

## Chapter 2

# Revisiting the City: The Relevance of Urban Sociology Today

N. Jayaram

**Abstract** Events since the 1990s, with the advent of globalisation and the information and communication technology revolution in particular, have had a profound impact on cities around the world and have rejuvenated academic interest in the urban question. This chapter makes a case for revisiting the city from a sociological perspective. Laying emphasis on the distinction between “locale” and “milieu” and on the community–cosmopolitanism dialectic in urban areas, it elucidates thematics for an urban sociology today. The chapter further considers areas for empirical investigation, such as issues of citizenship and cyberspace, in the light of the dialectic. It concludes with a brief discussion on methodological considerations in studying the city.

**Keywords** City • Community–cosmopolitanism dialectics • Locale and milieu • Social space • Urban sociology

Attempts by social scientists to grapple with the reality of the city have repeatedly highlighted the inherent complexity of the phenomenon and have thrown up many concepts and theorisations (see Saunders 1985; Flanagan 1993). Similarly, attempts by planners and administrators to deal with the urban problems have revealed the limits to planned urban habitat change (see Jayaram 1989; Dear 2000: 118–39). It is

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N. Jayaram (✉)  
National Law School of India University, Bengaluru, India  
e-mail: njayaram2@rediffmail.com

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hardly surprising that the intractability of the urban question in social theory and in urban planning led to cynicism.<sup>1</sup> In 1985, Saunders (1985: 7–10) confidently announced the death of urban sociology.<sup>2</sup>

In retrospect, Saunders's obituary on urban sociology was premature; it even turned out to be unfounded.<sup>3</sup> The rapid unfolding of events since the 1990s—the breakdown of the erstwhile Soviet Union and the disenchantment with communism; the end of the cold war and the realignment of the international economic and political order; the rise of the European Union; the spread of globalisation and the associated information and communication technology (ICT) revolution, with attendant impact on the movement of human beings, ideas and capital; the rise of religious fundamentalism and the violence associated with it—have all had a profound impact on the cities around the world and rejuvenated the academic interest in the urban question.

What globalisation has done is to bring together urban centres, both within individual countries and internationally (Short and Kim 1999).<sup>4</sup> This has been greatly facilitated by increased physical connectivity, via improved means of transportation, and efficient electronic connectivity, via television, mobile telephony and the Internet. Whether it is boom or meltdown in the economy, religious celebrations or racial attacks, democratic elections or military takeovers, no city in the world today can remain unaffected. This internationalisation of the city is both inviting and challenging at the same time. Conventional sociologists and post-modernists alike are revisiting the city (see Dear 2000; Ellin 2006).

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<sup>1</sup>The golden era of urban sociology became passé because of its failure to discover a social process which absolutely corresponded with a spatial form. Marxist scholars, like Castells (1977: 75–77), attribute this failure mainly to the “fetishism of space” in the work of the Chicago School pioneers such as Park (1915, 1926) and his disciple Wirth (1964/1938).

<sup>2</sup>Saunders referred to “... a body of literature that indicated the difficulties in defining what an urban settlement actually was, for it was apparent that definitions in terms of size were purely arbitrary and had little sociological significance, while more specifically sociological formulations in terms of peculiarly “urban” cultural characteristics exhibited an unfortunate propensity to collapse in the face of empirical evidence demonstrating the existence of “urban” phenomena in “rural” areas or of “rural” phenomena in “urban” areas” (1985: 7). Furthermore, he found it “[e]ven more disturbing ... that so many of the themes and problems addressed by the urban sociology literature appeared to have been lifted from other areas of the discipline” (Saunders 1985: 7). Thus, “Gradually, the suspicion began to grow that *there was no such thing as urban sociology!*” (Saunders 1985: 7; emphasis added).

<sup>3</sup>With the publication of the English translation of Castells' *The Urban Question: A Marxist Approach* (1977), scholars like Sawers (1984) and Harvey (1985) attempted to revive interest in the study of urban processes under the rubric of “spatialised political economy”. But, with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, not only Marxism got debunked in politics, the Marxist approach found itself in disfavour in the academia (Jayaram 2008: 8).

<sup>4</sup>Short and Kim (1999) discuss the “accelerating, widening and deepening processes of globalisation” in relation to the city under three broad headings: economic globalisation and the city, cultural globalisation and the city, and the political globalisation and the city. They draw particular attention to the emergence of globalism as a “discourse”.

## 1 The City: Locale and Milieu

In revisiting the city, a distinction needs to be made between the *locale* (place) and the *milieu* (space) dimensions of the urban form (Dürschmidt 2000). The locale dimension of a city, that is, its physical/territorial boundary, is demarcated administratively, even if arbitrarily. That is what we see on the map; that is what administrators define as the jurisdiction of the city. The milieu dimension, on the other hand, is identifiable in terms of the processes around which the city dwellers' lives revolve. These processes could be (a) social, involving groupings and intra- and inter-group interactions, with varying degrees of complexity resulting from size and composition of the population; (b) cultural, referring to ways of thinking and acting; and (c) political, having to do with relations of power/control, though not necessarily in the formal sense).

Two points need clarification. First, the milieu dimension of the city is embedded in its locale dimension, but the milieu dimension transcends the locale dimension. That is to say, locale provides the physical context for milieu, but locale does not delimit milieu.<sup>5</sup> The cities are locales in which many milieux interact and new ones emerge. Second, the study of the locale dimension is important in its own right, just as it is in relation to the milieu dimension. But it calls for a multidisciplinary, if not interdisciplinary expertise, which conventional sociological training hardly provides in its urban sociology courses.

The primary focus of revisiting the city in urban sociology would be on people and their culture, rather than on the physical dimensions of the habitat called the city. Focussing on the people and their culture in the cities, the key issues appear to centre around (a) citizenship, local relations and cosmopolitanism, on the one hand, and (b) the articulation and experience of community and identity, on the other. The dialectics of these two foci, namely, community and cosmopolitanism constitutes the contemporary relevance of urban sociology. The scope of the new urban sociology is variegated, just as its thematics are vibrant. In what follows, an attempt is made to discuss these with special reference to India.

## 2 Community–Cosmopolitanism Dialectics

There are multiple sources of this community–cosmopolitanism dialectic. To start with, there has been a phenomenal growth both in the number of cities and the number of people living in them.<sup>6</sup> In developing countries, much of the growth in

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<sup>5</sup>As Dürschmidt argues in his study of everyday lives in London, the “milieux ‘extend’ not only beyond immediate local surroundings [that is, locales], but beyond the metropolis as such, thereby in turn transforming the very make up of [the city’s] everyday life” (2000: 1).

<sup>6</sup>In India, the number of “towns” increased from 1,827 in 1901 to 2,843 in 1951 to 5,161 in 2001 to 7,935 in 2011. Many of these towns are part of Urban Agglomerations and the rest are

the urban population is not due to natural reproduction within the cities; it is due to rural–urban migration.<sup>7</sup> What is noteworthy is that there have been important changes in the origin and destination of migration flows. There has been a change in the gender profile of the migrant population, with an increase in female migration that is independent of marriage-related relocation. Overall, there has been a greater heterogeneity of the city’s population. “The theme of city life”, as Richard Rodrigues observes, “is the theme of differences” (quoted in Dear 2000: 2).

The migration of people from rural to urban areas, and the movement of people between these two areas generally, have been facilitated by communication revolution. The last three decades have seen a rapid expansion of railway and road networks in India. Far-flung areas of the country have been linked to metropolises and urban centres with direct railway connections. Besides the Government of India’s national highways project, called “the Golden Quadrilateral”, the state governments have been improving the state highways linking urban centres. The improved means of transportation have meant increased facilities for movement of people and goods, considerable reduction in journey time and greater exchange between urban centres and their hinterlands. Contributing further to the last consequence has been the remarkable spread of the electronic medium of communication like the television, mobile telephony and also, to some extent, the Internet.

The engine behind these developments is, no doubt, the nature of and trends in economic development that has been taking place in the globalisation era, especially after the adoption of the policies of liberalisation and structural adjustment by the Government of India. The traditional industries—for example, jute in Kolkata, textiles in Mumbai, and the public sector in Bengaluru—have declined, and new ones—such as the information technology (IT) and the IT-enabled services in Bengaluru,<sup>8</sup> financial services and commercial cinema in Mumbai—have shot into prominence. The changing economy has reinvigorated cities like Chennai, Hyderabad and Pune, fostered conurbations, as in the case of Gurgaon near Delhi, Hosur near Bengaluru and so on, and given a fillip to growth in many a small town. Not only has the production technology and distribution management have

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(Footnote 6 continued)

independent towns. The total number of Urban Agglomerations/Towns, which constitutes the urban frame, is 6,166 in the country (Census of India 2011). The percentage of urban population to total population increased from 10.84 in 1901 to 17.29 in 1951 to 27.78 in 2001 to 31.16 in 2011 (Census of India 2011).

<sup>7</sup>The exponential decadal (1991–2001) growth rate for major metropolises in India was as follows: Greater Mumbai (Bombay), 2.62; Kolkata (Calcutta), 1.82; Delhi, 4.18; Chennai (Madras), 1.70; Bengaluru (Bangalore), 3.20; and Hyderabad, 2.42. With a population of 16.3 million, Greater Mumbai was the most populous city in India in 2001 (Census of India, cited in Sivarakamrishnan et al. 2005: 27).

<sup>8</sup>The nature of the economic shift has been such that Bengaluru, once known as “the pensioners’ paradise” has now acquired the reputation of the Silicon Valley of India. With Bengaluru becoming a key centre for jobs outsourced from Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, “bangalore” has even become a verb to refer to an outsourced job!

changed, the consumption patterns of urban dwellers have also undergone change. Consumerism, consumer society and so on are the new terms used to designate this change.

The city, which has always been a visible marker of civilisation, has become even more so. The greater visibility of the city is seen not only in terms of the extent and variety of assets it possesses, such as industries and business houses of varying sizes, a vast administrative machinery, specialist hospitals and educational institutions, architectural heritage sites and skyscraper buildings, gated colonies and squalid slums, flyovers and metros, but also in the nature and vibrancy of its lifestyles and culture, such as pubs and malls, performing creative arts, and commercial cinema, nightlife and crimes, sport spectacles and mega events. The city has attained heightened observability and become an extraordinary source of dreams, aspirations and illusions. Naturally, it acts as a magnet not only for public and private investment, but also for a rural population, as an island of promise in the midst of despair. Interestingly, it is this observability of the city which makes it a site for terrorist attacks.

Paradoxically, contrary to the analytical prognosis of the classical sociologists and social thinkers (excluding the pessimist like Vilfredo Pareto), with the advancement of science and technology, rationality and law and the march of industrial capitalism, the bearing of religion on social life has not waned. The consensus mustered by social scientists in the decades following Second World War that modernisation and secularisation would replace religion with faith in science, education, and the rule of law has turned out to be unfounded. Starting in the 1980s, it became evident that religion was not on the retreat. There have been aggressive ethnic and religious mobilisations of various hues, including Buddhism and Hinduism, which were once seen as otherworldly, acquiescent and docile religions. Globally, cities have become the sites of multiple religious movements, conversions and cults representing a variety of global evangelist and indigenous traditions. Both new electronic and conventional press media have been used for such representations. It is in the context of these developments that the dialectics of community and cosmopolitanism is being played out.

Briefly put, urban modernisation has not engendered secularisation of social life. It appears that equating urbanity with modernity, or urbanism with secularism, has resulted in grave misunderstanding of ethnicity, religion and identity in urban areas. The paradox under reference cannot be explained either by the essentialist concepts of the ecological school or the deterministic assumptions of the political economy perspective. Understanding and explaining this paradox of urbanism needs new conceptual tools and theoretical forays.

The rapid urbanisation and urban-ward migration of rural population has aggravated the existing problems and brought in their train new ones. Overcrowded housing and slums, overloaded transportation services, overstretched medicare facilities, substandard civic amenities, the breakdown of urban governance and so on, have been researched at length. Similarly, the governmental and policy initiatives and programmes for addressing them have been reviewed and evaluated.

However, the last two decades have witnessed the emergence of new interest groups and initiatives. Citizen groups for developing the city they live in have come into existence. There are many civil society organisations engaged in all activities from garbage collection and disposal to cultural promotion. There are citizen initiatives concerning voter registration, commuting, vigilance against crime, etc. Many of these initiatives and organisations are formally recognised by the government, and some of them are also financially supported by the government. However, there are parallel “governance” mechanisms in place, which are not recognised, and in some cases, are even illegal. For example, the phenomenon of gangs and their warfare in big cities, often dubbed the “underworld”, is little understood. The same is true of the growth of urban violence resulting from gang warfare, communalism, ethnocentric assertions, etc.

Paradoxically, the city appears to be its own undoing—the more a city improves, the more attractive it becomes, resulting in greater influx of the population and aggravation of the problems. The urban problems, thus, would appear to be *sui generis* intractable.<sup>9</sup> One may recall here Henri Lefebvre’s observation that “there can be growth without social development (that is, quantitative growth without qualitative development)” (1996: 177). He argues that “changes in society are more apparent than real. Fetishism and ideology of change (in other words, the ideology of modernity) conceal the stagnation of essential social relations” (Lefebvre 1996: 177). It is in this context that the scope for a new urban sociology will have to be spelt.

### 3 Thematics of an Urban Sociology Today

The dialectics of community–cosmopolitanism implies that community and cosmopolitanism constitute two opposing polar tendencies. Apparently, this parallels the dichotomous typologies suggested by early sociologists to grapple with changes that the European society was experiencing due to rapid industrialisation–cum–urbanisation. The conceptualisations propounded by the German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies (1855–1936) and the French sociologist Emile Durkheim (1858–1917) readily come to mind.<sup>10</sup> Wirth (1964/1938) too alluded to this when he implicitly contrasted urbanism as a way of life from the rural way of life.

<sup>9</sup>Tracing the roots of the urban crisis in developing countries to the distorted nature of the overall development, elsewhere I have argued that “though it may sound paradoxical, the path to urban development lies in rural socio-economic transformation” (Jayaram 1989: 52).

<sup>10</sup>Tönnies (1957/1887) distinguished between *Gemeinschaft* (community, where “natural will” rules and life is spontaneous) and *Gesellschaft* (association, where “rational will” rules and life is artificial and contrived). Durkheim (1964/1893) distinguished a society characterised by “mechanical solidarity” (where integration is due to likeness and where repressive laws predominate) from that characterised by “organic solidarity” (where integration is due to interdependence resulting from division of labour and specialisation and where restitutive laws predominate). If *Gemeinschaft* and mechanical solidarity are characteristic of small societies in rural areas, *Gesellschaft* and organic solidarity are characteristic of large societies in urban areas.

However, what the dialectics of community–cosmopolitanism suggests is something more than the two contrasting types or an evolutionary trajectory (cf. Tönnies and Durkheim). The dialectic draws attention to the inevitable contradiction that the juxtaposition of community and cosmopolitanism raises in urban existence.

The concept of cosmopolitanism is premised upon the assumption of what Lefebvre terms the “homo urbanicus” (Lefebvre 1996: 97): (a) that city dwellers are atomised individuals with segmented personalities, (b) that urban life recognises the universal human by erasing differences and (c) that the city offers inclusive citizenship and the “right to urban life” (Lefebvre 1996: 158). As Ernest Gellner notes, “The individualism inherent in the condition of modular man, if pushed to its logical conclusion, was hostile to the cult of community” (Epigraph in Kaur 2001: 80).

The concept of community, as used in the urban context, no more refers to a spatio-temporal entity in which face-to-face interaction is by definition important. The definitional criterion of the concept of community now revolves around identity, which has to do more with imagined commonalities even among people who may not be personally acquainted, than with face-to-face interactions among people living in physical contiguity. Accordingly, we have such expressions as religious communities, caste communities, linguistic communities, migrant/diasporic communities and so on—all hinging on “consciousness of kind” in reference group terms.

We should hasten to clarify that under certain circumstances face-to-face interaction can solidify and reinforce community identity. Wirth long ago inferred “... the spatial segregation of individuals according to color [*sic*], ethnic heritage, economic and social status, tastes and preferences ...” (1964/1938: 53). He postulated that this is a natural outcome of the larger size of urban population, which involves “a greater range of individual variation” (Wirth 1964/1938: 53).<sup>11</sup> To Wirth, sorting and segregation of the urban population follows a natural ecological principle. He did not consider the forces—economic, political and social—which can result in voluntary seclusion or forced exclusion of the population on specific identity criteria. The Muslim ghettos in Ahmedabad,<sup>12</sup> Kolkata and Mumbai, the ethnic refugee camps in Chandigarh and Delhi, the linguistic enclaves among slum-dwellers in Bengaluru and the changing composition of *pols* (traditional neighbourhood groupings) in Ahmedabad (Ray 2008) are cases in point. The point that is emphasised here is that communities come to be constituted; they need not be natural formations. These communities tend to be particularistic in their value orientation, and exclusive in relation to one another.

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<sup>11</sup> “[T]he greater the number of individuals participating in a process of interaction, the greater is the *potential* differentiation between them”, ran his axiom (Wirth 1964/1938: 53; emphasis original).

<sup>12</sup> With reference to Ahmedabad, “a city with many borders”, Mahadevia (2007) observes that segregation based on religion has gone beyond ghettoisation; it is now a complete separation of the physical space of the city. The population size of the separated entities and their almost complete self-sufficiency implies minimal or no contact with the main city. Of course, for Muslims, this comes at an economic cost.

Viewed thus, it is easy to understand how community (emphasising collectivity, with its narrower and more rigid articulation of identity) and cosmopolitanism (emphasising differences and universal individualism, with its broader and more flexible articulation of multiple identities) are polar tendencies in the city. Their dialectics (a) determines the everyday life of urbanites, (b) shapes their aspirations and facilitate/hinder the realisation of those aspirations, (c) conditions the articulation of their identities, (d) defines the politics of identity and intercommunity relations and (e) constantly redraws the place–space configuration in the city. In what follows, we shall explore the possible areas and issues for empirical investigation.

#### 4 The Urban Citizen: Contestations Over Definition

With reference to a city, one could ask “who belongs to the city?” or “who are its citizens?” Apparently, this is an easy question to answer—anyone living in that city for a relatively long period (as contrasted from a visitor or a sojourner) is its “citizen”. A closer examination of the situation in different cities would reveal this answer to be facile; it is, in fact, invariably contested. In law, anyone born in a city or domiciled in it for a defined duration (10 years in Indian cities) is a citizen of that city. The citizenship that so accrues entitles its holder to certain rights, for instance, in admission to public educational institutions, allotment of public housing, or sites (land) for building houses, etc.

However, given the limitation of resources, facilities and opportunities in any city, and the resulting competition, the legal definition of citizenship is challenged in quotidian existence by those who call themselves “natives” of the city as well as by the migrants. The citizens would like a more *exclusive* definition of the citizenship, restricting it by a rigidly defined “nativity” in terms of the language of the state in which the city is located. Thus, “Mumbaikar” (someone belonging to Mumbai) becomes coterminous with being “*Marathi Manus*” (Marathi people), emphasising the idea of “sons/daughters of the soil” in linguistic terms. The natives would consciously exclude not only those who have immigrated to the city during the last decade, but even the second- and third-generation descendants of original migrants. This exclusion has often resulted in aggressive street politics and violence targeting the “outsiders”. The Shiv Sena movement against the south Indians (derisively called Madrassis) in the late 1960s and early 1970s and the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena movement against north Indians (mostly migrants from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, derisively called Bhaiyyas) in Mumbai are illustrative of this phenomenon.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup>Shiv Sena (literally “Army of Shiv”, referring to Shivaji Bhosale, the Maratha King) is a right-wing nativist (Marathi) and Hindu political party, founded by Balasaheb Thackeray in June 1966 (see Gupta 1982; Eckert 2003; Mehta 2004). Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (literally “Maharashtra Renaissance Army”) is a right-wing ultra-nativist regional political party operating



The migrants, including those who have moved in only recently, would want a more *inclusive* definition of citizenship. After all, the city, by its developmental logic, is a conflux of migrant streams resulting in a unique culture. Most of them are the city's citizens "by adoption" (Dürschmidt 2000: 3). Furthermore, it is they who toil for the general prosperity of the city, they would argue. Thus, they are citizens of the city by virtue of being there.

Interestingly, the legal definition of city's citizenship is not a prerequisite for voting registration for the state assembly or Lok Sabha elections or even elections to civic bodies. Obviously, this is a bone of contention. The natives oppose voting rights to the migrants and the migrants press for them, as this is the only element of political power that migrants have, even if it is available only once in 5 years. The emigrants, given their concentration in specific localities, constitute vote banks and they do vote *en bloc*; they have even been successful in getting their candidates elected not only to civic bodies, but also to state legislative assemblies. Given the heterogeneity of the city's population, no political party can afford to lose sight of such vote banks.

Contestations about citizenship are not confined to issues concerning the right to use of facilities, allocation of houses and house sites, reservation in employment, rights to political representation, etc. They spill over into symbolic space. Many cities in India have been renamed in the last few decades: Bangalore has become Bengaluru; Baroda, Vadodara; Benaras, Varanasi; Bombay, Mumbai; Calcutta, Kolkata; Madras, Chennai; Trivandrum, Thiruvananthapuram and so on. Within each city, there have been demands for renaming the city's landmarks and streets. In Mumbai, Crawford Market and Victoria Terminus have become Jyotiba Pule Market and Chatrapathi Shivaji Terminus; in New Delhi, Connaught Circus, Rajiv Chowk; in Chennai, Mount Road, Anna Salai; in Bengaluru, South Parade, Mahatma Gandhi Road and so on.

The "natives" demand priority to be given to the state/regional language both in the public realm—in educational institutions, civic ceremonies and official documents—and in private parlance—on nameplates, signboards and hoardings. There have been cases where the native vigilante groups have enforced this through violent methods. There is symbolic contestation about statues, too. In Bengaluru, the statue of Thiruvalluvar (a Tamil saint poet) has remained installed but not unveiled in a predominantly Tamil-speaking area of the city. The reason is that the

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(Footnote 13 continued)

in Maharashtra, founded by Raj Thackeray, nephew of Balasaheb Thackeray, in March 2006 after the splitting of the parent party, Shiv Sena. These Senas are a force to reckon with in Mumbai. Similar political parties and quasi-political outfits are operating in all major cities in India.

native Kannada-speaking activists want a *quid pro quo*—a statue of Sarvajnya (a Kannadiga saint poet) be installed in Chennai, the predominantly Tamil-speaking capital city of Tamil Nadu!<sup>14</sup>

The demand for renaming cities, or their monuments and streets, or for prioritising the use of the local language, as against the official language Hindi, or English, or any other, or for/against installing statues is more than a desire for erasing colonial memories or commemorating the local heroes. It is the dialectics of community–cosmopolitanism at work. Such demands seem to counter cosmopolitanism<sup>15</sup>; underlying them often are atavistic tendencies glorifying a community or vilifying another, not infrequently based on a mythologised or imagined past, and on frozen memories.

The counter-positioning of nativist movements and cosmopolitanism appears to be more pronounced in cities where a larger section of the population consists of the first-, second-, or third-generation migrants who are visibly different from the natives. In brief, the answer to the question “who belongs to the city?” depends on “who *defines* citizenship?” The legal and the sociopolitically contingent definitions of citizenship seem to vary. As a consequence, the city is the site of myriad articulations of identity and mobilisations of people. The issue of urban citizenship and citizen rights thus throws up a variety of themes and issues for sociological investigation.

## 5 Differences, Identities and Territories

Cities are generally heterogeneous in their composition: the larger the population of a city, the greater the heterogeneity of its population (Wirth 1964/1938: 52–53). The identity derived from citizenship of the city would, therefore, be too homogeneous. Except when it is invoked by the “natives”, it is also tenuous and fragile. Only when a citizen performs a feat or conferred an honour, or a team representing the city scores over another in a competitive event, the citizenship identity (for

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<sup>14</sup>On 7 August 2009, the High Court of Karnataka dismissed a petition by pro-Kannada outfits opposing the unveiling of the statue scheduled for 9 August 2009. It warned the parties against any agitation, and passed strictures against the petitioners “for wasting its time” by moving a frivolous Public Interest Litigation suit (TNN and Agencies 2009).

<sup>15</sup>With reference to Bombay being renamed as Mumbai by the Shiv Sena government which came to power in 1995, Sujata Patel writes that, in one sense, “... the official change of name symbolizes the transition from a colonial to an indigenous orientation. Contrarily, this move was perceived, and is still being perceived, as a chauvinist act by the Shiv Sena government that obliterated historical expressions, experiences, and processes which were part of the received colonial epoch, but were not necessarily stamped by colonialism. The name change was in fact erasing a multi-ethnic and multilingual cosmopolitanism being nurtured in the city, that of a bourgeois class-based modernity, substituting it with a populist-oriented ethnic and religious identity” (2006: 250). Such perceptions about renaming the cities or sites and streets within cities exist in other renamed Indian cities, too.

example, “Mumbaikar”) invoked with pride. Similarly, when the city remarkably recovers from a natural disaster such as a flood or human-engineered calamity like a serial bomb blast), a reference is proudly made about the city’s citizenship spirit. The use of citizenship identity with a positive connotation is limited, though not insignificant. However, it is periodically invoked by the “natives” (“we”/“us”) whenever the migrants (“they”/“them”) are viewed as a negative reference group. The consequences are negative, and the citizenship identity takes a dent.<sup>16</sup>

Given the heterogeneity of the city’s population, we should expect that more non-city-based identities are ascribed or invoked in urban life. There are self-defined and other-defined identities for urban collectivities; correspondingly, there are assumed/ascribed stereotypes and eulogistic/pejorative labels. Apart from region, language and physical features (as in the case of migrants), religion, caste, class, gender and sexuality may be invoked in identity formation. As is to be expected, a city dweller has multiple identities; s/he invokes or responds to an external invocation of an identity or combination of identities depending upon the situation.

Those invoking identities, their own or especially of the others, often have limited or no knowledge of the differences. Proclivity for prejudices acts as a smokescreen for knowledge. Due to this, there is often mistaken invocation of identities. But once invoked, the identities and the stereotypes that go with them influence the behaviour of people. Even if one is knowledgeable, the process of judgment could be erroneous. Judging the behaviour of an individual by reference to the group to which s/he belongs or judging an entire group based on the behaviour of an individual is fraught with danger.

To the extent that identity formation/invocation proceeds on such primordial lines as religion, caste or linguistic affiliation, there is the inherent danger of essentialising or reifying ethnicities. Categorical distinctions in social situations result in (a) allocating an individual to an ethnic category, (b) behaving towards that person in a particular way and (c) rationalising/justifying that behaviour. Heightened interaction within the group and avoidance of others is one outcome. The feeling of security within the familiar, on the one hand, and the perception of threat from others, on the other, results in voluntary or forced exclusion and the formation of ethnic enclaves and ghettos. Violence exacerbates social distances and hardens the group boundaries. It is in this context that social space gets embedded in physical place.

It is true that territorial demarcation of communities and ethnic enclaves existed earlier too. In almost all traditional Indian cities, religious communities and caste groups resided in specific areas of the city, and many of these areas were even known by the names of those communities or castes. Society was more strongly defined by the caste idiom, and the idea of cosmopolitanism was yet to take root. However, in post-Independence India, caste idiom is officially delegitimised and

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<sup>16</sup>Since citizenship-based identity is a contested terrain, *when* it is invoked and by *whom* could have empirically varying outcomes.

discrimination based on religion, caste and gender is proscribed. Cosmopolitanism is the modern value premise, and the city is expected to be its harbinger. However, not only with notable exceptions have earlier segregated residential areas persisted, but there have also been newer articulations of segregation and exclusion. Since open discrimination is violation of law, informal insulation of residential colonies is operative in housing societies, gated communities and so on.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, who belongs to which part or area of the city and why, throws up several facets of urban life for sociological inquiry: the formation of urban enclaves, the nature of their interaction with other areas of the city, and the quotidian life of the people living there. The changing geography of class, gentrification of working-class residential areas, and the changing composition of slums need to be understood with locality as the focus.

## 6 Social Networks: Negotiating Life in the City

Irrespective of where one lives in the city, negotiating urban life implies establishing social networks. Conventionally, such concepts as “reachability” (links radiating from a person reaching back to that person), “multiplexity” (two persons being linked in more than one way) and “intensity” (individuals being ready to honour obligations) are used in analysing social networks. Cities offer a variety of network possibilities, which vary in terms of the scale on which they are organised, as also the nature (specific or diffuse) of their organisation: family reunions and kitty parties, clubs and associations, cult groups and secret societies, chit funds and mutual-aid groups and so on.

These networks aid the urban dwellers in negotiating their everyday life; they are important for them in realising their aspirations. In case of need, they can draw upon resources and social support of their networks. The networks function as resource pools and insurance mechanisms in the urban world characterised by uncertainties and risks. One could postulate that the stronger one’s social networks in the city, the more comfortable would be her/his life; conversely, urban life would be wretched without social networks. We have very little sociological knowledge about the different types of urban social networks, their origin and development, their structure and functioning and their overall dynamics in urbanism.

Another emergent facet of urban life that calls for sociological attention is cyberspace. The ICT Revolution, an integral part of globalisation, has profoundly affected the city. As Dear has observed, “No-one can ignore the challenges of the information age, which promises to unseat many of our cherished notions about

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<sup>17</sup>When a celebrity experiences such discrimination, as it happened in Mumbai in July 2009 (Dubey 2009a, b), it attracts wider attention. The experience of ordinary mortals (Gohain and Dash 2009) rarely gets raised as a public issue. The protest against discrimination by a celebrity highlights the violation of cosmopolitanism, and the acquiescence of the vast majority points to refuge in community.

socio-spatial structuring” (2000: 160). While being predominantly city-centric, the impact of cyberspace is felt widely, even in rural areas. Scholarly attention is now turning to this phenomenon (see Mitchell 1995; Castells 1996; Graham and Marvin 1996).

In his insightful work on the digitally mediated environment, Mitchell (1995: 160–61) argues that the organisation of the city will undergo profound changes as cyberspace encompasses its economic, sociocultural and political life. In his “city of bits”, Mitchell visualises the ubiquity of networks in an electronically mediated environment (Mitchell 1995: 167). The value of a network connection is determined by bandwidth. “Bandwidth-disadvantaged” (the new have-nots), “zero bandwidth” (the lack of network communication) and “digital hermit” (the marginalised outcasts of cyberspace) will be the new concepts to work with. Since ICT has been the driver of economic growth in India, scholars are examining its influence on social change (see Saith et al. 2008; Upadhyya and Vasavi 2008). There is urgent need for sociological research on the cyberspace dimension of the city.

## 7 The City and Civil Society Organisations

Outlining the constituent elements of the “ideal type” of the city, Max Weber emphasised “at least partial autonomy and autocephaly, thus also an administration by authorities in the election of whom the burghers participated” and “a court of its own and at least partially autonomous law” (1958/1905: 81). Both urban administration (executive) and urban courts (judiciary) are formal public institutions; they derive their authority based on legal-rational considerations through legislative enactments. Although several facets of urban life have traditionally remained outside the public sphere, it can be said with little contradiction today that, directly or indirectly, the presence of governmental authority is apparent in all aspects of urban society.

However, in India, during the last few decades, civil society initiatives have become increasingly prominent in urban areas. Scores of non-governmental organisations are operating in Indian cities. Some of these have sanction under law and are governed by rules and regulations specified under legislative enactments: they must have a constitution, hold periodic elections to offices, conduct general body and other meetings, get their accounts audited and annually report compliance to the specified authority. However, outside the ambit of the law there are several civil society initiatives, not all of which would withstand legal scrutiny, and some of which are blatantly illegal (and operate even after they are banned by law).

These civil society initiatives may originate as resistance mechanisms opposed to some proposal or programme of the government bodies that would affect the interest of the locality or the community. Some resistance initiatives develop into well-organised local interest groups; they may even get co-opted as complementary mechanisms in government’s development programmes (Chaplin 2007). A few may become oppressive mechanisms, indulging in coercion or extortion by using their connections with the administrative machinery or by sheer muscle power. The

persistence of anachronistic laws,<sup>18</sup> politicisation of policy issues, corruption in politics and administration and so on, have weakened the efficiency of the formal governance machinery, opening up possibilities for non-formal and non-legitimate governance mechanisms. All this offers scope for research in urban sociology.

A notable development in Indian cities is the large-scale public celebration of religious festivals. Often festivals such as Ganesh Utsav and Janmashtami in Mumbai or Kali Puja in Kolkata involve meticulous organisation and large-scale mobilisation of money and human resources. The duality of these festivals is noteworthy. On the one hand, there is secularisation of the religious sphere whereby some primordial differences like caste, creed and linguistic affiliation are temporarily suspended. On the other hand, there is heightened religiosity in secular places during this period. Public display of religiosity and religious symbols, religious processions, etc., whether by a majority or a minority religious community, could be intimidating to the other. This is particularly so in the light of the strained communal relations between, say, the Hindus and the Muslims in some Indian cities.

Another trend in this context is the celebration of birthdays (called *jyanthis*) or observance of the death anniversaries of regional heroes (for example, Shivaji in Mumbai and Pune), community leaders (for example, Babasaheb Ambedkar in many cities), nativist politicians (for example, Balasaheb Thackeray in Mumbai) or even charismatic film stars (for example, Rajkumar in Bengaluru). The personalities concerned are venerated as icons; the statues installed in their memory almost assume the status of idols. Considering that these icons and their statues are symbolic representations of sections of the urban population, rather than that of the city as a whole, they also become targets of desecration for sections opposed to them. The cities in India frequently experience violence resulting from such desecration.

There is an apparently increased religiosity in Indian cities. Even a cursory glance at the press and the electronic media would show the plethora of cults, *guru/baba* and *mai/amma* traditions outside the brahmanical Hinduism, *sant* (saint) groupings, and the temples, mosques, churches and shrines dotting the urban landscape.<sup>19</sup> Migrants from different parts of the country celebrate their own festivals on a scale that such festivals are no more private domestic observances.

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<sup>18</sup>For instance, the Bombay Rents, Hotel Rates, and Lodging House Rates Control Act, 1947—popularly known as the Rent Act—is a typical illustration of an anachronistic law. Enacted in 1948 to meet the post-war housing problem, this law has stayed on books with disastrous consequences for the city (Mehta 2004: 123–128).

<sup>19</sup>On 31 July 2009, the Supreme Court of India ruled directing the government to ensure “that no temple, church, mosque or gurdwara is constructed on a public street or a public space” (quoted in Times News Network 2009a: 9). It warned “that officials would be dealt with firmly for dereliction of duty” in this regard (Times News Network 2009a: 9). Nevertheless, the honourable court refrained from passing any order on the demolition of the places of worship and shrines already erected in violation of law as “it could lead to disturbance of law and order” (Times News Network 2009b: 1). It is important to note that, the honourable court’s directive came as a ruling on an appeal filed by the Government of India in 2006 challenging an order of the Gujarat High Court directing

Irrespective of whether it is a sectarian/religious festival or the celebration/observance of the birthday/death anniversary of a community icon or a charismatic community and political leader, there are demands for declaration of public holiday to mark the occasion. Facing prolonged agitations, the government has buckled to such demands. For instance, as per the gazette notification of the Government of India, in 2009, there were 17 “closed holidays” and 50 “restricted holidays”.<sup>20</sup> All but three—Republic Day, Independence Day and Mahatma Gandhi’s Birthday—of the closed holidays are for religious festivals—one Buddhist, two Christian, five Hindu, one Jain, four Muslim and one Sikh. Similarly, all but four of the restricted holidays are for religious festivals, some for festivals of very small sections of the population. The dynamics of religious festivals and celebrations, religious processions and so on in the civil society sphere thus offer interesting themes for investigation by urban sociologists.

## 8 Conclusion: Some Methodological Considerations

Like the parent discipline of sociology, and its sub-disciplines, the history of urban sociology has witnessed the rise and fall and reincarnation of paradigms. The urban ecology propounded by the Chicago School and the political economy perspective of the Marxist scholars both enriched the development of the subject by their delineation of key concepts, theoretical premises and methodologies. Both also betrayed their incapability to explain significant turn of events from their respective theoretical perspectives. In revisiting the city, it is important to realise that theories and methodologies are not an end by themselves; they are analytical frameworks for understanding social realities. Globalisation has not only resulted in unprecedented change, it also appears to have debunked many an axiomatic notion about the city and the changes therein. Thus, critical eclecticism appears to be the viable option for urban sociology now.

Sociology is not the only discipline interested in the city or the urban form; anthropology, architecture, economics, geography and other disciplines have been enriching our knowledge of the city. It is time that urban sociology looks outward,

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(Footnote 19 continued)

the Government of Gujarat to remove all religious structures, without any discrimination, that were encroaching the public land. When, in pursuance of the High Court order, the authorities took steps to demolishing a *dargah* (the tomb/shrine of a Muslim saint) in Vadodara in the middle of a road, riots broke out and the army had to stage a flag march to bring the situation under control (Times News Network 2009a: 9).

<sup>20</sup>On a “closed holiday”, all government offices, public institutions and autonomous organisations receiving financial support from the state will remain closed. All employees of these offices, institutions and organisations, are entitled to avail two “restricted holidays” in a year. A “restricted holiday” is not a holiday for the office, institution or organisation; it is a kind of special leave of absence for the employees.

consciously crossing disciplinary boundaries, while being firmly located in the fundamentals of the parent discipline. This implies a willingness to work with practitioners of other disciplines, and openness to the methods, tools and techniques that they deploy in their approach to the city. Perhaps this will also help urban sociology to overcome the blinkers of its former dominant paradigms.

Focusing on a single city, or a detailed study on one aspect of the city, has been the dominant tradition in urban sociology. Such studies, no doubt, add to the substantive body of knowledge about a given city or some aspects of that city. They do not take our theoretical understanding of the processes and patterns of the city under globalisation per se. For that, we need comparative analysis. As Dear bemoans, “Unfortunately, the empirical, methodological and theoretical bases for such analysis are weak”, and “our methodological and theoretical apparatuses for cross-cultural urban analyses are also underdeveloped” (Dear 2000: 160, 161). We lack an adequate sample of national and international cities, of big cities and small towns.

Speaking of comparative analysis, conventionally, the nature and problems of the city have been sought to be explained in terms of the overall development of the country: cities in developed countries as contrasted with their counterparts in developing countries. While there appears to be a correlation between development and urbanisation, for understanding cities in the globalisation era, the extent of urbanisation of a country has special nuances. Thus, first, we need to make a distinction between the city in countries (a) in which the majority of the population lives in cities/towns and their immediate surroundings (the United States of America, for instance), and (b) in which the majority of the population lives in rural areas (China or India, for instance), but are profoundly influenced by urban areas. Cities such as Singapore (which is a modern city-state) and Hong Kong (which was a British urban colony and is now a Special Administrative Region of China) are of a different genre.

We could conclude our discussion on revisiting the city by recalling what Lefebvre had to say about the city and its future:

To think about the city is to hold and maintain its conflictual aspects: constraints and possibilities, peacefulness and violence, meetings and solitude, gatherings and separation, the trivial and the poetic, brutal functionalism and surprising improvisation. The dialectic of the urban cannot be limited to the opposition centre-periphery, although it implies and contains it ... Thinking the city moves towards thinking the world (thought as a relationship to the world) ... globality as totality ... the universe, space-time, energies, information, but without valuing one rather than another ... One can hope that it will turn out well but the urban can become the centre of barbarity, domination, dependence and exploitation ... In thinking about these perspectives, let us leave a place for events, initiatives, decisions. All the hands have not been played. The sense of history does not suppose any historic determinism, any destiny (quoted in Kofman and Lebas 1996: 53).



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