

Work, Life and Leisure

Cities in the Contemporary World

In 1880, Durgacharan Ray wrote a novel, *Debganer Martye Agaman* (*The Gods Visit Earth*), in which Brahma, the Creator in Hindu mythology, took a train to Calcutta with some other gods. As Varuna, the Rain God, conducted them around the capital of British India, the gods were wonderstruck by the big, modern city – the train itself, the large ships on the river Ganges, factories belching smoke, bridges and monuments and a dazzling array of shops selling a wide range of commodities. The gods were so impressed by the marvels of the teeming metropolis that they decided to build a Museum and a High Court in Heaven!

The city of Calcutta in the nineteenth century was brimming with opportunities – for trade and commerce, education and jobs. But the gods were disturbed by another aspect of city life – its cheats and thieves, its grinding poverty, and the poor quality of housing for many. Brahma himself got tricked into buying a pair of cheap glasses and when he tried to buy a pair of shoes, he was greatly confused by the shopkeepers who accused one another of being swindlers. The gods were also perturbed at the confusion of caste, religious and gender identities in the city. All social distinctions that appeared to be natural and normal seemed to be breaking down.

Like Durgacharan Ray, many others in nineteenth-century India were both amazed and confused by what they saw in the cities. The city seemed to offer a series of contrasting images and experiences – wealth and poverty, splendour and dirt, opportunities and disappointments.

Were cities always like the one described above? Though urbanisation has a long history, the modern city worldwide has developed only over the last 200 years. Three historical processes have shaped modern cities in decisive ways: the rise of industrial capitalism, the establishment of colonial rule over large parts of the world, and the development of democratic ideals. This chapter will trace some of the processes of this urbanisation. It will explore how the modern city emerges, and what happens within the city.

1 Characteristics of the City

To begin with, how do we distinguish between cities on the one hand and towns and villages on the other? Towns and cities that first appeared along river valleys, such as Ur, Nippur and Mohenjodaro, were larger in scale than other human settlements. Ancient cities could develop only when an increase in food supplies made it possible to support a wide range of non-food producers. Cities were often the centres of political power, administrative network, trade and industry, religious institutions, and intellectual activity, and supported various social groups such as artisans, merchants and priests.

Cities themselves can vary greatly in size and complexity. They can be densely settled modern-day **metropolises**, which combine political and economic functions for an entire region, and support very large populations. Or they can be smaller urban centres with limited functions.

This chapter will discuss the history of **urbanisation** in the modern world. We will look in some detail at two modern cities, as examples of metropolitan development. The first is London, the largest city in the world, and an imperial centre in the nineteenth century, and the second is Bombay, one of the most important modern cities in the Indian subcontinent.

1.1 Industrialisation and the Rise of the Modern City in England

Industrialisation changed the form of urbanisation in the modern period. However, even as late as the 1850s, many decades after the beginning of the industrial revolution, most Western countries were largely rural. The early industrial cities of Britain such as Leeds and Manchester attracted large numbers of migrants to the textile mills set up in the late eighteenth century. In 1851, more than three-quarters of the adults living in Manchester were migrants from rural areas.

Now let us look at London. By 1750, one out of every nine people of England and Wales lived in London. It was a colossal city with a population of about 675,000. Over the nineteenth century, London continued to expand. Its population multiplied fourfold in the 70 years between 1810 and 1880, increasing from 1 million to about 4 million.

Activity

Can you think of appropriate examples from Indian history for each of these categories: a religious centre, a market town, a regional capital, a metropolis? Find out about the history of any one of them.

New words

Metropolis – A large, densely populated city of a country or state, often the capital of the region

Urbanisation – Development of a city or town

The city of London was a powerful magnet for migrant populations, even though it did not have large factories. ‘Nineteenth century London,’ says the historian Gareth Stedman Jones, ‘was a city of clerks and shopkeepers, of small masters and skilled artisans, of a growing number of semi skilled and sweated outworkers, of soldiers and servants, of casual labourers, street sellers, and beggars.’ Apart from the London dockyards, five major types of industries employed large numbers: clothing and footwear, wood and furniture, metals and engineering, printing and stationery, and precision products such as surgical instruments, watches, and objects of precious metal. During the First World War (1914-18) London began manufacturing motor cars and electrical goods, and the number of large factories increased until they accounted for nearly one-third of all jobs in the city.

1.2 Marginal Groups

As London grew, crime flourished. We are told that 20,000 criminals were living in London in the 1870s. We know a great deal about criminal activities in this period, for crime became an object of widespread concern. The police were worried about law and order, **philanthropists** were anxious about public morality, and industrialists wanted a hard-working and orderly labour force. So the population of criminals was counted, their activities were watched, and their ways of life were investigated.

In the mid-nineteenth century, Henry Mayhew wrote several volumes on the London labour, and compiled long lists of those who made a living from crime. Many of whom he listed as ‘criminals’ were in fact poor people who lived by stealing lead from roofs, food from shops, lumps of coal, and clothes drying on hedges. There were others who were more skilled at their trade, expert at their jobs. They were the cheats and tricksters, pickpockets and petty thieves crowding the streets of London. In an attempt to discipline the population, the authorities imposed high penalties for crime and offered work to those who were considered the ‘deserving poor’.

Factories employed large numbers of women in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. With technological developments, women gradually lost their industrial jobs, and were forced to work within households. The 1861 census recorded a quarter of a million domestic servants in London, of whom the vast majority were

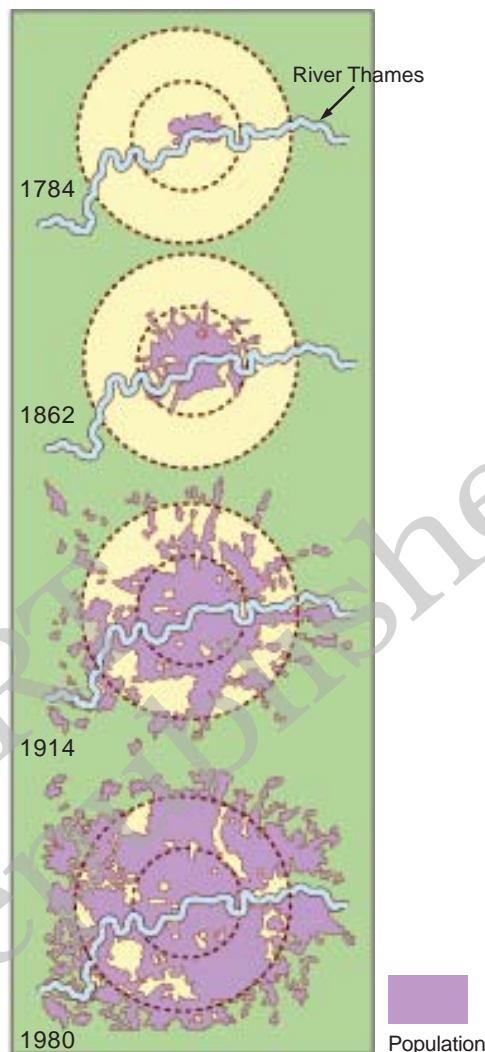


Fig. 1 – The growth of London, a map showing its population in four different eras.

New words

Philanthropist – Someone who works for social upliftment and charity, donating time and money for the purpose

women, many of them recent migrants. A large number of women used their homes to increase family income by taking in lodgers or through such activities as tailoring, washing or matchbox making. However, there was a change once again in the twentieth century. As women got employment in wartime industries and offices, they withdrew from domestic service.

Large number of children were pushed into low-paid work, often by their parents. Andrew Mearns, a clergyman who wrote *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London* in the 1880s, showed why crime was more profitable than labouring in small underpaid factories: 'A child seven years old is easily known to make 10 shillings 6 pence a week from thieving ... Before he can gain as much as the young thief [a boy] must make 56 gross of matchboxes a week, or 1,296 a day.' It was only after the passage of the Compulsory Elementary Education Act in 1870, and the factory acts beginning from 1902, that children were kept out of industrial work.

Activity

Imagine that you are a newspaper reporter writing a piece on the changes you see in London in 1811. What problems are you likely to write about? Who would have gained from the changes?

1.3 Housing

Older cities like London changed dramatically when people began pouring in after the Industrial Revolution. Factory or workshop



Fig. 2 – A Stranger's Home, The Illustrated London News, 1870.

Night Refuges and Strangers' Homes were opened in winter by charitable societies and local authorities in many towns. The poor flocked to these places in the hope of food, warmth and shelter.

owners did not house the migrant workers. Instead, individual landowners put up cheap, and usually unsafe, **tenements** for the new arrivals.

Although poverty was not unknown in the countryside, it was more concentrated and starkly visible in the city. In 1887, Charles Booth, a Liverpool shipowner, conducted the first social survey of low-skilled London workers in the East End of London. He found that as many as 1 million Londoners (about one-fifth of the population of London at the time) were very poor and were expected to live only up to an average age of 29 (compared to the average life expectancy of 55 among the gentry and the middle class). These people were more than likely to die in a 'workhouse, hospital or lunatic asylum'. London, he concluded 'needed the rebuilding of at least 400,000 rooms to house its poorest citizens'.

For a while the better-off city dwellers continued to demand that slums simply be cleared away. But gradually a larger and larger number of people began to recognise the need for housing for the poor. What were the reasons for this increasing concern? First, the vast mass of one-room houses occupied by the poor were seen as a serious threat to public health: they were overcrowded, badly ventilated, and lacked sanitation. Second, there were worries about fire hazards created by poor housing. Third, there was a widespread fear of social disorder, especially after the Russian Revolution in 1917. Workers' mass housing schemes were planned to prevent the London poor from turning rebellious.



Fig. 3 – Rat-trap seller, cartoon by Rowlandson, 1799.

Rowlandson recorded the types of trades in London that were beginning to disappear with the development of industrial capitalism.

New words

Tenement – Run-down and often overcrowded apartment house, especially in a poor section of a large city

Activity

In many cities of India today, there are moves to clear away the slums where poor people live. Discuss whether or not it is the responsibility of the government to make arrangements for houses for these people.



Fig. 4 – A London slum in 1889.

What are the different uses of street space that are visible in this picture? What would have changed in the conditions of working class housing in the twentieth century?



Fig. 5 – For the poor, the street often was the only place for rest, leisure and fun. The Illustrated London News, 1856.

Over the nineteenth century, the elites became increasingly worried about drunkenness and squalor on the streets. Gradually, a **temperance movement** developed to fight against the evils of drinking.

1.4 Cleaning London

A variety of steps were taken to clean up London. Attempts were made to decongest localities, green the open spaces, reduce pollution and landscape the city. Large blocks of apartments were built, akin to those in Berlin and New York – cities which had similar housing problems. Rent control was introduced in Britain during the First World War to ease the impact of a severe housing shortage.

The congestion in the nineteenth-century industrial city also led to a yearning for clean country air. Many wealthy residents of London were able to afford a holiday home in the countryside. Demands were made for new ‘lungs’ for the city, and some attempts

Source A

‘The children too must not be forgotten in the open spaces. The *kinderbank*, or low seat to suit their short legs, should always be provided and where possible spaces of turf be supplied with swings or seesaws, with ponds for sailing boats, and with sand pits where these can be kept sufficiently clean.’

Source

New words

Temperance movement – A largely middle-class-led social reform movement which emerged in Britain and America from the nineteenth century onwards. It identified alcoholism as the cause of the ruin of families and society, and aimed at reducing the consumption of alcoholic drinks particularly amongst the working classes.

Activity

Imagine you are investigating the conditions in which the London poor lived. Write a note discussing all the dangers to public health which were created by these conditions.

were made to bridge the difference between city and countryside through such ideas as the Green Belt around London.

Architect and planner Ebenezer Howard developed the principle of the Garden City, a pleasant space full of plants and trees, where people would both live and work. He believed this would also produce better-quality citizens. Following Howard's ideas Raymond Unwin and Barry Parker designed the garden city of New Earswick. There were common garden spaces, beautiful views, and great attention to detail. In the end, only well-off workers could afford these houses.

Between the two World Wars (1919-39) the responsibility for housing the working classes was accepted by the British state, and a million houses, most of them single-family cottages, were built by local authorities. Meanwhile, the city had extended beyond the range where people could walk to work, and the development of suburbs made new forms of mass transport absolutely necessary.



Fig. 6 – New Earswick, a garden suburb.
Notice the enclosed green space to produce a new community life.

1.5 Transport in the City

How could people be persuaded to leave the city and live in garden suburbs unless there were some means of travelling to the city for work? The London underground railway partially solved the housing crisis by carrying large masses of people to and from the city.

The very first section of the Underground in the world opened on 10 January 1863 between Paddington and Farrington Street in London. On that day 10,000 passengers were carried, with trains running every ten minutes. By 1880 the expanded train service was carrying 40 million passengers a year. At first people were afraid to travel underground. This is what one newspaper reader warned:

The compartment in which I sat was filled with passengers who were smoking pipes. The atmosphere was a mixture of sulphur, coal dust and foul fumes from the gas lamps above, so that by the time we reached Moorgate, I was near dead of **asphyxiation** and heat. I should think these underground railways must soon be discontinued for they are a menace to health.

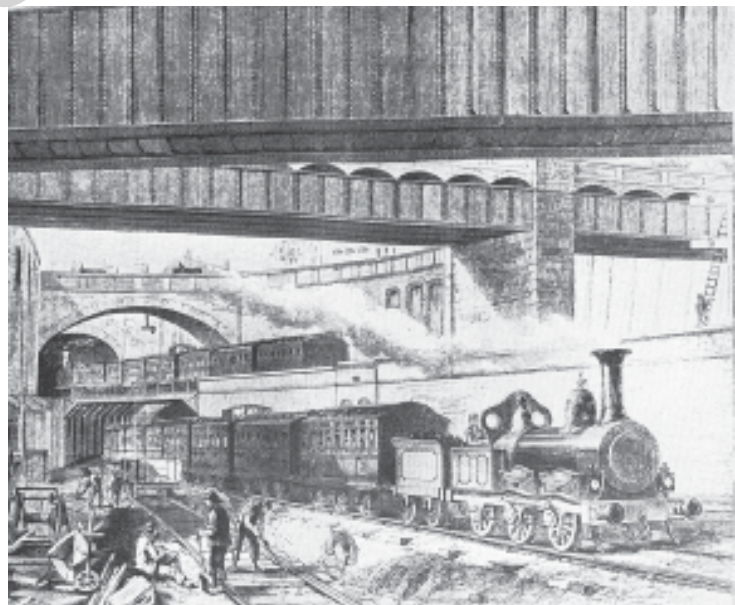


Fig. 7 – Railway lines being laid in London, Illustrated Times, 1868.

Many felt that the 'iron monsters' added to the mess and unhealthiness of the city. Charles Dickens wrote in *Dombey and Son* (1848) about the massive destruction in the process of construction:

Houses were knocked down; streets broken through and stopped; deep pits and trenches dug in the ground; enormous heaps of earth and clay thrown up; ... there were a hundred thousand shapes and substances of incompleteness, wildly mingled out their places, upside down, burrowing in the earth ...

To make approximately two miles of railway, 900 houses had to be destroyed. Thus the London tube railway led to a massive displacement of the London poor, especially between the two World Wars.

Yet the Underground eventually became a huge success. By the twentieth century, most large metropolises such as New York, Tokyo and Chicago could not do without their well-functioning transit systems. As a result, the population in the city became more dispersed. Better-planned suburbs and a good railway network enabled large numbers to live outside central London and travel to work.

These new conveniences wore down social distinctions and also created new ones. How did these changes affect domestic and public life? Did they have the same significance for all social groups?

New words

Asphyxiation – Suffocation due to lack of oxygen supply



Fig. 8 – London Underground advertisement for Golders Green, around 1900.

You can see the Underground advertisement persuading people to move to green, uncrowded and picturesque suburbs.



Fig. 9 – Cows on the streets of London, The Graphic, 1877.
Clearing streets was part of the project of building a modern city. In the nineteenth century, cows regularly blocked traffic on London roads.

2 Social Change in the City

In the eighteenth century, the family had been a unit of production and consumption as well as of political decision-making. The function and the shape of the family were completely transformed by life in the industrial city.

Ties between members of households loosened, and among the working class the institution of marriage tended to break down. Women of the upper and middle classes in Britain, on the other hand, faced increasingly higher levels of isolation, although their lives were made easier by domestic maids who cooked, cleaned and cared for young children on low wages.

Women who worked for wages had some control over their lives, particularly among the lower social classes. However, many social reformers felt that the family as an institution had broken down, and needed to be saved or reconstructed by pushing these women back into the home.

2.1 Men, Women and Family in the City

The city no doubt encouraged a new spirit of **individualism** among both men and women, and a freedom from the collective values that were a feature of the smaller rural communities. But men and women did not have equal access to this new urban space. As women lost their industrial jobs and conservative people railed against their presence in public spaces, women were forced to withdraw into their homes. The public space became increasingly a male preserve, and the domestic sphere was seen as the proper place for women. Most political movements of the nineteenth century, such as Chartism (a movement demanding the vote for all adult males) and the 10-hour movement (limiting hours of work in factories), mobilised large numbers of men. Only gradually did women come to participate in political movements for suffrage that demanded the

New words

Individualism – A theory which promotes the liberty, rights or independent action of the individual, rather than of the community

right to vote for women, or for married women's rights to property (from the 1870s).

By the twentieth century, the urban family had been transformed yet again, partly by the experience of the valuable wartime work done by women, who were employed in large numbers to meet war demands. The family now consisted of much smaller units.

Above all, the family became the heart of a new market – of goods and services, and of ideas. If the new industrial city provided opportunities for mass work, it also raised the problem of mass leisure on Sundays and other common holidays. How did people organise their new-found leisure time?

2.2 Leisure and Consumption

For wealthy Britishers, there had long been an annual 'London Season'. Several cultural events, such as the opera, the theatre and classical music performances were organised for an elite group of 300-400 families in the late eighteenth century. Meanwhile, working classes met in pubs to have a drink, exchange news and sometimes also to organise for political action.

Many new types of large-scale entertainment for the common people came into being, some made possible with money from the state. Libraries, art galleries and museums were established in the nineteenth century to provide people with a sense of history and pride in the achievements of the British. At first, visitors to the British Museum in London numbered just about 15,000 every year, but when entry was made free in 1810, visitors swamped the museum: their number jumped to 127,643 in 1824-25, shooting up to 825,901 by 1846. Music halls were popular among the lower classes, and, by the early twentieth century, cinema became the great mass entertainment for mixed audiences.

British industrial workers were increasingly encouraged to spend their holidays by the sea, so as to derive the benefits of the sun and bracing winds. Over 1 million British people went to the seaside at Blackpool in 1883; by 1939 their numbers had gone up to 7 million.



Fig. 10 – A famous London resort, painting by T.E. Turner, 1923.

Pleasure gardens came in the nineteenth century to provide facilities for sports, entertainment and refreshments for the well-to-do.



Fig. 11 – Sailor's Home in East London, The Illustrated London News, 1873.
The working poor created spaces of entertainment wherever they lived.



Fig. 12 – A tavern with coaches parked in front, early nineteenth century.

The image makes clear the connection taverns had with horse-drawn coaches in the early nineteenth century. Before the railway age, taverns were places where horse-drawn coaches halted, and tired travellers had food and drink and rested the night. Taverns were located on coach routes and had facilities for overnight stays. After the coming of the railway and bus transport, taverns went into decline along with horse-drawn coach transport. Pubs came up near railway stations and bus depots. Here people could stop for a quick drink and chat.

3 Politics in the City

In the severe winter of 1886, when outdoor work came to a standstill, the London poor exploded in a riot, demanding relief from the terrible conditions of poverty. Alarmed shopkeepers closed down their establishments, fearing the 10,000-strong crowd that was marching from Deptford to London. The marchers had to be dispersed by the police. A similar riot occurred in late 1887; this time, it was brutally suppressed by the police in what came to be known as the Bloody Sunday of November 1887.

Two years later, thousands of London's dockworkers went on strike and marched through the city. According to one writer, 'thousands of the strikers had marched through the city without a pocket being picked or a window being broken ...' The 12-day strike was called to gain recognition for the dockworkers' union.

From these examples you can see that large masses of people could be drawn into political causes in the city. A large city population was thus both a threat and an opportunity. State authorities went to great lengths to reduce the possibility of rebellion and enhance urban aesthetics, as the example of Paris shows.



Fig. 13 – A scene during the dockworkers' strike, 1889.

Box 1

Hausmanisation of Paris

In 1852, Louis Napoleon III (a nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte) crowned himself emperor. After taking over, he undertook the rebuilding of Paris with vigour. The chief architect of the new Paris was Baron Haussmann, the Prefect of the Seine. His name has come to stand for the forcible reconstruction of cities to enhance their beauty and impose order. The poor were evicted from the centre of Paris to reduce the possibility of political rebellion and to beautify the city.

For 17 years after 1852, Haussmann rebuilt Paris. Straight, broad avenues or boulevards and open spaces were designed, and full-grown trees transplanted. By 1870, one-fifth of the streets of Paris were Haussmann's creation. In addition, policemen were employed, night patrols were begun, and bus shelters and tap water introduced.

Public works on this scale employed a large number of people: one in five working persons in Paris was in the building trade in the 1860s. Yet this reconstruction displaced up to 350,000 people from the centre of Paris.

Even some of the wealthier inhabitants of Paris thought that the city had been monstrously transformed. The Goncourt brothers, writing in the 1860s, for instance, lamented the passing of an earlier way of life, and the development of an upper-class culture. Others believed that Haussmann had 'killed the street' and its life, to produce an empty, boring city, full of similar-looking boulevards and facades. In a play called *Maison Neuve* written in 1866, an old shopkeeper said, 'Nowadays for the slightest excursion there are miles to go! An eternal sidewalk going on and on forever! A tree, a bench, a kiosk! A tree, a bench, a kiosk! A tree, a bench ...'

The outcry against Haussmann's Paris soon got converted into civic pride as the new capital became the toast of all Europe. Paris became the hub of many new architectural, social and intellectual developments that were very influential right through the twentieth century, even in other parts of the globe.

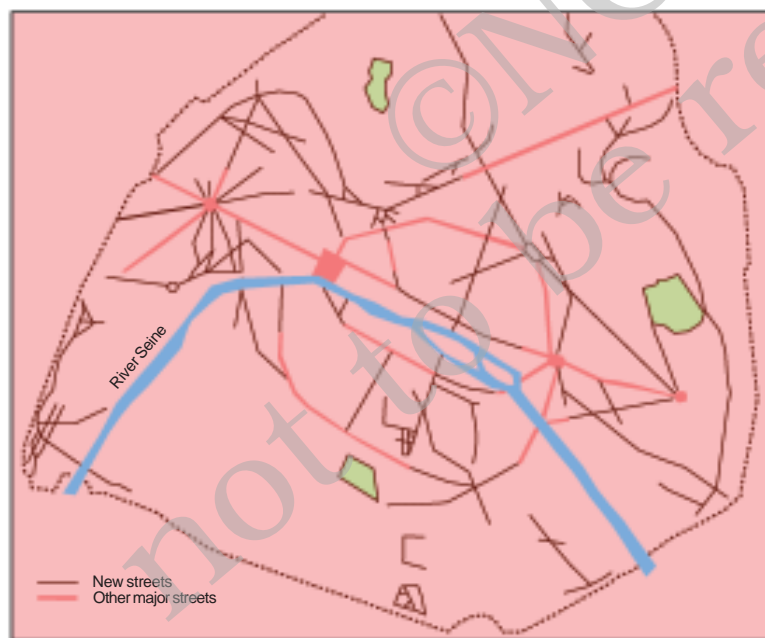


Fig. 14 – Plan of principal streets in Paris built by Baron Haussmann between 1850 and 1870.



Fig. 15 – A cartoon representing Haussmann as the 'Attila of the Straight Line', holding a compass and a set square, and dominating the plan of Paris.

4 The City in Colonial India

In sharp contrast to Western Europe in the same period, Indian cities did not mushroom in the nineteenth century. The pace of urbanisation in India was slow under colonial rule. In the early twentieth century, no more than 11 per cent of Indians were living in cities. A large proportion of these urban dwellers were residents of the three **Presidency cities**. These were multi-functional cities: they had major ports, warehouses, homes and offices, army camps, as well as educational institutions, museums and libraries. Bombay was the premier city of India. It expanded rapidly from the late nineteenth century, its population going up from 644,405 in 1872 to nearly 1,500,000 in 1941.

Let us look at how Bombay developed.

New words

Presidency cities – The capitals of the Bombay, Bengal and Madras Presidencies in British India

Discuss

Read Source B carefully. What are the common features of city life that the authors note? What are the contradictory experiences they point to?

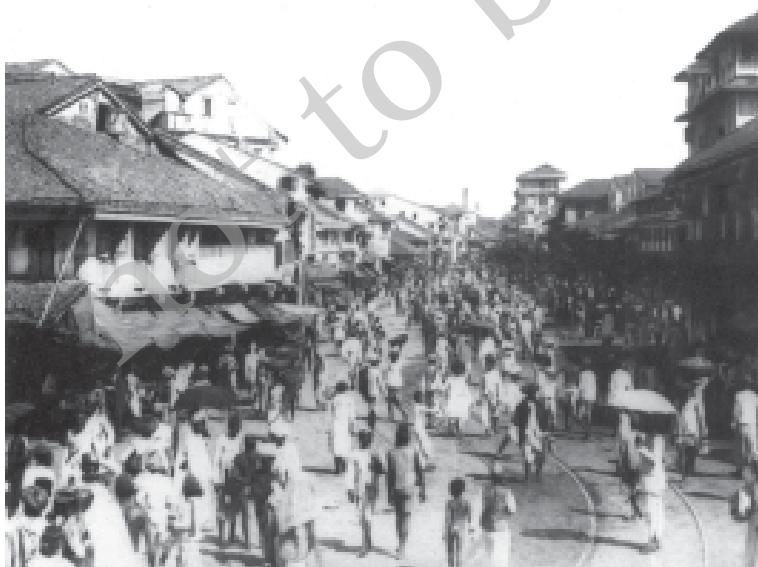


Fig. 16 – A bustling street in Null Bazaar, Bombay, photograph by Raja Deen Dayal, late nineteenth century.

Source B

Contradictory experiences of cities

Kali Prasanna Singh wrote a satire in Bengali describing an evening scene in the Indian part of Calcutta around 1862:

‘Gradually the darkness thickens. At this time, thanks to English shoes, striped Santipur scarfs [sic] and Simla dhuties, you can’t tell high from low. Groups of fast young men, with peals of laughter and plenty of English talk are knocking at this door and that. They left home when they saw the lamps lighted in the evening and will return when the flour mills begin to work ... Some cover their faces with scarfs [sic] and think that no one recognises them. It is the evening of ... a Saturday and the city is unusually crowded.’

Hutam Pyancher Naksha, a collection of short sketches on urban life in Calcutta, 1862. Translated by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay.

In 1899, G.G. Agarkar wrote about Bombay:

‘The enormous expanse of Bombay city; its great and palatial private and governmental mansions; broad streets which accommodate up to six carriages abreast ... the struggle to enter the merchants lanes; the frequent troublesome noise of passenger and goods trains whistles and wheels; the wearisome bargaining in every market, by customers who wander from place to place making enquiries with silver and notes in their pockets to buy a variety of commodities; the throngs of thousands of boats visible in the harbour ... the more or less rushed pace of official and private employees going to work, checking their watches ... The clouds of black smoke emitted by factory chimneys and the noise of large machines in the innards of buildings ... Men and women with and without families belonging to every caste and rank travelling in carriages or horseback or on foot, to take the air and enjoy a drive along the sea shore in the slanting rays of the sun as it descends on the horizon ...’

G.G. Agarkar, ‘The Obverse Side of British Rule or our Dire Poverty’.

Source

4.1 Bombay: The Prime City of India?

In the seventeenth century, Bombay was a group of seven islands under Portuguese control. In 1661, control of the islands passed into British hands after the marriage of Britain's King Charles II to the Portuguese princess. The East India Company quickly shifted its base from Surat, its principal western port, to Bombay.



Fig. 17 – A view of Bombay, 1852.

You can see the Colaba lighthouse on the right and St Thomas's Church in the distant background. It was still possible in the mid-nineteenth century for artists to search for picturesque spots. The major development projects had not yet started.

At first, Bombay was the major outlet for cotton textiles from Gujarat. Later, in the nineteenth century, the city functioned as a port through which large quantities of raw materials such as cotton and opium would pass. Gradually, it also became an important administrative centre in western India, and then, by the end of the nineteenth century, a major industrial centre.

4.2 Work in the City

Bombay became the capital of the Bombay Presidency in 1819, after the Maratha defeat in the Anglo-Maratha war. The city quickly expanded. With the growth of trade in cotton and opium, large communities of traders and bankers as well as artisans and shopkeepers came to settle in Bombay. The establishment of textile mills led to a fresh surge in migration.

The first cotton textile mill in Bombay was established in 1854. By 1921, there were 85 cotton mills with about 146,000 workers. Only



Fig. 18 – A map of Bombay in the 1930s showing the seven islands and the reclamations.

about one-fourth of Bombay's inhabitants between 1881 and 1931 were born in Bombay: the rest came from outside. Large numbers flowed in from the nearby district of Ratnagiri to work in the Bombay mills.

Women formed as much as 23 per cent of the mill workforce in the period between 1919 and 1926. After that, their numbers dropped steadily to less than 10 per cent of the total workforce. By the late 1930s, women's jobs were increasingly taken over by machines or by men.

Bombay dominated the maritime trade of India till well into the twentieth century. It was also at the junction head of two major railways. The railways encouraged an even higher scale of migration into the city. For instance, famine in the dry regions of Kutch drove large numbers of people into Bombay in 1888-89. The flood of migrants in some years created panic and alarm in official circles. Worried by the influx of population during the plague epidemic of 1898, district authorities sent about 30,000 people back to their places of origin by 1901.

4.3 Housing and Neighbourhoods

Bombay was a crowded city. While every Londoner in the 1840s enjoyed an average space of 155 square yards, Bombay had a mere 9.5 square yards. By 1872, when London had an average of 8 persons per house, the density in Bombay was as high as 20. From its earliest days, Bombay did not grow according to any plan, and houses, especially in the Fort area, were interspersed with gardens. The Bombay Fort area which formed the heart of the city in the early 1800s was divided between a 'native' town, where most of the Indians lived, and a European or 'white' section. A European suburb and an industrial zone began to develop to the north of the Fort settlement area, with a similar suburb and cantonment in the south. This racial pattern was true of all three Presidency cities.

With the rapid and unplanned expansion of the city, the crisis of housing and water supply became acute by the mid-1850s. The arrival of the textile mills only increased the pressure on Bombay's housing.

Like the European elite, the richer Parsi, Muslim and upper-caste traders and industrialists of Bombay lived in sprawling,

Activity

Have a debate in class with speakers for and against the motion, on the following topic:
'City development cannot take place without destroying communities and lifestyles. This is a necessary part of development.'



Fig. 19 – Interior of Esplanade House built for J.N. Tata in 1887.



Fig. 20 – Scene by Robert Grindlay of Bombay, 1826.
A number of palanquins are being carried across the square.

spacious bungalows. In contrast, more than 70 per cent of the working people lived in the thickly populated *chawls* of Bombay. Since workers walked to their place of work, 90 per cent of millworkers were housed in Girangaon, a ‘mill village’ not more than 15 minutes’ walk from the mills.

Chawls were multi-storeyed structures which had been built from at least the 1860s in the ‘native’ parts of the town. Like the tenements in London, these houses were largely owned by private landlords, such as merchants, bankers, and building contractors, looking for quick ways of earning money from anxious migrants. Each *chawl* was divided into smaller one-room tenements which had no private toilets.

Many families could reside at a time in a tenement. The Census of 1901 reported that ‘the mass of the island’s population or 80 per cent of the total, resides in tenements of one room; the average number of occupants lies between 4 and 5 ...’ High rents forced workers to share homes, either with relatives or caste fellows who were streaming into the city. People had to keep the windows of their rooms closed even in humid weather due to the ‘close proximity of filthy gutters, privies, buffalo stables etc.’ Yet, though water was scarce, and people often quarrelled every morning for a turn at the tap, observers found that houses were kept quite clean.

The homes being small, streets and neighbourhoods were used for a variety of activities such as cooking, washing and sleeping. Liquor

Activity

Look at Fig. 20 What kinds of people do you think used this mode of transport? Compare it with the pictures of the horse-drawn tram (Fig. 22) and the electric tram. Notice the inversion of the numbers involved: the horse-drawn tram or electric tram needed only one operator while a single traveller required several people.

Source C

Why spaces cannot be cleared

Bombay’s first Municipal Commissioner, Arthur Crawford, was appointed in 1865. He tried to keep several ‘dangerous trades’ out of south Bombay. He described how builders and entrepreneurs bribed inspectors to continue with their haphazard use of space, even when their activities increased pollution:

‘... Kessowjee Naik brought his dyers back to their old quarters. I prosecuted them, but was defeated. Kessowjee Naik spent money like water, eminent physicians swore solemnly that dye pits were beneficial to health! ... This infamous success emboldened a powerful German firm to open a large steam Dyeing Factory close to Parbadevi Temple whose refuse waters polluted the fair sands of Mahim Bay ... Last but not least Bhoys and Dasses, Shenvis Brahmins and all the Jeas, set up cotton and spinning mills anywhere their sweet will prompted them: for example close to the Byculla Club itself, around the Race Course and Kamathippora Foras Road, in Khetwady, on Girgaum Raod and at Chowpatty.’

While reading such statements we must remember that colonial officials liked to represent Englishmen as honest and Indians as corrupt, the Englishmen as concerned with pollution of the environment and Indians as being uncaring about such issues.

Source

shops and *akbaras* came up in any empty spot. Streets were also used for different types of leisure activities. Parvathibai Bhor recalled her childhood years in the early twentieth century this way: 'There was an open space in the middle of our four *chawls*. There the magicians, monkey players or acrobats used to regularly perform their acts. The Nandi bull used to come. I used to be especially afraid of the Kadaklakshmi. To see that they had to beat themselves on their naked bodies in order to fill their stomachs frightened me.' Finally, *chawls* were also the place for the exchange of news about jobs, strikes, riots or demonstrations.

Caste and family groups in the mill neighbourhoods were headed by someone who was similar to a village headman. Sometimes, the jobber in the mills could be the local neighbourhood leader. He settled disputes, organised food supplies, or arranged informal credit. He also brought important information on political developments.

People who belonged to the '**depressed classes**' found it even more difficult to find housing. Lower castes were kept out of many *chawls* and often had to live in shelters made of corrugated sheets, leaves, or bamboo poles.

If town planning in London emerged from fears of social revolution, planning in Bombay came about as a result of fears about the plague epidemic. The City of Bombay Improvement Trust was established in 1898; it focused on clearing poorer homes out of the city centre. By 1918, Trust schemes had deprived 64,000 people of their homes, but only 14,000 were rehoused. In 1918, a Rent Act was passed to keep rents reasonable, but it had the opposite effect of producing a severe housing crisis, since landlords withdrew houses from the market.

Expansion of the city has always posed a problem in Bombay because of a scarcity of land. One of the ways the city of Bombay has developed is through massive **reclamation** projects.

4.4 Land Reclamation in Bombay

Did you know that the seven islands of Bombay were joined into one landmass only over a period of time? The earliest project began in 1784. The Bombay governor William Hornby approved the building of the great sea wall which prevented the flooding of the low-lying areas of Bombay.



Fig. 21 – Chawl on Kalbadevi Road built in the early twentieth century.

What do you notice about the organisation of space in this building?

Activity

Imagine that you are a young person living in a *chawl*. Describe one day in your life.

New words

Akbaras – Traditional wrestling schools, generally located in every neighbourhood, where young people were trained to ensure both physical and moral fitness

Depressed classes – A term often used to denote those who were seen within the caste order as 'lower castes' and 'untouchables'

Reclamation – The reclaiming of marshy or submerged areas or other wasteland for settlements, cultivation or other use

Since then, there have been several reclamation projects. The need for additional commercial space in the mid-nineteenth century led to the formulation of several plans, both by government and private companies, for the reclamation of more land from the sea. Private companies became more interested in taking financial risks. In 1864, the Back Bay Reclamation Company won the right to reclaim the western foreshore from the tip of Malabar Hill to the end of Colaba. Reclamation often meant the levelling of the hills around Bombay. By the 1870s, although most of the private companies closed down due to the mounting cost, the city had expanded to about 22 square miles. As the population continued to increase rapidly in the early twentieth century, every bit of the available area was built over and new areas were reclaimed from the sea.

A successful reclamation project was undertaken by the Bombay Port Trust, which built a dry dock between 1914 and 1918 and used the excavated earth to create the 22-acre Ballard Estate. Subsequently, the famous Marine Drive of Bombay was developed.

4.5 Bombay as the City of Dreams: The World of Cinema and Culture

Who does not associate Bombay with its film industry? Despite its massive overcrowding and difficult living conditions, Bombay appears to many as a *'mayapuri'* – a city of dreams.

Many Bombay films deal with the arrival in the city of new migrants, and their encounters with the real pressures of daily life. Some popular songs from the Bombay film industry speak of the contradictory aspects of the city. In the film *CID* (1956) the hero's buddy sings, *'Ai dil hai mushkil jeena yahan; zara hatke zara bachke, ye hai Bambai meri jaan'* (My heart, it is difficult to live here! move over a little, take care of yourself! this is Bombay! my love). A slightly more disillusioned voice sings in *Guest House* (1959): *'Jiska juta usika sar, dil hai chhote bada shahar, are vah re vah teri Bambai'* (Bombay, you city what a place! Here one gets beaten with one's own shoes! The city is big but people's hearts are small!).

When did the Bombay film industry make its first appearance? Harishchandra Sakharan Bhatwadekar shot a scene of a wrestling



Fig. 22 – Colaba Causeway, late nineteenth century.
Notice that the trams are being drawn by horses. You can see stables for horses on the left and the Tram Company's offices in the background.



Fig. 23 – Marine Drive.
A familiar landmark of Bombay, it was built on land reclaimed from the sea in the twentieth century.

match in Bombay's Hanging Gardens and it became India's first movie in 1896. Soon after, Dadasaheb Phalke made *Raja Harishchandra* (1913). After that, there was no turning back. By 1925, Bombay had become India's film capital, producing films for a national audience. The amount of money invested in about 50 Indian films in 1947 was Rs 756 million. By 1987, the film industry employed 520,000 people.

Most of the people in the film industry were themselves migrants who came from cities like Lahore, Calcutta, Madras and contributed to the national character of the industry. Those who came from Lahore, then in Punjab, were especially important for the development of the Hindi film industry. Many famous writers, like Ismat Chughtai and Saadat Hasan Manto, were associated with Hindi cinema.

Bombay films have contributed in a big way to produce an image of the city as a blend of dream and reality, of slums and star bungalows.

Discuss

Read Source D. What does the poem communicate about the opportunities and experience for each new generation?

Source D

The Many Sides of Bombay

My father came down the Sahyadris
A quilt over his shoulder
He stood at your doorstep
With nothing but his labour

...

I carried a tiffin box
To the mill since childhood
I was cast the way

A smith forges a hammer
I learned my ropes
Working on a loom
Learnt on occasion
To go on strike

My father withered away toiling
So will I, and will my little ones
Perhaps they too face such sad nights
Wrapped in coils of darkness

Excerpted from the poem *Maze Vidyapeeth* (1975) by Narayan Surve.

Source

The verses of this poem are a stark contrast to the glittering world of films, pointing to the endless toil which new migrants encounter in the city.

Box 2

Not all cities in Asian countries developed in an unplanned manner. There were many cities that were carefully planned and organised. Consider the case of modern Singapore.

Lee Kuan Yew's Singapore

Today, most of us know Singapore as a successful, rich, and well-planned city, a model for city planning worldwide. Yet the city's rise to this status is quite recent. Until 1965, Singapore, though an important port, shared all the problems of other Asian cities. Planning was known in Singapore since 1822, but benefited only the small community of white people who ruled Singapore. For the majority of its inhabitants, there was overcrowding, lack of sanitation, poor housing, and poverty.

All this changed after the city became an independent nation in 1965 under the leadership of Lee Kuan Yew, President of the People's Action Party. A massive housing and development programme was undertaken and it completely altered the face of the island nation. Through a programme of total planning which left nothing to chance, every inch of the island's territory was controlled in its use. The government itself won popular support by providing nearly 85 per cent of the population with ownership housing of good quality. The tall housing blocks, which were well ventilated and serviced, were examples of good physical planning. But the buildings also redesigned social life: crime was reduced through external corridors, the aged were housed alongside their families, 'void decks' or empty floors were provided in all buildings for community activities.

Migration into the city was strictly controlled. Social relations between the three major groups of people (the Chinese, the Malays and the Indians) were also monitored to prevent racial conflict. Newspapers and journals and all forms of communication and association were also strictly controlled.

In 1986, in the National Day Rally speech, Lee Kuan Yew's recalled his early experiments with planning: '... we would not have made economic progress, if we had not intervened on very personal matters: who your neighbour is, how you live, the noise you make, how you spit or what language you use. We decide what is right. Never mind what the people think – that is another problem.'

Reported in *The Straits Times*.

Although the citizens of Singapore enjoy a very high degree of material comfort and wealth, there are many who point out that the city lacks a lively and challenging political culture.



Fig. 24 – Singapore Marina, which is built on land reclaimed from the sea.

Activity

Compare the examples of the work done by Baron Haussmann in Paris and Lee Kuan Yew, almost a hundred years later, in Singapore. Discuss if physical comfort and beauty in the city can be introduced only by controlling social and private life. In your opinion, is this a good enough reason for the government to make rules about the way in which people should live their personal lives?

5 Cities and the Challenge of the Environment

City development everywhere occurred at the expense of ecology and the environment. Natural features were flattened out or transformed in response to the growing demand for space for factories, housing and other institutions. Large quantities of refuse and waste products polluted air and water, while excessive noise became a feature of urban life.

The widespread use of coal in homes and industries in nineteenth-century England raised serious problems. In industrial cities such as Leeds, Bradford and Manchester, hundreds of factory chimneys spewed black smoke into the skies. People joked that most inhabitants of these cities grew up believing that the skies were grey and all vegetation was black! Shopkeepers, homeowners and others complained about the black fog that descended on their towns, causing bad tempers, smoke-related illnesses, and dirty clothes.

When people first joined campaigns for cleaner air, the goal was to control the nuisance through legislation. This was not at all easy, since factory owners and steam engine owners did not want to spend



Fig. 25 – The London smog, The Illustrated London News, 1847.
Smoke from burning of coal, in industries and in homes, covered London, making it difficult to breathe the air or see the road.

on technologies that would improve their machines. By the 1840s, a few towns such as Derby, Leeds and Manchester had laws to control smoke in the city. But smoke was not easy to monitor or measure, and owners got away with small adjustments to their machinery that did nothing to stop the smoke. Moreover, the Smoke Abatement Acts of 1847 and 1853, as they were called, did not always work to clear the air.

Calcutta too had a long history of air pollution. Its inhabitants inhaled grey smoke, particularly in the winter. Since the city was built on marshy land, the resulting fog combined with smoke to generate thick black smog. High levels of pollution were a consequence of the huge population that depended on dung and wood as fuel in their daily life. But the main polluters were the industries and establishments that used steam engines run on coal.

Colonial authorities were at first intent on clearing the place of miasmas, or harmful vapours, but the railway line introduced in 1855 brought a dangerous new pollutant into the picture – coal from Raniganj. The high content of ash in Indian coal was a problem. Many pleas were made to banish the dirty mills from the city, with no effect. However, in 1863, Calcutta became the first Indian city to get smoke nuisance legislation.

In 1920, the rice mills of Tollygunge began to burn rice husk instead of coal, leading residents to complain that ‘the air is filled up with black soot which falls like drizzling rain from morning till night, and it has become impossible to live’. The inspectors of the Bengal Smoke Nuisance Commission finally managed to control industrial smoke. Controlling domestic smoke, however, was far more difficult.

Conclusion

Despite its problems, the city has always been attractive to those seeking freedom and opportunity. Even the gods in Durgacharan’s novel, referred to at the beginning of this chapter, found heaven imperfect, compared with all that they had witnessed and experienced on their visit to Calcutta. Yet all the aspects of city life that upset them were signs of the new routes to social and economic mobility that the city offered to the millions who had made it their home.

Activity

Write out a notice from the Bengal Smoke Nuisance Commission to the owner of a factory pointing out the dangers and harmful effects of industrial smoke.

Write in brief

1. Give two reasons why the population of London expanded from the middle of the eighteenth century.
2. What were the changes in the kind of work available to women in London between the nineteenth and the twentieth century? Explain the factors which led to this change.
3. How does the existence of a large urban population affect each of the following? Illustrate with historical examples.
 - a) A private landlord
 - b) A Police Superintendent in charge of law and order
 - c) A leader of a political party
4. Give explanations for the following:
 - a) Why well-off Londoners supported the need to build housing for the poor in the nineteenth century.
 - b) Why a number of Bombay films were about the lives of migrants.
 - c) What led to the major expansion of Bombay's population in the mid-nineteenth century.

Discuss

1. What forms of entertainment came up in nineteenth century England to provide leisure activities for the people.
2. Explain the social changes in London which led to the need for the Underground railway. Why was the development of the Underground criticised?
3. Explain what is meant by the Haussmanisation of Paris. To what extent would you support or oppose this form of development? Write a letter to the editor of a newspaper, to either support or oppose this, giving reasons for your view.
4. To what extent does government regulation and new laws solve problems of pollution? Discuss one example each of the success and failure of legislation to change the quality of
 - a) public life
 - b) private life

Project

Make sure you watch any one of the Mumbai films discussed in this chapter. Compare and contrast the portrayal of the city in one film discussed in this chapter, with a film set in Mumbai, which you have recently seen.