



Urban Space as a Site For Capital(ist) Reproduction? An Outline of The Governing Principles of Colonial and 'Post'-Colonial Urban Structures

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ABSTRACT

This article argues that the predominant governing principle that structured the urban space during colonial and post-colonial era was to facilitate capitalism in general and capitalist class in particular. It is in this context that the article first undertakes an enquiry into the nature of urban space during the colonial era. It further explores the post-partition rehabilitation and resettlement measures. The article attempts to argue that even the post-colonial India failed to integrate various classes in the urban social structure and it acted as a site for capitalist reproduction.

KEYWORDS

Urban Space, Colonial Cities and Post-Partition Settlement

Introduction:

This article at first identifies the British economic policy and social attitudes that governed the course of urbanization in different parts of India. Second, it further enquires the nature of urban spaces that emerged post-partition. Partition resulted in mass migration and displacement. This resulted in the demand for rehabilitation and resettlement. It is in this context that this article attempts to analyze the nature of urban spaces that were constructed to house the affected masses in principle. The section below begins by examining the nature of urban spaces during the colonial period.

Urban Spaces during British Rule:

India came under the British rule in 1858. The course of urbanization after 1800 in all parts of India was determined by British economic policy and social attitude. During the 150 years of British rule, India's urban landscape went through a radical transformation. The major changes were (1) the creation of three metropolitan port cities which emerged as the leading colonial cities of the world, (2) The creation of the chain of hill stations in the Himalayan foothills, South India and the introduction of tea and coffee plantation which produced a number of small settlements with distinct urban characteristics in Assam, (3) the modification of the urban landscape of the existing cities with the introduction of (a) the Civil Lines and (b) the Cantonments, (4) the introduction of the railways and modern industry which led to the creation of new industrial townships such as Jamshedpur, Asansol, Dhanbad, and (5) the improvements in urban amenities and urban administration. These were the characteristics that shaped the urban landscape in India during the colonial period (Ramachandran 1989). A detailed account of these events is outlined below.

The metropolitan Cities: By the start of the 20th century, Calcutta, Bombay and Madras had become the leading cities of India; although none of these had a population of a million. The older cities of the Mughal period had all dwindled into small towns and cities. Thus, Delhi, Varanasi, Ahmedabad, Agra and Allahbad had populations of around 2,00,000 only while Calcutta, the leading city, had a population of over 9 lakhs.

Hill Stations and Plantation Settlement: The hill station was an inheritance from the British period. The first hill stations were established as early as 1815, and by 1870 there were over 80 hill stations in four different areas in India, serving the four major metropolitan cities of Calcutta, Delhi, Bombay and Madras. These areas were: (a) Simla-Mussoorie- Nainital- near Delhi (b) Darjeeling-Shillong near Calcutta (c) Mahabaleshwar in Western Ghats near Bombay, and (d) the Nilgiri-Kodaikanal

area in Tamil Nadu. With the course of time, a substantial native population migrated to these towns, seeking employment in providing the various services, which the British needed. The British built schools, hospitals, clubs and hotels for exclusive use of Europeans.

Civil Lines and Cantonments: The urban landscape of a large number of Indian towns and cities, which existed long before the arrival of the British, was modified substantially during the British rule. The modifications are most noticeable at the administrative centers of the British Raj. The civil Lines were a new addition to all but the smallest administrative centers, while the cantonments were most often built near major towns for considerations of security.

Railway, Industrialization and Urbanization: The most direct contribution of the railways to the growth of the existing cities was the railway station. The railway station soon became the focal point of the city, rivaled only by the main market centers. The cities began to grow in the direction of the railway station and even the main markets began to shift towards this area. The result was haphazard urban growth from the city center towards the railway station.

Urban Amenities and Urban Administration: One of the major benefits of the British rule was the improvement of the civic amenities in some of India's major cities. Piped water supply, street lighting, domestic electricity supply, sewerage, modern shopping areas and in some cases parks and playgrounds for recreation were established in a number of cities. However, it must be admitted that at the time of Independence, the vast majority of India's towns and cities did not have electricity leave alone piped water supply and sewerage. During the British period, civic amenities were provided only in the civil lines area and the cantonment. The native city remained outside the pale of modernization. Urban administrative bodies were established to look after the civic amenities from 1881. These municipalities were primarily concerned with the collection of local taxes, the maintenance of roads, removal of garbage and night soil, primary education and public health. Town planning was not introduced during the British period, although legislation for the improvement of slum area was enacted in the first two decades of the 20th century in Bombay and other provinces.

This section provides a synoptic over view of the changes that took place in the urban landscape during the colonial era. It argues that the changes that took place like the establishment of metropolis, civil lines, cantonment areas and urban administration etc were facilitating the reproduction of capital. The next section will try to examine whether there were any

changes in the governing principles post-independence.

Urban Spaces Post-Partition: The Indian Context

Partition has been synonymous with violence, migration, displacement, desolation etc. But in this section an attempt will be made to understand the 'economics of partition'. This section tries to argue that although there were religious reasons facilitating partition but, the economic aspects of the event cannot be overlooked.

The Economics of Partition:

It can be understood through various grounds. One such aspect refers to the goal of Pakistan (*the Pure Land*) which was seen as the Muslim answer to Hindu 'oppression' and Hindu 'capitalism'. In the climactic years of 1946 and 1947, the Muslim League campaigned energetically against the *bania* (trading, money lending, interest-gathering and, in that sense, fundamentally un-Islamic) Congress, and further, its leader who the League considered as the 'bania' leader (Gandhi); The League believed that Congress was working hand-in-glove with British imperialism. Therefore, it campaigned strongly against Hindu capitalism and fascism which oppressed not only the Muslims, but also untouchables and other minorities (Pandey 2001). The Muslim League's demand for Pakistan was presented as an aim towards true freedom – justice for all who were oppressed and poor. "Divide to unite" was the League's paradoxical battle cry. Once the Muslims were free and secure in Pakistan, and the Hindus in Hindustan, the two could come together in many areas: communications, defence, foreign affairs, civil rights. The votaries of Pakistan promised a great deal such as "Islam is by nature egalitarian"; it was argued, that the Muslim state would provide the best conditions for genuine democracy and socialism. Jinnah in March 1946 declared,

I am an old man. God has given me enough to live comfortably at this age. Why would I turn my blood into water, run about and take so much trouble? Not for the capitalists surely, but for you, the poor People in Pakistan, we will do all in our power to see that everybody can get a decent living. (Jinnah quoted from Pandey 2001:28)

Headlines in *Dawn* in November 1946 made the same claim that - "Qaede- Azam and Muslim League have always befriended the downtrodden". From the point of view of the League, fair access to resources was an important reason for the partition of India. Whether the Muslim League materialized this vision needs further analysis, but the inter-relationship between geographical space, politics and economic resources can be interlinked together. The next section attempts to understand the politics of resettlement to examine the direction of developments after the partition of India.

Rehabilitation and Resettlement Measures:

The first major town planning efforts after the partition of India consisted of the building of a large number of refugee towns by the Ministry of Rehabilitation. Because of the emergency situation, and the inability and unwillingness of refugees to await the preparation of elaborate plans, most of these towns were built very quickly. In the absence of rigidly predefined frameworks for physical development, efforts went into rehabilitation (Sarin 1982). The partition rendered millions of people homeless. The Indian state had to rehabilitate over 8 million refugees. The Amritsar Trust had been established in 1946. Its work had hardly begun when the city broke into violence. Its activities were suspended in the aftermath of partition. For the rebuilding and reconstruction the Trust was only revived in April 1949. Dr Dina Nath Ahluwalia, a former Chief Minister of Suket, was appointed as its permanent chairman. Mr D.D. Kailash was its Town Planner. The first meeting was held in the Town Hall on 19 April 1949. It resolved that the Public Works Department should survey the damaged areas and the Muslim evacuee property within the city. The Amritsar Improvement Trust's operations were, closely bound by the provisions of the Punjab Development of Damaged Areas Act. This laid down a notification period during which objections

could be raised. Government sanction was obtained following the 60 day period. It was then that land was acquired. This was purchased out of the Trust's funds accruing from the annual Government grant and the 2 per cent slice it received of the Municipal Committee's gross income. It was also given by the Government valuable plots of evacuee property in Anjuman Park and the Anjuman Islamia Fruit Market in Hall Bazaar. These were to be developed as new wholesale and retail fruit and vegetable markets which would provide business opportunities for refugees. About 170 retail stalls were proposed for construction on the former site to a design approved by the Improvement Trust. The refugees were granted loans of up to Rs 2000 to help pay for the construction and to start their business.

In all, during the first decade of independence, the Amritsar Improvement Trust had notified 20 schemes under the terms of the Punjab Development of Damaged areas Act. Seventeen of these had received government sanction. In principle, the schemes were evenly divided between commercial and residential developments. They covered a total area of 70.92 acres. The above scheme of rehabilitation is telling of the fact that developments were inclined towards city building. The influence of the British imperialism is reflected by direction chosen by the now Independent Government of India. The next section outlines the approach of the government in rehabilitation and resettlement of the refugees. The preferential approach of the government towards professional, bureaucratic class is visible by the fact that cities were being built up to rehabilitate the 'service' class to suit the needs of the market and 'officials' of the government of Punjab. Business and Industry received impetus in this period. But, for the general masses there was chaos and darkness.

No Proper plans of Refugee Resettlement: In East Punjab the process of building was handicapped by the shortage of building materials. In addition the main problem that surrounded the city of Amritsar was the legal acquisition of land and property, much of which was owned by evacuees. There was also an acute shortage of town planners. Building designs were hurriedly drawn up in many cases by engineers from Public Works Departments rather than by architects at that time. The housing shortfall was exacerbated by the demolition of properties to widen roads and create new market areas. The slow rebuilding process meant that many refugees lived in dangerously dilapidated dwellings. Each monsoon, the press was full of reports of building collapses. Finally, in both cities, Lahore and Amritsar the rebuilding process was overseen by the Improvement Trusts that had been established in the wake of the 1922 Punjab Town Improvement Act (Talbot, 2007).

Preferential Approach of the Government: The government had constructed barracks and low cost housing for the low income group. Primarily the displaced persons were not integrated into the urban spaces but were cluttered around the urban spaces. Moreover the resettlement policy had an economic dimension. The businessmen were allotted shops and factories, but the displaced poor were given assistance for loan or grant. This loan system was later abandoned and co-operatives of people were given loan and not individual people. Urban rehabilitation in Punjab immediately included the process of providing almost 11 lakh displaced people of urban characteristics with houses and urban land. The evacuees claimed to have abandoned in urban areas of West Pakistan 22,972 standard acres while the urban area available in East Punjab and PEPSU region was 19,273 standard acres. Out of which 13,444 standard acres were in East Punjab and 5,729 in PEPSU. An urban allotment section was started under a tehsildar with 56 clerks. The first and immediate need of the evacuees was housing. While the number of urban houses left on the East side was much smaller than those left in the West, the houses were poor in quality and capacity as compared to non-Muslim houses in Pakistan. (Schechtman, 1999:39) The land resettlement operations in the East Punjab were divided into two parts: (a) Rural, (b) Urban. The urban rehabilitation programme was directly administered by the Central Govern-

ment with active co-operation of various State Governments. The Punjab Government was also directed by the Government of India to chalk out various schemes for urban rehabilitation. But in case of rural rehabilitation, all powers were delegated to the Government of East Punjab, which was authorized to work out details for the evacuees (Prakash, 1949:1-2) The Government established a Rehabilitation Secretariat at Jalandhar for rural and urban resettlement in the East Punjab. At one stage as many as 8, 000 Patwaris worked at Jalandhar.

For the lower middle class the government evolved the scheme of cheap housing colonies. In these colonies sites had been provided for religious buildings and schools. The more serious problems were encountered by the lower class displaced persons who were so poor that they could not afford to spend anything for roofed shelter. For them mud hut colonies were set up. Another scheme to provide shelter was the construction of 4,200 houses at the laying out of 9800 building in new township colonies built at various places in the Punjab. In PEPSU, 10,000 Bahawalpuris were earmarked for Patiala. Of these some were to be housed in the town itself either by repairing the *kholasor* in new barracks which were constructed for displaced persons. The bulk of the population was to be housed in a new township in close precincts of the town at Tripuri where 1800 new houses were planned for construction. Nearly 8,000 Bahawalpuria evacuees were planned to settle in Jind. 400 houses were planned to build in Phagwara. The PEPSU Government planned six model townships near Patiala, Phagwara, Basti Nau, Bhatinda, Kotakpura and Barnala. To provide financial aid to the poor and middle class evacuees for rehabilitation in business, the government sanctioned a scheme of loans and grants. In the beginning all loans to urban evacuees were granted individually. Later on it was decided that loans, should as a rule be given only to co-operative societies or groups of displaced persons. The Punjab government had by the end of November 1949, sanctioned Rs. 1,25,00,000 as loans and 18,00,000 as grants to displaced persons. To provide displaced shopkeepers a means of earning for their living, it was decided to allot evacuee shops and factories only to displaced persons. There were nearly 17,000 evacuee shops. All of these were allotted to displaced businessmen from West Pakistan. The total number of evacuee factories and industrial establishments in the province was 1,392 of these 1,114 had been leased through auction.

The Industry Department of the Punjab Government had started 32 training centres in which both boys and girls trainees received instruction in various trades and crafts. These centres were located at different towns in the province. To help rehabilitation of the displaced industrialists and to provide gainful employment to other displaced persons new industrial areas were developed in important cities. To restrict the shifting of factories under Factory Act, East Punjab Act, March 1948 Control of Dismantling Act' was passed by the East Punjab Government. To make up for the loss of capital and skilled labour, the Government of India set up a Rehabilitation Finance Administration for meeting the financial requirements of small and medium level migrant businessman on medium and long term basis. The industrial development in the East Punjab was based on an economic system under which private enterprise

controlled almost the entire industrial field. However, the Punjab government rendered the maximum possible assistance to private enterprise to encourage the growth of industries. The future plans of the state government for the industrial development went in different directions. These efforts were expected to change the face of Punjab state and to achieve a healthy, happy and prosperous future of urban East Punjab. After the partition, the East Punjab was a deficit state in food grains and cotton. The East Punjab government started development schemes like supply of better seeds, agricultural implements, fruit nursery production, compost schemes, tubewell scheme, mechanical cultivation and land reclamation schemes, etc. on a 'no profit no loss' basis. The agricultural education and research work was carried on first in Khalsa College, Amritsar and subsequently, since August 1949, at Ludhiana.

From the above description it can be argued that there was discrimination in the process of resettlement and allocation of land. The lob-sidedness of the government and improper planning led to the formation of clusters of population.

Conclusion:

In the context of post-colonial urbanization, partition and the subsequent resettlement it would only be correct to refer to Manuel Castells. He suggested that, the first phase of industrialization, was 'dependent' almost exclusively on the basis of foreign capital (Argentina, Uruguay, Chile), or on the basis of the mobilization of the national bourgeoisie using populist movements (Mexico, Brazil), which played a limited role but closely depended on external trade. Although, it accelerated the disintegration of the rural society, it scarcely changed the urban functions (perhaps with the exception of Buenos Aires). The collapse of the mechanisms of the world market and the new situation created in class relations encouraged a restriction on imports and created industries centered on local consumption. Given the characteristics of these industries – low capitalization and an immediate need of profitability, their introduction depended on urban manpower and, above all, on the potential market of the great urban areas. Even this limited industrialization gave rise to an excessive expansion of services, for this was an opportunity of partially absorbing a whole mass of more or less unemployed people. After World War II foreign, particularly American investment found an outlet for surplus capital in the development of this local industry; it was also a question of opening up new markets. The process was accelerated in those countries where a basis already existed (the Argentina, Chile and, above all, Mexico and Brazil) and it rose rapidly in other countries that had hitherto been limited to primary production, such as Peru and Colombia, where the changes during the last fifteen years have been spectacular. The cities thus became to some extent industrial centres and, furthermore, suffered the second impact of their dependence through the mass of services introduced and through the further destruction of the old agricultural and artisanal forms of production (Castells. 1977).

It is in this context it can be well argued that in the milieu of India also urban spaces acted as a site for capital-(ist) reproduction.

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