# SEPARATION, MOBILITY AND THE ORDINARY CITY

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Separations

By 2030, corporate projections inform us, 30-35 percent of India's population, and 70% of its employment, will be located in Tier 1 and Tier 2 cities, which together, at the moment, account for 65 cities in total. Is there urbanism outside of this list of 65 cities, what we might call 'citi-ness', and if so, what analytics do we have, and do we need, to understand their social and, crucially, their political possibilities at this time of tumult and chaos that attends every dream of accelerated development?

I will suggest that our understanding of Indian cities and their politics needs to be stood on its head. We have been handed a sort of trickle-down theory of Indian citi-ness, even in the postcolonial variants of those theories. While attending to the issue of postcolonial difference and urbanity, the narratives of incompleteness and prematurity imply something that is indeed mature and complete in relation to which our cities are marked by a series of 'lacks'.

We are told that Indian cities like Kolkata did not make the tradition to 'proper urban modernity', or that Indian cities are premature metropolis, from which we have made a transition, to the post-metropolis, without become the metropolis proper. These cities are out of time, and before time, because they became cities in advance of the industrial

revolution that is supposed to beget the metropolis. But, it is pointed out, thatpre-bourgeois modes of sociality persist in in factories and slums.

These comments belie unexplored and unelaborated conceptions of 'proper urban modernity' and the bourgeois city, implying a city based on ideas of a universal individual separated from that which makes them specific. To this we must ask, not if Indian cities are becoming properly modern and bourgeois, but if the paradigmatic city itself was 'properly modern' or 'bourgeois', and if, indeed, we can think of the modern bourgeois city withut is exclusions and brutalities.

I contend that these comparisons are inappropriate foundations for an understanding of the contemporary postcolonial city, partly because the paradigmatic city is more accurately seen as a fiction, or as a very fleeting reality bracketed by the dreams of the city on the one side, and the shattering of that dream into shards of apocalyptic realities on the other.

The paradigmatic city is a fiction, and social theory, including radical social theory and its postcolonial variants, have been complicit in creating and maintaintng this fiction. This is a debilitating fiction if we have to develop an analytics of ordinariness, the conditions of existence prevailing in those cities outside the 65 Tier 1 and 2 cities which are listed as the sites of contemporary capitalism in the Indian context.

Why is the paradigmatic city a fiction, and in what ways is social theory complicit in the perpetuation of this fiction?

Note that there is a paradox in the history of cities, or, more accurately, in the historiography of the city as a social-spatial-cultural form. On the one hand, in the very history of civility, or the birth of the polity, of solidarity, there is a presumption of the city already existing. It is here that one becomes more than one was by coming across those not like oneself, an experience of unhomelinessthat forces one to confront those not oneself, and to negotiate a relation, a modus vivendi, with that difference. This ideal, of the city in which one makes common cause with strangers, in one variation or another, lies at the base of much social theory.

The city is the gateway to 'the universal', or at least a way out of the particular, where the force of circumstance leaves no choice but to become one with an other. This one can see in the Kantian and liberal tradition of talking of civil society, in Tonnies' account of the passage from community to society, in Marx's account of the emergence of the working class and indeed of 'revolution', in the Habermasian tradition of the public sphere, in the modernisation theory's account of the inevitable transition from rural to urban society,or in the more recent Italian writings, not only by Hardt and Negri but more importantly in the writings of Paulo Virno on the multitude, and now, in the writings on the common, even the mobile commons, in the post-austerity city of postcolonial Europe.

In all these scenarios, the city, perhaps following in some oblique way from Plato's analogy of the cave, is a refuge from the storm (in our case we can use the storm as a metaphoe for continuing primitive accumulation and the unfinished wars to settle the question of sovereign power), anplace of an ultimate denouement, a place for the forging of new and liberating refuge, and of crafting collective projects of new futures.In the radical variants of

such social theory, the city is the generalised condition of sociality on which to graft the programs of radical transformation: No city, no civil society, no intellectuals and masses, no public spaces or spheres, no working class, no mass political party, no revolution.

But the rise of the paradigmatic city, the city so valorised by the social theory that accompanied and chronicled its rise, was not innocent.It was based on a series of separations, and of flows and mobilities. We know that the great metropolises of Europe, and then the great centres of manufacturing that were points of concentration and maturity of capitalism, and that sectors of London or Manchester or Liverpool that came to house the offices of the factories and the banks and the great trading companies were surrounded by squalor. This was the humanity made surplus by capital: the excluded, as Sanyal has called them, were thus not just a feature of the postcolonial city of the contemporary times, but a constitutive presence of the paradigmatic city, whose authorities expended considerable force to maintain separations between the zones of capitalist modernity and the areas of housing its detritus, the bodies that it either could not absorb, or had absorbed, digested and excreted. No bourgeois citizen went there except for a taste of the illicit, or to perform acts of charity, or the spread the word of god. Or, indeed, to restore order. Segregation was the order of the day. One should recall that despite its pretension to universalism, civil society originated in this paradigmatic, segregated city, and also that it acquired its veneer of respectability, its properly bourgeois character, by adopting a pedagogical role with respect to the excluded detritus of capitalist modernity, the improvements of whose lives became of its chief objectives, and the spread of bourgeois values to these zones of exclusion became its chief means of achieving this.

But this was not all: after all, the lowness of the low people, the new migrants forced into the city by primitive accumulation and war, too had to be acknowledged, and tamed. And this is when we come to spectacles put in place: the public executions and the drawing and quartering using ingenious methods and newly invented machines so evocatively described by Peter Linebaugh in <u>The London Hanged</u>. If some public squares became Habermasian zones of contact between members of the bourgeoisie, some others became scenes of public punishment too. One keeps in mind these practices whose object was to pacify the potential criminals and rebels inhabiting the zones of exclusion in the paradigmatic city, so reminiscent of the current methods used by ISIS for similar purposes. Similarly, one needs to keep in mind the many examples of the commons, open to the use of many but not all the residents of the city, to compensate for that from which they were separated by the enclosures.

How were the separations maintained in these paradigmatic cities? Urban planning, as the Colombian writer Arturo Escobar sugest, was aimed both to pacify and to contain the always present below the surface fury of those made surplus in the countryside, but whose arrival as the universal individual in the city was permanently deferred. But as Michael Faber's great novel, The Crimson Petal and the White, chronicles the relations between the zones inhabited by the detritus of capitalist modernity from those inhabited by its beneficiaries were constantly breached, not so much by rebellion as the necessary traffic between the two, one that became ordinary with the arrival of mass public transport.

Let me re-iterate the point I am making here: the paradigmatic city is the stage for social theory's celebration of modernity, and the dream of universalism that is explicitly or

implicitly made by social theory. But with few exceptions, and we know too well who they are, the practices of separation that made the city in the first place –both the separations of people from their means of sustaining life – that is, the original but still continuing moment of primitive accumulation - and the separations of lives in the city from each other – remained external to the writing on the city. It was only by externalising these separations that the transcendence and liberation associated with the city could be sustained.In the end, the dreams of revolution starting in the city and spreading in the countryside did not come to fruition. Fordism that followed the age of empire had great success in pacifying the excluded of the paradigmatic city via reformism and social democracy. That too, came to an end in the upheavals of capital, and in the social rebellions that followed it in the metropolitan 1968.

Before the postcolonial city was the colonial city: it is that long moment that makes it 'natural' to compare the postcolonial city with the metropolitan city, to await the arrival of 'proper bourgeois urbanism', the failure to achieve it, and the consequent disappointments.

The colonial centres in the age of empire came to embody a differentciti-ness. They were part-replicas in the colonies: parts that were 'European' in form and name, which were separated from those parts that were not. Casbah and French quarter: GilloPontecorvo's Battle of Algiers. Separations here were more brutally enforced, as the excluded were more alien, more mysterious, less penetrated by the organs of capital, surveillance and service.

But colonial extraction also needed points in the hinterland outside the replica cities of empire: as points in the opium trade, as locations for locomotive factories, as in-situ offices

for mining companies, as railway hubs or change junctions, and for colonial administration beyond the presidency cities. The paradigmatic cities of Europe must have appeared as remote but familiar to inhabitants of the colonial replica cities, as perhaps the colonial replica cities must have to those inhabiting these strange hybrid formations that were part village, part city, part depot or logistical hub, part outposts closer to the sites of colonial extraction, far from the 'head offices' or 'regional' or 'zonal' offices, the state agencies involved in and coordinating these essential activities of the colonial relation. That distance between the site of the administration of primitive accumulation and its actualisation is the distance between the colonial/postcolonial metropolis, and what I call the ordinary city. It is not, as has been suggested, that these places did not experience or did aspire to Europe: it was in one location the colonial modern was more able to take on the bourgeois form, while on the other, it retained it openly brutal and exploitative character.

Today, these settlements close to the sites of primitive accumulation, or separating producers from the means of production, bear odd traces of that earlier moment: long forgotten and now distortedly pronounced locations such as, for example, Bekar Bandh in Dhanbad, or once grand colonial structures now occupied for example by cattle or their owners, mired in disputes of provenance and inheritance that mark them as de factounproprietered. There is no grandeur in this decrepitude, just decrepitude encroached and transformed into something far less alluring than nostalgia.

Between the site of primary, primitive accumulation and that of its administration were lines of flight – of capital, of labour – and later of as much of the haute bourgeoisie that colonial and postcolonial political economy was able to produce.

(((These fantasies of the city as a site of liberation assume it to be an 'open' space, and to have an open culture. But we know that this is not true. A city, more than anything else, is marked by separations. And it is not only in the ancient or the medieval worked that the city's separation is marked by walls and gates and armed fortifications. But the history of cities is also a history of separations. The city of walls, both in its ancient and medieval versions, and in it more contemporary avatars – whether it was Housmann's Paris or Buenos Aires with its cordons sanitaire, or the racial separations marking white rule in the African colonies, or the class separations maintained by the police in Victorian England, or, in our own contexts, the civil lines. The paradox of the city as a site of universalist imaginaries is that it is also a site of enforced and continuous separations. We will revisit this question of separations in the city towards the end when we return to the issue of which city, when becomes amenable to life in common, and the ordinary moment in the lives of cities, as well as lives in ordinary cities, that make such a life in common at best a fleeting, ephemeral experience, nothing as transcendant as commonism.)))

Nowhere outside of 'the west' did the paradigmatic city hold sway over the popular imagination as it did Latin America, and those disappointed with the non-arrival of proper, bourgeois, modern cities in India would do well to briefly consider this history.
Latin America is the most urbanised of all of the third world. More importantly, high percentages of population reside in very few cities, until recently, accounting for close to or over half of the national population. That starts to change in the 1980s, with the collapse of Latin American developmentalism. The veneer of welfare assumed by Manuel Castells in his

writings on the Latin American city was ripped by austerity. The city was a refuge from the civil wars. The city became a stage for those civil wars.

The brutal segregations of the paradigmatic cities were compounded in the colony. And again let me draw on the Latin American examples to set up my point, as it was in these postcolonies that the myth of the paradigmatic city were most firmly entrenched outside Europe. Despite – indeed perhaps due to - the greatest creolisation and mestizaje-ization of the ruling elite in these ex-colonies, the spatial separation was more complete. The ruling classes were committed to Enlightenment universalism: recall the slogan of the Brazilian flag, Ordem O Progresso. The origins of the favelas of Brazil and the barrios of the rest of Latin America all trace back their origins to the refusal of the colonial and postcolonial ruling classes to share space with descendants of slaves and the rise of settlements to service these ruling classes around them. Port cities, great centres of transport and industry reflecting Latin America's place in the empire of capital, all had large migrstions both internally from the hinterlands, and also the detritus from Europe.

So much so that within a hundred years of decolonisation Latin America became in large parts Italian and German, much as also black and indigenous. Populism and authoritarian developmentalism, which both had social welfarist components, fused together to produce the authoritarian populism of the classic Latin American variety. Buenos Aires was the most advanced and complete replica of Paris, more Paris than Paris itself some would say, but as Arturo Almandoshows, this was not restricted to this context. Dictatorship, a commitment to a version of Enlightenment, availability of open space. Allowed Latin American cities to experiment with urban planning in ways not possible in Europe.

(exaggerated modernism of Latin American cities. Dictatorships and urban planning. The availability of terra nullius.

Brazil and futurism Oscar Neimeyer and Luis Costa and Roberto Marx won competitions. The developmentalist state led by Kubitschek. But the rational planning had other traces: the location, legend had it, was dreamt by the Italian Saint Don Bosco. And workers, as James Scott noted, were not allowed to live in the city. It was hoped they would just return to where they came from.

The character changed also as a result of actually declared civil wars, or primitive accumulation, or land wars and deforestation and rape of the Amazon and the land via extractive industries.

It was the imperial cities of Europe and their replica cities in the colonies that were written in, and assumed to be, the stages for the politics of civility, universalism and transcendence. But the logic of replication went beyond, or deeper and further, than the paradigmatic city and its postcolonial offsprings. Postcolonial replicas of the Fordist city included the factory towns, the steel towns that emerged as part of the dream of nation-building and of self-sufficiency. We often forget in talking of primitive accumulation how deeply the public sector firms were invested and implicated in primitive accumulation, via contract work with a range of other firms, many of which were private.

And here we find other separations and settlements: not only coal and ore came to, say Jamshedpur, not only workers from the rest of India though primarily from the environs, but also indigenous populations dispossessed of the lands that were mined. These, as the magisterial work of Dilip Simeon on Jamshedpur shows, had other separations: separated from the main mass of industrial workers. It was here that ethnicity and caste were used deliberately as labour-disciplining mechanisms, where, to the extent possible, the separations operating in society at large were replicated within the organisation of the labour process itself.

It is only since the 1960s that social theory's enchantment with the paradigmatic city began to falter. Race proved to be an insurmountable obstacle in the Fordist cities of America. Race riots upended and exposed the myth of the city as a place of liberation. The logic of the mobilities of capital and of people in the service of capital unravelled. The paradigmatic city dissolved before the promises made on the model of the paradigmatic city could come to fruition. A cynicism crept in about the city. Soja pushed the nail in the coffin of the modernist theory of the city with his eulogy of Los Angeles, a centreless seamless space of flows. I will come to the return of the city as a possible place for a new political community toward the end of my lecture.

Ordinariness

I want to move from the city that was paradigmatic to colonial and postcolonial imaginings of proper citiness, and indeed to the postcolonial city that was paradigmatic to cities further from the administrative centres of state and capitalist power, to the deeper points of the application of that power. It is here that we can look for the 'ordinary cities'  which will

house 40-odd % of India's population by 2035. Ordinariness is both, in my conception, a feature of the new outsides of old cities, and of other, more remote centre of inhabitation.

For examples of the first, we can fruitfully work with Sanyal and Bhattacharya's notion of the 'new sites of labour', where, responding to Global circuits of production and circulation, we have concentrations of the information sector. Here, self-employment dominates, whichis different from wage employment, a Peasant form in industrial work, rather than the other way around?

(So in ordinary cities this is another feature?)

Part of this informal sector is integrated with domestic and global capital, but a large part of it is non-capital.

OPne could add to the list of lacks and presences that constitute ordinariness: Little or no international finance: banks, insurance, etc.

Little or no ATM.

Large power cuts ruling out certain forms of industry and industrial work.

Large informality in supply of utilities.

Jugad: Katiyabaaz.

I suggest that Informal sector as constituted by 'exclusion'? or by 'adverse incorporation'?

Redundant labour force is not only formed as Sanyal describes it, as the Detritus of expansion of modern capitalism.

But also increasingly of natural calamity and weather extremes.

Where do contradictions lie?

increases the number of points of possible disruption of capitalism? Gurgaon?

Violence and civil war which are now the generalised conditions of the postcolony: there will be NO lasting peace of a Kantian variety, as postcolonial forms of rule, having shed their once liberal-socialist ideal and increasingly barricaded behind a discourse and institutional apparatus of securitization, itself now conducts a near-continuous civil war both inside and outside the paradigmatic city.

Demonetisation was a mechanism of rendering labor surplus: 2 million lost jobs.

Widespread joblessness. Low skills, but high ingenuity.

If we take Sanyal and Bhattacharya's 3 tiers of labour schema:

Direct wage work in capitalist production

Informal economy as a part of the global commodity chain

And those activities that are part of the outside of capitalist relations.

The ordinary city has mostly 2 and 3.

Use of 'man power' to maintain order in 2 and 3.

Picherit: hierarchy of middlemen in informal work. Trust and force.

Middlemen/recruiter/worker: as in his work on maistris in Andhra.

Some Dalits and other subordinated castes

Here, it is not the abstract universal citizen working as a worker, but a particular worker,

who depends a lot on his or her particularity.


This layer of the haute bourgeois, who have long decamped

Separation by lifestyle choice and aesthetic demands.

Open defecation: for example the killing in Rajasthan.

Who can and cannot defecate, punishments.

Here, we see not the Street politics and quiet encroachments by the poor, as in AsefBayat's

account, but byby the propertied on nominally public lands and properties.


Quiet encroachment: not so possible in the ordinary city. Not enough anonymity,

Powers circulates but it does so unevenly: in the ordinary city, there is greater concentration

not so much in the state, as in some figures: bahubali, or strongman: a euphemism for a

figure equally involved in politics, in criminality for the purposes of unaccountable

domination and predatory accumulation (sand mafia, stone mafia, etc.) Their power makes

possible the functioning (or not) of those who represent other institutional matrices, with

which they are often enmeshed.


The developmentalistwelfarism that is signalled by these writings too are missing from the

ordinary city.

Not only civil society proper, but also political society as described, which was part of the

postcolonial modern in places like Kolkata, are missing.

but what about the same in the rest of the cities? Not renting or selling to Muslims, meat eaters, Biharis, etc.

Ordinary cities too can be transnational, and have a history of translocality and transnationality: tourism, migration, old communities, etc.

We must consider restrictions and separation in the city

What has happened to these ordinary cities: in the period after the emergency they no longer were the strongholds of the congress or the left, as they once were. They are bastions of caste and regional parties. This has also solidified caste as an organisational/mobilisational categories.

It is in the ordinary city that the boundary between the rural and the urban is the most permeable and tenuous.

The ordinary city is the future of the postcolonial metropolis: not so much because of the migrations of the 1970s and 1980s, as much as those of the 1990s and 2000s. The compression of Indian capitalism, and its leapfrogging, both depend on classical and new forms of primitive accumulation, creating the compulsions for large scale migration to the cities. That is when we hear about the ungovernability of the metropolis. That is when the power of the bourgeoisie became contested by the new arrivals. That is when the movements by the new subalterns in the cities: for example domestic workers.

The promise of a better life in the city, of a good life, of civility, the dream of the bourgeois city, is just that: a promise deferred into the future, an impossible dream. Badiou says that the fact that dream is impossible should not deter us from dreaming it: because it is in the pursuit of the impossible that politics happens, which takes us to a place different from, and better than, what we have now.

The perfect city, the bourgeois city to which we compare ourselves and fall short, to which we aspire but produce imperfect and now crumbling replicas, is a city that will heal the wounds opened by primitive accumulation, and the civil wars that capitalism and the quest for sovereignty have unleashed. But primitive accumulation is not a trauma from which we have recovered, partly because it is an ongoing trauma, a constant finger in the wound. And sovereignty, must as we try to shore it up with the increasing securitizaton and militarization of everyday life is, and is likely to remain, an unsettled question.

A politics that is takes as its foundational assumption the paradigmatic city is a politics that ignores the fundamental fact of our times: the ordinary city will not become like the postcolonial metropolis, even though, as Chatterjee says, that metropolis is a city out of time, a pre-mature city. Nor will the post-colonial metropolis come to approximate the 'mother cities' of empire of which it was a replica. Rather, the reverse is likely to happen: in the age of austerity, the paradigmatic city is unable to provide the items of collective consumption as welfare or as entitlement, nor is it likely to be based on the assumption of the universal citizen: mass migrations, the wars on terror into these cities have transformed them into versions of the postcolonial cities. Likewise, it is unlikely that the ordinary city will begin to resemble the post-colonial metropolis; rather, the postcolonial metropolis will

become a larger version of the ordinary city, as the new sites of labour, and new flows of capital and labour bring primitive accumulation right to the doorstep of the bourgeoise. No pedagogical relationship implied by civil society in the model of the paradigmatic city will suffice as a politics of pacification. Fluidity and instability, rather than settled citizenship, is the material for imagining new impossible dreams.

Hardt and Negri, in attempting to renew the left by moving its goals from communism to 'commonism', declare that "the city is the source of the common and the receptacle into which it flows."If we take this as a way forward, as versions of the new left seem to have done in the West, then we need to ask another, prior set of questions. How do we move from a conception of the paradigmatic city assuming the successful transition to capitalism, and therefore to private property, to one in which the commons not only escapes primitive accumulation, but becomes the locus for the organisation of a new political subject? Heteregenity and a non-teleological account of citiness, should be our starting points. Ordinariness, not the paradigmatic city, is the given terrain on which to build new impossible dreams of the future.