city.

This was followed by the Modernist Discourse during the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which called for town planners to be accorded with official posts and an extended bureaucratic framework for support. But when it came to shouldering the onus of accountability or any criticism with regards to urban planning, the local self-governing bodies were shunted forwards and made to bear the brunt of reprimands from whoever was the in-charge. These bodies were never given any kind of assistance from the colonial state as well. One merely needs to observe the nature, functions and end

outcomes of the Bombay Development Committee (BDC), Report on the Possibilities of Development of Salsette as a Residential Area, and the Bombay Backbay Reclamation Scheme, coming under the purview of Bombay Development Directorate (BDD)- to name a few, in order to understand these imprudent and escapist tendencies of the colonizer's government.

Thus, a close relation can be discerned between the colonial state's confidence in the tenets of town planning and its understanding of the concept of "development" that was largely based on "achieving structure and eliminating haphazardness". The philosophy of urban planning, as it was gestated in the colonial state of Bombay, was characterised by preserving the dichotomy of control and domination over and above the ground realities of the day. It aspired to drift by making use of the models of convenience, in addition to pursuing its dream goal of creating a mirage of control over all the 'lesser subordinates'.

# UNDOING THE COLONIAL CITY: THE CULTURAL-NATIONALIST'S RESPONSE

Formal socio-psychological discourses have suggested multiple theories stating that the motions of group identification and categorisation are generic and real processes that are faced by individuals of the human world in a regularly standardized format; the results of these are observed with the typology of collective identifications emerging in the context of 'external' inter-group relations. Hence an individual's personal and her/his group identity will always remain a multi-dimensional, evolving entity. Defining the 'us' inevitably brings the 'them' to the arena of discussion as well. Separating any two or more categories as collectivities is the basis for the evolution of group identities. Symbolizing individual and group identification by way of belongingness allows personal diversity and collective likenesses of people to co-exist harmoniously throughout the world, thus diverting serious threats to the notion of collective identity.

Alternatively, Benedict Anderson's concept of nations as Imagined Communities, understood as "a socially-constructed community, imagined by the people who perceive themselves as part of a group" turns out to be an important analyser of the birth conditions and nature of nationalist movements that were growing under the nose of colonialist rule.

Applying this understanding to the area of our study, the municipality workings of Gujarat city serve as a fine illustration of the nationalist's response towards the superiorly developed and progressive colonial cities. The choice of this location is influenced by the fact that in 1915, Ahmedabad was the home-state of stalwart leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi and his close aide, Vallabhbhai Patel- with the former having recently emerged as the leader of the nationalist movement. Patel, in fact, for many years was a elected member and president of the municipality.

The Gujaratis had always prided themselves on the degree of self-governance that they had achieved under British rule. This dictated that in order to get any of Town Planning Act schemes implemented, the government town-planner had to obtain the consent of politically active pro-nationalists like Patel amongst others. The Jamalpur and Kankaria plans were popularly accepted and easily passed. Whereas the proposal of west-side expansion of the city beyond the Sabarmati, even though it was met by resistance from the agrarian class, was passed by Patel due to its expansionist promise. One controversial plan proposed building a new wide road right through the middle of the old, walled city that would connect the railway station of the east to the western river. Although having Patel's private seal of approval, the construction of this road was put off till 1933 due to the highly politicized municipalities' resentment that they were neither consulted on nor had they approved the go-ahead for such an endeavor. Also, during 1924, the Congress and Gandhian Labour Union of Ahmedabad cognized that workers participating in municipal elections would be 'en-able-d' to present their needs, problems and difficulties in front of the authorities in an official manner.

More nationalist uprisings by way of the Swadeshi and resultant Khadi-Cloth Movements, accompanied by the visual medium of lantern slide shows represent a few initiatives that were undertaken by many anti-colonialist sentiments of that time.

#### CONCLUSION

Post-colonial research has ascertained this much- that knowledge-based narratives of the Indian context that catered to British sensibilities and convenience (thus representing the imperial complex of visuality as its preferred mode of operation) denoted a manipulative power play that ensured the creation and maintenance of a Foucauldian state of order, for the governance of the colonial state. But the colonial elite and their minions failed in their predestined duty to connect with and impose their developmental ideas beyond the borders of their own lands. A rational, orderly urban order was not fated to emerge during the colonizer's reign.

The powerful and dominating colonial state upheld the validity of its urban ideology by making use of the mimicry and confidence techniques. Turning a blind eye towards its shortcomings, contradictions and dichotomies to maintain the hegemonic order's legitimacy thus became an addictive habit. Although in hindsight, it became apparent that all these futile efforts were in vain as the nationalist movement began to gain momentum in India.

Recognizing differences of 'urban imagination' indicates that there indeed exists a possible space for incorporating subjective interpretations vis-à-vis the dominant narratives of power and inequality. Expressions of native-indigenous heterogeneity and colonialist hegemony have created distinctive visualities of the social that were earlier not a part of the colonial order's mainstream discourse-agenda. Thus, we have come to gain an understanding of how the process of 'seeing' any aspect of the society is connected to power, and how it functions as a tool of legitimate authority and resistance alternatively.

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