UNIT 36 THE CITY AS THE SITE OF MOVEMENTS*

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36.1 INTRODUCTION

The past ten years have witnessed a resurgence of interest in colonial Indian cities which, one commentator suggests, ‘... represent, perhaps, the first wave of a major emerging field in the historiography of the region.’ (Beverley, 2011: 483) New texts address modern architecture and planning in Lahore, public politics in Bombay, the control of Delhi as India’s new capital, Bangalore’s and Delhi’s experiments with modernity, postcolonial stories about Mumbai and studies of its Indian architects and apartment dwellings. They, and other works, demonstrate that the colonial Indian city was witness to several different types of movements, relating to: public health; the regulation of prostitution; architectural styles; municipal politics; religious movements; and changes in domestic architecture. But an earlier review of many of the same books identified one of the major movements that this newer wave of urban literature neglects, as reflected in its title ‘Beyond nationalism: modernity, governance and a new urban history for India’. (Nair, 2009) This review rightly pointed out that India as a “land of villages” has dominated much history writing, but that there was a place for the Indian city in post-independence histories of colonialism. These studies usually portrayed the city as an economic space, that is, as a node that allowed Indian wealth to be traded back to the British metropole. But these economic histories themselves superseded works which had examined the city as a site of anti-colonial nationalism. With the rise of cultural and postcolonial studies in the 1980s-90s, economic analyses have been overshadowed, while the simultaneous rise of interest in the (often rural) subaltern has detracted attention from the formal politics of anti-colonial nationalism which was often centred in cities. Janaki Nair suggests that two more recent books, by Douglas Haynes (1991) and Nandini Gooptu (2001), are subject to the lingering influences of political and economic history in their portrayal of Indian city life. Yet these two books will feature prominently in this Unit since they blend political and economic analysis with understandings of rhetoric and cultural history. Also, they focus upon nationalism in its various forms, as a vital component of Indian urban history. Any attempt to study urban nationalism, however, faces the immediate problem of definition: what is urban? And

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what is nationalism? The rest of the Unit will review continued elite discourses about, and activities in, the city, before looking at the techniques used to mobilise the non-elite of the city. It will then consider religious nationalism before concluding with comments on some of the most exciting approaches which focus on the city as a lived, sensed, and heterogeneous space.

36.2 AN URBAN HISTORY OF ANTI-COLONIAL NATIONALISM?

Urban history has long struggled to define what about its history is specifically urban, rather than a more general trend that can be detected in a city. (Chandavarkar, 2009: 208) In the Indian context this has often meant distinguishing city life from habits brought to the city by rural migrants or colonial governors. Other models sought to explain Indian cities through the frame of modernisation, underdevelopment or, their unique Indianness. The ‘urban’ itself can be thought through the formal and informal spaces of politics and power that operate in different localities, mahallas, wadis and galis, bazaars, factories, mills and other workplaces. (Masselos, 2007: 6)

Nationalism is no more easily defined. Do we accept the uprising of 1857 as ‘The First War of Independence’? Were members of the municipal committees of 19th century cities nationalists? Or should nationalism be dated, as is often presumed, to the 1885 founding of the Indian National Congress (INC) and the 1906 birth of the Muslim League? Should we emphasise the non-constitutional, more radical politics that emerged in opposition to the partition of Bengal in 1905? Should we associate nationalism with popular politics and mass movements, which only really began in 1919 (and were continued through the noncooperation movement 1920-24, Civil Disobedience 1930-34 and Quit India 1942-44)? And do socialists and communists, many of whom were inter-nationalists, and religious nationalists, many of whom were blamed for communal violence and divisive politics, also merit attention?

First, we must acknowledge that these types of politics overlapped and intersected. The more elitist, constitutional nationalists continued to work alongside both Gandhi and the more radical nationalists, although they defied their calls to boycott elections for provincial assemblies that were introduced by the 1919 Government of India Act. Gandhi attempted to appropriate the Khilafat movement of Muslim protest against the treatment of the Ottoman state and the Caliphate after the First World War, though simultaneously threading Congress appeals with Hindu rhetoric, while Nehru was one of the many bridgeheads between Congress and socialist organisations.

But we also have to acknowledge that each of these movements had very different approaches to the city. Prashant Kidambi (2012: 951) has made the vital distinction that: ‘...while nationalist thought might have re-imagined the colonial city, nationalist political practice certainly strove to reorder and reclaim it.’ Gandhi remained committed to the Indian village as the political and spiritual heart of India, posing the city as the corrupting core of modern life: the export of India’s wealth and the import of cheap European goods occurred in the city, while amenities were confined to a few elite parts. As Gandhi commented dismissively in 1915: ‘I don’t like Bombay.... I see here all the shortcomings of London but find none of its amenities...’ (quoted in Hazareesingh, 2007: 204)

However, Gandhi’s view was counterposed to the campaigner Benjamin Horniman, who suggested that urban regeneration and civic reconstruction in the cities was an indispensible part of anticolonial nationalism. Horniman appreciated the city dwellers’ comprehension of their rights and privileges and the potential force of an urban satyagraha.
(Hazareesingh, 2007: 131) Gandhi later came around to this pragmatic view of the urban. In a city like Ahmedabad, as Howard Spodek (2011: 19) has shown, Gandhi could promote many different struggles for independence: ‘... an end to untouchability; harmonious relations between Hindus and Muslims; a clean and safe city; peaceful, cooperative labor relations; an educated citizenry, with an emphasis on moral education and civic awareness; compassion and support for the poorest of the poor; hand spinning and weaving of cotton cloth, providing work for almost anyone who wanted it; and the use of khadi by rich and poor alike.’ These tactics emerged after what Kidambi has termed the Victorian-Edwardian period of civic patriotism in Bombay, which correlated with constitutional, reform nationalism. After the First World War, the urban nationalist scene was radically transformed.

36.3 ELITE CITY SPACES

Kidambi (2012) has shown how late nineteenth-century Bombay emerged less as a space of nationalism than a sphere of middle class mobilisation through journalism, civil and political associations, and municipal politics. This sphere of Indian, and increasingly nationalist, civil society allowed an elite to act as representative of the masses, to initiate programmes of self reform, and to challenge the shortcomings of colonial urban governance. Douglas Haynes (1991: 4-5) has examined parallel developments in the western Indian town of Surat through a series of more broadly relevant questions: what were the attractions of liberal and national concepts during late colonial rule? Why did communal identities get strengthened alongside the expansion of democracy? And why did the expansion of democratic institutions not include the ‘underclass’ in the emerging Indian polity?

Haynes has argued that it was the culture of local politics that changed in Surat, as clearly expressed in its changing rhetoric and ritual. One strand of this was led by Gandhians (who had their own leading class), but another was more elitist and fought for political change within the limits of the constitution, though in the ‘outer’ public sphere (as opposed to the ‘inner’ public or community sphere). During the 1921 municipal elections in Surat, many councillors refused to adopt noncooperation tactics and confirmed their commitment to constitutional methods. This liberal discourse (loyalty to the law, progress through political evolution, a spirit of service to the state) was attacked by Gandhians, but it survived the collapse of noncooperation and was still influencing forms of city nationalism in 1925. Many nationalist leaders returned to the provincial legislatures and municipalities, within the constitutional system devised by the British (known as Dyarchy) and implemented by the 1919 Government of India Act. However, this was by no means a conservative measure, many of the Swarajya party members entered the Bombay legislature so as to wreck it from within. However, once within the political machine, many members found themselves collaborating with the colonial government to secure the sort of urban reforms they had accused the colonial government of neglecting.

Similar processes were underway in Bombay but Hazareesingh (2007: 174) has detailed how complexly intertwined the elite nationalist movement was here with debates about citizenship and with non-Indians. Patrick Geddes was a Scottish social theorist and town planner who was very influential in urban development circles after arriving in Bombay in 1915. He argued that cities needed civic commitments, and that material poverty was an obstacle to citizenship, which entailed rights such as water supply, public transport and urban sanitation. These ideas were extensively reported by the nationalist press, the Chronicle newspaper asking what was ‘politics... but civics in their [sic] extended application to the country’? (quoted in Hazareesingh, 2007: 180).
These citizenship arguments were made alongside compatible nationalist demands for reform (not overthrow) of the existing system, to benefit the poor, women, and the under-educated. This form of nationalism placed social rights as a demand before the colonial state for the first time, and in protest against the lack of rights contained in the Government’s 1919 Act. While providing a forum for the city elites to exert their influence, the nationalist press was also widely read and served to bridge the “outer” domain of the public sphere with the ‘inner’ domain of the domestic, the community and, when necessary, the street.

As editor of the Bombay Chronicle, Horniman was a key figure in the city’s nationalist elite politics, but he was also pivotal in crafting the urban response to Gandhi’s first mass movement through a hartal (business closure) on 6th April 1919: ‘The Mahatma envisaged the hartal as a low-key day of mourning which should not appear as an attempt to “put pressure on any government”. However, Horniman and other members of the Satyagraha Sabha insisted on the inclusion of public speeches and processions effectively making a bid to transform the hartal into a day of action.’ (Hazareesingh, 2007: 132) The day itself was a triumph for Horniman’s vision, in part due to the people of Bombay being stirred by reports of shootings by the police in Delhi the previous day.

D.W. Ferrell (1971), similarly, provided an early interpretation of elite influence during the Rowlatt Satyagraha in Delhi which lasted from 30 March to 18 April 1919. After the transfer of the capital from Calcutta was announced in 1911, Delhi was increasingly penetrated by nationalist institutions, revolutionary movements, pan-Islamist/Khilafat activists, and other discontents over the inadequacies of the Dyarchy reforms. Delhi’s political scene was subdued after the suppression of the ‘Mutiny’ in 1857-58 (Gupta, 1981). But by 1919 the city had a new vernacular press, regular public meetings and numerous volunteer organisations when the new movements combined to encourage a political awakening in Delhi.

Ferrell divided the anti-Rowlatt movement into three phases: the first two days of hartals (30-31 March); a phase when the established leaders lost control of the satyagraha movement, being unable to prevent a second hartal on 6th April; and the final phase of 10-18 April, being nine days of protest over Gandhi’s arrest. Ferrell argued that the primary leaders of the movement (notable figures such as MA Ansari) lost control of the movement due to the activities of secondary leaders of the city (‘petite bourgeoisie’[sic]) who identified with, and articulated the demands of, the underprivileged of the city. The resulting mobilisation, and uncontrolled crowds at the Delhi Railway Station, allowed the police to open fire on 30th March, facilitating Swami Shradhanand’s emergence as the local hero who confronted the police in front of the Town Hall, on Chandni Chowk. Over the past four decades, explaining the links between elite politics and the mass mobilisation of the urban poor has proved more challenging to historians of urban nationalism in India than providing historical descriptions of events.

36.4 MOBILISING THE NON-ELITE

Jim Masselos (2007: 1) has, more consistently than other scholars, sought to explain the ways in which city people established their presence in the cities they lived in, coming together in different places and areas, in formal and informal ways. He claimed in a 1977 essay that the formal, nationwide structures of the INC and Muslim League, and the way they hierarchised their own politics, does not mean that we should similarly rank and differentiate between those ‘national level’ cities, and the regional, provincial, or other type of city. Instead, he said, ‘... to view the local as national ...[is to] analyse
the diversity of kinds of power operating within such a field.’ (Masselos, 2007: 15) This ‘field’ has most often tended to be the street, and the object of analysis the crowd. Crowds were quickly formed, and were suddenly dispersed after a brief, though far from unplanned, existence, and as such, pose difficult questions about how they relate to their surroundings, and whether they are determined by class and history or are autonomous? (Masselos, 2007: 82, for further work on the crowd see Tambiah, 1997)

How has the urban majority and its links to the economy and politics been studied? Nandini Gooptu’s (2001) focus on popular politics in United Provinces towns emphasised the need, in the context of a preceding emphasis on factory labourers, to look at the spaces of the bazar (market areas), of small scale manufacturing units, and the sites where artisans and craftspeople, transport and construction workers, hawkers, street vendors and peddlers, and service groups such as sweepers and municipal workers worked and lived. Gooptu stressed the role of democratic institutions and emerging political languages and ideologies (rhetoric) referring to nation, class or community, while pointing out that dyarchy reforms shaped both popular and elite politics:

The imperatives of representative politics necessitated effective mass mobilisation which, in turn meant that ‘politics’ penetrated the lives of far wider social groups than ever before. As the elites galvanised themselves into action to compete for office and influence, they needed to make those whom they sought to represent a part of the political process. This, in turn, spurred on the formation of new organisations and the evolution of new modes of political action and discourse. It led to the expansion of the ‘public sphere’ and the innovation of political rituals and practices to forge political collectivities. (Gooptu, 2001: 8)

Therefore, it wasn’t just the colonial state that collected information about, disciplined and regulated the urban population. Gandhi’s Congress was wary of cities, but it was also suspicious of the urban poor, and its inherent instability, volatility and rootlessness, which could lead to moral decay, social animosity and political disorder (Gooptu, 2001: 14). In addition to uplift and reform movements, the poor were disciplined and marshalled into an urban political force: ‘In this view, the poor were either childlike, needing reform and moral and spiritual guidance, or misguided and violent, needing discipline and a strong, paternalistic, even coercive, hand of control and direction’. (Gooptu, 2001: 17) Explicitly urban tactics were forged, as when the Home Rule Leaguers targeted communities in their localities to capitalise on Gujarati discontent in 1918 Bombay: thus, Gujarati and Marathi lower and middle classes at Girgaum and nearby areas; traders, workers and servants near the cloth markets at Dhojitalao and Crawford Markets; grain dealers at Dana Bunder; Marathi mill workers near Elphinstone Road; and the Muslims of Chakla, Umarkhadi and Khara Talao (Masselos, 2007: 167) were targets of their campaigns.

While Congress did explicitly view the urban poor as a resource to be drawn upon and disciplined, these activities have to be seen in the context of existing and legitimate interest in the inspirational techniques adopted by Gandhi to inspire a new generation of political subjects. Gandhi’s genius was to articulate Swaraj (self-rule) as a concept that did not just span points in time (a glorious pre-colonial past, a degraded colonial present, and a virtuous post-colonial future) but also scales of space (national self-rule being dependent upon an individual’s rule of self). Each individual’s self-discipline was, therefore, the basis upon which independence would be won: ‘Armed with this powerful rhetoric, the Gandhians attempted to break down the conceptual walls between the inner and outer arenas of local politics, to smash colonially derived assumptions about the political world, and to persuade many city dwellers that it was not only possible to oppose the government and make it bend to their wishes but also a moral imperative to
do so.’ (Haynes, 1991: 204) Gandhi’s rhetoric was profoundly religious, including: *ahimsa* (non-violence); *tapas* (self-suffering or penance); *tyag* (renunciation); *dharma* (duty); and *satya* (religious truth). These rhetorical techniques were used to mobilise the urban poor through public speeches, printed circulars, songs and slogans virtually every week in Surat during the noncooperation movement of 1920-23. Audiences were expected to wear homemade *khadi* (cloth) ‘... and one had to be willing to endure the shame-oriented rhetoric of public speakers. Often audiences responded very concretely to the appeals of speakers by throwing their foreign caps and coats into the bonfires, by signing up as members of Congress, or by subscribing to Congress funds.’ (Haynes, 1991: 241) This was part of a broader programme that included attacks on governmental institutions in the city; winning seats in the municipal elections of 1921; hartals; attempts to nationalise local education; and the withholding of tax payments.

These tactics were deployed to mobilise urban dwellers throughout India. Howard Spodek (2011) has argued that Gandhi made Ahmedabad into the ‘shock city’ of nationalism. Here at, the national headquarters for the INC, cloth workers were mobilised, uplift work for the ‘untouchable’ (*harijan*) populations launched and literary cultures transformed. Again, while Gandhi’s tactics were non-violent they were not passive. Moderate local politicians, like Ramanbhai, were replaced and a shift in culture and language as much as politics was organised, as exposed by Spodek’s sensitive balancing of urban history and political biography. (Spodek, 2011: 32) Gandhi’s new city leadership, which would be used to target the urban masses, comprised wealthy benefactors like Ambalal Sarabhai, Congress ‘lieutenants’ like Vallabhbhai Patel, figures who took elected posts such as Kasturbhai Lalbhai, who became a member of the Central Legislative Council, and campaigners for the urban poor like Anasuyaben Sarabhai. Though with very different visions of what the city ought to be, these workers collaborated under the Gandhian creed to change the city, just as the experience of Ahmedabad changed Gandhi’s views of cities, business and industry. Articulating the links between citizenship, cities and nationalist politics that had been outlined in Bombay 20 years earlier, in 1935 Gandhi outlined a hopeful urban image of latrines as clean as libraries, children in education, minimised contagious diseases, no division between labourers and owners; ‘... someday the Municipality will be like this. And I will get to see it. It is in the power of the citizens to achieve it.’ (Spodek, 2011, 69)

This came after the suspension of the Non Cooperation movement in 1922 following an outbreak of violence against the police in Chauri Chaura. But the urban poor had been kept at a distance by the organising Gandhian elite and therefore failed to participate fully. The poor were usually censured for not meeting Gandhi’s strict moral codes regarding violence, alcohol and foreign cloth. In Surat, the working classes responded by not volunteering for high profile or dangerous positions in the movement, or for picketing duties or imprisonment. The mid to late 1920s saw the Congress focus shift to rural uplift, working with low caste groups and campaigning for women’s education. While not always explicitly urban, these policies helped Congress penetrate more and more of the population, such that they were ready to be called upon when the next mass movement was launched in 1930. Congress inaugurated the Civil Disobedience movement with Gandhi’s Salt March to Dandi and its first phase ran from March 1930 to March 1931. When the Round Table talks in London failed to deliver what Gandhi had hoped for when he suspended the movement, Civil Disobedience was relaunched and ran from January 1932 until it was disabled by mass arrests in 1933-34.

Civil Disobedience used similar tactics to Non Cooperation but radically altered their scope in order to target the poor, who were increasingly impoverished as the Great Depression hit the global economy in 1930. Massive propaganda drives were launched
in 1928 against the (all-white) Simon Commission for constitutional reform, and used meetings, pickets, bonfires of foreign cloth, hartals, processions, drills parades, flag hoisting, and the celebration of national days and weeks. (Gooptu, 2001, 325) While many of the processions were strongest at the level of the mohalla (neighbourhood, as discussed later in the chapter), major processions focussed on business districts and the bazars where the working poor could participate. These were the people described by the government and police in the United Provinces as ‘bazar scum’, ‘vagabonds’, people of ‘very poor quality’ and ‘low class elements’, constituted by manual labourers, job hunters, hawkers and street vendors. (Gooptu, 2001: 327) Rather than being a passive audience, these workers participated in Congress processions and gatherings. Volunteers trained local supporters in physical exercise, drilling and flag hoisting, and this training often took militaristic forms, at odds with Gandhi’s non-violence ethos (Gooptu, 2001: 341). Indeed, the fear of popular urban uprisings led in part to remarkably harsh measures by the colonial government in 1932.

After the Government of India Act of 1935 and the fuller provincial autonomy it offered, Congress participated in the elections of 1937 and ran ministries in provinces across the country. As with earlier collaborations under the dyarchy regime, nationalist politicians found themselves quickly absorbed into the bureaucratic mindset. While many pursued radically egalitarian, reform programmes, other nationalist programmes regarding policing and planning displayed (perhaps necessarily) remarkable compatibilities with the colonial tradition. (Chatterjee, 1998) However, Congress resigned its seats in 1939 in protest at India’s entry into the war without consultation, and launched the Quit India movement in 1942. Though drawing upon the established repertoire of civil disobedience, this movement allowed a greater scope of techniques that edged closer to forms of violence (for instance, sabotage or arson). This can, in part, be attributed to the rising influence of socialists and communists in the 1930s, many of whom had links to, and influence over, Congress. The Congress Socialist Party had been formed in 1934 and favoured an agitation programme that would allow Congress to tap into the groundswell of protest by the working poor that had emerged during Civil Disobedience, by addressing tangible concerns in the village, town or mohalla. (Gooptu, 2001: 373) The focus was on workplace inequalities such as low pay, accident compensation, and arbitrary dismissals, while campaigns were begun in neighbourhoods against high rent, lack of services and poor housing, injecting the goals and tactics of socialism into the Congress repertoire.

The Quit India protests from August 9th 1942 constituted the largest insurrection in India after 1857. Marshalled under Gandhi’s iconic phrase “Do or Die” the movement appeared to mark a newly militant Congress, but Masselos (2007: 244) has emphasised the role of repetition, remembering, and returning to the protests of 1919-24 and 1930-34 in Bombay. There were attempts to direct the crowds and volunteers, to mediate open rebellion with calls to non-violence, and to use the same techniques of pickets, processions, and flag raisings. But the early arrest of the Congress elite freed city populations to express themselves in new ways, moving from neighbourhood protests to attacks on the police throughout the city, only to disperse and regroup later in the day. The city’s infrastructure was targeted in a wave of new tactics (which were also tried successfully in the countryside): grain shops and trucks were attacked; telegraph lines and mail boxes were burnt; rail lines were sabotaged, police chowkies were attacked; while arson became much more widespread in late August. Many workers also went “underground”, relying upon networks of harbourers, supporters and suppliers to evade both the police and Gandhi’s call for them to surrender to the police. The Quit India years saw a decline in violence between Hindus and Muslims, which had been accelerating in India since the 1920s, though this tension was to re-emerge as ‘religious nationalists’ debated what shape a post-war independent India would take.
36.5 CITIES AS SITES OF RELIGIOUS IDENTITIES

The rising tensions between Hindus and Muslims from the 1920s onwards cannot be reduced simply to a question of nationalism, but the political organisation of religious communities as a means of strengthening demands for independence was a major force in shaping religious identities in the interwar period. Sandria Freitag (1989) has demonstrated, through the case of Benares, how central the city was to the formation of community identity, in terms of public performances, collective ceremony and popular protest, and how religious communities shifted from anti-government protests to communal hostilities in the 1930s. Nandini Gooptu (2001: 190-191) has complemented this emphasis on urban religious groups with attention to divisions within religious communities, in terms of caste, urban rituals, or Islamic Sunni-Shia divides.

In part, these divisions have to be explained outside of urban contexts and at the national scale, as Muslims had seats reserved for them in the Government of India Acts of 1919 and 1935 (as did Sikhs in the Punjab and non-Brahmins in Madras), making the triannual elections into provocative politico-religious events not just for the minorities but also for new meta-category of ‘Hindus’. But religious identities were also fostered by the major political parties as well, and not just the explicitly religious Muslim League. Despite claiming to represent all Indians, and having many influential Muslim leaders, Congress strategies were saturated with Hindu imagery and practice (Gould, 2004). In part, this can be attributed to Gandhi’s belief (in agreement with much colonial thinking) that India was distinguished by its deep religious affiliation, which was marked out as superior to western civilisation in opposition to colonial orientalist thought. (Haynes, 1991: 265). But Muslims in India were also coping with changing conditions and demands on their everyday lives. In Surat, for instance, municipal housing regulations were felt to be restricting practices of purdah, while urban development threatened the sanctity of mosques and Muslim heritage sites. (Haynes, 1991: 264) During the Khilafat campaign, a Muslim campaigning language Gujarati laced with Urdu had developed, while Gandhian Gujarati favoured Sanskrit-derived words. Public meetings echoed to very different cries, of ‘Allah-o-Akbar’ and ‘Vande Mataram’ respectively. (Haynes, 1991: 269)

Both Hinduism and Islam were developing and militarising forms of social and political organisation within the space of the city, as well as in the textual arenas of the Quran or the Vedas. Gooptu (2001: 192) especially identifies the shudra, or labouring, poor, as a significant driving force of Hindu militancy in the cities of the United Provinces in the 1920-30s. In the context of growing competition for fewer jobs and changing patterns of patronage, religious mobilisation provided the Shudra with a means of claiming self respect and masculinility, while demarcating Hindu land and territory in the city. Festivals such as Holi presented an opportunity to temporarily overturn social hierarchies and geographies of the city, unlike upper-caste Hindu festivals like Dussehra that did not, although they also presented opportunities for religious processions to proclaim communal identity (Legg, 2007: 119-148). Though Congress worked around, and with, some of these developments, aggressively communal organisations like the Hindu Mahasabha were more assertive at penetrating the cities with campaigns for reclaiming converted Hindus and organisations at the mohalla level, feeding fears of supposedly aggressive Muslims.

Muslim ritual practice and religious expression was also changing, with many organisations preaching a return to early puritanical Islam, textual norms of the faith, and a greater personal adherence to the tenets of Islam (Gooptu, 2001: 245). But this seeming traditionalism actually led to innovations in the public, urban life of Islam, in which ‘outer’ expressions of anguish and sentiment were encouraged, just as festival practices were adapted and martial public rituals became common in north India. Muslim
artisan had suffered economically and socially even more harshly than their Hindu counterparts, and were easily converted to movements that promised to address their marginalisation. Sacred and institutional geographies of the city were vital: ‘... many of the urban mosques and sufi shrines, as well as the anjumans and madrassas, developed as centres of community organisation and support, where people came for advice, consolation and material help.’ (Gooptu, 2001: 276) These changes in Indian Islam were, of course, related to an increasingly antagonistic Hindu reformism. Tanzeem (organisation) and tabligh (propagation of religion) emerged as a means of focussing on the urban Muslim poor in competition with Hindu voluntary organisations and their campaigning in the bazars. They operated at the mohalla level on an everyday basis but also mobilised large Hindu processions that disturbed the peace of mosques at prayer time. Such sites were of religious significance, but marked for the Muslim and Hindu poor a way of claiming cities from which they felt increasingly excluded: ‘... with the mounting scarcity of housing and land for settlement or for petty trading, the politics of space and territory assumed central importance in the lives of the poor, in which the sacred and the profane intermingled.’ (Gooptu, 2001: 314) In cities across India communities that had previously mingled started to separate out into Hindu and Muslim neighbourhoods, in which communal organisations drilled men and boys into becoming militarised defenders of their faith and families. These movements unintentionally but undeniably prepared the way for the violence between Hindus and Muslims of 1946 ahead of partition in August 1947 that saw cities across the country violently fold in upon themselves. (for a sensitive discussion of Delhi as a partition city see Pandey, 2001). It must be remembered though, that the city equally produced and encouraged new and unprecedented unities, such as trade unions, based on the common experience of exploitation and suffering, which often existed alongside and sometimes against the more divisive qualities of urban politics. (Some of these moments are discussed in the Unit on Bombay.)

### 36.6 LIVED CITIES

In conclusion, I would like to focus attention on some writings on nationalism in the city that go beyond the political and economic historical approaches that Nair critiqued in her review essay “Beyond nationalism”. These could broadly be referred to as cultural geographies and histories of urban nationalisms. They attend to what Thomas Blom Hansen and Verkaaik (2009, 5) call “urban spirits” which are not empirically verifiable but are, ‘...the proliferating fantastic and mythical qualities of cities and urban spaces are effective realities that shape the behaviour, cosmologies and desires of people in cities, or of those who visit them, imagine them, or describe them in narrative or imagery.’ They also encompass the practices and rituals through which people live and experience their city and are as much about time as space. For instance, the exhilarating feeling during Non Cooperation in Surat during which Congress succeeded in making public politics accessible and emotive and created an atmosphere of impending change; of a different future becoming attainable (Haynes, 1991, 239). But they can also regard not-letting-go, the refusal to forget, and the determination to remember. For instance, after the police fired on the Gurdwara Sisganj on Chandni Chowk during Civil Disobedience in May 1930, regular protests were held at the temple, and a Sikh counter-inquiry was formed, to contest the state magistrate’s conclusion that the firing was ‘inevitable’ and ‘manly’, and to insist that it had actually been ‘...indiscriminate, vindictive and excessive.’ (Legg, 2005: 191) Plans of the site revealing the marks of unrestrained shooting of bullets onto the building, personal narratives and photographs of the injured were used to make the Gurdwara into a site of counter-memory that refused to forget the violence inflicted upon the building and its inhabitants.
1. Some of the Persons Injured by Firing into the Gurdwara


The mohalla (or moholla in Bombay) was a unit of community cohesion in many Indian cities that became the prime target of nationalist movements seeking mass mobilisation. Masselos (2007, chapter one) has explored the sheer diversity of Muslim mohollas in Bombay, divided upon lines of doctrine (Shia and Sunni, or the leader followed by Muslims in that area), social grouping (such as khoja or konkanis, expressing a group’s history and customs), and language (Marathi, Gujarati, Urdu or Hindi), with intersecting subgroups between all three. Mohollas often had jamats (elder councils) in addition to family authority networks, which could become the last wrung in national hierarchies leading up to the Muslim League and resisting colonial attempts at governance, but they could also be stubbornly autonomous. As such, Masselos (2007: 41) concludes: ‘…what is significant is how the field operates, the kind of forces which become manifest within it, and the processes of change that occur as a result. In this sense, the moholla symbolizes a greater – not a lesser – world.’

At the level of the moholla, novel types of cultural-political practice were made possible. Prabhat Pheris emerged during the Civil Disobedience movement across India even if no one seems quite sure of their origins, though residents at the Patidar Ashram in Surat claimed to have forged them through blending religious devotionalism and nationalist sentiment (Haynes, 1991: 234). They consisted of small bands of people moving through a city in the early morning, singing patriotic songs and urging households to do their duty. (Masselos, 2007: chapter eight) They became so popular in Bombay that by July 1930 it was estimated that 125 groups existed in the city, across geographical, linguistic, class and religious divides. They disturbed the city’s peace, which perturbed the police, and their widespread and deeply emotional appeal even alarmed the Congress, which established a committee and published rules of conduct to regulate the prabhat pheris, free them of bad passions, and make them productive, harmonious and uniform across.
the country. While they did become unified, Gandhi was unable to stop negative political songs: after a Kanpur riot in 1931 it was reported that prabhat pheris had been singing anti-Muslim slogans. (Gooptu, 2001, 294)

Between the route of the procession and the space of the mohalla lay the crowd. This was the source of most parties’ power, but also the source of fear; a massive population of boundless energy and potential for overwhelming the government, but also for turning on each other. Through establishing clear daily routines during the Civil Disobedience movement, Congress tried to discipline the crowd and penetrate the city, but it also had to relate to the crowd and draw them in to the city’s political performances. In Bombay ‘... behind the innovative novelty of the national cycle and the secular freshness of its idiom were significant parallels between the national commemoration and the city’s religious festivals and practices.’ (Masselos, 2007: 205) The crowds had been trained since childhood on how to participate in city religious processions and Congress capitalised on these emotional, embodied memories: the symbolism of the sea; the aural experience of prabhat pheris; the ‘holi fires’ of foreign cloth. The crowds became so involved that they later became victims of police violence: ‘Such expectations developed an audience and a connoisseurship, it created emotional involvement and, in some cases, activist crowd participation not necessarily along Gandhian non-violent lines.’ (Masselos, 2007: 215)

Similarly, Muslims protesting the proposed demolition of a portion of a mosque in Kanpur in 1913 had appropriated the mourning rituals of Mohurram to draw out local support: explicit parallels were drawn between the trials of Hussain and Hassan (Gooptu, 2001: 269). Processions could also play on audience emotions in different ways. A Congress procession in Benares in April 1930 stopped at points throughout the city to enact scenes of police brutality and satyagrahi oppression (Gooptu, 2001: 332), while the folk dance tradition of nautanki was appropriated for expressions of Hindu and nationalist themes (Gooptu, 2001: 347).

If the nation, the city, the mohalla and the street were politicised by nationalism, so was the home (Chatterjee, 1989). Gandhi had not only called for women’s social uplift and education, but called them forth as a political army. Initially he tried to proscribe women to spinning cloth from the home, or using their moral force to picket liquor and foreign cloth stores, but in 1930 many women refused his spatial demarcations and took to the street. Many women also played a pivotal role in revolutionising domestic space and politicising it. A few women made their homes into political headquarters for their politician husbands, but many more women made their homes political by spinning cloth, teaching nationalist songs to their children, supporting processions and prabhat pheris and even printing prohibited leaflets or harbouring absconding or underground radicals. (Legg, 2003) The home could also be a depoliticised space for training in Congress nonviolence. During potentially uncontrollable protests in Bombay over the deportation of Horniman in 1919 Gandhi ordered his followers to go home for private religious contemplation; evacuating the streets and dividing popular sorrow into private mourning, thus neutralising the risk of an unruly public display. (Hazareesingh, 2007: 144)
2. Swadeshi League Procession in Delhi

Source: *Hindustan Times*, February 27th 1930. Lady Workers of the Delhi Swadeshi League: Standing from the left is Mrs. J.N. Sahni who presided over the meeting; Mrs. Bishen Narain (wife of Late Bishen Narain) is seen at the other end.

3. Swadeshi League Procession in Delhi

Source: *Hindustan Times*, February 27th 1930. Lady Workers of the Delhi Swadeshi League carrying placards, advocating the use of Swadeshi articles.
36.7 SUMMARY

From the domestic to the national, from economic and political to the cultural and the sacred, nationalism was both made in, and went on to make, the cities of interwar India. This Unit has only been able to give a brief sense of a rich literature on the elite, popular, religious and lived spaces of nationalism in 20th century colonial India. With a new generation of literature emerging on Indian cities, it remains to be seen if the nationalist city will be explored as richly as the examples of colonial urbanism.

36.8 EXERCISES

1. Why has the Unit discussed the city as a ‘sphere’ or ‘field’ of politics?
2. How does religion become a formative aspect of colonial urban life?
3. Why is it necessary to understand the mobilisation, actions, and capabilities of the urban crowd?
4. What links are produced and maintained between neighbourhood/mohalla level politics and National level campaigns and programmes?
5. The city is a space for both remembering and forgetting. Discuss.

36.9 REFERENCES


